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FURTHER STUDIES IN RIO GRANDE VALLEY HISTORY

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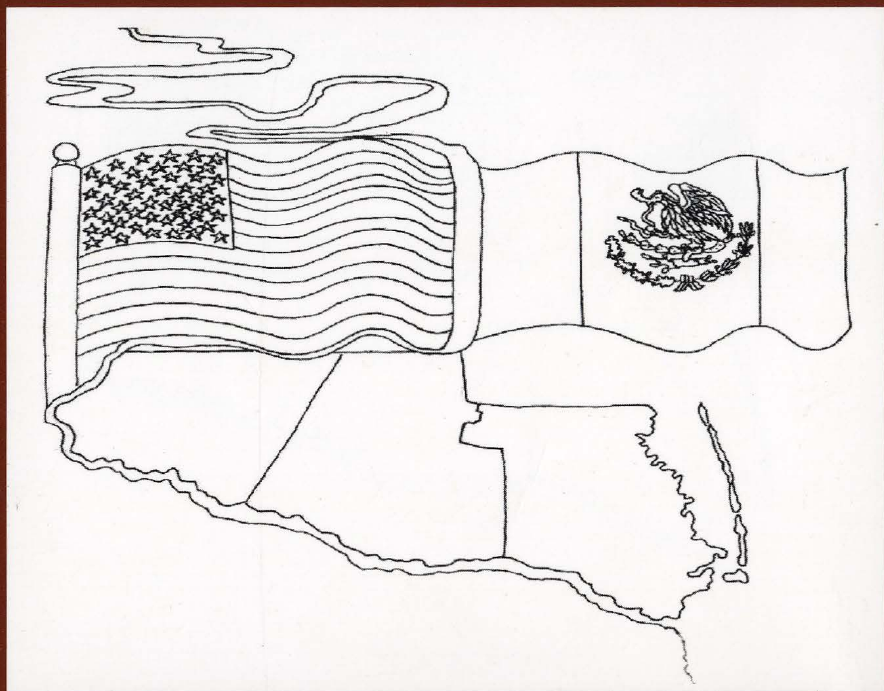

Volume Seven

The UTB/TSC Regional History Series

The University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College

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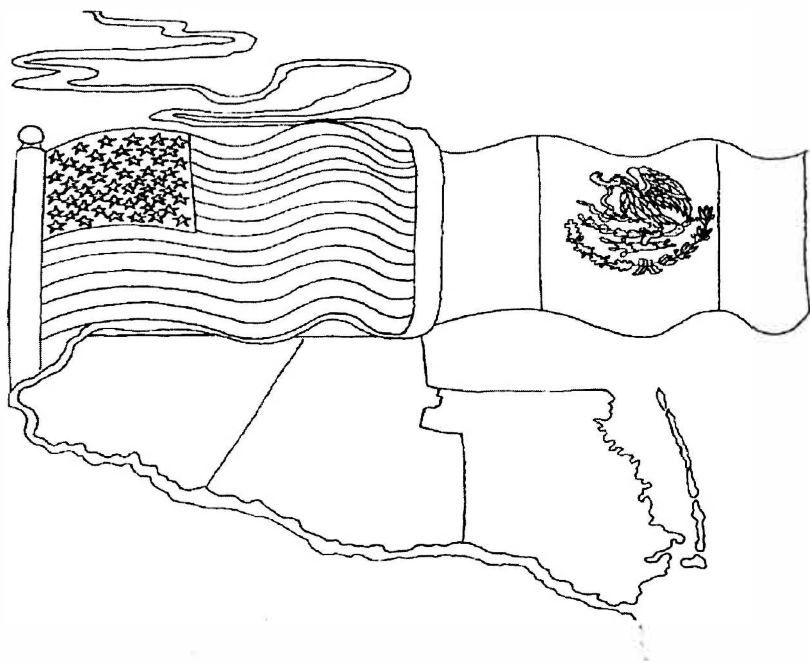

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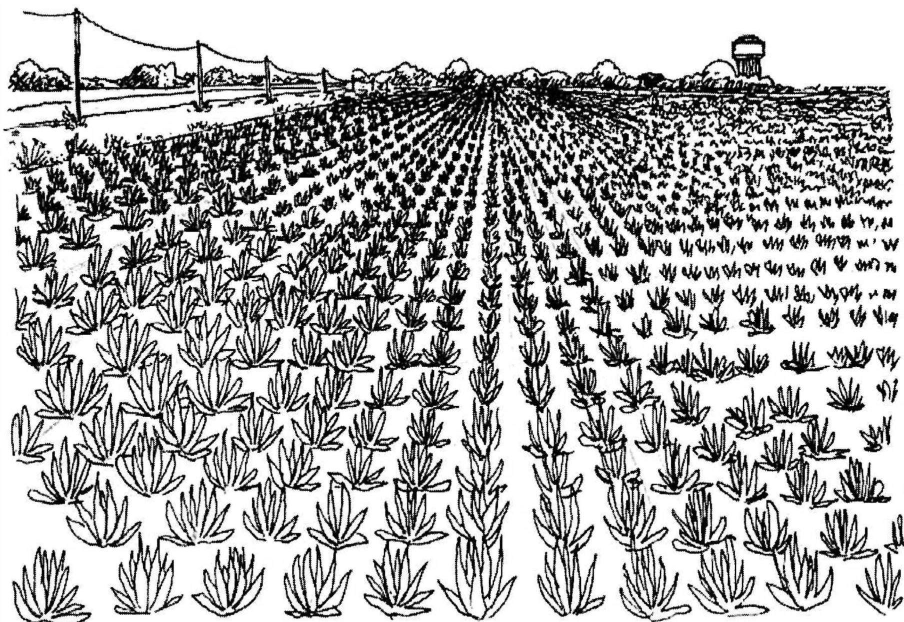

The Spirit of the North Bank

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by

Eduardo Ybarra

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General History

The Spirit of Matamoros

Salt: Basis of Wealth in South Texas

by

David J. Mycue

Picture yourself a young man growing up in rural Spain early in the sixteenth century. Before long you might realize your limited chances to rise out of your miserable circumstances: a peasant's life of unremitting labor, a religious' life of groveling servitude, or a scholar's life in an illiterate culture would hold slim appeal for the ambitious. Upon reflection, such lads might discern that one avenue for success did exist—discovery of gold or silver. Daily, before young men's eyes, aristocrats paraded, dressed in gaudy displays of conspicuous consumption, seamed with threads of silver and gold. Even Church property bedazzled the pious with veneers of precious metals. Lacking special skills, young Spaniards during that era may have found a military career attractive. Only shortly before, Christopher Columbus had opened a New World for Spain. Reports streaming back from Columbus' explorations told of enormous wealth that would excite the adventurous. An archetype of such a young man was Hernán Cortés. Disembarking in Hispaniola at the age of 22 in the early 1500s, he considered himself a gold prospector from the outset, and for a long time afterward. Others around him, however, came to see that his talents wielded a keener edge.

Cortés had grown up in Medellín, in Extremadura, commonly thought of as the most backward part of Spain in those years. Somehow he had gained an education as a youth, so in the New World he stood out among his fellows as one who could read and write. In Hispaniola, however, he spent most of this time with the local natives, panning for gold in creeks and streams. As time went on, Spanish officials on the island and in Cuba, which they colonized next, called upon him to help with governmental affairs. His ability to manage bureaucratic problems proved highly valuable. It was not long before Governor Diego de Velázquez of Cuba appointed him as his secretary.

Cortés' competence continued to enhance his reputation in Velásquez's eyes, culminating in his commissioning Cortés with the task of leading a reconnaissance trip into the mainland. Previous explorers (the Governor's relatives, mainly) had initiated some landfalls and had seen the natives freely using gold and silver. Of course, on hearing the reports, Cortés lobbied his boss to put him in charge of the next mission. Thus began the grand quest for precious minerals in Mexico that led to the subjugation of the Aztec nation and colonization of New Spain, as Spanish officials termed the new lands.

Throughout the succeeding decades of adventure that he would encounter there, Cortés never lost sight of his earliest goal. One of the first private conversations between him and Montezuma, in fact, concerned the source

from where the Aztecs were obtaining so much gold. Montezuma, not yet recognizing the ultimate perils of the newcomers, showed Cortés inventoried records of the precious minerals. Consequently, the *conquistadores* had charts handy for their treks across the mountains of Mexico during the following century.[1]

Gold hunting from central Mexico proved inexhaustible as long as the mountainous terrain continued, since valuable ores are usually found in such locales. Before the sixteenth century had ended, the Viceroyalty of New Spain established numerous mines and towns far to the northeast. Saltillo, Monclova, and Monterrey were founded in the late 1500s, before the Sierra Madre mountain chain played out and the land flattened into an arid wilderness, referred to by officials as *Desierto Muerto*, or "Dead Desert."[2]

Thus, as the seventeenth century opened, exploitation of the established mines in the mountain communities progressed apace. Since desert flatlands are an unlikely source of precious minerals, the end of the mountain chain meant that the feverish drive to locate new gold and silver veins would henceforth calm down. Paradoxically, however, another mineral—salt—became the new object of the miners' quest. Processing gold or silver ores necessitated large amounts of the substance. In addition, pioneer life on the frontier required plenty of the humble mineral both to preserve food and to tan animal hides, leather serving as the plastic of the age by supplying all sorts of containers, bottles or vessels, and transportation accoutrements. Thus the early Spanish miners in Mexico were surprised to learn that lands brimming with precious ores lacked sufficient quantities of salt.

The lack of salt in the mining communities created difficulties for the extractive industry. When refining precious ores could not take place at the mines owing to an insufficiency of nearby salt, mule teams often had to haul the raw ores (including loads mixed with dirt and gravel) to the interior, a slow and wasteful operation. During the early years of mining operations in the Sierra Madre, natives supplied salt to the Spaniards from sources that they had been exploiting for thousands of years. From somewhere out of the north, laden with shoulder baskets of salt, those salt-bearers regularly appeared along established trade routes. The Spaniards happily received the salt because the types brought up from the interior proved greatly inferior to the mineral coming down from the north.

As the need for salt intensified, mining officials began tracing the natives' paths to their origins. Finally, in 1697, the Spaniards discovered the natives' source: salt lakes in the *Desierto Muerto*, about one hundred miles northeast of the farthest northern mines in the Sierra Madre chain, just above Monterrey. Consequently, in the early 1700s, charts of the *Desierto Muerto* began outlining the location of the salt lakes, one of the few geographical features displayed on the early maps so far north. In nearly every account of activities

in the area, the need for salt appears almost as often as the pious desire to Christianize the Indians. In Mexico City, authorities advanced arguments to colonize *Desierto Muerto*, frequently mentioning the salt deposits available there along with dangers of English intrusions into the Gulf of Mexico during the War of Jenkin's Ear.[3]

In 1746, the Viceroy of New Spain, the Marqués de Altamira, commissioned the military governor of Querétaro, José de Escandón, to organize a new colony out of the *Desierto Muerto* territory. Escandón chose to name the colony Nuevo Santander, after his birthplace in northern Spain. José had left there as a young teenager to sail to the Yucatán, where he had begun a military career. His energy and competence in increasingly difficult positions had led to his appointment in Querétaro, a major outpost about a hundred miles north of Mexico City; and his success in dealing with the Indians there led the Marqués to select him to establish the new colony, one of the last provinces that Spain authorized in the New World.[4]

To discharge his new orders, Escandón led a few preliminary expeditions north, recruiting settlers already living in Sierra Madre communities not far from where the new province would begin. On his first expedition, he sent ahead a detachment to explore for saline deposits as he established villas with settlers. Nuevo Santander began at the Pánuco River, which flows into Tampico Bay, and extended northward to the San Antonio River, where Texas had been colonized generations previously. Midway in Nuevo Santander, Escandón established several villas along a turbulent river, later named the Río Bravo or Río Grande. Among those villas were Camargo, Reynosa, Mier, Revilla, Dolores, and Laredo.

His first order to the officer whom he placed in charge of Reynosa, Captain Carlos Cantú, was to build boats and roads in order to reach "*Las Salinas de la Reyna*" ("The Salt Seepages of the Kingdom"), which existed about forty miles slightly northeast.[5] During Escandón's forays to explore the region, he allowed his men to help themselves to the salt, load it onto their pack mules, and return to the interior as long as they paid the royal treasury the required share for the King.[6]

Nearly a decade after the settlement of the river villas, the Viceroy sent out an audit team under José Tienda de Cuervo. After inspecting the results of Escandón's work in Reynosa, Tienda de Cuervo reported back that the only economic activity of any significance taking place there appeared to be related to the extraction of salt and its use in the villa for tanning hides. The settlers were scooping the salt out of the salt lakes to supply most of the other river towns; in fact, Tienda de Cuervo believed, enough salt existed in the lakes to support all New Spain.

An analysis of the salt crystals demonstrated that the mineral was of the highest quality, "admirable," in the auditor's word. Already the settlers were

employing Cotoname Indians, originally from Reynosa, to mine the salt at the lakes. Before the Spaniards, the Sepinpacan ("Salt Makers") Indians had been living near the lakes and harvesting the salt, but what happened to them the early records do not disclose. As early as 1755, some of the settlers in Reynosa and Camargo who were involved in the salt trade were reportedly becoming wealthy.

In general, Tienda de Cuervo's report dovetailed with that of Fr. Vincente Santa María, the missionary who had accompanied Escandón. Santa María had been amazed to see that birds which had fallen into the lakes had petrified, retaining exactly the same shape as when they had entered death. Missionaries later assigned to Reynosa used salt as a means of exchange to buy corn. Tienda de Cuervo further observed that cattle, sheep, and goats owned by the original settlers were thriving because of the excellent quality of salt provided. Ox carts were already hauling chunks of the mineral to Frontón (today Port Isabel), where the cargo was being loaded aboard ships destined for Veracruz.

During its stay in Reynosa and the other major villas along the river, the Tienda de Cuervo team awarded, or set up the process to obtain, permanent land ownership deeds for those settlers who had struggled for the past ten years to bring Spanish civilization to the new lands. The deeds along the river were of two sorts:

1) *Porciones* (thin strips of land, about three-fourths of a mile at the river and 15 miles long on the average);

2) Grants (in the more arid lands usually starting where the porciones ended). In contrast with the porciones, grants comprised huge land masses because, the justification ran, they contained no guaranteed water source as the *porciones* did. Spanish bureaucrats numbered each *porción* in accord with individual jurisdictions (Reynosa, Camargo, Mier, Dolores, and Laredo). Grants, on the other hand, instead of carrying numbers, were given descriptive terms, often geographic and preceded by a saint's name.

Such was the case with the distribution of lands surrounding the salt lakes. Beginning about fifty miles above Reynosa and extending west to east nearly to the Gulf of Mexico, the lakes appeared in parts of three grants. After bureaucrats set up the administrative machinery in the 1790s, those grants received the names of *San Salvador del Tule* ("Cattail"), *Los Mesteños* ("Mustangs"), and *Agostadero* ("Pasture") *de San Juan de Carricitos* ("Reeds"). Today those three grants comprise much of Hidalgo and Willacy Counties.

Though the salt lakes–or Royal Salines, as the Spanish often called them–formed three distinct sections, generally corresponding to legal demarcations, they seldom appeared as typical lakes. The mutating factors were droughts,

common in the area, which changed the landscape radically. Most of the time, the lakes looked like barren, glistening terrain, devoid of vegetation. Geologists now theorize that eons ago the Gulf of Mexico had extended miles farther west but gradually receded, leaving the salt residue to crystallize in natural depressions of the earth's surface which created, after a good rain, in the words of a pioneer, "an ice-covered pond with ruffled white caps lightly tinged with pink."[7]

Not all experts have agreed on the origins of the salt lakes. A mechanical engineer, James Walker Cain, theorized that they had not been formed upon a salt dome, as had been commonly believed. Cain, who would one day gain great wealth by exploiting sulfur beneath the Palangana salt dome in Duval County (a hundred miles north of the salt lakes) was convinced that winds blowing westward from the Gulf had for ages dropped ocean salt over the land depression to create the phenomenon of the salt lakes. Another professional, Walace Hawkins, an expert in mining law, while making a legal study of them, became fascinated with their aesthetics:

> The white salt, sometimes tinged with pink, is alternately covered and left bare by the water during the seasons and even daily by reason of the shifting winds. It forms a natural laboratory for a continuous and almost visible crystallization. When there is water, the glistening salt plain, festooned by mesquite and ebony greenery, seems as ice on a frozen lake.[8]

Toward the western end of the geologic phenomenon, the part in the *Tule* grant later termed *El Sal del Rey* would appear almost oval following a rainfall. That lake commonly measured about a half mile across, yet was never more than two feet deep. The middle section of the salt lakes, nowadays usually forgotten, sprawls in the Spanish grant of *Los Mesteños*, later reapportioned into several subgrants. Rosa María Hinojosa obtained ownership of it in 1794, but she quickly transferred much of it to her brother. *Los Mesteños* consisted of 323,126.2 acres and straddled the county lines of Hidalgo and Willacy when it was partitioned in 1913.[9]

The eastern section of the salt lakes has come to be known as *La Sal Vieja* ("The Old Salt"). It is about four miles long and a half mile wide, depending on recent rainfalls, which can leave a depth of as much as ten feet. In places, five islands protrude above the waters. Even so, *El Sal del Rey* waters crystallize more salt than those at *La Sal Vieja*. The latter, however, tasted "extremely briny" to geologists, who conducted tests in the area for indications of oil in the 1920s. In any case, the environment surrounding all the salt lakes seemed to create an almost mystical atmosphere, particularly when viewed in the bright sunlight. The magical effects are heightened by profusions of sun-baked skeletons of dead trees in narrow coves.[10] Folklorists and imaginative writers in the Valley have for generations woven into their

stories the eerie ambience sometimes felt at the lakes.[11]

Surrounding *La Sal Vieja* was *San Juan de Carricitos,* the grant awarded José Narciso Cavazos (alternatively Cabazos) on February 22, 1792. Totaling 601,657 acres, it amounted to the largest acreage ever granted a private individual by Spain in the New World. Less than one hundred years later, half of Carricitos had become the core of the King Ranch.

Pedants sometimes take umbrage at the designation of the western section of the lakes. Although in colonial times they were commonly referred to as "*La Purificación*" or "*Sal de Nación,*" shortly after the Mexican War, Americans applied the name most recognizable today, *El Sal del Rey.* It derives from an ungrammatical Spanish language construction devised by Yankee law clerks, unschooled in the niceties of *el castellano.*[12] Owing to the duration of a lawsuit concerning ownership of the terrain (the case lasted nearly a century, the longest lasting lawsuit in Texas legal history), the name for the western salt lake stuck, perhaps because it appeared in so many legal documents.[13]

Land on the face of and surrounding *El Sal del Rey,* termed the *San Salvador del Tule* grant, was awarded by King Charles IV to Juan José Ballí on April 18, 1798. Although Ballí belonged to a handful of influential families whom Escandón settled in Reynosa, and although Ballí was the son-in-law of Juan José Hinojosa, chief justice or *alcalde* of Reynosa, authorities soon arrested Ballí. The charge was smuggling salt without having paid the King's mandatory tax, that is, the famous royal fifth for any ores extracted from the earth—and salt was no exception.

Under Spanish law, ownership of all underground resources was reserved for the King. The Spanish judicial system had, since the Middle Ages, taken it for granted that salt resided among the valuable minerals of the nation, and in 1784 the economic and administrative reforms of Charles III specifically cited salt as a mineral that required payment to the King of twenty percent. Occasionally government officials permitted concessionaires to lease rights of extraction, but normally officials let any colonist take salt as long as he paid the tax. Of course, because of the inferior quality of salt in the Mexican interior, and human nature being as it is, smuggling salt southward would long constitute a problem for authorities. In Nuevo Santander, the tax was collected by a special official, designated administrator of salt and located in the provincial capital.

Languishing in prison, Captain Ballí died in 1804. Probate of his property awarded *Tule* to the Cárdenas family in 1829 because, at Ballí's death, he still owed the Cárdenas family an unpaid loan. Besides, Ballí was a convicted felon, so the court saw little merit for his side. The salt lakes came to be called "*Laguna Cardeneña*" by Mexicans as late as the mid-nineteenth century in the popularly known *Rancho La Noria Cardeneña,* as local ranchers still refer to the greater part of *Tule.*[14]

While land grants were being apportioned and ratified by official surveyors and notaries in the 1790s, the Viceroy sent to Nuevo Santander a newly arrived officer from Spain, Félix Calleja del Rey. His commission was to examine the economic potential of the northeastern region of New Spain. After an exhaustive tour, Calleja recommended more intensive exploitation of the salt lakes north of Reynosa. He had investigated other salt sources in Nuevo Santander, particularly salt lagoons near San Fernando to the south, but none compared in quality to the salt lakes. Calleja explained:[15] Their beds are solid masses of coagulated salt that the rains do not liquefy. Blocks are taken out as from a quarry, and salt has been known to coagulate to a depth of two *varas* [66 2/3"]. In some districts it is the color of mother-of-pearl, and branches of trees or birds that accidentally die and fall in them are transformed in a period of twenty-four hours to salt, maintaining their figures.

Calleja suggested constructing factories on the Gulf, where fish caught there could be salted, thus generating a fish jerky industry. He also urged transporting great quantities of salt to the Gulf, where ships docked nearby could be loaded for transport to distant ports of the world. Salt would answer the economic problems of northeastern New Spain, he concluded, since its extraction and use to prepare deerskins were even then the main activities of the settlers, and "commerce is purely barter among the people…."[16]

Efforts to exploit the salt resources continued throughout the Spanish era into the Republic of Mexico period. Before the Independence of Mexico, Spanish authorities had installed Jesús de la Garza to administer the mines at the salt lakes. De la Garza lived there and collected payments on behalf of the King of Spain from all who mined. After Independence, the Republic of Mexico appointed Antonio Cantú Sánchez to do the same job. Cantú continued in that position until war with the United States broke out. Under Spain, the salt deposits had supplied nearly all Nuevo Santander villas except for Laredo, which in the late 1700s had launched a flatboat downriver to trade in Reynosa for its famously superior salt.

Even today, from the air, one can see deep ruts in the earth engraved by ox carts that transported enormous amounts of salt from the lakes. The oxen teams numbered six to eight animals clamped in yokes that pulled huge wagons constructed atop eight-foot wheels of solid wood. Some teams traveled as far west as Torreón on the Coahuila-Durango border, and other teams went as far south as Zacatecas. Oxen, however, did not constitute the only animals serving as engines of the salt traffic. Mule teams, comprising as many as thirty animals—each carrying 250-pound loads—likewise struggled along the salt trails into the interior of Mexico.

Closer to the salt lakes, other routes followed ancient Indian trails, such as the one through Rosario Ranch at the river near today's Cameron-Hidalgo county line. Another trail wended southwest through what became the Vela

family's Laguna Seca Ranch and on to the Jaraschinas Ranch north of Tabasco (La Joya). There the well-known trail followed the river to hard-bottomed sandstone crossings, near where Rio Grande City and Roma would one day arise. Traveling through the Carmargo or Mier jurisdictions, the oxen or mule teams trudged deep into the interior. Settlers ranching along those salt trails, even before the war between Mexico and the United States, complained about the disturbing noise of teamsters' whips when swung about. They sounded like cannon shots, the ranchers grumbled.[17]

The salt trade traffic never halted during the Texas Republic, while it and Mexico vied over the sovereignty of the region between the Nueces and the Rio Grande. Following the U.S. annexation of Texas and the subsequent war, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo defined the Rio Grande as the official international border, yet preserved ownership rights of the original deed holders. Furthermore, the Treaty established that mineral rights beneath an individual's property would be reserved to the sovereign government as they always had been.

Because that last provision proved so odd in Anglo-American law, the separate underground mineral ownership rights, now transferred to Texas, became problematic from the start. Taking advantage of the confusion, Texas legislators lost no time in passing laws permitting sales of the conquered lands, including mineral rights, despite the Treaty. And it did not help when Texas Governor J. Pinkney Henderson added to the problem by issuing land patents that included such mineral rights. Texas courts, of course, quickly nullified those actions of the legislative and executive branches; but legal shenanigans would haunt the salt lakes proprietary rights for decades to come.

During the early statehood period, the salt lakes were considered the most valuable property in the Lone Star State. All roads into or out of far south Texas passed close to the salt lakes. Its mineral treasure kept tempting the venturesome. Unscrupulous lawyers and land developers fraudulently produced above- and below-ground ownership certificates to the salt lakes. Real estate agents sold portions of the property with underground mineral rights, based on the supposition that they were available as head right claims or as awards for those who had fought in the war for the Texas Republic or the Mexican War.

A leading culprit in those machinations turned out to be, surprisingly, John Charles Watrous, the first federal judge for Texas, appointed (owing to a personal friendship with U.S. President James K. Polk) on May 27, 1846. Previously, during the Republic of Texas, Watrous had served as State Attorney General in the administration of Texas President Mirabeau Lamar. Judge Watrous, though seated in Galveston, thus knew well the ramifications of the peculiar law pertaining to the salt lakes.

Watrous' manipulations to secure the minerals for others did not go

unnoticed. In 1848, the Texas Legislature called on him to resign because of his actions. In 1852, the Texas Legislature enacted a law to stop his underhanded schemes in an effort to end the legal chaos it had initially wrought by authorizing the mineral rights land certificates. Furthermore, during the 1850s three petitions for the impeachment of Watrous were filed in the U.S. House of Representatives. Perhaps the strongest protest of all came in February 1859, when Sam Houston took the floor of the U.S. Senate to denounce Judge Watrous as a "judicial monster" who was serving as the "mastermind of the salt fraud scheme."[18]

Watrous had been working in collusion with a New York financier, J. N. Reynolds, who, along with multitude of opportunistic rogues, had followed General Zachary Taylor's army into Texas. Quickly Reynolds became keenly fascinated with the salt lakes. To him, they had the potential of an investment bonanza, so he began buying up the still circulating fraudulent certificates in competition with H. M. Lewis, a San Antonio speculator, who was purchasing other certificates for the same land. When Reynolds took physical possession of the salt resource, he settled with Lewis and built a ranch by the lakes after purchasing materials in Reynosa and transporting them to *El Sal del Rey*, where he had piers and houses built.

While all that activity was going on, the Cárdenas family filed suit against both Reynolds and Lewis. Reynolds nevertheless persisted and on April 6, 1852, named J. S. Woods his agent to manage the entire salt lakes property. Woods had the job of collecting proceeds from any mining of salt, and he was to pay himself from the profits. Despite those arrangements, however, the venture failed when Indian attacks succeeded in burning Reynolds' property and running off his agent.[19]

Though of short duration, Reynolds' foray to acquire the salt lakes brought about the longest lasting legal case in Texas history. Styled J. N. Reynolds vs. Cárdenas, it is recorded as the first civil suit filed in Hidalgo County in 1852, the year that government entity was organized out of Cameron County. Reynolds died before the U.S. Civil War broke out, but the case lingered in probate, led by F. J. Parker, administrator of Reynolds' estate. Parker, despite all the legal cautions that had gone before, marketed shares of the property until his death in the late 1800s. At that point the case continued through his successor, Thomas Carson, and his attorney, F. E. Macmanus, who also attempted to sell the property as the case proceeded.

Macmanus noted in his sales prospectus that a railroad would eventually connect *El Sal del Rey* to the Gulf seventy miles east or to the Rio Grande forty miles south of the lake. The high quality of salt at the central location proved a likely spot to equip factories for the production of carbonate of soda derivatives based on chemical formulations of common salt (chloride of sodium). The resulting product of soda ash constituted a necessary component

of many nineteenth century products, such as soap, dyes, clothes, bleach, and sodium bicarbonate. Despite Macmanus having included verbatim judicial opinions in his prospectus, the case was not decided until the 1930s, when it was settled by a master of chancery. By then, German chemists had developed new means for obtaining soda ash, such as using ammonia instead of salt.[20]

However, following the end of the Mexican War, it seemed as if the floodgates had opened for promoters. Besides Watrous and Reynolds, many international businessmen who had been operating in Matamoros before the Mexican War became attracted to economic opportunities opening on the other side of the Rio Grande. As the new town of Brownsville was being established, businessmen rushed across the border. Charles Stillman, credited as founder of the city, had been working in Matamoros since he had arrived as a teenager. His Connecticut banking family had sent him to Mexico to learn its ways and language and serve as a liaison to eastern U.S. business interests. Once the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was signed, he and his associates immediately began mapping out numerous ventures.

In one of them, Stillman and Mifflin Kenedy, a former river pilot for General Taylor, chartered a railroad to run between the salt lakes and the Gulf. Those plans, however, never reached fruition, despite the men going so far as erecting a ranch building near the lakes. Kenedy had big plans for an *El Sal del Rey r*anch. In 1884, he imported 10,000 Merino sheep from his home state of Pennsylvania, but two years later only 2,000 were left, so he sold off the rest.[21]

Meanwhile other entrepreneurs went on exploiting the salt depoşits, even herding camel caravans there after Jefferson Davis, U.S. Secretary of War in the late 1850s, had initiated the importation of the animals to help tame the West. The animals could carry 600 pounds each and were thought to be a boon for the salt trade until teamsters reported that the camels were temperamental creatures, difficult to handle, or unable to get along with other animals in the caravans. Teamsters grumbled about disgusting and aggravating habits that the ill-tempered camels displayed, including spitting and biting, as well as the horrendous stench that they emanated. The animals continued to carry salt north during the Civil War, but their organized use ended at its close. For many years afterward, throughout the West, flabbergasted old pioneers arriving in town worried their friends and relatives by reporting visions of wild camels loping through the desert..

Among the most active businessmen drawn to opportunities offered by the salt lakes following the Mexican War were two recently arrived American lawyers, Robert H. Hord and Elishu K. Basse. After paying the Cárdenas family $10,000 for one-fourth interest in *El Sal del Rey,* they proceeded to build a ranch near one of the well-trodden salt trails. At the same time they aided the filibustering efforts of José María Carbajal. The latter was a soldier

of fortune allied with Brownsville businessmen who were embarked on separating south Texas and northeastern Mexico from the two nations north and south of them. The plot, referred to as *El Plan de la Loba,* had as its goal the creation of a new nation, the Republic of Sierra Madre. Perhaps the venture drained the energies, if not the finances, of Basse and Hord. Until the fall of 1858, they had agents actively in charge at the lake, but afterward these lawyers' names disappear from records concerning the salt venture.[22]

Without much exaggeration, one might view the first decade that South Texas became indisputably part of the United States as the frenzied scene of a "salt rush" by men who moiled for the white mineral, just as other Americans were joining the rush to California to explore for the yellow kind. Mexico's loss had opened opportunities for budding American fortune seekers, and all might have gone well were it not for the U.S. Civil War. At its onset, when Texas voted to join the Confederacy, Sam Houston resigned as Governor in protest. The new incoming Chief Executive of Texas, Francis Lubbock, traveled to Virginia before his inauguration. There, Lubbock conferred with Jefferson Davis, then President of the newly established Confederate States of American (CSA). One of the main items on their agenda had to do with a huge problem: the CSA lacked sufficient salt. New Orleans merchants were already declaring that they were running out of the commodity. Throughout the CSA, the scarcity of salt was replacing the weather as the daily topic of conversation. The Confederate Army was finding it necessary to order its quartermasters to preserve meats with ashes and saltpeter. Soldiers began suffering from the lack of quality salt in their food. According to nutritionists, when salt is insufficient in a diet, the lack hampers the secretion of enough hydrochloric acid with other gastric juices to promote digestion. As a result, there is a drop in sodium chloride content in the blood. At the beginning of the Civil War, salt was selling for 65 cents a sack. Before the end, that price had risen to $20 a sack.[23]

The scarcity eased early in the conflict owing to the agreement between Lubbock and Davis. In an effort to expedite the process, Governor Lubbock urged Hidalgo County Senator Edwin Scarborough and Cameron County representatives to shepherd a bill through the Texas Legislature. The resulting new law authorized the State to operate the south Texas salt lakes as a government monopoly with its workers exempt from the military draft. Consequently, Governor Lubbock appointed Antonio Salinas of Brownsville State Caretaker to manage the salt works. Salinas, together with Senator Scarborough and Edward Dougherty, officially informed the landholder, Don Jesús Cárdenas, that the State was taking possession of the property, top and bottom, for the duration of the war. Cárdenas issued a written protest but took no further action, and Salinas began supplying the salt to the Military Board of the Confederacy. Dougherty later recalled why he thought the transfer went

so smoothly. Dougherty understood that Salinas had made a private agreement with Cárdenas, letting him keep all salt already taken out of the lake. In return, Cárdenas allowed Salinas to take possession of a building that the family owned nearby. Dougherty, who after the War became a State district judge, did not comment in his depositions whether the appropriateness of Salinas' salty surname had any humorous influence on the recommendation to the Governor for the position.[23]

Salinas stayed in charge until November 2, 1863, when Union forces under General Nathaniel Banks invaded the Valley near the mouth of the Rio Grande. One of General Bank's first orders went to Colonels John L. Haynes and E. J. Davis (the future Reconstruction Governor). They were to march a detachment to the salt lakes and destroy the operation. Up to then, the Confederacy—under contracts with Richard King—were carting loads of cotton down from East Texas and Louisiana through the King Ranch to the Rio Grande, where the cotton was smuggled across to Bagdad, a town on the Mexican side at the mouth of the river. There small boats transported the bales in relays to European ocean vessels offshore. The Union was blockading all Southern ports, but the waters off Bagdad fell under international law. After unloading the cotton, drivers of the empty carts would start back north after stopping at the salt works to load up with the precious mineral. When Union forces destroyed the salt works, Salinas left peacefully, never to return. He died on May 3, 1870, at Rancho Longoreña in Cameron County.[23]

When the Civil War ended, the Texas Constitution was amended permitting owners of surface land to also own the minerals beneath their property. The Cárdenas family thereby would have held undisputed ownership of the western salt lakes, above and beneath, were it not for the lingering lawsuit with the Reynolds' faction.[23] While the suit dragged on during the late 1800s, the King Ranch bought up increments of the Cárdenas property, incorporating much of it as *Sal del Rey* Land and Cattle Company.[24]

Similar buy-outs by the King Ranch were also taking place around *La Sal Vieja* and the *Carricitos* lands. Following Richard King's death, as part of the adjudication of his estate, much of it in debts, his banker, Francisco Yturria, received numerous King properties, including *La Sal Vieja.* During the early 1900s, Lon Hill, founder of Harlingen, purchased it, only to sell it in 1918 to a retired veterinarian, Dr. C. M. Corbett.[25]

As the nineteenth century was drawing to a close, a U. S. Army officer, Lt. W. H. Chatfield, stationed at Fort Brown in Brownsville, published a book that extolled the quality and value of the south Texas salt deposit, which, in Chatfield's words:[26]

> stands in the front rank of undeveloped mineral resources of Texas, only awaiting the touch of intelligently directed capital to convert it into an inexhaustible source of wealth and commercial fame. This lake

> is one of the natural wonders of the American continent, owing to the extraordinary phenomena that distinguishes it from all other salt lakes or mines. .... The bottom consists of pure rock crystal salt, of the best quality known to the commerce of the world. .... There is little doubt of Hidalgo County becoming famous through this Salt Lake alone.

With such laudatory words to ponder, newly arrived Anglo-American pioneers devised numerous schemes to exploit the salt resources after the railroad was extended south in 1904 to join the lower Rio Grande Valley (LRGV) to the rest of the United States. Up to then, the LRGV was mostly Hispanic in culture with Spanish prevailing as the most commonly used language and the peso the most commonly used money. While the Chapa family (descendents of the Cárdenas family) at San Manuel and the McAllen family (descendents of the Ballí family) at their ranch store near Linn continued selling chunks of the mineral, LRGV pioneers began traveling to the salt lakes for weekend picnics or health dips in the briny water. Visitors who waded into the lakes soon noticed their feet encrusted with the mineral. During the pre-mass media era, before pro-active balms were touted on late night television infomercials, folk medicine advocated salt baths for arthritis, impetigo, acne, or other skin rashes.[27]

Pain cries and moans from those folks sloshing around the waters become almost palpable through the decades when researchers come across early photographs of weekend visitors dressed in the modest swim ware of the era. Taking the cure for their ills, early pioneers lolled about the salt lake beaches while their friends, seen in the distance, ventured out in their semi-diaphanous wraps. Those brave enough to lie down in the shallow, salty waters to cure their open sores surely were devotees of Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche's dictum: "What does not kill you, makes you stronger."[28]

Other agricultural pioneers along the Rio Grande during the first decades of the twentieth century also strove to take advantage of the abundant mineral resource, apparently under their feet for the taking. In efforts to construct a canal infrastructure connected to steam pump houses on the powerful—before the dams—river, engineers ordered large quantities of salt brought to the pump houses. Their managers stored it in salt shacks nearby, keeping the salt at the ready to maintain the pumping machinery by moving it through the pipes periodically to avoid silting in the metal parts.[29]

Besides the pump houses built to irrigate the lands, ice houses were constructed at San Benito and Kingsville to help keep the produce cold during transportation out of the Valley before the advent of refrigerator cars. The ice houses likewise created a huge need for salt. Fruits and vegetables transported over the railroad extension from Hidalgo County to Harlingen had a long way to go to reach northern markets.

Beginning in the early 1920s, oilmen started intensive exploration of the

area around the salt lakes, believing (wrongly, as it turned out) that a salt dome existed beneath them. Drilling started in 1928, and some oil and gas was discovered, but the activities led to a general ruination of the easternmost lake, *La Sal Vieja.* The oilmen constructed concrete platforms in it for their drilling rigs and tanks. Along the edges of the lake, they laid gravel and caliche roads. After hurricane Beulah hit the area in September 1967, the oil companies abandoned the infrastructure machinery. Ten years later, observers were still reporting, "Pieces of rusted metal form a maze of pipes and other paraphernalia are to be found everywhere along the margin of the lake."[30]

Long before then, by the late 1920s, new salt mining extraction techniques were causing the price of salt to fall drastically. Even so, as late as 1929, fifty tons of salt were being extracted each week at *La Sal Vieja.* Likewise, folks were then still visiting *El Sal del Rey* to scoop off salt with long hoes, wooden shovels, and wheelbarrows or to cut out large chunks, storing them in sheds after draining and sacking the mineral.

Even so, fewer and fewer people persevered in those activities; and as sales declined, the recollection that the salt lakes existed north of the Valley dimmed among townsfolk, although newspaper reporters would occasionally write filler pieces that reminded south Texans about the deposits, now dubbed "a freak of nature." Nevertheless, LRGV creameries stayed busy buying some of the salt to make ice cream, and laundries kept buying the salt to make detergents.[31]

During the late 1930s, the last private entrepreneur of the mineral at *El Sal del Rey* was Earl West, brother of Milton West, U.S. Congressman from the Valley at the time. For some reason Earl sported the odd nickname of "*La Coyota.*" People in town considered him a hermit because he lived by the lake for a while. Ledgers at the McAllen Ranch indicate that he was paid as much as $1.25 for 120 pounds of salt or $600 a ton for five tons of ground salt.[32]

In the late 1940s, farmers began buying up land surrounding the salt lakes. They chopped down the native chaparral (mesquite, retama, and prickly pear, for instance) to farm mostly cotton and sorghum. After harvest, the lands took on a bleak and barren appearance. In the 1950s, the Campbell family established *El Sal del Rey* Ranch, where they raised "Brafords," a cross of Brahman-Hereford cattle, and sold hides, as many as 6,000 at a time, using salt from the lake to preserve the skins. In the 1970s, Elouise Cheney Campbell, wife of one of the farmers, offered guided tours to church and social groups. After a catered barbecue, Mrs. Campbell would regale her audience with a lecture on the history of the region.

When the oil boom was at its peak, and later, producers used the salt brine for oil drilling. The brine was vacuumed out and pumped into storage tanks to be mixed with the drilled mud to prevent premature hardening. During the 1980s, the city of Edinburg invested millions in a combination shrimp farm

and airplane repair facility to operate at the salt lakes; but—despite the project being promoted by a famous, retired astronaut—the enterprise never achieved reality. For years after its failure, visitors would notice abandoned brine pits around the lake, making the area look like a catfish farm.[33]

Notwithstanding those continuing failures to utilize south Texas salt resources during the late twentieth century, the area did reach some success as a tourist site, as evidenced by Campbell's enterprise. Tourism at the salt lakes, however, had actually taken root with the Centennial of the Republic of Texas in 1936. Back then, the State had set up a granite monument commemorating:[34]

GREAT SALT LAKE

> Here has existed since the first Spanish chronicler traversed the region, a Great Salt Lake, which supplied all Northern Mexico with salt.

Where that marker resides nowadays constitutes a mystery for local historians, although photographs of it demonstrate its existence a few generations ago.

A second granite marker for the salt lakes was erected by die-hard enthusiasts of the Confederacy in 1963. It is presently located on the Hidalgo County Courthouse lawn and entitled "EL SAL DEL REY C.S.A." Its surface is etched front and back with a long narrative of events having taken place at the salt lakes during the Civil War. Owing to severe weather pitting in the granite, however, the words are just about incomprehensible.

Historians erected a third historical marker, dated 1964, again a slab of granite, this one located on the south side of *El Sal del Rey,* facing State road 186, between Linn/San Manuel on highway 281 and Raymondville next to highway 77. This historical marker took the honor of becoming the first for Hidalgo County in a new series of State markers initiated by the Texas Historical Commission (THC) in the 1960s. The standard metal plaque for *El Sal de Rey* is inserted on the front face of the stone; on top, at an angle, is another plaque, which is smaller, noting that on August 27, 1979, the National Registrar of Historic Places inscribed the site as an official archaeological district. The words beneath on the larger plaque read:[35]

> Directly to the north, upon Spanish discovery, 1746, claimed for the King. Under old law that salt was money. People of wide area got salt here. 1863-64 work aided Texas in the Civil War, later disputes over el Sal del Rey established Texas laws for private ownership of minerals.

Tourist fascination with the site grew as south Texas became more and more attractive to northerners seeking warmer climes during winters. Lured by the exotic vegetation of the semi-tropics and its unusual fauna, particularly migratory birds, winter visitors became intrigued with the disparate histories of the area. Consequently, during the early 1990s, local environmentalists

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organized into the Texas Nature Conservancy and started buying undeveloped lands, mainly to save endangered wildlife from becoming extinct. In prehistory the salt lakes had served game animals as necessary salt licks, the environmentalists noted in their efforts at education.[36]

Pressured by groups such as the Nature Conservancy to preserve the natural habitats, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service purchased the salt lakes and surrounding lands from the environmentalists. U.S. Park officers at Santa Ana Wildlife Refuge accepted managerial responsibilities. In 1992, Park officials closed public access to *El Sal del Rey* and surrounding 5,000 acres, to allow the natural vegetation to regain its former state. During the closing ceremony, Elouise Campbell gave her lecture about the lake one last time, noting that it was currently ranked second in importance among all historical sites in Texas, the Alamo in San Antonio remaining first.[37]

In January 2005, Park officials deemed that the vegetation around the area had sufficiently regained its former lushness, so they held another ceremony to reopen *El Sal del Rey* for the enjoyment of birders in particular. Biologists and geologists determined that the area forms a unique ecosystem. Officials entitled the enterprise the Lower Rio Grande Valley National Wildlife Refuge. Interest in birds that migrate through the Valley had grown in recent years to produce an economic boom along the lower Rio Grande. The re-opening was shared with the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network, which has a common agenda with the LRGV environmentalists and birders to halt the extinction of many species that flock to coastal and internal waterways. The growing national and even international interest in the cause convinced local chambers of commerce to band together in establishing the Valley as a center to study birds.

Paradoxically, the lands surrounding the salt lakes, originally granted to private families, are now reverting to public ownership, while the underground minerals of the lakes, originally belonging to the government—whether Spain, Mexico, or Texas—are now owned by the Bentsens, a political family in the Valley whose wealth was based on land development projects, that is, on acquisition and sales of land to pioneers from the north in the twentieth century. Thus are confounded simplistic theories of privatization or socialization of lands. Rugged individualism of raw, grasping youth began the process of scrounging for riches 500 years ago. Genial cooperation of mellow, mature elders has ended the fervid hunt, not at the fonts of gold or silver, but in locales of thriving, vibrating life. Cortés had been bemused upon learning that the Aztecs valued feathers over gold. In full circle, the values of the original inhabitants of the Americas are taking precedence over the minerals. The latter remain dormant nowadays at *El Sal del Rey* while grey-headed visitors seated on camp stools stare through binoculars at gawky long-billed curlews, while panoplies of sweeping species of birds float overhead, a far cry from what the

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34 See MOSTH photo archive inventory (IV HISTORICAL MARKERS Hidalgo El

Sal del Rey) for McAllen *Monitor* Collection, accession 92.79.02a_Sal.

35 Folder, "El Sal del Rey," M. McAllen Collection, MOSTH archive accession 90.71.02a; MOSTH photo archive inventory, 99.88.01a; Heller, "Salt Lakes," pp. 24-25.

36 Mallouf, *et al.*, pp. 142-143.

37 Campbell, MOSTH archives accession 02.23.01.

38 Newspaper Article, "Sal del Rey: Historic Site and Exceptional Wildlife Refuge," by Richard Moore, *Monitor*, McAllen TX, January 16, 2005, p. 12C.

The Zavaleta Family: A Legacy of Public Service
by

Antonio N. Zavaleta and James E. Zavaleta
with Theresa Zavaleta[1]

Gernikako arbola	The Tree of Guernica
da bedeinkatua	Is a blessed symbol
euskaldunen artean	Loved by all the Basque people
guztiz maitatua	With deep love
Eman da zabal zazu	Give to all the world
munduan frutua	Your fruit
adoratzen zaitugu	We adore you
arbola santua.	Sacred tree.[2]

Basque Origins

Zabaleta is a Basque surname of considerable antiquity.[3] Students of Hispanic heraldry indicate that, though the antiquity of the name makes it impossible to document an exact temporal origin, the name has appeared prominently in Iberian history for at least the last twelve hundred years. Basque surnames "are quite distinctive and most are derived from the ancestral country home's name or other prominent geographic feature."[4] The Basque surname is a word by which an extended family is described and located, and is determined by a technique typical of tribal peoples. A Basque surname, for example, may describe a people *"who live at the top of the hill"* or *"the people who live by the river"* [5]

In his work on Basque surnames, Fernando González-Doria described the name's meaning: "Zabaleta has its origin in the Basque country and while we do not know in which century it appeared, we do know that it is an ancient Basque surname." In the Basque language, the surname Zabaleta refer to a wide flat area.[6] Thus, Zabaleta describes the people who live by a flat place in the mountainous Pyrenees. Another version translates Zabaleta as *"the people who live by the mountain pass."* When the surname-root, *"Zabal,"* meaning a wide place, is combined with the maximizing ending *"eta,"* it becomes "a very-wide place." Hence Zabal-eta is, *"un lugar muy ancho."* [7]

The Basque practice of associating place designators with extended families also allows us to know the exact location of the Zabaleta family in the Basque countryside, through an oral tradition which pre-dates written records, or at least to the eighth century CE (Contemporary Era). It stands to reason that, since the Basque language describes a people's location, there could be

more than one founding family called *Zabaleta*. In fact, this research has located two families, one in the Basque Province of Navarre *(Navarra)* and the other in neighboring Guipúzcoa. The two families are related, and together they form the progenitor base for the extended Zabaleta family both in Spain and in the Americas.

It should be noted here that the Zabaleta surname spelled with a "b" and Zavaleta spelled with a "v" have the same origin. With the sixteenth century emigration of Zabaleta's to the New World, this Basque surname, along with many others, was changed from the Basque spelling using "b" to the Castilian spelling using "v." Etymologically there is no difference between Zabaleta and Zavaleta. In fact, this change allows us to easily differentiate between Zabaletas born in Spain and Zavaletas born in the Americas (beginning around 1500). Simply stated, all Zabaletas/Zavaletas are members of the same family, separated by generations and oceans.[8] For the purpose of this article, when Zabaleta is spelled with a "b" it refers to a Spanish origin, and when spelled with a "v" it refer to an American origin.

The Basques speak an ancient tongue, *Euskara,* which, means, "way of speaking." *Euskara* is not one of the Indo-European families of languages. Though theories of Basque origin abound, their precise beginning as a genetically and culturally homogeneous people is lost in time.[9] It is known, however, that the Basques have occupied a single geographic region of the Iberian Peninsula for longer than any other identifiable European ethnic group. The Basques are most probably one of the only surviving Neolithic peoples of Europe.

> *It is believed that the Basques have lived in or near their present location, on the border between Spain and France for thousands of years, a relatively small tribe surviving when many others were overwhelmed by invaders, losing their ethnic identity.*[10]

Over the last two thousand years, the Basques, who inhabit the Pyrenees mountain range, where it meets the Cantabrian Sea along the modern day Spanish-French border, have struggled to maintain their cultural and linguistic identity. Today, four contiguous Spanish Provinces make up the Basque region: Viscaya, Álava, Guipúzcoa, and Navarre. Collectively this region is known as the Basque Country. Over time, national borders have been created where only ethnic ones once existed. There are also three Basque Provinces in France: Labourd, Basse Navarre, and Soule. Together the seven Provinces form what is known as *Euskal Herria.*[11]

The Iberian Peninsula has an ancient history, and in the early historic period, consisted of disassociated groups of long established peoples surrounded by more recently invading tribes. In his book, *History of Spain and Portugal,*[12] Payne points out that the origin of the Basque people is shrouded in mystery,

but one thing is certain: this tribal people, organized by kinship, were among the first inhabitants of Europe. Benefiting from the rugged terrain of the Pyrenees, they remained relatively secluded until the Romans invaded the Iberian Peninsula around 75 BCE (Before Contemporary Era).[13]

Through successive invasions over approximately one thousand years, from the time of Christ to 1,000 CE., the Basques never succumbed to foreign domination. Payne explained that *"to this day the Basques are considered to be xenophobic, very difficult to get to know, and always wary of strangers."*[14] Tony recalls, in the 1970s, our cousin Bruno Zavaleta recounting a story of his first trip to the Basque country. Bruno, who is always given to wearing a Stetson®, even in Spain, remarked that the combination of a Tejano Zavaleta wearing a Stetson® was such a shock that people were "afraid" of him.[15] They were amused to discover that he was their "cousin" from Texas. This isolationist stereotype is, of course, thought to be one of the Basque's most successful strategies for ethnic survival. *"The truth is that the Basque distrusts a stranger much too much to invite someone into his home who doesn't speak his language."*[16] It was this inherent Basque distrust of strangers that drove the Basque Diaspora to the farthest reaches of the Americas, and, eventually, to the northern frontier of Mexico along the *Rio Bravo del Norte.*[17]

Basque history and culture have been described continuously since the time of the Roman Empire, with Roman historians and geographers providing references to the Basques two thousand years ago. From their well-protected vantage points in the Pyrenees, the Basques watched successive waves of invaders come through their land. In his classic publication, *A Book of the Basques*,[18] Rodney Gallop eloquently describes the Basque country, telling how the Basque were witnesses to the arrival of the Aryans, the ancestors of most native Europeans.[19] The Romans, Visigoths, Franks, Normans, Moors, and, finally, Castilians subsequently all crossed through *Euskal Herria*. As Christianity slowly began to take hold, the Basques' tribal identity survived in the secluded and easily defensible internal valleys of the Pyrenees, untouched through the eighth century, CE.

The Basque region lies at the crossroads of sub-continents and empires. Through the passage of time, and the movement of armies, Christianity was the only external force that was able to eventually permeate Basque tribal armor and philosophically "conquer" them. This was only possible because the primary road to the second holiest pilgrimage site in Europe, *Santiago de Compostela,* the burial site of St. James the Apostle, passed directly through the Basque countryside. Over the course of a thousand years, pilgrims from the farthest reaches of Europe and the Middle East traversed the road from the Holy Land to Rome (Europe's primary pilgrimage site) and then on to Santiago.

Slowly but surely, the emergence of Europe from the Dark Ages required the Basques to convert their verbal tribal codes to written records, guaranteeing thousands of years of inheritance and land ownership. Rights, which in the pre-literate world had been passed on by word of mouth and ratified by tribal councils, had to be converted to a written format known as the *fueros.*[20] It was the power of ancestral rights that allowed the Basques to form allegiances with the earliest Christian monarchs of Castile and Aragon. In the early centuries, the *fueros* empowered the tribal structure and its leaders. Later, *fueros* formed the basis for the formation of Basque regions, provinces, and communities, as well as the authority from which the first generation of European style Basque lords emerged and governed.[21]

Finally, the history of the Iberian Peninsula informs us that the Basques have always enjoyed full autonomy, resisting local warlords and answering only to their own lords. Through the formation of alliances with the Kings of Castile and Aragon, the Basques were afforded honors and the rights to trade as if forming a separate country. For example, since the Basque province of Guipúzcoa was never conquered by the Moors, the Kings of Castile and Aragon bestowed the status of "nobility" upon all of its inhabitants, and while this honor was mostly honorary and never utilized by the majority of the population of Guipúzcoa, the leading Basque families[22] eventually came to be recognized as *Hidalgos* or Basque "nobility."

Zabaleta Family Origins

Tracing family history through time, over generations, and across oceans is both time-consuming and expensive. It was not until the advent of the Internet that more than fifty years of study of Zavaleta family history and genealogy could be more fully facilitated by a few simple keystrokes, but travel to historic family locations and national archives is still essential.[23] Old World family records are often sketchy and, in antiquity, mostly non-existent. However, the nature of the Basque population, their geographic area of origin, and the uniqueness of their surnames make the records and references available beyond the ordinary. It is when families have had illustrious histories, or have played important historical roles, that familial reconstruction is easiest. For the sake of this article, only family history with the surname Zabaleta/Zavaleta is considered. Documented family history now approximates two thousand years of direct descent. Special thanks to doctoral student and friend Michael Scott Van Wagenen, who has, in the interest of my work on family history and the origin of families in Northeastern Mexico, spent more than 100 hours in the, Family History Library of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Salt Lake City, Utah. It is important to note that in the Mormon archives, Michael found numerous Zavaleta ancestors in Northern Mexico whose surname was recorded with an "S." Therefore, the search for Savaleta and

Sabaleta revealed many heretofore unknown family links and answered many questions that the family had held for many years. As a result of his work and that of Tony Zavaleta, Jr., the Zavaleta family genealogy has a documented direct line of descent that now exceeds 60 generations and is placed in time at the year zero CE. Two thousand years of direct family descent.

The earliest reference we have to the Basque family known as Zabaleta comes from the ancient accounts of the military campaigns of Charlemagne and of his defeat at the hands of the Basques at the Battle of Roncevaux Pass (French spelling) or Roncesvalles (Spanish spelling) in 778 CE. [24] The ancient account of Charlemagne's only defeat provides us with a twelve-hundred-year-old description of the Zabaleta family home and of *El Camino de Zabaleta* (the Zabaleta road running through the forest and the Roncesvalles Pass), near the modern border between Spain and France.[25]

> *Los cronistas carolingios universalizaron Valcarlos englobandolo en un pedazo del "Pirineo de los Vascones," que no conocían por si mismos, sino por relatos de supervivientes y, en mayor medida, de gentes que oyeron contar las historias de primera mano. Pero, como dudarlo, fueron enormemente precisos en las referencias topográficas... la hondonada subyacente por la que corre un rumoroso arroyo que no se deja ver hasta* ***la borda Zabaleta****" (in this case the word "borda" translates as a small country cottage).* [26]
>
> Approximate translation: *The Carolingian chroniclers spread the word of Valcarlos, locating it in a part of the "Pyrenees of the Basques," which they did not know personally, but had heard of in the stories of survivors and mainly from people that had heard the stories told first hand. However, how can one doubt it, as they were extremely precise in the topographic references...the underlying hollow in which runs a roaring stream that is not seen until reaching the Zabaleta's cottage.*

The ancient account describes the battle in which Roland the nephew of Charlemagne was killed and provides a lyrical, even poetic, description of the home's country setting:

> *Con trazas de volver a pisar el trazado genuino, la senda gana la luz en otro claro del bosque, el a que forma un recoleto parado enmarcado entre gruesos castaños y dos caudalosos arroyos,* ***conocido por Zabaleta (lugar ancho),*** *un rincón cautivador por su sabor pastoral que preside una recia casona de piedra, hoy convertida en borda."*[27]
>
> Approximate translation: *With plans to return to walk along the actual layout, the footpath opens into the light in another clearing of the forest, one that forms a secluded stopping point, framed between thick chestnut trees and two mighty streams, known as Zavaleta (a wide space), a corner of the woods, captivating with its pastoral flavor that presides over a sturdy stone house, today converted into a cottage.*

The Kingdom of Navarre and the Province of Guipúzcoa

It was not until the year 905 that Sancho Garcés I (a direct ancestor), organized the Basque region around a European-style regional dynasty. It became known as the Kingdom of Navarre. McAlister states that, *"The Kingdom of Navarre was created in the tenth century by Romanized Basques in the western Pyrenees; and the kingdoms of Castile and Aragon were both formed in the first half of the eleventh century, Castile from the east of León, and Aragon from a county of Navarre in the central Pyrenees."*[28]

The principality of Navarre enjoyed independence for several hundred years, largely due to the fact that it had no threatening neighbors. While the eastern half of the Basque country was drawn more and more into the French realm, the western half, today located in Spain, included the regions of Navarre and Guipúzcoa, home of the Zabaleta family.

Payne suggests that by the twelfth century this region had been mostly Christianized and was comprised of farms with strong extended families.[29] Slowly, Guipúzcoa and the entire Spanish Basque region became part of the Castilian world, and the Basques were poised to play a major role in the expansion of Castile in its colonization of the New World after 1492.

The Zabaleta family has its origin in Guipúzcoa and Navarre, and, as such, all Zabaletas in the Old World and Zavaletas in the New World herald from the same general location. Map searches indicate that the distance from the Zabaletas of Lesaca, Navarre, to those in Urretxu, Guipúzcoa, to be no more than 50km or 30 miles.

The Basque regions of Guipúzcoa and Navarre have had a homogenous cultural and socio-economic identity for at least the last one thousand years. Melded around families, Guipúzcoans and Navarrans are a people who have developed a culture based both in their experiences in the mountains and on the sea. The mountains and the sea coexist with equal importance in Basque history and identity.

Mark Kurlansky's, *The Basque History of the World,* is particularly illustrative of this fact.

> *"For hundreds, if not thousands of years, the Guipúzcoans have stood on their rocky coastline and watched the great whale migrations cross the Bay of Biscay. Basque fishermen followed the great beasts to Newfoundland. Famed as boat-makers, mariners, and as navigators, Basque settlements have been found in Newfoundland that pre-dates the Norsemen, and certainly the voyages of Columbus."*[30]

Basque shipbuilders from San Sebastián and other Guipúzcoan ports are known to have built the legendary Santa María, and it is also known that Columbus heavily recruited Basque mariners for his historic voyages.[31]

Urretxu Villa Real, Guipúzcoa

The Royal Village of Urretxu is located in inner Guipúzcoa, equidistant from the four Basque capitals.[32] Urretxu is part of the region of the Upper Urola River Valley, and was built along the Urola River located at the base of the steep faced Mount Irimo. Urretxu lies along a narrow and elongated valley with an undulating topography.[33] One of the earliest known references to the Zabaleta family is associated with the establishment of the Basque village of Urretxu and its designation as a Royal town. Urretxu was designated a "Royal Village" (*Villa Real*) in 1383, and was designed in a manner typical of the Middle Ages. The first known historical document from the region is its City Charter, signed by King Juan I of Castile (1358-1390) on October 3, 1383. In the early centuries after its formation, Urretxu was a stopping point for kings and armies along a main east-west route from the capitals of Europe connecting the Iberian Peninsula.[34] Today, the medieval antecedents of Urretxu *"conserve the magnificence of the ancestral Basque gothic houses and palaces found there."*[35] One of the most distinctive Basque family country homes, or *caseríos,* in the Urretxu region is the *Caserío de Zabaleta*, located on the approach to Mount Irimo, above the Hermitage of Santa Barbara.

Many references to the origin of the Zabaleta family point to this very precise and easily locatable area in Guipúzcoa. "Zabaleta" is a geographic place name easily locatable on Spanish geodesic maps.[36] The Zabaleta family of Urretxu, who we know sent members to México around 1500, is directly related to the Zavaleta family of South Texas, and has its origin in the large *caserío* in Urretxu, Guipúzcoa. This Basque country *casona* maintains its coat of arms (*escudo*) on its façade to this day. *En campo de sinople, una torre de argent;* translated: a silver castle-tower on a green background (the tower is a clear allusion to the relationship with the Torre de Zabaleta in Lesaca). This house was the birthplace of many very illustrious family ancestors who were powerful regional lords and land owners.

It is because of the historical importance of this family site that we know that the Zabaleta family is one of the earliest of the region. We are indeed fortunate to have available to us, Lope de Isasti's 1625 description of the house. The house is described as "truly monumental," having been constructed by only the most "accomplished stone masons":

> *La casa Zabaleta se nos presenta ya próxima, mostrando su fachada de ladrillo rojo sostenida por recios muros de mampostería y dos bellos arcos de sillares. Zabaleta sorprende por las medidas de su zaguán y sus establos, y la amplitude de las estancias en toda su primera planta. Pero es en la parte alta, en la gabaría, donde la casona deja ver su verdadera dimensión y la importancia que tuvo antaño, pues sus vigas y entramado, la estructura toda del tejado, en verdad monumental, no pudo ser obra mas que de consumados maestros.*[37]

Approximate translation: *The Zavaleta house appears to us (walking along the road and toward the house)...showing its red brick façade maintained by strong walls of stone and two beautiful arcs of cast stones. The Zavaleta house surprises one with the size of its vestibule and its stables, and the amplitude of the rooms in the entire first story. But it is in the second story and above that the large house lets us see its true dimension and the importance that it had long ago, since its beams and framework, and the entire structure of the tile roof, which is truly monumental, could not have been built by anyone other than by consummate master builders.*

Equally significant is the fact that the work of Jaca on the history of Urretxu documents the Zabaleta family descent line, beginning with the first "Señor" of the *Caserío de Zabaleta,* Joan de Zabaleta y Aguinaga, who fought in the war against France in 1524. He married María de Iturbe Irigoyenin in Zumárraga in 1526. The couple was given the country home as a wedding gift by Joan's father Pedro. Pedro and his wife Domenja had another son, Martín, who moved to nearby Legazpia, and married María de Aizaga y Lakidiola. The descendants of Martín and María began another branch of the family whose members still live in Legazpi. The gift of the house included "all the land, water rights, *castañares, robledales, cubas, arcas, ajuar y bastago.*"[38] Translation: orchards and house furnishings.

María Irigoyenin died in childbirth, and Señor Joan de Zabaleta y Aguinaga then married María Joaniz de Zabalo y Legazpi, the daughter of General Legazpi the commander of the Royal troops in the Philippine Islands. This marriage created an even stronger Zabaleta connection to Legazpi. Joan and María Legazip's firstborn son, Santuru, fought in the War of the Pyrenees in 1558, and he was designated by King Felipe II to escort the French princess, Isabel de Valois, from the border of France into Spain, via the *camino real*, which passed directly in front of his Zabaleta house. Santuru's son, Santos Zabaleta married Cathalina de Beydacar and became Capitán and payroll officer for the Royal Navy of Galleons. In 1613, he became *Alcalde* of Urretxu and then *Alcalde* of Bergara in 1615-1626. In 1615 he served as part of the official escort of King Felipe III through Guipúzcoa from the French border to Oñati.

The fourth Señor of Zabaleta was Joan de Zabaleta who married María de Galdos who also served as *Alcalde*. Joan de Zabaleta and María de Galdos had a son named Domingo. There exist two unsubstantiated versions of the descent line of Domingo de Zabaleta. The first, indicates that Domingo served as Capitán in the army of *Flandes* (Holland) and was killed at the battle of *los Paises Bajos*. In the second version he returns from war and produces an heir. The examination of both records suggests that the first is the most plausible, because there is no record of a male heir.

Assuming he had no male heir, the ownership of the *Caserío de Zabaleta* passed to his sister, María de Zabaleta y Galdos who married Miguel de Nocolalde y Barrenechea. Their daughter María Joséfa de Zabaleta married Cristóbal de Gaviria y Gárate, a member of the Order of Santiago, who was governor of the Spanish Guard and ambassador of the Court to France. His son, Juan Santos de Zabaleta y Gárate became the Royal court historian and author of numerous scholarly books on history, politics, and philosophy.[39]

Juan de Zabaleta y Gárate married Antonia de Espinoza, and their son Antonio de Zabaleta y Espinoza married Juana Lafuente, who was born in San Sebastian in 1705. Their daughter Doña María de Zabaleta y Lafuente moved to México, most probably to meet her brother Antonio, who had established residence there. In Mexico, she married Antonio de Llobregat. One of their sons, Maríano, became *Capitán de Dragones* in Buenos Aires, while their other son, José de Zabaleta, married Francisca Sancho.

In the records of sixteenth century México, Pedro, Antonio, Juan, José, Santos, and other common Zabaleta "Christian" given names continue to reappear generation after generation, and well into the twentieth century. Second and third born sons also gave their children common family names, so it is quite easy to follow the family line through time to Mexico. For example, Juan de Zabaleta y Mondragón, a second son, married María de Salinas in 1595, and named his son Pedro de Zabaleta y Salinas. Pedro served in the *Indias* for many years as Capitán in the Royal Spanish navy. Manuel de Zabaleta served in Cuba as *Coronel* in the army. He died there in 1836, leaving a fortune to his native city of San Sebastian for the construction of hospitals. A street in San Sebastián (Donostia) was named in his honor in 1895.

Casa Torre de Zabaleta, Lesaca (Lesaka), Navarre

The C*asa-Torre de Zabaleta,* located in Lesaca, Navarre, was constructed in the thirteenth century or earlier. In 1364, Lesaca town records note that the tower was being reconstructed: *"A Tomas de Gárriz, maestro balador, 100 carlines prietos por restaurar las almenas del Palacio de Zabaleta.*[40] Translation: Pay to master estimator, Tomas de Garriz 100 coins for the restoration of the Zabaleta Palace.

In 1444, Señor Ochoa López de Zabaleta defended the region of Navarre against the Guipúzcoans, who sacked and plundered his home.[41] For his service to the Crown, the Zabaleta family was recognized by the monarchs of Aragon, and the funds to "restore" the *casa-torre,* damaged during the siege, were provided by King Juan II, in gratitude for Zabaleta loyalty and support.[42] Around 1450, López de Zabaleta was granted a Captaincy, becoming the regional military commander, and was made responsible for the safety of Goizueta and "*el Gobierno de las Cinco Villas*," the Government of the Five Villas.[43]

Mosén Felipe Zabaleta the son of Ochoa López de Zabaleta became “El Señor del Mayorazgo de Zabaleta” and also the “owner” of the *Palacio de Cabo de Armeria de la villa*. Later he would receive the title of *"Salvador de Lesaca y Capitán General de Filipinas"*.[44] Felipe Zabaleta, who was also Señor de la *casa-torre de Zabaleta*, is recorded in Lesaca history through extant letters as having been the *"Magnifico y Nuestro Especial Amigo,"* of *Cardenal de Fox, Infant de Navarre*, Bishop of Bayona and uncle to Queen Catalina.[45]

The historical documentation of the Zabaleta family in Lesaca, Navarre, briefly predates the family in Urretxu, Guipúzcoa, but is generally contemporary to the family just a few kilometers away. It is probable that the *Caserio de Zabaleta* in Urretxu was the Lesaca family's country estate. Lesaca, located in the Basque province of Navarre, lists the *Torre de Zabaleta* as one of the two most important historical monument buildings in the town.[46] The Torre, also known as *"la Caxerna and as Labrija"* was known to have housed the troops of The Duke of Wellington during the Peninsular War or the *Guerra de Independencia* (1808-1814).[47] The troops were likely housed in the *casa-torre* during Wellington's campaign to dislodge the French from San Sebastián (Donostia) in 1813, until the sacking and burning of San Sebastián at the hands of the Anglo-Portuguese Army, also in 1813.[48] Bishop Zarándia, the owner of the *casa-torre* during the French occupation of Spain, was held prisoner by the French until he was freed by Lord Wellington's forces. An antique photograph of the *Torre de Zabaleta*, taken in 1916, shows a woman washing clothes in the Ońin River which runs along the side of the tower.[49]

The "primary" Zabaleta family coat of arms is shared by both the family in Lesaca and Urretxu, and is characterized by a silver castle-tower on a green background. There is no doubt that the two family locations in the neighboring Basque provinces of Guipúzcoa and Navarre are directly related.

Zabaletas in Public Service to the Crown

With the establishment of the primary locations of Urretxu and Lesaca and their strategic importance to the Spanish Realm, the Zabaleta family began centuries of royal service, and established their social-economic and political dominance in the region. The Zabaleta family was established in this mountainous area by 800 CE., and played a major role in the formation of both Basque and Castilian history. One historian put it this way:

> The Zabaleta family is both ancient and noble.[50] *"En el caso del apellido Zabaleta, todo y su antiguedad y desarrollo, posee títulos nobiliarios, segun las fuentes bibliograficas."*
>
> Translated: *The surname Zabaleta, both in antiquity and through the years, possesses titles of nobility, according to the bibliographic sources.*[51]

There is ample evidence in the historical record of the importance the Zabaleta family played. While the term Guipúzcoan "nobility" is merely an historical footnote, in reality the title opened the door for the Zabaleta family to develop social, economic and political status, and it facilitated family movement to the Indies in the sixteenth century. In 1499, a royal document authored by Queen Blanca and King Juan de Labrit confirmed and increased all the social, political, and economic privileges granted to the Zabaleta family by King Carlos, on October 1, 1202. Lesaca history notes that the town continued to thrive through the centuries because of these benefits to the Zabaleta family: *"por los muchos servicios prestados por los vecinos de Lesaca a la Corona.*[52]*"*

From the family's earliest references, the Zabaletas are described as having been formally educated. They attended preparatory schools and universities run by religious orders, studied Roman Catholic doctrine and the law, read the classic literature, and were among the first to write the history of their people and their region. It was this education that led to successive generations of public office.

Numerous sources suggest that many Zabaleta ancestors served as magistrates, *"testigos,"* and *"escribanos,"* and were witnesses and scribes for legal documents. In one recorded case, it is said that:

> *"Beltran de Larrain y Galarza testo en Aranaz ante Matias de Zabaleta el 27 de diciembre de 1682, declarando que es Señor de la Casa de Larrain y que esta en su sano juicio. Pero enfermo del cuerpo."*
>
> *Translated: Beltran de Larrain y Galarza testified in Aranaz before Matías de Zabaleta on December 27, 1682, declaring that the Señor of the Casa de Larrain was in good health and mentally able to handle his affairs although he was physically ill.*[53]

From the history of the Basque town of Aranaz, another example describes three Zabaletas involved in a legal document, in which the parish priest, Don Pedro Luys de Zabaleta, is named as the executor of the estate of his nephew Lino de Larrain. The document was witnessed by Juan Fermín de Zabaleta and was notarized by Matías de Zabaleta. The author says that it was notable that all of the notaries (attorneys) in Aranaz were Zabaletas, and that the position was past on from father to son.[54]

It is obvious from the records that the status of "nobility" or *hidalguía* provided great influence with the Crown and that the feudal lords maintained their status over land and people through the centuries. Beginning in the sixteenth century, families began to receive funds sent to them from the Americas. This newfound source of wealth further served to solidify family status at home in Spain with family in the colonies. As the years passed, it was important to maintain contact between Spain and the colonies for the purpose of arranging proper marriages. Marriages between Spanish families

remained a popular and important business proposition at least until the end of the colonial era in 1820 and in many cases well into the nineteenth century.

Family records indicate that arranged Basque marriages were common through the middle of the nineteenth century. Basque families in Matamoros, Tamaulipas, México and on the north side of the river, sought Basque men and women to marry from established Basque colonies up river at Camargo, Cuidad Mier, Revilla (now in Tamaulipas) as well as in Nuevo Leon, and throughout the Basque communities of México. In the eighteenth century, Matías Zabaleta made reference in his writing to the importance of "properly" educating the family members who leave Spain for the Americas so that they may have "proper marriages" with Spanish-born men and women when they came of age.[55]

Records dating from the fourteenth century for the royal town of Urretxu through the present day indicate that the Zabaleta family played a substantial social, political, and economic role in the region and in the Americas. Basque and Spanish records list some of the positions and honors held by family members: Hidalgo, Military and Naval officer, Bishop, Monsignor, Priest, *Familiar de la Inquisition*, Royal Historian, *Pagador de la Real Armada*, *Alcalde,* Governor, Ambassador to the Court; Royal envoy; Professor, Author, Historian; Magistrate, *Caballero de la Orden de Santiago*, and Superintendent of Royal mints. Historical Basque notables born at the Zabaleta family home in Urretxu include General Gaspar de Jauregui, *"el Pastor*;*"* Francisco Domingo de Zabaleta, professor of the University of Alcalá in the seventeenth century; and Santuru de Zabaleta y Zabalo, special envoy of King Felipe II in 1565. As noted, the coat of arms from the house of Zabaleta de Urretxu is shared by Zabaleta families in Lesaka, Navarre, as well as with families in Durango, Bizkaia, Elduain, and Tolosa, further indicating that all of these branches of the family are related.[56]

Other branches of the family display coats of arms which signify their individual accomplishment and membership in military orders. For example, in the Zabaleta houses in Irun and Mondragón, family members are known by the following coat of arms:

> *En campo de oro, un árbol de sinople con un jabalí de sable empinado a su tronco; also, En campo de oro, cuatro escudetes de gules cargados de una cruz a todo trance de argent y colocados en dos palos. Entre ellos tres panelas de sinople colocadas dos en los flancos y una en punta; tambien, En campo de argent, un águila de sable. En campo de gules, cinco veneras de oro colocadas en sotuer.*[57]
>
> Approximate translation: *On a field of gold, a green tree with a black boar with raised tusk. Also: On field of gold, four small red shields with silver crosses with two wooden clubs. Among them three green trees two placed at the sides and one at the top; Also: On a field of*

silver, a black eagle, on a red background, with five gold scallop shells arranged in a bent cross.

Over at least the last 1,228 years of recorded history, Zabaletas are documented to have served the Realm as nobles, adventurers, religious, military, politicians, and intellectuals. They were called to serve the Kings of the house of Aragon, and to escort Queen Isabel through Guipúzcoa. When it was time to adventure out to the New World, Zavaletas are known to have been among the first to dare.

Ermita de San Juan and La Virgen de Zabaleta

The *Caserío de Zabaleta* was located on one of the principal pilgrimage routes to *Santiago de Compostela.* From the twelfth century to the present day, the family has maintained the hermitage of San Juan, located on family property and along the road that the pilgrims walk. At some point in the distant past, the hermitage acquired the sacred object of a *"Black Virgin,"* known also as the *Virgen de Zabaleta*. Beginning in medieval times, the Zabaleta country house complex included a sanctuary for weary travelers, as well as a hospital for pilgrims.[58] The *Diccionario Histórico Geográfico*, dating from 1802, lists a pilgrim's hospital located at *Caserío de Zabaleta*.[59]

The family home was positioned along one of the most heavily traveled routes of the medieval world. Travelers of all social classes, including royalty, passed along this route and, visited the *Virgen Negra de Zabaleta.*

Since the time of their conversion, more than a thousand years ago, the Basques have been fervent Catholics. Today, the Basque Country is characterized by the duality of sophisticated large cities, with first class universities, modern industry and wealth, along with the pastoral countryside where little has changed in a thousand years. In the rural areas, life continues to be based on the changing of the seasons, and Catholicism has been frozen in time very much as it has in rural México. In 1610, Fray Felipe de Zabaleta, the priest at Zugarramurdi and the Monastery of Urdax played a major role as inquisitor in the famous Witchcraft trials of Logroño.[60]

Three hundred years later, in the 1930s, an anti-clerical fervor swept over Spain, very much as it had in México. In 1930, the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera ended, followed in 1931 by the abdication of King Alfonso XIII and the declaration of the Second Republic. By May of 1931, Basque Bishop Mateo Mugica of Vitoria had been expelled, and, in June of 1931, the Primate of Spain, Cardinal Pedro Segura, was expelled as well. The rural religious backlash began when, in late June of 1931, a little-known but important hysterical craze befell the inner mountain communities of Guipúzcoa.

Described in William Christian's book *Visionaries: The Spanish Republic and the Reign of Christ,* by July 1931, crowds of more than 50,000 persons gathered in remote and rural Guipúzcoa to see visions and miracles. As in

Fátima and Lourdes, first children and soon adults began to have visions of the Virgin Mary, to fall into trances, to communicate heavenly messages. This hysteria brought international attention to this remote corner of the earth and was roundly condemned by the Church, but, curiously, it was seen as useful by the government. In México, less than a decade earlier, President Plutarco Elias Calles made his famous visit to El Niño Fidencio at Espinazo in the desert of northern México. In November of 1931, the Basque seer José Garmendia was similarly requested to visit Spanish President Macía in Barcelona.

The center of the "seer" phenomena was Ezkioga, a village very near to Urretxu and Zumárraga, and one of the "permanent seers" was León Zabaleta, a humble farmer from Oñati, located only a few miles from Ezkioga.[61] As in México, eventually the government joined the Church in condemnation, fearing the emergence of a new socio-political-religious movement that they could not control. In early 1932, the Spanish government, in an attempt to separate government from religion, demanded the removal of all religious images from government offices in Guipúzcoa. This is most likely when the icon of the Virgen of Zabaleta was removed from its permanent shrine at the *Caserío de Zabaleta* in an effort to protect it from destruction by the anti-clerical secular movement. In 1933, the Vatican denounced the agglomerations of religious fanatics in Guipúzcoa, and the cult was forced underground. In 1936, three years of turmoil across Spain led to the overthrow of the Second Republic, to the Spanish Civil War, and to continued reprisals against Basques by General Franco, including, in 1937, the Nazi bombing of the Basque national symbol, the Tree of Guernica.[62]

Neither dictators nor World War have been able to dampen Basque religious and political fervor, and now in the 21st century, Basque fringe separatist groups continue to operate in the mountains and conduct terroristic plots against the Spanish government and people. The dark side of family history includes at least one Zabaleta family member who is a convicted "ETA" (Basque Fatherland and Unity) terrorist. In December 2001, José Javier Zabaleta received 200 years imprisonment for an attack in 1980 that killed five persons.[63] In a recent article, Inaki Zabaleta, "found that 85 percent of all articles on Basques in the U.S. Press made reference to terrorism and that of the approximately 2.4 million Basques only about 70 are terrorists. In contrast, Patxi Zabaleta, a representative in the Navarre legislature and the leader of "ARALAR," a Basque nationalist party, openly opposes violence and supports the arrest of "ETA" members, including at least one of her kinsmen.64 Patxi Zabaleta has said, "Once people start settling down, politics is far from the problems of daily life. Self-determination is not the bread and butter of daily life." [64] On March 24, 2006, ETA declared an end to terrorism and announced a "permanent" cease-fire in order to seek political solutions to issues of nationalism in the Basque Country.

Zavaletas in the New World

The movement of Zabaletas from their homes in Guipúzcoa and Navarre to the New World began at least five hundred years ago. Historical documents indicate that Zabaletas were among the first to arrive in the New World, arriving by the year 1500.[65] We know, however, that they were not included among the first 506 founding e*ncomenderos* of New Spain 1521-1555.[66] Only a handful of the original *encomenderos* was Basque. Almost certainly the first Zabaletas in the Americas were military and naval officers and *hacendados*.

It is widely known that the majority of the seamen recruited by Cristóbal Colón (Christopher Columbus) were Basque sailors, and at least one Spanish publication includes a Zabaleta on the crew list.[67] It is well documented that Columbus had strong Basque connections, that his ship the Santa María was owned by the Basque merchant, Juan de la Cosa, and the Pinzón brothers. and that Columbus sailed with a Basque crew. Additionally, the crew of the ship La Niña was primarily Basque. The Mariners' Museum of Newport reports that, on his second voyage, Columbus sailed "with 17 ships, 1,200 men and boys, including sailors, soldiers, colonists, priests, officials," many of whom we know were Basque.[68]

Some of the earliest documented members of the Zabaleta family were seafarers and fishermen. In his book, *The Basque History of the World*, Kurlansky suggests that Basques are believed to have discovered the route to North America by following the great whale migration in the North Atlantic. Basque fishermen preceded Norsemen in North America and were there centuries before Columbus.[69] It is safe to establish a historical baseline for the Zabaleta family's arrival in the New World between 1492 and 1520, a supposition that has considerable support, but still requires definitive documentation.

The Spanish utilized their earliest Caribbean outposts as jumping-off points to México and the rest of Latin America. The records of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), LDS database, "Familysearch. org," documents Zabaletas in Cuba and Puerto Rico from the early 1500's and in México, Central America and South America from shortly after the *Conquista* and certainly by 1530.[70] Evidence from these important databases, along with other historical records, indicate that from approximately 1500 forward, and with each wave of Spanish exploration and colonization of New Spain, Zabaletas were present, many playing significant and historic roles. Zabaleta men made their way from the Basque homeland to the New World, first as naval and military officers and as members of religious orders. Zabaleta colonists quickly followed.

By the end of the fifteenth century, all of the factors critical for the Basque Diaspora to the New World were in place. Major Basque families recognized by the Crown sat at Court and were considered to be noble and

loyal. Additionally, as "good" Catholics they were positioned for favor by the Catholic Monarchs. Major Basque families had established dominance over land and sea, and, by 1500, the principal families were sent to the New World, serving as landlords, government officials, priests, officers, and professional soldiers. All Spanish families had members who were in need of land, and it was known that in the New World one could easily establish rank and status not held or possible in Spain.

It is important to note that tracing family genealogy across five centuries and two continents is no simple matter. One major genealogical research technique that has served this study is the tracing of "Christian-Baptismal" or given names, passed down over generations from father to son and daughter. Tracing Zabaleta family history is informed by both the uniqueness of the surname, as well as the consistency and faithfulness of their given names. Therefore, given names like Pedro, Juan, José, Antonio, Francisco, Santos, Bartolo, and Abraham are bestowed upon the male children in the family generation after generation and century after century across continents. For example, the landlord of *Caserío Zabaleta* in the late fifteenth century was Pedro de Zabaleta. The initial patriarchs of the Zabaletas in México were located in the states of Veracruz, México and Puebla in 1550, in Hidalgo in 1600, in Nuevo León, Coahuila, Durango and Zacatecas in 1650, and in Brownsville, Texas, in 1890. All were named Pedro and all are descendants from the original Pedro in Spain.

Zavaletas Arrive in México 1530

The first Zabaletas to arrive in México were sailors and soldiers, followed by priests and then colonists. Service to the Realm was followed by attention to family interests. Records document the arrival of Zavaletas in Veracruz shortly after the *Conquista*. Immediately following the fall of Tenochitlán in 1521, Hernán Cortez and his troops had to be supported by supply lines from Spain through Cuba to Veracruz. One of the first *Conquistadores*, Juan Navarro a Basque from Navarre, is a documented family ancestor whose descendants were among the founders of Saltillo. The areas along this sixteenth-century supply route comprise the current day Mexican States of Veracruz, México and Puebla, with the State of Hidalgo a little to the north of the Valley of México and Oaxaca to the south.

Zavaleta family oral history places family members in the Mexican states of Veracruz in the 1520s as naval and military officers and in the Valley of México and Puebla by 1540 as colonists. Zavaleta family members were also established in Hidalgo between 1540 and 1580, where they launched ranching interests in the area of *Huichapan, Provincia de Jilotepec*. By the beginning of the seventeenth century, the Zavaleta surname frequently appears in the historical record in México.[71] The Zabaletas of Urretxu are known to have established residence in México in the middle of the sixteenth century, and are

believed to have been established in Puebla on the east side of the valcano and in the Valley of Chalco where they founded the *Hacienda de Zavaleta*. It is at the *Hacienda de Zavaleta* that the given names Pedro and Antonio first appear in México and then follow through the generations with both the southern branch and the northern branch of the family.

Hacienda de Zavaleta

Tlalmanalco, in the Mexican State of México, is a picturesque drive on a modern highway not more than thirty miles from México City. However, in 1519, at the time of the *Conquista*, it was a regional capitol of the Aztec empire. It is an interesting note that the Nahuatl word "Tlalmanalco" translates to "lugar de tierra plana," or the place of flat earth, thus bearing an uncanny resemblance to the meaning of Zabaleta in the Basque language.[72] Positioned along the route from coastal Veracruz to México City, this central place was one of the earliest Basque settlements. The *Hacienda de Zavaleta* is today located in the village of San Rafael in the ancient municipio of Tlalmanalco which sits at the foot of the beautiful snowcapped volcano *Iztaccíhuatl*. The *Río de la Compañía* runs down from the snows of the volcano and through the lands of the hacienda. A group of twelve Franciscan missionaries built one of the earliest Catholic churches in México on this spot in the 1530s. The Church of San Luis Obispo de Tolosa (Tolosa is a Basque town in Guipúzcoa) is the burial place of the messianic Franciscan leader Fray Martín de Valencia, leader of the Christianization of the region.[73] In 1564, only forty years after the *Conquista*, José de Castañeda the governor of Tlalmanalco leased land that he had inherited from his father, to twenty-one Spanish families including the Zavaleta family. The *Hacienda de Zavaleta* was established at Tlalmanalco by Coronel Joaquín de Zavaleta, of the Puebla Zavaletas, in 1703 at the beginning of the eighteenth century, and is considered to be a "magnificent" example of a Spanish Baroque hacienda in colonial Mexico.[74] Unfortunately, the family hacienda was lost due to "poor administration" and the inability of its founder to pay a debt of 4,850 pesos which had accumulated during the period 1700 and 1770. At the time of its loss, it is estimated that seventy percent of the native population in the area lived on and worked for the *Hacienda*.[75] There is evidence, however, that Zavaletas lived in the area well before 1700, since by that time there existed four mills in the province, one named San Nicolás de Zavaleta, indicating that the family had farming interests in the province in the 1600's.[76] The *Hacienda de Zavaleta*, as indicated earlier, is located on the north side of the volcano in the Valley of Chalco-Amecameca. The Zavaleta family was well established in the State of Puebla on the southeast side of the volcano by 1600. By the middle of the 18th century, there existed 46 haciendas in the area of Chalco consisting of "rented" lands which produced wheat, corn and barley. These included the *Hacienda de Zavaleta* which was a speculative entrepreneurial enterprise, called *"haciendas aventureras."*[77] Of

the 46, only 4 were irrigated, the others dependant upon rain for the crops and when crops failed debts to the actual land owners mounted to a point where they could not be repaid. This constituted a kind of indenture system for the privileged class of landless Spaniards. While considerable research remains to be done on this system, it is quite possible that Colonel Zavaleta's military profession made it impossible for him to properly attend to his hacienda. The *Hacienda de Zavaleta* was featured in the January 1993 issue of the magazine *México Desconocido.*[78]

While the *Hacienda de Zavaleta*, in the State of México lives on and is immortalized in Mexican history as the site of the signing of *"El Convenio Zavaleta,"* in reality the property which bears the surname was held by the family for less than a century. In 1832, General Santa Anna chose the *Hacienda de Zavaleta* as the site for a treaty (*convenio*) signed by the Generalissimo and General Bustamante, which returned General Gómez Pedraza to power, thus guaranteeing Santa Anna's own return to power.[79]

Among the Christian given names passed on in the Zavaleta family, Antonio and Pedro, are two of the most prominent names linking Puebla to the Basque homeland. Antonio de Zavaleta was a family patriarch in Puebla during the seventeenth century from where Joaquin is believed to have originated and during the Mexican Revolution there was a Coronel Antonio Zavaleta in Toluca.[80] Records indicate that Zavaletas founded and built the hacienda and occupied it from 1700 to some point in the eighteenth century at which time ownership was passed on in succession to several other Spanish families who own the hacienda buildings and its ruins to this day.[81] At the beginning of the 19th century and at the end of the colonial period, the *Hacienda de Zavaleta* was counted in the lands of Doña Gertrudis Ignacia de la Cotera Rivascacho, wife of the Conde de San Bartolomé de Jala.[82] Like any large land operation, over the years, they experience both good times and bad, and one interesting record encountered during this study indicates that some *Hacienda de Zavaleta* farm equipment was to be auctioned for the payment of debts in 1870.[83] During the post-colonial eighteenth and nineteenth century ownership of the *Hacienda de Zavaleta* was passed to a series of Spaniards. In 1915, the region of Chalco-Amecameca, in which the *Hacienda de Zavaleta* is located, had a population of over 100,000.[84] Only approximately 50 percent of the land had been converted to Ejido due to the social and economic power of the Spanish families which controlled the lands. In the decade after the revolution seven Spaniards controlled approximately 67,000 (165,000 acres) hectares while all together non-campesinos controlled more than 102,000 hectares (252,000 acres).[85] At the beginning of the 20th century the lands of the *Hacienda de Zavaleta* were in the possession of José de la Macorra, and now a century later, while most of the original hacienda land is in *ejido* the beautiful buildings of the hacienda originally built by the Zavaleta family are

still owned by the Macorra family. It was the Macorra family that developed la *Industria papelera*, or paper mill in the area a century ago, and employed most of the town's people.[86] *"tenemos arreglados bien nuestra titulos pero carecemos de datos para justificar el despojo verificado despues del ano 1857." "La fabrica San Rafael (Hacienda de Zavaleta), rodeada de hermosos bosques y majestuosas caidas de agua, controlaba los principales elementos para un adecuado funcionamiento: madera, agua, y vias de comunicacion. Los bosques cercanos y los viveros instalados en sus propiedades, como la hacienda de Zavaleta en Tlalmanalco...le proporcionaban la madera."*[87] Translation: "We have good titles to our land but we lack data to justify the loss of land we suffered after 1857." *La Hacienda de Zavaleta* at San Rafael was surrounded by beautiful forests and majestic waterfalls that provided the most important natural resources for a suitable operation: wood, water, and roads near forests and the plant nurseries that we built on the hacienda. The hacienda provided ample resources for all who lived on the Hacienda de Zavaleta in Tlalmanalco." By 1936, and two decades after the Mexican Revolution, the *X-Hacienda de Zavaleta* had been reduced in stature to a "*ranchería*," with fewer than 1,000 hectares (2,470 acres) of land, the amount that the law would tolerate for a single owner. *Campesino* or peasant claims for land on the "rancheria" continued well into the 1940's.[88] It was at that time that the attorneys for the Macorra family argued that the majority of claimants for land were in fact former paper mill workers, were not native to the area, and had no intention of farming the land. In March 2006, Tony and Gaby visited the X-*Hacienda de Zavaleta* and found its beautiful grounds and buildings in a state of decline.[89]

The Zavaleta Diaspora in México

The highest density of Zavaletas found in sixteenth and seventeenth century records are found in the adjoining States of Veracruz, Puebla, México, Oaxaca, and Hidalgo. A family legend passed down from generation to generation recounts that, after the initial Zabaletas were established in Veracruz, the family split, with one branch establishing roots in the southeastern states (especially in Puebla, and Oaxaca), with another branch going north to the Mexican state of Hidalgo. Records place Zavaletas in the area of Huichapan, Provincia de Jilotepec, in the present Mexican State of Hidalgo as early as 1550. Oaxaca, Puebla and México, were major destinations for settlement by Spanish families in the early colonization period. By the early 1700s, a major branch of the Zavaleta family had been established in Oaxaca and, along with the Zavaleta family in Puebla and México, has a large kindred group that continues to thrive there today.

By the beginning of the sixteenth century, the Zabaleta family in Spain was vested with large land holdings, with family members playing major

roles at Court, in the Church, and in the Military. Additionally, the marriages of Spanish-born (*Españoles*) Zabaletas were routinely arranged for Spanish-born Zabaletas living in *Nueva España*, thus solidifying existing social and economic networks between families in Spain and México. Because Basque family statutes (*fueros*) required that control the family land be inherited by the firstborn son, second born children and other siblings had to be "married out" or strategically placed in political, military, and religious roles. The dawn of the seventeenth century saw a heavy flow of people and supplies from Spain to the New World, providing tremendous opportunity for service and fortune. By the early 1600s, family members were establishing positions with every wave of colonization in the Americas.

The Basque colony of Nueva Vizcaya, modern day Durango, was colonized in the 1630s, and the northern territories of Nuevo León, Coahuila and Chihuahua by the mid-seventeenth century. Durango and Zacatecas became launching points for the exploration and colonization of the North that continued through the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Zavaletas were located in every Basque enclave along the major *Camino Real*, or King's Highway. This major route ran northward to Chihuahua and Coahuila and into New Mexico. In his book, *Camino del Norte*, Erlichman describes how pre-historic Indian trails were used by the Spanish, Tejanos Texians and then by modern American highway builders. A good example of family movement can be seen from the presence of Zavaletas in Parras and Torreón, Coahuila, where Zavaletas were documented to have been born and to have lived throughout the sixteenth century. This is also true of the example of Fray Juan de Zavaleta, who most likely attended the Franciscan seminary in Zacatecas and lived in Santa Fe, New Mexico, at the time of the Pueblo Revolt.

Zavaletas on the Northern Frontier in 1600

The Zavaleta family of Northeastern Mexico and Southern Texas traces its family origin to members who emigrated from the Mexican State of Hidalgo during the founding and colonization of Nuevo León around 1600. Historical evidence indicates that the Zavaletas living in the Mexican State of Hidalgo were very successful ranchers and growers. By 1600, the family was described as "wealthy Basque ranchers," and they were asked by other Basque explorers and *empresarios* to participate in the exploration and colonization of Nuevo León, with the promise of more land as an important incentive.

Zavaleta family members José and Luis Zabaleta, listed as *Españoles*, from Hidalgo in the first census, established land holdings in Cerralvo, the birth place of Nuevo León. We know that, at the time, José and Luis moved northward from Hidalgo to Nuevo León, the Señor de Zabaleta in Huichápan, Provincia de Jilotepec, was Pedro Zabaleta. Pedro could have been their grandfather, their father, or an older brother. At this time we do not know. By 1635, the two brothers, José and Luis Zabaleta, were selected to "lead"

a group of colonists in the founding of the new town of Cadeyreta near Monterrey. The legal act that conferred the land to them for settlement is documented in the official records of Cerralvo.[90]

Following both Basque and Spanish traditions, José and Luis were required to strike out on their own in order to establish new family land holdings. Most likely, the Señor de Zavaleta sanctioned their joining the exploration of the north, and because they had the coveted status of *Español*, they were guaranteed land. Records for the founding of Cadeyreta list the number of families, Indians, and livestock they brought to the new town. José Zavaleta was further designated as the first *alcalde* of the newly established town of Cadeyreta. Further research is required in Cadeyreta to determine the outcome of the family investment there. It is probable that they or their descendants subsequently moved to the metropolitan areas of Monterrey, Nuevo Leon and Parras, Coahuila. The dates of their appearance and movement coincide with the appearance of Luis Zavaleta in Coahuila, and it is most likely that Luis moved from Cadeyreta to settle in Parras or Torreón, Coahuila. Records indicate that there was movement of Zavaleta family members to the Mexican State of Coahuila at the same time as Nuevo León.

Within a single generation, the family's principal given name of Pedro began to appear in the records of Monterrey, circa. 1700. By the middle of the eighteenth century, with the formation of the Escandón expedition to colonize Nuevo Santander, Spanish towns were established along the *Rio Bravo del Norte* from Laredo down to Matamoros, Tamaulipas. Many of these Spanish pueblos had large Basque contingents. Basque marriages continued to be arranged between Spain on the one hand and Camargo and Matamoros on the other, well into the nineteenth century. Pedro Zavaleta and his wife María Encarnación in Monterrey in the early eighteenth century produced a son, Santiago (James) Zavaleta (1775) whose wife was Pascuala Hernández. Their son, Pedro Zavaleta was born in 1810 in Monterrey. Pedro Zavaleta married María Simona García, and they had sons Francisco "Gabino" (b.1830) and José Francisco (b.1834) and daughters María Luisa (b. 1838) and Telesfora (b. 1849), in Monterrey, Nuevo León.

The time between 1810 and 1840 was turbulent in northern México and the Mexican province of *Coahuila y Tejas*. Boundary disputes continued for decades as families moved back and forth from their ranches in México below the *Rio Bravo* to their land grant ranches north of the *Rio Bravo*. Family lore recounts that Francisco "Gabino", the son of Pedro Zavaleta and María Simona García, was born in Tejas. At this point, this is impossible to verify, except that the death certificate of his son Bartolo records his father's (Gabino) birthplace as Texas (México). Francisco "Gabino" was married to Agustina Sánchez, of a family known to have had large land holdings in South Texas. Their son Bartolomé is listed as having been born in Monterrey. Bartolomé

was always known in legal documents as Bartolo and was the patriarch of the Zavaleta family in Brownsville, Texas. Data from original records and transcribed records do not always match and hence discrepancies are yet to be validated. For example, in the Mormon records, and searching for "Sabaleta," suggest that Pedro Zabaleta who married Maria Simona Garcia produced two sons Francisco (could be Gabino) who married Maria Agustina Sanchez in Monterrey on April 26, 1854, and Jose Francisco. Francisco Zabaleta and Agustina Sanchez (probably Sanchez Sáenz) produced four children we have record for, Bartolome, Isabel, Petronilo, and Jose Abran Zabaleta Sanchez who was christened on March 17, 1865 in San Juan Bautista, Cadereyta Jimenez, Nuevo Leon. This is very significant, in that for the first time, we have a direct Zavaleta connection back to Cadereyta. Additionally, we now know that Bartolo and Abraham had a brother Petronilo and a sister Isabel. This information was heretofore unknown to the family.

Fray Juan de Zavaleta and the Pueblo Revolt

Years ago, in the early 1970's, while a graduate student at The University of Texas studying in the "old stacks" in the UT Tower, Tony was looking through Castañeda's *Our Catholic Heritage in Texas 1519-1936.* Having learned that Carlos Castañeda was a Brownsville native and a revered University of Texas professor, Tony took interest in Castañeda's work. Tony had become accustomed in his library research to automatically check the index for "Z" on the offhand chance of locating an ancestor. On that day, and to his surprise, he first learned about Franciscan Fray Juan de Zavaleta and his place in Texas history.

In his mammoth seven volume work, published under the auspices of The Knights of Columbus of Texas in 1936, Castañeda provided a sketchy note on Father Zavaleta from the expedition diary of Juan Domínguez de Mendoza Cavo y Caudillo, who set out on December 15, 1683, from *Presidio de El Paso del Norte* (present day Cd. Juarez, Chihuahua) down river on a reconnaissance of the Jumano and Tejas Indians living at the confluence of the *Rio Bravo* and the *Rio Conchos*.[91]

A small group of Franciscans had set out down river in the direction of the confluence of the *Rio Conchos*, two weeks earlier, on December 1, 1683. This group included Fray Juan de Zavaleta, Commissary of the Spanish Inquisition in New Spain. Father Zavaleta was credited in Mendoza's notes as having celebrated Mass for a group of Jumano Indians on the north bank of the river (today Texas) on January 1, 1684.[92] Fray Zavaleta had in fact been one of a long line of Franciscans who Christianized the Pueblo Indians in New Mexico.[93] The Oñate governorship began nearly a century of constant bickering between the Spanish government and the religious authority, providing an opportunity for a revolutionary charismatic movement to develop among the Pueblo natives.[94]

Fray Juan de Zavaleta was a presbyter at Santa Fe Mission in 1680, when the "Pueblo Revolt" erupted, resulting in the deaths of at least 400 Spanish settlers throughout Nuevo México, as well as the martyrdom of twenty-one Franciscan priests.[95] Eleven Franciscans managed to escape, among them Father Zavaleta and his *compadre* Father Acevedo.[96] Retreating to the safety of the Presidio at *El Paso del Norte*, Father Zavaleta celebrated the first Catholic mass in Texas at Ysleta Mission on the north bank of the *Rio Bravo* (today Texas) on October 12, 1680. Mass was celebrated for approximately 100 Tiguas and assorted Spanish refugees from New Mexico, survivors of the revolt.[97] Our last historical glimpse of Father Zavaleta recounts that he and Father Nicolás López accompanied the Mendoza expedition on further explorations of northern Texas.[98]

Zavaletas in Chapeño, Tamaulipas/Texas

In the 1750's, José de Escandón, Count of Sierra Gorda, was commissioned to establish the final Spanish settlements along the lower *Rio Bravo*. He selected thirty-eight families from Cerralvo, Nuevo Leon to join the existing nineteen in the formation of Laredo, Revilla, Mier, Camargo and Reynosa. The group was authorized to form *haciendas, villas, and lugares* (settlements).

After one hundred years of peaceful existence along the *Rio Bravo del Norte,* the Mexican American War (1845-1848) ended their, difficult but tranquil life, with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo on February 2, 1848. The treaty established the boundary between México and the United States at the *Rio Bravo del Norte*, causing México to lose half of her landmass, but ostensibly guaranteeing Mexican citizens living on the north bank continued rights to their land. The Zavaleta family was one of those families, and the village of Chapeño,Tamaulipas, (now Texas), located below the present site of Falcon Dam in Starr County, would become their point of origin in the United States.[99]

The little village of Chapeño was destroyed by the creation of Falcon Dam in the 1950's. Today the *pueblito* called Chapeño is one of the most important birding sites in South Texas, attracting hundreds of birders to the area each year.[100] Tony visited the abandoned location of Chapeño in the 1980's by driving along Chapeño County Road in western Starr County to its terminus. At the dead end of the road Tony found the ruins of a very old building made of large sandstone blocks. He was approached by an old man from a nearby farm. When Tony asked the man what this was, he responded that it was the ruins of the old Chapeño elementary school. Tony told him he was a Zavaleta, and the man did not hesitate to tell Tony an amazing story. He said that the huge sandstone blocks were carved out of the river bank by hand a hundred and fifty years ago, an old Spanish method, and were originally taken from the ruins of the Zavaleta family home nearby (the Zavaletas family had moved to Roma) to build an elementary school for Chapeño that was then abandoned

in the 1950's.[101]

While Chapeño was a major family focal point in Texas, Francisco "Gabino" and Agustina Sánchez, who were said to have been born in Tejas. The Zavaleta family were well known merchants in Cuidad Mier, Tamaulipas and were present in Mier at the time of the famous Black Bean Episode in 1843.[102] Family stories handed down over the generations tell how Zavaletas lived in south-central Texas around Gonzáles, and watched the hostility toward Mexicans unfold there from the 1830s through the formation of Texas and eventually to the Mexican American War, when they returned to the safety of Cd. Mier, Tamaulipas. Francisco "Gabino" and Agustina had three sons, Bartolo, Jose Abraham, and Petronilo and one daughter, Isabel. Bartolo Zavaleta Sánchez was born in Monterrey, Nuevo León, México, on August 24, 1857,[103] the feast day of St. Bartholomew.[104] Little is known about the parents of Bartolo and Abraham, who are said to have died, leaving Bartolo and Abraham orphaned in their childhood. Family lore recounts that the two boys were then "adopted" by a family friend, the well-known Mexican General Francisco Estrada, in Nuevo León. At his death, General Estrada left the two Zavaleta brothers a *porcíon* of land (59) that had originally been granted to Juan de Dios García, along the *Rio Bravo.*[105] This story rings true in that the two Zavaletas, being from Cuidad Mier or Monterrey, had no original claim to *porcíon* 59 and had to have acquired it through another means such as a gift, as the story suggests. The Zavaleta *porcíon* was adjacent to the Chapa family *porcíon,* so, being sensible people, the two Zavaleta brothers married the two neighboring Chapa sisters. Bartolo married Eufémia Chapa Sáenz on January 27, 1875 [106] at the Our Lady of Refuge Parish in Roma, Texas,[107] and on October 27, 1896, Abraham married Estéfana Chapa Sáenz, Eufémia's younger sister.[108]

Descendants of Abraham and Estéfana

Over time and distance, families have a way of losing track of one another and this was the case of the descendants of the two Zavaleta brothers. Bartolo and Eufémia Chapa Sáenz Zavaleta stayed in south Texas, and their descendants mostly reside there today. Abraham who married Estéfana Chapa Sáenz Zavaleta, moved their family north into what is today Live Oak County, Texas.

Our great grandparents Bartolo and Eufémia died long before Tony was born. When Tony was a child, his grandfather Pedro, did not speak English and was in his eighties. At the age of fourteen, Tony Zavaleta was the only available grandson who had a valid Texas driver's license, and as such, was called upon to be the "regular" driver for "Papa Pete," back and forth to his ranch at Nuevo Progreso. While they enjoyed a cordial relationship, there was simply no way that Tony, with his budding interest in family history, could have asked his grandfather Pedro about his father Bartolo's brother Abraham

and his descendants.[109] Our fathers and their siblings have always known that their grandfather Bartolo had a brother named Abraham, but as recently as the 1970's they could not tell us anything about what happened to Abraham's branch of the family.

In 1973, while on a Ford Foundation trip to San Francisco, Tony happened to look in the telephone book for Zavaletas, and found Juan Zavaleta, today 87 years of age (son of Santos, son of Abraham; "Tio Johnny" (b. 1919 Roma, wife Maxilinda Ravara). Juan owned and operated several highly regarded limousine services in the San Francisco Bay area including the Tri-Terminal Limousine Service at the San Francisco International Airport.[110] In his prime Juan served as the Bay area chauffeur for Governor Ronald Reagan and once drove the King and Queen of Spain on their week long trip through California. His company was highly recommended by the Royal advance people and becuase they recognized his name as having a Spanish-Basque origin.

While on a trip to Michigan, and on his way to Michigan State University in the late 1970's, Tony opened the Detroit telephone book to find Rolando and Donald Zavaleta listed (Juan had told Tony that he had cousins in Detroit). Tony called the Detroit Zavaletas, mentioned Juan, and was instantly connected again. This time Tony discovered an even greater family treasure located in the Midwestern states of Michigan, Ohio, and Illinois, all cousins and descendants of Abraham and Estéfana.[111] There is considerable research still to be completed on the descendants of Abraham and Estéfana. We know that, at some time in the early twentieth century, they moved out of the Lower Rio Grande Valley and relocated to the area around Live Oak, Karnes and Bee Counties, and San Diego in Duval County, Texas.[112]

It is not known what their connection was to that area of south Texas. It quite possibly could have been a Chapa-Sáenz family connection since we know that there are Chapa-Sáenz in that area of San Diego, Texas. There could also have been an earlier Zavaleta connection to their father, Gabino, who is believed to have been born in Tejas and who fought with the Tejanos in the Texas Revolution. At this point we simply do not know, but it certainly predates modern Texas. Their connection to the area around San Diego stems from Spanish land grants and settlements prior to 1800.

Family connections long lost, Abraham and Estéfana had eight children: five boys, Santos (b. 1898 – d.1970 in Joliet, Ill.); Francisco (b.a 1902, d. unknown); Abraham, Jr. (1904-d. 1946 in Raymondville, Texas); Bartolo (b. 1910-d. San Diego, Texas 1976 in Gibsonburg, Ohio.); José María (b.1907 in Roma - d. at 10 months); as well as three daughters, María (d. 1938 in Runge, Tx.); Sylvestra (of Beeville, Texas) and the youngest, Petra (died in 2000 in Weslaco, Texas).[113] Their mother Estéfana died very young, most likely sometime in the 1920s. While not confirmed, it is possible that she died as a result of the complications from delivering her youngest child, Petra. We do

not presently know where Estéfana died and is buried. Abraham was widowed in the 1920s, and raised his eight children. He did not re-marry. Abraham is believed to have moved back to the Lower Rio Grande Valley after the death of his wife Estéfana. Family history tells us that he died before his brother Bartolo, who died in 1936. Odes Zavaleta de Galvan the daughter of Bartolo and Adelaida, and who presently resides in Ohio, indicates that in a conversation with her father Bartolo he recollected that he was 12 years old when his father Abraham died. Therefore Abraham would have died in 1922 but we do not know where he is buried in South Texas. Quite possibly they are both buried around Three Rivers in Live Oak County, Texas. Bartolo was supposed to "pick-up" the daughters of Estéfana and Abraham to be raised by his wife, their *Tia* Eufémia, but they were "taken in" by other family members nearer to where they lived. It was largely the early deaths of Abraham and Estéfana that led to the two branches of the family being separated and unknown to one another for more than fifty years. There continued to be marriages between members of the Sáenz family with the children of Estéfana, who was a Chapa Sáenz.[114] Abraham, Jr. lived for a while in Runge, Texas, in Karnes County, and then moved permanently to Raymondville, in Willacy County, working in agriculture. He is buried in Willacy County. He had three children: sons, Manuel; Guadalupe, who live in the State of Washington; and Francisco, who lived in Bakersfield, California. He also had two daughters: Epifania and Agrora.[115]

Tony also learned, in the 1980's, that there were Zavaletas living in Bakersfield, California, and that they are the descendants of Francisco (d. 1995), the son of Abraham Jr. This branch of the family is quite well known as *conjunto* musicians, and their descendants continue to reside in Bakersfield.[116] Abraham, Jr.'s sons Guadalupe (Wally) and Manuel live in the State of Washington and have worked in the contract agricultural labor industry for many years. Manuel and his eight sons operate a very large and successful trucking company that operates eighteen wheelers nationwide. Santos, the son of Abraham and Estéfana, lived in the mid-west and had one son, Juan, and three daughters, Elida, Goya, and Santos (female). It was Santos' son Juan whom Tony met from San Francisco. Juan's father Santos is buried in Joliet, Illinois.

Abraham and Estéfana's son Francisco had four daughters; Levina, Amelia, Hortencia, and Juanita (who died at 8 years of age). Francisco and his four daughters lived in the area around Runge, Texas, in Karnes County. Abraham's and Estéfana's son Bartolo was married to Adelaida Ledesma (now age 85), and they had thirteen children, including seven sons (Samuel; Mario; Rolando; Americo; Donaldo; Arnoldo and Abraham) and six daughters (Dolores; María Elena; Lovelia; Odes; Rosa María; and Melinda). Bartolo, the son of Abraham the brother of Bartolo, died in Gibsonburg, Ohio, and is

buried there. His widow Adelaida, age 85, lives in Ohio, next door to her daughter Odes. Children, Abraham, Rosa Maria and Arnoldo today live in Ohio. Today the grandsons and granddaughters of Bartolo and Adelaida live and work in the Midwestern states of Michigan, Ohio, but a large part of the family, including sons and daughters of Bartolo and Adelaida, have returned to West and South Texas.[117] Lovelia and Melinda live in Plains, Texas; Dolores lives in Lubbock, Texas; Mario lives in Edinburg, Texas; Americo lives in North Carolina, Samuel, Rolando and Donald all live in Michigan. Abraham and Estéfana's daughter María (daughter Olivia) died in 1938 in Runge, Texas, and Petra (b. 1914 - d. 1998, children Socorro and Ezequiel) died in Weslaco, Texas in 2000. Sylvestra, who lived in the Beeville area near her son Jorge, is unaccounted for.

Descendants of Bartolo and Eufémia

The Chapa sisters inherited the Chapeño Ranch, the boundaries of which conformed to those of *porción* 58 in Starr County, Texas,[118] Bartolo also had the title for porcion 55 conveyed from Juan Antonio Leal and 56 conveyed from Juan Panteleon Yzaguirre. Their marriages to two Zavaleta brothers united both halves of Chapeño within one family by adding *porcíon* 59. Bartolo and Eufémia had eight children: Santos (b. 1875 - d. c. 1945); Pedro (b. 1881 - d. 1965); Nazaria (b. 1885 - d. 1910); Bruno (b. 1886 - d. 1915); María Flavia (b. 1887 - d. 1974); Agustina (b. c. 1890 - d. c.1985); Leocadia (b. 1896 - d. 1973); and Joséfina (b. 1897 - d. 1986).[119]

Bartolo was a rancher, although he was called upon to run for Starr County Constable, precinct two, and on November 8, 1904, after receiving 222 votes, he was elected to that position.[120] Bartolo also served as deputy sheriff, and was deputized on January 27, 1909 [121] and March 19, 1930. [122] It is said that no other person knew the river above and below Chapeño as well as Bartolo. He served as its only law enforcement officer for the first quarter of the twentieth century. When petroleum exploration came to the area, Bartolo was recruited by the South Texas Gas Company to work as a "line-rider" for the area from Chapeño down to Roma.

In the early 1900's, the river between San Ygnacio below Laredo and Roma was still some of the wildest country remaining in the United States. It was literally the "Wild West," and only the most experienced people dared ride the river between those two points. During the Mexican Revolution, it was commonplace for Mexican incursions to cross over to the Texas side, but it was said that the respect people had for Bartolo Zavaleta was such that revolutionaries and bandits stayed away from his jurisdiction.

Bartolo was a devout Catholic who guided the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, "Cavalry of Christ," based in Brownsville, Texas[123] as they visited the *rancherías* of Starr and Zapata counties. Bartolo was a strong proponent of education and sent his children to parochial schools.[124] His son Pedro was

boarded at Saint Joseph College in Brownsville, Texas, some one hundred miles down river. Pedro was sent to Brownsville as a boy, and would return home via riverboat in the summers and during the holidays. Upon his graduation, the Oblates and the Marist Brothers helped to send him to Monterrey Nuevo Leon, to continue his study of Civil Engineering at the university a precursor of famed Monterrey Tech. He returned as a graduate engineer and surveyor around 1895.[125]

Bartolo and Eufémia's daughter Leocadia was born on November 9, 1891.[126] Tia Calla, as she was known, was boarded with the Sisters of Mercy in Rio Grande City and at Incarnate Word Academy Convent in Brownsville. She never married, and was the General Manager for the General Telephone Exchange Company in Roma, their first dial system. In 1912, she began many years of service as an elementary school teacher in Zapata and Roma, retiring in 1936. She taught at both public elementary schools and at parochial schools run by the Sisters of Mercy. Because she knew everyone in the area, she is said have been a formidable campaigner, and a strong supporter of the Democratic Party.[127] Her assistance in political races was heavily sought by all of the "big name *políticos*" of the day, including those of Duval County's Box 13, where her cousins lived. She is said to have been a factor in the presidential election of Lyndon Johnson, who later invited her to the White House. Leocadia led a long life and died on February 22, 1973, in Edinburg, Texas[128] Leocadia lived to be 81.[129] At the age of 5 in 1952, while traveling from Southern California to Brownsville, Texas, Tony remembers the Ferdinan Zavaleta family stopping by the Roma home of Tia Leocadia for a visit.[130] A rock collector from an early age, Tony's recollection of the visit is probably due to the fact that Leocadia's home had a rock wall from the famed Starr County petrified forest rock. María Flavia was born on May 7, 1887,[131] and died on February 5, 1974, in Hidalgo County, Texas. She never married.[132] In 1910 Nazaria became ill, and Bartolo was forced to borrow money for her treatment, using some of his land as collateral. Nazaria Zavaleta Chapa succumbed to her illness at the age of twenty-five on December 22, 1910, and, like her parents, is buried in the old section of the Roma Cemetery known as the *Cementerio de Roma.*[133] The ranch land was lost.

Over the course of his nearly half a century as a lawman in Starr County, Bartolo was summoned from time to time to Brownsville to testify in cases in Federal Court. He would travel there first by horse-drawn ranch wagon on dirt roads and later by train. On a trip from his farm to Rio Grande City, when Bartolo was riding in his wagon with his grandson, Armando Ramirez Zavaleta, the horses pulling the wagon were spooked, and the overturned wagon mortally wounded Bartolo. Bartolo Zavaleta Sánchez died the same day, September 24, 1936, at the age of seventy-nine.[134] His widow, Eufémia Chapa de Zavaleta, lived for another eleven years, dying on June 9, 1948, at

the age of 94.[135] Eufémia received medical treatment for the last eight years of her life from Dr. Mary Headley Edgerton, the first female physician in Starr County.[136]

Santos Zavaleta, the daughter of Bartolo and Eufémia was born on November 1, 1875 in Starr County, Texas.[137] Santos Zavaleta married Hilarión Ramirez and had four children: Bartolo "Lito" (b. c. 1904 - d. 1997)[138], Ruben, Armando, and Roberto. Santos Zavaleta died around 1945.[139] Agustina Zavaleta was born in Starr County, Texas, on February 28, 1893.[140] She married Virgilio Rodriguez, and had four children: Gilberto, Virgilio, Minerva, and Romeo.[141] She died in the late 1980s. Bartolo and Eufémia's youngest daughter, Joséfina, was born around 1897, and, like her brother Pedro, was also boarded in Brownsville. She graduated from Incarnate Word Academy Convent in 1912.[142] Upon graduation, she served for many years as the executive secretary for revered Cameron County Judge Oscar C. Dancy.[143] Joséfina married Guadalupe Elizondo, and had two children: Ramiro, who died in childhood of appendicitis,[144]and Josefina Margarita, who lived to adulthood. Joséfina Zavaleta Elizondo died in Cameron County on December 23, 1986.[145] During the decades after the Second World War, my cousins and I knew that we had a large extended family but unfortunately the family did not invite the descendants of the daughters of Bartolo and Eufémia to family gatherings. Therefore, the younger generations do not know them.

The Zavaleta family of Brownsville, Texas

Pedro Zavaleta Chapa was born on June 29, 1881, in Cuidad Mier, Tamaulipas.[146] He was the first-born son of Bartolo and Eufémia and their second child. His older sister, Santos, was born six years earlier, on November 1, 1875.[147] After completing his engineering training, Pedro returned briefly to Roma, and then took a job in Nuevo Laredo, where he met and arranged a marriage to his first wife, Rafaela Mireles Farías, member of a prestigious family from Torreón, Coahuila.[148] Familial accounts state that Rafaela was fourteen when she married Pedro and that they did not have their first child for six years. Family tales recount that Pedro took Rafaela on the arduous three-day journey from Roma, Texas, to Falfurrias, Texas, to seek treatment from famed Mexican folk faith healer and curandero "Pedrito" Jaramillo.[149] Not long after this visit, Rafaela conceived their first child, Pedrito. During the first decades of the 20th century, Pedro worked briefly on the family ranch, and developed a business as a civil engineer with a land leveling and clearing business, "*desenraiz*," which became his lifelong professional specialty. Pedro Zavaleta was so familiar with the eastern part of Cameron County that he was often consulted by A.E. Anderson, Cameron County's first professional surveyor and famed Indian relic collector. Knowing that Andrew Anderson was an arrowhead collector Pedro would often locate archaeological sites on

Anderson's maps which had been uncovered by Pedro's workers in the *monte alto*.

Pedro and Rafaela had four children: Pedro Jr., "El Paso Pete (b. 1906 - d. 1968; wife Consuelo, child Hector); Rafael, "Uncle Ralph" (b. 1907 - d. 1985; wife Eloisa Valdez, children, Roberto, Ralph, Jr., Rosario); Alfonso, "Uncle Al" (b. 1918 - d. 1976; wife Anna Maria de Leon, children, Al, Jr., Norma, Louie); and Enrique, "Uncle Henry" (b. 1920 - d. 1996; wife Herlinda Ramirez Bruni, child Theresa), and moved his family to Brownsville sometime before World War I. In September, 1918, Pedro signed up for the American military draft in Brownsville, although he was not conscripted.[150] Family oral tradition conflicts with documents on when exactly the family arrived in Brownsville. Pedro told his son Jesús that he had moved to Brownsville in 1905.[151] However, his first two sons were born in 1906 and 1907 in Starr County.[152] It is possible that Pedro established himself in Brownsville, and brought his family from Roma to Brownsville at a later time. Pedro's two younger children by Rafaela, Alfonso and Enrique, were both born in Brownsville.[153]

Upon arriving in Brownsville, Pedro was formally introduced to R.B. Kreager, the powerful Chairman of the Republican National Committee and Mayor of Brownsville. Bartolo, who was a well-known and respected Lawman in Starr County, introduced his son to Kreager. Pedro moved to Brownsville to become the general manager of the Brulay Plantation in the deep Southmost region, the largest sugar cane producing farm in the area.[154] Pedro's brother Bruno soon joined him, becoming the plantation commissary. Bruno Zavaleta had been university educated in Saltillo, Coahuila, and was a Certified Public Accountant. It was not unusual for large labor-intensive farms to employ hundreds of workers during harvest season. Bruno married Esperanza Lavios in Brownsville sometime before 1906, and their marriage produced three children: Raul (b. 1912 - d. 1958), Magdalena (b. 1913, now 92 years of age) and Bruno Hugo (b. 1915 - d. 1969 Children: Bruno Jr., Cecilia and Carmelita). Regrettably, in late 1915, Pedro's brother Bruno was killed in a mechanical accident involving a wheel on a water pump at the Brulay Plantation.

After Bruno's death, the Lavios family "took in" Esperanza and her young children.[155] His son, Bruno Hugo (Tio Bruno) began a very successful Alamo Finance Company in Brownsville, and became part owner, along with his uncle Alfredo Lavios of the Cactus Restaurant, and co-owner of the Brownsville Lumber Company with his Brother in Law, Manuel Marquez. He died on March 29, 1969. His brother Raul joined the United States Coast Guard (died in the 1950's) and Magdalena, Tia Manena, never married, and is the oldest living descendant of Bartolo and Eufemia Zavaleta. Manena had a very successful career in retail and retired from Sears in Brownsville. Rafaela, Pedro's wife of 20 years, died at the age of 34 on August 2, 1920, as a result of complications associated with the birth of their fourth son, Enrique.[156]

Because of the tremendous land clearing and leveling activities taking place in Cameron County in the 1920s, and because he was experienced in this business in Starr County, and a land surveyor, Pedro was hired by Lon C. Hill, the founder of Harlingen, to head an enormous land-clearing operation in eastern Cameron County, from Los Fresnos north to Rio Hondo and west to Harlingen and San Benito. Since this work was performed by hand labor, it is reported that he was responsible for the day-to-day operation and for many hundreds of workers.[157] His "big city" experience in the 1890s changed Pedro from his south Texas ranching forbearers. Descriptions of Pedro the Monterrey-educated engineer were of an incredibly handsome, impeccably dressed dandy who was well known in the elite circles of Matamoros society all of whom were also formally educated.

Pedro was living in Brownsville with Rafaela and their four boys at the time of her death. After Rafaela's death, Pedro was introduced to his future wife, Concepción García Gómez, through his connections to Matamoros Basque society.[158] Concepción was born on April 24, 1900, to Jesús García Cortina and María Guadalupe Gómez Chapa.[159] Concepción was a descendant of one of the original colonizing families of Nuevo Santander in 1750, and was descended from regional aristocratic families, including the de la Garza, Falcón, Treviño, and Cisneros. All of these families played a large part in the development of the region. Concepción García Gómez Cortina Cisneros had seven siblings. Pedro and Concepción's children joined the ranks of the Matamoros-Brownsville elite European families.

The García family were prosperous cotton farmers in México. Manuel García Gómez, Concepción's brother, opened the first wholesale warehouse in the Rio Grande Valley. Throughout her life, Concepción, who was the great-grand daughter of Don Juan Nepomuceno Cortina Goseascochea (1824-1894), remained connected to the prominent families of Matamoros. Both Pedro and Concepción were members of the extended Chapa family, who were amongst the founders of Ciudad Mier, Tamaulipas. The Gómez family was prominent in its own right, and General Irineo Gómez, from whom Concepción is descended, was an original land grantee and owner of the Las Barrosas Ranch, which is presently located in Kenedy County, Texas, and consisted of 24,660 acres granted in 1833.[160] This ranch was lost as a result of the outcome of the Mexican American War. Irineo Gómez' hacienda was located at the present site of San Carlos, Tamaulipas. In the 1980's after a conversation with Tia Minerva Pacheco, she told Tony how to located the old Hacienda site of Iréneo Gomez in San Carlos, Tamaulipas. Tony visited there for many years.

Concepción, a statuesque woman approaching six feet was formidable in every aspect of her life. While a kind, generous, and loving mother and grandmother, Concepción was respectful of even the most humble (a Cortina family trait) in the community. During the deportation of Mexicans from

the United States and Texas in the 1930s, she "sponsored" numerous less fortunate Mexicans, providing them with a "pass" so as not to be forcibly removed from the country. To this day, her deeds are legendary, and people, when learning that she was our grandmother, always have a heartfelt story to tell us about her and her impact on their family.

Concepción was eighteen years younger than Pedro, and met him after the loss of his first wife Rafaela. According to family anecdotes, Pedro originally thought to marry his sister-in-law Esperanza, Bruno's widow, but Pedro's two oldest sons (El Paso Pete and Tio Rafael) insisted instead that he marry Concepción.[161] On July 2, 1921, Pedro married Concepción at the Immaculate Conception Cathedral in Brownsville, Texas.[162] Pedro had four sons from his first wife Rafaela, and with his second wife Concepcion he had an additional six children: Jesús "Uncle Jesse"(b.1922; wife-mother Corina Esparza Cavazos, children: Dr. Jesse, Diana, Dr. John); Fernando "Uncle Zip"(b. 1924-d.2004, wife-mother Eleanor Reid, children: Anthony Dr. Tony, Thomas Dr. Tommy, Ferdinan Jr., and Eleanor; children by other mothers include (Joe Alfred Garcia, mother Estella Robles; Ashley Contreras, mother Celia Contreras; and Lucy, Patty, Jo Ann, mother Lucinda Guevara); Emma "Tia Emma"(b. 1926 husband Tony Gutierrez, children: Concepción, John, Emma, Gerardo, Jay, Melinda, Melissa and Gus); Josefina "Tia Bebe" (b.1927, husband Leonel Garza, children, Pedro, Belinda, Concepción, Leonel and Josefina); Gustavo "Coach Gus"(b.1929, first wife, Rose Sanchez, children: Nannette, Dr.Rose Marie, second wife, Graciela Fragoso, children: Vanessa, Gustavo, and Bartolo); José "Dr. Joe"(b. 1932, first wife Rosalinda Guerra, children: Joseph Jr., Gina, Peter, second wife Susan Schoch, children: Nancy, Elizabeth, David, and Samuel).

The family of Pedro and Concepción lived initially at 212 E. Jefferson St. in a house that Pedro designed, but were forced to sell it due to the hard times during the Depression.[163] Pedro, who grew up on a farm, owned his own farm near Nuevo Progreso, Tamaulipas, in an area known as Empalme.[164] Despite the Great Depression, Pedro, while faced with difficult times, continued to thrive. It was told to Tony as a child that, during the Great Depression, our grandmother Concepción would bring produce from the farm and distribute it to the neighborhood on East Jefferson. Pedro and Concepción would work their farm until their deaths. Some of Tony's fondest childhood memories are of the summer days at our grandmother's farm. Concepción was a member of a pioneer family in Matamoros, and, as such, had her own considerable land holdings on the east side of Matamoros near Ejido El Gomeño and Ejido La Burrita, and part of the original Ygnacio Treviño land grant. Concepción was a direct descendant of Ygnacio Trevino and it is through her family line that the Historic Palmito Hill Ranch, and the battlefield of the last battle of the Civil War has come into the family. It is important to note that Concepción

Garcia Gomez' sister Tia Evangelina Garcia Gomez married Parxedis Orive III, a Brownsville policeman. Their only son, Parxedis Orive IV, known as "Uncle Prax" was raised as a brother with his cousins the Zavaleta boys. It is important to make mention of Prax Orive, Jr. and Tia Ventura and their five daughters (Evangeline; Olga; Teresa; Cynthia; and Jeannette Marie)in this article. He was a revered long time member of the Texas Southmost College board of trustees and was the family "owner" of Palmito Hill, a responsibility which has now fallen to his wife and daughters and to Tony. Prax helpedTony to acquire his small portion of the family's historic ranch site and the establishment of the "Historic Palmito Hill Ranch." Both Tony's ranch and Uncle Prax' ranch were designated "Family Land Heritage Ranches," by the Texas Department of Agriculture. This designation certifies that the ranches have been in continuous operation by the same family for more than 100 years.

The Great Depression was a difficult time, even for the landed families, who were "cash poor," as were so many others during this time in American history. To help the family make ends meet, Pedro's and Concepción's oldest son, Jesús, would send money to his family as he earned it.[165] When his younger brother Fernando moved to Arizona to work in the Civilian Conversation Corp Camp (CCC), he also sent money home.[166] This money was invaluable to the family, as Pedro and Concepción still needed to support their four younger children. When Jesús and Fernando moved out of the house, Gustavo became the oldest son in the house, and helped his mother during the depression by walking the fourteen blocks to the Fort Brown Commissary in order to get foodstuffs for the family. Gustavo recalled his mother hand sewing dresses for his two sisters Emma and Josefina.[167]

Concepción had a diminutive Mexican housekeeper, "Santos Campos," who had been with her since the 1930s, having worked in the Edelstein family home at 1608 W. Levee (now the home of Tony and Gaby Zavaleta). The intrepid Santos, said to be an "Indian" who stood four feet tall, helped Concepción run the house and raise her kids. By the time that our cousins came along in the late 1950's, Santos was very much a family institution and very much in charge. She lived into the 1980s, and was reported to be over ninety years old at the time of her death, having raised three generations of Zavaletas in Brownsville.

Concepción's eldest son, Jesús Zavaleta remembers the morning of Sunday, December 7, 1941, and the news of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, which was cause for six of the eight Zavaleta boys to answer the call to serve their nation in the Armed Forces. The Zavaleta boys served in World War II and the Korean War. Alfonso and Enrique served in World War II, becoming Sergeants in the Army, Jesús served in WWII, and reached the rank of Technical Sergeant in the Army Air Corps. Tio Jesus tells the story about the time he contracted malaria in the South Pacific, and upon reaching the

hospital in New Guinea, received a grim prognosis about his poor chances for survival. Jesús stated that he simply zipped up his flight jacket and sweated it off.[168] His younger brother Fernando served in WWII and in Korea achieving the highest enlisted rank of Chief Master Sergeant in the United States Marine Corps. Fernando was a prisoner of war during the Korean War held by the Communist Chinese. He died in 2004 and is buried at the National Cemetery in San Antonio, Texas. Gustavo served in the Korean War reaching the rank of Sergeant in the USMC. The youngest of the family, José, who was the first to graduate from college, was a commissioned First Lieutenant MSC in the Army, and served in Korea.[169]

During the war, the older brothers serving in the Armed Forces became known by the English equivalents of their names. Alfonso became Al; Enrique became Henry; Jesús became Jesse; Fernando became Ferdinan (although he was also commonly known in the service as "Zip"). The younger brother's names were anglicized by the Marist Brothers at Saint Joseph Academy when they enrolled in the early 1940's given the patriotism prevalent during World War Two. Gustavo became "Coach" Gus; and José (Dr. Joe) became Joe. After the Korean War, most of the Zavaleta boys returned to Brownsville. Pedro, Jr. had a very successful automobile repair business in El Paso.[170] Rafael was a Brownsville Fire Fighter and owned Zavaleta Auto Repair Service in Brownsville.[171] Al worked at Union Carbide at the Port of Brownsville, moving to Florida in the early 1960s to work at Cape Kennedy. Henry worked in several positions with the Department of State and then had a full career as an Educator and business man.[172] Jesse worked initially at Pan-American Airways and subsequently moved to Alamo Iron Works as a salesman until his retirement.[173] Ferdinan started a business in 1956 known as Star Paving Company,[174] which he managed until his death.[175] Gus went to college, obtaining a Bachelor's Degree in Kinesiology and becoming a successful coach at St. Joseph's Academy and then head football coach at the Institúto Tecnológico de Monterrey, ITESM, where he successfully coached two National Championship football teams. He retired from coaching after working at both Porter and Pace High Schools in Brownsville. Joe went on to medical school at UTMB, and became a successful physician and also completed a residency in obstetrics and gynecology. In his medical career of forty years in Brownsville, he delivered more than 10,000 babies. Both sisters Emma and Josefina graduated from Villa Maria High School in Brownsville and had successful careers in retail and at the City of Brownsville in their early years. Emma moved with her family to Louisanna and Josefina moved to Mexico City with her family.

In the mid to late 1950s, Gus and Joe Zavaleta added a "t" to their surname, which began the two "tt" spelling of Zavaletta. There are several versions of how this occurred, but one account is that their half-brother

Henry gave them a document in which Bartolo Zavaleta had signed his name Zavaletta prompting them to do the same.[176] More probably it was a reaction to the discrimination they faced as the first Zavaletas to attend Texas universities in the 1950's. Pedro Zavaleta Chapa, the patriarch of the family also known as "Papa Pete" died on March 15, 1965 in Brownsville, Texas,[177] and his wife Concepción García Gómez vda. de Zavaleta, also know as "Mama Chita" lived for another twenty five years, dying in Brownsville on February 1, 1991.[178] Throughout the latter half of the twentieth century, the various Zavaleta families have branched out of the Valley, moving as close as Edinburg, Austin, and Dallas and as far away as California, Florida, and Indiana. Today Zavaletas/Zavalettas are found in many professions and carry on the proud legacy of their pioneer ancestors.

Cameron County Election History 1968-2006

In the State of Texas, most local offices have non-partisan elections, whereas County elections are partisan, meaning that a party primary will first be held, followed by a general election in November. Texas also has Special Purpose Districts that are created by the State. In the current boundaries of Brownsville, Texas, there several special districts, including the Brownsville Independent School District, the Texas Southmost College District, and The Brownsville Navigation District, all of which hold non-partisan elections. Brownsville City Commissioners were elected at-large until 2003, when the city opted to create four districts with two commissioners elected at-large. Brownsville's move to single member districts was Tony's dream and initiative for a more representative form of government for Brownsville. Tony initiated the change that took almost 15 years to implement.

Over the last forty years, the descendants of Pedro and Concepción have run for Local, County and Special District positions with great success. Zavaleta political service in Cameron County commenced when Dr. Joe Zavaletta became a Brownsville Independent School District trustee in 1968.[179] The boundaries of the Brownsville Independent School District generally conform to the city limits of Brownsville, but the district does encompass the rural areas surrounding Brownsville.

F.E. "Zip" Zavaleta (Ferdinan) ran for County Commissioner Precinct #2 in the Democratic Primary held on May 2, 1970. He received 1,526 votes, coming in second out of four candidates, and unseated the incumbent, Johnny Cavazos, a distant relative.[180] Since none of the Candidates gained a majority, a runoff primary election was held between F.E. "Zip" Zavaleta and Miguel (Mike) Cortinas, Jr., another distant relative, on June 6, 1970. F.E. "Zip" Zavaleta received 2,815 votes to Mike Cortinas' 3,801 votes, thus losing the election.[181] F.E. "Zip" Zavaleta ran for Cameron County Commissioner again in 1972, for the Precinct #1 seat. In the Democratic Primary election held on

May 6, 1972, F.E. “Zip” Zavaleta received 991 votes, coming in third of three candidates, and as such did not advance to the primary runoff election.[182] This election ended F.E. “Zip” Zavaleta’s aspirations for political office.

In the early 1980's, Dr. Tony Zavaleta (son of Ferdinan) began his political career by running for Brownsville City Commissioner Place #2 against William A. Garza. Tony Zavaleta received 4,311, votes to William A. Garza’s 1,931 votes.[183] Tony Zavaleta began his first term in office on November 28, 1983.[184]

Gus Zavaletta ran for Cameron County Judge in 1986. The County Judge presides over the County Commissioners’ Court Meetings and is the CEO for county government. Out of five candidates running in the Democratic Primary, Gus Zavaletta placed third, receiving 5,668 votes and failing to advance to the runoff election.[185]

In 1987, Dr. Tony Zavaleta ran for reelection for his seat on the Brownsville City Commission Place #2 position. On November 3, 1987 Tony Zavaleta ran against Adolph E. Crixell. Tony Zavaleta received 6,361 votes to Alolph E. Crixell’s 4,140 votes.[186] Tony Zavaleta began his second term as City Commissioner on November 16, 1987.[187]

In 1986, our cousin Prax Orive was elected to the Texas Southmost College Board of Trustees and he was re-elected twice, in 1992 and 1998. He served a total of 13 years and was a Board member at the time of his death on March 3, 1999.

In 1986, Reverend Marion “Pat” Robertson announced his intention to seek the Republican candidacy for President of the United States in ,1988. Dr. Joe Zavaletta was selected to serve as Robertson’s Cameron County Chairman, and Pat Robertson was the top vote getter in the Republican primary election in Cameron County in March of 1988.[188] As a result of the historic Robertson victory in Cameron County, Dr. Joe Zavaleta was elected to represent Cameron County Republicans as party chairman at the State convention in 1988. It was at the Republican state convention that a little known George W. Bush in blue jeans introduced himself to Dr. Joe with the words, “Hi, I’m George Bush, how are you doing?” Little did Dr. Joe know that the young man would become Governor of Texas and later the 43rd. President of the United States.

In 1988, Gus Zavaletta tried again to gain County office when he ran in the Democratic Primary again for County Commissioner Precinct #1. He received 1,405 votes, coming in third place, ending his aspirations for County Office.[189]

In 1991, Tony Zavaleta resigned his position as City Commissioner Place #2, which he had held for eight years, to run for Mayor of Brownsville. The duties of the Mayor of Brownsville are defined by the type of government the city has. Like most home rule cities in Texas, Brownsville has a

council-manager style of government. The role of the mayor is as "a voting member and presiding officer of the Council who also performs ceremonial functions".[190] On November 5, 1991 Dr. Tony Zavaleta (a direct descendant of Juan Nepomuceno Cortina) ran against Ralph Cowen (a direct descendant of Rip Ford) and Pat Ahumada. Tony Zavaleta received 4,637 votes to Pat Ahumada's 3,761 votes, and Ralph Cowen's 2,898 votes.[191] Since no majority was met, Tony Zavaleta faced Pat Ahumada in a runoff election held on December 3, 1991, where Tony Zavaleta received 4,712 votes to Pat Ahumada's 4,894 votes.[192] By defeating Tony Zavaleta, Pat Ahumada was elected mayor, and was soon to become the only mayor in Brownsville history to resign his position two years into his four-year term. Tony Zavaleta remained a major political force in Brownsville from his Mayoral defeat in 1991 through 2006, and is considered an elder statesman of South Texas politics. Tony is often called upon to provide commentary for the media.

The Southmost Junior College District is the Special District that was formed to administer Texas Southmost College in Brownsville, Texas, in 1926. The Texas Southmost College District defines its boundaries as follows. "The Southmost Union Junior College District is comprised of the territory in the Brownsville Independent School District, Point Isabel Independent School District, and Los Fresnos Consolidated Independent School District, all in the County of Cameron, State of Texas."[193] On May 2, 1992, Dr. Joe Zavaletta ran for Texas Southmost Board of Trustees Place #5 against Ernest F. De León. Dr. Joe Zavaletta received 2,299 votes to Ernest F. De León's 1,413 votes.[194] The Texas Southmost College Board of Trustees serves six-year terms. He served until 1998, when he did not seek reelection.[195]

On May 4, 1996, Gus Zavaletta made his final attempt for political office after a ten-year hiatus. He ran for Brownsville Independent School District Trustee Place #6. In order to be eligible to be a Trustee, Gus Zavaletta retired from coaching at James Pace High School in Brownsville, Texas, effective May 4, 1996.[196] Gus Zavaletta received 1,904 votes to Joe Colunga's 2,930 votes.[197] Dr. Joe Zavaletta returned to politics in 2001, this time running for the position of Brownsville City Commissioner Place #1. He ran against Marlys Cortinas on May 5, 2001, receiving 4,977 votes to Marlys Cortinas' 3,210 votes.[198] In 2003, Brownsville started its move from at-large elected commissioners to four district commissioners and two at-large commissioners.[199] Joe Zavaletta became City Commissioner at-large "B" on June 10, 2003.[200] The system of having four district and two at-large commissioners was completely in place by the 2005 City Commission elections.

The Brownsville Navigation District governs the Port of Brownsville and the Brownsville Ship Channel. In 2004, Peter Zavaletta (son of Dr. Joe) began his political career by running for the Brownsville Navigation District Board Commissioner Place #1 against Sydney Lasseigne. In the election held on

May 15, 2004, Peter Zavaletta received 2,151 votes to Sydney Lasseigne's 1,420 votes.[201] On May 26, 2004, Peter Zavaletta was elected as Board President, a position that is held for a six-year term.[202] In 2005, Dr. Joe Zavaletta ran for reelection in his position as City Commissioner at Large "B" against Ernie Hernández. On May 7, 2005 Joe Zavaletta received 2,869 votes to Ernie Hernández' 4,562 votes, at seventy-two, Dr. Joe retired from 35 years of public service.[203]

As of 2006, two Zavaletas held elected offices. Peter Zavaletta, who was elected to the Brownsville Navigation District in 2004, has a term which will expire in 2008. Dr. Tony Zavaleta, who grew up in historic West Brownsville recently moved back there with his wife Gabriela (a University of Texas at Brownsville-Texas Southmost College Student and Government Senator 2004-2005) purchased the historic Edelstein/Pacheco home at 1608 W. Levee in 2002. He was elected Democratic Precinct Chairman for Cameron County Precinct 11, which votes at Skinner Elementary School on St. Charles Street.

As of the publication of this book, the members of the next generation of the Zavaleta/Zavaletta family are growing-up and learning about their rich family history. They are preparing for their turn in the family history of public service, which has spanned eight hundred years.

The University of Texas at Brownsville

Endnotes

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Carnaval y Fiestas Mexicanas de Matamoros
by
Rosaura Alicia Dávila

En 1936 SGM Carlota Galván de León fue coronada reina del Carnaval de Matamoros por lo que ya desde un año antes de que se iniciaran las Fiestas del Charro en Brownsville, Matamoros contaba con sus Fiestas de Carnestolendas cuyo espíritu aún pervive al iniciarse éstas con la quema del mal humor y la coronación del rey feo. Cuando Brownsville organizó las Fiestas del Charro, había pasada libre, no se les pedían a los matamorenses papeles para cruzar el puente y podían asistir a todas las festividades de la vecina población y así pudiéramos decir que eran fiestas de Matamoros. Cantinflas prometió enviar un contingente representativo de la Asociación de Charros de la capital para que se le diera más relevancia a las fiestas y se organizara un coleadero, jaripeo y todo lo que hablara de nuestras tradiciones que es el significado de las fiestas. En Matamoros se celebra el carnaval que contribuyó a la alegría de esos días.

Es en 1950 que se invita a las escuelas de Matamoros a desfilar en Brownsville. El 16 de enero de 1951 Don Guadalupe Caballero, Gerente de la Cámara de Comercio de Matamoros se quejaba de que las escuelas no habían presentado el presupuesto de vestuario, conjuntos musicales así como transporte para las Fiestas del Charro e informaba que el inspector Hesiquio Mora Navarrete estaba en la capital mexicana gestionando una misión cultural que preparara los números escolares para el festejo. Se elaborarían cuando menos cinco carros alegóricos que serían presentados por Matamoros a un costo de 200.00 dólares cada uno y que serían costeados por la Cámara de Comercio, Centro Bancario, Asociación Algodonera, Asociación de Madereros, Molinos de Aceite y Compresoras de la ciudad. Informó que se habían hecho los arreglos convenientes para que el desfile de carros alegóricos que se iniciaba en Brownsville de las Fiestas del Charro, pasara íntegramente a Matamoros. Fue así como por primera vez en los 14 años que se celebraban estos festejos, el pueblo de Matamoros tuvo la oportunidad de presenciarlo sin cruzar la frontera. Fueron 800 alumnos los que participaron de las escuelas: Miguel Sáenz González, Tipo Federal Franklin Delano Roosevelt, José Arrese, Josefa Ortiz de Domínguez, Colegio México, Colegio Don Bosco, Academias Comerciales Justo Sierra, Tamaulipas, y Secundaria Federal # 1. En ese año, al alumno de segundo grado de la Escuela Primaria Tipo Federala a Andrés Cuéllar, su maestra lo invitó a participar en las Fiestas del Charro. Con la danza michoacana de "Los Viejitos" aclarán a todo el grupo que los gastos eran mínimos porque el traje era de manta y la careta de cartón (en ese entonces ni soñar con el plástico) costaba $3.00.

En aquellos tiempos no había casettes musicales y se contrató un conjunto en vivo así como la escuela pagó la renta del autobús que los llevaría a Brownsville. Pero, al parecer, los ensayos no surtieron mucho efecto porque a la hora del desfile cada quién llevaba su propio paso. Todo mundo se reía cuando los veía. En el desfile del domingo participaron 1,201 escolares matamorenses en las Fiestas del Charro y los festejos concluyeron con un suntuoso baile de Carnaval organizado por la Cruz Roja.

Es en esa época que llegó a esta ciudad procedente del estado de Oaxaca, el Sr. Alfonso Cartas Flores. Aquí formó una familia con su esposa Ma. Hortensia Sánchez de Cartas con quien procreó a: Alfonso, Roberto, Laura, Eleazar y Violeta. Junto con sus tres hijos formó la Marimba Oaxaca. Vestidos de indios chamulas amenizaban fiestas en el Valle de Texas y Matamoros. Muy pronto les invitaron a diversas ciudades del Valle como Embajador de las Fiestas del Charro y en Matamoros actuaban primero en el carnaval y después en Fiestas Mexicanas así como el 16 de septiembre.

También para los Mr. Amigos fue en la década de los sesenta que formó la Lira Tehuana. Para 1957 Lupita Morales Benavides y Conchita Sayas eran las candidatas a Reina del Carnaval de Matamoros. Cada una de ellas (apoyada por diversas asociaciones que organizaron diversos eventos para lograr su triunfo que en esa ocasión) favoreció a Lupita Morales. Entre los candidatos a Rey Feo estaban Jesús Rodríguez "El Oso", cuya candidatura apoyaba el Club Ballerina; Antonio García "El Grillo" y de último minuto surgió la candidatura de Guillermo "El loco Rebollo." Se organizó un desfile de niños, entierro del mal humor y Coronación de la Reina del Carnaval y Rey Feo. Además habían un Baile de Disfraces a cargo del Club Venecia en el Casino Matamorense. También habían el gran desfile de carros alegóricos, las charreadas, y las corridas de toros, por lo que podemos decir que básicamente se siguen las mismas tradiciones.

Reinas De Carnaval: 1936 Carlota Galván de León; 1940 Alhelí Lozano Elizondo; 1941 Leticia Cárdenas Montemayor; 1953 Elsa Garza de García Moreno; 1957 Lupita Morales Benavides; 1960 Yolanda Guerra Nájera.

Reinas De Fiestas Mexicanas: 1970 Patricia Seguy Cadena; 1971 Hilda Tabankewitz; 1972 Silvia Cantú Ramírez; 1973 Yolanda Botti Vallejo; 1974 Sonia Cavazos Garza; 1975 Norma Leal Garza; 1976 Ma.del Carmen Morales Sánchez; 1977 Patricia Sayas Alcalde; 1978 Adriana Argüelles González; 1979 Sara Charur Deck; 1980 Hilda G. Salinas Hernández; 1981 Aurora Guadalupe Córdoba López; 1982 Aideé Marina Argüelles Pérez; 1983 Marcela Ronquillo Villarreal; 1984 Juanny Ramírez Ruvalcaba; 1985 Elizabeth Blanco González; 1986 Martha Patricia Pérez Galván; 1987 Mayra Betancourt Arellano; 1988 Nancy Susana Martínez Sarabia; 1989 Lucero Alicia Martínez González; 1990 Iris Sosa Ruvalcaba; 1991 Alejandra Hinojosa Córdoba; 1992 Elsa Lucero

Cárdenas Cárdenas; 1993 Ma. Esthela García Garza; 1994 Gloria Camorlinga Cadena; 1995 Roxana Villanueva Mata; 1996 Verónica Ubach Gutiérrez; 1997 Mayra Flores Benavides; 1998 Sandra Vanesa Guajardo Danache; 1999 Sugey Aguirre Martínez; 2000 Lorena Cepeda Ríos; 2001 Vanesa Lartigue Hernández; 2002 Cristal Ballí Pena; 2003 Mariana I. Primera; 2004 Marta Gabriela Cavazos Cavazos.

Es a partir de 1970 que se empiezan a denominar Fiestas Mexicanas. En 1973 se inició la elección del Charrito del Ano y al finalizar esa década Matamoros inicia la tradición de tener una o varias personas invitadas con diferentes denominaciones:

Matamoros

1979 Homenaje a Rigo Tovar en la Plaza Hidalgo organizado por la Presidencia Municipal y el Comité de Fiestas Mexicanas.

1980 Homenaje a Elisa Noeggerat Cárdenas (Dulce) en la Plaza Hidalgo.

1981 Susana Alexander y Roberto D'Amico.

1982 Lu Ann Caughey, Miss Texas. Visitante Distinguida y Llaves de la Ciudad.

1983 Ignacio López Tarso.

1984 Alicia Juárez. Invitada de Honor.

1986 Rigo Tovar. "Hijo Predilecto de Matamoros".

1987 Maria del Sol. Invitada Especial.

1989 Maria Victoria. Huésped Distinguida.

1991 Francisco Xavier. Invitado Especial. José Angel Espinosa "Ferrusquilla" Huésped Distinguido.

1992 Lalo González, "Piporro," Invitado de Honor.

1993 Lalo Mora y Lorena Herrera. Invitados de Honor.

1995 Rosenda Bernal. Invitada de Honor.

1996 Paquita la del Barrio. Invitada de Honor.

1997 Marco Antonio Regil. Invitado de Honor.

1998 Bobby Pulido. Invitado Especial.

1999 Jorge Salinas y Mónica Sánchez. Invitados Especiales.

2000 Raúl Magaña y Yadhira Carrillo. Invitados Especiales.

2001 Fernando Colunga. Invitado Especial.

2002 Sergio Goyri. Invitado Especial.

2003 Dulce. Invitada Especial.

2004 Eugenia León. Huésped Distinguida.

2004 Gabriel Soto. Invitado de Honor.

2004 Sari Bermúdez. Presidenta del Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes."Valor Nacional".

Estas fiestas son importantes porque ya existen participaciones de dos o tres generaciones en los desfiles, reinados y organización de las mismas. En 1982 Andrés Ramón Cuéllar Dávila tenía 4 años de edad y lo nombraron Embajador de la Guardería del Magisterio para participar en el Desfile Internacional. Ese sábado muy temprano su mamá enfiló con el pequeño ya vestido de charro a las siete y media de la mañana para evitar las largas colas del puente. Buscamos el carro alegórico y después de una larga espera por fin enfilamos rumbo a la calle Elizabeth se encontraba pletórica y la mamá caminaba pegada al carro, dándole indicaciones. Saluda, sonríe, etc. Y así cruzamos el Puente Nuevo, volteamos por la Álvaro Obregón, la Hidalgo, la Sexta, de norte a sur, pasamos por la Presidencia Municipal y dos cuadras después terminamos. Serían las cuatro de la tarde. Al llegar a la casa, el niño tenía fiebre por lo que mi vecina dijo que le habían hecho ojo durante el desfile. Se ofreció a hacerle la curación poniendo un huevo en un vaso de agua, como se coció y las claras se hicieron hebras lo que según ella era clara señal del mal de ojo. Cuando ella se fue le di una aspirinita, lo puse a dormir y se levantó sin fiebre.

Tanto las Fiestas del Charro, como Fiestas Mexicanas representan la oportunidad de dos pueblos de divertirse juntos, de convivir, de compartir tradiciones y con el turismo que nos visita representa una inyección económica para la región.

Cronista Adjunta de Matamoros

Fuentes

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A History of the Development of Brazos Santiago Pass
by
Carl Chilton

Along the 400 mile Gulf of Mexico coastline between Corpus Christi, Texas, and Tampico, Mexico there is only one location with access to a protected harbor. A few miles north of the mouth of the Rio Grande a pass, known as Brazos Santiago, provides access from the Gulf to the sheltered waters of the Laguna Madre bay. It has long been recognized that Brazos Santiago and the Laguna Madre provide an excellent location to utilize ocean shipping. The life of the Rio Grande Valley has long been influenced by its proximity to the Gulf of Mexico, which provides opportunities for ocean shipping, commercial fishing, industrial development and recreation.

Spanish explorers were first to arrive by water. Within twenty-seven years after Columbus discovered the New World, Spaniards were exploring the entire Gulf coast. There were, however, no permanent residents of the area until the mid-1700s, when Spain began encouraging settlers to locate along the Rio Grande. The first settlements were some distance inland, in the Reynosa area, but by 1790 settlers had located near Matamoros, and a town began developing there. Residents began to look at the possibility of ocean shipping, but pirates and smugglers were among the first to use the Brazos Santiago and the Laguna Madre. For years the Spanish government had required that ocean shipping be channeled through Vera Cruz. This led to smuggling in the Brazos Santiago area, and small communities of smugglers located near Point Isabel and near the mouth of the Rio Grande. Pirate Jean Lafitte preyed on Spanish shipping in the Gulf, capturing gold enroute from Mexico to Spain. At one time the Laguna Madre was the base of his operations. While at anchor in the Laguna Madre, his ships were protected from Gulf weather and were difficult to spot behind the sand dunes of Padre Island.

In 1824, Matamoros was designated as an official port of entry of the newly-independent Mexico. Legitimate traffic increased and smuggling declined. Americans began to reside and go into business in Matamoros, and the economy of the area improved. There was considerable ocean shipping between Brazos Santiago and New Orleans, along with some New York shipping, although a sandbar in the Brazos Santiago pass made it difficult for larger ships to reach the quiet waters of the Laguna Madre. Smaller ships on the New Orleans route were able to enter the bay through Brazos Santiago, which had sufficient depth for vessels drawing eight or nine feet of water. The larger ships used on the New York route could not enter the bay, and would have to unload cargo on to smaller vessels while remaining in the Gulf. In 1836, Texas won its independence from Mexico, defeating a Mexican army

at the Battle of San Jacinto. The economy of Matamoros declined because of tariffs, government edicts and an unstable government in Mexico, resulting in less ocean shipping, although this commerce has always played a role in military activities in the area.

After the annexation of Texas in 1845, a dispute arose between the United States and Mexico regarding the location of the international border. Mexico claimed the border was the Nueces, while the United States claimed it was the Rio Grande. President James Polk ordered General Zachary Taylor and an army of 3,000 to establish an American presence on the Rio Grande. As these troops marched overland, a fleet of ships carrying military supplies headed for Brazos Santiago, and a supply depot was set up at Point Isabel. The ability to move supplies by ship played an important role in the military operations of Taylor's forces. Some months later a second American army arrived by ship. These troops, under command of General Winfield Scott, remained at Point Isabel for about six weeks, then sailed for Vera Cruz, where they invaded Mexico. After two years of war Mexican forces surrendered and the peace treaty established the Rio Grande as the international border. Lands north of the river were now part of the United States. The community of Brownsville was established, and business conditions improved in both Brownsville and Matamoros.

American authorities soon recognized the importance of shipping at Brazos Santiago, and efforts were made to improve conditions there. Buoys were put in place to mark the location of the pass, and a customs house was established at Point Isabel. In 1850 the Texas Legislature urged Washington to provide funding for the erection of a lighthouse, which was completed in 1853. There had been discussion about whether it should be built at Point Isabel, or on Padre Island, and the Point Isabel site was chosen because it afforded better protection from hurricanes. In 1854, U. S. Army Engineers studied the idea of deepening the pass. Consideration was given to dredging to a depth of twelve feet, but no action was taken. The 1850s saw continued shipping between Brazos Santiago and Galveston and New Orleans. The products shipped out included mules, lead, pigs, wool and hides. Incoming shipments included hardware, dry goods, furniture, machinery and lumber.

The Civil War brought a dramatic change in ocean shipping. At first Brazos Santiago was a major port for Confederate commerce, but this was stopped by a Union Navy blockade. Ships then began calling at Bagdad, a Mexican village on the south bank of the Rio Grande, which became a major outlet for Confederate cotton. Brazos Santiago became a port of entry for the Union army. After the war, commercial shipping resumed through Brazos Santiago, with over fifty vessels sailing for New Orleans or New York in 1868. In the 1870s foreign vessels began to arrive.

The first serious attempt to conquer the sand bar that had consistently

denied entry to large vessels began in 1882. A jetty was built at the location of the present south jetty, constructed of alternate layers of brush mattress and clay bricks, about twice the size of ordinary building bricks. It was hoped this structure would cause scouring in the pass, making the water deeper than its normal eight or nine foot depth. The jetty did not have the strength to withstand the waves and tides, however, and by 1887 had it completely disappeared. Thus, the first effort was a failure, and fifty years would pass before success was achieved.

In the late 1800s the area's economy and population saw little growth, but some shipping continued. Most people intending to settle arrived by ship. Ariel Rendall Key, a member of a pioneer Brownsville family, described her arrival in 1898:

> We went from Galveston to Point Isabel on a Morgan steamer. There was a company of U. S. Infantry on board, headed for Fort Brown. My father, Norman Rendall, was going to take a job as manager of the Post Ice and Water Works. There was a severe storm while we were on the way to Point Isabel. Nearly every one was seasick. When we reached the bar the ship could not cross, and supplies were running out. So after a few days a "lighter", a sailboat it was, came and the soldiers were "lightered" off the ship. They took the men off the ship by bringing the "lighter" as close as possible to the stern. When the mast swayed over the deck a soldier grabbed it, and with his baggage on his back, slid to the deck. When the Gulf calmed down our ship went in to the long pier in the bay at Point Isabel, and there we boarded the little train and traveled the rest of the way to Brownsville.

As the 20th century dawned, light draft vessels from Galveston and New Orleans continued to call at Brazos Santiago. In 1904 the Corps of Engineers dredged a channel across the Laguna Madre to Point Isabel, permitting smaller vessels to cross the bay and unload at the railroad tracks at Point Isabel. The year 1904 saw completion of a railroad line connecting Brownsville with the rest of the United States. The area, no longer isolated geographically, began to grow, with new communities established along the railroad line. An agriculture industry soon developed, and its products were shipped north by rail. Manufactured goods and fuel arrived by rail. Before long the agricultural products to be shipped exceeded the capabilities of the railroads. Men of vision saw a need for a deepwater port, and efforts were again begun toward this goal. A project to build a deepwater port at Point Isabel in the 1920s failed, but local residents and governmental officials envisioned a future for ocean shipping in the area.

In 1927 and 1928, the Corps of Engineers undertook a new effort to protect the pass by building two 1,600-foot jetties. These jetties proved to be too short and too small to withstand the waves and the tides. But lessons were learned that led to development of a new design. The engineers also attempted

to dredge a channel through Brazos Santiago at a depth of 16 feet. They discovered the depth of the outer bar made it difficult to maintain a 16-foot channel, since the sea bottom deepened abruptly and the deep water quickly caused the channel to refill. These efforts were abandoned in 1928.

In 1927 and 1928, navigation districts were organized in Brownsville and Port Isabel, and applications were made to obtain federal assistance for port construction. Receiving funding proved to be long and difficult, but in the 1930s the new Roosevelt administration began making funds available to combat the economic depression. A combination of federal and local monies was put in place for construction of port facilities in both communities. The Public Works Administration also made federal funds available for construction of jetties. In October, 1933, the low bid of $2.6 million by W. E. Callahan Construction Company was accepted. In December 1933 a tugboat and barge bringing building materials crossed the bar, reporting there were twelve feet of water over the bar at low tide. Construction of the jetties began in January 1934.

Congressman John Garner, always a strong supporter of the port development, was given major credit for the success in obtaining government funding. He continued to give assistance after he became Vice President. Senators Tom Connally and Morris Sheppard and Congressman Milton West provided additional support. The Brownsville Navigation District was represented by attorneys R. B. Rentfro and H. L. Yates, who negotiated with officials in Washington regarding the funding. As mentioned before, earlier engineering efforts had failed to eliminate the sand bar. Army engineers dealt with this difficult problem by building a model of Brazos Santiago in their laboratory at Mobile, Alabama. Their laboratory experiments indicated two 5,000 foot jetties would be needed to protect the pass and maintain a deep water channel. The new jetties would be located closer together and would be much larger than the ones built earlier.

The design of the new jetties required three types of rock: rip-rap, core and cover stones. Rip-rap and cover stones were limestone rocks, while the cover stones were granite. The rip-rap weighed up to two hundred pounds per rock, the core stones weighed up to four thousand pounds each, and the granite cover stones, which came from the Marble Falls, Texas area, weighed from six to ten tons each. 450,000 tons of the three types of stone were needed. Nearly 9,000 carloads of rock came to Port Isabel by rail, and were transported across the Laguna Madre by barge. Each trip by barge carried six or seven rail cars. A loading pier and railroad tracks were built for each jetty by Dodds and Wedegartner Construction Company of San Benito. Construction of each jetty required two sets of railroad tracks, one for the railroad car carrying the stone, the other for a construction crane. The crane stood on its own huge frame and dropped the stone in place as it moved along the track. The rail car

carrying the stone moved along beneath the crane.

The construction process called for the rip-rap to be dropped first, forming a bed about three feet thick. This was followed by placing the core rock, creating a berm, then finally placing the huge cover stones, carefully adjusted and wedged into place with small stones. The jetties were to be a width of 14 feet at the top, with an elevation of 6 feet above mean low tide. They were designed to be strongest at the far ends to withstand the strong tides and heavy wave action. The width of the beds increased to about 120 feet at the far ends. The length of the north jetty, on Padre Island, was 5,010 feet and the south jetty, on Boca Chica beach, was 4,620 feet long. This difference was accounted for by the fact that the beach at Boca Chica extended further into the Gulf. The north jetty was 25 feet deep and the south jetty was 22 feet deep.

When the construction of the jetties was half complete, a dredge began deepening the channel to a depth of 25 foot depth. The construction that had already taken place caused the flow of water in the pass to scour the channel to an average depth of 18 feet. The incoming tide brought a great flow of water through the pass into the Laguna Madre. Then, as the tide receded, the rapid flow of water back into the Gulf effectively scoured the channel. This was of great satisfaction to the engineers, verifying what they had deduced from their laboratory experiments. The jetties construction was completed in early 1935. The $2.6 million cost was the largest portion of federal money expended in bringing deep water ports to the Rio Grande Valley.

Seventy years later, the jetties, improved and stronger than ever, continue to protect Brazos Santiago. The channel through the pass, now 42 feet deep, accommodates ships of a size not dreamed of in 1935. These larger ships call at the Port of Brownsville, a busy center of industrial and maritime activity. The construction of the jetties and the dredging of the pass conquered the sand bar and opened the door to deepwater shipping. These successful efforts are an engineering achievement that stands as a credit to the Corps of Engineers.

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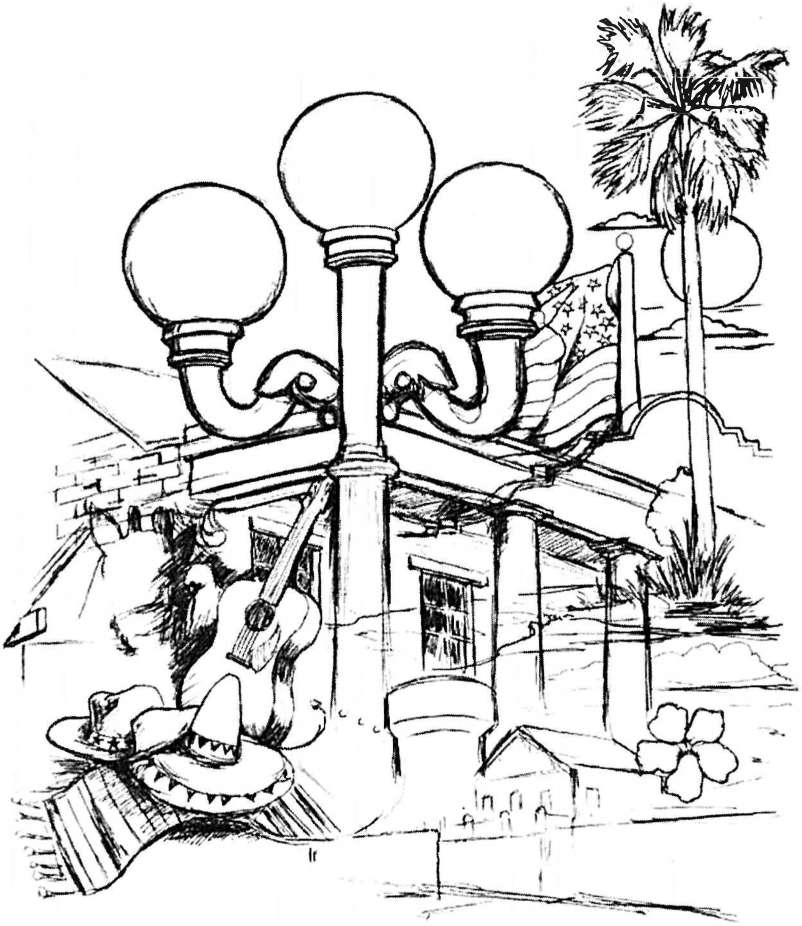

The Spirit of Brownsville

El Retraso Español y su Interés Final por la Colonización del Bajo Bravo

by

Arturo Zárate Ruiz

La presencia temprana de los españoles en el Bajo Bravo no supuso su dominio inmediato sobre estos territorios. Las rencillas entre potenciales conquistadores, el fracaso de distintas expediciones, la irreductibilidad de los indios nómadas y la carencia de minas retrasó la colonización de la zona. Si surgió finalmente algún interés de la Corona española por el área, éste estuvo en gran medida ligado a asegurar su dominio del Golfo de México, en peligro por el ataque de los piratas y los reclamos de otras potencias europeas. Y si esta zona atrajo finalmente a colonizadores concretos, fue porque se dieron algunas mínimas oportunidades económicas, derivadas de la privatización de la tierra.

Las primeras visitas de los españoles

Tras haber Américo Vespucio, en 1497 y en 1502, recorrido y registrado en sus mapas las costas tamaulipecas, Francisco Garay se acercó de nuevo a ellas en 1518. Recorrió los litorales del Golfo de la Florida hasta el Pánuco.[1] Por órdenes de Garay, gobernador de Jamaica, Alonso Álvarez de Piñeda regresó a la zona en 1519. Repitió la ruta de Garay y acampó en la boca del río de las Palmas, el cual unos mapas identifican con el Bravo y otros con el Soto la Marina (lo cual quizá sea lo más exacto). Permaneció allí durante 40 días y consideró el área un Edén por su belleza, su riqueza de vida, y la paz de sus habitantes. Era octubre. Regresó entonces a Jamaica para informar de todo esto a su gobernador, Francisco Garay. En el camino Piñeda se encontró con Hernán Cortés, quien entonces no podía interesarse por estas tierras pues se dirigía ya a Tenochtitlán.

Francisco Garay sí continuó interesado por ellas. Tras escuchar a Álvarez de Piñeda, envió a la región nuevos exploradores. Le encomendó a Diego de Camargo y a otros 150 hombres de colonizar el lugar. Éstos llegaron en verano, y consideraron el clima insoportable y más propicio para el mal humor. De hecho, tuvieron que abandonar el área tras estallar las hostilidades con los nativos. Camargo murió en los enfrentamientos.

Garay, de cualquier manera, remitió nuevos navíos a la zona, primero bajo el mando de Miguel Díaz de Aux y luego bajo el mando de Ramírez El Viejo. Sin embargo, estos capitanes prefirieron llegar a la Huasteca para sumarse allí a la huestes de Hernán Cortés.

El gobernador Garay finalmente tomó él mismo cartas sobre el asunto. Acompañado por el veterano explorador Juan de Grijalva, Garay llegó aquí

el 25 de julio de 1523 y le tocó sufrir, al menos, los calores, el temporal y los mosquitos que desanimaron a los infortunados exploradores que guió Camargo. Sufrió aun hambre por agotársele los bastimentos. Huyó, pues, hacia la zona del Pánuco, donde desilusionado se encontró con que la Huasteca era ya una área reclamada por Hernán Cortés. Garay decidió así olvidarse de cualquier proyecto de colonización.[2]

En 1520, Pánfilo de Narváez le había ya disputado a Cortés todo México. Había llegado a Veracruz para apresarlo pues éste había roto con las órdenes de Diego Velázquez, gobernador de Cuba. Narváez fue, sin embargo, el que cayó preso en manos de Cortés. Durante el enfrentamiento, perdió además un ojo.

En España, el emperador Carlos I no dejó de reconocer que el leal había sido Narváez y, en 1526, le encomendó conquistar y gobernar los territorios desde la Florida hasta el río Las Palmas. Partió, pues, a América con 400 hombres. Pero su gesta no fue sino una cadena de desastres. Al aproximarse a Cuba, muy apenas sobreviven Narváez y sus hombres a un huracán. En la Florida, los indios los recibieron de manera hostil, por lo que tuvieron que regresar a sus barcos y conformarse con costear el territorio. A la altura de Galveston, en Texas, otro huracán atrapó a los conquistadores. 80 hombres sobrevivieron el naufragio, aunque no Narváez. En tierra, sólo 15 sobrevivieron el invierno, y, de ellos, cuatro sólo sobrevivirían los siguientes infortunios. Entre ellos, Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca continuaba la búsqueda de las fuentes de la eterna juventud. Para eso exploraría Texas y los territorios del suroeste americano hoy fronterizos con México. A veces estaba sujeto a la esclavitud por los indios, a veces estaba liberado y apoyado por ellos, hasta finalmente llegó con los otros sobrevivientes en 1536 a Culiacán, Sinaloa, que ya entonces era un asentamiento español en México.

Tras escuchar el relato de estos exploradores, Francisco Vázquez de Coronado partiría de Culiacán y recorrería en sentido inverso el camino de aquéllos, ahora en búsqueda de "El Dorado". De nuevo falló.[3]

Consolidación de la presencia española en el nordeste de México

Tras los iniciales reveses, los españoles no se interesarían de lleno en colonizar el norte del hoy Tamaulipas sino hasta muy después de haber establecido poblaciones mucho más lejos de la metrópoli virreinal (México), por ejemplo, en Nuevo México, donde fundaron Santa Fe en 1609.

Aun así, todo esto no quiere decir que la presencia española no se diera en el hoy nordeste mexicano. Desde el siglo XVI los españoles, y sus aliados tlaxcaltecas, tuvieron una sólida presencia en el hoy nordeste de México, con poblaciones como Saltillo (1575, 1592) y Monterrey (1579, 1596). Desde principios del siglo XVII los neoleoneses establecerían rutas a través del río las Palmas y del Pánuco para facilitar el comercio con el resto de los

novohispanos.[4] Si estos hombres tardarían todavía mucho tiempo en ocupar en forma estable la ribera del Bravo, sus ganados se les adalantarían bajo el cuidado de mayordomos o pastores, y incluso de "congregas" o rancherías indígenas. Parte de ese ganado, al volverse salvaje en la franja del Nueces, daría origen a las razas "mesteña", o "mustanga" como le llaman hoy los americanos. Es más, desde 1650 se organizarían caravanas a las salinas de la Barra y del río Bravo para recoger la sal que se consumía domésticamente y se aplicaba en la industria minera.[5]

Ciertamente, la presencia española en el área tamaulipeca era muy precaria, como lo muestra la fundación de San Antonio de los Llanos (hoy Hidalgo, Tamaulipas) en 1667, seguida por su destrucción en 1673 por la resistencia indígena.[6] Lo prioritario en la Nueva España era la explotación de metales preciosos, y el ahora Tamaulipas no tenía mucho que ofrecer.[7] Aun así, la actividad ganadera en la región y algún comercio se llegaron a dar en el siglo XVII, todo lo cual dejaría un sello en nuestra cultura que aun pervive.

La disputa de Europa y de los piratas por los territorios de América

¿Qué incrementaría, posteriormente, el interés español por estos territorios? El verlos amenazados éstos y todas sus posesiones en el Golfo de México por otras potencias europeas y por los piratas.

La decadencia de España era ya evidente en 1640 con su pérdida de Portugal y, en 1648, con su pérdida de los Países Bajos. El ascenso de Francia era muy claro, tras la Paz de Westfalia en 1648. La Paz de los Pirineos en 1659 daría el tiro de gracia a la hegemonía española en el viejo continente. El respetillo de los europeos hacia los dominios españoles en América se vendría abajo.

Así, los piratas serían más que un terror para los puertos y las rutas comerciales españolas. Representarían pérdidas para el imperio de muchas islas y tierras en las costas del Golfo de México y el mar Caribe. En 1655, bucaneros al mando de William Penn le arrebatarían Jamaica a la corona española; ésta habría de reconocer la hegemonía británica sobre la isla desde 1670. En 1664 los franceses ocuparían el norponiente de la Isla Española, y se asentarían en Port de Paix. El galés Juan Morgán se apoderaría de Puerto Príncipe (Camagüey) en 1669, de Maracaibo en 1670, y de Panamá en 1671. Frente a esta amenaza, en 1671, el virrey novohispano Mancera debió reequipar la armada de Barlovento y enviar tropas mexicanas a Santo Domingo para defenderlo de los "desolladores" franceses.[8] Aun así, Lorencillo se atrevió doce años después a adentrarse en la misma Nueva España, donde saqueó Veracruz en 1683, Tampico en 1684 y Campeche en 1685. Según refiere Riva Palacio, Tampico (Pueblo Viejo) corrió con suerte, pues tras caer en manos de los piratas y éstos hacer a muchos de los habitantes prisioneros. La armada de Barlovento acudió en auxilio, derrotando en la mar al enemigo, liberando a

los prisioneros, y quitándole a los piratas los esclavos y el botín. No les tocó gozar la misma suerte en Veracruz y Campeche, donde los habitantes no sólo perdieron cuantiosos bienes, sino además sufrieron los peores tormentos y ultrajes, y aun, en muchos casos, perdieron la libertad o la vida.[9]

Pero no sólo el acecho de piratas, sino amenazas importantes y directas de las mismas potencias europeas contra los territorios españoles en América se darían en esta década de 1680. Por ejemplo, en 1682, el Obispo de Brandemburgo despachó a las Indias siete poderosos navíos para cobrarse los sueldos que España le debía a sus tropas, por la guerra de Flandes. Si bien, esta armada no llegó más allá de las Bahamas, y regresó a Europa, la calma no se reestableció en la Nueva España, pues una escuadra francesa al mando del almirante Ganared se acercó entonces a sus costas; es más, una escuadra inglesa a las órdenes de lord Darmut también lo haría en 1683, como también varios navíos holandeses y franceses al mando de Meintebon.[10]

La pérdida de la Luisiana y otras amenazas

Por despobladas, las costas del Golfo de México fueron del continuo interés para las potencias europeas que competían con España. Tan temprano como agosto de 1638, hubo de salir de Monterrey el capitán Jacinto García de Sepúlveda a perseguir en el hoy Texas, cruzando el Bravo por lo que es hoy ciudad Mier, a unos aventureros holandeses.[11]

Una expedición extranjera sí exitosa fue la de René Robert Cavelier, Señor de La Salle. Recorrió Norteamérica desde el Canadá y los Grandes Lagos hasta la desembocadura del Misisipi (1666–1682). Le permitió así a Luis XIV de Francia reclamar para sí—y arrebatarle a España—el gran territorio de la Luisiana. El peligro de que La Salle extendiese sus conquistas se intensificó en 1684, cuando volvió a América para tomar posesión del territorio de la Luisiana como Virrey de Norteamérica. Perdiendo rumbo, no halló la Luisiana y desembarcó en la bahía Matagorda, Texas, entre lo que hoy son Galveston y Corpus Christi, relativamente cerca de lo que hoy es Matamoros.

Tal proximidad a la Nueva España—la perla de las colonias—los españoles ya no la pudieron tolerar. Tras tener noticias del desembarco, el virrey novohispano, el Conde de Paredes y Marqués de la Laguna, dio instrucciones al gobernador de Nuevo León, el Marqués de Aguayo, de que enviase una expedición para rechazar al francés.[12]

Su capitán fue Alonso de León “El Mozo”. En busca de los invasores, don Alonso exploró la región. El 6 de julio, acampa en las lomas donde en la actualidad está situada Reynosa. Posteriormente se detiene en lo que hoy son los ejidos La Gloria, El Moquete y El Ebanito. Finalmente, el 12 de julio de 1686 estableció un campo militar sobre las estratégicas márgenes de un recodo del río Bravo, donde hoy se localiza el ejido Lucio Blanco, al oriente de lo que ahora es nuestra ciudad.

En Matamoros, a veces lo vemos como un evento muy singular, como si hubiese tenido dedicatoria única a los asentamientos que posteriormente se darían en la región. Pero este campo militar simplemente sirvió para defender por un tiempo breve la costa texana y tamaulipeca de los enemigos.[13]

Contexto mundial: la lucha de los imperios por las colonias

De hecho, en ese mismo año, don Alonso recibiría nuevas instrucciones del entonces virrey novohispano, el Conde de Monclova, para que se trasladase a Coahuila y fundase allí una población estable que llevaría el nombre del virrey, y con la cual se contendría la amenaza francesa. Este virrey ordenaría otra expedición más, marítma, que saldría de Veracruz bajo el mando de Andrés de Pez para continuar buscando a La Salle desde la costa. Don Alonso de León, ahora siguiendo órdenes del nuevo virrey, el Conde de Galvez, atraparía en 1689 a dos franceses que lo llevarían finalmente, en 1690, al establecimiento francés en la bahía de San Bernardo o Espíritu Santo. Allí había llegado La Salle con 280 personas. Encontró, sin embargo, ruinas y pocos sobrevivientes a los ataques de los indios. Al parecer, los indios Karankawa no habían sólo destruido el precario fuerte francés de San Luis sino hecho víctimas del canibalismo a sus defensores. Alonso de León relató al respecto:

> *....comían carne humana en barbacoa y después medio quemaban los huesos, y los molían para revolverlos con peyote o con mesquitamal, y comían las de amigos en bailes y mitotes, para emparentar con el difunto, y la del enemigo sin rito, guardando siempre el cráneo, el cual les servía como vasija para tomar líquidos.14*

Tras rescatar a estos franceses, que después remitiría a México y luego a España, fundó sobre el río Neches la misión de San Francisco de los Tejas, al norte de lo que hoy es Houston,[15] la cual serviría para cristianizar a los indios y contendría el avance de los franceses en la Luisiana.

Aunque fuese un completo desastre, la expedición de La Salle en el área le serviría de pretexto a Estados Unidos, más de un siglo después, para reclamar su precedencia a España sobre la provincia de Texas una vez que le compró a Francia la Louisiana. A su favor argumentarían los estadounidenses que la presencia francesa en Texas se siguió dando a pesar de la gesta de Alonso de León. De hecho, de los supervivientes rescatados por de León, Pierre y Jean Baptiste Talon regresarían finalmente a Francia y guiarían a Louis Juchereau de St. Denis en su expedición a Texas de 1700. En 1714, Pierre acompañaría incluso a Jucherau hasta San Juan Bautista, hoy Guerrero, Coahuila, para que éste contrajese matrimonio con una mujer del poblado, para establecer una ruta de contrabando y para hacer después un reconocimiento del río Bravo hasta su desembocadura.[16]

Pero en 1690 la lucha de España todavía consistía en preservar el golfo de México como *mare nostrum*. Entonces, el virrey, Conde de Galve, enviaría

la armada de Barlovento para expulsar exitosamente a los franceses de Santo Domingo. Como estaba en juego el control español del Golfo de México, tres años más tarde este virrey ordenaría la fundación de Penzacola, en la Florida.[17] Todo el Golfo y el Caribe eran zona de guerra. Se disputaba allí cuáles dominios seguirían siendo españoles y cuáles no. Los resultados de esta guerra en cierta medida definirían las fronteras culturales entre lo que hoy es la América española y lo que son las otras Américas.

El Bajo Bravo y la lucha de los imperios por definir sus fronteras

Si a principios del siglo XVIII los corsarios ingleses y angloamericanos recrudecían su disputa por Belice y numerosas islas del Caribe con despiadados asaltos a Yucatán, a Campeche y, en general, a los galeones cargados con el oro de Indias,[18] los franceses hacían lo suyo al norte del Golfo de México. Tras el naufragio, en 1706, de una navío francés en la Bahía de Santiago (entre los puertos Isabel y de Brownsville), los españoles reanudaron su patrullaje de esta región para evitar nuevos e indeseables despojos territoriales. Para reforzar su presencia militar, el capitán Juan José de Hinojosa propuso incluso fundar un poblado donde ahora se halla el casco antiguo de Matamoros. Arguyó que la belleza de los esteros o laguitos circundantes serviría para atraer colonos fieles a España. Fue este capitán quien dio el nombre de "Paraje de los Esteros Hermosos" al sitio.[19]

Con todo, las prioridades para el imperio español fueron otras. Por un lado, el área del hoy Bajo Bravo seguía siendo una de "indios hostiles" que le hacían la vida imposible a los neoloneses. Sobre las costumbres caníbales de los indios hablaría, en tiempos de José de Escandón, el padre Santa María escribió:

> *Para disponer mejor y suavizar la carne de los infelices prisioneros condenados a servir de potaje en las orgías de los comanches, les frotan todo el cuerpo con cardos y pieles humedecidas hasta hacerles verter la sangre por todas partes. Preparado así este manjar tan horrible y más que brutal, se ordenan los danzarines en su fila, y círculo alrededor de la hoguera y de sus víctimas. Uno a uno y de cuando en cuando, saliéndose del orden del baile, se acercan a los desgraciados prisioneros, y con los dientes les arrancan a pedazos la carne que palpitante aun y medio viva la arriman con los piés a la lumbre, hasta que dejándo de palpitar se medio asa: entonces vuelven a ella para masticarla y echarla a su estómago antropófago, cruel y más que inhumano. Cuidando al mismo tiempo de arrancar los pedazos de las partes más carnosas donde no peligre la vida, como también en no romper al principio ninguna vena de las principales para que no se desangre, para que ya descarnado todo el cuerpo y roído hasta los huesos, se acercan a la víctima los viejos y viejas a roerle con lentitud las entrañas y quitarle la vida. Suelen también dejar para la noche siguiente la consumación de la obra, y entretanto*

aplican a los infelices en las heridas y bocados que les han sacado de la carne, carbón molido ó ceniza caliente, observándolos de continuo para que no se acaben sin que tengan parte en su Muerto los viejos y viejas.20

Por otro lado, Texas era el territorio más cercano a la Luisiana. Fue allí, pues, que Felipe V envió colonos y tropas que contuvieran el avance francés. Este monarca vio aparentemente coronados sus esfuerzos cuando en 1730 la villa de San Antonio de Béjar, fundada en 1718, podía sostenerse ya como cabeza de la provincia texana.[21] El Paraje de los Esteros Hermosos no fue entonces más que un ocasional lugar de paso.[22] Desde la perspectiva de los imperios, podía merecer el apelativo "*no man's land*" que alguna vez José Vasconcelos dio a todo lo que es hoy la frontera de México con Estados Unidos.[23]

La guerra entre los imperios por las colonias se aceleraría en las siguientes décadas. Grandes territorios pasarían—permítaseme la expresión—como pelota de un soberano a otro. Por ejemplo, en 1762, España le arrebató a Francia la Luisiana Occidental, y en 1763, también a Francia, Inglaterra le quitó el Canadá, la India y la Luisiana Oriental. Esta última, si bien volvió a manos de Francia en 1800, Napoleón se la vendió—junto con la porción española[24]—a Estados Unidos en 1803. Para entonces, Francia como quiera se sentía desquitada ya de Inglaterra tras haber apoyado exitosamente la independencia de los Estados Unidos en 1776. Pero España, por la vastedad de su imperio, uno en que "no se ponía el sol", era la potencia que tenía que pelear en todos y aun los más remotos frentes, por ejemplo en Alaska, la cual el Zar de todas las Rusias le disputó en 1741. Así, España perdió la Florida de manos de Inglaterra en 1763, la recuperó en 1783, y finalmente se quedó sin ella, al arrebatársela poco a poco la nueva potencia mundial, Estados Unidos, en 1810, 1813 y en 1819. En ese mismo año, Jean Laffite controlaría la isla de Galveston, y la convertiría en uno de los últimos refugios de piratas.[25]

Colonización del Nuevo Santander

En este ambiente continental intensamente bélico fue que en 1748, durante el reinado de Fernando VI, el virrey novohispano Francisco Güémez y Horcasitas, Primer Conde de Revillagigedo, ordenó finalmente a José de Escandón trasladarse desde Querétaro al Seno Mexicano y establecer allí lo que sería la colonia del Nuevo Santander (hoy Tamaulipas). Con gran experiencia militar tras expulsar invasores ingleses en Campeche y Tabasco y tras someter rebeldes indígenas en la Sierra Gorda (Querétaro), Escandón no pudo menos que lograr un éxito inusitado en su empresa. Ya en 1755 tenía 24 villas establecidas y organizadas bajo el régimen de ayuntamientos. Aunque estas villas quedaron hasta cierto punto sujetas a Escandón a través de los capitanes que para cada cual nombraba, había un número de autoridades

locales elegidas anualmente por los vecinos, entre ellos un juez, un procurador y dos regidores. El carácter fuertemente castrense pero pobre culturalmente[26] y apenas religioso[27] de su conquista, el exterminio implacable y cruel de la resistencia indígena—minimizado, con todo, por el rápido, entusiasta y, por ello, sano mestizaje—, el desarrollo inmediato de una sólida economía ganadera, y la relativa autonomía e igualdad que Escandón dió a cada villa dejarían huellas en Tamaulipas que en alguna medida perduran. Le darían además a la gesta de Escandón una velocidad sin par.[28]

Ahora bien, aunque Matamoros hoy sobresalga en Tamaulipas por su historia y pujanza económica, su sitio no se halló entre los preferidos por Escandón para sus villas. Por el bochornoso calor—y frío espeso y penetrante—, por los huracanes, y por los sorpresivos desbordamientos del río Bravo y subsecuentes inundaciones, Escandón lo consideró poco atractivo para los colonos neoloneses que vendrían al área, acostumbrados a un clima de tierra firme, si no menos severo, sí más previsible. Así, lo más que las fundaciones de Escandón se acercarían a la costa, en la región del Bajo Bravo, sería hasta Reynosa, establecida el 14 de marzo de 1749, a más de cien kilómetros del Golfo de México.[29]

Colonización del Bajo Bravo: de la propiedad comunal a la privada

El hoy Matamoros no necesitaría, con todo, de fundaciones formales para poblarse y consolidarse. Las oportunidades que sus laguitos ofrecían para la caza y la explotación del ganado, y el plausible comercio marino—legal o de contrabando—que podría desarrollarse gracias al río y la no tan lejana costa, atrajeron pronto a personas atrevidas. Matías de los Santos Coy, fue el primero que llegó aquí, desde Camargo (Tamaulipas), con intenciones de quedarse. En el área que hoy es el centro de Matamoros, estableció un rancho en 1749, y lo nombró San Juan de los Esteros Hermosos. En 1765 José Miguel Ramírez, con su esposa—originarios de Santander (España)—, tomó posesión de varias tierras concedidas a su padre al norte del Bravo, en el sitio que hoy ocupa ITEC-UTB (Brownsville). Así lo fueron haciendo otros colonos en distintos sitios cercanos, a una y otra márgenes del Bravo.

Sin embargo, mientras José de Escandón gobernó el Nuevo Santander, el goce de estas tierras fue por lo regular comunal. El Conde de Sierra Gorda evitó el dotar de tierras a los colonos, salvo a algunos hacendados a quienes privilegió. Temía darles a los colonos pretexto de vender los predios posteriormente y tras ello abandonar el Nuevo Santander. Lo que urgía era el poblarlo. Además, la mayoría de los colonos vivía de la ganadería y contaban con agostaderos suficientes.

Esto cambiaría con las reformas borbónicas de mediados de la década de 1760. Con ellas, la corona española quiso fortalecer el control político y económico de sus territorios. Para ello, entre otras acciones, busco el

debilitar la relativa autonomía de las instituciones locales, encarnadas a veces en líderes como Escandón. Promovió además la recaudación de impuestos a través de la privatización de tierras.

Por ello, Escandón tuvo que abandonar el gobierno de Nuevo Santander en 1767. Lo sustituyó Juan Fernando de Palacio. El nuevo gobernador se distinguió por el reparto individual de tierra a cada uno de los colonos, según lo que se denominó Autos de la General Visita. Los predios eran largos rectángulos, con uno de sus extremos angostos tocando alguna corriente de agua para que sirviese de abrevadero. El reparto delimitó además las distintas poblaciones, reservó terrenos para las necesidades y crecimiento de la comunidades, aseguró sitios a las misiones de indios y forjó incluso la cultura local, tan apegada a la propiedad, la igualdad y el individualismo.[30]

El interés por poblar el Bajo Bravo crecería así por el incentivo de la propiedad privada.

La compra de los sitios de ganado en el Bajo Bravo

La apropiación de los terrenos del Bajo Bravo se iniciaría en 1774. Bajo el liderazgo del capitán Ignacio Anastacio de Ayala, trece familias de Camargo y una de Reynosa acordaron formalmente comprarle 113 sitios de ganado mayor a quienes originalmente se beneficiaron con las conquistas de Escandón. Éstas eligieron el de San Juan de los Esteros Hermosos para congregarse. Sin embargo, los colonos se posesionaron y empezaron a explotar esas tierras sin pagarlas. Antonio de Urizar, hacendado de La Sauteña y antiguo propietario de los 113 sitios, los demandó en 1781 en el juzgado de Camargo. Dice el historiador Oscar Rivera Saldaña que éste fue el primer conflicto agrario de toda la colonia del Nuevo Santander.[31] Tras la intervención del gobernador Diego de la Saga, los colonos por fin se resolvieron a finiquitar la deuda el 17 de junio de 1784. No sino entonces pudieron ser reconocidos propietarios legítimos de ellas, y atreverse, el 1° de diciembre, a iniciar el trazo formal del pueblo,[32] el cual seguiría la tradición novohispana de abrir calles en cuadrícula y de flanquear una plaza (como la hoy Hidalgo) con las edificaciones principales.

Al norte del Bravo, el beneficiario de los títulos de propiedad, en 1781, sería José Salvador de la Garza.

El Colegio de la Frontera Norte

Endnotes

1 Humberto González Ramos, "Conquistas Fracasadas" *El Bravo* (Matamoros: 8 de marzo de 1998) Suplemento Dominical, p. 12.

2 Ver, por ejemplo, Milo Kearney y Anthony Knopp, *Boom and Bust, The Historical Cycles of Matamoros and Brownsville*, (Austin, TX: Eakin Press, 1991), pp. 7–9;

Octavio Herrera, *Breve historia de Tamaulipas*, (México: Fondo para la Cultura Económica, 1999), pp. 29–31.

3 Ver Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo y Valdes, *The Expedition of Pánfilo de Narváez*, (Albuquerque: Imprint Society, 1974).

4 Ver Patricia Osante, *Orígenes del Nuevo Santander 1748–1772*, (México: UNAM-UAT, 1997).

5 Ver, por ejemplo, Patricia Osante, *Orígenes del Nuevo Santander 1748–1772* (México: UNAM-UAT, 1997), pp. 85–86.

6 Ver Juan Fidel Zorrilla, "Tamaulipas", Capítulo IX. El Septentrión Novohispano. *Visión Histórica de la Frontera Norte de México*, (Universidad Autónoma de Baja California, 1987), pp. 349–352.

7 Ver, por ejemplo, Patricia Osante, *Orígenes del Nuevo Santander 1748–1772* (México: UNAM-UAT, 1997), p. 269.

8 "1660–1680", *México a través de los siglos,* II, ii, xv (México: Ed. Cumbre, S. A., 1973).

9 Ver, por ejemplo, Mireille Méjan Carrer, "Piratas, filibusteros, corsarios, bucaneros", *Istmo* (México: enero-febrero, 1999) 38–41; "1680–1689", *México a través de los siglos,* II, ii, xv (México: Ed. Cumbre, S. A., 1973).

10 "1680–1689", *México a través de los siglos,* II, ii, xv (México: Ed. Cumbre, S. A., 1973).

11 Ver Alicia A. Garza, "Starr County", *The Handbook of Texas Online.* <www.tsha.utexas.edu>

12 Ver *México a través de los siglos,* II, ii, xv y xvii.

13 Ver, por ejemplo, Andrés Cuéllar Cuéllar, "Cronología histórica de Matamoros", Sociedad de Historia y Geografía de Matamoros (texto inédito); Eliseo Paredes Manzano, *Homenaje a los Fundadores de la Heroica, Leal e Invicta Matamoros en el Sesquicentenario de su Nuevo Nombre* (Edición del Ayuntamiento de Matamoros, 28 de enero de 1976).

14 Citado por Oscar Rivera Saldaña, *Frontera Heroica, I. Colonización del Noreste de México (1748–1821)*, (Matamoros: 1994), p. 8.

15 Ver "San Francisco de los Tejas Mission", *The Handbook of Texas Online*, www.tsha.utexas.edu/online.

16 Ver, por ejemplo, Robert S. Weddle, "Talon Children" y "La Salle Expedition", en *The Handbood of Texas Online* www.thsa.utexas.edu/handbook/online/.

17 Ver *México a través de los siglos,* II, ii, xvi.

18 Ver, por ejemplo, *México a través de los siglos,* 10ª ed., II, iii, vi.

19 Ver, por ejemplo, Milo Kearney y Anthony Knopp, *Boom and Bust, The Historical Cycles of Matamoros and Brownsville*, (Austin, TX: Eakin Press, 1991), p. 12.

20 Ver *México a través de los siglos* 10ª ed., II, iii, ix.

21 Había sido apenas fundada en 1718.

22 Cf., por ejemplo, *México a través de los siglos,* 10ª ed., II, iii, vi; ver también, Milo Kearney y Anthony Knopp, *Boom and Bust, The Historical Cycles of Matamoros and Brownsville*, (Austin, TX: Eakin Press, 1991), p. 12.

23 Ver José Vasconcelos, *La tormenta*, en *Obras completas*, vol. 1. (México: Libreros Mexicanos Unidos, 1957), p. 821.

24 Entonces ya había usurpado Napoleón el trono español.

25 Ver, por ejemplo, Jacques Pirenne, *Historia universal, las grandes corrientes de la historia*, (Barcelona: Ed. Éxito, S. A., 1972) vols. IV y V; Luis González, "El periodo formativo", *Historia Mínima de México* (El Colegio de México: 1974), pp. 73–114; *México a través de los siglos,* 10ª ed., II; Carol A. Lipscomb, "Karankawa Indians", *The Handbook of Texas Online*, www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/

26 Guillermo Lavín nota que, si en 1748 florecía en Europa la Ilustración, los colonos que llegaban y poblaban el Seno Mexicano no sólo eran gente sin "formación académica o artística" sino incluso sin conocimientos de albañilería; pues para poder construir la única casa de cal y canto en el Nuevo Santander, José de Escandón tuvo que mandar traer artesanos de la metrópoli. Ver Guillermo Lavín, "El desarrollo cultural", *Tamaulipas. Los retos del desarrollo*, ed., por Marco Aurelio Navarro y José Luis Pariente, (Victoria, Tamaulipas Universidad Autónoma de Tamaulipas), pp. 225–244.

27 Paralelamente a la conquista de Escandón se puso en práctica un sistema de misiones que cristianizaría y sedentarizaría a los indios. De ellas se encargarían los franciscanos del Colegio de Guadalupe en Zacatecas. Sin embargo, su éxito fue muy limitado, entre otras razones, porque Escandón se negó a dotarles formalmente de tierras de hallarse éstas en las cercanías de alguna villa española. Ver Octavio Herrera, *Breve historia de Tamaulipas*, (México: Fondo para la Cultura Económica, 1999), pp. 66–67.

28 Ver, por ejemplo, "Tamaulipas" *La Enciclopedia de México*, p. 7494–7495; *México a través de los siglos,* 10ª ed., II, iii, vi; ver también, "Poblaciones Fundadas por don José de Escandón y Helguera", *El Bravo* (Matamoros: 2 de septiembre de 1990) Suplemento Dominical; Milo Kearney y Anthony Knopp, *Boom and Bust, The Historical Cycles of Matamoros and Brownsville*, (Austin, TX: Eakin Press, 1991), p. 12; Juan Fidel Zorrilla et al, *Tamaulipas, fértil planicie entre sierra y laguna, Monografía Estatal*, (México: Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1993), pp. 54–57; Rosaura Alicia Dávila, "Fundaciones: 1998, Año de Celebración para Tamaulipas, Reynosa y Brownsville", *Maquila Social* (Matamoros: Febrero, 1998), p. 31.

29 Ver, por ejemplo, Milo Kearney y Anthony Knopp, *Boom and Bust, The Historical Cycles of Matamoros and Brownsville*, (Austin, TX: Eakin Press, 1991), p. 12.

30 Ver, por ejemplo, Octavio Herrera, *Breve historia de Tamaulipas*, (México: Fondo para la Cultura Económica, 1999), pp. 70–73; Oscar Rivera Saldaña, *Frontera Heroica. Tomo I. Colonización del Noreste de México. (1748–1821)*, (H. Matamoros, Tamaulipas: 1994), pp. 47-49, Milo Kearney y Anthony Knopp, *Boom and Bust,*

The Historical Cycles of Matamoros and Brownsville, (Austin, TX: Eakin Press, 1991), pp. 14–18; Andrés F. Cuéllar, *De Matamoros a México con sus gobernantes* (Matamoros: Ediciones Archivo Histórico-Sociedad de Historia, 1996); José Raúl Canseco Botello, *Historia de Matamoros* (Matamoros: Litográfica Jardín, S. A., 1981); Clemente Rendón de la Garza, *Bicentenario de Nuestra Señora del Refugio de los Esteros Hermosos* (Monterrey: Servicios de Multimedia, 1994).

31 Ver Oscar Rivera Saldaña, *Frontera Heroica. Tomo I. Colonización del Noreste de México. (1748–1821)*, (H. Matamoros, Tamaulipas: 1994), pp. 47–49.

32 Una lectura alternativa de este episodio podría ser: "...Bajo el liderazgo del capitán Ignacio Anastacio de Ayala, trece familias de Camargo y una de Reynosa se lanzaron a poblar y trabajar en 113 sitios de ganado mayor que hoy constituyen el municipio de Matamoros. Eligieron el de San Juan de los Esteros Hermosos, hoy cabecera municipal, para congregarse. Sin embargo, un señor muy listo, Antonio de Urizar, se preocupó antes de conseguir los títulos de propiedad de esas tierras que de llegar a ellas. Resultó así dueño de La Sauteña y propietario de los 113 sitios. Los colonos no eran más que paracaidistas que explotaban ya esas tierras sin pagarle la renta al titular. Éste los demandó en 1781 en el juzgado de Camargo...Tras la intervención del gobernador Diego de la Saga, los colonos por fin se resolvieron a finiquitar la deuda el 17 de junio de 1784. No sino entonces pudieron ser reconocidos propietarios legítimos de ellas, y atreverse, el 1º de diciembre, a iniciar el trazo formal del pueblo."

Fugitive Slaves and Free Blacks in South Texas
by
Alberto Rodriguez

> The African American in northern Mexico found a society that, for the most part, welcomed their presence and created a place of refuge where they could engage in activities and integrate into Mexican society – John C. Gassner[1]

The first evidences of Blacks in South Texas and Northern Mexico is with the shipwreck of John Hawkins in the late 1500s.[2] Hawkins was the son of an English sea captain who became involved in the western sea trade. In 1562, Young Hawkins became involved in transporting human cargo to New Spain, trading his captives for pearls, hides, ginger and sugar.[3] Hawkins continued his profitable trade until 1568 when the Spanish took issues with his newfound business venture. By Spanish law, only Spaniards had a monopoly on the slave trade in the New World. The Spaniards cut off Hawkin's illegal trade with an attack on six of Hawkins ships off the coast of Veracruz, Mexico. A Mexican legend has it that some of Hawkin's ships were able to escape to Northern Mexico where they were overpowered by the human cargo they transported.[4] Hawkins' slave trade established the Black presence in Northern Mexico and allowed his human cargo to go undetected in the sparsely populated area for years. The descendants of these Blacks encountered members of José de Escandón's settlement of Nuevo Santander in 1747.[5]

Thus, Blacks in South Texas established themselves long before any Anglo or even Tejano attempts to settle the new frontier. Historian Patrick J. Carroll suggests that slave ships crashed onto sand dunes along the mouth of the Rio Grande, allowing slaves to swim ashore and eventually establish a colony. The shifting tides of lower Laguna Madre made it difficult for even the most experienced navigators to maneuver. In 1747, José de Escandón and his settlers described a Black tribe of people that lived along the mouth of the Rio Grande. They called them *Los Negros* and described them as taller than the average Native American with characteristics of "Black people". Escandón notes that they were dark and had frizzy hair. He also noted that they often married tribal members outside their ethnic group and lived in peace with most of the natives.[6]

The next major influx of Blacks to South Texas came with the American Antebellum Period, dominated by runaway slaves who used the Underground Railroad to escape from Dixie. Slaves in Texas and Louisiana often recognized that the northward journey to freedom was too long and instead chose the shorter path to the South. Between 1820 and 1865 Mexico served as a safe

haven for runaway slaves. Estimates ranged anywhere from 5,000 to 20,000 Blacks who escaped into Mexico and the South Texas region.[7] Earlier, Mexico had opposed slavery and had taken constitutional steps to abolish it. The Plan of Iguala, proposed by Augustín de Iturbide in 1820, abolished slavery in what was still New Spain. Then, in 1824, the Mexican Constitution included an amendment that did away with slavery. In 1829, under General Vicente Guerrero, slaves in Mexico were emancipated.[8] As the Black plantation system ended in Mexico, many Afro-Mestizos managed to change and remake their ranking within Mexican society, unlike the South that still worked under a plantation system that had a low ranking set for Blacks. Wage labor allowed many Blacks and Afro-Mestizos in Northern Mexico and South Texas to move up in society and redefine their ranking within the Mexican racial structure. Under the new laws of Mexico, Black southern slaves no longer had to travel thousands of miles to the North for freedom. Runaways could walk southward or sail the warm waters of the Gulf of Mexico to acquire freedom.

Although Mexico abolished slavery, the history of importing African slaves continued. For many Mexicans, owning slaves became a way to distinguish their social standing. According to historian Dennis N. Valdes, many of the children of slaves were often released due to plummeting prices and the rising cost of living.[9] At the peak of importation of Africans to Mexico, over 200,000 Africans resided in areas like Costa Chica, Tampico and Guerrero.[10] Former Mexican slaves formed their own culture and identity, becoming a mixture of African and Mexican. Yet, as stated earlier, Mexican society had a history of race and *calidad.* An example of labels used in marriage records shows the racialization that existed in Mexico:

Negro	(Tended to denote a pure Black man)
Mulato	(Spanish and Negro)
Mulato Blanco	(Spanish Negro usually called Mulato)
Mulato Prieto	(Negro and Pardo)
Mulato Lobo	(Pardo and Indian usually called Lobo)
Morisco	(Spanish and Mulato)
Mestizo	(Spanish and Indian)
Castizo	(Spanish and Mestizo)
Indio	(an Indian)
Indio ladino	(Indian who had adopted Spanish customs and spoke Spanish)
Lobo	(same as Mulato)
Coyote	(used to denote a Mestizo)
Chino	(Negro and Indian; a person born in the Philippines)
Pardo	(Negro and Indian)
Moreno	(person of African decent)
Español	(white)

Mascogos (Black Seminoles, descendants of escaped African slaves who joined with the Seminole Indians in Florida)[11]

The Mexican caste system had many stages that could be negotiated for Blacks. In the U.S. South, Blacks were slaves and nothing more. Many were doomed to stay slaves for the rest of their lives. The American plantation system did not allow social mobility for Blacks. Even after emancipation, Anglos would use Black Codes and Jim Crow laws to keep Black social mobility to a minimum. U.S. laws operated on the "one drop rule" that made any person with any African lineages a second-class citizen. However, in Mexico Blacks could buy into the Mexican racial hierarchy. Black male runaway slaves from the United States often married into the Mexican indigenous population, allowing their children to become free. Their children became Mexican citizens, allowing them to work under Mexican laws.[12] In contrast, American slaves born to Blacks were added to the growing slave population and were not given freedom.

Runaway Black slaves incurred both conflict and cooperation in their journey to freedom. The journey would take them across an artificial political border into Mexico, where they would live and work alongside Mexicans. Not only did runaway Blacks have to face the constant fear of their former slave owners raiding the Mexican border; they had to confront an entrenched Mexican racial system that shaped their place in society. Blacks who ran away to Mexico took a structural position that did not threaten most Mexicans in South Texas. In fact, Blacks running away into Mexico, in many ways, served to break the structural dominance of Anglos in Texas.

In 1857, The Cart War in Texas erupted, causing major conflict between Mexicans and Anglos. "Mexicans and Tejanos had built a successful business of hauling food and merchandise from the port of Indianola to San Antonio and other towns in the interior of Texas."[13] Arnoldo De León in *They Called Them Greasers*, points out that Anglos became angered over Mexican sympathy with Black slaves, which led to the Cart War of Texas. Examination of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) Slave Narratives reveals that runaway slaves viewed many Mexicans as helpful and sympathetic to their flight.[14]

With the outbreak of the American Civil War, Southerners faced major economic obstacles. Union blockades of major ports made the export of cotton impossible. Southerners began to use South Texas and Mexico as avenues for important exports. Overnight, areas like Brownsville, Matamoros, and Port Bagdad were faced with massive population explosions similar to those of the Colorado and California gold rush. By 1863, the population in Matamoros alone had risen from 5,000 to 15,000.[15] Houses that used to rent for ten dollars a month were subdivided into 12x14 rooms and rented for one hundred dollars a month per room.[16]

Port Bagdad became the major point of export for Confederate cotton. The port was located across the river from present day Brownville and twenty miles from present day Matamoros. Historian James A. Irby describes the port as being "filled with the backwash of the world."[17] He called Port Bagdad the "backdoor of the Confederacy" claiming it extended the war considerably.[18]

The use of Port Bagdad not only helped Southerners, but it benefited Tejanos and Mexicans who were engaged in their attempt to remove the French from Mexico. Mexico depended on the Confederacy for supplies and weapons.[19] Tejanos would also benefit from trade and political agreement between the Anglos and Mexicans. Tejanos served as middlemen and often as brokers of cotton exportation. For example, a joint venture between Tejanos Santiago Vidaurri and José María Jesús Carbajal and Anglos James H. Callahan and John S. (Rip) Ford made the cotton trade with Mexico a profitable venture.[20]

With the amount of attention South Texas was receiving, Blacks who assisted their masters with the transportation of cotton across the border found it easy to escape their owners. According to former slave Ben Kinchlow, many Blacks took cotton to the Rio Grande for export through Port Baghdad. This presented them with an opportunity to run away to Mexico...

> While I was yet on the Border, the plantation owners had to send their cotton to the border to be shipped to other parts, so it was transferred by Negroes slaves as drivers. Lots of times, when theses Negroes got there and took the cotton from their wagon, they would then be persuaded to go across the border by Meskins, and then they would never return to their masters. That how lots of Negroes got to be free.[21]

Analysis of the first two Texas Censuses taken in 1850 and 1860 reveal that South Texas served as a sanctuary to free Blacks, making runaways' flights easier. In 1850, South Texas made up 4% of the total Texas population, but was home to 4.79% of the free Blacks.[22] Nineteen of the 397 free Blacks in Texas resided in South Texas. The percentages were even larger in 1860 when South Texas held only 1.8% of the total Texas population but was home to 41% of the total free Black population of Texas.[23] In 1860, Texas free Blacks numbered 355 with 104 living in South Texas. According to former slaves, one reason for the larger number of Blacks on the border could be due to their positive experience with local Mexicans.[24]

In some cases, escape was as simple as pushing cotton bales into the river and using them as rafts. Sallie Wroe, an ex-slave from Austin, told the story of how her father went down to Brownsville with her three uncles...

> One day pappy and Uncle Paul and Uncle Andy and Uncle Joe was takin bales of cotton on ox wagon down to de Rio Grande. Each men was drivin a ox wagon down to Brownsville, where dey was to wait

> to meet Massa Burdette. But pappy and de others left de wagons long de river bank and rolled a bale of cotton in de river and four of dem gits on dat bale and rows with sticks cross over into Mexico. Dis was durin de war. Pappy come back to us after freedom and say he done git long fine with Mexico. He larnt to talk jes like dem... He brung some money from Mexico and taken us all to Brenham and buyed us some clothes.[25]

As Ben Kinchlow pointed out, trusted Blacks often were the ones transporting Confederate cotton into Mexico. Wroe's father and uncles were transporting Confederate cotton to the Rio Grande and Northern Mexico. Wroe's family members took advantage of the trade with Mexico to acquire their freedom. Wroe's narrative also shows how easy it was to escape into Mexico. Even though the Wroe family members had acquired some degree of autonomy from their masters, they still seized the opportunity to run away. The proximity of Mexico to Texas plantations and the need of the Confederacy to use Blacks to move cotton during the Civil War trade combined to make it easy for slaves who wished to change their current situation to escape into Mexico.

The problem of runaway slaves into Mexico became so drastic that former slaveholders would offer from two hundred to two thousand dollars for the recovery of their property. The cities of Austin and San Antonio led the recovery project with a collection of $20,000 and 500 to 1000 volunteers to capture runaway slaves.[26] Rip Ford fueled the recovery projects. He reported in 1855 that "4000 slaves reside in Northern Mexico… and worth 3,200,000 [dollars]… [and] just waiting to be captured."[27] Slave hunters would be able to make easy money by joining these recovery projects. The constant flight of slaves to Mexico gave them a steady income.

Mexico and the United States did not have any agreements when it came to fugitive slaves. The U.S. passed slave fugitive laws as early as 1793, but it did not apply in Mexico. Although local leaders like Santiago Vidaurri, José María Jesús Carbajal, James H. Callahan, and John S. (Rip) Ford constantly lobbied both the Mexican and the U.S. governments for slave fugitive acts or laws, they were not imposed in Mexico. This lack of laws did not stop slave hunters or former slave owners from making raids into Mexico.[28]

Jacob Branch, an ex-slave from Double Bayou, Texas, remembered the border raids, "De whites folks rid de Mexican side dat river all de time, put plenty slaves git through, anyway."[29] Branch's observations of raids could have been related to the actions of Rip Ford, José M. Carvajal and James H. Callahan. Runaway slaves in Mexico had much to fear. Not only were they in constant fear of being abducted by border raiders but some Mexicans also participated in the hunting and recovery of runaways. Even though the slave narratives I researched determined that Mexicans were helpful to Blacks in

some cases, the most affluent Mexicans shared the views of many Southern Whites.

However, in the eyes of former slaves, most Mexicans assisted them. Jacob Branch recalled that Mexicans allowed Blacks to use their flatboats to cross the Rio Grande. Branch stated:

> After war starts lots of slaves runned off to git to de Yankees. All dem in dis part heads for de Rio Grande River. De Mexicans rig up flatboats out in the middle of de river, tied to stakes with rope. When de culled people gits to de rope dey can pull deyself cross de rest de way on dem boats.[30]

As early as the 1760s, ferry boats (flatboats) were used by people on both sides of the river in their daily lives. These ferry boats were made accessible to runaway Blacks. With the growing Confederate trade with Mexico, ferry boats were in constant use on the Rio Grande. To Branch, the use of ferry boats made his escape into Mexico easier.

Social relationships were closer between Mexicans and Blacks than between Blacks and Anglos in South Texas. Blacks, like Mexicans, had suffered at the hand of Anglos. Mexico had lost much of its land and was regarded as a second-class country by many Anglos. South Texas Mexicans had a history of defiance against Anglos.[31] In turn, Blacks and Mexicans had a shared experience when it came to Anglo attitudes in South Texas. Thus the social contact between Blacks and Mexicans was close. Blacks knew for the most part that Mexicans would not enslave them and in many cases would help them in their flight to freedom.

In one narrative, Felix Haywood recalled that he was born into slavery in a small town east of San Antonio and lived in Mexico for some time. Haywood remembers:

> sometimes someone would come long and try to get us to run up North and be free. We used to laugh at that. There wasn't no reason to run up North. All we had to do was walk South and we'ed be free as soon as we cross the Rio Grande. In Mexico you could be free. They didn't care what color you was, black, white, yellow, or blue. Hundreds of slaves did go to Mexico and got on alright. We would hear about 'em and how they was goin'to be Mexican. They brought up their children to speak only Mexican.[32]

In Haywood's mind, Mexican people did not hold the prejudiced assumptions about Blacks that did Anglo Americans. He points out that Mexicans did not care about the color of one's skin. Although a racial structure existed in Mexico, the need for labor and for the valuable skills that former slaves learned on American plantations could increase a person's value or change his caste on the South Texas frontier. Haywood's narrative points to an assimilating process rather than a continuation of Black culture

in Mexico.

Some scholars have also deduced that Blacks looked to assimilate into Mexican society in both Mexican and South Texas peripheries, having their children learn Spanish and Mexican customs. According to Alwyn Barr, Blacks had a difficult time with the Spanish language. Once Blacks did learn the language it became easier to maneuver within Mexican society.[33] The 1860 Texas Census corroborates Haywood's observations of Mexican cooperation in both Mexican and South Texas peripheries. In a sample of 24 households with Blacks or Mulatto heads in the 1860 Cameron County manuscript census, 42 percent were interracially married.[34]

Anglo slaveholders recognized that many Mexicans were less likely to discriminate against Blacks on the border. Before dying, James Boyd's master, Sanford Wooldridge, told him to take his cattle down to Matamoros...

> I gits de job punchin cattle on a ranch in South Texas. I druv cattle into Kansas, over what de white folks calls de Chisaum Trail. I worked lots of cattle and is what dey call top hand. I's workin for Massa Boyd den, and he gits me to drive some cattle to Mexico. He say he ain't well no more and for me to sell de cattle and send him de money and git de job down dere. I goes on down to Mexico and do what he say. I marries a gal name Martina in 1869, down in Matamoras. Us have four children and she die. Dat break me up and I drifts back to Huntsville.[35]

It appears that James Boyd enjoyed a sense of autonomy from his master even after he relocated to Mexico. Boyd's master perhaps understood that James would more likely be sold to another slave owning family after he died. Boyd's choice to stay in Mexico raises questions we do not see in other narratives. Did Boyd see himself as a citizen of Mexico or did he maintain an American identity? Mexico provided citizenship rights for Boyd that he could not acquire in the United States. Boyd seems to have acquired a social economic status that he did not have in the United States. In Mexico, it appeared that he was seen as a valued cowboy who knew the ins and outs of ranch life and cattle drives. Even though a caste system existed in Mexico and in South Texas, runaway slaves were acquiring social mobility. Ex-slaves like Boyd acquired specialized skills that made them valuable to a local economy short on skilled labor. Thus, Boyd's structural position changes from property under the United States racial hierarchy to a valuable cowboy and integral part of Mexican society under the Mexican racial hierarchy. In several cases Blacks acquired some kind of social and economic status that made them even more desirable.

Benjamin Lundy, an abolitionist of Quaker descent from Sussex County, New Jersey, visited Matamoros on November 5, 1834. Lundy had a vision of establishing an all-Black colony in Mexico.[36] On his visit to Matamoros,

Lundy met several Blacks who lived at the mouth of the Rio Grande and who were integrated within Mexican society. One of them, a brick maker named Nicolas Drouet, was seen as the leader of the Black community.[37] Drouet was a free Black who had come to Matamoros from Louisiana after fighting in the Battle of New Orleans.[38] Lundy also met with Bartolo Passement, a member of the same community. A civil engineer and architect, Passement helped to build Casa Cross, one of Matamoros' most prominent homes. It still stands today. In his journeys, Lundy described peaceful interaction between Mexicans and Blacks in Mexico. Both Drouet and Passement used the many skills they had learned as slaves to redefine their structural position. Unlike the South, the Texas border was in need of specialty skills and made it easier for Blacks to move up in South Texas society.

In 1849, Ben Kinchlow and his mother were sent to Matamoros, Mexico, by slave-owner Sandy Moore. Kinchlow worked both sides of the border as a ranch hand and cowboy. He reported having a friendly and cooperative relationship with Mexicans on both sides of the river...

> The county was very thinly settled then and of very few white people; most Meskins, living on the border... We lived very neighborly. When any of the neighbors killed fresh meat we always divided it with one another. ... Every neighbor had a little place. We didn't have any plows; we planted with hoe and went along and raked the dirt over with our toes.... Their was not hired work then... and when people wanted to brand or do other work, all the neighbors went together and helped without pay.[39]

Kinchlow points out that "most of settlements was all "Meskin" mostly; of course there was a few white people,"[40] but his neighbors were mostly Mexicans. When his neighbors wanted to brand their animals or plant their crops the local people got together and helped without pay. For Kinchlow, the line of color and race crossed for activities such as branding, hunting and dances.

In the case of Kinchlow's mother, relationships sometimes led to marriage. When Kinchlow was five years old, his mother Lizaer (Eliza) Moore, a Mulata, married Juan Rios, a Mexican from Brownsville. Kinchlow, however, does not reveal that his mother married a Mexican and that his brothers and sisters were Afro-Mexican.[41] Although it is not known why Kinchlow did not reveal his Mexican step-father or his Afro-Mexican siblings he did tell both of his interviewers that he was the son of a Mulatta mother and an Anglo father.[42] Kinchlow could have reaped more benefit letting people know that he was closer to Anglos than Mexicans, allowing him to move in and out of border society.[43] Although Kinchlow did not claim any lineage to his Mexican step-father or siblings, he would find love within the South Texas Mexican society...

> I fell in love with a Mexkin girl once... The girls was named Juanita and Antonita Flores. Antonita was the one I fell in love with... Of co'se I had chances to talk to her some. Both of 'em had long black hair an' they were black-eyed an' ride! M-m-m! Them girls could sho' ride. They was good at handlin' many kind of stock. They wore dresses just above the ankles. Oh, yes, they rode in their dresses... I used to go by Antonita an' smile an' pass her a sign an' she always answered. I would have married her if I had stayed on there but I was young an' hadn't even joined up with McNally yet an' when I left their [sic], I drifted farther away an' never did go back. But Antonita stayed in my memory a long time. She was good an' kind an' as pretty as a rose. I thought lots of her an' I knowed she thought lots of me. We used to ride together but most of the time the old man was with us. Sometimes I got to talk to her an' I could slip in a nice word while we were off together.[44]

Much like Anglo stereotypes, Kinchlow extols the sexuality of Mexican women. That he supposedly fell in love with a Mexican woman tells the reader that race relations in South Texas were somewhat convoluted. Antonita Flores' father, for unknown reasons, allowed the courtship to continue under his supervision. He obviously had a different understanding of the miscegenation laws that existed from the Civil War through the 1920s.

Kinchlow's structural position would change both under the Anglo racial and the Mexican racial structure. Kinchlow lived in an area that was neither truly Mexico nor the United States. In Mexico his family was able to assimilate into Mexican society to the point where his mother married a Mexican native. On the other side of the border, he would change his structural position, become a valuable cowboy, and use the valuable skills he learned in Mexico. Thus, as his structural position changed, he was able to navigate and negotiate a better social status.

As a result, in the 1860 census, Brownsville resident Lizaer Moore and Kinchlow were documented as being Mulata, but in 1870 she is documented as White. When Kinchlow and his mother moved to Matagorda County, Texas, they were both listed as Black in the United States Census. When Kinchlow's family moved back into Central Texas it did not matter if they were part White. Local people still saw them as Black. In South Texas, his family was upgraded from Black to Mulato to White. Blacks on the border did not have to live by the "one drop" rule. In South Texas and in Mexico, many married into Mexican society, allowing them to change the race structure on the border. Children of Blacks and Mexicans who had interracially married in South Texas were seen as Mulato. In time, they could be documented as White.

Still, analysis of local elite Tejanos reveals an upper class that claimed "Whiteness" and the privileges that came with it. As early as 1845, Tejanos Lorenzo de Zavala, José Antonio Navarro and José Francisco petitioned the Texas government for Mexicans to be documented as "White". The ruling would insure that Tejanos and Mexicans would enjoy the privileges of "Whiteness" and not be categorized as Black. Even revolutionaries like Catarino Garza made a dramatic distinction when asked about the African race.[45] In one of his first literary battles he explained to an Anglo lawyer, "this white lawyer who villainously lies asserting that one American is worth more than ten Mexicans... there is one Mexican, without being black, who can prove in any terrain that he is worth as much as him or any other of his cohort."[46] Garza goes on to describe an occasion in St. Louis where he met a Moro "with courteous manners despite being a moro, that is to say from Morroco, Tangiers."[47] Although Garza was a liberal and did not support Porfirio Díaz and his regime, he was still concerned about the stigma that went along with being Black. Even Tejano progressives like J.T. Canales, a founder of LULAC, made a conscious effort to exclude Blacks and Mexican Nationals from the organization.[48] Tejanos negotiated their "Whiteness" through "racial power sharing" with Anglos. Many Tejanos supported Anglo political machines in return for a protection of privileges. Elite Tejanos and Anglos made sure their structural position was known and justified to the Anglo racial hierarchy. South Texas and Northern Mexico are at the peripheries of both countries. Still, White Southerners and elite Tejanos would work as one to control Blacks in the area. South Texas would become an area with an identity of its own. This hybrid culture in South Texas that was neither fully American nor Mexican allowed the area to redefine and take a form unlike any other.

Often, it was Anglos who ran away from the South and brought their slaves with them.[49] In a military correspondence from Captain Giddings to Colonel John S. Ford, Giddings describes what an Anglo family fleeing the War into Mexico on February 23, 1864, expected to find:

> The party consisting of Mrs. Nancy J. Parriss, her four children, her sister, and sixteen year-old bother. Mrs. Parriss listed her property as consisting of two mules, two wagons, one yoke of steers, two horses, and personal baggage. Her mother Mrs. Smith, was taking three Negroes, a women of 35 and two boys aged 12 and 13. She had told that by paying ten dollars to the authorities on the Mexican side she could peon her Negroes and keep them. Both women believed their husbands to be on the Union side.[50]

Captain Giddings expressed concern over the idea that Black slaves were being allowed into Mexico and used as *Peones*. In some cases, masters fled the war and took their slaves into Northern parts of Mexico during the Civil War.

In 1862, Bill Thomas, an ex-slave from Hondo, recalled that "Massa Chamlin" took Thomas and his two sons with fifteen bales of cotton to the Rio Grande during the Civil War:

> I'll tell you how I got away fom there. Masst bought cotton And carried it to Mexico. He taken his 2 boys with him and we had 5 wagons and I drove one. I had 4 oxen and I had 3 bales of cotton on my wagon: he had 6 oxen and 6 bales of cotton, and the last wagon, it had 10 bales on it and 6 oxen. He had to ship it acrost the Rio Grande. If a Mexican bought it, he come across and took it over himself. Rackin how much he got for that cotton? He got 60 cents a pound. Yes'm he sho did. Cotton was bringin that then I was freed over there in Mexico. I was about 14 years old. Massa Chamlin, he stayed over there till the country was free. He didn't belive in that fighting. I cooked in a hotel over in Mexico. I cooked two years at $1.00 a day.[51]

In this case, not only slaves escaped to Mexico but Anglo Unionists who did not support the Confederacy. These Anglos looked to Mexico for a continuation of the Black structural position under the United States racial hierarchy, by taking their slaves into Mexico and hiring them out for income. Thus, the structural position did not change for some Blacks in Mexico. For example, Chamlin remained in Matamoros with his family until the war ended. Chamlin believed in slavery, but did not see why he should incur the expenses of a war. He understood that slavery might not survive the war. Thomas was only 14 years old when he was introduced to Mexico. Nowhere does Thomas mention that he was truly a free Black in Mexico. His young age suggested he would have needed a caretaker. It is very likely that Thomas was hired out as a servant to Mexicans. He would not have escaped being a slave if this was the case. Many masters ran ads in the local Matamoros newspapers advertising slave labor for hire. Thus, for some Blacks, crossing the river did not mean freedom.

Anglos who moved into Mexico sought to maintain the structural position of Blacks under the United States racial hierarchy as they moved into Mexico. In the nineteenth century, Benjamin Lundy identified a few Anglos who lived in Matamoros that looked to subjugate Blacks. He documented that they not only came to the area to make money, but they brought their racist views with them. Lundy points out that Anglos were not interested in respecting Mexicans or Blacks in Matamoros:

> I do not find one foreign white man except a cooper named Morris, that is as friendly as he ought to be to Mexicans. The sole object of the foreigners in general, who come to this place, is to make money; and they indulge in all the unholy prejudices against people of colour, which they brought with them, or have contracted from their associates here.[52]

Lundy points to an incident in a Matamoros dance hall where Anglos voiced their anger at the admittance of a group of young Blacks.[53] He stated the Anglos were escorted from the premises and the young Black men were allowed to stay. Blacks in Matamoros had become an integral part of Mexican society and seemed to have shared some of the rights native Mexicans did at the time.

Mexicans and Anglos had been at odds since the Texas Revolution of 1835 when Anglos led the way in the annexation of Texas. Both ethnic groups would once again be at odds in 1846 with the U.S. Mexican War when Mexico lost half of its land to Anglos with their vision of "Manifest Destiny". In 1857, the Cart War in Texas erupted, causing major conflict between Mexicans and Anglos. "Mexicans and Tejanos had built a successful business of hauling food and merchandise from the port of Indianola to San Antonio and other towns in the interior of Texas."[54] Historian Arnoldo De León's book *They Called Them Greasers* points out that Anglos' anger over Mexican sympathy with Black slaves led to the Cart War. Blacks used the ethnic conflict between Mexicans and Anglos to their advantage.[55]

As more and more Black slaves crossed the river between Brownsville/ Matamoros, locals on both sides made it more difficult for them to work and live in the area. As far North as Seguin and Gonzalez, laws were passed that persecuted Mexicans and Blacks who came into the town. It was also believed that Mexican sympathizers were causing insubordination among slaves. Anglo landowners believed that contact and interaction between Blacks and Mexicans would eventually cause a major insurrection. In the eyes of many Anglos, Mexicans helped slaves escape and were sympathetic to their situation.[56]

Texans were haunted by fears of Black insurrection. Then, on September 6, 1856, in Colorado County, certain Anglos uncovered a plan of insurrection. According to the plan, Mexicans and Blacks would kill all adult Anglo males and take their women as wives.[57] Blacks were to break into their bondsmen's homes, take their weapons, and make their way into Mexico with the help of their newfound sympathizers. The rumor of the insurrection motivated Anglos to kill or beat some Blacks in the area. Anglos in other cities and counties used the rumors to harden their views in regards to slavery and to create exclusion acts.[58]

The new structural position for Blacks who came to the border tended to disrupt Anglo dominance. Blacks were encouraged by Mexicans to escape into Mexico so that the Anglo social structure would be broken down. The Federal Writers Project (WPA) Slave Narratives points out that the South Texas borderlands faced continual conflict and cooperation. Not only were Blacks hunted by their masters but the often elitist Tejanos formed alliances with Anglos to continue the system of oppression. Even though Blacks

sometimes saw border Mexicans as sympathetic to their situation, they would find that even Mexican society could turn against them. The Census data reveals that Blacks were eventually forced into their own enclaves. The bi-ethnic families of the early years became a thing of the past.

Life was difficult for Blacks in Texas after emancipation. The end of the American Civil War brought Reconstruction and the Freeman's Bureau to Texas and the South. Between 1865 and 1868, the "bureau spent $17,000,000 establishing 4,000 schools, 100 hospitals and providing homes and food for former slaves."[59] Its initial goal was to protect former slaves from unscrupulous Southern Anglos in hopes that each Black would "understand his duties and his privileges as a freeman."[60] The Freeman's Bureau and Black abolitionist Frederick Douglas led the way in the ratification of both the 13th and 14th Amendments.[61]

Conditions for many Blacks after the American Civil War mirrored those under slavery. Southerners made it difficult for most Blacks to acquire any kind of social mobility. The most effective method was the passing of laws that discriminated against or excluded Blacks. The first was the Black codes that legislated the "prohibiting [Blacks] right to vote, forbidding them to sit on juries, limiting their right to testify against white men, carrying weapons in public places...working in certain occupations."[62] These laws served as the foundation of the Jim Crow segregation that engulfed the South throughout the 1900s.

In 1889, Texas passed laws that segregated Blacks on public transportation. Although Texas was not the first to pass segregation laws it opened the door for *Plessey v. Ferguson* in 1896 which made it legal to segregate Blacks as long as they had equal facilities to serve them. The United States Supreme Court would not overturn *Plessey v. Ferguson* until the early 1950s.

Endnotes

1 John C. Gassner, "African American Fugitive Slaves and Freemen in Matamoros, Tamaulipas, 1820-1865" (Thesis M.A. University of Texas--Pan American, 2003), p.16.

2 *Ibid*, pp. 44-45.

3 Rayner Unwin, *The Defeat of John Hawkins; A Biography of His Third Slaving Voyage* (New York: Macmillan, 1960). His first trip brought 300 Africans from the west coast of Africa to Santo Domingo.

4 *Ibid.* The legend cannot be proven but it remains part of local folklore.

5 Gassner, pp. 46-48.

6 *Ibid.*

7 Ronnie C. Tyler, "Fugitive Slaves in Mexico" *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 57, No. 1: (January, 1972), p. 7.

8 General Vicente Guerrero was born in the small village of Tixtla, Mexico. A poor mestizo, Guerrero had seen first hand the injustices of slavery when he saw the mestizo class looked down upon by *peninsulares* and *criollos*.

9 Dennis N. Valdes, "The Decline of Slavery in Mexico" *The Americans*, Vol. 44, No. 2: (October, 1987).

10 Patrick J. Carroll, *Blacks in Colonial Veracruz: Race, Ethnicity, and Regional Development* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), pp. 82-85.

11 Edgar F. Love, "Marriage Patterns of Persons of African Descent in a Colonial Mexico City Parish", *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol. 51, No. 1: (Feb., 1971), p. 81.

12 Earlier, Mexico had opposed slavery and took constitutional steps to abolish it. The Plan of Iguala, proposed by Augustín de Iturbide in 1820, abolished slavery in what was still New Spain. Then in 1824, the Mexican Constitution included an amendment that did away with slavery. In 1829, under General Vicente Guerrero, slaves in Mexico were emancipated.

13 The Cart War erupted in 1857 and had national and international repercussions.

14 Arnoldo De Léon, *They Called Them Greasers: Anglo Attitudes Towards Mexicans in Texas, 1821-1900* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983), pp. 49-62.

15 James A. Irby, *Backdoor at Bagdad: The Civil War on the Rio Grande*, (Texas Western Press: The University of Texas El Paso, 1977), pp. 5-6

16 *Ibid.*., p. 5.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 5.

18 *Ibid.*., p. 7.

19 In 1862 Napoleon III tried to create an empire in Mexico by collecting on over due loans to Mexico. The French installed Archduke Maximilian of Austria as emperor of Mexico. The insurgents in Mexico were led by Benito Juárez in the north and those in the south by Porfirio Díaz.

20 Tyler, pp. 1-18.

21 Ben Kinchlow "Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936-1938," [accessed 10 June 2003], p 6.

22 In 1850, the number of Texas Free Blacks was 397 in 1850 and 19 or 5% lived in South Texas. The Total population of Texas in 1850 was 212,592, in South Texas the total population was 8,541or 4% of total Texas population. Historical Census Browser. Retrieved [Jan. 1, 2005], from the University of Virginia, Geospatial and Statistical Data Center: http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/collections/stats/ histcensus/ index.html.

23 In 1860, Number of Texas Free Blacks was 355 in 1860 and 104 or 41% lived in South Texas. The total population of Texas in 1860 was 604,215, in South Texas the total population was 11,023 or 1.8% of total Texas population. Historical Census Browser. Retrieved [Jan. 1, 2005], from the University of Virginia, Geospatial and Statistical Data Center: http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/collections/stats/histcensus/

index.html.

24 “Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers’ Project, 1936-1938”.

25 “Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers’ Project, 1936-1938,” Sallie Wroe [accessed 10 June 2003], p. 2.

26 Tyler, p. 7.

27 *Ibid.*,. p. 6.

28 *Ibid.*.

29 “Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers’ Project, 1936-1938,” Jacob Branch [accessed 10 June 2003], p. 5.

30 “Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers’ Project, 1936-1938,” Jacob Branch [accessed 10 June 2003], p. 5.

31 Elliott Gordon Young, *Twilight on the Texas-Mexico Border: Catarino Garza and Identity at the Cross-Roads, 1880-1915* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), pp. 29-32; David Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987), pp. 1-11; and Arnoldo De Léon, *They Called Them Greasers: Anglo Attitudes Towards Mexicans in Texas, 1821-1900* (Austin University of Texas Press, 1983), pp. 48-62.

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36 Benjamin Lundy, Edited by Thomas Earle, *The Life, Travels, and Opinions of Benjamin Lundy* (Philadelphia: W.D. Parrish, 1847, Reprint New York: Augustus M. Kelly, 1971), p. 113.

37 Lundy, pp. 142-143.

38 Gassner, pp. 24-36.

39 Kinchlow, pp. 3-4.

40 Kinchlow, pp. 3-4.

41 U.S. Bureau of the Census. *Cameron County, 1860-1930.* Prepared by the Geography Division. Washington, D.C., 1860-1930.

42 John H. Fuller, “Ben Kinchlow: A Trail Driver on the Chisholm Trail” in Sara R. Massey, ed. *Black Cowboys of Texas* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2000), pp. 99-115.

43 Ben Kinchlow, American Life Histories: Manuscripts from the Federal Writers’ Project, 1936-1940 Interviewed by Florence Angermiller, [accessed 10 June 2003],

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44 *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

45 Elliott Gordon Young, *Twilight on the Texas-Mexico Border: Catarino Garza and Identity at the Cross-Roads, 1880-1915* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), pp. 29 -32.

46 *Ibid.*, p. 34.

47 *Ibid.*, p. 35.

48 *Ibid.*, pp. 29-32.

49 Alwyn Barr, *Black Texans,* 22-38 and Ronnie C Tyler, "Fugitive Slaves in Mexico," pp. 1-13.

50 James Arthur Irby, "Line of the Rio Grande: War and Trade on the Confederate Frontier 1861-1865," Thesis (Ph.D.) University of Georgia, 1969, p. 209.

51 "Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936-1938," Bill Thomas [accessed 10 June 2003], p. 2.

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54 The Cart War erupted in 1857 and had national and international repercussions.

55 De Léon, pp. 50-52.

56 *Ibid.*.

57 George M. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971); Edwin D. Driver and Dan S. Green ed. *W.E.B. DuBois on Sociology and the BLAC.k Community* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978); Mia Bay, *The White* Image in the Black Mind: African-American Ideas About White People, 1830-1925 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); and Edward A. Johnson, *The History of Negro Soldiers in the Spanish-American War* (Raleigh: Capital Printing Co., 1899), all give an insight to the fear of the Black men in the United States.

58 De Leon, *They Called Them Greasers*, pp. 50-52.

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61 The 13th Amendment officially abolished slavery in all areas of the United States. The 14th prohibited the States from denying or abridging the fundamental rights of every citizen and required them to grant all persons equal protection and due process. http://www.nps.gov/malu/documents/amend14.htm, Martin Luther King, Jr., National Historic Site Interpretive Staff.

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Reporting from the Rio Grande: How the Press Saw the Brownsville Area Before, During, and After the Civil War

by

Bill Young

P.M. Spinelli was probably no different from thousands of men who sought their fortunes in deep South Texas at the time of the Civil War. Spinelli was a customs broker, real estate agent, shipping broker, and translator working in homes and offices in Brownsville and Bagdad. He happened to be in Bagdad on the afternoon of September 18, 1864, at the same time as an Associated Press reporter looking for a story. Little did Spinelli realize that, because of that coincidence, literally millions of people in the United States would soon know his name because of an incident involving the flying of an American flag.

As it turned out, Spinelli's story was tacked on to a much longer piece on an alleged invasion of Brownsville by Juan Cortina, who was said to have run Rip Ford and his Rebel force out of town, run up the American flag and declared himself for the Union. When Spinelli did the same sort of thing, he was arrested for his troubles, according to the AP: "Mr. Spenelle (sic) of the House of Mssrs. Spenelle & Co. was arrested by the French [at Bagdad] today; he has been flying the American flag from his house since the French landed."

After being published in New Orleans, the story of Cortina and Spinelli was picked up by the *Daily Missouri Democrat* and run on the front page September 19, 1864.[1] In quick order the identical, word-for-word story appeared on the front pages of the *New York Daily Tribune*,[2] the *Philadelphia Inquirer*,[3] the *New York Herald*,[4] and the *New York Times*[5] on September 20, 1864. The *Inquirer* remarked that the Cortina story was "doubted at Cairo (Illinois, the seat of the Telegraph head to the east)" and the *Times* called it "a strange story from the Rio Grande." Spinelli may not have yet known that not only his name, but also his patriotism and subsequent arrest, were known to millions of people in the Eastern U.S.

So it must have been, then, with all stories coming out of this area. Not only did the Union government feel that South Texas was important, but the Union press seems to have shared this feeling. Along with the stories of Cortina and Spinelli, the report captured a truly historic moment unique to this area, as witnessed by an unidentified observer from the "cupola of a hotel" in Bagdad, "(something) . . . may be seen today that which has not been witnessed before this age and not likely to again, four armies in hostile

array, Federal and Confederate on the opposite side of the river and the French and Mexican on this . . ."[6] And Spinelli, well, he survived the war and continued in his trade as witnessed by an advertisement he placed in the *Rio Grande Courier* in February of 1867: "P.M. Spinelli, custom house exchange, real estate, shipping & general merchandise broker, offices on 11th Street opposite the Custom House Bldg., offering translation from German, French and Spanish into English."[7]

For much of the newspaper reading public, the Brownsville area was big news throughout the war and continued on after the conflict was resolved. Most reporters spelled Cortina "Cortinas" and Matamoros "Matamoras." These spellings will not be changed, but written as they were reported so long ago. There are many, many intriguing and unusual events that appeared in the Eastern press during this time. Interest in Brownsville, however, wasn't limited to the Eastern press. Texas papers, particularly the *Houston Tri-Weekly News* and the *Tri-Weekly Telegraph*, frequently carried "letters from Brownsville" that informed readers of what was happening at the other end of Texas. One such letter appeared in a January, 1863, edition of the *Tri-Weekly News*.[8] From it, Houston readers learned that flour in Brownsville was selling for $25-$27 per bbl. (barrel), corn could be had for $7-$8 per bushel, hams at 25c and shoes for $4-$6.50 the pair. This, of course, was in Confederate money that was said to be selling for 25c "on the dollar." And, oh yes, a French fleet was hovering off Bagdad at the mouth of the Rio Grande.

Overland travel to and from Brownsville at that time was painfully slow. Knowing this, it must have been discouraging to read this classified advertisement in the *Tri-Weekly Telegraph* on November 7, 1864, "FOUR HORSE MAIL COACHES TO BROWNSVILLE—Stages connecting at Alleytown with the cars (train) from Houston every Monday, will go via Gonzalez, San Patricio, Kings Ranche (sic) through to Brownsville in 96 hours."[9] Richard King's spread had been mentioned before in the *Tri-Weekly Telegraph*. In January of 1864, we learn that the dread Yankees had visited the ranch on a mission of emancipation: "We learn that when the Yankees visited King's Ranche (sic) they endeavored to induce Capt. King's Negroes to leave with them. This they utterly refused to do, but remained with their mistress and came away with her, proving true to the last. Capt. King was away at the time."[10]

If the Texas press was interested in Brownsville, South Texas, and the struggle against the Imperialists in Mexico, the national press was no less impressed. The major papers regularly sent correspondents and mapmakers, and the illustrated magazines regularly sent artists to capture events as they happened. While maybe not being absolutely 100 per cent accurate, these reports nevertheless give us a very good idea of what was going on here, of who was involved, and the final outcome. Sometimes news items that were

mentioned almost as an afterthought reveal to us things that had not come to light previously. Take an item appearing in the *New York Semi-Weekly Tribune* in December of 1864: "Capt. Semmes of the Rebel steamer Alabama, is said to have arrived in Matamoros on the 10th ult. [Nov. 10, 1864] in the British schooner Adder from Havana and crossed over to Brownsville and passed through Texas on his way to Richmond."[11] Capt. Semmes was, in fact, Confederate Captain Rafael Semmes, commander of the CSS Alabama, a feared raider on the high seas who preyed on Union shipping at great cost to the Union war effort. The Alabama was sunk by the USS Kearsarge off Cherbourg, France, on Sunday, June 19, 1864. Semmes was picked up by friendly French boaters and taken to England and obviously made his way to Cuba, Mexico and finally to Brownsville. If Semmes was actually in Brownsville, we don't know for how long or where he stayed while here. Did he put up at the Miller Hotel? Did he stay in a private home with loyal Confederates? If so, with whom?

Whatever one makes of the reporting done from this area, any cursory study of the stories filed with Brownsville datelines reveals an area almost consumed by our war and another war—the Civil War and the Imperialist-Liberal struggle in Mexico. Even so, there were cross influences and all the players literally knew each other. Although Brownsville and South Texas may have been quiet when compared to Virginia and other sites of heavy fighting, there was still enough action to keep you on your toes.

The *New York Herald* in September of 1864 reported this little known skirmish under the heading "News From Texas, Our Texas Correspondence" with a date line from Brazos Santiago, Texas, and dated August 20, 1864.[12] It was not good news: "Two companies, A and F of the Eighteenth New York Cavalry, under the command of Captain Wilsey, have been and are now doing picket duty at Whitehouse Ranch on the Rio Grande. They have occasionally skirmished with the rebel cavalry, averaging as frequently as every other day. In one of these skirmishes Captain Wilsey had a valuable horse shot under him; at another time Lieutenant Boyle, in charge of the picket; lost three of his men—belonging to Company A—by a dash which the rebel cavalry made upon them. The rebels also captured a wagonload of rations and four mules. At another time, seven men belonging to Company F while the company was watering their horses at the Mouth of the Rio Grande, opposite Bagdad, were captured by the rebels. The evacuation of Brazos Santiago is proceeding gradually and slowly."

Eighteen sixty-four was a great year for reporters covering this area. The news for that year began, appropriately enough, on January 1 with a meeting in Matamoros that resulted in a bloodless coup and peaceful changing of the guard there. A 10-point agreement signed by representatives of both sides in an on-going power struggle in Matamoros included, among other things, the

decision that "All the authorities shall endeavor to preserve and contribute with their power to the union and peace of the State (of Tamaulipas)."[13] As reported in the January 23, 1864, edition of the *New York Herald*, Jesús de la Serna was named governor, but "General Manuel Ruiz shall be recognized as having the political and military command of the state."[14] Even so, all military forces in Matamoros were ordered to place themselves under the order of General Macedonio Capistrán "as General-In-Chief of the Brigade of Operations on Tampico—Colonel Juan S. Cortinas being the second in command." Capistrán was one of the officials ceding power, but was allowed to keep his rank and grade. Also in Capistrán's group were J.M. Cavazos, Andrés Gilberto Moreno, Antonio Zertucha and Francisco de León. Taking the reins of the government and of the local military establishment were Ruiz, De la Serna, Eufemio M. Rojas, Juan N. Cortinas, M. Echazárette, Joaquin Arguelles, Rafael Quintero, J.N. de Caceras and Felipe Vilano. The Imperialists were not part of the equation.

Elsewhere on *The Herald*'s front page was a story headlined "Important From The Gulf: Arrest of American Citizens In Matamoras." This tells of De la Serna causing the arrest of Brownsville businessman Jeremiah Galván and demanding a ransom of $10,000 for his release. Despite protests to American Consul in Matamoros N. J. T. Dana, Galván had to pay the money to gain his release. Galván's arrest and ransoming was also reported in the New York Times of January 23, 1864, " . . . A Brownsville letter reports that Gen. Serna's forced loan was imposed on Mexicans as well as foreigners, including four Americans, one of whom, Mr. Galván, was imprisoned for refusing to advance $10,000. He subsequently paid the money under protest and was released."[15] Galván, who operated steamboats on the Rio Grande and who was in business with his brother Patrick, served as Mayor of Brownsville from December 4, 1869 to May 23, 1870.

Not to be left out of the Brownsville news flap, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* on March 28, 1864, ran a sub-head proclaiming "Arrival of Deserters in Brownsville," but that head was accompanied by only a couple of lines of type explaining that "Deserters and refugees are continually arriving at Brownsville. Two thousand in all have reached that place."[16]

If Eastern papers weren't reporting from Brownsville, they were reporting from Matamoros. Two items in the September 10, 1864, *New York Herald* describe in some detail the movement and plans of Juan Cortina, including the story that "General Cortinas, leaving one thousand, five hundred men at Matamoros, under his brother, by forced march reached Victoria City, which had been captured by the French under Col. Dupin. Cortinas recaptured the city and put the French to flight, with heavy losses."[17]

In the same issue of *The Herald*, it is reported by "Our Matamoros Correspondence" that "The French hold Boca del Rio with a force of about

one thousand strong. . . . Cortinas declares his purpose to defend Matamoros against the French force advancing upon him. The town is, however, without fortifications, and it will be difficult for Cortinas to hold it. Cortinas demands of the merchants of Matamoros a forced loan of one hundred and fifty thousand dollars in specie. Mexicans of the liberal party as well as others have resisted the demand, since money cannot procure the defense of Matamoros. . . General Mejia, at the head of four thousand men was advancing on Matamoros from San Luis Potosí by way of Tula and Ciudad Victoria. He has already reached San Fernando."

Union General Nathaniel Banks' landing at Brazos Santiago in November, 1863, warranted front-page coverage in the *New York Herald*, including a map of the South Texas area. The reporter filing this story was obviously embedded with Banks' troops and had a front row seat as the invasion and subsequent action unfolded. Brazos Santiago and the coastal area didn't offer much to the invaders, a shoddy hotel of sorts and an otherwise dismal sight "Sand and sand hills meet the eye in every direction, and for miles there is no covering from the rays of the burning sun by day, nor the heavy, chilly dews by night. "Four wells were discovered by our soldiers, but the water is brackish and unpalatable. Around these were collected some thirty to forty head of poor cattle. They were suffering terribly from thirst, and drank with avidity the miserable water that our men gave them from the wells."[18]

Landing at the tip of South Texas proved to be a real adventure for military and journalist alike. Episodes with blockade-runners, Rebel schooners and the specter of the French at Bagdad only added to the excitement. Eventually the force reached Brownsville on November 4 to find the Rebels gone and the Confederate government buildings put to the torch. "The government buildings at Fort Brown," wrote *The Herald* correspondent, "were burned to the ground yesterday by the rebel garrison, preparatory to their evacuating the fort."[19] Interestingly enough, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* carried the identical story and map in its November 17, 1863, edition, the day after the *New York Herald* ran the piece.[20] Also on November 17, 1863, *The Herald* carried another local story, this time with two excellent maps of the coastal area, including one showing the names and anchor locations of the ships in Banks' fleet. Entitled "The Texas Expedition," the story relates that "the road from Brazos to Point Isabel is very good. The distance to Brownsville is 29 miles," and adds reports on the depth of water off shore and at the "bar at Brazos."[21]

Maps of this area often appeared in the *New York Herald*. On March 28, 1863, headed "Map of Texas," and featuring a map plus 30 inches of front page text, the story outlined the importance of South Texas to the Union and proposed "recapture of the Rio Grande," claiming that the Rebels' garrison was removed from Fort Brown and sent to Roma leaving the fort undefended and "easy pickings."[22] Another map appeared in The Herald editions of July

30, 1863: a one-half page map of the "Southwest U.S." showing Mexico, Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma.[23] Another showed up in *The Herald* on September 26, 1863, this one taking up a half page and showing "South Texas" with localities including Brownsville, Brazos and Palo Alto.[24] Then on November 23, 1863, *The Herald* had yet another front page map, this one identical to the map of one week earlier. The accompanying story bannered "Evacuation of Brownsville by the Rebels and its Occupation by Our Troops."[25]

The year 1865 brought area coverage to its zenith. After the Civil War ended, reporters flocked to Brownsville to give their readers a look at what amounted to the American frontier and how the war had affected it. It is fascinating. Our Civil War may have been over, but the struggle in Mexico continued throughout 1865 and enterprising reporters covered the fight between the Imperialists and Liberals for control of Mexico.

One of the most compelling and interesting stories to come out of this area after the Civil War is one filed in the July 2, 1865, edition of the *New York Herald*. Written by Correspondent "G.T.T." (Gone To Texas), the lengthy story begins on the front page and continues through four full columns on page 2. It is aptly titled "Up and Down Both Sides of the Rio Grande. Pictures of Brazos, Brownsville and Bagdad." These are word pictures, of course, but they are uniquely descriptive. After landing at Brazos the reporter crossed by ferry for a 12 and ½ cent fare to Bagdad. He was not impressed with what he found there:

> BAGDAD is a dirty, filthy place. The streets are covered with filth and mud puddles. It is indeed no wonder that the place is a sickly one. It is only a wonder that any one could live there at all," wrote G.T.T. ... The storekeepers were offering their stocks of goods at astonishing low rates. Cotton undershirts could be had for one dollar and a half, in specie, per dozen. Summer goods were so low that it was considered almost as cheap to purchase new articles as to have the old ones washed. 26

Attempting to cross from Bagdad to Clarksville proved a small obstacle to G.T.T., who was told he must have a military pass from the French Consul. After finding the office in a grimy building, the pass was obtained for 25c in silver. He found a good hotel in Clarksville, got a good meal and headed on to Brownsville, passing through the battlefield at Palo Alto on the way. Reaching Brownsville at nightfall, he found a disappointing scene.

> The City, is in a very dilapidated condition. Brownsville is today less by a third than it was six years ago, and its population has dwindled down to almost nothing at all. The old families who were residents of the place before the war, and who were among the wealthy classes, have all gone off, and now their homes, unfurnished and cheerless,

> remain unoccupied. The present population of Brownsville is made up almost totally of French and Mexicans. On entering Brownsville, the first objects that meet the eye are several rows of thatched huts occupied by native Mexicans. The men are indolent and saunter about without regard to the lapse of time or any evident desire to be interfered with by considerations for work or business, while their wives attend to their household duties in airy and abbreviated costumes suited more to the character of the climate than to the dictates of modesty.

G.T.T. wrote that Brownsville knows but "one real street" on which is located most of the stores and hotels in town. Many of these, he says, were closed, with "restaurants and barber shops" making up the major share of businesses that were open. His report continues with correspondence from all the major figures on all sides on both sides of the river, including a demand from Confederate General James Slaughter that all slaves escaping into Mexico be returned to their owners in Brownsville. General Tomas Mejia, the Imperialist commander of Matamoros curtly informed Slaughter that, according to Mexican law, any slave reaching Mexico is automatically free and would not be returned to Texas.

Not to be outdone by *The Herald*, the *New York Daily Tribune* sent its own correspondent to the border and a report on local conditions was filed in the August 3, 1865, edition of that paper. Rather than focusing on the appearance of Brazos Santiago, the writer gives us a descriptive look at the coast, including numerous wrecks on the beach. "Sunk in the sandy beach," he writes, "are to be seen the moss and seaweed covered frames of some 50 craft that once ran over the deep blue sea. Now the waves wash over them and the wind sings their requiem as their remains sink more deeply into the sand." About one and-one half miles off the beach lies a "small French fleet with the tri-color at the gaff." Composed of about a dozen vessels, only five of them are armed while two British Men-of-War are nearby, flying the "white ensign with a red cross." "Driving on the beach," he continues, "is one of the main pastimes of the people at the Boca and the hard sand makes a capital drive . . . from 5 p.m. until dusk carriages can be seen on the beach and with them parties of pedestrians, all there to cool and refresh themselves after the heat of the day . . ."[27]

From the mouth of the Rio Grande the reporter took a boat upriver to Matamoros. Along the way there is talk about building roads from Brownsville to Brazos Santiago and, eventually, a railroad. Once in Brownsville, the writer learns that "water . . . is of great consideration out here. The Rio Grande gives us water thick with mud, which is not fit to wash in. One way to clear the muddy fluid is to throw a handful of ground alum into a bucket and this will have the effect of clearing it." We further learn there is a better way still: throw some "pounded, bitter almonds into the water, which in a short time clears it up nicely and the almonds impart an agreeable flavor to it." "This town," he

observes, "and Matamoros are very much like each other, but the streets in Brownsville are wider than those in Matamoros, and, I think, but am not at all sure, that the dust is less. In both places it is dreadful. The guards march along at a slow pace, but cannot avoid raising a cloud of dust. No rain, but some wind stirs the dormant atmosphere at this season; and men are to be pitied who may be thrown at this outpost of civilization." What follows is a discussion of the merits of the Negro soldiers and their Mexican counterparts. In any event, "to pit against the French and Austrian troops, the very best corps would be necessary . . ." More reporting discusses the situation in Mexico, troop movements there and the determination of Cortinas to put a stop to guerillas that are said to be roaming the countryside.[28]

Follow-up stories were rare, but did happen. For example, the *New York Tribune* in its June 10, 1865, edition reported "Brownsville, Texas, was entered by the forces of Brigadier General (E.B.) Brown May 31. The rebels, before leaving sold their artillery to the Imperialists. Cortinas is still hovering around Matamoros."[29] Nearly two months passed before the *Tribune*, on August 8, 1865, printed this story: "It is understood that the Dept. of State has received information to the effect that orders have been given by the French commander in Mexico for the restoration of the property of the government that was taken to that country on the occupation of Brownsville."[30] The artillery, it would seem, had been given back.

By far one of the most intriguing post-war stories from Brownsville appeared in the *Tribune* of September 6, 1865.[31] Headlined "From The Rio Grande," followed by "Half an Hour with Gen. Cortinas," the story purports to tell of an interview with Cortina. It makes for very informative reading:

> From Our Special Correspondent
>
> Brownsville, Texas, August 8, 1865
>
> Hearing that Gen. Juan P. Cortinas was in town, I went to see him and hear his views on the State of Liberal affairs.
>
> I found the Chief in a small house belonging to him. He was seated in a room floored with brick and containing a small table, covered with a red cloth. A few chairs made up the rest of the furniture of the room and on these were seated some three or four persons. One of these was Signor. Francisco Gonzalez Rodriguez, late Chief of the Treasury of Tamaulipas.
>
> Cortinas is a man of about 50 years of age. He is of the middle size and strongly made. There is nothing at all noteworthy about his face. His black hair and beard are now tinging with gray. As to dress, the chief wore simply a light black coat and pantaloons of a gray color. In everything he looked the quiet citizen.

On hearing my business he gave me a seat on his left, and said in Spanish, in answer to my questions, "That the state of the Liberal affairs was good; that he could gather 3,000 men under his command," and at length he added that he would soon make an attack upon Matamoros . This, by the way, has been spoken of for the past two or three weeks. Cortinas observed that the United States could not continue at peace with the Empire of Mexico, but that if the old form of government was reestablished, the people of the two countries would live in the most friendly way.

Signor Rodriguez I found to be a clever and well-educated man. In the latter respect his chief is very deficient. Not more than 38 years of age, Rodriguez looks in the vigor of life, and has a delicate, intelligent face. He told me in Spanish—for he could not speak English—that the Mexican people were in a state of insurrection, and there was only wanting a "center of union" to enable the people to act in a body. I asked him what Gen. Negrete was doing, to which he said that officer is Secretary of War, and that he is with President Juarez, organizing a body of men. Signor Rodriguez tried to make things look hopeful for the Liberal side, and he spoke well; but it is evident that unless the United States openly takes sides with the Liberal party, there is no hope of their forcing the enemies from power.

Coincidentally, on the day of this interview the *New York Times* published an editorial from the Matamoros *Daily Ranchero* entitled "A Rebel Wail", or "how the Southern Confederacy Went Up . . . A Voice From the Rio Grande."[32] This *Daily Ranchero* editorial was more than likely written either by Somers Kinney or W.A. Maltby, co-owners of the paper. The lost cause situation was summed up by " . . . the Confederacy is dead and all that is left is the glorious privilege of being an unlamented, unreconstructed and unprosecuted Rebel . . ." It should be noted here that The *Ranchero* moved to Matamoros from Brownsville after the defeat of the Confederacy became a foregone conclusion. It was a pro-Confederate, pro-slavery paper.

Prior to the interview with Cortina and prior to the *Daily Ranchero* editorial in the *New York Times*, the Civil War had officially come to an end even though the fighting did not. On May 13, 1865, elements of the Union and Confederate armies fought at Palmito Ranch, some eight miles east of Brownsville, not too far from Boca Chica beach. Today that skirmish is known as the Battle of Palmito Ranch but at the time is was reported in the Eastern press as the "Battle of Boca Chica Pass." Two weeks after the battle, on May 26, 1865, the *Saint Louis Post Dispatch* reported "Fighting In Texas" in a front-page story that is at odds with modern day research on the particulars of the battle.[33] The *Post Dispatch* reported "72 killed, wounded and missing. Slaughter reports his losses at 40 killed and 5 wounded." One day later, on May 27, 1865, the *New York Tribune* reported on a fight at "Boco

del Chica Pass."[34] The report was brief and devoid of details:

> The Steamship Clinton, from Brazos on the 16th (May 16) brings a confirmation of the fight at Boco del Chica Pass between the United States forces under Col. Barrett and the Rebels under Gen. Slaughter, in which the enemy were driven twenty miles toward Brownsville, when the Rebels were reinforced and Barrett retreated, fighting and reached Brazos with the loss of 72 killed, wounded and missing, including Capt. Temple and Lieut. Sedwick of the 34th Indiana, captured. Slaughter's official report magnifies our force and claims a big victory. He admits a loss of 40 killed.

Two days after that report went to press, the *Tribune* on May 29, 1865, filed the report allegedly made by Confederate General James E. Slaughter:[35]

The Last Battle

Gen. Slaughter thus reports concerning what is likely to prove the last battle of the Rebellion:

HEADQUARTERS WESTERN SUB-DISTRICT, TEXAS
IN THE FIELD, MAY 13, 1865

Capt. L.G. Aldrich, Assistant Adjutant-General

We attacked the enemy—about eight hundred strong—this evening at 3 o'clock, and drove him in confusion eight miles, killing and wounding about thirty and capturing eighty prisoners, with many arms and accouterments. Owing to the scattered conditions of the men, a halt was ordered: Capt. Carrington's command coming up, he was again attacked and driven within one mile of Brazos, when darkness put an end to the pursuit. Had not our artillery horses broken down, we would doubtless, have captured the whole command.

I cannot speak too highly of the sagacity of Colonel Ford and the gallantry of his command. Our loss was four or five severely wounded. We did not have three hundred in the fight, large numbers not having arrived.

J.E. SLAUGHTER, Brig.-Gen. Comdg.
Official:L.G. ALDRICH, Asst.-Adjt.-Gen.

Some four months before the fight at Palmito Ranch, Slaughter was rumored to be thinking about an attack on the Union forces at Brazos Santiago. The *Tribune*—by now regularly reporting from this end of Texas—carried an item in its January 11, 1865, issue reporting "General Slaughter is said to be at Brownsville with 2,000 troops. Col. Ford at Indian Ranch with 500. It appears they meditated the capture of Brazos a short time ago. From Our Special Correspondent."[36]

History seems to disagree on the reasons for the fight at Palmito Ranch, the most common being that the combatants simply hadn't gotten the word

that Lee had given up at Appomattox about a month before the clash here. Another reason given is that influential investors had hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of Confederate cotton already sold and they stood to lose this money if that cotton fell into Union hands. Giving up Brownsville at that time would have resulted in just that. An item in the June 17, 1865, *New York Tribune* indicates the news still hadn't reached all parts of Texas as cotton continued to pour into Brownsville, a month after Palmito Ranch. "The fact," reported the *Tribune*, "of the United (States) occupation of the town not being generally known, some 700 or 800 bales of cotton came in from the interior, all of which was taken possession of by order of Gen. Brown." Brownsville's condition was also duly noted by the *Tribune*, "Brownsville, when occupied, was found to be in a terribly dirty condition. Dead horses and mules lying in the streets. Gen. Brown set all the citizens to work at once with donkeys and water-carts, and it is now in a good, healthy condition."[37]

Once the Civil War was actually over and done with, correspondents could begin to report to their home papers about the struggle that continued in Mexico. Even before the Civil War was over in the East or in South Texas, some of the papers were turning their attention to the situation in Mexico. The *New York Herald* on January 27, 1865, published a large front page map of Mexico and South Texas detailing "The French in Mexico."[38] On November 2, 1865, the *New York Daily Tribune*, under the headline "Mexico" reported a fight between the Liberals and Imperialists near Matamoros, "Brownsville reports say the Liberals have lost 500 killed and wounded and that the Imperial loss was several wounded and less than a dozen killed."[39] Some two weeks later, the *New York Times* said that "Servando Canales is marching toward Bagdad and will try to capture it . . . meanwhile, an Imperial gunboat has passed from Bagdad to Matamoras."[40]

By 1866 things, at least along the South Texas border, were decidedly more quiet. Still, an occasional local report found its way into the Eastern press, including an interesting front page story in the January 18, 1866, *New York Times* beneath the heading "Capture of Bagdad by a party of Texas Filibusters" and declaring it to be "highly important and exciting intelligence." "Several officers and men," reported the *Times*, "crossed from Clarksville, Texas, and took up quarters apparently for the night." "Shortly after midnight the guards at the ferry and along the river were surprised, and disarmed by this party . . . such lighters as were at hand were immediately seized and with them the party crossed the military force at Clarksville, about one hundred strong, mostly composed of negroes, and entered Bagdad. "The Imperial garrison in Bagdad, about one hundred and seventy-five, was completely surprised and captured. The commander of that post and the captain of the post were taken prisoners while in bed. . . . the filibusters, upon capturing the town immediately inaugurated a system of plunder and pillage. The warehouses were gutted and

their contents crossed over to the American side of the River."[41] No one knew it at the time, but this was the beginning of the end for Bagdad. Six months later, the *Times* reported that a force had entered Brownsville on May 31, 1866, and furnished this news, "The report of Kirby Smith going to Mexico is confirmed."[42]

It should be noted here that occasionally a so-called "map issue" could be almost a work of art. A good example of that would be a November 20, 1861, issue of the *New York Herald*. A beautiful map takes up all of the front page under the heading "The Great European Alliance Against the Mexican Republic." Shown is all of Mexico and all of South Texas from Houston down.[43]

While national news organizations really didn't discover South Texas until later in the war, there were still snippets early on.Even before there was Brownsville, the area north and south of the Rio Grande in what is now deep South Texas was the subject of reporting from the nation's major media. It was the War With Mexico that had the press and the country's attention in the mid 1840s. As they were to do less than 20 years later, newspapers sent topographers and reporters to this area to cover the war. Much of the reporting deals with battle reports, letters and general information from this area and, since there was no town, maps showed battle lines, Matamoros and Fort Texas, later renamed to Fort Brown. Brownsville may not have been here, but the area is unmistakable, from the twists and turns of the Rio Grande, through the resacas, to what would come to be known as Fort Brown. Some of the coverage from the Rio Grande was text only, however, and drew from an information pool that was apparently available to all. Some of the Mexican War papers and their content:

New York Spectator — May 13, 1846: Inside map "War Area of South Texas."[44]

The New York Weekly Tribune — May 14, 1846: Front page map and accompanying text. This paper was owned and published by Horace Greeley.[45]

Niles' National Register, Baltimore, Maryland — May 30, 1846: Dual front page maps of this area, text, letters, news.[46]

The Daily Union, Washington City — June 12, 1846: News from South Texas and the Mexican War.[47]

The New York Herald — June 14, 1846: Front page map (9 ¾" x 6") "The War on the Rio Grande" accompanying text.[48]

The Politician, Nashville, Tennessee — June 26, 1846: Letters, reports, statistics from Battles of Palo Alto, Resaca de la Palma and reports from General Zachary Taylor.[49]

It is in the *New York Tribune* that we find one of the earliest mentions of Brownsville by name. In its January 15, 1849,[50] edition, the *Tribune*, under the heading "News of the Rio Grande" reports on a road being built from Brownsville to Rio Grande City and details the killing of " . . . a Mexican by Indians near Laredo."

Under the sub-headline "Important From Texas" the *New York Times* on March 31, 1861, reported the Union army's decision to defend Fort Brown to the bitter end. "The report of Capt. Hill's determination to defend Fort Brown created great excitement all along the Rio Grande border. A large number of state troops were on the way to Brownsville, and other companies were being organized for the same destination."[51] Barely two months later, the *Times* reported the surrender of Fort Brown: "The steamer Daniel Webster was still off Brazos, waiting to take the Federal troops . . . the Texas troops at Brazos are represented to be fortifying the island, so as to make it impregnable."[52]

Along with the daily papers of the day, the so-called "illustrated magazines" were also very popular with the reading public. The top two of these were *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* and *Harper's Weekly."* These publications either sent artists to draw scenes as they saw them or had artists create etchings in wood, or woodcuts, from photographs taken by local photographers. One of these photos wound up in an *Illustrated London News* in January of 1864.[53] Readers in Britain, then, got a glimpse of wartime Brownsville as depicted in an engraving "from a photograph by A.G. Wedge of Matamoras." Wedge is believed to have been employed by area photographic pioneer Louis de Planque. What follows is a chronological list of illustrations from Brownsville or Matamoros and the publication in which they appeared:

March 23, 1861 — *Harper's Weekly*: Engraving with a small bit of text, "Fort Brown from the River." This shows a steamboat going by Fort Brown, headed upriver.[54]

April 17, 1861 — *Harper's Weekly*: Engraving and bit of text, "Point Isabel, Texas, with the Daniel Webster sailing with U.S. troops on board (from a sketch by a government draftsman.)[55]

December 5, 1863 — *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*: Engraving shows Rebels evacuating Brownsville, the Plaza in Matamoros and Matamoros from the U.S. side. Small body of text summarizes Banks' landing at Brazos Santiago.[56]

February 13, 1864 — *Harper's Weekly*: Engraving showing another view of the Confederates evacuating Brownsville.[57]

February 20, 1864 — *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*: Several engravings of fighting at Matamoros and one of "the Market House at Brownsville, Tx." Considerable text, including the observation that "The town of Brownsville has a Mexican rather than an American look."[58]

June 11, 1864 — *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*: Brief text and engravings, including "Fort on the Rio Grande" and "Ruins of Fort Brown, destroyed by the Rebels."[59]

December 16, 1865 — *Harper's Weekly*: One of the best known and widely duplicated images of Brownsville, engraving of "Elizabeth Street, Brownsville, Tex. From a photo. (probably by Louis de Planque.) Brief item of text.[60]

November 17, 1866 — *Harper's Weekly*: Excellent series of engravings showing scenes in Brownsville and Matamoros, "Cols. J. Cerda and S. Canales" plus Matamoros city hall in flames and one of "General Ford's" forts.[61]

January 1, 1876 — *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*: "Troubles on the Rio Grande." Engravings from Brownsville and Matamoros, including a troop of cavalry riding out of Fort Brown in pursuit of Mexican bandits.[62]

These papers mentioned above are not all-inclusive of all reporting done from Brownsville during the time period involved. There are certainly others, perhaps many others. What this article has shown, however, is that our area was of vital interest then and by that interest has earned the reputation that it now has as one of the most historically important cities in Texas.

Endnotes

1 *Daily Missouri Democrat,* St. Louis, Missouri, September 19, 1864, Vol. XIII, No. 33, p. 1.

2 *New York Daily Tribune*, September 20, 1864, Vol. XXIV, No. 7,319, p. 1.

3 *Philadelphia Inquirer,* September 20, 1864, p. 1.

4 *New York Herald,* September 20, 1864, Whole No. 10,250, p. 1.

5 *New York Times,* September 20, 1864, Vol. XIII, No. 4,053, p. 1.

6 *Daily Missouri Democrat,* St. Louis, Missouri, September 19, 1864, Vol. XIII, No. 33, p. 1.

7 *Rio Grande Courier,* Brownsville, Texas, February 24, 1867, Vol. II, No. 20, p. 2.

8 *Houston Tri-Weekly News,* January 3, 1863, Vol. XXI, No. 77, p. 2.

9 *Houston Tri-Weekly Telegraph,* November 7, 1864, Vol. XX, No. 160, p. 2.

10 *Houston Tri-Weekly Telegraph,* January 11, 1864, Vol. XXIX, No. 127, p. 2.

11 *New York Semi-Weekly Tribune,* December 6, 1864, Vol. XIX, No. 2,038, p. 1.

12 *New York Herald,* September 6, 1864, Whole No. 10,236, p. 1.

13 *New York Times*, January 23, 1864, Vol. VIII, No. 3,848, p. 1.

14 *New York Herald,* January 23, 1864, Whole No. 9,989, p. 1.

15 *New York Times,* January 23, 1864, Vol. VIII, No. 3,848, p. 1.

16 *Philadelphia Inquirer,* March 28, 1864, p. 1.

17 *New York Herald,* September 10, 1864, Whole No. 10,240, p. 4.

18 *New York Herald,* November 17, 1863, Whole No. 9.923, p. 1.

19 *New York Herald,* November 16, 1863, Whole N. 9,922, p. 1.

20 *Philadelphia Inquirer,* November 17, 1863, p. 1, 2.

21 *New York Herald,* November 17, 1863, Whole No. 9,923, p. 1, 3, 4.

22 *New York Herald,* March 28, 1863, Whole No. 9,691, p. 1.

23 *New York Herald,* July 30, 1863, Whole No. 9,813, p. 1.

24 *New York Herald,* September 26, 1863, Whole No. 9,871, p. 4.

25 *New York Herald,* November 23, 1863, Whole No. 9,929, p. 1.

26 *New York Herald,* July 2, 1865, Whole No. 10,534, p. 1, 2.

27 *New York Daily Tribune,* August 3, 1865, Vol. XXV, No. 7,589, p. 1.

28 *New York Daily Tribune,* August 3, 1865, Vol. XXV, No. 7,589, p. 1.

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The International Entanglements at the Battles of Palmito Ranch

by

Lyon Rathbun

Between August of 1864 and May of 1865, a unique circumstance prevailed in the far southwestern corner of Texas: Two wars, on opposite sides of the Rio Grande River, were occurring simultaneously. On the Mexican side, a war to expel the French, who had invaded Mexico in 1862, was raging. The French invaders, who established a hereditary monarch with the crowning of Maximilian in 1864, were supported by large landowners, military officers, and Church officials who wanted to preserve ancient privileges. Opposing the *Imperialistas* were followers of Benito Juárez, seeking to establish constitutional democracy, universal education, and economic modernization. On the American side, war had been initiated by the rulers of the agricultural South seeking to preserve their own ancient privileges against the encroaching demands of the modernizing North. Controlling commerce flowing up and down the Rio Grande River became critical to the contending parties on both sides of the river. By 1864, four armies were vying for control of the Rio Grande Delta.

In many respects, the wars occurring in Mexico and the United States were rooted in the distinctive histories of each respective country and remained separate from each other. Yet Mexico and the United States are neighbors who share a complex, inter-joining history; in fundamental ways, the wars occurring in Mexico and the United States during the 1860's were interrelated. The French invaded Mexico because the United States was preoccupied with its own Civil War and could not defend the Monroe Doctrine; and, once the French incursion began, there was cooperation between the Confederacy and the Mexican imperialists, while the Union supported Juárez and the Mexican republicans.[1] The mutual friction and collaboration between the opposing four parties became concentrated in the Rio Grande Delta, the terminus of an international waterway that was vital to the war efforts of the Confederates and of the *Juaristas* – and therefore vital to the Northern Unionists and Mexican *Imperialistas*.

The mutual threat of defeat fostered a Faustian bargain between the United States and France: As long as the Union refrained from giving material aid to the *Juaristas*, the ruler of France, Napoleon III, refrained from recognizing the Confederacy --and prevented Maximilian from forging an overt alliance with the Confederacy. However, in the Rio Grande delta, official policies of neutrality clashed with the immediate exigencies of war. Twice, for brief,

intense moments, the wars on opposing sides of the river fused together on the same battlefield at Palmito Ranch, strategically important because of the nearby rise along the river of some thirty feet that dominated the approach to Brownsville from the coast, some twelve miles downriver. Because the Union blockade had forced virtually all Confederate trade to flow down the Rio Grande River, Brownsville, located directly across the river from Matamoros, had become a vital entry-point of Confederate trade flowing up and down the Rio Grande. Twice during the last nine months of the war, Union troops marched on Brownsville from the coast only to be stopped by Confederate forces at Palmito Ranch.

Between the 6th and 9th of September, 1864, Federal troops from the Union garrison on Brazos Santiago, a tiny coastal island just to the north of the river mouth, attacked the Confederate picket at Palmito Ranch. The American commander, Colonel Day, of the Ninety First Illinois Volunteers, was coordinating his efforts with the *Juarista* General controlling Matamoros, Juan Cortina. Joining the Union soldiers in their effort to capture Brownsville were upwards of three hundred *Juarista* troops. A concentrated Confederate cavalry charge routed the Federal-*Juarista* advance, "leaving arms, equipment, and casualties 'by dozens' upon the field."[2] Eight months later, in May of 1865, four weeks after Lee's surrender at Appomattox, another body of Federal troops attacked the Confederate picket at Palmito Ranch, confident that they would soon be in control of Brownsville. This time, Confederate Calvary, supplied with *Imperialista* ammunition, reinforced by *Imperialista* artillery, and aided by *Imperialista* soldiers, drove the Federal attackers back to their fortification on Brazos Santiago. Again, the retreating Union soldiers left a litter of wounded, killed, and captured comrades, along with scores of abandoned weapons, behind them.

Although insignificant as military engagements, the two battles of Palmito Ranch are illuminating events in the comparative history of Mexico and the United States; they are prisms through which we can see how that international boundary, the Rio Grande River, fostered common interests among contending parties during a time of simultaneous war. Lamenting the tangled labyrinth of Mexican history, Porfirio Díaz reputedly later exclaimed, "Poor Mexico, so far from God and so close to the United States." To understand the knotted historical forces that had their flash points around the high ground at Palmito Ranch in the fall of 1864 and the spring of 1865, some wit could well have quipped, "so far from Washington and Richmond and so close to the mouth of the Rio Grande."

The Geopolitical intersection of the U.S. and Mexican Civil Wars

When England, Spain, and France collectively seized the Mexican port of Vera Cruz in January of 1861, Civil War in Mexico interconnected with the

imminent outbreak of the American Civil War. The European Powers dared to violate the Monroe Doctrine *only* because the United States was preoccupied with its own impending Civil War. For Union officials, the European incursion in Mexico, which soon became a unitarily French invasion, rivaled the secession of the Southern States in gravity. For the Confederacy, the prospect of establishing an alliance with a French-controlled monarchy in Mexico greatly enhanced the possibility of victory.

The pretext for the European incursion into Mexico was the foreign debt that Mexico had accumulated during the "War of Reform" that engulfed Mexico between 1858 and 1860. Beginning with the final exile of Santa Anna in 1855, a group of remarkable liberal leaders, headed by Benito Juárez, the Zapotec Indian governor of Oaxaca, inaugurated a new liberal movement, La Reforma, which would shape the subsequent history of Mexico. When he visited Mexico in the fall of 1869, the American Secretary of State, William H. Seward, who had hobnobbed with the most distinguished men of his era, would declare that Benito Juárez was the greatest man he had ever met in his life.[3] Seeking to stabilize constitutional democracy, modernize the economy, and establish universal education, the Liberals, who won power with the election of Juan Alvarez in 1855, began a legal assault on the special privileges and powers held by the army and the Church. Their reform initiatives, the Ley Juárez (abolishing military and religious fueros, granting soldiers and clerics the right to be tried in their own courts), the Ley Lerdo (forbidding the Church and villages from owning landed estates), and the Ley Iglesias (limiting the fees clergy could charge for performance of baptisms, marriages, and burials) was capped by the Mexican Constitution of 1857, which provided for suffrage to all males twenty-one or older, the abolishment of slavery and of all titles of nobility. The new Mexican Constitution also included a bill of rights guaranteeing freedom of speech, press, assembly, and education. Freedom of religion was tacitly recognized and Roman Catholicism, conspicuously, was not made the state church; there was to be no state church.[4]

When conservatives, especially ranking army officers, Church officials, and big land owners challenged the Constitution, the "War of Reform" broke out, dividing Mexico into warring camps between 1858 and January of 1861, when the liberals finally recaptured Mexico City. Although Juárez won election to the presidency in March of 1861, the war had left Mexico bankrupt and increasingly unable to pay its foreign debt, which exceeded $80,000,000. Ninety percent of customs receipts, the main source of government income, was allocated just to servicing the interest on the foreign debt.[5] Juárez declined to continue to try to service the debt. In October of 1861, representatives of France, Spain, and Great Britain met in London where they signed an agreement calling for joint armed intervention to seize military forts and customhouses along Mexico's Gulf Coast.

The European intervention began in the winter of 1861, when Spanish, French, and British troops landed at Vera Cruz. By May of 1862, discord between the international coalition led to the complete withdrawal of the Spanish and British contingents. Driven by the grandiose ambitions of Napoleon III, France increased its military force to 6,500 men and by the end of April was marching on Mexico City. On May 5th, 1862, at the fortified city of Puebla, the French were defeated by General Ignacio Zaragoza, a native of Matamoros, and Brigadier General Porfirio Díaz, who would rise to the presidency in 1876. One year later, a reinforced French army overran the Mexican defenders at Puebla, marched on Mexico City, and drove President Juárez into exile. The French intervention reached its apogee in 1865, when Maximilian controlled both Mexican coasts and had confined Juárez to the remote northern hamlet of el Paso del Norte, on the Texas-New Mexico border. When Napoleon III withdrew French troops at the end of 1865 and American arms began flowing to the *Juaristas*, the *Imperialistas* were finally defeated in July of 1867. After four years of exile, Juárez resumed the presidency.

In invading Mexico, Napoleon III clearly saw the American Civil War as a prime opportunity for France to re-establish a foothold in the Americas. His rationale was announced to the American public in a notorious pamphlet, *La France, le Mexique et Les Etats-Confédérés*, that caused a sensation when it was published in the *New York Times* in 1863, as the French Army was seizing Mexico City. Beginning with Mexico, the French would "regenerate" all of South America into an alliance of stable, prosperous, enlightened monarchies that would provide France with an unlimited stream of raw materials and leave France the dominant power in the Americas. The American Civil War had nullified the Monroe Doctrine and left France able to "oppose the absorption of the Southern America by Northern America." France had marched on Mexico City in "sympathy with the Confederate States." The consolidation of French power over Mexico, and eventual recognition of the Confederacy, would "consecrate the final separation and secession of those states from the American Union." France would help the Confederacy win independence from the Federal Union, and the Confederacy would subsequently protect French interests in Mexico from attack by the North. "Mexico, developed by our efforts, and sheltered from the attacks of the North, will reward all our hopes."[6] Celebrating the convergence of interest between the Confederacy and the emerging French empire in France, *La France, le Mexique et Les États-Confédérés* helped to excite Northern apprehensions over events in Mexico.

From the beginning, Union officials were united in their alarm – and divided in their response – to the European intervention in Mexico. Secretary of State William Seward pointed out, "the possibility of European domination of Mexico, in combination with the secession of the Southern states would

result in the return of the American continent to European domination."[7] In 1861, to subvert the rationale for intervention, Seward authorized his Minister to Mexico to negotiate a treaty that would pay the interest on Mexico's funded foreign debt. However, the treaty was never signed and Mexico remained vulnerable to the financial imperialism of the European powers. Later, when France invaded Mexico, Seward remained firmly convinced that France would eventually be forced out of Mexico by the indigenous resistance of the Mexican people. For Seward, prudence demanded that the United States continue recognizing the legitimacy of the Juárez government, but refrain from aiding his military efforts to repulse the French. By keeping both France and Maximilian from recognizing the Confederacy, Seward was instrumental in preserving American resources for the struggle against the Confederacy.[8]

Throughout both of Lincoln's administrations, Seward's most vocal critic was Ulysses S. Grant. A soldier, not a diplomat, Grant regarded the joint European seizure of Vera Cruz in the opening of 1862 as a direct act of war against the United States. In his memoir, Grant explains that he "supposed as a matter of course that the United States would treat it as such [an act of war] when their hands were free to strike."[9] In the final months of the war, as victory became increasingly inevitable, Grant began authorizing clandestine efforts to aid the *Juarista* forces. And immediately after Lee's surrender, he sent forty thousand troops to the lower Rio Grande Valley to aid Juárez in expelling the French from Mexico.[10]

While Union strategists debated the best means of restoring republican rule to Mexico, Confederate officials sought to cultivate relations with the French, who openly hoped for a Confederate victory. To Confederate General James Williams, Maximilian expressed "his earnest hope" that the Confederacy would win.[11] A spokesman for Maximilian's government reported to Confederate agent John Slidell that Maximilian considered Confederate victory "identical with that of the new Mexican empire."[12] After 1863, with Confederate prospects declining, while the French star in Mexico appeared to be rising, the Confederate Government became increasingly anxious to establish relations with Maximilian's government. When their anticipated alliance with Maximilian failed to materialize, offended Confederate congressmen publicly suggested that a fitting end to the Civil War would be for Union and Confederate armies to combine and drive France from Mexico.[13] As the war neared its end, a Union general would travel to the Rio Grande delta to implement this very idea.

The French intervention in Mexico, fostering Union affinity for Juárez and Confederate support for Maximilian, established the broad context for the international entanglements that occurred around Palmito Ranch between September of 1864 and May of 1865. Locally, the events at Palmito Ranch resulted from a series of interlocking movements that had pulled four armies

to the Rio Grande Delta by the end of August of 1864.

The four-sided Intersection of the Civil Wars in the lower Rio Grande

The Confederate Flank

Even before the fall of Fort Sumter in April of 1861, John Salmon Ford, who would play pivotal roles in both battles at Palmito Ranch, had made sure that the lower Rio Grande River would be available to serve Confederate commerce.

Immensely capable and versatile, Ford, a native of South Carolina, grew up in Tennessee, was trained as a doctor, and arrived in Texas days after the Battle of San Jacinto. Elected to Congress in 1844, he had lobbied for the annexation of Texas to the Union and enlisted in the United States Army when the war with Mexico broke out in 1846. A clue to his character lies in the enduring sobriquet, "Rip," or "Old Rip, " that he first acquired while serving as adjutant and surgeon for a Texas Ranger regiment in the Mexico City Campaign. An abbreviation for "Rest in Peace," "R.I.P." was the last word that Ford had scrawled on the dozens of death certificates that he had written for troops killed in action. Ford, like his nickname, was an anomaly: He earned the respect and affection of those who knew him, but habitually violated protocols. An avowed white supremacist, he treated the many Mexican Americans among his troops with genuine decency.[14] A doctor, he excelled as a battlefield commander; supremely cautious as a military tactician, he won many victories by delivering a decisive first' punch.[15] Though he would become utterly indispensable to the Confederate war effort in Southwest Texas, he was distrusted as a maverick by senior officers and never received a formal commission as an officer of the Confederate Army.[16] After the Mexican American War, he became a journalist, and then cemented his reputation as a military commander leading a regiment of Rangers in various Indian campaigns and against the Mexican outlaw, Juan Cortina, in the "First Cortina War" of 1859-60.

Elected as a delegate to the Texas Secession Convention from Brownsville in January of 1861, Ford played a key role in drafting the motion that declared Texas a "separate sovereign state." Before the end of the month, a committee of the Secession Convention ordered Ford to recruit a volunteer force in the Houston vicinity and move towards the Lower Rio Grande region to capture all United States property and munitions of war.[17] By February of 1861, he had recruited 500 volunteers in six companies and sailed down the coast to the island of Brazos de Santiago, already in use as a Federal garrison. After the island stronghold fell into Confederate hands, the United States commander of Fort Brown agreed to surrender all the federal forts from Brownsville to El Paso. The last Union troops evacuated Brazos Santiago on March 13th, nine days after Lincoln had taken the oath of office and a full month before the

surrender of Fort Sumter.

Even before the Federal blockade of Confederate ports commenced in the spring of the 1861, Ford had insured that the Confederacy would be able to use Matamoros and Bagdad as international outlets for Confederate commerce. Charismatic and cool-headed, Ford had quickly established cordial relations with the Mexican civil and military authorities in Matamoros, who were eager to promote transactions that would transform the Matamoros Customs House into a Golden Goose of the Mexican treasury. In a tone of deadpan self-satisfaction, Ford recalls in his memoir that he personally "visited the merchants of Matamoros, particularly those of foreign countries, and insisted upon steps being taken at once to open trade with Europe and the Confederate States through Matamoros." He advised King & Kenedy to put their steamboats under the Mexican flag and thus avoid capture by the Union Blockader that waited off shore at Brazos Santiago. "The boats of that firm," Ford wrote, "were then allowed to navigate the waters of the Gulf of Mexico and the Rio Grande. They were laden with freight intended for the government and the citizens of the Confederate States, and no one interfered."[18]

Ford further secured the Confederate's trade route through Matamoros by having his cavalry patrols guard the wagon trains that rolled across the Nueces Strip from Houston and San Antonio to Laredo and Eagle Pass, at the northern end of the Valley, and to Brownsville, at the southern end. Describing the increasingly important trade, Ford wrote, "Cotton was hauled across Texas to Matamoros where it was traded for foodstuffs and war materiel. An immense trade opened up in a short while. Matamoros was soon crammed with strangers and filled with goods of every class."[19]

This trade flowed up and down the lower Rio Grande in 1861 made Matamoros a boomtown and transformed Bagdad into the largest, and most prosperous, port-of-call between New Orleans and Vera Cruz.[20] Lieutenant Colonel Fremantle, the British officer who would be on hand to watch the Battle at Gettysburg in July of 1863, passed through Bagdad in March of that year. In his diary, Fremantle remarked that, "Seventy vessels are constantly at anchor outside the bar; their cotton cargoes being brought to them, with very great delays, by two small steamers from Bagdad." Describing the town, he wrote, "For an immense distance, endless bales of cotton are to be seen."[21] When General Lew Wallace, of Indiana, came to Brazos Santiago in March of 1865, the trade coming in and out of Bagdad was still enormous. His report to General Grant exclaimed,

> As to the rebel trade by way of the [the twin cities of] Matamoros and Brownsville, I think it is only sufficient to say that I can stand on my boat and count at least 100 vessels of all kinds lying off Bagdad. Neither the port of New Orleans nor that of Baltimore can present today such a promise of commercial activity.[22]

Especially after the Union capture of New Orleans in 1862 and the fall of Vicksburg in 1863, Confederate exports and imports flowed primarily through Matamoros and Bagdad.[23] Ford would be reassigned to Austin in June of 1862, and his replacement, Brig. Gen. Hamilton P. Bee, would abandon Brownsville when Federal troops arrived in November of 1863. However the Union occupation of South Texas would only succeed in diverting the Confederate trade from Brownsville to entry points upriver. For the duration of the war, Union authorities would never succeed in blocking the export of Confederate cotton that flowed downriver to Bagdad onto foreign flagships waiting off shore.

The Juarista Flank

While Ford was consolidating Confederate control over the north side of the Lower Rio Grande, Mexican conservative and liberal factions were engaged in a fierce struggle for control over the state of Tamaulipas in general, and Matamoros-Bagdad in particular. Towards the end of 1863, Juan Cortina won control of this contest, which left the Mexican side of the lower river in the hands of a *caudillo* who usually supported Juárez. With *Juaristas* in control of Matamoros-Bagdad, the second flank of the four-sided military occupation of the delta fell into place.

The Civil War Era power struggle for Matamoros began in 1861 when the state legislature of Tamaulipas refused to ratify the election of the liberal candidate for governor, Jesus de la Serna, due to fraud. When a conservative won the new election on July 8th, the dispute degenerated into armed conflict between factions. In October, the *Juarista* leader, José M. Carvajal, began a sustained attack on Matamoros that continued from October 21st to December 31st, 1861, and left much of the town a smoldering ruin. Although Carvajal finally retreated with his troops to Brownsville, the nominally *Juarista* chieftain of Coahuila and Nuevo Leon, Santiago Vidaurri, brought his army to Matamoros in January of 1862, restored order, and brought Tamaulipas as well as Matamoros under his rule.[24]

Vidaurri, whose headquarters were in Monterrey, was so important to the Confederate trade flowing into Mexico through Nuevo Leon and Piedras Negras that Jefferson Davis commissioned his own diplomatic representative, José Quintero, to visit Vidaurri and solidify commercial cooperation between his regime and the Confederacy. The trade that fell under Vidaurri's control generated enormous profits in customs revenue. Above Laredo, at Piedras Negras, opposite Eagle Pass, the collection was over $50,000 a month and sometimes $125,000 a month at several other crossings.[25] Vidaurri competed intensely with rival *caudillos* for control of the customs revenue generated by the Confederate trade.

While Santiago Vidaurri was extending his rule from Coahuila to

Tamaulipas, Juan Cortina was waiting for his opportunity to leap from the local to the regional stage. Traditional American historians typically depict Juan Cortina as *the* quintessential border bandit, who threatened the Texas-Mexico border with mayhem until finally subdued by the civilizing hand of the state's policing power. Revisionists, on the other hand, have resurrected Cortina as a redemptive figure, a progenitor of *La Raza Unida,* the modern Chicano Movement, dedicated to restoring social justice to a disenfranchised people.[26] Notwithstanding the relative merits of these contending views, from the perspective of Mexican history, Juan Cortina was a *caudillo,* a regional warlord. Collectively, Mexico's nineteenth century *caudillos* provided a modicum of local stability, while causing a good measure of the political chaos that hobbled Mexico until the dictatorial rule of Porfirio Díaz finally brought an inequitable stability to Mexico in the 1870's.

Juan Cortina and other regional figures assumed the role of *caudillo* because Mexican independence in 1821 had diffused power from the national "vice-regal" level, where it had rested for almost three hundred years, to local centers of authority and prestige. During the nation's first fifty-five years of independence, Mexican governments had lasted less than a year on the average, and only two administrations completed their full term: power remained largely fragmented among the nation's regional war-lords. The *caudillos* use violence to settle grievances; their power depended on personal charisma and ability to inspire dependency and obedience through distributing accumulated wealth. Because each *caudillo* depended on his personal capacity to buy the loyalty of his retainers, and keep an upper hand over rivals, each local warlord was potentially the enemy of his neighbor. The result was a political climate of chronic infighting, conflict, and violence. The French intervention had not only prevented Juárez and his government from reducing the local power of *caudillos*, but had left the national government utterly dependent on the good will and military expertise of capricious local chiefs. To maintain power, *caudillos* like Santiago Vidaurri and Juan Cortina would fight anyone who threatened their power-base and form alliances with anyone who could provide immediate tactical advantage.[27]

Juan Cortina had first developed his power-base by daring to defy the Anglo establishment that had taken root in Brownsville at the end of the Mexican American War. On September 28, 1859, Cortina had led his private army into downtown Brownsville, sealed off several square blocks, and killed three Anglos whom he accused of murdering Mexicans. With this daring act, Cortina had became a hero to a Mexican population still reeling with humiliation over the recently concluded Mexican American War that had ceded two-fifths of Mexico's territory to the United States. In his account of the ensuing "First Cortina War," Major Samuel Heintzelman highlighted the esteem that Cortina had won among his countrymen by attacking Brownsville's

Anglo establishment:

> Cortina was now a great man: he had defeated the 'Gringo,' and his position was impregnable; he had the Mexican flag flying in his camp, and numbers were flocking to his standard. When he visited Matamoros, he was received as the champion of his race – as the man who would right the wrongs the Mexicans had received; that he would drive back the hated Americans to the Nueces, and some even spoke of the Sabine as the future boundary.[28]

Significantly, in making himself a legendary figure to the local Mexican population, Cortina also made his nemesis, John Ford, a hero to Anglo Texans. Ford's reputation as a military leader was greatly enhanced when he cooperated with Heintzelman in driving Cortina back into Mexico in 1860. If "Old Rip" could whip Juan Cortina in 1860, Texans were confident he could subdue the Rio Grande Valley in 1861. Over the next two decades, John Ford would maintain a profoundly symbiotic relation with Juan Cortina.

When Ford did conquer the Delta region in 1861, Cortina resumed his attacks across the border. In the new context of the American Civil War, Cortina's border raids constituted pro-Union guerilla attacks against Confederate power. In May of 1862, Cortina invaded Zapata County, attacked the county seat, Carrizo, and hanged the Confederate County judge. Cortina's forces fought several engagements with Ford's cavalry until Ford's key lieutenant, Captain Benavides, from a leading Mexican-American family in Laredo, defeated Cortina and forced him back into Mexico.[29] From his base inside Mexico, Cortina made contact with Union officials and began receiving clandestine shipment of arms to continue his attacks against Confederate forces.[30] After the Union re-occupied the Valley in 1863, Cortina was received in Brownsville with a salute, military review, and banquet hosted by Union General Herron.[31] Nominally, Cortina remained in league with the American Union and the *Juarista* cause; however, he would also help supply Ford's forces when his "Cavalry of the West" was marching down river to re-conquer Brownsville in 1864, and he would help facilitate Confederate trade after Ford had re-conquered Brownsville. As Ford explained matter-of-factly, "He [Cortina] was known to be friendly to the Union men, yet he was not averse to allowing his friends to earn an honest penny by supplying the Confederates."[32] And when the French were poised to conquer Matamoros at the end of September of 1864, Cortina was offered a commission in the Imperial Army. Until the end of his life, in 1894, Juan Cortina could never transcend the imperatives of *caudillo* politics.

Cortina's final ascendancy to power in Tamaulipas dramatizes his inability to subordinate the pursuit of local power to the higher demands of national interest. On November 6th, 1863, the same day that Union troops were marching into Brownsville, Cortina conspired with a conservative general,

José Maria Cobos, to seize control over Matamoros from the *Juarista* General Manuel Ruiz. When Cobos issued a *pronunciamiento* critical of Juárez, Cortina had Cobos arrested, court-martialed, and marched to the outskirts of town. With a large part of the Matamoros populace looking on, a platoon of Cortina's soldiers executed Cobos by firing squad. When Ruiz regrouped his forces and attempted to re-take Matamoros from Cortina, a new battle for the town broke out between the rival armies near the main plaza. Cortina had 600 men and six artillery pieces; Ruiz had 800 men and four artillery pieces. The fighting raged through the night and into the next day with as many as two hundred and fifty artillery rounds being fired.[33] After watching Ruiz's forces being routed, a Union solider who witnessed part of the battle wrote, "Cortina's cavalry dashed through the streets striking down the fleeing fugitives."[34] After eighteen hours of continuous bloodletting, the battle for Matamoros was over. As many as three hundred men were killed, including all of Ruiz's artillerymen, who fell at their guns; "We have lost everything," Ruiz told President Benito Juárez."[35]

By defeating Ruiz, Cortina had made himself the dominant *caudillo* in Tamaulipus. Within hours of defeating Ruiz, he proclaimed himself governor of Tamaulipas and assumed the rank of General. Signaling the importance of Bagdad and its trade, Cortina renamed Bagdad, "Villa Cortina," and named one of his subordinates mayor.[36] He had achieved local supremacy – but in the process had destroyed a *Juarista* fighting force that Benito Juárez (and Cortina himself) needed to resist encroaching *Imperialista* armies.

The Union Flank

By the summer of 1863, with the victories at Gettysburg and Vicksburg giving the North an offensive advantage for the first time in the war, Union strategists turned their attention to West Texas. Lincoln's inner circle had long been vexed by the Confederate trade pouring through Matamoros. However, when the French captured Mexico City in June of 1863, the establishment of a Union presence on the lower Rio Grande became a strategic imperative. Expressing his sense of urgency, Lincoln personally wrote General Nathaniel Banks, busy preparing the Rio Grande expedition, to say that, "recent events in Mexico, I think, render early action in Texas more important than ever." Four days later, he informed General Grant that, "in view of recent events in Mexico, I am greatly impressed by the importance of re-establishing the national authority in Western Texas."[37]

On November 2nd, 1863, as French forces were pressing into Central Mexico, a force of six thousand Union troops, commanded by General Nathaniel P. Banks and General Napoleon Dana, landed at Brazos Santiago. By then, John Ford had been replaced by Brigadier General Hamilton Bee as the Confederate commander at Fort Brown. When General Bee learned

that Union troops were disembarking on the coast, he ordered all cotton and military supplies burned and retreated with the small corps of troops under his command. When some eight thousand pounds of powder in the fort magazine exploded, a strong wind carried the sparks and smoke into the town, and an entire block of buildings near the ferry was engulfed in flames, causing panic and pandemonium.38 Richard Fitzpatrick, the Confederate commercial agent in Matamoros, considered Bee's hasty retreat to be "one of the most cowardly affairs which has happened in any country."[39] Had Colonel "Rip" Ford still been in command of Brownsville, would he have shown the same heedless disregard for the safety of those he was leaving behind? Eventually, Bee would be relieved of his command for his precipitous withdrawal from Brownsville.

After Union troops were in control of Brownsville, a considerable number of Union sympathizers, who had taken refuge in Matamoros during the Confederate occupation, returned to reclaim their confiscated property. Conversely, Confederates crossed to Matamoros in such numbers that already high housing costs rose. Their abandoned Brownsville properties were confiscated and sold at auction.[40]

Establishing their main base at Brazos Santiago and Ft. Brown, Union troops proceeded to seize other ports along the lower Texas Gulf Coast. By the opening of 1864, Federal troops had taken possession of Corpus Christi, Matagorda Island, Indianola and Port Lavaca. Other Union troops pushed up the Rio Grande Valley to Santa Gertudis, Edinburg, Ringgold Barracks, and Rio Grande City. With Union forces consolidating control over the lower Rio Grande, the Confederate trade with Matamoros trade was pushed upriver to Laredo, 235 miles upstream from Brownsville, and Eagle Pass, another ninety miles up the Rio Grande, driving transportation costs up by at least fifty percent, and increasing the tariff revenues streaming into Santiago Vidaurri's treasury.[41]

General Banks appeared to be consolidating control over West Texas, which actually could have halted the Confederate's trade via the Rio Grande. However, in the opening months of 1864, the Union chief of staff, General Halleck, redirected Banks to conquer Texas by way of the Red River Valley, a route that would take him into east Texas through lower Louisiana. The Rio Grande Valley was given secondary priority to the Red River campaign, and all but a token force of Union troops, stationed at Fort Brown and Brazos Santiago, were re-deployed to the new Louisiana theater of war. Halleck informed Banks that the need to deter the French and interfere with the Confederate trade still justified the presence of Federal troops in West Texas. However, "this policy will be satisfied if a single point is held."[42] Apparently, Halleck did not anticipate the possibility that with the Union forces withdrawn from the Lower Rio Grande, the Confederates could re-occupy the area – and

thereby encourage the French Navy to seize Bagdad and Matamoros.

The French Flank

From the beginning of the French incursion into Mexico, Confederate officials had been urging the French to seize Matamoros by sea. In March of 1863, a special Confederate agent was sent to urge top French officials to occupy Matamoros, the last *Juarista* outlet to the Gulf of Mexico. The French capture of Matamoros would strike a double blow at the *Juarista*s and at the United States, who would not be able to capture or blockade Matamoros without risking war with France. For their part, the French were eager to capture Matamoros and control its customs revenue. Revealing the strategic importance of Matamoros to the French military campaign, a member of Maximilian's inner circle wrote, "In Matamoros, not in the capital [Mexico City], lay the key to the Empire."[43] Hoping to cement an alliance between France and the Confederacy, the French foreign minister, Saligny, was ready to move on Matamoros in 1863. However, the French navy was unable to act because two thirds of the French crews were incapacitated with yellow fever.[44] Conspicuously, the French would finally move on Bagdad-Matamoros one month after the Confederates re-occupied the lower Rio Grande in July of 1864.

With Union forces drawn down, and merchants lobbying to restore the cheaper direct trade route to Matamoros via Brownsville, the Confederate commander of Texas, General "Prince John" Magruder, gave John Ford the mandate to re-conquer the Lower Rio Grande Valley in late December, 1863. By the spring of 1864, Ford had recruited a force of nearly 1,300 cavalrymen and begun his march south. After repulsing a Union raid on Laredo in April, Ford's "Cavalry of the West" rode down the Great River Road, which paralleled the Rio Grande. In late June, he overwhelmed an advanced Union outpost of some two hundred troops guarding the approach to Brownsville at Las Rucias Ranch, about twenty-five miles northwest of Brownsville. By July, Ford's cavalry was skirmishing with Federal pickets on the outskirts of Brownsville; on July 16th, Union troops began to evacuate Fort Brown and retreat to Brazos Santiago. By July 30th, Ford's "Cavalry of the West" was securely in control of Brownsville. By August, only a rump force of about 1,500 Union soldiers, commanded by Colonel Henry Day, remained on Brazos Santiago.[45]

With Ford's encouragement, cotton, cattle, and other goods began moving by the direct route through Brownsville to Matamoros and the price of goods fell by about half.[46] Dismayed by the new flow of Confederate commerce moving through Matamoros, U.S. Consul Pierce explained in a letter, "Large quantities of merchandise now cross the river daily for the interior of Texas. They having taken advantage of the absence of our troops, and if they had left

with Colonel Day a few hundred cavalry the trains they would capture going and coming would pay their expenses."[47]

With the Confederates back in control of Brownsville, citizens who had sworn the oath of allegiance to the U.S. fled to Matamoros, while Confederates returned to Brownsville. French *Chargé d'affaires* M.L. Geofroy wrote on August 27th, 1864, that "a great number of Federals, after having evacuated Brownsville… passed the Rio Bravo and put themselves at the disposal of Mr. Cortina." With a note of foreboding, Geofroy added that, "the chief would also have received a considerable supply of arms and munitions, dispatched from American territory."[48] By the end of August, Cortina was cultivating his connections with Union officials as a way of saving himself from the newest threat to his survival – the French Naval squadron that had landed troops at the mouth of the Rio Grande and seized control of Bagdad.

On August 22, with the Confederates back in control of the Delta, and the Union presence reduced to a small garrison bottled up on Brazos Santiago, a French naval force, commanded by Captain A. Veron, bombarded Bagdad and then landed four hundred *Imperialista* troops. Cortina's local commander, Colonel Servando Canales, who only had a small detachment to defend the port, was obliged to retreat to Matamoros. With Governor Vidaurri at Monterrey having joined the *Imperialistas*, Matamoros was cut off from both east and west.[49]

On August 31st, Consul Leonard Pierce wrote Commander M. B. Woolsey, of the West Gulf Blockading Squadron, that the French had begun collecting port charges on all ships leaving Bagdad. "I do not see their right in this," Pierce wrote, "as the custom-house is located here [Matamoros], and all vessels now clearing have entered at this custom-house, and until the French can get possession of it, I don't see how they can interfere."[50] By seizing control of the customs revenue in Bagdad, the *Imperialista* forces had cut off Cortina's main source of revenue. In dire straits, he resorted to raising forced loans, never to be repaid, from the local merchants. Those who refused were thrown in prison.[51] Increasingly desperate, Cortina formulated an agreement with the local Federal authorities to mount a joint attack on Brownsville and thus save himself from the encroaching *Imperialista* armies moving on Matamoros from both Bagdad and from Victoria, the capital of Tamaulipas.

The first Battle at Palmito Ranch

A joint *Juarista*–Union attack on the Confederates holding Brownsville was precisely the kind of international incident that Secretary of State Seward was anxious to avoid. Indeed, on September 30th, 1864, shortly after learning about the engagement at Palmito Ranch, Seward complained petulantly that, "Cortina's presence in arms within the United States in an attitude of war against a friendly power with which the United States are at peace would not

be tolerated…the neutrality of the United States in the war between France and Mexico should not be violated."[52] Stewart's agitation was understandable. Neutrality with the warring parties in Mexico had kept the Union from having to fight the Confederacy *and* French forces – in Mexico, or elsewhere. But U.S. Consul Pierce, from his beleaguered office his Matamoros, and Colonel Henry Day, looking out at the French squadron anchored off the coast from Bagdad, could not resist the opportunity to strike back – at both the French and the Confederates – by entering into an ad hoc military alliance with General Juan Cortina.

Fittingly, what drove Cortina into his partnership with Pierce and Day was the cooperative relationship that John Ford had established with his new counterpart, Captain A. Vernon, now in control of the Confederate traffic moving from Bagdad to waiting off-shore ships. Sending two lieutenants to visit with the French Commander in Bagdad, Ford received a personal response from Captain Veron that, "If the exigencies of war should take me to Matamoros, you may rest assured that I shall see that all persons and property covered by the flag of your nation are duly respected."[53] Considering that Vernon's response was tantamount to French recognition of the Confederacy, Ford recalled that, "Com. Veron's communication caused a great deal of satisfaction to friends of the Southern cause. *It gave General Cortina no great pleasure*."[italics added]. With the French cooperating with Ford to facilitate Confederate commerce, Cortina "began to give clear indications of an unfriendly character." His troops shook down Confederates crossing over to Matamoros from Brownsville; nighttime ferry traffic across the river was halted. Ominously, Cortina "complained that when his soldiers went down river to engage the French, Colonel Showalter's men, stationed at Palmito Ranch, fired across the river at the Mexicans."[54]

Cortina had already formulated his contingency plan to seize Brownsville before the end of August. In his August letter to Commander Woolsey, U.S. Consul Pierce had explained that, "Affairs in the city are in a complete state of confusion. The Mexicans have enemies all around them on their own soil, and at present it looks as though there might be a fight at any moment between the forces of our governor (Cortina) and the rebels in Brownsville." Without revealing his own complicity in Cortina's plans, Pierce explained that Cortina planned "to take his force, cross the river above, attack Brownsville, and then throw himself and troops under the protection of our forces at Brazos." Alerting the commander that American citizens might soon need the aid of his squadron, Pierce added that, "Cortina declares that he will go over, hoist the American flag, and drive them out. This may occur at any moment. If this should take place, most of our citizens (although of loyal citizens we have but few) will probably run for Brazos for safety, as it would result in a free fight."[55]

What Pierce did not tell Commander Woolsey, or reveal in any of his surviving correspondence, was that he had acted as an intermediary between Cortina and Day. That Pierce did, in fact, coordinate communication between the two is known from a surviving affidavit that Cortina's lieutenant, Colonel Servando Canales, wrote to explain why he had refused to go along with Cortina's plan to join Federal troops in attacking Brownsville.

Sometime in late August or early September, Cortina had gathered his top lieutenants to inform them of his intention to "contract a defensive and offensive alliance between the Government of Tamaulipas and the Commander of the forces of the U.S. then being at the port of Brazos Santiago." Surrounded by "hostile forces that would not long delay in attacking us," Cortina had insisted that his plan was the only way to "save the artillery and munitions of war in the garrison…" Cortina reassured his officers that, "the commander of the U.S. troops had…the greatest willingness, not only to make the said agreement, but also to attack in concert with us the French forces already occupying the Mouth of the river." Cortina's forces would "aid in every manner the forces of the U.S. and even to attack Brownsville if necessary provided that both did it simultaneously; the object of this being to cross the artillery and munitions of war from Matamoros to this city." Cortina had reassured his uneasy lieutenants that, "the commanders and other officers were to retain their ranks and privileges," and that the *Cortinista* artillery and munitions of war would be considered Mexican property "to be returned to the Republic whenever the government thereof should demand the same."

Several days after conferring with his officers, Cortina and his lieutenants had met with Consul Pierce to formalize his alliance with Colonel Day. Pierce had cautioned Cortina that "neither he nor the commander of the forces at Brazos Santiago were sufficiently empowered to make this treaty, and that he could only assure that, for his part, the Cortina Brigade would be well received and there would be no reason why Mexico should lose her right to her arms & munitions." Clearly acting as an intermediary, Pierce was letting Cortina know that both he and Day were exceeding their authority in forging their alliance and could not offer any assurances of Union aid should the plan backfire. At this point, Canales decided "not to take a single step in the hair-brained measure proposed by Cortina."[56]

Servando Canales' affidavit, along with reports written by Union and Confederate officials, provide a generally consistent picture of the coordinated Union and *Juarista* effort to capture Brownsville. The first step was to overrun the Confederate picket at Palmito Ranch, roughly half way between Brazos Santiago and Ft. Brown. On the afternoon of September 6th, under cover of a heavy rain, a body of Cortina's troops and their artillery formed a line along the Mexican shore and opened fire on the Confederates encamped at Palmito Ranch. Shortly afterwards, a squadron of Union troops, who had

left their redoubt on Brazos Santiago that morning, attacked the Confederates from the North. Taking cover in the ranch, the Confederates fought through the afternoon. According to Ford, Showalter's company "silenced the Mexican artillery on several occasions and were reported to have killed forty Mexicans."[57]

While Showalter's troops were under attack, Ford had received "timely information" that Cortina had dispatched about six hundred troops with artillery up the Rio Grande. Their plan was to cross the river and attack Brownsville as soon Ford left Fort Brown to rescue his beleaguered troops at Palmito Ranch. Informed that his departure would signal the attack, Ford did not "budge" from the city or from Fort Brown. Luckily for the Confederates, the ongoing rain had swollen the river and "kept the Mexicans from crossing into Confederate territory."[58]

While Ford waited in Fort Brown, Showalter, "who had had recourse to the bottle" used the cover of darkness to retreat from Palmito Ranch and move his company back to within eight miles of Fort Brown. "He came to town in a maudlin condition," Ford recalled, "and claimed to have lost from 15 to 150 men." According to Showalter, "large parties of Mexicans and Federals had driven him from his camp, a force of Federals was at that moment advancing by the Point Isabel road, and a heavy body of Mexicans had been sighted on the opposite bank of the Rio Grande."[59] Ford concluded from Showalter's report that Cortina and the Federals would attack Brownsville in the morning. In preparation, Ford organized a militia of volunteers to defend the town and sent his wife and children to the convent in Brownsville.

The citizens of Brownsville fully expected to be overrun by *Juarista* and Federal troops. The Austin *State Gazette* reported on September 21st, 1864, that the "frantic" citizens of Brownsville were "preparing to evacuate."[60] Rumors, in fact, did spread that Cortina *had* (again) seized control of Brownsville. On September 20th, the *New York Times* reported,

> Cortina has crossed the Rio Grande, at the head of 2,000 men with sixteen cannon, and occupied Brownsville, Texas. Cortina's artillery had forced the French to fall back. Soon afterward the Imperial forces were joined by the rebels under Ford, who was endeavoring to furnish the former with supplies. Cortina, however, succeeded in putting both rebels and *Imperialistas* to flight. Outgunned by the heavy guns of the French squadron, Cortina had crossed a large portion of his men to the American, side of the river, took possession of Brownsville, and hoisted the Stars and Stripes where the rebel flag had lately waved. A later report says that Cortina has espoused the cause of the Union, and has sent an aide to Gen. Canby with a tender of his army and artillery and his personal services.[61]

According to this account, not only had *Juaristas* joined Union forces, but *Imperialistas* had joined the Confederates. The *New York Times* had concocted

Secretary of State Seward's worse nightmare.

John Ford credited the heavy rain that fell over the lower Valley on the night of the 6th as a critical factor in saving Brownsville from Cortina's anticipated assault. Because of the "terrible rain," the roads became "impassable to cannon and perhaps to anything else. We thanked God for it, believing we would have time to prepare for the reception of our enemies." Through the haze that hung in the air the next morning, Ford could make out "the Mexicans advancing two pieces of artillery toward the ferry. The gunners were stationed and the port fires lighted. They had six other pieces not a great distance to the rear to aid them."[62]

Confident that Cortina's troops would not attack until Ford had led his cavalry out of town, the shrewd Confederate commander remained at Fort Brown while he sent the main body of his forces to Palmito Ranch, where Colonel Day had reinforced the task force he had sent on September 6th. According to Ford, who has left us the most comprehensive account of the battle, Colonel Giddings moved on September 9th with 207 men of Showalter's command (who was under arrest for abandoning his post) and 167 of his own company. A few miles above Palmito Ranch, they attacked a combined force of six hundred Federals and three hundred *Juaristas.* "Captain Carrington led the attack," Ford recalled,

> followed by the companies of Captains Carr and Sanders. They drove the enemy five or six miles, killing and wounding a great many. As Captain Carrington attacked the Federal center, Captain Carr moved on the enemy's right and did a fine service, killing a great many. The whole line was now engaged. The enemy retreated, with a loss of 80 or 90 killed and wounded; many of the Mexicans fled to Mexico. Colonel Giddings followed the enemy to near the mouth of the Rio Grande. He found them drawn up in line with four pieces of artillery, with about 800 men ready to fight, and another 250 on board the steamer Matamoros, lying in the water. Upon consultation, the Confederates concluded not to attack. Leaving a force in observation, the main body fell back to Palmito Ranch.[63]

Ford had thwarted the combined Federal-*Juanista* effort to capture Brownsville that he himself had helped trigger by establishing his own alliance with the French occupiers of Bagdad.

While the records are inconsistent regarding dates and do not specify Cortina's exact location and actions, Federal, Confederate and Mexican documents all report that Cortina led his own Brigade in the fighting around Palmito Ranch between the 6th and the 9th of September. On September 13th, 1864, the captain of the U.S. Gunboat, *Aroostook*, was at Brazos Santiago to re-supply. Explaining recent events on the mainland, he wrote, "on the 10th instant, Cortina had crossed the Rio Grande with a force of about one hundred and fifty Mexicans, with the intention of fighting his way through the

rebels to seek asylum at Brazos Santiago."[64] And on the 21st of September, Confederate Brigadier-General Drayton informed his commander, Major General J.G. Walker, that, "A large number of [Cortina's brigade] crossed over the Rio Grande, under Cortina himself and fought us several days in conjunction with the Yankees, near the mouth of the river, while another party of them attacked us in flank from their side of the Rio Grande with cannon and musketry."[65] While the Union and Confederate sources only mention Cortina's presence among the Federals, Servando Canales provides a detailed and vivid account of how Cortina crossed over to join the Union forces.

At dawn on the 6th, Canales had followed Cortina, and a large contingent of his brigade, to the outskirts of Bagdad, where they launched an artillery attack on the entrenched French troops. Planning to renew the attack at dusk, the company retreated to Burrita, a Mexican hamlet on the South shore, six miles up-river from Bagdad. In the afternoon, reports arrived that, "the forces of Cortina which had remained behind with a piece of artillery had opened fire on a Confederate force on this [the north] side of the river."

At about sun-down, an adjutant informed Colonel Canales that "Cortina had opened fire on the Confederate troops, and that the cavalry had crossed the river and were still fighting the forces of the South." Shortly afterwards, Cortina himself arrived and announced his plan to "pass all his force over to the other side of the river for the purpose of saving them together with the artillery and munitions which had remained in Matamoros." Exchanging bitter words with Cortina, Canales remained in Burrita after "all the forces of Cortina had crossed the river with three pieces of artillery."[66] In Ford's estimation, Colonel Canales' refusal to join Cortina was a decisive factor in the outcome of the battle. In his memoir, Ford wrote, "His [Canales'] refusal to enter our territory as a friend and ally of the Federals had helped us greatly and probably enabled us to defeat the combination of Cortina and the Federals."[67]

Colonel Day left no report of the calamitous battle around Palmito Ranch on the 9th of September.[68] However, an exchange of brief letters between Colonel Day and his Confederate counterpart, John Ford, does add further confirmation that a significant number of Cortina's troops joined the Federals on the North side of the river. After the battle, Ford penned a cordial letter to Day inquiring whether twelve Mexicans, "of the *Exploradores del Bravo* of Colonel Echarzarreta's corps, General Juan N. Cortina's brigade," who had been taken prisoner during the fight, were "at the time of capture in the service of the Government of the United States?" Day responded that, "relative to 12 Mexicans who were taken prisoners by your forces and who were formerly under the command of Colonel Echazarreta, Juan N. Cortina's brigade, those men were in the service of the United States and fighting under the U.S. flag."[69]

Whatever the exact numbers of Cortina's troops involved at the first Battle of Palmito Ranch, sufficient numbers were engaged for Ford's Calvary to capture twelve *Juaristas*. Overshadowed by larger events, the first Battle of Palmito Ranch is barely mentioned in most histories of the Civil War in Texas. Yet, it remains significant as an occasion when the aims of local Federal officials, seeking to disrupt Confederate trade and hamper the French, coincided with Cortina's anxiety to escape encroaching *Imperialista* armies. For a passing moment, the Mexican Civil War fused with the American conflict on the battlefield. Eight months later, the Confederates' own dire circumstances would pull them into an emergency alliance with *Imperialista* forces, and the two wars would again become temporarily entangled.

Round Two at Palmito Ranch

To at least some extent, the second Battle of Palmito Ranch was sparked by a political atmosphere of mounting agitation over the French presence in Mexico. By the spring of 1865, the French advance had reached its zenith. During that critical year, *Imperialista* armies had secured victories in the states of Oaxaca, Morelia, Sonora, and Chihuahua. French naval squadrons controlled the waters and ports on both of Mexico's coasts. The monarchist land offensive had confined Juárez to the Apache Indian country near the Texas and New Mexican border. But as the French incursion was peaking, the Confederate Government was crumbling. After Lee's defense of Richmond was broken by the Army of the Potomac, the Confederate Capital of Richmond was evacuated; President Jefferson Davis and his cabinet fled the capital to escape an invading army – as Juárez had fled Mexico City two years before.

As Confederate defeat became increasingly inevitable, Northern displeasure with Maximilian grew in intensity. Campaigning for the vice presidency in 1864, Andrew Johnson had declared, "The time is not far distant when the Rebellion will be put down and then we will attend to this Mexican affair...An expedition into Mexico would be a sort of recreation to the brave soldiers of the Union, and the French concern would quickly be wiped out."[70] In May of 1864, the Republican Presidential Convention resolved that: "The establishment of any anti-republican government on this continent by any foreign power cannot be tolerated."[71] While Secretary of State Seward continued to advocate neutrality, General Grant was anxious to bring military pressure to bear against the French before the Confederate and Union armies were decommissioned. Peace in Mexico could only be secured, Grant insisted, while "we still have in service a force sufficient to insure it."[72] Within weeks of Lee's surrender at Appomattox on April 9th, 1865, Grant would order General Sheridan to position a force of 42,000 troops on the lower Rio Grande, where they could funnel arms and supplies to *Juaristas* on the other side of the river. But even before Lee's surrender, in March of

1865,Grant allowed a subordinate, Major General Lew Wallace, to negotiate a truce with Confederate forces in the Lower Rio Grande that would facilitate a joint military expedition against the French.

General Lew Wallace had served as a lieutenant in the First Regiment, Indiana Volunteers, during the Mexican American War. His keen interest in Mexico had begun in 1843, when he first read William Prescott's *History of the Conquest of Mexico.* Later, he would publish two best selling novels, *Ben-Hur* and *The Fair God* – the second of which was based on the clash of Spanish and Indian cultures in Mexico. In the winter of 1865, Wallace had won Grant's permission to meet with Confederate commanders in the Lower Rio Grande. His ultimate objective was to re-unite North and South under one flag by embarking on a great crusade to enforce the Monroe Doctrine. Wallace was confident that Confederate forces could be re-integrated into the Union by participating in a joint expedition against the French occupation of Mexico.

Disguising his visit as an inspection tour of the Federal garrison at Brazos Santiago, Wallace actually held a two-day conference with Colonel John Ford and General Slaughter at Port Isabel in March of 1865. By then, General Slaughter was the commanding officer at Fort Brown. Describing his meeting to General Grant, Wallace later wrote, "both General Slaughter and Colonel Ford were not only willing but anxious to find some ground upon which they could honorably get from under what they admitted to be a failing Confederacy." Wallace emphasized that "Both Slaughter and Ford entered heartily into the Mexican project. It is understood between us that the pacification of Texas is the preliminary step to a crossing of the Rio Grande." Wallace also noted that "General Slaughter was of the opinion that the best way for officers in his situation to get honorably back into the Union was to cross the river, conquer two or three states from the French, and ultimately annex them, with all their inhabitants, to the United States."[73] The acting Confederate military commander of Texas, General John Walker, did eventually reject Wallace's proposal as farcical. However, the understanding that Wallace established with Ford and Slaughter during their conference set the stage for the second Battle of Palmito Ranch that would occur two months later.

Although Wallace's truce was never officially endorsed, it ended the sporadic clashes between foraging parties of Union soldiers still stationed at Brazos Santiago and the Confederate pickets encamped at Palmito Ranch and elsewhere. In his memoir, Ford recalled that he and Slaughter had, "left General Wallace expecting the peaceful coexistence along the river to continue." The cessation of active hostilities, Ford explained, was "the cause for allowing many officers and men to visit their homes on furlough.[74] Ford did not mention that by the spring of 1865, the Confederate government was

no longer able to supply Ford's troops. Many soldiers had dwindling supplies of ammunition and lacked sufficient clothing to withstand the unseasonably cold winter of 1864-1865. In January, Colonel Giddings, whose men would be on picket duty at Palmito Ranch in May, reported that some of his men are "without pants…and go about camp in their drawers."[75] Already reduced to six companies, Ford's "Cavalry of the West" was further degraded by increasing rates of desertion. By the end of winter, over one hundred men in Benavides' Regiment had deserted. The already high rates of desertion escalated even further with news of Lee's surrender on April 9th.

As an elderly veteran of Ford's Calvary (retired in San Diego), Captain Carrington would recall that news of Lee's surrender had first been delivered to Giddings' pickets stationed at Palmito Ranch. Sometime during the first week of May, a passenger on a steamer churning up the river to Brownsville threw copies of the *New Orleans Times*, containing news of Lee's surrender, to some soldiers on the shore. As news of Lee's surrender spread through Ford's already depleted army, soldiers began to desert "by the score, and to return home; so that on the morning of the 12th of May, 1865, there were not more than three hundred effective men at and below Brownsville."[76]

By the spring of 1865, the garrison at Brazos Santiago was under the command of Colonel Barrett, who was not yet twenty-five years of age and had no combat experience. He had come to Brazos as the commander of the Sixty-second Regiment, U.S. Colored Troops, in February of 1865. When the acting commander of the garrison, Colonel Robert B. Jones, left the post in early April, Colonel Barrett had assumed command of the isolated Federal encampment. By May of 1865, the garrison comprised some 500 troops made up of the Sixty-second and Eighty-seventh U.S. Colored Troops, the Thirty-fourth Indiana Volunteer Infantry, and several dismounted companies of the First and Second Texas Union Cavalry. In February, Barrett and Jones had requested permission from department headquarters to march on Brownsville and capture the city. Although they were confident that their forces "could occupy [Brownsville] any day," their requests had been "emphatically refused."[77]

Yet by the beginning of May, all hostilities had ceased; Lee had surrendered; the local Confederate forces lacked supplies and were deserting. Under these circumstances, Colonel Barrett concluded that he would face no opposition – from headquarters or from the Confederates – if he marched his forces into Brownsville and seized control of the strategically important town. Cotton was still being warehoused in Brownsville and ferried across to the river to Matamoros; furthermore, Barrett had been at Brazos Santiago during General Wallace's recent visit. As a senior officer, he would have been keenly aware of his superiors' determination to aid the *Juarista* guerrillas operating on the other side of the river -- and even mount an expedition against the French from

the Lower Rio Grande Valley.

Perhaps Barrett was scheming to gain control of Confederate cotton; perhaps he was trying to win the favor of his superiors. Whatever his exact motivations in launching his attack on Brownsville, surviving sources do suggest that he was willing to endanger his troops to enhance his own career. On May 18th, 1865, the *New York Times* published a letter written by a Quartermaster of the Thirty-fourth Indiana Volunteers, who were decimated during the second battle of Palmito Ranch. In a tone of anger and betrayal, the Quartermaster explained, "Tis but a few days since our regiment was cut to pieces, under circumstances that were truly horrifying. This post is commanded by the Colonel of a colored regiment, and wishing to establish for himself some notoriety before the war closed, he started a colored regiment to Brownsville, on the Rio Grande, in direct violation of orders from headquarters."[78]

On the night of May 11th, in a driving rain storm, without consulting either subordinates or superiors, Barrett ordered Lieutenant Colonel Branson to take 250 troops from Brazos by steamboat to Port Isabel. His mission was initially to conduct a probe towards Brownsville. At the last moment, the steamer became inoperable, and with the storm growing more severe, the troops returned to the island. Rather than aborting the mission, Barrett ordered the Union troops to cross the Boca Chica Pass in small boats at the lower, southern end of the island. Before their departure, the column was strengthened by fifty men of the Second Texas Cavalry.

The company of some three hundred soldiers reached the mainland around 9:30 PM and marched, soaking wet, southwest following the telegraph lines stretching from Boca Chica to the Brownsville Road, reaching White Ranch at around 2:00 AM. Finding the Confederates' south-most encampment deserted, Branson and his company rested "in a thicket and among weeds on the banks of the Rio Grande one mile and a half above White's Ranch."[79] At 8:30 AM, *Imperialista* troops on the far shore saw them and ran to alert the Confederate picket at Palmito Ranch. Commanded by Captain Robinson, the Confederate troops were members of Colonel Giddings's regiment. Giddings was himself on leave and did not participate in the ensuing battle.

"Skirmishing most of the way with the enemy's cavalry," the Federal troops overran Palmito Ranch at noon, driving off the entire Confederate company of some ninety men. Burning the ranch, and taking three prisoners, along with two horses and four beef cattle, the Union troops rested on the high ground adjoining the Ranch. At 3:00 PM, they were attacked by the Confederate cavalry who had earlier escaped from the ranch, regrouped, and sent a messenger to Fort Brown requesting reinforcements.

Robinson's troops had the advantage of being on horseback. Moreover, they had been reinforced from adjoining Confederate camps and now

numbered about 190 mounted men. Fighting aggressively, Robinson's men forced the Federals to retreat from Palmito Hill all the way back to White's Ranch, "skirmishing some on the way." Protected by darkness, Branson's company rested at White's Ranch. At daybreak, Colonel Barrett and two hundred members of the Thirty Fourth Indiana Volunteer Infantry arrived from Brazos Santiago to reinforce Branson's troops.

In the morning, the reinforced body of some five hundred infantrymen resumed their march on Brownsville. Again, they retook Palmito Ranch, where the remaining Confederate supplies were burned. Waiting for reinforcements, Robinson and his small company of cavalry withdrew to the north, hoping to draw the Federals deeper into enemy territory. Still thinking he could drive off the rebel defenders and capture Brownsville, Barrett rashly led his already tired troops, who lacked artillery and cavalry, above Palmito Ranch, ever further from their line of escape. By late afternoon, they were two miles north of Palmito Ranch where, in Branson's words, "a sharp fight took place in the thicket on the river bank."[80]

When word reached Colonel Ford that the picket at Palmito Ranch had been attacked, he directed Robinson to "hold his ground, if possible," until he could collect enough men to reinforce him. Suggesting how badly the readiness of his forces had deteriorated, Ford recalled that his couriers sent out to collect reinforcements from outlying camps "found some of the detachments badly prepared to move. The artillery horses had to travel the most of the night of the 12th to reach Fort Brown. So had many of the men."[81] Though General Slaughter was intent on retreating, Ford convinced him to issue an order to march against the Unionists.[82] At 11:00 AM, on the morning of the 13th, the same day that the leaders of the Trans-Mississippi Department were gathering to sign papers of surrender, Colonel Ford left Fort Brown "at the head of the few troops present," along with six pieces of artillery. One artillery piece was manned by a company of French soldiers who had crossed the river and joined Ford's company. They had been assigned to Colonel Ford by his friend, A. Vernon, the French naval commander at Matamoros.[83] According to one Union account of the battle, *Imperialista* soldiers accompanied Ford to reinforce Robinson above Palmito Ranch.

When Ford's reinforcements arrived between 3 and 4 PM, Robinson's forces were "in a heavy skirmish" with the Second Texas Calvary and a company of the Thirty-fourth Indiana Volunteer in a thicket on the river bank about two miles north of Palmito Ranch. A regiment of the Sixty-second was moving forward to mass for an attack against the Confederate position -- which the Federals did not realize had been reinforced by Ford's men.

The right wing under command of Captain Robinson, two companies aiming for the right flank, and artillery firing from the center, Ford's Cavalry charged into the Federal line. In his account of the battle, Ford describes

how he ordered his unit of "French volunteer cannoneers" into the battle. As the Confederates were positioning themselves, "a ranger came up at full speed and informed Ford that the Frenchmen had halted and unlimbered the piece. Ford moved back at full speed and told the Frenchmen, "*Allons*!" They limbered up briskly and went forward with celerity."[84]

The effect of Ford's attack on the Federal troops was devastating. According to Carrington, the Sixty-second was "quickly demoralized and fled in dismay." About 140 members of the Indiana Volunteers were held back as skirmishers, while the entire Federal force commenced to retreat. In Carrington's words, "Ford's fierce cavalry charges harassed them exceedingly. The artillery moved at a gallop. Three time, lines of skirmishers were thrown out to check the pursuit; these lines were roughly handled and many prisoners taken."[85]

While Carrington recollected the battle with a sense of relaxed triumph, the Indiana Quartermaster, who experienced the brunt of the Confederate charge, remembered the fray in a palpable tone of pain and betrayal. "Though our Colonel [Branson] suspected we were being led into a trap," the quartermaster recalled,

> *still the commanding officer ordered us onward.* [italics added.] After advancing some twenty miles, the rebel infantry and artillery opened upon us...their artillery poured into our ranks a destructive fire. An order was given to retreat at double-quick – the worst time in the world for such an order – but the men, *who were much cooler than their commander* [italics added], fell back steadily, keeping up a heavy fire. Our skirmishers, having no orders to fall back, were all either killed or captured. After we had retreated three miles, the rebel cavalry made its appearance in our rear, cutting us completely off. The men were not long in massing and pressing their way through, but the rebel artillery played upon us terribly. This was repeated several times and our soldiers fighting desperately. The day was hot and the fire was hotter. At last the rebels got a cavalry reinforcement and made a final charge upon us. We were now close to the river, and many rushed to the water for safety. Some were shot in the river. The color guards were all shot down, but the sergeant, he tore the colors from the staff, and also the banner, tied the flag around his own body and leaped into the river. A soldier took the banner and followed his example. The latter escaped, but the sergeant was shot and sank to the bottom. Of three hundred men starting out in the morning only eighty escaped and most of these by swimming to the Mexican shore. It was the most abominable affair that I ever saw.[86]

The route continued across the same eerie tidal flats that Colonel Day's troops had crossed in their feverish retreat from Palmito ranch eight months before. "The federals, Carrington recalled, "were thus pursued for about eight

miles, making repeated efforts to check the pursuit, but without success."[87]

At Cobb's Ranch, about two miles from Brazos Santiago, the surviving Federal troops regrouped and rested. The Confederates, and their artillery horses (who had marched hard all the way from Brownsville) were themselves too exhausted to press the advance. "Boys," Ford recalled saying to his troops, "we have done finely. We will let well enough alone and retire."[88] Though General Slaughter made a belated appearance at nightfall, urging Ford to press the attack, the Second Battle of Palmito Ranch – the last battle of the Civil War – was over.

There is no evidence that the Second Battle of Palmito Ranch involved any coordination between the Federal garrison at Brazos Santiago and the *Juaristas* conducting their harassing guerrilla war against the *Imperialistas* who still held Matamoros. However, before leaving Brazos Santiago, General Wallace did meet with General José María Carvajal, who was collaborating with Juan Cortina in the *Juarista* guerrilla war against the *Imperialistas.* Because Benito Juárez had commissioned Carvajal to procure arms and men, Wallace brought Carvajal to New York immediately after their conference on Brazos Santiago. In New York, Carvajal would offer Wallace a commission as a major general in the Mexican Army upon his impending resignation from the United States military. Over the next two years, the two would cooperate closely in channeling decommissioned American soldiers and large amounts of munitions to Juárez's army.[89]

For several months after the French capture of Matamoros, Cortina had remained loosely attached to the French Army. Then, on April 1st, 1865, at Fernando, on the coastal plain some eighty-five miles south of Matamoros, Cortina had declared his loyalty to President Benito Juárez. In mid-April --to announce his return -- he had marched his army to the outskirts of Matamoros, overrun the town's defenses, killed an *Imperialista* colonel and several of his men, retrieved some military supplies previously concealed in the town, stolen some horses, and galloped out of town. In April, he had also captured the steamboat *Señorita*, loaded with cotton, and turned the prize over to Union officials.[90] When Carvajal left for New York with General Wallace, Cortina had assumed leadership of the *Juarista* resistance. In May of 1865, he was conducting guerrilla raids against the *Imperialistas* in the Matamoros area and further north, in the region between Ciudad Victoria and Monterrey.[91]

While Cortina was not coordinating his operations with Barrett on May 12th and 13th, the Confederates and French suspected that he was -- and were preparing their own emergency military alliance in the event that Cortina attacked Brownsville. The collaboration between the French and Confederates included the French artillery unit that Ford mentions in his recollection of the battle. According to the quartermaster of the Thirty-fourth Indiana Volunteers, an indeterminate number of *Imperialista* troops were with Ford when he was

charging into the Union line above Palmito Ranch on the sunny afternoon of May 13th.

When Ford left Fort Brown to reinforce Robinson, General Slaughter remained in Brownsville to coordinate efforts with *Imperialista* General Mejía against a possible attack by Juan Cortina.[92] To repulse a large *Juarista* attack on Matamoros that had occurred on the 1st of May, Slaughter had loaned both men and artillery to Mejía. Three days of intense fighting had been required to repulse the attack.[93] By May 13th, the tables were turned, and Slaughter was in need of Mejía's assistance. In a letter written long after the battle, a member of General Slaughter's staff, L.G. Aldrich, explained that Slaughter had remained at Fort Brown on the morning of May 13th because he had received "information, that suspicious movements on the part of Cortina…indicated an advance by him on our base of supplies – Brownsville – in conjunction with the movements of the Federals from Brazos Santiago." Such an eventuality was quite possible, Aldrich explained, "in view of his (Cortina's) known intimacy with the Federal authorities." Placed in command of the post, Aldrich organized volunteers into a home guard, pickets were placed at strategic points on the river, and "all precautions possible were taken to successfully baffle any effort of Cortina."[94]

Meanwhile, through the offices of the Confederate agent then operating in Matamoros, Señor Quintero, Slaughter negotiated an agreement with the *Imperialista* Commander of Matamoros. If Cortina attacked, "Mejía's cavalry would cross, in citizen's dress, and come to our assistance." While the entire Confederate force was at Palmito Ranch, Señor Quintero remained with Aldrich through the night of the 13th, "ready to go to Matamoros with the summons upon which they were to move."[95] Juan Cortina *had* seized Brownsville in 1859. He *had* conspired with Union officials to seize Brownsville in 1864. The possibility that he would attack Brownsville in May of 1865 had pulled the Confederate commander of Fort Brown into his own – actual – alliance with the *Imperialista* forces across the river.

The Confederate troops still available to heed Ford's call to arms on the 12th and 13th of May were threadbare and desperately low on supplies. It is entirely conceivable that Captain Vernon and General Mejía supplied Ford with ammunition and allowed more one artillery unit to join their Confederate friend on the North side of the river. The French were under constant danger from *Juarista* guerrillas who were in communication with the Union garrison at Brazos Santiago. Furthermore, many French officers fully expected to be at war with the United States as soon as the Confederacy had surrendered.[96] It is true that Ford, a forthright narrator of events, does not mention the presence of additional *Imperialista* forces among his troops on the 13th. But did his aging memory block out their presence to magnify the glory of his victory? Memories of battlefield glory were among the few things left to savor for

former Confederate officers like Ford during the hard years that followed the end of the war.

According to the Quartermaster of the Thirty-fourth Indiana Volunteers, there were a significant number of *Imperialista* troops with Ford -- enough to even effect the outcome of the battle. To explain the Confederate victory, he wrote, "*The French helped them* [italics added]. "We took a few prisoners in the morning, and most of them were Maximilian's French soldiers. It is to be hoped that he will get his fill of fighting United States troops. We can prove that our men were fired on by the French and from the Mexican shore, and that they sent ammunition over to the rebels."[97] From Lieutenant Colonel Branson's account, we know that *Imperialistas* on the Mexican shore aided the Confederates by alerting their pickets at Palmito Ranch to the presence of Federal troops on the morning of the 13th. Furthermore, Carrington recalls that on the day after the battle, he was ordered by Ford to survey the field of battle, gather abandoned arms, and bury the dead. In a bend of the river near Palmito Ranch, his soldiers found a "body of federals" still in hiding. They had not been able to cross the river because of skirmishers on the Mexican side. When some of them had tried to swim across, they were "immediately slain and stripped by Mexican bandits and thrown into the river."[98] The testimony of a Union private after the battle also corroborates that the Federal forces were harassed by fire from the Mexican shore. During the retreat, Private Smith had fallen out of the ranks from exhaustion about half a mile below Palmito Ranch. "From there," he explained, "I tried to swim the river; I swam the river about halfway, when the Mexicans began to fire at me from the Mexican bank of the river. And I then turned and swam back." Shortly afterwards, Private Smith was captured.[99] For the exhausted Union soldiers who no longer had the strength to keep up with their retreating comrades, escape across the river was the only alternative to capture. For them, the enemy were not only the Confederates charging from behind on horseback, but also the *Imperialista* troops on the far shore, cutting off their only remaining means of escape.

While the exact number of *Imperialistas* helping the Confederates on May 13th remains unknown, Ford *was* aided by some indeterminate number of *Imperialista* troops, during a passing moment at the end of the Civil War, when the necessities of the Confederate army holding Brownsville coincided with the interests of the *Imperialistas* who controlled Matamoros. Their collaboration at Palmito Ranch in May of 1865 was a striking counterpoint to the battlefield alliance between *Juaristas* and Federals on the same ground eight months earlier.

In the context of the Civil War as a whole, the two battles of Palmito Ranch were minor engagements – without effect on the final outcome of the war. Yet on no other battlefields of the Civil War was there collusion with soldiers from different nations engaged in their own separate war. The international

entanglements that occurred at Palmito Ranch were *sui generis* events that could only have happened in the border region of Southwest Texas. Here, for a brief historical moment, that international waterway, the Rio Grande River, had conflated the interests of American Confederates and the French occupiers of Mexico, while Northern Unionists found their own common ground with the Mexican followers of Benito Juárez. The *ad hoc* international alliances that occurred at the two battles of Palmito Ranch deserve to be remembered as examples of how the Rio Grande River can mix and meld the interests of contending parties on opposing sides of the river.

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Endnotes

[1] The literature on relations between the United States and France during the Civil War Period is vast. The works consulted for this study include: Jasper Ridley, *Maximilian and Juárez* (London: Phoenix Press, 1992); Robert R. Miller, *Arms Across the Border: United States Aid to Juarez of Mexico During the French Intervention.* (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society,1973); Alfred J. Hanna & Kathryn A. Hanna, *Napoleon III and Mexico* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1971); Richard Sinkin, *The Mexican Reform, 1855-1876: A Study in Liberal Nation-Building* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979); Howard F. Cline, *The United States and Mexico,* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963).

2 William J. Hughes, *Rebellious ranger; Rip Ford and the old Southwest* (Norman University of Oklahoma Press, 1964), p. 229.

3 Robert R. Miller, *Mexico: A History* (University of Oklahoma Press: 1985), p. 253

4 Miller, *Mexico: A History,* Chapter Eight, "Juárez and Maximilian" pp. 231-256.

5 *Ibid*, p. 237.

6 Hanna, *Napoleon III and Mexico*, p. 61.

7 James Morton Callahan, *American Foreign Policy in Mexican Relations* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1932), p. 65.

8 Callahan, *American Foreign Policy in Mexican Relations*, p. 68.

9 U.S. Grant, *Personal Memoirs* (New York: Library of America, 1984) p.775.

10 *Ibid.*, p. 775.

11 Hanna, *Napoleon III and Mexico,* p. 119.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 119.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 142.

14 In the 1850's Ford was a member of the Know Nothing Party, which in Texas was vehemently pro-slavery, and also a member of the "Order of the Lone Star

of the West," which advocated the establishment of a slave empire in Cuba and Mexico.Stephen B. Oates, "John Salmon 'Rip' Ford," Introduction, John S. Ford, *Rip Ford's Texas,* ed. Stephen B. Oates, (Austin: University of Texas press, 1963) p. xxx Numerous anecdotes, by Ford, and those who have studied his career, illustrate the relaxed decency with which he treated Mexican Americans under his command. One telling example is Ford's account of how he resolved a dispute between one of his Mexican soldiers and a messmate. See Ford, *Rip Ford's Texas*, p. 364.

15 Ford's military tactics are discussed in Stephen B. Oates, "John S. 'Rip' Ford: Prudent Cavalryman, C.S.A" *Lone Star Blue and Gray, Essays on Texas in The Civil War*, ed. Ralph A.Wooster (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 1995).

16 Phillip T. Tucker, *The Final Fury: Palmito Ranch, The Last Battle of the Civil War* (Mechanicsburg, PA: 2001), p. 55.

17 Oates, "John S. 'Rip' Ford: Prudent Cavalryman, C.S.A," pp. 314-15.

18 Ford, *Rip Ford's Texas*, p. 329.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 330.

20 Hanna, *Napoleon III and Mexico,* p. 183.

21 Arthur J.L. Fremantle, *The Fremantle Diary,* ed. Walter Lord, (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1954), p. 6.

22 Miller, *Arms Across the River,* p. 43.

23 On the importance of the Matamoros trade to the Confederacy see: Robert L. Kerby, *Kirby Smith's Confederacy: The Trans-Mississippi South, 1863-1865,* (New York & London: Columbia University Press, 1972) pp.*165-86;* Ronnie C. Tyler, *Santiago Vidaurri and the Southern Confederacy,* (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 1973); James W. Daddysman, *The Matamoros Trade: Confederate Commerce, Diplomacy, and Intrigue* (Newark: U. of Delaware Press, 1984).

24 Milo Kearney and Anthony Knopp, *Boom and Bust: The Historical Cycles of Matamoros and Brownsville* (Austin, Tx.: Eakin Press, 1991) p. 123.

25 Frank L. Owsley, King Cotton Diplomacy (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1950), p. 128.

26 Jerry Thompson includes an excellent overview of the historiography on Juan Cortina in "Introduction," *Juan Cortina and the Texas-Mexico Border 1859-1877* (El Paso, Tx.: Texas Western Press, 1994) pp. 1-14.

27 My understanding of the Caudillo in mid-Nineteenth Century Mexican politics is based on Eric R. Wolf and Edward Hansen, "Caudillo Politics: A Structural Analysis," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 9, no.2 (January 1968), pp.168-79.

28 Thompson, *Juan Cortina and the Texas-Mexico Border*, p. 21.

29 Ford, *Rip Ford's Texas,* p. 324.

30 Jerry Thompson, *Mexican Texans in the Union Army*, (El Paso, Tx.: Western Press, 1986), pp. 8-12.

31 Kearney & Knopp, *Boom and Bust*, p. 131.

32 Ford, *Rip Ford's Texas*, p. 364.

33 Thompson, *Juan Cortina and the Texas-Mexico Border*, p. 38.

34 Nannie M. Tilley, ed., *Federals on the Frontier: The Diary of Benjamin F. McIntyre, 1862-64* (Austin: U. of Texas Press, 1963) p. 292.

35 Thompson, *Juan Cortina and the Texas-Mexico Border,* p. 38.

36 Kearney & Knopp, *Boom and Bust,* p. 132.

37 Kerby, *Kirby Smith's Confederacy,* p. 187.

38 Kearney & Knopp, *Boom and Bust*, p. 128.

39 Kerby, *Kirby Smith's Confederacy*, p. 191.

40 Kearney & Knopp, *Boom and Bust*, p. 130.

41 Kerby, *Kirby Smith's Confederacy*, pp. 192-3.

42 *Ibid.*, p. 194.

43 Samuel Basch, *Memories of Mexico: A History of the Last Ten Months of the Empire* Ed. Hugh M. Oechler. (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1973), pp. 172-3.

44 Ridley, *Maximilian and Juárez*, p. 119.

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46 Kearney & Knopp, *Boom and Bust*, p. 134.

47 Leonard Pierce, U.S. Consul to Commander M.B. Woolsey, U.S. Navy, *War of the* Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate *Armies* (128 vols., Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901) Vol.46, ser.1 pt.1. pp. 652-3. (Hereafter cited as *Official Records*)

48Carlos Larralde, *Juan N. Cortina and the Struggle for Justice in Texas* (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Publishers, 2000), p. 70.

49 Kearney & Knopp, *Boom and Bust*, p. 135.

50 Pierce to Woolsey, *Op. cit.,*, p. 653.

51 Kearney & Knopp, *Boom and Bust*, p. 135.

52 William Seward to E.R. S. Canby, *Official Records*, Vol. 41, ser.1, pt.3. pp. 497-98.

53 Ford, *Rip Ford's Texas,* p. 370.

54 *Ibid.*, p. 370.

55 Pierce to Woolsey, *Op. cit.,*, p. 652.

56 A copy of Servando Canales' affidavit is in Ford, *Rip Ford's Texas*, pp. 377-80.

57 *Ibid,* p. 371.

58 *Ibid,* p. 372.

59 *Ibid,* p. 371-2.

60 *Austin State Gazette*, 21 September 1864

61 *The New York Times* 20 September 1864

62 Ford, *Rip Ford's Texas*, p. 372.

63 *Ibid,* p. 374.

64 *Official Records* Vol.46, ser.1 pt.1. p. 652.

65 *Official Records* Vol.46, ser.1 pt.1. p. 946.

66 Servando Canales, *Op. cit.,* p. 381.

67 Ford, *Rip Ford's Texas*, p. 382.

68 Interestingly, *The Official Records* do contain a brief account, written by Day, of the successful Union attack on Palmito Ranch that occurred on the 6th. (*Official Records* Vol. 46, ser. 1 pt. 1. p. 947.) However, there is no account of the subsequent events between the 7th and the 9th of September.

69 *Official Records* Vol. 48, ser. 1 pt. 1. pp. 947-8.

70 Hanna, *Napoleon III and Mexico*, p. 236.

71 Callahan, *American Foreign Policy in Mexican Relations*, p. 297.

72 Hanna, *Napoleon III and Mexico*, p. 238.

73 Miller, *Arms Across the River,* p. 43.

74 Ford, *Rip Ford's Texas*, p. 389.

75 Jerry D. Thompson, *Vaqueros in Blue & Gray* (Austin: Presidial Press, 1976), p. 121.

76 Captain W. H. D. Carrington, "The Last Battle of the War, May 13th, 1865," in John H. Brown, *History of Texas from 1685 to 1892*, 2 V, (Austin, Tex., Pemberton Press, 1970), VII, p. 431.

77 Tucker, *Final Fury*, p. 37.

78 *The New York Times,* 18 June 1865.

79 Report of Lieutenant Colonel David Branson, *Official Records* Vol. 48, ser. 1 pt. 1. pp. 265-6.

80 *Ibid,* p. 266.

81 Ford, *Rip Ford's Texas*, p. 389.

82 *Ibid,* p. 390.

83 Tucker, *Final Fury*, p. 120.

84 *Ibid,* p. 391

85 Carrington, "The Last Battle of the War," Op.Cit., p. 433.

86 *The New York Times*, 18 June 1865

87 Carrington, "The Last Battle of the War," Op.Cit., p. 433.

88 Ford, *Rip Ford's Texas*, p. 393.

89 For Wallace's relationship with Carvajal, see Miller, *Arms Across the Border*, Chapter Seven, "General Wallace – Friend of Mexico," pp. 41-47.

90 Kearney & Knopp, *Boom and Bust*, p. 141.

91 Thompson, *Juan Cortina and the Texas-Mexico Border 1859-1877*, p. 68.

92 John Salmon. Ford, *Unpublished Memoirs of Col. S. (Rip) Ford* (Brownsville,Tex.:1950-1960) Vol V, p. 1032; Vol VII, pp. 1193-4.

93 Kearney & Knopp, *Boom and Bust*, p. 141.

94 I.G. Aldrich to John S. Ford, 21 October, 1890, in Ford, *Rip Ford's Texas*, p. 394-395.

95 *Ibid,* p. 395.

96 In his memoir, Ford describes a conversation with a French officer who asked Ford how he would respond to the impending war between France and the United States. *Ibid*, pp. 403-404.

97 *New York Times,* Sunday, June 18, 1865

98 Carrington, "The Last Battle of the War," *Op. cit.,*, p. 434.

99 Tucker, *Final Fury,* p. 140.

The Secret Mission of Lew Wallace
by
Sondra Shands

The year 1865 was not a good year for the Confederate States of America. William Tecumseh Sherman, a general in President Abraham Lincoln's Union Army, bragged that he would make Georgia howl. True to his word, Sherman allowed his troops to rape, pillage and burn their way for some two hundred and fifty miles until they reached the ocean. Leaving in their wake scorched earth that was some sixty miles wide across Georgia, Sherman then sent a message to Washington, D. C. offering the city of Savannah, Georgia, to President Lincoln as a Christmas present. General Sherman then turned his troops and moved them upward through South Carolina. Very soon South Carolina became a state filled with cities and towns consisting of burned and vacant homes, widows and orphans.

The Army of Northern Virginia, trying desperately to hang on near the Virginia cities of Petersburg and Richmond, would ultimately surrender on Palm Sunday, April 9, 1865. Robert E. Lee, Commanding General of the Army of Northern Virginia, attired in his cleanest dirty shirt, groomed as always, including polished boots, met Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant, sloppily dressed as always, including mud spattered pants and boots, ever present cigar and whiskey bottle in hand. The two men met in the parlor of the McLean home in Appomattox, Virginia, and agreed to the terms of surrender. The following day Lee and his men met Grant and his men on the Appomattox Court House steps. For all practical purposes the War between the North and the South was over. Much, however, had transpired between Sherman's destructive swath and Lee's surrender at Appomattox.

In the spring of that year, a Union Major General by the name of Lewis "Lew" Wallace reread a letter from an old Unionist friend in Texas and fantasized. At the time of the Civil War there were more than two hundred thousand slaves in Texas. There was never any doubt in the minds of most Texans that Texas would become a part of the Confederate States of America. In fact, Texas was one of the original seven states to secede from the Union. Wallace's friend wrote to him that he now found himself more than uncomfortable in his surroundings, being, he said, "one of thousands of persons displaced by the war."[1] This letter convinced Lew Wallace that the Rebels in Texas were weary of the war and wanted to give up on the cause. The letter went on to state that "Texans, if approached correctly, would be willing to abandon the Confederate cause and join Union forces in fighting the French Imperial government in Mexico."[2]

Wallace was not happy about his present appointment, which was an

administrative position as Commander of the Union's Midwest; he would rather receive accolades as a military hero. Instead of this honor, when he showed up late for the battle of Shiloh, he found himself sitting behind a desk contending with General Grant's displeasure. Texas, he reasoned, could well provide the opportunity to achieve an outstanding record. Years before, as a First Indiana Volunteer, Wallace had been stationed along the Texas/Mexican border on Brazos Island.[3] Now, nearly two decades later, he envisioned himself landing once again and going ashore at Point Isabel, Texas. All that was required of him, the General determined, was to convince Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant, the Commanding General of the Union forces, that he, Wallace, should make the journey to Texas. General Grant, along with many other Unionist military leaders, believed that Southern leaders were sympathetic to the French presence in Mexico and that the Confederacy would cast its lot with the French-imposed leader, Maximilian, in his ongoing fight against the Mexican rebel leader, Benito Juárez. Should this happen, President Abraham Lincoln would have a fight on his hands that might well last for many more years.[4] Using this situation to his advantage, General Wallace wrote to Grant putting forth his vision for ending the war in Texas. There were some 60,000 Texans fighting for the Confederacy. A fourth of the Texas Confederate soldiers were fighting east of the Mississippi, while the remainder of the Texas soldiers were stationed in Arkansas, Louisiana, Texas, and the Oklahoma Territory, which at that time was known as the Indian Nation.[5] Wallace felt certain that with the right motivation the Texas Confederates would gladly return to the Union.

General Wallace was very aware that General Grant knew President Lincoln was a champion of the former Mexican President, Benito Juárez, so he believed that if his plan was presented properly to Grant that the General would see the advantages of providing an honorable peace and reentry into the Union for the war-weary South. This being done, Wallace was confident that the Confederates along the Rio Grande would gladly join in the fight to drive the French from Mexico. (Wallace also pointed out in his letter to Grant that the Confederates knew President Lincoln and the North were extremely concerned that the "French Intrusion" might come to the aid of the Confederates, resulting in many more years of war.[6])

Ending the Confederate rebellion in Texas, Wallace reasoned, could stamp out the cotton trade between the sister cities of Brownsville, Texas, and Matamoros, Mexico. This misperception about the weakness of trade between Matamoros and Brownsville came from the letter Wallace had received from his friend who was living in Texas and who obviously had little knowledge of the extent of trade between the cities. Texas was one of the largest producers of cotton by the time of the Civil War. "The hard-beaten trail which ran through the King Ranch down to the mouth of the Rio Grande was often

bumper to bumper with trailers pulled by mules and horses, straining in their efforts to transport the heavy bales of cotton. The surrounding scrub brush, covered in blowing cotton, gave the land an appearance of being blanketed with snow which refused to melt in the sweltering South Texas heat."[7] The logical point of shipment for the cotton was Mexico. Even with a blockade by the Federal Navy, hundreds of ships waited at the mouth of the Rio Grande River to receive the continuous deliveries of cotton. Besides the cotton trade, Brownsville and Matamoros thrived on prostitution, gambling, and other assorted activities, which created a profitable economy for both sides of the river.

Lewis Wallace was born in Indiana, where he would read for the law, sit for the bar and ultimately become an attorney. Later, he would become a senator, and, after the War Between the States, he would be Governor of the Territory of New Mexico. Wallace would also fill the post of United States Ambassador to Turkey. But it would be as a writer that Wallace would garner fame and be most remembered. His classic account, *Ben Hur, a Tale of the Christ*, would become one of the most popular novels of the 19th century. Wallace was a man of considerable achievements, to be certain, but he would fail in his desire to be remembered as a military hero, although he was not aware of this fact in the spring of 1865. That year Wallace fancied himself as the man to put an end to the Trans-Mississippi Confederate Rebels and their cause in Texas.

With the needed permission from General Grant, Wallace set out for Texas. The official reason for the trip was to inspect the Union troops serving along the Rio Grande. Instructions from Grant made it very clear that Wallace was not to divulge the reason for his journey to South Texas. Wallace enjoyed the subterfuge, writing to his wife about the questions his travels raised, telling her about the "great curiosity"[8] he created. He failed to mention in his letters home that General Grant's instructions to him were precise. Very simply stated, Wallace had no authority to do more than meet with the Confederate leaders. He was not to take any action without consent from Grant.[9] Lew Wallace, however, appears to have been a man much taken with himself. The old adage about someone with a little authority would seem to apply to Wallace, for, as he traveled, his scheme became more and more elaborate. In a subsequent letter written to his wife, it was quite apparent that the dreams of grandeur from Wallace's youth had not faded but grown stronger as he aged.

Brigadier General James E. Slaughter, Commander of the Western Sub-District of Texas and Colonel John Salmon (Rip) Ford were the men Wallace would need to speak with and convince that what his idea was viable. Both Federal and Confederate divisions were stationed along Brazos Santiago and Fort Brown respectively in March of 1865 when Wallace reached Point Isabel, Texas. It was obvious to the officers and troops on both sides that the war was

near an end. As a result of that knowledge, there existed, for the most part, an unspoken ceasefire, with only occasional skirmishes. Fighting between the Northern and Southern troops along the Rio Grande River in South Texas had, for the most part, halted.

According to Wallace's postwar autobiography, he was direct in speaking to both men about his intentions, and they were more than willing to listen to whatever Wallace was proposing.Neither Ford nor Slaughter ever stated what they thought Wallace had in mind when he asked for the meeting at Point Isabel, Texas, but Rip Ford wrote that Federal General Lew Wallace had sent word to General Slaughter that he would like to meet with him. Ford also wrote that Wallace spoke of the uselessness of fighting on the Rio Grande and that no amount of fighting would alter the outcome of the war. Ford then stated that "nothing of a formal nature"[10] was decided at the meeting, which occurred on the eleventh of March.

Originally, the meeting between Slaughter, Ford and Wallace was set for March ninth, at Point Isabel. However, a blue norther came up suddenly, bringing howling winds and cold rains. The meeting was postponed for two days until the eleventh of March, when Wallace could safely make the crossing from Brazos Island. General Slaughter and Colonel Ford, along with Slaughter's staff, attended the meeting. General Wallace brought, not only his staff, but cooks, food and drink for everyone in attendance, at a cost of some six hundred dollars[11] plus tents for everyone's sleeping comfort. The meeting lasted for two days, during which Lew Wallace shared sleeping quarters with James Slaughter. Later Wallace's humor could be seen in the letter he wrote to his wife describing the sleeping arrangements. He mused about the sleeping accommodations and how they might be perceived by the citizens of the United States should they learn he had shared quarters with the enemy.[12]

Conversations appear to have gone well. Ford and Slaughter acknowledged the probable outcome of the war. Ford wrote, "We admitted the fact, but declined to entertain those propositions for want of authority from the Confederate government."[13] Wallace put forth his ideas on assisting Benito Juárez, and, according to Wallace, both Slaughter and Ford were open to the suggestion. Wallace felt that General Slaughter, for certain, agreed with him that a willingness to join Juárez in Mexico would help them to be brought honorably back into the Union.[14] Wallace understood that while Slaughter and Ford might very possibly be interested in what he proposed, they had no authority to act on their own stead. Quite frankly, neither did Wallace. However, he seems to have overlooked that small point. When he wrote again to his wife, Wallace told her, "What I aim at now is nothing less than bringing Texas, Arkansas and Louisiana voluntarily back into the Union."[15] This of course, was the entire Trans-Mississippi Confederacy.

Colonel Ford was not certain it could be accomplished because rumors

had it that General Kirby Smith, the Commander of Confederate forces in the Trans-Mississippi Confederacy, was secretly negotiating with Maximilian. Regardless, Ford and Slaughter agreed to send General Wallace's proposal to their superior, Major General John G. Walker, Rebel Commander of the State of Texas.[16] Walker, who was at the time in Houston, Texas, presumably would then inform his superior, General Kirby Smith, who was in Shreveport, La. Wallace reported only to Grant. In his correspondence with Grant, Wallace's feelings of self-importance were obvious. He related the outcome of the meeting with Slaughter and Ford at Point Isabel and then informed Grant that secrecy was necessary to protect the parties and because of this need for caution he had not made the Union leader on Brazos Island aware of what had transpired at the meeting.

Major General John Walker did not respond to Wallace's plan as he expected and hoped. Walker was an "officer of the last ditch school."[17] Rip Ford wrote that when General Walker read his dispatch he sent a sharp reprimand to Slaughter and himself and then published Ford's letter in the Houston newspaper. Ford later wrote that Walker made some remarks "of rather unpleasant nature concerning them but he did not care for he felt the reports were not of a character to cause a Southern man displeasure."[18] Although the talks fell through at that point, it was still agreed upon by Wallace, Ford and Slaughter that there would be a continued truce, though it be an unofficial truce, along the Rio Grande River in South Texas as General Robert E. Lee suffered through the agony of surrender in Virginia.

Because General Wallace failed to tell the Federal officer of the Brazos Santiago troops about the truce, more bloodshed was inevitable. On the twelfth of May, a report came in to Colonel Ford that Yankees had advanced and that there was fighting below San Martin Ranch, which was situated near Boca Chica beach. Ford sent word to hold the ground if possible and he would come to the regiment's aid as soon as men could be assembled at Fort Brown. Rip Ford's men were seasoned and capable and disciplined, even though by many accounts they were men who were too young or too old and very rough around the edges. Many of these men had served with him for years in "Indian campaigns...they knew his bravery and his unsleeping vigilance. He had fought more than a score of battles and never failed to achieve a decided victory."[19] During the Mexican War John Salmon Ford served as Adjutant to John Coffee Hays' Texas Rangers. As Adjutant it was his responsibility to maintain the rolls of the troops. It became his custom to write beside the names of deceased Rangers, "May his Soul Rest in Peace"[20] which he ultimately abbreviated as R.I.P. thus, the nickname, Rip. Ford's rank of Lieutenant Colonel was from his days as a Texas Ranger, not the Confederate army. In fact he had refused an official rank from the Confederacy. Ford preferred to lead his men with a rank that came from "hard-won respect,"[21]

not a title bestowed upon him. To a man, his troops adored him and would have followed him anywhere. The problem now, however, was that Ford had given many of his men furlough. The War was winding down, plus there was the unofficial truce between Wallace, Slaughter, and Ford. The result, of course, was a shortage of troops.

According to Ford, he received word of the battle occurring near San Martin Ranch late in the day. He and Slaughter had supper together in Ford's quarters and discussed the situation. Ford asked Slaughter what his intentions were. General Slaughter said he planned to retreat. Furious, Colonel Ford roared at him, "You can retreat and go to hell if you wish! These are my men and I am going to fight!"[22] He also told Slaughter, "I have held this place against heavy odds. If you lose it without a fight, the people of the Confederacy will hold you accountable for a base neglect of duty."[23] Ultimately Slaughter agreed to meet Ford the next morning at the Fort Brown parade grounds and ride with him into battle. The following morning, Slaughter didn't appear at the agreed-upon time. By his own words, Ford waited for Slaughter on the parade grounds until 11:00 a.m. Ultimately, Ford gave the order and led the few available troops toward the ongoing battle. When Ford saw the Federal lines fanned out below San Martin or Palmito Ranch, he wrote, "This may be the last fight of the war, and I am going to be whipped."[24] Ford took a deep breath and rallied his troops by telling them that they had never lost a battle and they would not lose this one!

The second battle of Palmito Ranch, which occurred over a month after General Robert E. Lee's surrendered to General Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox, Virginia, was a staggering albeit belated victory for the Confederates. When the smoke cleared Yankees lay dead all over the battlefield, which stretched a distance of some seven miles to Boca Chica beach. Others floated face down in the Rio Grande River where they died trying to outrun the charging mounted troops. Over two-thirds of the Federal troops were dead or captured. When the battle was over, Ford released all of the Union soldiers who had been taken prisoners, "Yankees from New York, Negro soldiers and Southern renegades."[25] No Confederate soldiers were killed at the second battle of Palmito Ranch. At day's end, General Slaughter, who stated that he had remained behind at Fort Brown to "watch the Mexicans,"[26] now came charging up demanding that Ford continue to charge the enemy. Colonel Ford replied that he would "not send his men to Brazos Island in the dark."[27] According to Fehrenbach's *Lone Star*, Slaughter in an absolute fit of rage then rode wrathfully toward Boca Chica beach, where he spurred his horse into the ocean's surf firing his pistol at the Yankees, who were attempting to reach the safety of Brazos Island in the fading daylight. Despite Slaughter's insistence to make camp for the night at Palmito Ranch, Ford refused. Instead, he moved his men some eight miles above Palmito Ranch, well away from Brazos Island

and the enemy. He told Slaughter that he was not willing to "give them a chance to 'gobble' me up before daylight."[28] Ford would not subject his men or prisoners, had he detained any, to unnecessary danger.

The second battle of Palmito Ranch was not only the Union's last unsuccessful attempt to seize control of Fort Brown, it was the last battle of the War Between the States. Rip Ford wrote in his account of the battle, "We must return to the Almighty for this victory, though small it may be, gained against great odds and over a veteran foe. This was the last land fight in the war."[29] Several days following the battle of Palmito Ranch, Ford learned of Lee's surrender at Appomattox. After cursing, he started laughing.[30] Thirteen days after the victory of Palmito Ranch, Colonel Ford gathered his troops and disbanded his men rather than surrender. In fact, the Texas Rebels never officially surrendered.

General Lew Wallace had come to Texas on a mission. The stated mission was inspection of the troops. Secretly, Wallace had planned to bring about the end of the War in Texas, perhaps even the entire Trans-Mississippi Confederacy. It was his plan to convince Confederate leaders to surrender and join Benito Juárez in his fight to oust the French Imperial government in Mexico. Wallace understood that such a feat would result in the military fame he greatly coveted. Many men, Confederates and Unionists, including Ford, Slaughter, and even Wallace, would ultimately join Juárez in his fight, but it would occur after the war and would bring no military recognition for Wallace. By refusing to inform the Federal Commander on Brazos Island about the unofficial truce agreed upon by Slaughter, Ford, and himself, Wallace not only failed in his mission, he inadvertently set the stage for the second battle of Palmito Ranch. Yet, although this was a battle that was unnecessary in the outcome of the Civil War, it was a much-needed triumph for the morale of the South.

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Endnotes

1 Jeffrey Wm. Hunt, *The Last Battle of the Civil War* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), p. 25.

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3 *Ibid,* p. 30.

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5 Walter Prescott Webb, *The Great Frontier* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Reprint, 1952), p. 351.

6 Jeffrey William Hunt, *The Last Battle of the Civil War* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), p. 27

7 Sondra Shands, "Cotton and its Impact on Brownsville and the Rio Grande Valley", in Milo Kearney (ed.), *Still More Studies in Brownsville History* (Brownsville: The University of Texas at Brownsville, 1991), p.266.

8 Jeffrey William Hunt, *The Last Battle of the Civil War*, p. 28.

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10 John Salmon Ford, *Rip Ford's Texas*, edited by Stephen B. Oates (Austin University of Texas Press, 1963), p. 389.

11 T. R. Fehrenbach, *Lone Star* (New York: Collier Books, 1968), p. 388.

12 Jeffrey Wm Hunt, *The Last Battle of the Civil War* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), p. 32.

13 John Salmon Ford, *Rip Ford's Texas*, p. 388.

14 Jeffrey William. Hunt, *The Last Battle of the Civil War*, p. 33.

15 *Ibid.*, p. 33.

16 *Ibid.,* p. 34.

17 T. R. Fehrenbach, *Lone Star*, p. 388.

18 John Salmon Ford, *Rip Ford's Texas*, p. 389.

19 Trudeau, as quoted by Phillip Thomas Tucker, *The Final Fury* (Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania: Stackpole Books, 2001), p. 59.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 18

21 *Ibid.*, p. 55

22 John Salmon Ford, *Rip Ford's Texas* p. 389.

23 *Ibid.*, p. 390

24 *Ibid.*, p. 390

25 *Ibid.,* p. *391*

26 T. R. Fehrenbach, *Lone Star*, p. 390.

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28 John Salmon Ford, *Rip Ford's Texas*, p. 392.

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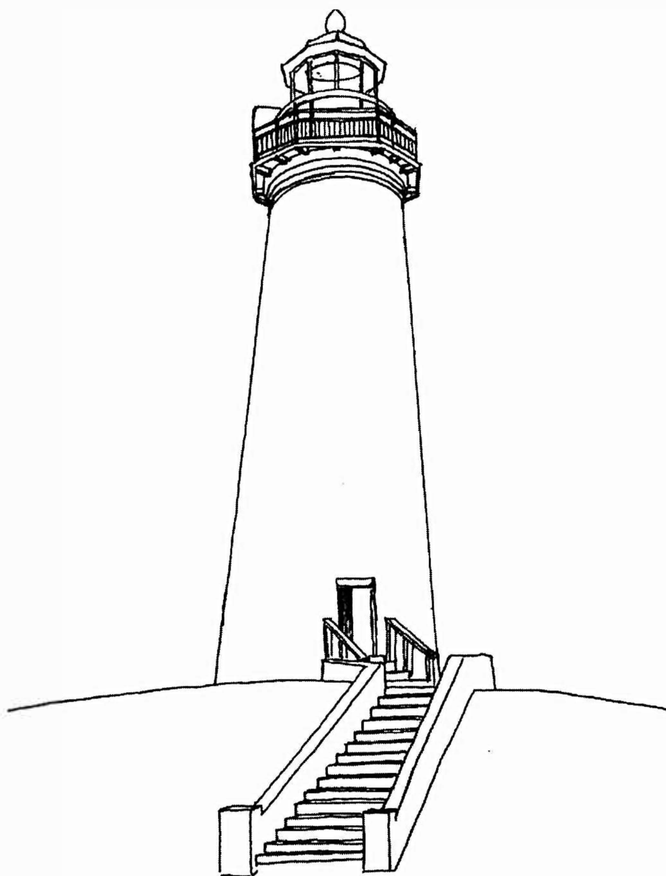

The Spirit of Port Isabel

The Legacy of the Texas Rangers on the Texas-Mexico Border in Light of the Emergence of the Texas Minutemen

by

Joseph E. Chance and Milo Kearney

Each generation reevaluates the past in terms of its own experience, and events of the year 2005 are calling for a fresh look at the controversy over the history of the Texas Rangers along the Mexican border in the light of the emergence of the Minutemen and the opposition to them of the Brown Berets. This development has emerged just as the historical accounts of the Texas Rangers and their opponents were settling into a musty discussion of past wrongs. Now, however, issues that seemed to have been put behind us have metamorphosed into open, passionate issues once more.

The historiography of the Texas Rangers has been strongly dichotomized between their admirers and their detractors. Several years ago, Dr. Chance was invited to make a presentation for the library at Victoria, Texas, as part of a yearly program of speakers on the Texas Rangers. He was the last speaker in the series, following paeans of praise heaped upon those god-like chevaliers who had tamed the Texas frontier, fighting for truth, justice, and the Texas way. Much of the praise was deserved. The Rangers are a great law enforcement agency. Yet these lawmen are not without a dark chapter in their history. In South Texas below the Nueces River, the *Rinches*, as they are known in Hispanic tradition, are despised as murderers and terrorists, especially for their actions during the first two decades of the twentieth century, a period remembered as the era of the bandit wars.[1] Various books and a documentary film entitled "Border Bandits" have delved into this complex issue.[2]

Despite the tendency for accounts to support either the Rangers or their foes, the current uproar reminds us that there were important motivations on both sides. The modern Minutemen were formed in Tombstone, Arizona, by a group of citizens concerned for the lack of effective American control of illegal immigration across the Mexican border. The intent of these volunteers is to passively keep an eye on the border region to report to government agencies sighted attempts at illegal border crossings. The first chapter of the Minutemen Civil Defense Corps to form in Texas (as an arm of the Arizona group[3]) evolved out of the Sarco Concerned Citizens, a group of residents of Sarco (a small town near Goliad in Goliad County) who met to discuss local issues.[4] Two other groups, the Texas Minutemen and U. S. Border Watch, were planning to restrict their monitoring projects to that part of the Texas-Mexico border between El Paso and Fort Hancock.[5] Five additional

Minuteman chapers subsequently sprang up in Texas, in El Paso, Houston, Dallas, Midland-Odessa, and Abilene.[6] In April of 2005, Minutemen Civil Defense Corps of Texas decided that they would patrol the South Texas border in operation "Secure Our Border," starting in October 2005. They hoped to rally 7,000 volunteers for the effort. Navy Seals and ex-Army Rangers began reconnaissance duty along the border at Brownsville already that same month of April. They marked maps to show the routes of heavy illegal crossings. They applied for training by Customs and Border Protection, but the Department of Homeland Security denied the request.[7] The plan was for holding a border operation every October and April. The Arizona-based Minuteman Civil Defense Corps planned to come to McAllen and Pharr and possibly Brownsville,[8] while the Texas Minutemen said they might first come to Brownsville in April 2006.[9]

The Minutemen claimed to be motivated by the new fear of catastrophic terrorism from Moslem extremists, some of whom were detected trying to cross the porous Mexican border. There is also outrage at the lack of security for rural border residents, whose property was constantly crossed by illegal immigrants, ruining their security and serenity, as well as killing animals and trashing property.[10] Immigrants were accused of tearing down fences and letting animals out, stealing vehicles, and breaking into barns and homes.[11] A resulting strain on the American prison and educational systems was also quoted, as well as a purported concern for the abuse and death of the immigrants at the hands of the *coyote* smuggling guides.[12] Another concern is the vast numbers of illegal workers crossing into the United States and flooding the manual labor job market, presumably taking jobs from Americans and depressing wages (a charge denied by some). The Minutemen direct anger at the United States government for allowing an open-door policy and failing to protect national interests by controlling immigration.[13] Thus, just as in the case of the Texas Rangers of the 1850 to 1920 era, the Minutemen have been praised (including on Lou Dobbs' television Program on CNN) for defending American interests.

The issues listed by the Minutemen deal with serious concerns to Americans in general. With Mexico having emerged as the main supplier of illegal drugs to the United States, Brownsville and McAllen have become staging areas for the drug traffickers. Over thirty industry-standard tunnels have been uncovered dug below the border for smuggling use. Members of the U.S. Congress have voiced concern that terrorists might use the drug smuggling network. In 2004, 3,000 illegal migrants were caught originating from from such terrorist-linked countries as Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Somalia.[14] Furthermore, Dr. Mary des Vignes-Kendrick, deputy director of the Center for Biosecurity and Public Health Preparedness of the University of Texas School of Public Health in Houston has expressed concern that the

border could be the target of bioterrorism.[15]

On the other hand, while the Minutemen are not law enforcement personnel, their activities have been perceived as Ranger-like efforts intended to intimidate Hispanics. Just like the Texas Rangers, the Minutemen have been accused of racist motives. In fact, in June 2005, Bill Parmley resigned as president of the Goliad chapter of the Texas Minutemen in protest against what he saw as racist tendencies in his organization (along with its "lack of firm bureaucratic structure"). For example, Parmley felt that the group was undermining Goliad County's sheriff Robert de la Garza because of his being a Hispanic, despite de la Garza's going out of his way to support the Minutemen.[16] In September, the Goliad chapter disbanded altogether.[17] In reaction to the accusation of racism, the Minutemen point to their plans to patrol the Canadian border as well, seeing illegal immigration there as an equal threat to national security.[18] The new president of the Minutemen Civil Defense Corps in Texas, currently residing in Arizona, was a native Texan Hispanic – Al Garza.[19] In January 2006, Garza went on to become the national executive director of the Minuteman Civil Defense Corps, the number two position after President Chris Simcox.[20] Nonetheless, the charge of racism is all the more worrisome in light of the fact that traditional hate groups (including the Ku Klux Klan and the neo-Nazi National Alliance) have now focused hostility on America's growing Hispanic population. One former Klansman was indicted in Tennessee in June of 2005, charged with preparing pipe bombs to kill Hispanic immigrants.[21] Some Minutemen have carried guns and Confederate flags.[22] The Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), a non-profit civil rights organization, has claimed that the Texas Minutemen have been infiltrated by white suprematists and neo-Nazis, a claim denied by Al Garza for his group.[23]

The Minutemen were having an impact already in August of 2005 on inhibiting illegal workers in Houston from appearing at their usual pick-up corners.[24] In reaction, the American Civil Liberties Union started to train volunteers to monitor the Minutemen to ensure that no civil or human rights violations occur.[25] This training began in Brownsville on 19 September 2005.[26] By January of 2006, the Texas chapter of the Minutemen had organized groups to report on illegal immigrants and the employers who hire them in both Brownsville and McAllen. The membership was continuing to grow, and an operation was planned for early in the year.[27] Hidalgo County Democratic Party Chairman Juan Maldonado opposed the Minutemen's advent in the region, accusing them of "hate, fear, and ignorance." He expressed concern for the human rights of the vulnerable and desperate border-crossers, and signed a petition denouncing the Minutemen and calling for additional funds to hire more Border Patrol agents.[28] Professor Antonio Zavaleta, Vice President of External Affairs at the University of Texas at Brownsville and

Texas Southmost College, warned that the Minutemen were a threat to the long-standing congenial symbiosis between Matamoros and Brownsville.[29]

A potentially more explosive reaction came from the Brown Berets, the most vociferous opponents of the Minutemen. The Brown Berets were equally controversial, just as were the erstwhile enemies of the Texas Rangers (who were labeled alternately as protectors of the weak and as bandits). Born in the late 1960s from the Chicano Liberation Movement, the Brown Berets have, like Juan Cortina and other border resistance fighters before them, crossed over into the area of unlawful behavior, not only in their one-time plan to occupy California's Catalina Island in the name of Mexico, but also in their newly stated aim to defend illegal immigration in defiance of American immigration laws. The clash of these issues once again, as in the case of the Texas Rangers, is threatening to burst into violence. Pablo Delgado, a Brown Beret leader, at a press conference held at Hidalgo County Democratic Party headquarters, warned the Minutemen to think twice before coming to the Rio Grande Valley. The Brown Berets stated their intention to oppose the Minutemen with physical force if necessary.[30]

The issue was heated up still more by the presentation in the national Congress of a bill to arm civilian militias to patrol the U.S.-Mexican border.[31] The South Texas Civil Rights Project discussed the issue, and its director and attorney, Abner Burnett, warned South Texas ranchers that they could lose their ranches in law suits should a Minuteman allowed onto their property kill or injure an illegal. Burnett admitted that he "felt the same way about the Minutemen as I did about the lamebrains who ganged up on the unfortunates when I was in high school."[32] Also, in September of 2005 a group from Brownsville's San Felipe de Jesús Catholic Church, calling itself Social Justice and Peace Pastoral, launched a "white ribbon" campaign of prayer and a call for dialogue in opposition to the Minutemen.[33] The Cameron County Commissioners on 13 September 2005 passed a resolution opposing the Minutemen. In a heated exchange, Brownsville resident James Robinson spoke of the illegal Mexican workers as "people who will work for anything and have no pride in what they do," whereupon Precinct 4 Commissioner Edna Tamayo commented that such a statement hurt "because you are talking about my ancestors."[34] The Brownsville City Commission also adopted a resolution that the Minutemen are not welcome.[35] Yet the Minutemen Civil Defense Corps of Texas president, Al Garza, an ex-Marine, asserted that such measures would not stop his group from planning to come to Brownsville on 1 October in operation "Secure our Border." Garza stated that, "We have the Constitutional right to assemble, they are breaking the law and committing a federal offense."[36] On 1 October 2005, the group met in Falfurrias, Texas. Nonetheless, the plans to come to the Rio Grande Valley were on hold, waiting for the arrival of additional vounteers.[37]

With these current issues fresh in mind, let us now review the case of the earlier Texas Rangers. In doing so, this article will focus on the 1900-1920 period and on the river counties of Cameron, Hidalgo, and Starr. This was a region of large, isolated ranches, the major centers of population being the small river villages of Brownsville and Rio Grande City. Only the shallow Rio Grande River separated these three Texas counties of Cameron, Hidalgo, and Starr from Mexico, and the political turbulence in northern Mexico spilled over into them in the late nineteenth century.

Numerous raids from Mexico, many thought to have been led by Juan "Cheno" Cortina, had rustled cattle and robbed the ranches. A company of Texas Rangers under Captain Leander McNelly had been dispatched from Austin to the lower Rio Grande Valley in 1875 to calm this situation. George Durham documented the exploits of McNelly's Rangers in the Valley in his book *Taming the Nueces Strip*. McNelly's philosophy of dealing with rustlers was simple. He not only caught the criminals, he judged them and executed them as well. His drastic actions reflected his frustration with the chaotic situation. Few jails existed, and those that did leaked prisoners like a sieve. Prisoners brought before politically-dominated courts could expect to be tried by a jury of friends and relatives and sentenced with a pre-assumption of innocence. McNelly's executioner was Jesus "Casoose" Sandoval, a psychopath who dispatched prisoners in brutal fashion described by Durham.

> By the time we got there, each bandit had been pulled loose from his head. Bound tight, each had been lashed to a tree by the neck; then Casoose had looped the feet with his rawhide lariat and slapped his horse. That was it ... each bandit had been pulled loose from his head.[38]

McNelly was famous for not taking prisoners, and his brutality did much to calm the Rio area. Yet his unlawful dealings with the citizens had set the tone for other Ranger activities to come later in the early twentieth century.

While in South Texas, McNelly and his men visited the King Ranch, and quickly struck up a friendship with Captain Richard King that would build into a strong bond between the King Ranch and the Texas Rangers that has continued to present. The State of Texas, emerging from the tyrannical military rule of Reconstruction, was bankrupt. The State required the McNelly Rangers to furnish both their own firearms and mounts, and the resulting mixture of derelict rifles and muskets was sadly matched by the age of their hollow-hoofed, swayback mounts. In Corpus Christi, pioneer merchant Sol Lichtenstein furnished the McNelly men with fifty-caliber single shot Sharps carbines, even upon McNelly's tentative announcement that "the carpetbaggers didn't leave much money in Austin," suggesting that repayment from Austin would be slow. Yet Lichtenstein agreed to accept McNelly's requisition, and the Rangers were uniformly armed with the same standard field piece.[39]

Then Captain King outdid the generosity of the Corpus Christi merchant by furnishing the Rangers with remounts from his *remuda* of prized horses.[40] Later, according to W. W. Sterling, Captain King paid to re-arm the Rangers with Model 1873, 44-40 caliber Winchesters, "the gun that won the West," a repeating rifle that greatly increased Ranger fire power.[41] In later days, this bond of friendship came to be misinterpreted by some, who referred to the Rangers simply as "Kineños," who were sent to South Texas only to look out for the interest of the King Ranch and the other large ranches of this area.[42]

The Ranger tour of duty in the Valley during the first two decades of the twentieth century has been poorly documented by historians. Highly partisan Ranger accounts, such as those furnished by the bombastic and egoistic Captain Bill McDonald,[43] the loquacious Captain William Warren Sterling, or that famous Ranger academic apologist, Walter Prescott Webb,[44] have either colored or damned by omission Ranger actions in the Valley. In the second camp of Ranger historians reside many current historians who tend to issue scathing blasts against Ranger deeds in the Valley during this era. Many of the very acts of Ranger violence that have been criticized, however, were indeed legally justified and often averted more bloodshed.[45] So, between the two camps of Ranger historians, where does truth lie? Seemingly, an objective coverage of this important subject is yet to be written.

Why is the subject of Ranger violence in the Valley during this era important to Texans? A great many Valley Hispanics can recite with bitterness some act of murder, violence or injustice committed against a family member by the hated "*Rinches*", a generic term used to denote any law enforcement officer, member of a posse, or vigilante.[46] Valley *Tejanos* also point to the written history of this region of the state as "a bunch of Anglo lies." The copy of Webb's book *The Story of the Texas Rangers* that Dr. Chance obtained from the library has written across the cover page the word, "fascist" inscribed by some previous patron, and has extensive passages that cannot be repeated here. Most who suffered through the turbulent times of the Bandit Wars who could speak with authority on the subject have gone on to meet their rewards, and their descendents often paint a confused picture of the circumstances of that time which is often as partisan for their side of the story as the McDonald/Sterling/Webb accounts. The truth will serve both sides well and allow Texans to attempt to make peace with the violent Valley history of that era.

Let us attempt to examine objectively several Ranger acts of violence as viewed from these two equally partisan camps to illustrate the spin on Ranger history that exists in the current literature. The violence in dealing with Valleyites set by Capt. McNelly was continued by those Rangers who followed in his footsteps. Capt. John A Brooks' Ranger Company was stationed in Brownsville in 1906 when a series of killings by Ranger Anderson Yancey "A. Y." Baker spurred a riot against the Rangers in that city.

According to Adjutant General Sterling, from the pages of his book, *Trials and Trails of a Texas Ranger*, Baker was on patrol on the El Sauz Ranch, north of Brownsville, when he came upon Ramon de la Cerda branding a stolen calf. An exchange of gunfire occurred: de la Cerda's bullet struck Baker's horse while Baker's fire killed de la Cerda. According to Sterling, the inquest over Ramon Cerda's body was held by Justice of the Peace Esteben García Osuna, with no other statement as to the findings.[47]

But there is other evidence to the contrary. Mr. Carlos Gavito, of Los Fresnos, Texas, in a telephone conversation with Dr. Chance reported that his grandfather, Valentín Gavito, who served as Justice of the Peace from 1900-1919, performed the inquest. He reported that the body of Ramon de la Cerda had evidence of being dragged through the thorny brush and cactus that abounded at El Sauz, and had been emasculated. Alfredo de la Cerda, Ramon's younger brother, thirsted for revenge against Baker for the death of his brother. He pledged to kill Baker himself or pay a reward to anyone who would do the job. Less than a month later, Ramon's brother, "…Alfredo de la Cerda was shot and killed by A. Y. Baker," according to both Webb and Sterling.[48] What Sterling and Webb failed to mention was the manner of Alfredo's death. Alfredo was seated in the Fernandez Store, at the corner of 13th and Elizabeth Streets in Brownsville, trying on a pair of gloves, when "Baker came in the store and shot him in the back." A mob of citizens quickly formed to lynch Baker, who ran into Fort Brown for Federal sanctuary to protect himself from the mob of angry Brownsville citizens that had formed to even the score.[49] This is not quite the image of a Texas Ranger that has been created in the mind of the public. Webb dismissed the de la Cerda killings in a short paragraph, not even mentioning the assassination of Alfredo de la Cerda

Yet acts of Ranger violence against the people of the lower Rio Grande Valley would greatly increase due to the turmoil then brewing in northern Mexico. The violence of the Mexican Revolution of 1910 began to spill over the north bank of the Rio Grande by 1911. *Maderista* raiding parties invaded the U.S. in search of money, food and arms to supply their army. While the U.S./Mexico border had always been an unsettled and violent environment, the frequency and magnitude of Mexican incursions into the lower Rio Grande Valley became a major problem. After repeated requests for Federal protection, Texas Governor Oscar B. Colquitt met with President Taft in September 1911 to design a plan for border protection. It was decided that with the help of federal funds the Texas Ranger force would be expanded. For public consumption, Colquitt stated the official position of the State: "If there should be any attempt to renew depredations on Texas soil or bullets are fired into Texas territory by the Mexicans, I will promptly send the Rangers to give protection to our citizens, and these Rangers will shoot to kill." Thus

Rangers were ordered by their chief in Austin to "shoot to kill," which came to be interpreted as a mandate on how to deal with the Valley population.[50]

The call for more Rangers resulted in a flood of applicants, characterized by Brownsville attorney R. B. Craeger as "young men, hot blooded young fellows without much education…not the type you want to entrust lives and property unless you have some restraint." Another Valley resident noted that, "We can't get along without Rangers but we want character with it."[51] Among those responding to the call for Rangers was one William Warren Sterling, a college student fresh from Texas A & M Univerity, of whom more will be said later.

By 1915, the lower Rio Grande Valley had become a battlefield, with more than forty-one incidents documented by Frank Cushman Pierce that resulted in the death of U.S. citizens, rustled cattle, and the wholesale destruction of property.[52] To respond to this stepped-up violence, Gov. James Ferguson, without funds to finance proper border protection, began issuing and selling Ranger commissions to his political friends to form a self-styled "Special Force" of Rangers. This law enforcement group, with all the authority of any Texas Ranger, had ranks filled with men ignorant of the laws of Texas, with no law enforcement experience, and who were unaware of the language and customs of the Hispanic population they were sent to protect. Many of these men were by-and-large mercenaries and gunslingers, often more lawless than the Mexican bandits.[53] The resulting blood bath caused one observer to state that, "It was the Special Rangers who were the real trouble."[54]

One of these Ranger companies was commanded by Ranger Captain Henry L. Ransom who had been appointed by Gov. Ferguson. He had served as chief of police in Houston, and in this capacity had killed a noted criminal lawyer of that city. During the Philippine Insurrection, Ransom served in the 33rd Regiment of Volunteers, and liked to related stories around the campfire in the evenings about the number of Filipinos summarily executed by this U.S. force. Capt. Ransom held the belief hat he had been sent to the Border as an instrument of justice---"The Governor sent me down here to stop this trouble, and I am going to carry out his order. There is only one way to do it. President Díaz proved that in Mexico---That's what I did to that lawyer in Houston."[55]

Several of the actions of the Ransom Rangers were documented by William Warren Sterling, a member of Ransom's Ranger company, in his exciting autobiography, *Trials and Trails of a Texas Ranger*. Sterling documented the Mexican raid on the McAllen Ranch in northern Hidalgo County on 24 September 1915. The young Ranger transported Ransom and his men to the McAllen Ranch in his 1915 Dodge, one of the first motorcars owned in the Valley. The Rangers arrived too late to participate in the battle, but James B. McAllen had successfully defended himself, killing one raider and wounding three others. According to Sterling, "Two died a few days later."[56] In a little

book published by Kirby F. Warnock, *Texas Cowboy*, he recounted the oral memoirs of his grandfather, Roland A. Warnock, living in the Valley during the days of the bandit troubles. Warnock wrote that the Ransom Rangers had tracked down the wounded raiders, "...by their bloody rags and horse tracks. Every man they found they killed."[57]

The Ransom Rangers returned to Guadalupe Ranch, owned by Mr. Sam Lane, and were resting on the front gallery of his ranch house when two riders passed the house: Jesus Bazan and Antonio Longoria. Captain Ransom recognized Longoria as a man who had been identified on a list as a bandit sympathizer and he confided to Lane that he and his rangers were going to kill Longoria. Lane pleaded with Ransom not to kill Bazan, his old friend and neighbor. Ransom agreed to spare Bazan, and shortly thereafter the Rangers crowded into their cars, one driven by Sterling, and overtook the two men on horseback. The riders moved off the road to let the automobiles pass and as they did, the Rangers opened fire, killing both Bazan and Longoria. Rangers warned the local population that any attempt by them to bury the bodies of the slain men would result in their death. The bodies were to be left where they fell as warning to anyone who might think about aiding any raider from Mexico. Ignoring Ranger threats the bodies were buried two days later by ranch hands, on September 1915.

According to Warnock:

> What had happened was the Rangers had found some bloody rags at their place and they killed them for lying to them. These Mexicans were afraid that if they told the Rangers anything, the bandits would have killed them, but if they hadn't helped the bandits, then the bandits would have killed them.[58]

Adjutant General Sterling failed to mention these murders in his book, as well as another incident in his exciting life story. He and his brother, Ed Sterling, shot Roland Warnock's father to death on the streets of Mission on 2 October 1915, probably while trying to serve an arrest warrant, in their capacity as "Special Rangers". Earlier there had been considerable bad blood between the elder Warnock and the Sterling family, and the murder was felt by some to be an act of revenge. According to Roland Warnock, his unarmed father was shot nine times in the back. The Sterlings were arrested and charged with murder. During the ensuing trial, the Sterlings testified that they thought that Frank Warnock was pulling a gun from beneath his shirt, but no gun was ever found. Both the defendents were found not guilty by the jury.[59]

How hypocritical it was that Sterling would later disparage Ransom by writing that, "After I became adjutant general, I would never enlist a man (Ransom) of this background."[60] Warnock further recounted that Sterling had murdered an "innocent Mexican" whose only crime was showing an interest in Sterling's sister.[61]

But General Sterling was not the only writer to omit important details of this period of Texas History. The distinguished historian Walter Prescott Webb, an admitted Ranger partisan, had to record this apology for the Rangers of 1910-1920:

> Though there were still good men in the Ranger force, there is no doubt that it had deteriorated. The force had become political, because the captains were appointed by the governors, and each new governor appointed a new set of captains. It so happened that Texas had some bad governors in that period, one of who was impeached, and bad governors appointed bad men, as well as incompetent, as Rangers.[62]

The exact number of Hispanic citizens of our state murdered by the "Special Rangers" is unknown, but estimates vary wildly from 100 to 5,000 persons. The figure of 5,000 seems unlikely. The U.S. Census of 1910 lists the following population figures: Cameron County, 27,158, Hidalgo County, 13,728, Starr County, 13,151, for a valley total of 54,037. Using this figure and assuming that those persons murdered were men, about half of that population, a figure of 5,000 murders means that about 19% of the Valley men fell victim to murder, or about 1 male in 5. This figure would mean that if one classified the murder of citizens as a disease, then this malady would assume epidemic proportions. R. B. Craeger, a Brownsville attorney and politician , later testified that the Rangers "…had a black list of bad Mexicans: 200 of them were killed, but 90% of them were innocent…If you wanted a Ranger, you went to a saloon to find him; that was Ranger headquarters in Brownsville."[63] Many of the murders were committed to terrorize the local population; in one instance five Hispanic men were found murdered with "beer bottles stuffed into their mouths."[64] Frank C. Pierce, U.S. Consul to Matamoros, a resident of the valley during this time, set the number of murder victims at three hundred.

John R. Peavey, serving in the Valley that time as a deputy sheriff of Cameron County, wrote *Echoes from the Rio Grande*, a memoir of his life as a law enforcement officer on the Rio Grande during the first half of the twentieth century. He remarked that after the onset of Mexican raids into the Valley, "…resentment toward strange Mexicans reached a new high, and several were found shot to death. Some of them may or may not have been bandits. People were shooting first and not talking afterward."[65]

It is important to note that Rangers were not the only law enforcement agency to be guilty of crimes against Valley citizens. One Valley resident felt that the Rangers had not committed all these crimes against citizens, saying that, "…it was deputy sheriffs and sheriffs and river guards and the immigration agents and the Department of Justice…"[66] It is also possible that many of the murders blamed on the Rangers were committed to settle old grudges and feuds among the citizens. However, the Hispanic residents

along the Rio denominated all the law enforcement officers as "*Rinches*"--
-their name for the Rangers, responsible for the crimes, and even today this unflattering phrase can be heard: "*Pinche rinche, cara de chinche* ("Damned Ranger, face like a bedbug").[67]

However, by the actions of a courageous State Legislator from Brownsville, José Tomás (J. T.) Canales, legislative action was introduced to curb the Ranger excesses. Canales, an attorney and later a judge, was a pioneer in the fight for Hispanic civil rights, a founder of LULAC, and responsible for legal actions that brought an end to separate schooling for Hispanic youngsters. In introducing the bill on 12 January 1919 on the floor of the Texas House of Representatives to reorganize the Rangers, Canales stated that the Ranger force was "a shame and disgrace to my native state" that among the Ranger force were "men of desperate character, notoriously known as gunmen, their only qualification being that they can kill a man first and then investigate him afterward."[68]

Canales immediately found himself the focus of criticism and threats, not only from his colleagues, but from the Ranger force as well. As Canales walked down the streets of Brownsville shortly thereafter, he was approached by a large man wearing a big Stetson, a Texas Ranger by the name of Frank Hamer who would later become one of the most famous Rangers in the history of the state. Hamer berated Canales for his criticism of the Ranger force, and in the presence of a witness warned the diminutive legislator that he was "going to get hurt" if he continued his criticism of the Rangers. Approaching a local law enforcement officer to seek protection from Hamer, Canales was told by the Cameron County Sheriff to "...take a double-barreled shotgun and kill that man (Hamer)...No jury would ever convict you for that."[69] Canales rejected the suggestion, which no doubt would have resulted in his death at the hands of the seasoned Ranger gunman. One might also speculate on the possibility that Canales had been set up to attack Hamer so that the legislator could be killed with impunity.

J. T. Canales had created a storm of controversy in the halls of the Capitol by the introduction of his Ranger Reorganization bill. During the height of the rancorous debate that followed the introduction of the Ranger Reorganization bill, Canales warned his colleagues that, "I do not expect to live six months...if this bill is killed."[70] The Texas Legislature convened a joint committee to investigate the sensational charges leveled by Canales, and all of Texas followed the testimony eagerly in their daily newspapers. But not many people were willing to step forward and volunteer their testimony. John Peavy had noted that

> The county and state officers were very active when it came to hunting down a Mexican bandit gang but they talked little about it. Newspaper reporters had a hard time gathering information about what actually happened.[71]

However, Canales persevered in his efforts and soon had lined up an impressive collection of witnesses. The investigation lasted some two weeks and served to document atrocities committed against Hispanics on the border and named the guilty parties, among whom was Capt. H. L. Ransom, charged with killing prisoners. While Ransom's Ranger Company had killed other prisoners, one such incident was documented during the investigation. On 18 October 1915 a Mexican raiding party wrecked a locomotive north of Brownsville, killing several passengers. The Ransom Rangers rushed to the scene, capturing four Mexican prisoners. Cameron County Sheriff T. W. Vann testified to the joint investigating committee that Ransom and his Ranger Company took the prisoners "out in the woods and shot them."[72] John Peavy, who arrived on the scene of the locomotive wreck shortly after it occurred, offered more details on the executions in a book written in the later years of his life:

> Upon arriving we were told that several Mexicans living near the Tandy Ranch not far from the train wreck had been taken into custody and several of them had been hung. I walked over to the scene of the hangings. It was an ugly and grim sight...Be that as it may, in this case I was inclined to disagree with some others, that the hanged men helped to wreck the train. I had seen the tracks of the bandits where they had approached the scene of the wreck and then returned to Mexico by the same route. I could see no sign of tracks coming from the Tandy Ranch where the hanged men lived.[73]

The proceedings of the Ranger Investigation Committee are too lengthy to be covered in this paper, but suffice it to say, Canales was able to make his points to the legislators and citizens of Texas. The *Galveston News* reported that "He (Canales) proved the existence of a shocking and intolerable condition that demands correction."[74] The Reorganization bill, greatly amended, was signed into law by Governor Hobby on 19 March 1919. The law reduced the size of the Ranger force to four regular companies, each consisting of a captain, sergeant, and fifteen privates, supplemented by a quartermaster and a six-man headquarters company commanded by the senior captain. However, the right of the Governor to issue "Special Ranger" commissions was retained, allowing the ranks of the Rangers to remain infested by political appointees. Pay raises were granted to the Ranger force, but stricter requirements were imposed: mandatory weekly reports from each Ranger to his company commander to help check unauthorized activities, and Rangers were required to seek the cooperation of local authorities. But the heart of the Canales Ranger Bill was gutted by his colleagues in the Legislature. The Canales proposal would have placed each Ranger under bond to prevent an abuse of the authority granted by his commission from the state. The bonds posted would range between $15,000 for captains to $5,000 for privates. Persuasive

testimony against the requirement for a bond was offered by the famous Texas Ranger Captain John H. Rogers, who felt that the bonding requirement of the Canales bill would "destroy their efficiency."[75]

The reorganized Ranger force began to receive the training in fingerprints and ballistics that would propel them into the ranks of 20th century crime fighters. But the new Ranger force was still shackled by state politics. Rangers had no permanent tenure, often losing their positions with each change of the governor, who would appoint his partisans to Ranger positions and would fire those Rangers who were political enemies or who only wished to remain neutral in the election. The Rangers continued to be pawns to the political winds of the state which changed direction virtually every four years.

With the rise of the Fergusons, Jim and later his wife Miriam, to the Governor's office, many incompetent persons were given or sold Ranger Commissions for political favors. Adjutant General Sterling, who was appointed to his rank by Gov. Ross Sterling (no kin) reported that his predecessor as captain, a Ferguson man, was an ex-bartender, whose principal experience in riding consisted in straddling beer kegs, and among the Rangers it was bantered that instead of six-shooters, the Ferguson Ranger appointees should be issued bung starters.[76] Professor Joseph Chance is able to add this personal family recollection:

> My father, serving as a Department of Public Safety patrolman during the 1930's was stationed in Hillsboro, Texas, in 1933, and was returning to his post with the family in the family automobile north of Georgetown, when a car ahead began to open up on the road signs that lined the road with a "tommy gun". Dad stopped in Salado and called ahead to the Sheriff of Bell County to report the car. At this time the highway ran through Belton, and the sheriff responded by erecting a barricade across the highway in the middle of that town. By the time my family reached Belton the barricade had been removed, and the Sheriff reported that he had to release the highway sign shooters, because they were "Ferguson Rangers having a little fun."

It was not until 1935 that a legislative bill, supported by Gov. James V. Allred, removed the Ranger force from gubernatorial patronage. This legislative act combined the Rangers with the Department of Public Safety, removing control of the Rangers from the Office of the Adjutant General, who in the opinion of ex-Adjutant General William Sterling, had "no conception of the duties of a Ranger."[77] Thus was created an authority to develop the modern Ranger that we proudly hail today, an experienced state lawman with knowledge of scientific crime detection.

However, the Ranger force still suffers along the border from the legacy of the injustices committed against Hispanic citizens during the turbulent time period from 1900-1920. This tumultuous era in the history of the lower Rio Grande Valley needs to be documented in an objective manner so that

Texans can confront a dark chapter in the history of our great state. Efforts are now in progress (2005) to close the border again the prevent the ingress of possible terrorists, a situation akin to the Bandit Wars of the first two decades of the twentieth century. We as citizens of the lower Rio Grande Valley need to be certain that the errors of this turbulent period of Valley history are not repeated.

The renewed focus on Texas Ranger activity in the Rio Grande Valley during the era of the Mexican Revolution has resulted in wider public attention and interest. The controversial film *Border Bandits* recently (June, 2005) aired on KMBH, the Valley public television station, accompanied by a disclaimer. The February 2005 issue of *Texas Monthly* includes the article "Fallen Heroes", by Don Graham, J. Frank Dobie Regents Professor in American and English Literature at the University of Texas at Austin. Graham offers an assessment of Walter Prescott Webb's classic *The Texas Rangers* from the standpoint of more recent analyses. A better understanding of the reasons for Mexican-American hostility towards the Texas Rangers in the Rio Grande Valley a century ago should provide perspective for similar reactions to the Minutemen. The ongoing call for securing the border against troubles spilling over from Mexico that led to the Texas Rangers' response a century ago also serves as a warning of how rapidly border problems can escalate into destructive ethnic conflict.

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The Brownsville Herald and the Changing Views of Local German Americans and Mexican Americans during World War I

by

Gerhard Grytz

> We have liked them. We also respect and admire them. Their genius, their intelligence, their statesmanship, their industry and thrift, their splendid achievements in all lines of industry and art, their bravery in war and the superior genius displayed in their military leaders, their substantial character in general — all have served to inspire admiration for the German in American hearts... *Brownsville Herald*, 6 February 1917, 2:1

> Our hearts have been deeply stirred by the horrible practices of the Hun... under the guise of so-called Kultur commit unspeakable crimes...beneath the iron heel of the ruthless Teuton murderer...quell the rush of the Teuton horde toward our own land... *Brownsville Herald*, 11 February 1918, 5

World War I marked a major turning point in the history of German immigrants in the United States and Texas. After the publication of the Zimmermann Telegram and America's subsequent declaration of war against the German Reich in April 1917, a wave of anti-German sentiment, legislation, and propaganda swept the country throwing it into hysterical "Germanaphobia." Everywhere, German American character and loyalty came under scrutiny. "Local patriot groups" investigated their activities and behavior, putting German Americans under tremendous psychological strain. In this atmosphere the pressures to assimilate, to Americanize, became overwhelming for many of them. World War I and its accompanying anti-German sentiments in the United States did not cause acculturation of German immigrants, but accelerated processes already in progress.[1]

World War I similarly marks an important turn in the way the nation as well as Texas started to reevaluate its approach to people of Mexican descent. After initial fears of disloyalty, the federal and state government together with the leading segments of Anglo society attempted the promotion of Hispanic involvement in mainstream national life for the first time. This participation in civil and military life during World War I gave many citizens of Mexican descent for the first time a sense of belonging in and acceptance into mainstream American society, which in the postwar period translated into concerted efforts to accomplish full integration and equality.[2]

On the publication of the Zimmermann Telegram in March 1917, fears of a Mexican-German alliance and a possible invasion from the south amplified

anti-German and anti-Mexican sentiment in the United States. In places like Arizona, for example, Mexicans and Mexican-Americans actually carried the brunt of these attacks. They were considered a threat to local safety, and ethnic discrimination against them reached new heights. At times, Mexicans and Mexican Americans were viewed as the tools of German labor leaders who would stir up unrest — allegations that were at times repeated even in Southern Texas directed at German-American and Mexican-American citizens.[3]

Thus the outgrowths of national anti-German sentiments spared neither the American Southwest nor Texas. Yet, open anti-German actions against individuals did occur only occasionally. Expressions of anti-German sentiment in Texas' news media remained generally national in scale. Overall, the press in Texas restated the general accusations of German Americans' lack of loyalty and questionable character.

The Lower Rio Grande Valley was a region in which the various effects of World War I on German Americans and Mexican Americans were particularly pronounced. Here, at the outbreak of the hostilities of the Great War, people of Mexican birth and Mexican descent constituted by far the largest segment of the population, while the German and German American presence was in the middle of a tremendous upswing. After the arrival of the railroad in the Valley, large numbers of German and German American farmers made their way into the growing Lower Valley from the Midwest in the search for new agricultural opportunities, and by the beginning of the war they represented the largest non-Hispanic immigrant group in the region.[4]

This study tries to uncover and analyze the views and treatment of German Americans, with an observant eye on the effects on Mexican Americans, in the unique ethnic environment of the Lower Rio Grande Valley as they were expressed in the leading newspaper of the region — *The Brownsville Herald.* As the largest newspaper of the area, the *Herald*, like other newspapers in various regions of Texas, held a near monopoly on the distribution of local, national, and international news in Brownsville and the Lower Rio Grande region. Through the selection of news that it reported and editorial statements, the *Herald* exercised significant influence over political and civic matters in the community. More than simply reflecting the community's views and opinions, it tried to create "public opinion," representing the views and attitudes of the region's Anglo leaders. After the publication of the Zimmermann Telegram, with its proposed German-Mexican alliance, and during the United States' involvement in the war itself, the paper's attitudes regarding the perception of German Americans and Mexican Americans underwent significant changes. Gradually, *The Brownsville Herald* became more anti-German in its reporting. Stereotypes held about German Americans repeatedly expressed by the paper did not change, but their connotation did. What once was interpreted as

positive German character traits turned into negatives. Toward the end of the war, Germans and German Americans were held responsible for most of the ills that had befallen the region. Generally, however, these attacks were launched in an abstract manner without mentioning particular German or German American individuals. On the other hand, citizens of Mexican descent and Mexican birth, after initial fears of disloyalty, were increasingly encouraged to engage in civic matters of the community and were welcomed into the mainstream life of the dominant Anglo minority.[5]

After war broke out in Europe during the summer of 1914, news of the progression and escalation of the war quickly filled the front of Texas's newspapers, including *The Brownsville Herald*, every single day. Texas' newspaper editors, however, were in a peculiar situation. Texas had a significant German and German American population and in the years leading up to America's involvement into the global conflict, papers like the *Dallas Morning News* and the *San Antonio Express* tried not to offend this influential and economically powerful segment of Texas' society. They would defend them against negative national newspaper reporting by proclaiming that "Germans and Austrians have full right to defend their existence." These newspapers' watchful eyes were much more concerned with the security of Texas' southern border, which they saw threatened by the disruptions of the Mexican revolutions. Soon though, the issues would be connected as German American tensions rose and a possible cooperation between Mexico and Germany, a suspicion that was held for a while, seemed imminent and threatening. At the beginning of 1917, reports that the Mexican press generally tended to be pro-German and anti-American increasingly perturbed Texas newspapers.[6]

The effects of the growing tension between the United States and Germany and the possible consequences for U.S.-Mexican relations were also felt and reported by *The Brownsville Herald*. In February 1917, a month before the publication of the Zimmermann telegram and two months before the United States' entry into the war, the *Herald* reported that "the first effect of the German situation on the Mexican border [led to the] recall of all orders for the departure of national guard [troops] in Brownsville...and San Benito."[7] Beyond keeping a watchful eye on the border, the *Herald* did not worry about a possible threat posed by Germans or German Americans. Quite the contrary, the *Herald* in a lengthy editorial expressed its admiration for Germans, their character, and their loyalty under the headline "AMERICANS ARE A UNIT":

> For the sake of the long years of friendship between the United States and Germany, as well as for the sake of the very large numbers of Americans of German descent, it is to be hoped most earnestly that the present crisis in the relations between these two nations may not

> eventuate in actual hostilities...for the good people of Germany. We have liked them. We also respect and admire them. Their genius, their intelligence, their statesmanship, their industry and thrift, their splendid achievements in all lines of industry and art, their bravery in war and the superior genius displayed in their military leaders, their substantial character in general — all have served to inspire admiration for the German in American hearts...As a rule, American citizens of German descent are worthy men and women, cleanly, intelligent, thrifty, industrious and law-abiding...As to the immense number of American citizens known as 'German-Americans,' we doubt not that they will be loyal to the flag.[8]

The following day, a report affirmed the "prediction of the Herald" that German immigrants in large numbers were making every effort to receive their naturalization papers, "proving their loyalty to the land of their adoption in the present crisis in the relationship between this country and Germany." While providing this optimistic outlook regarding German American loyalty, the newspapers warned, however, less than two weeks later, to keep a watchful eye on a possible "wholesale exodus of Germans from the United States to Mexico."[9]

March 1, 1917 was the date of the publication of the Zimmermann Telegram, the message of the German Foreign Minister Arthur Zimmermann to the German Ambassador to Mexico. This telegram proposed an alliance between Germany, Mexico, and Japan in the event of war between Germany and the United States, offering Mexico the return of its northern provinces lost during the Mexican American War. Predictably, news of this telegram not only further increased German-American tensions but also led to renewed fears along the Mexican-American border. Most southern and southwestern newspapers took the proposal laid out in the telegram not as a serious threat and calculated that the chances of a Mexican attack were remote. Nevertheless, Texas' newspapers especially interpreted the revelation of a proposed German-Mexican cooperation as a cautionary sign that required at least "preparedness" on the American side.[10] *The Brownsville Herald* likewise did not see any actual danger that the Mexican government would accept such a proposal, though it reiterated several times allegations that Germany and German agitators had been involved in Mexican internal and border affairs for years, instigating turmoil in an attempt to destabilize Mexican-American relations. Initially the paper questioned neither German American loyalties nor the Mexican government's peaceful intentions, holding only the German government responsible for the suggested alliance. In an editorial on March 2, 1917, the *Herald* stressed that the "brainy level-headed Mexican statesmen and generals" would not make the mistake of accepting this offer as they have their "own hands full just now reconstructing [their] fortunes, after the various revolutions...have laid the country almost in ruins." In this as well as

two subsequent editorials, however, *The Brownsville Herald* pointed out that it suspected that "Germany has been scheming for long to bring about trouble between Mexico and the United States," and that, at the least, German money had ended up in the pockets of Huerta, Carranza, Villa, and the supporters of the Plan de San Diego.[11] (This conspiracy intended to separate South Texas once again from the United States by stirring a Mexican-American revolt and murdering Anglo men. It never came to fruition due to the arrest of one of the conspirators in McAllen.[12])

Even though *The Brownsville Herald,* in its March editorials, also proclaimed that it doubted that any "Texan of German blood...could be induced to say '*Hoch der Kaiser*,' after this impudent offer of the Fatherland to turn this state over to a foreign country [and] knowing Texas, our German fellow Texans join in the general derision of Germany's offer," its tone in reporting about Germans and German Americans started to change slowly.[13] The story of German American Paul Scharfenburg, a private in the United States military, especially attracted the attention of the *Herald*, and for the first time questions regarding German American loyalty arose, even if ever so slightly. Scharfenburg, a member of L Company, First Minnesota Infantry, stationed in San Antonio, was found guilty by a military court in San Antonio of furnishing Germany with military information and was consequently dishonorably discharged and confined to hard labor for five years. After several articles reporting on the case during the beginning of March 1917, *The Brownsville Herald* on March 10 offered its opinion on the case, expressing that it judged the sentence handed to Scharfenburg for his crimes, which consisted primarily of saying "to hell with America," was too light, and then, for the first, time questioned the loyalty of German Americans by stating that "the case of Paul Scharfenburg illustrates more or less what may be expected from some, at least, of our hyphenated Americans, in the event of war with Germany."[14]

Throughout March 1917, the *Herald* reported several instances that could be interpreted as signs of German American disloyalty. On March 8, the paper furnished the headline "GERMANS IN NUMBERS GO TO MEXICO," and at the end of March it reported on the arrest of a German national, F.T. Bonnett, who carried a pistol and failed to produce appropriate papers as he tried to cross the border into Mexico. In the same edition, the paper on the other hand praised German Americans in Missouri for their display of loyalty to the United States under the headline "A Hyphenate's Good Sense," by reporting that they had replaced all German flags that decorated the facilities of their *Turnverein* with American flags. In this article, the paper explicitly tried to bring attention to a necessary and crucial distinction between "German people...and Prussian aggression and lawlessness." Yet despite making this distinction, an editorial published only a few days before America's declaration

of war on April 2 launched a minor, though general, attack on the nature of the German character. It read: "Zimmermann And His Intrigue — attempted intrigue with Mexico against the United States at a time when Germany was professing friendship for the United States is an illustration of these peculiarities of German character." Within a month following the publication of the Zimmermann telegram, *The Brownsville Herald's* view regarding the nature of German character had changed from complete admiration to thc expression of reservations about the nature of the German per se.[15]

While Texans everywhere were concerned over the growing tensions with Germany and the possibility of an upcoming military conflict, their major concern had rested for some years with the disturbances in Mexico and the Mexican-American border during the Mexican revolution and after the uncovering of the Plan de San Diego. Particularly, the Anglo elite in southern Texas, where Anglos represented only a minority of the population, had been concerned with a Mexican / Mexican American uprising. After the publication of the Zimmermann telegram, which bore a striking resemblance to the *Plan de San Diego*, these fears found renewed strength across Texas. However, while central and eastern Texas news media "kept up a steady drumbeat of stories linking Mexico with Germany," *The Brownsville Herald* did not join in this chorus.[16] In contrast, it rather tried to dismiss such a connection between its neighbor and the German Empire. The *Herald* reported under the headline "Activities of Germans Denied," that "Mexican officials [stated] there is no such thing as a military faction favorable to Germany and a civil faction favorable to the United States."[17] In addition, the paper blamed other newspapers in Texas for creating hysteria regarding a German-Mexican alliance that had, in its view, no basis in reality and could only contribute to ill feelings between the neighbors and discredit the loyal population of the Lower Rio Grande Valley.

> Sensationalism in the press of the border in publishing unfounded rumors calculated to stir up ill feeling between Mexican and Americans... There have been published in a paper not exactly 500 miles from here in the last week three stories which I consider pernicious in that they excite the people of this border unduly and create ill will between our people and those of our neighbor in the south...I do not think...that there will be found one slacker in Brownsville or in the United States once the peril to the nation sinks into the heart of the people.[18]

Unlike other southwestern news media, *The Brownsville Herald* did not question the loyalty of Mexican-American citizens.

Initially, the entrance of the United States into World War I with Congress' declaration of war against Germany in April 1917 did not radically change the view of *The Brownsville Herald* when it came to reporting about German and Mexican Americans. Reporting about social events involving Germans

and German Americans in the Valley continued without change for the months of April and May. Repeatedly, the paper reported the activities of Mercedes' German enclave very favorably. The paper in no way objected to the celebration of services in Mercedes' German Evangelical Church in the German Language or the activities of the town's Concordia *Gesangsverein* which celebrated German *Kultur*. Rather, it pointed out that, despite celebrating their German traditions, the German American citizens of Mercedes were absolutely loyal to the causes of the United States in the military conflict.[19] As evidence, the *Herald* reported on Carl Ortmann, German immigrant in Mercedes, and his opinion on the conflict under the headline "Mercedes Farmer Here to Sign Up: I regretted to see war come, but now that the country is into it, I am going to do my bit with the army. So declared Carl Ortman...Ortman is of German descent, but declares that the United States is my own native country."[20] The paper also reported that Fritz Leiberg of Pharr was "admitted to American citizenship" and was vouched for by the loyal German American citizens of Mercedes.[21] These statements and actions, in combination with other reports of large scale German American display of loyalty in other parts of Texas,[22] now that war had started, made the editor of the *Herald* conclude that:

> the Kaiser may have learned by this time that there are no more German-Americans since this country has gone to war with Germany. There are those who were German-Americans before that event that are now American Germans perhaps, but by the time the war is ended they will all be just plain Americans like the rest of us.[23]

Soon, however, such contemplation of widespread German American displays of loyalty disappeared from the paper's reports and editorials. Interestingly, after May 1917, the weekly news section on the community of Mercedes with its large German contingent disappeared completely from the pages of the *Herald*.

While *The Brownsville Herald* had continued its reporting about German and German American cultural activities in the Valley, it also addressed the growing restrictions, suspicions, and initiatives placed on and taken against German immigrants. Only days after the United States' declaration of war, the *Herald* announced under the headline "Germans Cannot Come and Go Now" that the "port of Brownsville, the bridge, and ferry will be closed to Germans" and that "the closing order will be enforced to the letter...evident when several Germans residing in Matamoros and whose characters are considered above question were refused entry."[24] Simultaneously, mail services, an important tool for Rio Grande Valley Germans to stay in touch with their families and friends in their former home, were suspended. While German mobility and activities were restricted, new suspicions about the intentions of some Germans and German Americans arose. In two editorials, the *Herald* warned that disloyal German elements might use their influence to arouse workers

as strike leaders, and that the same elements would be interested to "create disaffection among the Negroes of the South."[25] In light of such suspicion, it is no surprise that the *Herald* reports about some measures taken against Germans and German culture, particularly the teaching of the German language. On April 30, *The Brownsville Herald* announced that the Board of Regents of the University of Texas at Austin suspended several enemy aliens, among them K.F. Muenzinger, adjunct professor of German, and Prof. E. Prolosch, head of the German language department. Beyond their Germanness no reason for their suspension was provided. The Brownsville paper reported that the instruction of the German language will be, for now, continued in Texas' educational institutions, except in grade schools where the teaching of German will be immediately suspended.[26] With a background of such news reports, it is not surprising that *The Brownsville Herald* started to revise its assessment regarding the loyalty of German Americans in their midst. In a September 1917 editorial the *Herald* printed:

> Our 'German-American' fellow citizens cherish a sort of sentimental feeling for the old country...Yet beyond doubt the vast majority of them are loyal Americans...The truth of the matter is, there should be no more German-Americans...If their names are of such decided German cast as to cause them to be singled out as of that people, then they should Americanize their names.[27]

The paper's unqualified belief in German American loyalty had vanished and the burden of proofing their loyalty was placed on German Americans who had to show on which side they stood through their actions, for example by Americanizing their names.

The Brownsville Herald's assessment of Mexican and Mexican American loyalty at the early stages of America's involvement in World War I was the opposite of its attitudes about German Americans. Initially, the paper reported and commented frequently on its suspicions of Mexican American disloyalty and later progressively changed its stance toward an unqualified acceptance and portrayal of Mexican American loyalty, which the paper actively tried to promote in numerous articles. As the country prepared to mobilize for the war overseas, *The Brownsville Herald*, like other newspapers in Texas, pointed out that a watchful eye should be kept on the Rio Grande. Only days after the United States' entry into the war, the *Herald* ran a story about a Mexican individual living in Brownsville who was arrested for "talking sedition against the United States," spurring early fears of Mexican and Mexican American disloyalty.[28] The bigger concern though was the possibility of a mass exodus of Mexican and Mexican Americans south across the border, which would have hurt the Valley's economy tremendously, especially the agricultural sector. The *Herald* expressed its fear that hostile elements in society, specifically Germans, would drive Mexican and Mexican Americans into

Mexico by raising their fears that they might be drafted into the United States' military forces. The *Herald* tried to stop this potential exodus by reassuring that "the troops of the armies that are being formed by the United States will not be drawn from the class of people refered [sic] to above [Mexicans and Mexican Americans] and they need have no fear of being forced into military service."[29] Yet despite these reassurances, the worst fears of *The Brownsville Herald* seemed to become reality. On May 30, 1917, the paper reports under the headline "TRAINLOADS OF MEXICANS NEEDLESSLY FLEE NATION" that:

> the same German influences which have been operating in other sections of the state and country in anti-conscription activity are responsible of the headlong, needless flight of Mexicans and Americans of Mexican blood across the border, is the belief current among business men and citizens in Brownsville and the Valley generally...German influence insinuatingly persuading all Mexicans, young, old and middle aged that they will be drafted for army service...One train from Mission today reached Brownsville crowded with Mexicans who were hurrying to get to Mexico...The situation as a whole has become so serious to the farming communities of South Texas and the border that business men, realiz[e] that [a] labor shortage faces the farmers.[30]

Despite the *Herald's* references in May, the military draft did reach Mexican Americans soon thereafter. The paper admitted that the "exodus of Mexican Americans has apparently been larger than believed" as "only 50 per cent of called showed up." The paper displayed no sympathy with these so-called "slackers." In two editorials, the *Herald* launched attacks on the character of the slackers who tried to avoid the draft by proclaiming that "nobody likes a slacker." The editorial continued: "Nobody is sorry for the slacker who looks out through the bars because he ran away from his own shadow on registration day" and that "those refugees serve no flag. Especially is this so of the Mexicans who have fled for fear of having to fight. They fled from Mexico when that country needed them, taking refuge in the United States."[31]

These developments and comments, however, did not lead *The Brownsville Herald* to launch attacks on the general nature of the character of Mexican Americans. Quite on the contrary, it tried to push for the loyalty of this portion of the population by changing its earlier tune significantly, proclaiming that "Mexican people as a rule are good citizens' and that "*We want them. We need them* [the italics are mine]."[32] The *Herald* repeatedly reported on the large scale participation of thousands of Mexicans and Mexican Americans at patriotic rallies and their fulfillment of their duties in organizations like the Red Cross under headlines like "WAKE UP AMERICA PATRIOTIC DEMONSTRATION IS NEW NOTE IN HISTORY OF BROWNSVILLE,"

"STARR COUNTY'S CAPITOL HOLDS PATRIOTIC MEET," and "THE LOWER RIO GRANDE VALLEY'S DUTY."[33]

Toward the end of the summer 1917, *The Brownsville Herald* also was glad to point out that Mexican and Mexican American enthusiasm for service in the American military had substantially increased. Repeatedly, Mexicans and Mexican Americans expressed their wishes to serve in the military in these times of war. They also stressed that they would like to serve with members of their own ethnic group and made frequent requests to the Cameron County draft board to this effect. The plan of forming a Mexican battalion raised much interest in Brownsville and on the border. Their wishes were fulfilled when the 360th Infantry Regiment of the Nineteenth Division was organized at Camp Travis in September 1917. Throughout the remainder of the war many men from Brownsville, Port Isabel, Harlingen, Falfurrias, Rio Grande City, and Edinburg served in this unit. Mexicans and Mexican Americans fulfilled their patriotic duties on all fronts and *The Brownsville Herald* emphasized this display of loyalty to the American flag after it had initially expressed doubts.[34]

While *The Brownsville Herald* increasingly accepted the loyalty of Mexican Americans and their participation in all matters civic and politic, the paper downgraded its opinion of Germans and German Americans dramatically. As the war dragged on, American draft calls went up, and American casualty numbers on the European battlefields increased, the *Herald* increasingly displayed a view that attacked Germans, German Americans, and for that matter anything German. The nature of these attacks was mainly kept in a general tone – general attacks on the German character, which was an "obstacle to democracy" – without reference to any specific individuals in the Brownsville and the Lower Rio Grande Valley.[35] Accusations of German anti-American activities in the region were more often based on rumors rather than actual facts. One major concern of the *Herald* was that German activity on the border would incite Mexican and Mexican Americans to actions directed against the interest of the United States. Increasingly Germans were held responsible for everything that went wrong on the border. In December, the *Herald* warned of the "banditry that is being instigated in Mexico by German agents," and a couple of weeks later, concluded, without citing any evidence, that "Germans cause [the] bandit raids."[36] Later, in the spring of 1918, the newspaper again reported on the infestation of Mexico with German spies and saboteurs who aimed at hurting the United States and the reaction of authorities to this threat under the headline "MANY SPIES ARE AT WORK":

> Mexico [is] honeycombed with German spies, agents, and reservists who have flocked there from the United States...The activities of German spies along the border have been so pronounced [that] United

States cavalry men stationed at Brownsville executed the order to end the private telephone line connecting a business house in Brownsville with a similar institution in Matamoros.[37]

However, Germans across the border were not the only alien enemies that seemed to pose a threat. Germans on the northern side of the border also had to be controlled in order to stop them from any possible anti-American acts. *The Brownsville Herald* extensively reported about the national and local efforts to keep track of male and female enemy aliens, mostly Germans and Austrians, and register them.[38] The paper pointed out that it was essential for the internal safety of the United States that all of the estimated half million enemy aliens be registered and that in addition to their names and places of residence "detailed information concerning the family and business relations and habits of every German" will be collected.[39] Furthermore, the public was made aware of the restrictions that these enemy aliens were placed under, for example that they were not allowed within "100-yard zones about the piers, docks, and warehouses closed to Germans."[40] Registration of enemy aliens in Brownsville, according to the *Herald,* went very slowly, and only a few Germans showed up to register with authorities. The *Herald* consequently warned that "failing to register may cause suspicion of an unfriendly attitude" and that "failure to register and to register promptly may result in internment."[41]

As the drive for registration continued throughout 1918, *The Brownsville Herald* increasingly exposed real and alleged German anti-American activities in Brownsville and the region. In January, the paper reported on the arrest of a German national, Max Ehieze, who was accused of "loose talk" and had in his possession a map of Texas that looked suspicious. In February, the *Herald* reported about a German citizen who was arrested in Brownsville and held at Fort Brown because he had failed to register under the alien enemy registration provisions.[42] *The Brownsville Herald* was equally perturbed with the alleged attempts of anti-American German elements in the region to undermine the local promotion of Liberty Bonds. Without mentioning any specific individuals, the paper accused Germans and German Americans of engaging in propaganda to undermine the sale of these bonds while, at the same time, trying "to wiggle out of [their] patriotic duty to invest to [their] capacity in Liberty War Bonds."[43] In light of such accusations, Germans and German Americans in Brownsville tried to prove their patriotic loyalty by purchasing such bonds. The names of many German American Brownsvillites appeared on lengthy lists printed in the *Herald* during April, showing all the subscribers to Liberty Bonds. Among these subscribers were Adolf Asheim, $50; H. Bollack, $3,000; Adolf Dittmann, $1,200; Henry Gruenwald, $100; A.S. Hibler, $50; Anita Kowalski, $100; Emile Kowalski, $200; David Maltby $50; H.B. Moler $50; Mrs. Thielen, $1,000: W.S. Thielen, $50; B.V.

Thielen, $50; and Herbert Weinert, $100.[44]

Beyond challenging the overall loyalty of Germans and German Americans in the Rio Grande Valley and general warnings of possible sabotage under headlines like "THE HANDIWORK OF THE ENEMY IN OUR MIDST," *The Brownsville Herald* also reported on specific cases in which Germans were accused of illegal activities.[45] The first of these instances occurred in January 1918 and illustrates some of the paranoia that had already gripped the region and nation regarding German Americans. In the January 18 edition, the *Herald* reported on its front page about an act of sabotage allegedly committed by German elements under the heading "GERMAN SYMPATHIZERS ATTEMPT DESTRUCTION OF SAN BENITO PAPER " as follows:

> A plot by German sympathizers is believed by Editor A.E. Stephenson of the San Benito Light to have been responsible for the partial destruction of the paper's plant at San Benito last night...[by] unknown persons....'During the week of the Red Cross drive,' Mr. Stephenson said 'a stranger came into my office and told me that he had overheard the conversation of two men on a train. The men made some remarks to the effect that if the San Benito Light did not discontinue printing so much matter on behalf of the Red Cross and so much anti-German matter that something would happen to the paper.[46]

Acknowledging that the individuals who committed the crime were "unknown," the paper nevertheless left the distinct impression in its headline that Germans evidently committed this act, without providing any evidence to substantiate the rumor. This case illustrates how *The Brownsville Herald*, like many newspapers in the nation, fell into the trap of anti-German American propaganda which they had created themselves and which created an atmosphere where vague accusations and rumors proved to be sufficient evidence.

Two more cases, in which the *Herald* accused, and officials actually charged, German Americans with illegal activities, demonstrate the absurdity of the "Germanaphobia" that had taken a hold even in the Rio Grande Valley. The instances involve J.A. Müller, Henry Brandt, and Brandt's wife, all of McAllen. They were charged with violations of the Espionage Act. Their violations consisted, as the paper reported, mainly in their refusal to buy Liberty Bonds or to join the Red Cross. The articles describing the cases in *The Brownsville Herald* speak for themselves:

> J.A. Mueller of McAllen, charged with violating the espionage act, was yesterday placed under a $20,000 bond...Mueller is being held in jail...Mueller testified that he had bought no Liberty Bonds of the third issue, that he had been unable to do so. Mr. Glasscock testified that Mueller was comfortably situated financially and that he had been offered the money to buy Liberty Bonds at six per cent, one and three quarters per cent more than the bonds bear. Henry V. Brandt, also of

> Hidalgo county, charged with having told a bond committee that there was no use buying Liberty Bonds, that Germany was winning every day.[47]

> Henry V. Brandt, charged with violating the espionage act, was yesterday afternoon placed under a $10,000 bond....Brandt is charged with having refused to buy Liberty bonds because, so witnesses said, he thought Germany was going to win anyway...Members of the bond committee who visited him said he could borrow the money, if necessary, at 6 per cent interest.....It was also stated that Brandt's wife had declined to join the Red Cross. Brandt told the examining court that he came to Texas from North Dakota.....He stated that he subscribed to German newspapers and periodicals.[48]

For the whole period of war, these were the only instances in which *The Brownsville Herald* reported actual violations, as absurd as they seem today, of the Espionage and Sedition Acts, which involved Germans or German Americans in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. It took until June 1918 before any German citizens were arrested and interned for violating the enemy alien provisions. On June 8, 1918, the *Herald* reported, under the heading "Aliens Are Sent To Internment Camp," that "Guenther Weiske and Wilhelm Neuhaus [were] arrested by E.H. Parker of the Department of Justice [and] sent to Fort Douglas, Utah for the duration of the war," and that this was "the first permanent internment order received here since the outbreak of the war." After the conclusion of the war and after their release from the internment camp, both men apparently returned to Mercedes, where they lived at least until 1920.[49]

As disturbing as these cases were for German Americans in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, they posed no real threat to their way of life. In contrast, the general attacks on German character and German language had a much greater impact on their lives as their culture, their way of life, and the very essence of their identity was challenged. What worried German Americans was, for instance, the initiatives by the Texas legislature to rid the state of the German language. Interestingly, Brownsville's representative, J.T. Canales, was one of the most outspoken supporters in the legislature of a "resolution against the teaching of German in the public schools and other educational institutions of the state."[50] At the time, in March 1918, the effort was defeated, but by the end of the war *The Brownsville Herald* proclaimed on page one of its September 9 issue that "FOURTEEN STATES INCLUDING TEXAS HAVE PLACED BAN ON TEACHING GERMAN IN SCHOOLS."[51] Not only did German Americans see German banned from Texas' school and universities, a look at the daily articles of *The Brownsville Herald* served as a constant reminder that the American view of German culture, German character, and German nature had changed dramatically since the spring of the previous year.

For example, no longer would they read about German thrift and culture, but about the "profiteering Hun," "the horrible practices of the Hun [who] under the guise of so-called *Kultur* commit[s] unspeakable crimes," and "the ruthless Teuton murderer."[52]

In January of 1918, Governor William Hobby unsuccessfully requested special forces consisting of Texas Rangers to patrol the border. Such fears, however, had completely vanished when it came to the Mexican and Mexican American population residing on the northern side of the Rio Grande. Local and state government as well as *The Brownsville Herald* attempted to nurture Mexican American cooperation and involvement in the war effort and patriotism. The Spanish-language press of southern Texas, namely *La Prensa* of San Antonio, *Evolución* and *El Demócrata* of Laredo, in their reporting aimed at promotion of further improving relations between Mexico and the United States as well as between Anglos and Mexican Americans. *La Prensa*, *Evolución* and *El Demócrata* also expressed that it was the civic duty of all Mexican Americans to participate on all levels in the war effort and, like *The Brownsville Herald*, the San Antonio papers showed no sympathy for so-called "slackers."[53] Despite the concerns regarding "slackers," the *Herald*, during 1918, reported only one instance in which a Mexican American individual was charged with disloyalty. In April 1918, the *Herald* printed that "Pasquale Gonzales has been arrested and charged with having violated House Bill No. 15, generally known as the Loyalty Act." In contrast, articles and editorials pointing out how Mexican Americans contributed to the war effort as much as possible were much more frequent under headlines such as "RESIDENTS OF MEXICAN AND SPANISH BIRTH BUYING BONDS...PROVING THEIR LOYALTY TO UNCLE SAM BY LIBERAL SUBSCRIPTION TO LIBERTY BOND ISSUE."[54]

That the general acceptance of loyalty and promotion of civic engagement did not come without strings attached was a lesson that Mexican Americans learned during the discussions to ban German language instruction for Texas' educational institutions. As mentioned earlier, J. T. Canales, Brownsville's representative in the Texas legislature at the time, was an avid supporter of a bill that would have banned German from all Texas' curricula in April 1918. During the debate, Canales was confronted by one of his colleagues, Johnson from Ellis county, with the question "would you agree to an amendment to the resolution to include a prohibition against teaching Spanish?" to which Canales replied "if we were at war, yes." Apparently, the invitation to join the Anglo mainstream was tied to pressures of acculturation.[55]

As World War I approached its end during the summer and fall of 1918, *The Brownsville Herald* shifted its focus away from issues of German American and Mexican American loyalties. The two topics that now grabbed its attention were the growing influenza epidemic, which according to the

Herald was "worse than Hun bullets," and the rising dangers stemming from a potential spread of Bolshevik ideology. What is strikingly interesting in the *Herald's* reporting about the dangers of Bolshevism is that it made use of a German word: "The Cry of *Kamerad*." Using the German term *Kamerad* instead *Comrade*, was clearly an attempt to link the "evilness"of Bolshevism with the dangers of Germanness that the paper had thoroughly established in its war-reporting over the passing year.[56]

From the publication of the Zimmermann Telegram in March 1917 to the end of World War I in November 1918, *The Brownsville Herald's* view of and attitude toward German Americans and Mexican Americans changed significantly. While the paper's attitude toward German Americans assumed an increasingly negative tone, the opposite was the case for Mexican Americans. Though the *Herald's* treatment of both groups developed in opposite directions, the desired results were similar. Mexican Americans were encouraged to become more a part of American mainstream whereas German Americans were forced to shed their German skin, thus attempting to move them both along the road of acculturation and assimilation. Thus, for Americans of Mexican heritage, World War I presented a crucial turning point toward their integration into the social and political life of Texas. Through their experiences in civilian and military activities many developed a sense of belonging in and acceptance into mainstream American society. In the postwar period, this translated into concerted efforts to accomplish full integration and equality through the efforts of newly founded organizations like the Order of Sons of America, which originated in San Antonio and spread to the Lower Rio Grande Valley.[57]

For German Americans in the Rio Grande Valley, what was most disheartening and had the largest impact were the general attacks on German character launched by papers like *The Brownsville Herald.* In public opinion, or rather in the public opinion that the media created, the basic problem rested with the very nature of the German. In an atmosphere of Germanaphobia, the good, law-abiding, thrifty, and honest German became the ugly, seditious, corrupt Hun. Positive stereotypes about German character that German Americans had used to their economic and social advantage and had internalized to create a feeling of contentment with their German identity turned into negative ones. The stereotypes themselves did not change, but their evaluation and interpretation did. German militaristic virtues, praised from the Revolutionary to the Civil War, were now reinterpreted as a sign of German *Militarismus*, the subservience of civic to military rule. The German striving for *Ruhe und Ordnung*, law and order, became *Obrigkeitshörigkeit*, the complete submission to authority. Thrift, the "German" trademark of German American merchants and artisans which had brought them success and earned them respect was transformed into the greed of the ugly German

exploiter.[58]

Attacks on the German language hit German Americans particularly hard. *The Brownsville Herald*, like other newspapers, propagated the idea that the German language was in itself morally corrupt and that it should not be taught in Texas schools. For people who came from different backgrounds and were defined by the native population in terms of their language and had learned to define themselves in the same terms, this kind of attack hit the very nerve of German identity. Attacks on German *Kultur*, German language, German character, and the reinterpretation of German stereotypes shattered the cornerstones, the essence, of which German Americans had built their ethnic identity. German identity, the way they had defined it, was no longer an asset. It had become a detriment and it appeared that it was time to let go of their constructed German identity because it had outlived its usefulness. Despite attacks on their character, language, and culture, German Americans did not publicly react. Some historians assert that this kind of rampant nativism led to the vigorous reassertion of German identity, but in the case of German Americans in the Rio Grande Valley this did not hold true. Publicly they shed the German skin, the German ethnic identity they had created for themselves. Names were Americanized, children receiving typical American names, and publicly displayed German behavior and utterances of the German language vanished completely.[59]

The University of Texas at Brownsville

Endnotes

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2 Carole E. Christian, "Joining the American Mainstream: Texas's Mexican Americans During World War I," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 92 (1989), p. 559.

3 Saul Landau, "The Bisbee Deportations: Class Conflict and Patriotism During World War I" (M.A. thesis: University of Wisconsin, 1959), p. 6; and Paul D. Hoffman, "Minorities and Ethnics in the Arizona Press: Arizona Newspaper Portrayals during American Involvement in World War I," *Locus* 1 (1989): pp. 69 and 80; and Gerhard Grytz, The German Arizonans: Ethnic Identity and Society Formation on a Southwestern Frontier, 1853- World War I (Ph.D. diss: University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 2003), pp. 236-240.

4 During the first two decades of the twentieth century, Cameron's and Hidalgo's German population grew more than tenfold. By 1920, the 340 German-borns constituted 0.5 percent of the Lower Valley's population bringing their percentage almost up to par with the ratio for Texas overall, where Germans made up 0.7 percent

of its residents. German-borns in Cameron and Hidalgo counties accounted for about one-fourth of all residents of European ancestry. Adding to these numbers residents of German descent their share of the total population in the region exceeded 2 percent. See Gerhard Grytz, "German Immigrants in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, 1850-1920: A Demographic Overview" in Milo Kearney, Anthony Knopp, and Antonio Zavaleta (eds.), *Studies in Rio Grande Valley History* (Brownsville: University of Texas at Brownsville, 2005), pp. 147, 154, and 155.

5 Patrick L. Cox, "'An Enemy Closer to Us Than Any European Power': The Impact of Mexico on Texan Public Opinion before World War I," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 105 (2001), p. 44.

6 Cox, "Enemy," 44-48; and Christian, "American Mainstream," p. 567.

7 *Brownsville Herald*, 5 February 1917, 1:3.

8 *Brownsville Herald*, 6 February 1917, 2:1.

9 *Brownsville Herald*, 7 February 1917, 1:4; and 15 February 1917, 1:1.

10 Lamar W. Bridges, "Zimmermann Telegram: Reaction of Southern, Southwestern Newspapers," *Journalism Quarterly* 46 (1969), 81-86; and Cox, "Enemy," 42.

11 *Brownsville Herald*, 2 March 1917, 2:1, 2; 5 March 1917, 2:2; and 20 March, 1917, 2:4. For the academic discussion about the degree of Germany's involvement in Mexican internal affair during the Mexican revolution and the Plan de San Diego, see amongst others Jake Watts, "The Plan of San Diego and the Lower Rio Grande Valley," in Milo Kearney (ed.), *More Studies in Brownsville History* (Brownsville: University of Texas at Brownsville, 1989), pp. 322-345; James A. Sandos, *Rebellion in the Borderlands: Anarchism and the Plan of San Diego, 1904-1923* (Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992), pp. 96-87, 111-112, 117, 140-142, and 166; Allen Gerlach, "Conditions Along the Border — 1915: The Plan de San Diego," *New Mexico Historical Review* 43 (1968), pp. 195-207. (Gerlach contends that "had the United States government appreciated the full implications and dimensions of the Plan de San Diego of 1915, it assuredly would have been so astounded on 17 January 1917 when the State Department was informed of the Zimmermann Telegram. p. [205]); and Holger H. Herwig and Christon I. Archer, "Global Gambit: A German General Staff Assessment of Mexican Affairs, November 1913," *Estudios Mexicanos* 1 (1985), pp. 303-327, which claims that a German military assessment of the Mexican situation by Colonel Eugen Zoellner, a Bavarian officer, in 1913 was the basis of Zimmermann Telegram and not the Plan de San Diego (321).

12 Jake Watts, "The Plan of San Diego and the Lower Rio Grande Valley," in Milo Kearney (Ed.), *More Studies in Brownsville History* (Brownsville: Pan American University at Brownsville, 1989), p. 334.

13 *Brownsville Herald*, 5 March 1917, 2:2.

14 *Brownsville Herald*, 7 March 1917, 1:3; 9 March 1917, 2:2,3; and 10 March 1917, 2:1.

15 *Brownsville Herald*, 8 March 1917, 1:4; 30 March 1917, 2:1; and 2 April 1917,

2:1.

16 Mario D. Longoria, "Revolution, Visionary Plan, and Marketplace: A San Antonio Incident," *Aztlan* 12 (1981), 221; and Cox, "Enemy," pp. 66, 77.

17 *Brownsville Herald*, 4 April 1917, 3:4.

18 *Brownsville Herald*, 4 April 1917, 1:1.

19 About German immigrants in the Lower Rio Grande Valley in general and Mercedes in particular, see Grytz, German Immigrants," 145-165. *Brownsville Herald*, 4 April 1917, 3:1; *Brownsville Herald*, 10 April 1917, 6:2; *Brownsville Herald*, 5 May 1917, 3:3:

20 *Brownsville Herald*, 9 April 1917, 1:3.

21 *Brownsville Herald*, 15 May 1917, 4:2.

22 *Brownsville Herald*, 16 April 1917, 1:5.

23 *Brownsville Herald*, 8 June 1917, 2:1.

24 *Brownsville Herald*, 10 April 1917, 1:2.

25 *Brownsville Herald*, 7 April 1917, 1:2; 13 August 1917, 2:2; and 19 April 1917, 2:4.

26 *Brownsville Herald*, 30 April 1917, 1:4; and 22 August 1917, 6:4.

27 *Brownsville Herald*, 7 September 1917, 2:1,2.

28 Cox, "Enemy," 79; Christian, "American Mainstream," 572; and *Brownsville Herald*, 7 April 1917, 1:2.

29 *Brownsville Herald*, 4 May 1917, 1:5. Even Texas Governor James E. Ferguson issued a proclamation to persuade Mexican residents that they need not fear the draft. See, Christian, "American Mainstream," 572.

30 *Brownsville Herald*, 30 May 1917, 1:3,4.

31 *Brownsville Herald*, 22 August 1917, 1:2,3; 8 June 1917, 2:1; and 28 August 1917, 2:1.

32 *Brownsville Herald*, 2 June 1917, 2:1.

33 *Brownsville Herald*, 20 April 1917, 2:2,3; 23 April 1917, 3:5,6; and 23 August 1917, 2:1.

34 *Brownsville Herald*, 22 September 1917, 1:1,2; and Christian, "American Mainstream," 580.

35 Cox, "Enemy," 43.

36 *Brownsville Herald*, 1 December 1917, 2:1; and 28 December 1917, 1:4.

37 *Brownsville Herald*, 8 April 1918, 1:3.

38 *Brownsville Herald*, 9 January 1918, 3:4; 4 February 1918, 1:3; 6 February 1918, 3:4; 18 June 1918, 1:4; and 10 September 1918, 1:2.

39 *Brownsville Herald*, 2 February 1918, 2:4,5.

40 *Brownsville Herald*, 17 December 1917, 5:1-6; 6:4.

41 *Brownsville Herald*, 4 February 1918, 1:3; and 9 January 1918, 3:4.

42 *Brownsville Herald*, 5 January 1918, 3:3; and 14 February 1918, 1:5.

43 *Brownsville Herald*, 29 April 1918, 2:1.

44 Brownsville Herald, 19 April 1918, 5; 20 April 1918, 5; and 26 April 1918, 5.

45 *Brownsville Herald*, 1 November 1917, 2:1.

46 *Brownsville Herald*, 18 January 1918, 1:1,2.

47 *Brownsville Herald*, 25 April 1918, 1:1,2.

48 *Brownsville Herald*, 26 April 1918, 1:5,6.

49 *Brownsville Herald*, 8 June 1918, 3:2; and Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920: Texas* [microfilm].

50 *Brownsville Herald*, 7 March 1918, 3:4.

51 *Brownsville Herald*, 8 March 1918, 1:1; and 9 September 1918, 1:1.

52 *Brownsville Herald*, 7 August 1918, 2:1; and 11 February 1918, 5.

53 *Brownsville Herald*, 16 July 1918, 1:1; Christian, "American Mainstream," 567-576; *La Prensa*, 26 May 1918; 17 June 1918; and *Evolución*, 23 June 1918.

54 *Brownsville Herald*, 19 April 1918, 1:1*; and* 1 October 1918, 1:1.

55 *Brownsville Herald*, 7 March 1918, 3:4.

56 *Brownsville Herald*, 8 November 1918, 3:3,4; 16 December 1918, 4:5,6; 17 December 1918, 4:5,6; and 18 December 1918, 5:3,4.

57 Christian, "American Mainstream," pp. 559, and 588-89.

58 Frederick C. Luebke, *Bonds of Loyalty: German-Americans and World War I* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1974), p. 84; For German militaristic virtues portrayed as a positive asset, see J.G. Rosengarten, *The German Soldier in the Wars of the United States* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1890).

59 The attack on the German language in the United States did not end with the conclusion of the war. Some of the most restrictive laws regarding instruction and use of the German language were passed in 1919 and 1921. See Frederick C. Luebke, *Germans in the New World: Essays in the History of Immigration* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), xvi. For example the largest organization of German Americans in Texas, the Order of the Sons of Hermann, had to switch its official language from German to English in 1921 – a process that was, however, not concluded until 1937. See *The Grand Lodge, Order of the Sons of Hermann in Texas — The First 100 Years* (San Antonio: Hermann Sons of Texas, 1990); and "Holly Wood, Public Relations Director, Grand Lodge of the Order of the Sons of Hermann, San Antonio, to Gerhard Grytz, Pocatello, Idaho, 18 July 2001." Luebke, *Bonds of Loyalty*, xv.

Promoting Valley Tourism in the 1920s: A Case of Competition and Ambivalence

by

Robin Robinson

In the early twentieth century a maturing America with disposable income, cars, and a strong rail network allowed previously remote exotic places like Florida and Southern California to blossom into winter resort and tourist destinations. One of the factors that enabled successful development in these locations resulted from strategically planned and well-financed national advertising campaigns to attract visitors, investors, and growth. In the 1920s, the Lower Rio Grande Valley sat ready to become the next Coral Gables or Palm Beach. Competition and lack of local resident interest, however, prevented the Valley from uniting to create the national promotion necessary for the region to reach its full potential as a winter tourist destination.

While Valley land developers, residents, politicians, and businessmen viewed agriculture as the sole catalyst for growth and prosperity in the early 1920s, Americans escaping the severe winters of the East and Midwest found another potential to this area. These "Snowbirds" who stumbled into the Valley often returned and brought others with them by spreading word of what they found. The number of visitors relocating and their economic impact did not go unnoticed. By mid-decade, most Valley interests recognized the need to attract and provide for these visitors, and even agreed on appropriate strategies.

Enacting a national promotional campaign calls for community collaboration and resident support. With each town too small to dominate the Valley or to provide adequately for tourists, area-wide cooperation was required. Cooperation, however, did not come easily in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. Before the 1920s, different Valley communities competed for irrigation projects and railroads. Railroads led to the establishment of new towns, all seeking their part of the growth and prosperity pie. Pairs of cities combined business organizations, promotional efforts, and local celebrations in an effort to advance their communities at the expense of other locations. Smaller farm towns might incorporate with a resort town and combine assets to enhance its growth and economic choices. One or two towns might join with a local land developer in promoting their part of the region to "settlers" in the Midwest, hoping to draw purchasers away from neighbors. This naturally resulted in a lack of Valley unity and boosterism. By the end of the 1920s, Harlingen, as well as Brownsville, claimed the title of "Capital of the Lower Rio Grande Valley."[1]

While individual communities competed for farmers, the out-of-state

visitors themselves reminded residents of the tourist potential of the Valley. A national developer of theaters from Oklahoma found California and Florida at a standstill and declared the Valley the next big region for development, including tourism. "You don't realize what you do have," the outsider told readers of *The Brownsville Herald.* "Much money in the north is looking to come south," he continued, and "if it comes sooner or later is up to them [the citizens of Brownsville] to determine."[2]

A Brownsville man returning from a December business trip reported an exodus of tourists from northern states to California and Florida. Thousands of these people, the businessman declared, would come to the Valley if only they knew of it. The local resident further stated that many inquired about the Valley, but the lack of literature and road guides for tourists caused Brownsville to lose thousands of dollars a year. The Brownsville Chamber of Commerce recognized this shortcoming, but its attempts to awaken interest in securing proper advertising literature for the city fell on unreceptive ears. The businessman promised that with just a small investment of a few thousand dollars in a general descriptive booklet, the city would "derive a hundred dollars for every dollar spent when the tourists come south next winter."[3]

The snowbirds who did travel here spread word of the virtues of the Valley. Without any formal promotional campaign, prospective tourists seeking winter stays requested information. The secretary of the Brownsville Chamber of Commerce lacked proper literature describing the attractions of the Valley, hotel rates, and other information requested by parties from states such as Iowa and Illinois. The only information available was two years old, outdated, and "practically useless." These inquiries included families looking to stay the entire winter and excursion groups of up to 100 people.[4]

Not until 1924 did the Board of City Development produce the booklet "Brownsville, The Friendly City of the South." The tract featured pictures of Brownsville and other parts of the Rio Grande inland delta, including a double-paged aerial view of the city. Unfortunately, only the Brownsville Chamber of Commerce possessed this literature, resulting in limited distribution outside the Valley.[5]

The first national campaign received serious discussion by the greater Valley Chamber of Commerce in 1925. Backers of the venture pointed to Florida's success, where proper advertising resulted in a tripling of that state's population in three years. The following day, *The Brownsville Herald* front-page banner trumpeted "Valley to Advertise to World," and the Brownsville city commission voted to provide $10,000 toward the effort. An advertising committee lined up 150 Valley citizens who agreed to hire an outside professional ad man and pledged to raise $25,000 to get the project started.[6]

The Valley Chamber of Commerce also enlisted the assistance of the Missouri Pacific railroad. Before a meeting of these executives and managers,

Valley leaders detailed the desired booklet and the wish to distribute hundreds of thousands via the Missouri Pacific railway. The executives found the idea attractive enough to allow the editor of their travel magazine to supervise the effort.[7]

Veterans at promoting their routes, the railroads realized that a successful publicity campaign required more than just getting the word out. Valley residents needed to become more knowledgeable about what their region offered so that they could be better salesmen when visitors arrived. Missouri Pacific hired J. C. Carter, a well-known Texas newspaperman and writer, to assist in conducting the local campaign of enlightenment. The railroads, more than local leaders, knew how much tourism contributed to the growth in California and Florida and encouraged the Valley to place as much emphasis on tourist development as agriculture development.[8]

The noticeable increase in snowbird traffic in the winter of 1926 caused locals to finally recognize what outsiders had been saying: the Valley was the next California and Florida. Rather than taking advantage of this growing popularity to develop a profitable tourist industry, city leaders more actively sought conventions. These groups, however, continued to be the same type of agriculture-related organizations valued in the past. A committee went to the 1926 Western Fruit Jobbers' convention in New Orleans seeking the next year's convention for Brownsville. Promotional material included 650 Mexican canes, with special large canes going to the Jobber's twenty-five officers. Visiting Valley delegates all wore identifying silk hatbands and brought with them a musical quartet to attract attention. Give them points for trying, but the Valley could not compete with other seeking cities like San Francisco, Los Angeles, Chicago, or Denver in either hotel space or attractions.[9]

That same year Brownsville finally put together a four-page promotional folder, the "first of its kind," for distribution to agriculture-related conventions. A major national ad campaign, however, remained elusive as business leaders continued to lack the desire or ability to seriously seek tourists. The Brownsville Chamber of Commerce unsuccessfully sought to raise a $15,000 publicity fund in February 1926. A capitalist from Chicago found this a puny effort, urging local promoters to start thinking big; "in the millions" big. A developer from Davenport, Iowa said that people in his part of the country had never heard of the Valley. Acknowledging the impressive agriculture activity in the region, he encouraged Brownsville to promote its tourist aspects with an "interesting and splendidly illustrated booklet."[10]

If Valley residents refused to promote and develop tourism, outsiders would. The forced awakening of the Valley occurred in the mid-twenties with a rush to the coast. It required these mostly outside developers to capitalize on the tourist potential of the Valley. Developers announced in March 1926

the coming of Hollywood, the "play town on the gulf," located on the Laguna Madre just north of Point Isabel. This "long-wanted play town and playground" offered the amenities of a fishing pier, inner boat harbor, an observation tower, and a variety of water sports. "The rush for the Gulf Coast is here" read the announcement for "summer and winter homes by the sea." The Rio Grande Railway promptly extended track to Hollywood.[11]

Point Isabel became the next rush to the Gulf, with 650 acres modeled after resort developments in Florida. Construction of a harbor and jetty and increased rail service initiated the project. A new bridge connecting to outlying Padre Island rapidly allowed money from Tampa, Florida to develop that beach. Desired attractions included utilities, a large hotel, an eighteen-hole golf course, paved streets, a sea wall, and possibly an American Automobile Association Speedway. Unlike Valley civic organizations, developers knew the value of advertising. Before construction began, the Padre Island project allocated $25,000 for publicity in the state of Texas alone. The Beaches Hotel resort opened to huge crowds in 1927 with bathing, boating, and dancing.[12]

With Florida as the consistent model, resort developers did not limit their ambitions to the Gulf Coast. Developers purchased the 900-acre town site of Olmito, northwest of Brownsville, to create a "township that will resemble Coral Gables of Florida more than any other project in the state of Texas." Features included paved roads, waterworks, exquisite landscaping, tennis courts, bridle paths, a lake large enough for speedboat competition, and a modern hotel with a swimming pool. In order to make everything uniform and new, all existing structures would be demolished and rebuilt, including the train station. The developer expected to sell 1,000 lots on opening day. As happened in Florida, prospective land purchasers camped on the lots of their desire and scuffles broke out over disputed claims.[13]

Coastal development provided the elements for a profitable tourist industry, yet the Valley still failed to capitalize. Outsiders continued to question why Brownsville made no serious effort at promotion. Judge Hugh L. Small, Fort Worth state promoter of good roads bemoaned, "We have had a hard time telling the world about this region, because we have nothing but some chamber of commerce literature to aid us in our arguments." Small suggested a "great" advertising campaign in major magazines. While the Chamber of Commerce continued to call for national marketing and establishing an advertising fund, few results materialized.[14]

Emphasis remained on agriculture, with efforts at promotion inexpensive and limited in scope. The Women's Publicity Committee saw the Women's International Fair in Chicago in April 1926 as an opportune time to tell the world about the Valley. They expected over 200,000 people from forty nations to see their display. The planned "large exhibit of prize-winning products" lacked any mention of tourism. The massive number of inquiries about the

Valley and the coast reported by the San Antonio Chamber of Commerce prompted Brownsville to consider placing a representative in the Alamo City to encourage people to visit. Like so many of the more ambitious ideas, this one never got off the ground.[15]

While Brownsville continued to talk about a national promotional campaign, developers acted independently. The Gillock Development Company of Chicago produced an impressive pamphlet titled "Buried Treasure." The cover showed two figures peering out the window of a snow-covered house at people struggling in a storm. This setting contrasted with the warm, sunny scene of palms and gardens. A caption read: "Come south to the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas from the frozen north to where the sunshine spends the winter." A map showed where the Valley lay, with twelve pages illustrating orchards, homes, gardens, fishing, schools, good roads, and other images to attract those stuck in the frozen north. Gillock targeted ten large, cold-weather U.S. cities with their literature.[16]

Gillock had bigger promotional ideas--a motion picture serial. Planning to produce a new film every two weeks, the first one showed the streets of "every town in the Valley" and the Gillock development of Barreda Gardens. Following reels would show the step-by-step growth of the many buildings going up all over the Valley. These films were developed in Chicago and were shown to "hundreds of thousands of persons throughout the East and North, selling the Valley as the premier and newest playground of the South." Developers sought to capitalize on their southern neighbor. The first episode included a shot of the international bridge and "streams of tourists' cars crossing to picturesque Matamoros."[17]

The railroads did their part to promote the Valley. The general manager and other officials of the Missouri Pacific lines came just to investigate the growth, leaving with promises to promote the Valley to tourists riding their line. Southern Pacific sent a promotional leaflet to 58,000 of its stockholders and distributed illustrated folders along its route. The railroads offered special spring rates from points along their lines running from Shreveport, Dallas, Fort Worth, and Houston and allowing stopovers for passengers on their way to California.[18]

The government of Mexico seemed more interested in attracting tourists than did Brownsville. The Plutarco Elias Calles administration initiated a program with the slogan "Come to Mexico." It included special rail rates and promotions, an extensive publicity campaign in the United States with travel bureaus in many large cities, special immigration exceptions, and improved facilities in Mexico. At the top of its promoted attractions sat the ancient ruins of the Aztecs and colonial Spain. Along with the Mexican central government's attempts to attract American tourists, the Mexican Consul in the Valley, A. C. Vasquez, distributed locally a pamphlet in English describing

Mexico's resources, grazing lands, and low taxes beneficial to American investments.[19]

Even without civic attempts at attracting tourists, development projects planned for 1927 in the way of beaches, drives, theaters, and other entertainment resorts stood to "make Brownsville the goal of all persons who come to Texas to play and will make of this city and its environs the new Riviera of the Gulf Coast." Brownsville's El Jardin Hotel stood out as the best in the Valley. Within a radius of twenty miles, tourists found all kinds of outdoor sports: hunting and fishing, lakes and seashore, and tennis and golf. The romantic and heroic city of Matamoros sat just across the river. Yes, Brownsville seemed destined to become the "Palm Beach of Texas."[20]

Despite the lack of effort, cars kept "coming to the Valley in flocks, like ducks migrating south when the north gets unpleasantly cold." A check in May showed a 250-percent increase of automobile traffic in 1927 over 1924. Edinburg reported that the number of tourist cars passing their booster club increased by 50 percent in a matter of just two weeks in June 1927. A man from Nebraska moved to Brownsville and built four-room apartments with the most modern amenities for seasonal tourists. A reporter for *The Brownsville Herald* stood on the highway between San Benito and Harlingen for one hour on a Friday in December and reported 195 cars, 37 (19 percent) from out of state and many from upstate Texas. Visiting autos displayed tags from Minnesota, Illinois, North Dakota, Pennsylvania, Mississippi, Arkansas, Ohio, Indiana, Florida, and California.[21]

The rest of the area did not sit idly by and allow Brownsville to dominate as the "capital" of the Valley. Harlingen sought a city tax that provided $10,000 annually for the Chamber of Commerce to use toward development. San Benito donated forty acres of city land for a country club and golf course. Other cities solicited the building of resort hotels to rival El Jardin.[22]

The year 1929 proved an even bigger year for visitors. A record-setting number of vacation homeseekers arrived on the Missouri Pacific and Southern Pacific railways in February. On Monday and Tuesday of the first week, the total exceeded 1,400. A Missouri Pacific special train brought 900 on Monday, according to the general agent at Harlingen, and another special train brought over 600 the following day. Southern Pacific railway also operated two special trains. Their agent general reported 415 visitors for the same two days. These passengers detrained at Brownsville, Edinburg, Mission, Harlingen, Progresso, and McAllen. Another several hundred were expected through the week on regular service. The next week bettered the new record. Monday and Tuesday's passenger total came to 2,250, with 2,450 for the week. The railroads predicted a third week better than the first. L. H. Moore, division passenger agent of Missouri Pacific, credited such numbers to extensive advertising by the railroads and land companies. The publicity campaign by Missouri Pacific

proved so successful that it attracted a group of its own ticket agents desiring to see for themselves what they were selling to their customers.[23]

Word of mouth, land developers, and the railroad may have brought visitors to the Valley, but the Valley failed to keep them. The average tourist spent $15 a day and stayed only three days before moving on to places like Florida or Los Angeles, "where special provisions have been made for their entertainment." Thus, Brownsville lost substantial tourist money to other places. Palm Beach and West Palm Beach, Florida netted a reported $17 million from tourists in 1928.[24]

Lack of publicity and information left the national public with misconceptions about the Valley. Brownsville still had a reputation as a frontier cowboy town. A London newspaperman passing through the Valley expected to find a Wild West scene, with people in the street toting six-guns and sporting wide sombreros. Mexico remained an enigma to most Americans. Tourists unnecessarily felt "suspicious" of Matamoros taxi drivers.[25]

The Chamber of Commerce discussed plans to make Brownsville more attractive to tourists. Suggestions included enlarging the tourist room at the Chamber of Commerce building, employing a full-time hostess to aid tourists, and organizing tourist clubs. Everyone agreed that the city needed golf courses, tennis courts, horseshoe pits, and other "amusement devices and games." Other suggested improvements included a daily sightseeing bus and a hard surface road to Boca Chica, the most popular beach. Conspicuously absent was any discussion about developing interest in Matamoros.[26]

In ten years, things had not changed much when it came to the promotion of tourism. Repeatedly, the Valley's climate and other characteristics believed to make it superior to California and Florida continued to be touted, but those places remained more attractive to tourists. Unlike the Valley's competitors, the region lacked a "spirit of boosting." The many cities of the region continued to act independently, and a national ad campaign, just as in 1920, remained only a discussion.[27]

Outsiders continued to encourage the Valley to advertise nationally. The publicity counsel for the Port Isabel Company told the Brownsville Kiwanis club that the Valley was superior to California, but that state's intensive national advertising put it ahead. A Valley businessman returned from the East with tales of people there asking him why the Valley did not advertise. They heard rumors about the beaches, golf, fishing, hunting, climate, and other advantages, but the lack of promotion allowed Florida to attract all the business.[28]

With individual communities unable to muster the necessary support to properly advertise itself, a renewed Valley-wide effort drew attention. After much debate, the Valley Chamber of Commerce decided on a thirteen-week national radio advertising campaign. McAllen tried it in 1928 with great

success, estimating a gain of $210,000 from tourists. $75,000 would buy thirteen thirty-minute spots on a popular Cincinnati station that would result in "hundreds of thousands" of additional tourists. This, one discussant said, is the secret to California and Florida's success.[29]

Everyone agreed that the radio campaign was a good idea, and all assented to contribute toward the $75,000. A skeptic in the crowd reminded the group that such plans had been arranged before, but when it came to collecting on the pledged funds, no one came through. The answer was a county tax. This called back to a persistent 1920s problem. Citizens needed convincing to become boosters. The Valley knew how to sell land, but it lacked the desire to host or entertain tourists. Part of the promotional effort required eliminating "knockers." Only then would the people accept a county tax.[30]

Knockers were everywhere. It was difficult enough to rally a single community around financing ventures to attract tourists, let alone the whole Valley. Brownsville city leaders encountered stiff opposition from residents when it decided to build a much-needed hotel in 1924 with contributions from the public. *The Brownsville Herald* and a committee of prominent citizens chaired by Mayor A. B. Cole found it difficult convincing residents that that their financial support amounted to an investment in the future of their community. Public meetings, knocking on doors, and publishing in the newspaper a "black list" of leading citizens who refused to "do their patriotic duty" failed to net the sought goal of an initial $75,000 seed money to start the project. If a single community could not support something that most everyone agreed was needed, what chance did a Valley-wide effort stand for success? [31]

As for the encouragement of "outsiders," once former snowbirds became Valley residents, they quickly forgot what first attracted them to the region and joined long-time residents in a conviction of the need for agricultural development. When investment banker George White, Davenport, Iowa, returned to the Valley in 1927 to buy land, his tone had changed from his radio interview the previous year where he encouraged the promotion and development of tourism. As a local landowner, he now encouraged additional infrastructure to support the citrus production in which he was now engaged.[32]

This brief study does not suggest that the lack of a national ad campaign prevented the Valley from reaching its full tourism potential. Rather, this is vivid illustration of a greater obstacle--competition between Valley communities and a general ambivalence towards tourism. Until the mid-twenties, the Valley possessed a myopic focus on agriculture with little interest in attracting or providing for winter tourists. Even if a united national campaign had materialized and thousands more tourists had heeded the call to visit, the Valley lacked the facilities and attractions of Southern California

and Florida. Furthermore, Valley residents showed little interest in addressing this deficiency. While the railroads found it in their best interest to promote tourism, more than one line served the Valley, and they competed with each other as vigorously as did the communities that they served. It required outside developers and their money to attempt building the Valley into the "play town and playground" of the Gulf Coast. Understandably, competition between these interests further deterred Valley unity.

In the end, the issue may be moot. The Great Depression that came on the heels of this period may have doomed success anyway. But the question does arise; what if the Valley had recognized the value of tourism earlier and local interests had united in a strong effort to promote, develop, and provide for visitors? Could the region have boomed and matured enough to withstand the Great Depression? And is there a larger lesson to learn? Tourism aside, could the Valley benefit today from greater cooperation between communities? It certainly could have in the 1920s.

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Endnotes

1 Milo Kearney, "The Shifting Relationship between Harlingen and San Benito in the First Three Decades of the Twentieth Century," *Studies in Matamoros and Cameron County History*, (The University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College, 1997), pp. 38-40; 44-45; 54-55; 57; The resort town of Rio Hondo merged with the farm communities of Combes and Primera in 1926 and 1927, 57; pp. 38-40, 52-54; "Capital of the Lower Rio Grande Valley," p. 59; Attempting to replace an earlier established town of Bixby as a train stop, La Feria literally stole Bixby's depot building and placed in on their own site in J. L. Allhands, *Railroads to the Rio*, (Salado, Texas: The Anson Jones Press, 1960), p. 138; *Brownsville Herald,* 7 March 1926, p. 136.

2 *Brownsville Herald*, 7 January 1926, p. 1, hereafter *BH.*

3 *BH* 27 December 1922, p. 1.

4 *BH* 27 December 1922, p. 1.

5 *BH* 11 August 1924, p. 1.

6 A member of the Valley Chamber of Commerce proposed an advertising scheme of "motion picture films and special automobile tour throughout the northern states" in 1924, but the chamber took no action in *BH* 3 February 1924, p. 6; Florida's success in *BH* April 21, 1925. p. 1; "Valley to Advertise to World" in *BH* 3 May 1925, p. 1; Milo Kearney and Anthony Knopp, *Boom and Bust: The Historical Cycles of Matamoros and Brownsville*, (Austin: Eakin Press, 1991), 227.

7 *BH* 20 May 1925, p. 2.

8 *BH* 20 May 1925, p. 2.

9 *BH* 18 January 1926, p. 1.

10 Promotional distribution to shippers, manufacturers, growers, and other businessmen attending the Southwest Shippers Advisory Board meeting, in *BH* 9 February 1926, p. 5; Publicity fund in *BH* 24 February 1926, p. 1; *BH* 4 March 1926, p. 1; Davenport, Iowa, developer in *BH* 7 March 1926, p. 7.

11 Ad in *BH* 14 March 1926, p. 7; Rio Grande Railway in *BH* 24 March 1926, p. 2.

12 Point Isabel in *BH* 4 April 1926, p. 1; Padre Island in *BH* April 1926, p. 1; Beaches Hotel ad in *BH* 17 April 1927, p. 4.

13 *BH* 11 April 1926, p. 1; "Scuffles" in Kearney, *Boom and Bust*, p. 224.

14 Outsiders' views in *BH* 7 February 1928, p. 3 and "What the Valley needs above all other things is better roads and a national advertising campaign" in 7 January 1927, p. 5 ; Judge Hugh L. Small in 7 February 1928, p. 3; Investment banker George White, Davenport, Iowa in 7 January 1927, p. 5; Ads in 18 April 1926, p. 7 and 19 April 1926, p. 2; 6 January 1927, p. 7.

15 *BH* 4 April 1926, p. 1; San Antonio Chamber of Commerce office in *BH*, 15 January 1928, p. 5.

16 *BH* 5 January 1927, p. 1; Examples of land company promotions are abundant. See more examples in Kearney and Knopp, *Boom and Bust*, 223-24; Ira G. Clark, *Then Came the Railroads: The Century from Steam to Diesel in the Southwest*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1958), 260; Allhands, *Railroads to the Rio*, 149; Milo Kearney and Anthony Knopp, *Border Cuates: A History of the U.S.-Mexican Twin Cities*, (Austin: Eakin Press, 1995), pp. 195-96.

17 *BH* 9 January 1927, p. 3.

18 Missouri Pacific in *BH* 6 February 1927, p. 12; Southern Pacific in *BH* 8 January 1928. p. 7; *BH* 15 March 1928, p. 3 and *BH* 2 July 1929, p. 2.

19 *BH* 4 March 1928, p. 5; Mexican pamphlet in *BH* 30 May 1928, p. 9.

20 "City Offers Recreations for Tourists" in *BH* April 1927, p. 2.

21 Automobile traffic in *BH* 3 June 1927, p. 1; Edinburg in *BH* 20 June 1927, p. 8; Apartment construction in *BH* 26 June 1927, p. 3; *BH* 15 December 1929, p. 14.

22 Harlingen in *BH* 8 January 1928, p. 2; San Benito in *BH* 26 June 1927, p. 3; Other cities building hotels include Harlingen in *BH* 4 February 1925, p. 1; 11 July 1915, p. 1; 10 March 1926, p. 5; 2 March 1927, p. 2; 10 April 1927, p. 1; Weslaco in 5 March 1926, p. 1; 12 March 1926, p. 3; 26 January 1926, p. 7; 15 February 1928, p. 2; Mission in 9 January 1927, p. 6; Mercedes in 29 March 1927, p. 1; La Feria in 10 April 1927, p. 1; Point Isabel in 8 May 1928, p. 1.

23 General description in Kearney and Knopp, *Boom and Bust*, 224; Specific numbers and examples in *BH* 5 February 1929, p. 2; *BH* 11 February 1929, p. 1; 26 February 1929, p. 3; Ticket agents visit in *BH* 9 August 1929, p. 2.

24 *BH* 15 April 1929, p. 3.

25 London reporter in *BH* 8 June 1928; Matamoros taxis in *BH* 18 August 1929, p.1.

26 *BH* 15 April 1929, p. 3; 23 August 1919, p. 1; 2 October 1929, p. 1; 13 October 1929, p. 1 Sec 2.

27 *BH* 22 August 1929, p. 1; 30 August 1929, p. 5; For a good discussion about competition between Valley communities and a lack of "boosterism," see the above-quoted essay by Milo Kearney, "Shifting Relationship," pp. 37-76.

28 Kiwanis club in *BH* 30 August 1929, p. 5; *BH* 11 September 1929, p. 5.

29 *BH* 23 August 1919, p. 1.

30 *BH* 23 August 1919, p. 1; 11 September 1929, p. 5.

31 Hotel committee in *BH* 21 May 1925, p. 1 and 22 May 1924, p. 1; Promotional efforts in *BH* 5 June 1925, p. 1 and *BH* 9 June 1924, p. 1 and 10 June 1924, p. 1 and 12 June 1924, p. 1; "Black list" of citizens in *BH* 4 June 1924, p. 1 and "Honor roll" list in *BH* 11 June 1924, p. 1; Subscription total in *BH* 29 May 1924, p. 1.

32 *BH* 7 January 1927, p. 5.

Conflicto del Municipio con la Compañía de Luz y Fuerza

by

Andrés F. Cuéllar

Por fin habían pasado los años de la Revolución Mexicana en Matamoros. La terrible crisis económica que sufrieron sus habitantes,[1] igualmente había pasado una terrible epidemia de viruela[2] y parecía haber cierto optimismo en la ciudad. A principios de 1919 el teléfono había llegado para quedarse y aparecían nuevos usos para esa modernidad como lo prueba la solicitud del Inspector de Policía que deseaba la instalación de algunos teléfonos que le ayudaran a desempeñar mejor su función.[3] El número de automóviles era suficiente como para que el tesorero se quejara de que las placas se habían agotado y por lo tanto algunos de estos vehículos traían un cartón en su lugar, por lo que fue necesario autorizar el gasto de comprar más placas.[4]

Los matamorenses disponían de ingresos suficientes para sostener uno de los espectáculos de masas más antiguos de nuestro país: las corridas de toros. Puesto que el "C. José L. Morelos manifiesta que deseando organizar en esta Ciudad una Campaña Taurina para dar corridas de toros pide se le conceda el permiso o se recabe de quien corresponda a fin de dar principio a la construcción de la plaza, comprometiéndose la Compañía que se organice a facilitarla gratuitamente cuando sea necesario para cualquier clase de espectáculos que se destinen sus fondos a la Beneficencia o Instrucción Pública". A lo que los representantes del pueblo de Matamoros contestan que "Siendo de reconocida utilidad para el comercio de esta Ciudad la verificación de esta clase de espectáculos, por el beneficio que recibe, es de concederse y se concede el permiso que se solicita previa la sanción del Superior Gobierno del Estado a quien se le insertará este ocurso con el acuerdo de informe del Ayuntamiento. Comuníquese el interesado."[5]

Aún no sabemos cuando se estableció la Compañía de Luz y Fuerza de Matamoros, pero pronto se convirtió en uno de los servicios vitales para la ciudad, como lo demuestra el corrido que se refiere a la Toma de Matamoros por Lucio Blanco en 1913 nos dice en uno de sus cuartetos:

La plaza de Matamoros
estaba fortificada
con la planta de la luz
estaba bien conectada.[6]

Muy probablemente el primer contrato que tuvo la Compañía de Luz y Fuerza de Matamoros terminó en el año de 1918 porque en la larga primera

sesión de cabildo celebrada el 13 de enero de 1919, el flamante presidente Don Leonides Guerra toma la palabra para tratar un último asunto:

> *Siguió en el uso de la palabra el C. Presidente y manifestó: que habiéndose extinguido el término en que la Compañía de Luz Eléctrica y Fuerza Motriz tiene compromiso con el Ayuntamiento para dar la luz o alumbrado público de la Ciudad, sería conveniente nombrar una comisión para otorgar un nuevo contrato.*[7]

A pesar de lo cansado que debieron haber estado, el asunto era tan importante que provocó "un ligero debate" y se nombró una comisión integrada por el C. Presidente Don Leonides Guerra, el Regidor Dr. Benito Hernández y el C. Comandante de Policía, Don Salvador Cárdenas, como perito en la materia. Este Don Salvador Cárdenas debió ser todo un estuche de monerías pues además de comandante de policía, podemos ver que resultó perito en la materia, no sabemos si eléctrica o de firmar contratos. Si tenemos paciencia lo veremos asumir el próximo año la Silla Presidencial de nuestro Municipio.

El propósito de esa comisión era "entrevistar al Gerente de la Compañía Sr. Emilio J. Puig, y tramitar lo necesario para establecer las bases del nuevo contrato sirviéndose dar cuenta del resultado."[8] Largas debieron ser las negociaciones entre la comisión y el Sr. Puig. Mientras éstas se llevaban a efecto, el Gerente envía un oficio a la autoridad que puede interpretarse como una forma de presión en la negociación, ya que en él informaba: "que teniendo que hacer algunas reparaciones de importancia en las calderas y bobedón" de la planta, respetuosamente pide permiso para la suspensión del servicio por espacio de cuatro o cinco días, manifestando que si antes de este término se termina el trabajo, se reanudará nuevamente el servicio."[9]

La autoridad demuestra su buena voluntad al acordar: "Dígaselo que en vista de las razones que expone es de concederse y se le concede el permiso que solicita." Pero apenas se comenzaba a elaborar el nuevo santoral de La Revolución, los días que escogió Don Emilio para practicar la limpieza interferían con el segundo aniversario de la Constitución de Querétaro por lo que en tono humilde "suplicándole, si le es posible, proporcionar luz la noche del 5 del corriente, en virtud de verificarse esta noche una audición en la Plaza Principal en celebración del Aniversario de la Promulgación de nuestra Constitución Política."[10]

Me imagino que algunos enamorados debieron haber rogado por que la "súplica" del municipio no fuera posible atenderla. No fue sino hasta la sesión del 24 de febrero cuando los responsables pudieron al fin mostrar los resultados de la comisión encomendada. Hacía más de un mes, indiscutiblemente que debieron sentir que estaban haciendo una gran labor, que comienzan con un preámbulo que más parece un ritual al informar, que:

Cumpliendo con lo dispuesto por este R. Ayuntamiento se acercaron al Sr. Puig antes indicado con objeto de tratar el asunto relacionado con el contrato de arrendamiento de la luz que está por otorgarse entre la Compañía y esta Corporación de cuya entrevista ha resultado lo siguiente:[11]

En seguida relatan las características de la negociación, en que debió estar en boca de ambas partes la crisis económica vivida en Matamoros. Describen que "el Señor Puig en nombre de los intereses que representa manifiesta: que no le es posible seguir proporcionando la luz, ni al Ayuntamiento ni a los particulares por el precio que se tenía convenido en el contrato anterior y desea que en este sentido sea reformado el nuevo contrato proponiendo la conveniencia de aumentar un 50% sobre la cantidad que antes se tenía convenida con el compromiso de dar mejor servicio; la comisión que tiene lo honra al informar que hizo al referido Señor Puig algunas objeciones sobre el particular manifestándole las condiciones actuales de nuestro pueblo en virtud de lo cual se consiguió que se redujera el aumento que se pretende, quedando en que la Compañía proporcionará la luz, previo el otorgamiento del contrato respectivo, al cual se le dará validez desde el día primero del corriente mes, siempre que se les conceda un aumento de un 25% sobre la cuota que pagan en la actualidad tanto el Ayuntamiento como los particulares y algunas otras estipulaciones de mero tránsito que se harán constar en el mismo contrato."[12]

Muy orgullosos debieron sentirse los negociadores, lo que no impidió que se sometiera a la discusión del Cabildo, pero el acuerdo tendría que ser favorable al declarar que se "acepta el 25% de aumento que propone la Compañía por medio de su representante y se dispuso se nombre una nueva Comisión que integraron los Señores Manuel Argueta y Salvador Cárdenas para que formulen las nuevas bases del contrato que se otorgue y lo sujeten a la consideración de esta corporación."[13] Los términos no debieron agradarle mucho a Don Emilio J. Puig porque un mes después no se había firmado el nuevo contrato y el Regidor Argueta se ve obligado a proponer que el Municipio vea la forma de firmarse contrato con la mencionada compañía acordando: "Líbrese oficio al gerente de la compañía en el sentido que se indica."[14]

Días después el comandante de policía se queja de que en algunas calles como la Herrera y la Bustamante carecen de alumbrado público "y como son de mucho tráfico, las pongo a consideración del H. Cabildo." A lo que éste responde que aún está pendiente la firma del nuevo contrato con la compañía de Luz y Fuerza Motriz y que en la firma de éste se tendrá en cuenta para incluirlo "porque es necesario." Don Emilio escogió el tortuguismo o tácticas dilatorias por que no fue sino hasta el dos de mayo cuando envía al ayuntamiento lo que pudiéramos llamar una contra propuesta, que deshacía

todo el trabajo anterior lo que provocó el inmediato rechazo del Cabildo y decide ponerse enérgico conminándolo a que "en vista de no haber sido aceptadas por esta Corporación las bases propuestas relativas al contrato para la ministración de luz, se dispuso concurra legalmente autorizado, a la próxima sesión de este R. Ayuntamiento, que tendrá verificativo el próximo Lunes 12 del actual, a fin de establecer de común acuerdo las bases legales y convenientes para ambas partes; advirtiéndosele que mientras no sea otorgado el contrato respectivo se le descontará de la cuota mensual todas las faltas de luz, solamente se reconocerán las interrupciones ocasionadas por causas de fuerza mayor clasificadas a juicio de esta autoridad."[15]

A pesar de que la exigente autoridad citara a Don Emilio para el "12 del presente," ese día no hubo sesión, pues todos sabemos que ese mes es de muchas fiestas y las cumplidas autoridades no podían ser ajenas a ellas, no fue sino hasta la semana siguiente, el 19 cuando tuvo a bien reunirse el cabildo y allí estuvo presente Don Emilio y se agregó el destacado Ingeniero Civil Leopoldo Palacios en su silla de ruedas y cuya presencia se debía a que deseaba rendir el informe sobre las condiciones de seguridad de la Plaza de toros recién construida. El primer asunto que trataron fue el ya largo problema del nuevo contrato de la Compañía de Luz y Fuerza Motriz. Sin embargo, sólo fue necesario "un ligero debate" en el que el Cabildo se enteró de que la compañía se encontraba imposibilitada para ofrecer el servicio "por falta de combustible y otras de fuerza mayor."[16]

Es conveniente aclarar que la compañía de Luz y Fuerza Motriz de Matamoros utilizaba como combustible la leña. Ya para entonces se tenían problemas para obtenerla, por lo que podemos decir que éste fue el principio del ecocidio que se ha cometido con esta zona. Como lo veremos, pronto este problema se agravará. Ante tales evidencias no tuvo más remedio el cabildo que condescender con Don Emilio y tomar el siguiente acuerdo:

> *En vista de las razones expuestas por el Gerente de la Compañía de Luz y Fuerza Motriz de esta Ciudad por las cuales se deja ver la imposibilidad en que se encuentra por el momento para otorgar el contrato que se le exige, por la escasez del combustible y algunas otras circunstancias de fuerza mayor, se le concede un plazo de noventa días contados desde la fecha para el otorgamiento del nuevo contrato.*[17]

Las condiciones de la Compañía de Luz y Fuerza Motriz de la ciudad debieron ir de mal en peor, porque a pesar de lo enérgico que parecía el Cabildo a los 90 días no se mencionó el problema y no fue sino hasta el 28 de julio del año siguiente o sea 14 meses más tarde cuando el problema vuelve a aparecer, precisamente para probar que la compañía funcionaba mal. Pues el Presidente Municipal, ahora Salvador Cárdenas, informa que en varias

noches carecieron de servicio eléctrico por lo que juzgó "pertinente y benéfico para los intereses Municipales, gestionar con el Gerente de la Compañía, un descuento, logrando obtener el de 25% sobre el pago de la segunda decena del presente."[18]

En agosto, Don Emilio informa al Cabildo que continúa con el problema de la falta de leña y que, por tal motivo, sólo podrá dar servicio hasta el día 15 o sea el día anterior. Don Miguel Elizondo consideraba el problema "de gran importancia para el pueblo" por lo que citó al Señor Puig para entrar en "pláticas y arreglos." Esta oportunidad aprovecha Don Emilio para explicar que la compañía se encuentra en muy malas condiciones, que de las dos calderas con que contaba, sólo una funciona, porque la otra está descompuesta y la compañía no cuenta con recursos para componerla y que la única manera sería que el municipio le prestara $2,000.00, en oro nacional, cantidad considerable. Con esta cantidad creía Don Emilio se le podían hacer todas las reparaciones y mejoras que requería la planta. Don Emilio proponía pagar ese préstamo con la luz que consumiera el municipio, a partir de la siguiente decena.[19] El ayuntamiento accede a prestarle la cantidad que reclamaba el gerente a condición de que ¡Por fin! firmara el contrato pendiente desde febrero del año anterior. Este cabildo más condescendiente con el presidente lo autoriza para que fije las bases del acuerdo. Es curioso como prefirieron ignorar el difícil problema de la falta de leña.

Once días después, El Presidente informa que el Señor Puig no puede firmar el contrato porque nadie se compromete con él a suministrarle la leña que necesita e insiste el mal estado de las calderas y la necesidad de los $2,000.00 oro nacional. No se hace referencia a que en la sesión anterior ya se había acordado prestar esa cantidad, y no se aclara si es la misma cantidad que no se le entregó por alguna razón o si se trata de otro préstamo igual. Ahora el Cabildo lo tomó en serio. Abrió

> *el debate el Síndico Procurador Barrera Guerra, contra la opinión del C. Presidente Municipal. Manifiesta que siendo el asunto que nos ocupa de aquellos que trasciende a las futuras administraciones, que justo que el actual Cabildo siente precedente de Autoridad, derecho y mandato que perdure en las generaciones venideras su paso por la cosa pública; que en su concepto no debe prestarse ese dinero a la mencionada Compañía., ya que ella no se obliga en nada para con los intereses municipales y sí se beneficia con los recursos de ésta. Tercian en el debate Fernández, Marín, Mendoza, Treviño y el Regidor Villarreal ya en pro ya en contra de la proposición y después de dos horas, se pregunta si se considera suficientemente discutido este asunto.*[20]

El Cabildo terminó apoyando el acuerdo de la sesión anterior y autorizaron al presidente a ir a Cd. Victoria para entrevistarse con el Señor Gobernador,

Don José Morante, para informarse de los medios legales que pudieran utilizarse para obligar a la Compañía a firmar contrato con el municipio, y hasta autorizaron la cantidad de $125.00 como viáticos para el viaje. El 1 de septiembre de 1920, después de explicar como se combatió a una más de las crecientes del Río Bravo, el Presidente pasa a explicar el resultado de su viaje a Victoria, obteniendo la condonación de unos bonos de cárcel y finalmente menciona que trató ampliamente el problema de la Compañía de Luz y Fuerza Motriz de la ciudad y que el gobernador provisional le dijo que procuraran no tener problemas con la mencionada compañía, que se le prestara el dinero y que procuraran asegurar el préstamo, que le enviaran el documento para estudiarlo y ver los medios en que podría obligarse a la compañía a firmar contrato con la ciudad..

Nuevamente se abre el debate más apasionado que en la sesión anterior y después de discutir por más de dos horas y media, siendo las 11:45 pm se suspendió la sesión sin llegar a acuerdo.[21] Pero en la sesión del lunes 13 de septiembre, fue el primer asunto que se trató, diciendo escuetamente que se firmó el contrato "de arrendamiento de luz" el 8 del mismo mes.[22] Con toda seguridad que hubo acuerdo tras bambalinas. Mes y medio después, el viernes 29 de octubre se da cuenta de un telegrama del Sr. C. F. Pérez, Director General de los Ferrocarriles Nacionales de México diciendo que libró órdenes para que se pongan a disposición de la autoridad municipal 20 furgones en Estación Ramírez para el transporte de leña para esta ciudad.[23] Indiscutiblemente que se alejaban las fuentes de aprovisionamiento de leña.

Aún nos falta por estudiar algunos libros de actas de cabildo para conocer los problemas que continuó ocasionando la mencionada compañía de Luz y Fuerza Motriz de Matamoros, es muy estimulante la preocupación del los miembros del cabildo tanto por procurar el mejor servicio posible, obtener el precio más barato, que significaba cuidar los dineros del pueblo y no vacilar ante una sugerencia del Señor Gobernador. Realmente lo que sucedía era que la Compañía utilizaba una tecnología obsoleta, suponiendo que las calderas hubieran estado bien reparadas, pronto hubiera hecho crisis la falta de leña o hubiera sido más caro el transporte de la leña que la electricidad que producían.

Lo que sí sabemos es que para el 18 de junio de 1924 ya había desaparecido la Compañía de Luz y Fuerza Motriz de Matamoros y se había fundado La Compañía Eléctrica de Matamoros S. A. de la cual era Vicepresidente y Gerente Don Emilio Puig. Eso nos indica que la compañía de Luz pudo haberse descapitalizado, pero no su gerente por los cargos que desempeñaba en la nueva compañía y en esa fecha solicitaba permiso para instalar torres y postes para importar la electricidad de los EU.[24] Situación que se prolongó hasta fines de los años 60s cuando se construyó la planta termoeléctrica Emilio Portes Gil de Río Bravo, ya con una industria eléctrica nacionalizada, Nuestra

Iniciativa privada siempre prefirió la comodidad de comprarla y venderla.

Cronista de Matamoros

Notas

1 "Crisis Económica en Matamoros de 1915 a 1919," trabajo inédito del autor.

2 *Ibid.*

3 *Libro de actas de cabildo* (en lo sucesivo se citará como LAC) Pag 1, Sesión del 3 de enero de 1919.

4 *LAC.* sesión del 3 de marzo de 1919, pág. 21.

5 *LAC.* Sesión del 24 de febrero de 1919 pág. 14.

6 Américo Paredes, *A Texas-Mexican Cancionero* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), Pág. 83.

7 *LAC.* Sesión del 13 enero de 1919. Pág 4.

8 *Ibid.*

9 *LAC.* Sesión del 13 de febrero de 1919. Pág. 10.

10 *Ibid.*

11 *LAC.* Sesión del 24 de febrero de 1919, Pág. 16.

12 *Ibid.*

13 *Ibid.*

14 *LAC.* Sesión del 26 de marzo. Pág. 28.

15 *LAC.* Sesión del 2 de mayo de 1919, Pág. 39.

16 *LAC.* Sesión del 19 de mayo de 1919. Pág.41.

17 *Ibid.*

18 *LAC.* Sesión del 28 enero de 1920. Pág. 193.

19 *LAC.* Sesión del 15 de agosto de 1920. Pág. 205.

20 *LAC.* Sesión del 25 de agosto de 1950. Pág. 211.

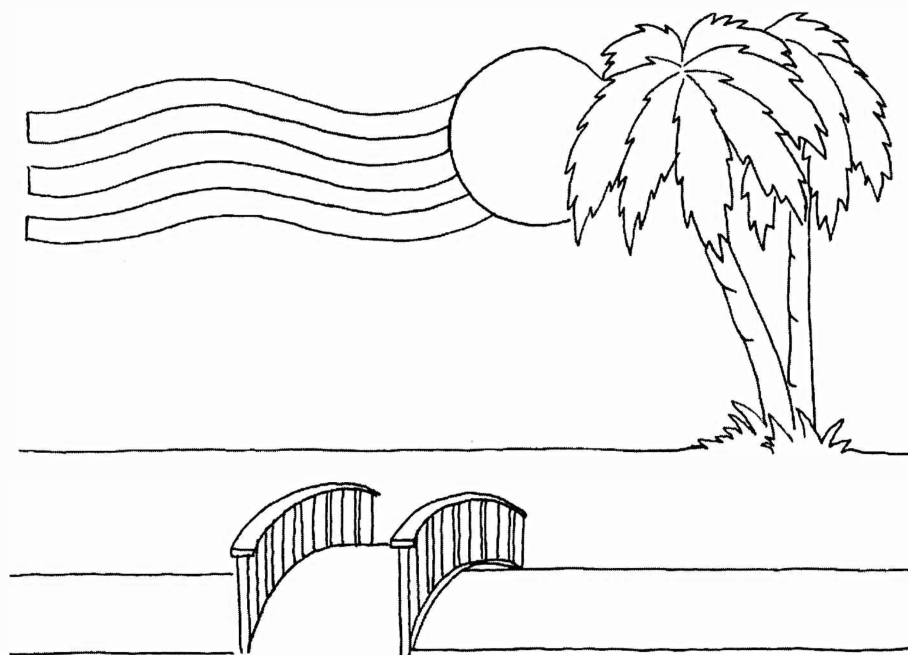
21 *LAC.* Sesión del 1º de septiembre de 1920. Pág. 220.

22 *LAC.* Sesión del 13 de septiembre de 1920. Pág. 225.

23 *LAC.* Sesión del 29 de octubre de 1920. Pág. 253.

24 *LAC.* Sesión del 28 de julio de 1924. Pág. 36.

Historical Studies of the Late 20th Century



The Spirit of Harlingen

A History of the Los Fresnos Chamber of Commerce

by

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For much of its past, the community of Los Fresnos has had a Chamber of Commerce. The existence of this organization was not continuous, but emerged into being at various intervals, and at times became quite operative—highly engaged in the activities of the community. It appears, as with most small-town Chambers, that much of its membership came from the community leadership, the farming sector, and the business sector of the community. Members often believed that the organization's efforts would bring or contribute to the economic prosperity of the town. It is this correlation, the vitality and activity of the Los Fresnos Chamber of Commerce compared to the economic prosperity of the times, that is the subject of this paper, investigated through the Chamber's history of activity. In regards to this relationship, many questions are raised. Did the Chamber contribute to the economic growth of the community or was there only the belief that it was contributing? Were the larger forces of the economic cycle the real causal factors of prosperity or decline? If the Chamber did significantly impact the level of economic prosperity, did it do so consistently and was it apparent? If it did not directly impact the local economy, did the Chamber have other important functions contributing towards the development of the community? As the history of the Chamber is reviewed and compared to the economic prosperity of each period, it is the hope of this writer that some of the answers to the above questions will emerge and the significance of the Chamber, or lack of significance, will also become apparent.

The town of Los Fresnos came into existence in the year 1915. At least that is the year that the first homes were built and the first families arrived to settle in the new townsite, which had been laid out by a land development company.[1] In those early years, the town of Los Fresnos was located at the intersection of what is presently Old Alice Road and Highway 100. The townsite remained there for the next twelve years, until 1927, when it moved approximately one mile to the east where the Southern Pacific Railroad Line to Brownsville had just been completed. The location of the railroad, coupled with the hurricane of 1933, all but destroyed the original townsite except for the school buildings, which remained. Today, 2005, the site contains three of the campuses of the Los Fresnos Consolidated Independent School District.

No record of the existence of a Chamber of Commerce during this early period, 1915-1927, has been found. However, it should be noted that the

driving force behind the development of the community was the "Land Company." The Company promoted the town, arranged for the weekly train excursions for the prospective residents from the north, and built public buildings including a schoolhouse and a community house. The latter was an all-purpose building used for religious services, town meetings, the home of Reverend Swann and his family (in the back of the house), a facility to house the prospective residents for a few nights when surveying the town, and a general gathering place.[2] In this regard, the Land Company served as the promoter of the community in much the same manner as a Chamber of Commerce would have done. Furthermore, since the Land Company was a private company, its interests were directly profit-oriented and its effectiveness was evident by the fact that the town survived and grew in those early years. This growth occurred without a Chamber, but instead, a suitable entity served as a substitute.

In the fall of 1927, a new townsite was laid out (east of the town at that time) by J. G. Fernandez of Brownsville, his brother, A. H. Fernandez, and other investors.[3] According to William Thomas Woodfin, in an article published on March 1, 1929, describing the early history of the relocated townsite, "[t]he sale and promotion of the Los Fresnos townsite has been in the hands and under the management of the Delta Development Co."[4] Woodfin noted that the relocation of Los Fresnos occurred because of the route of the Southern Pacific Railroad, and the new townsite was laid out along the railroad. The lots of the new townsite were first auctioned on December 15, 1927. In the two-plus years after the creation of the relocated townsite, many of the available lots were purchased and several businesses were operating, with Woodfin contributing the early success of the town to the Delta Development Co.[5]

It is in this early period of the present townsite of Los Fresnos, 1927-1929, that the first evidence of a functioning Chamber appears. According to Miriam Chatelle, it was the new Chamber of Commerce that was responsible for the sale of the lots. Its role was exemplified by her reference to a pamphlet printed by the Chamber in 1929.[6] It seems the Chamber was at least partially responsible for promoting the town and the area, as exhibited in the following excerpts from the above-referenced pamphlet:

Los Fresnos, a True Story

Truth is Stranger Than Fiction
Los Fresnos Chamber of Commerce
Los Fresnos, Texas

If you like the Sunshine, every day the year round. And the land where Health and Happiness are found. And the wallets are filled with returns from the ground, Come to Los Fresnos, Texas.

Of all the cities and towns in the Magic Valley of the Lower Rio Grande of Texas, there are none that have a larger trade territory than Los Fresnos. Of all the sections in the Valley, there are none that have more fertile soil, or ideal conditions for the production of unusual crops of vegetables and fruits than Los Fresnos. With Brownsville twelve miles to the south, the Arroyo Colorado, eighteen miles to the north, and San Benito, twelve miles to the west, and Point Isabel, eighteen miles to the east, we have a territory approximately thirty miles North and South and thirty miles East and West, with Los Fresnos the only town in that area, situated in almost the geographical center.7

The Chamber's pamphlet went on to describe the new town and the "remarkable growth" that had occurred in the town in its early years. It listed several of the businesses that were in the town and contained several paragraphs describing the "trade territory," the "gateway city," the "best climate of the Valley," and its "enviable record" as a community and area. The pamphlet ended with an invitation to come to Los Fresnos and included several letters of testimony from local farmers.[8]
A copy of one of the letters is included below:

Los Fresnos, Texas
November 5, 1929

Chamber of Commerce
Los Fresnos, Texas

Gentlemen:
Replying to your inquiry, I have been farming in the Los Fresnos district for the last five years. During that time, I have raised many crops of vegetables, where the returns per acre would run into hundreds of dollars. In the winter of 1927-28 I harvested and sold over $1200 worth of peppers from one acre, and my crop this year looks as though it will exceed that.
I have a young citrus orchard, nearly three years old, which has a nice crop of fruit on it, and is pronounced by most people who see it as the finest in the Valley for its age. I am thoroughly convinced that we have the finest citrus land to be found anywhere.

Signed: F. J. Kretz[9]

The Chamber pamphlet of 1929 and its accompanying letters attesting to the potential of the area demonstrate the spirit and vitality of the organization at the time. When this writer read the complete pamphlet, he was convinced that the Chamber of Commerce played a significant role in the growth of the area in the pre-Depression period of 1927-29. This role may have been in conjunction with the work of the Development Company and also with the personal character and vitality of many of the early settlers in the community who substantially contributed to the prosperity of the region.

Little or no information is available regarding the existence of the Chamber in the 1930s. The Depression of the 1930s had less negative impact in the area than it did in other parts of the country and according to some, farming in the area was still profitable in the early 1930s.[10] However, in addition to no evidence of a viable Chamber, there is no evidence that there was prosperity in the 1930s either. It appears that the period of rapid growth noted in the Chamber pamphlet of 1929 subsided by the end of the decade. The main event that did bring hard times to the community was the hurricane of 1933. Many buildings were destroyed or damaged and the event marked the end of the old townsite to the west. The only original house that remained intact in the old townsite was the Laughlin home. The Community House was so damaged that it was razed and some of the salvageable material was used in the construction of the Methodist church in the new townsite.[11] Of the various sources that tell us of the hurricane and the reconstruction that followed, none make note of a Chamber of Commerce. It appears that in the 1930s there was not a Chamber in the community and the community did not grow either. The depressed times were not necessarily because of the lack of a Chamber, but possibly the absence of a viable Chamber was the result of the depressed times due to the destruction from the hurricane of 1933 and the eventual arrival of the Depression to South Texas.

Chatelle suggests that there was a substantial decline in the business activity during the Depression years and little growth occurred until World War II. She notes that there were improvements by the County from 1935-1940 in the nature of public buildings, roads, and utilities, but makes no mention of contributions to these efforts by a Los Fresnos Chamber of Commerce.[12]

Prosperity returned to the community during the war and continued during the post-war period. The Chamber of Commerce was organized again in November of 1947.[13] Noting the significance of the various institutions of the post-war community, Chatelle selected the "Chamber of Commerce as the most representative of all the phases of activity" of the community. She cites a list of the membership attending a meeting of the Chamber in February of 1948 and notes the occupation of each member as well as the Chamber's slogan, "City of Friendship and Enterprise."[14] The list of the 24 members who were present was dominated by the names of farmers, of which there were fourteen. It also included two preachers and a minister.[15]

Evidence of the Chamber's activity during the late 1940s and early 1950s is not available; however, there is some indication that the Chamber was more the product and not the creator of the post-war prosperity. The community was bustling with many organizations and activities, the town was growing in numbers, and according to Maria Trinidad Silva, baseball and softball dominated entertainment as teams and leagues were created.[16] Community organizations also included the Women's Service Club, the Junior Service

League, and the Lions Club, which was organized in January 1948.[17] No where is it suggested that the Chamber assumed a more contributory role than it had in the late 1920s; it simply reflected the vitality, prosperity, and character of the small town of Los Fresnos which incorporated in 1946, an act which also reflected the progressive attitude of the era.

The prosperity of the 1940s was evident in the population growth of Los Fresnos, which increased from 550 residents at the beginning of the decade to 1113 at its end.[18] The 1950s represented a marked contrast to the 1940s. The town grew by just a few hundred residents during the decade and evidence of the Chamber's activities is even less. There is no evidence to suggest that an active Chamber even existed. This was not necessarily due to depressed economic conditions, as the 1950s were not void of prosperity. Generally, the local economy remained stable during the period, but it did not experience the rapid growth of the late 1920s and the 1940s. The reason for the apparent lack of an active Chamber may be due to the importance of the Lions Club, which evolved as the primary civic organization for men. Additionally, the Lions Club sponsored the annual Los Fresnos Charity Horse Show, which became the main civic event in the community. The Horse Show was a three-day event held every summer that attracted show horses from as far away as Tennessee and Kentucky. With the Lions Club as the leading community organization, and its Horse Show as the principle civic event during the 1950s, the influence of the Chamber of Commerce is not to be found even if a Chamber did exist. In this period, the Lions Club fulfilled the need for those energetic persons wanting to create an organization that could contribute to something or an organization in which they could contribute their time. The attitude that the community was sufficiently complete began to creep in, and the vigor and drive which existed in the 1920s and the 1940s to increase the community was not as evident in the 1950s. This spirit of complacency and satisfaction, believing that the town was acceptable just as it was and no more growth was needed, possibly contributed to the absence of the Chamber as well. Whatever the reason, the Lions Club, not the Chamber, promoted the community.

As the 1950s came to a close, the town did experience an economic decline. This was hastened by the closing of the nearby AMACO plant in the fall of 1957. Rather than leave the area when the announcement of the closing occurred, a plant employee, Harry Bugge of Brownsville, opened a hardware store in Los Fresnos in the fall of 1957. There had been two hardware stores that had closed down in the late 1950s and one still had some merchandise on the shelves. Bugge reopened the store and served the community as a plumber as well. According to Ruth Bugge, times were somewhat lean, no Chamber of Commerce existed, and there were few businesses available to support a Chamber.[19] The last few years of the decade and the beginning of the 1960s

represented somewhat depressed times and a stagnation within the business community of Los Fresnos. Events were more exacerbated by the freeze of January 1962, which devastated the citrus industry in the Valley, and the rainy summers of the early 1960s, which damaged much of the cotton crop during that period.

It was in this atmosphere that the Chamber of Commerce was reorganized in May of 1961.[20] This time, the Chamber seemed to have the clear goal of bringing vitality back to the community. Bob Overcash, its President, who was also the Vice President of the local bank, led the Chamber for the next several years. Overcash was an energetic leader and would often meet with Mary Louise Middleton, the Chamber Secretary and owner-operator of Franke's Restaurant, early in the morning over coffee at "Franke's" to discuss the Chamber's business. Middleton states that the Chamber was quite active and met regularly during the early 1960s. Breakfast meetings were held at Franke's Restaurant beginning at 7:00 a.m.[21] This writer remembers, as a teenager, having to get up quite early and being taken to those morning meetings because Dad—Ormal Keillor, a local businessman—thought it would be good for his son to hear the Chamber's business and be exposed to the activities of the community. This writer saw firsthand how the meetings were conducted, gained an early appreciation of the efforts necessary to build a healthy business community, and also enjoyed the breakfasts at the restaurant.

The Chamber of Commerce was especially active during the 1960s. One of its earliest projects was the community library. The Chamber, Secretary, Middleton, proposed the idea of the library in a regular meeting of the Chamber in 1961.[22] The Chamber endorsed the project and budgeted $50 to get it going. There were drives to obtain donated books and raise money for shelving. The temporary location was a room in an insurance and real estate business owned and operated by Oneta Grisham, and Grisham and other volunteers operated the library in its early years.[23] Due to the efforts of the Chamber, and the various other community organizations that supported the collection of the books and the fund drives, ". . . on July 15, 1962, with approximately one thousand books on the shelves, Open House was held to show the people of the community what the Library had to offer for their enjoyment."[24] Soon a Library Board was created, the funds to build a separate building were donated by Harry H. Whipple in memory of his wife, and the City of Los Fresnos assumed the operation of the Library. By the spring of 1966, the new Ethel L. Whipple Memorial Library was opened to the public. The Library, one of the community's most treasured landmarks today, thus was initially a result of the efforts of the Chamber.

Another event marked the activities of the Chamber in the 1960s. To bring new life and vitality into the community, the Chamber wanted to create

an annual event that would promote the community and bring the winter visitors (referred to as "Snowbirds" at the time) to the community as well. Middleton states that there was a desire to have an event in which the local "ag" students could display their animal projects.[25] The result was the Old Fashioned Country Fair, a two-day event in February, during the middle of the "Snowbird Season." The Fair included a few rides such as a Ferris wheel; an exhibit center for local crafts and hobbies such as quilting and sewing to be shown, and for Valley businesses to display their wares; numerous exhibits by the local school organizations; booths to sell drinks and food; and contests occurring almost every hour such as roping, judging baked goods and foods, greased-pig-catching, pie eating, horse-shoe throwing, animal judging, and others. There was entertainment such as singing, guitar playing, roping, and square dancing provided by various groups and organizations. Other activities included a parade on the first day to open the event, band concerts, and numerous activities by several of the groups in the local Jr. High and High School, as well as activities for those groups. The local School District fully supported the Fair with floats by the various classes; it even canceled school on Friday, the first day of the event. The activities seemed to increase until Saturday evening, when the fireworks were lighted. The event maintained the theme of the Old Fashioned Country Fair, with the women wearing long colorful dresses and bonnets, and the men wearing blue denim farm overalls and red bandannas. The event, which began in the early 60s, grew every year.

The person who was the annual committee chairperson for the event was Ormal Keillor, the father of this writer.[26] Keillor's wife (and this writer's mother), Georgiana Keillor, would promote the event for weeks in advance on various local radio and television shows as well as winter tourist gatherings throughout the Valley. The event continued to grow throughout the 1960s and within a few years it became a three-day affair. The Fair also incorporated the Cameron County Livestock Show into the activities, which brought young people from 4-H Clubs and school FFA Chapters from all over the county to exhibit their animal projects. Tourists from all parts of the Valley descended upon the community for the event and on many days the turnout was in excess of 5,000 visitors. As the Fair increased in importance, the summer Horse Show, sponsored by the Lions Club, rapidly faded. By the mid 1960s, the Horse Show had been abandoned and was replaced by the Fair as the major annual community event. Also, the Chamber of Commerce had replaced the Lions Club as the dominant organization promoting the community. This is not to say that the decade brought economic prosperity, but the Chamber and the Old Fashioned Country Fair brought a new vitality to the community that had not been evident since the late 1940s. The Chamber brought the community closer together and it promoted support of the local businesses.[27] Had it not

been for the Chamber, the community of Los Fresnos could have traveled the path of downward economic spiral that occurred in many of the other small farming communities of the Rio Grande Valley in the 1960s; several of these still remain today as skeletons of their pasts. However, it would not be until the 1970s that economic prosperity would truly arrive.

By the end of the decade of the 1960s, the Chamber had once again passed its zenith and would soon disband. The Old Fashioned Country Fair was discontinued in the early 1970s and the event simply became known as the Cameron Country Livestock Show, having only remnants of the Fair activities such as a small carnival and booths for clubs and organizations to sell food and drinks. Within a few years, the entire event was abandoned and the Cameron Country Livestock Show was later moved to San Benito, where it remained for many years.

A Chamber that disbanded and did not meet marked the years of 1970 through 1972. The key leaders of the 1960s had either moved away or were retired. In the 1960s, many of the Chamber's leaders were also in their sixties, and there were few or no young business men and women in the community to replace them. Furthermore, the 1970s brought economic prosperity and there seemed to be little interest for a Chamber. After a three-year absence, the Chamber was once again reactivated in the fall of 1972 and would promote the growth of the community for the next several years. James Keillor (the writer of this paper and the son of Ormal Keillor) was the leader of the reorganization effort. He became the interim President until the Chamber elected officers the following spring. The younger Keillor was elected President and Albert Fernandez, a descendent of the original developers of the relocated townsite, followed Keillor's tenure. The Chamber would remain throughout the decade. The leaders during this period included Keillor, Fernandez, and Rankin Garrett, a local real estate broker. This Chamber opened an office in a building adjacent to and on the north side of the local bank. It was staffed with volunteers for over a two-year period, and actively met and offered programs at each meeting.[28]

The primary obstacle for the Chamber and the growth of the community at the time was the city government. Keillor owned and operated a lumberyard and a construction company, which primarily built custom homes in the area. He also developed a few blocks on the southeast side of the city. Fernandez was also a land developer and developed several additional blocks within the Los Fresnos townsite. Both met adversity, primarily from the City Council, which took a no-growth position. The community had worked for decades for growth, and when the entire Lower Rio Grande Valley was booming in the 1970s, the City of Los Fresnos opposed growth at every turn, wanting to preserve for eternity the small community that existed. The Chamber and its leaders urged the City to adopt a progressive attitude toward growth and accept

the new developments that had been proposed by various parties. The City Administration steadfastly maintained its phobia of growth. The City won, and the Chamber once again folded by the end of the decade without having made any significant progress toward growth and prosperity. The 1970s were years when much of the Valley experienced a renaissance; however, Los Fresnos changed very little. There was a measure of prosperity in Los Fresnos during the 1970s, but it fell far short of its potential. What can be said of the Chamber's efforts is that they, along with the efforts of others, prevented the City from remaining absolutely stagnant and were an opposing force to the city government, which embraced a no-growth policy whenever it could. In this regard, the Chamber of the 1970s may have prevented the community and the City from literally being frozen in time, as many on the City Council would have preferred. Keillor abandoned his efforts through the Chamber and ran for office on the City's Board of Aldermen; he was elected to office in April of 1979. However, he remained a member of the opposition for the next four years until April of 1983, when he did not run again for office.[29]

In the late summer of 1984, Keillor was asked to fill a vacancy that had been created on the City Board of Aldermen. A member of the Board of Aldermen, Carl Macomb, Jr., made this request; he had been a member during Keillor's previous years. He convinced two other Board members to support the filling of the position by Keillor. Soon afterwards, it was announced that the City Secretary/Administrator, Mary Townsend, was moving to Houston along with her husband Gran Townsend, who was Chairman of the Planning and Zoning Board. At the same time, the City Engineer, Don Quilio, also announced his resignation. This was followed within weeks by the resignation of the Mayor, Jesus Vicinaiz. These events all contributed to the breaking apart of the old regime. During this same period, Keillor went to Bob Lemmon, the owner of Holiday Out Trailer Park located on the east end of the community, and convinced Lemmon it was time to reactivate the Chamber. The timing seemed right and by November of 1984, the Chamber had its reorganization meeting. Bob Lemmon was elected President of the Chamber and Keillor was elected Vice President; the new City Secretary/Administrator, Tommy M. Brooks, was also introduced to the community at that meeting. The new Administrator appeared to be pro-Chamber and pro-growth and it looked as if a new era in the history of the Chamber and the community would begin. This would not be a certainty until the elections in the following spring; they proved to be the most political and intense elections the town had witnessed up to that time. The result was that the old guard was firmly removed and the new was put in place. The new Mayor was Richard Sparks, who ran for Mayor for the one-year remainder of a two-year term; James Keillor, Joe Martínez, and Tom Scott were elected as Aldermen. They all ran together as a team of independents who supported growth. This group, coupled with Manuel

Abrego, an Alderman already on the Board with one year left on his term, created a council that had five pro-growth members and only one holdover from the old group. The City Board of Aldermen and the reorganized Chamber of Commerce would begin an era of cooperation that remained for the next fifteen years. The fall of 1984 would mark the beginning of the longest sustained period of continuous activity in the Chamber's history, as it has remained a viable organization, having an impact upon the community since its reorganization in November of 1984.[30]

The year 1985 brought hope. The City Board of Aldermen was a progressive group for the first time in fifteen years or more and the Chamber had been reorganized with a renewed vitality. However, all was not well. The Chamber and the City faced monumental challenges. The Chamber saw a community that was in the midst of its worst recession in decades. The freeze of 1982 had destroyed the local citrus industry. The peso devaluations of 1982 and subsequent devaluations had devastated the economy of Mexico and trade all along the north side of the border had been reduced to a trickle. This had an indirect, but still negative, impact on Los Fresnos. The Union Carbide plant had closed down as well and since many of the residents were employees at the plant, the real estate market in Los Fresnos was in shambles. Homes could not be sold; many who left the community were forced to rent their properties as best they could. Some simply boarded up and left. City water and sewer accounts barely grew and at times even declined in total numbers in 1984-86. The local economy was further damaged by the economic decline in Brownville. Many of the residents in Los Fresnos worked in Brownsville, and as the plants and factories of Brownsville shut down, the adverse economic impact was felt equally in Los Fresnos. The Los Fresnos area supplied many of the employees at the Marathon-Latourneau plant at the port. As that company drastically downsized during the 1980s, the lost jobs contributed to the economic ill health of Los Fresnos as well. The year of 1985 represented the bottom of the economic downturn that began in 1982.[31]

The City also faced extreme challenges. A project for a new water tower and water plant improvements had fallen into disarray in 1984. The subsoil on the site chosen for the water tower had proven inadequate and the new tower components had been rusting away on the ground for months. The sewer treatment plant had become nonfunctional and the State of Texas had been citing the City for violations for several years. Streets were decaying. There was a desperate need to build a police station with a holding cell. Furthermore, the tax base was not growing. The Manpower Programs of the late 1970s and early 1980s had all but disappeared and the City could hardly maintain the services it had previously filled with federal-government-subsidized salaries. The Reagan Administration had ended the Revenue Sharing Program by 1985 and the overall situation seemed to be impossible.

The City Board of Aldermen went to work and developed a plan that would rebuild the infrastructure of the City over the next ten years. In short, the new Board of Aldermen had to overcome fifteen years of infrastructure neglect by previous City Councils. The growth that had occurred in city government in the previous fifteen years was in the areas of the Police Department and the Emergency Dispatch Office; both of which, while necessary, created the need for a larger City Hall.[32]

Many of the new Board of Aldermen became Chamber members and knew that a Chamber of Commerce would be essential in the overall plan of creating a progressive and growing community. A viable business community had to be restored, combined with a growing tax base for the city. These two methods would be the means to restore economic prosperity. The Chamber's role would be to help recreate a community with vitality. It would bring the community leaders together to develop a more positive, forward-looking attitude, one with renewed hope and vigor. As such, the Chamber expanded its scope to more than seeking new businesses. It wanted support from the entire community and the surrounding area. It even changed its name to the Los Fresnos Area Chamber of Commerce. It solicited membership from various community leaders: the business community; the religious leaders of the churches; members of the School Board, City Council, and other political bodies; leaders of social organizations; and other interested parties. A decade later it was criticized as a community social organization rather than a Chamber of Commerce, but the intent in 1985 was to create a community organization. The Chamber's overall mission was to save a community from economic despair and be a revitalizing force to bring back a viable and energetic community spirit. Expanding the business sector was only a segment of its mission, and supporting existing businesses to prevent closures was an even higher priority. This philosophy, spirit, and mission remained throughout the 1980s and into the early 1990s.

In the Chamber, during the period from 1985 to 1992, there emerged two outstanding leaders. These two individuals were Mike Todd and George Gomez. Both were business-oriented and both understood the need for the Chamber to be the catalyst to reinvigorate the business community and the community as a whole. Supporting them were many other dedicated members of the Chamber who volunteered countless hours. Joyce Keillor, wife of this writer, worked on numerous projects and banquets. Lana Todd, who contributed in many capacities, was an excellent Chamber Secretary for several years, and another outstanding member was Jeffie Palmer, mother-in-law of this writer. By the end of 1986, Mrs. Palmer took charge of the membership committee and set a goal of one hundred members.[33] The dues were made reasonable, with one rate for businesses and a lower rate for individuals. Mrs. Palmer secured over a hundred members in 1987 and every

year thereafter except one during her tenure as the Membership Committee. Her efforts not only secured involvement in the Chamber from a large part of the community, but also provided the Chamber with the bulk of its operating funds.

From 1985 to 1992, the Chamber filled many roles. It brought together the business community and helped create the energy, will, and support necessary to endure the economic difficulties of the late 1980s. It welcomed and supported new businesses. It supported the City's efforts in creating a city of growth, opportunity, and an expanding tax base. It supported the City's efforts to rebuild the infrastructure of the City, which was so desperately needed. It provided for many annual events. Indeed, it appears to have fulfilled its mission of a community-oriented Chamber admirably.

The total effect of the Chamber's efforts from 1985 to 1992 can only be appreciated with a year-by-year description of its leadership and accomplishments. In November of 1984, when the Chamber of Commerce was reorganized, it selected Bob Lemmon as its President and James Keillor as its Vice President. A portion of the accomplishments of that reorganization year is noted below:

1. A new logo was established with Los Fresnos identified as the "Hub of the Lower Rio Grande Valley."
2. New by-laws were created.
3. The Chamber supported many local efforts such as the Red Cross Fund Drive, the Girl Scouts campaign to plant ash trees around the community (43 were planted), and efforts of the Sesquicentennial Committee.
4. The Chamber recruited Annie Mathew, M. D., to come to Los Fresnos and establish her practice. Dr. Mathew became the first medical practitioner in the City since the 1950s.
5. The annual 4th-of-July Bar-B-Que was initiated. That event was used as a reception for Dr. Mathew, and the profits were given to her to help subsidize the cost of her setting up her practice.
6. The Chamber contributed towards the furnishings of the new addition to the Ethel L. Whipple Memorial Library.
7. A Steering Committee chaired by Chuck Klinger was created to bring in new businesses.
8. The annual Chamber banquet was initiated; the committee members in charge of the event were Ann Meyn, Lana Todd, and Joyce Keillor.
9. The growth of the Chamber was substantial. On November 5, 1984, 25 people met to reorganize the Chamber. By the end of 1985, there were 81 paid memberships.
10. A Christmas decorating contest was initiated with three categories: non-residences, i.e., businesses, churches, government offices, etc.; residences; and mobile homes. Mike and Lana Todd won the residence award.[34]

The success of the revitalized Chamber continued into the next year. The new leaders of the Chamber for 1986 were Jim Manatt, President, and George Gomez, Vice President. The list of goals and proposed events stated in the January 21, 1986 minutes of the Los Fresnos Area Chamber of Commerce included: 1. clean up the downtown area of the City; 2. restore the City Park; 3. plant palm trees throughout the City; and, 4. support an Industrial Park Committee. Events to be held included: participation in the Sesquicentennial Celebration; the second 4th-of-July Bar-B-Que and celebration; and the 2nd annual banquet. Among the activities and the successes of the 1986 Chamber were:

1. The Chamber partnered with the Sesquicentennial Committee to put on the 3-day carnival event, February 28 to March 2, 1986. The Chamber assumed the responsibility of running the carnival, which included many booths and a tent circus as part of the activities. (The circus was located on the school grounds, which demonstrated the cooperation between Los Fresnos CISD and the Chamber.) Additionally, the Chamber assisted the Sesquicentennial Committee with other aspects of the event, such as a parade, quilt show, and baking contests.
2. The Chamber put on the second annual 4th-of-July Bar-B-Que. George Gomez and Mike Todd were co-chairpersons of the event, Joyce Keillor was in charge of ticket sales, and Debbie Abrego was in charge of the parade. The event would be a celebration to honor the efforts of the volunteer firemen, the ambulance volunteers, and the Los Fresnos Police Department. It included a parade, a carnival, live music, a baking contest, a 1-5 p.m. Bar-B-Que dinner, a dunking booth, a karate demonstration, sack races, the loading of a time capsule placed in the masonry sign in front of the Ethel L. Whipple Memorial Library (to be opened 50 years later), and the recognition of all of the emergency personnel that served the area.
3. An Industrial Park Committee was created.
4. The second annual Chamber banquet was held on November 22, 1986.
5. The Chamber sponsored a second Christmas decorating contest.
6. Many donations to local organizations and events were made by the Chamber, e.g., Los Fresnos Lions Soccer Team, Los Fresnos Senior Citizens Building fund, local Boy Scouts of America, Community Ambulance Service, and the Los Fresnos Beautification Committee.[35]

In 1987, the Chamber was led by Mike Todd as President. The "supporting cast" included Kevin Horn as Vice President, Lana Todd as Secretary, and Luis Romero as Treasurer. Joyce Keillor and George Gomez worked on numerous projects and events; Mrs. Palmer was in charge of membership.

The events and activities were similar to the previous years with the same mission of revitalizing the community. Added to the list of events and activities was a new Pancake Breakfast scheduled for February. Its purpose was to get acquainted with other people in Los Fresnos and to recognize the Winter Texans in our area.[36] Other additions included the Beautification Committee's "Yard of the Month" and "Beautification Award" recognitions that would be given out monthly with signs placed in the winners' yards for a month; an official Welcoming Committee for new businesses and residents headed by Jo Jennings; and an Education Committee that worked with the Lopez-Riggins Elementary on the Adopt-A-School Program.[37]

Mike Todd remained as President for the 1988 Chamber year. Other officers were George Gomez as Vice President, Lana Todd as Secretary, and Kevin Horn as Treasurer. The list of events and activities continued—the February Pancake Breakfast, business ribbon-cutting ceremonies, welcoming new residents, the 4th-of-July Bar-B-Que and celebration, beautification awards, and the end-of-the-year annual banquet. Other projects included a new office located in City Hall, with the office furniture, equipment, and cabinets being donated. Refinishing of the office furniture and installation of wall cabinets and a bulletin board were completed by Chamber members. The new office opened in April 1988 and was staffed with volunteers. The Chamber also constructed a welcoming sign on the west end of town along Highway 100, a new Chamber brochure was created, and the membership of the Chamber had reached 118 by October.[38]

George Gomez assumed the Presidency of the Chamber for the 1989 Chamber year with many of the same group of supporting members as in previous years serving as Officers and Directors. His tenure continued the philosophy and mission of the previous four years with the same activities and events. The Chamber completed a new map of the area for distribution along with its brochure. In 1989, the Chamber decided that it should develop a major event that would put Los Fresnos "on the map" across the Valley. George Gomez said that many in the Chamber wanted Los Fresnos to be known for something other than being a speed trap.[39] A planning committee was created and the result was the formulation of a Professional Rodeo Committee. The plan was to partner the event with the Los Fresnos Lions Club and the initial members of the committee were from both groups, the Chamber and the Lions. The committee's leaders were Don Blakey, President; George Gomez, Vice President; Mercedes Cantu, Secretary; Johnny Cardoza, Treasurer; Gene Daniels, Grounds; and Mike Todd, Membership. In addition to its regular annual event and monthly activities, the Chamber began to concentrate its efforts on the new major annual project for the community of Los Fresnos, a professional rodeo.[40]

The next year, 1990, included the First Annual Professional Rodeo. The

Chamber was led by Don Blakey as its President with some new faces in leadership roles. This year also marked the beginning of a change in the direction and mission of the Chamber. A shift in the focus from community-oriented events and activities to a single major event to attract winter visitors and others to the community occurred, i.e., the Professional Rodeo. The annual 4th-of-July Bar-b-Que became a scaled-down community picnic, and rain ruined the day for most of the participants and booth venders.[41]

The First Annual Professional Rodeo, the major event of the year, experienced several problems. Don Blakey was overwhelmingly successful in procuring free advertising for the event; the Rodeo was promoted all over the Valley. Additionally, there were numerous locations across the Valley where tickets for the Rodeo could be purchased; ticket sales apparently were outstanding. However, there was not an effective system put in place to control ticket sales or monitor the number sold. The Rodeo Committee had rented temporary bleachers, but the arena could accommodate no more than about 3000 people, including standing room around the perimeter. On the day of the event, the arena perimeter was overfilled; many ticket holders walked up to the arena and left in frustration because they could not see over the crowds. Others who had purchased tickets in advance came, but were turned away at the entrance because the arena was filled to capacity. Large amounts of money had to be refunded due to the overselling of tickets. Needless-to-say, many ticket holders across the Valley were upset with the situation. George Gomez later stated that it took at least two years to regain the good will of the rodeo public across the Valley due to the problems of the initial Rodeo.[42]

The problems that occurred with the first Rodeo had other rippling effects. Many Chamber members were not as enthusiastic about the Rodeo as were the members of the Lions Club. Some Chamber members were embarrassed about the outcome of the event. The City of Los Fresnos received numerous letters of outrage about the overselling. The letters came from ticket holders across the Valley who were not allowed into the event and had associated the event with the City of Los Fresnos.[43] Within months, Don Blakey, the Chamber President, announced that he was moving out of the State. The effect was that many in the Chamber did not want to continue the Rodeo. Those who still wanted to continue the Rodeo later created a separate, non-profit organization, the Los Fresnos Professional Rodeo Committee, which remained only quasi-associated with the Chamber as a committee. The key members and supporters of the new independent Rodeo Committee were the original Rodeo Committee members and many of the Lions Club members; Mike Todd and George Gomez were two Chamber members who were also key members of the independent Rodeo Committee. The Chamber provided support for the event in the future and participated with food booths, but the Rodeo was no longer a Chamber event after the first year. It should be noted

that the Los Fresnos Professional Rodeo Committee worked tirelessly over the next one-and-a-half decades to purchase bleachers, acquire adjacent land by the Lions Club for expansion, rebuild the arena, and expand the Rodeo to make the event one of the best in the Valley and one of the longest-lasting civic events that has occurred in Los Fresnos.[44]

In 1991, the Chamber's President was Dora Romero. It was a year of transition. Some of the stalwarts of the previous Chamber years, e.g., Mike Todd and George Gomez, were putting more of their energy into their roles on the new Rodeo Committee, trying to make that event a success after the initial Rodeo year. While they remained Chamber members and still continued to contribute significantly to the Chamber, their Rodeo efforts became a yearlong enterprise. They no longer could be the "workhorses" of the Chamber as in previous years. The Chamber had acquired many new members, but the vitality and voluntary effort put forth in the Chamber was not equal to that of the group of leaders from the previous six years. The annual 4th-of-July Bar-B-Que was scaled down. However, the Chamber introduced a new project, the Miss Los Fresnos Contest. The winner would be selected for the next Rodeo and represent the community in that event.[45]

One might argue that 1992 represented a decline in the vitality of the Chamber and the end of an era in the Chamber's history. Part of the transition may have been due to the general rise of economic conditions in the area and the Chamber's mission of saving a community was subsiding; many may have felt the role of the Chamber as viewed in 1985 had been completed.

George Gomez states that the Chamber of Commerce fulfilled its mission admirably from 1985-92. "The City was pro-business and proactive for growth. The cooperation between the City and the Chamber of Commerce was good, but it could have been better."[46] Gomez concedes that the City provided office space for the Chamber and did what it could do at the time to support the Chamber.[47]

Others who had experienced the City's negative attitude to growth and a Chamber of Commerce prior to 1985 would say there was a remarkable turnaround regarding the support of the Chamber by the City from 1985 to 1992; furthermore, the Chamber was highly supportive of the City in those years.[48] Gomez assesses the effectiveness of the Chamber from 1985-92 by stating that the Chamber ". . . progressed slowly but surely; it was not a dynamic force, but a steady arm of the community. The beautification programs were effective and the town looked better."[49] This writer gives even greater credit to the Chamber during those years. The Chamber, along with the City Council, did much to save the community in a significantly economically depressed period.

During the period from 1985 through the spring of 1994, and with the support of the Chamber, the City made substantial accomplishments. It

completed the water tower project. The water filtration plant was replaced. A plant to treat the City's sewerage was built which could serve a city of over 5500 people—a capacity that would be adequate for possibly two to three decades into the future. A Police Station with a holding cell was built as well as a new City Hall. A Community and Senior Citizens Center was built. A large City Garage was built to house City vehicles and equipment. An Emergency Services Building was built next to City Hall in cooperation with the Fire Department and the Emergency Medical Services. The City approved and supported two additions to the Library that were both paid for, and independently contracted by, Mr. Whipple. His desire was to add to his earlier donation to the community—the original Ethel L. Whipple Memorial Library. Major, north-south, utility trunk lines were extended along Paredes Line to allow for growth on both ends of town. This was done in cooperation with the School district; the line also provided the connections for the new High School that was opened in 1993. Many other projects were completed and by the spring of 1994, the City of Los Fresnos advertised for bids for a comprehensive repaving and street reconstruction project. This occurred at the same time the Highway 100 widening and repaving project had just been completed by the State of Texas on the west side of town. The City's ten-year plan was near completion. Without the support of the community, and especially the Chamber, it would not have been completed to the extent that it had been.

The Chamber of the late 1980s was a major supporter of the City and served as a catalyst in helping the City replace its infrastructure and prepare the groundwork for growth and expansion from which future Chambers and City politicians would reap benefits. Credit for this remarkable list of achievements must also be given to the City Councils of the period and the City Administrator, Mr. Brooks, who all worked closely with the Los Fresnos Area Chamber of Commerce to revitalize the community. Key members of the City Council who were proactive supporters of rebuilding the infrastructure of the City during this period were: Ruby Jean Cheshire, Manuel Abrego, Eduardo Cantu, Ramon Gonzalez, and Carl Macomb, Jr.[50]

The Chamber was effective in attracting many new businesses to the City during the 1985-1992 time period. The largest was Mike's Supermarket on the west end of town. Others included were: the Medical Practice of Dr. Mathew (after a 28-year absence of a physician in the community), the reopening of Dairy Mart, the Decorating Den, the Gift Box, H & A Grocery and Market, Los Fresnos Truss and Door Plant, Dairy Queen, Pitt Stop, Dorcas Flower Shop, Manrique Plaza, Los Fresnos Pharmacy, and several new restaurants and other small businesses. For a period that began in such depressed times, the accomplishments of the Chamber to help bring in new business appear to be substantial.

In 1992, interest in the Chamber declined. Frequently, Chamber meetings were conducted by the Chamber Vice-President Ramon Ramirez rather than by the President Dora Ramirez. The Chamber continued to support the Rodeo effort with monies it received from the City of Los Fresnos for that purpose. The Chamber also provided a food booth at the Rodeo. The Pancake Breakfast and the Miss Los Fresnos Contest remained as the other major events. A Chamber-sponsored, community Bar-B-Que was set for May 30th at the City Park. Other activities such as welcoming new businesses and residents, ribbon-cuttings, and beautification efforts remained. Mike Todd and George Gomez still remained key members and stalwart workers in the Chamber. However, signals of decline were evident by the announcement that in January of 1992, the agenda and minutes (of each previous meeting) would no longer be mailed to the membership, but would only be available at the meetings. One noteworthy event on June 17, 1992, signifying the relationship between the City of Los Fresnos and the Chamber of Commerce, was the Chamber's honoring of Tommy M. Brooks, the City administrator from November 1984 through June, 1992, with a plaque for his support of the Chamber—Brooks was leaving the city with a legacy of many accomplishments. At the Chamber meeting of December 15, 1992, Mrs. Palmer reported that the Chamber had 90 paid members for the year. This was the first year since 1986 that the membership was under 100 members.[51]

In 1993, the Chamber was led by Russ Powell as President. Memberships were effective and the February Pancake Breakfast was a success. The annual Bar-B-Que was moved to May 22nd. A very special event held at the April meeting in 1993 was the celebration of Harry H. Whipple's 103rd birthday. Mr. Whipple was one of the oldest persons in the community and had moved to Los Fresnos in 1915, the first year of the community's existence. Whipple was also a generous philanthropist who supported many local and Valley projects with substantial monetary gifts. In 1993, Don and Dottie Real joined the Chamber.[52] They and Don Badeaux, the new City Administrator, who came to Los Fresnos in August of 1992, would become the leaders in the Chamber over the next several years. Don Badeaux saw the Chamber as a social organization; he wanted it to be more business-oriented, with its primary mission to bring in new business.[53] To accomplish this goal, he was instrumental in creating the Los Fresnos Business Association as a committee of the Chamber. However, the Association had its own by-laws and it met independently of the Chamber. Members of the Business Association had to be business owners or general managers. Key members of the Association were Jim Cook (its President), Don Badeaux, and Don and Dottie Real.[54] Two positive changes occurred during the 1993 Chamber year: a newsletter was created and memberships were once again over 100 (108 paid memberships were reported at the October meeting). However, an indication

that the real power and control in the Chamber had shifted to the Business Association was evident in the October minutes of 1993, which noted that the Business Association entered into a contract with Breeden McCumber and Gonzalez Advertising and Design. It appears that the Business Association began to represent the Chamber of Commerce. Also reflected in the minutes are numerous reports by Mike Todd and George Gomez, indicating that the perennial Chamber workers were still quite active in the 1993 Chamber.[55]

Tony Rivas was the Chamber President for 1994; however, the minutes continue to reflect that the Business Association was increasingly running the Chamber. The Business Association worked on a plan for the renovation of the downtown area. FirstBank established a low interest loan program for improvements. Many businesses agreed to improve their storefronts; however, a new theme for the downtown with a uniform color and façade décor was being developed for the commercial participants to follow. Regarding the usual Chamber activities, Mrs. Palmer again secured over 100 members; the annual Pancake Breakfast, the park Bar-B-Que, the Miss Los Fresnos Beauty Pageant, yard recognitions, and the annual Chamber banquet, among others, were being performed by the general membership. The Business Association targeted the renovation of the downtown.[56]

This writer pursued research of the history of the Chamber of Commerce for the period of 1995 to the present from the Chamber records at the Chamber's current (May 2005) office location in the Well Fargo Bank. No records of the last ten years were available and much of the remainder of this history relies on oral interviews.[57]

Don Badeaux stated that in 1994 the Business Association merged their efforts with the Chamber. The by-laws of the Chamber were amended to create an eleven-member Board of Directors to run the Chamber. At least eight of the Directors had to be business owners or managers and the non-business Directors were non-voting members of the Board of Directors. Business membership was increased to $100 with non-business membership set at $35. Chamber programs had to be business-oriented. Some of the directors, other than the principal organizers previously noted, were George Morrison and George Stone. As did the Business Association, the Directors met monthly on a different day from the monthly meeting of the general Chamber.[59]

Regarding the accomplishments of the Chamber in the period from 1995 to 1999, Badeaux noted the following: a new brochure was developed; a Chamber theme was developed, "City Charm—Country Flavor"; artist's renditions of the design of the exterior of the downtown buildings were created and presented to the Chamber by the advertising and design firm of Breeden, McCumber, and Gonzalez (the renditions exhibited a Spanish/western architectural design for several building facades; the Chamber spent several thousand dollars for the renditions); and, funds for a 50% grant

program to help businesses finance their improvements were provided. The grant fund account was created by equal contributions from the Chamber, the Community Development Corporation, and the local bank. Building façade improvement grants were limited to a 50% matching grant with a cap of $5000 of grant money for each project—the remainder was paid by the business owner. Landscape grants of 50% matching funds were available with a cap of $1500. A grant approval committee was created to approve projects for grant funding. In addition to supplying funds for the grant program, the Chamber also supplied a substantial portion of the salary for a position labeled Chamber of Commerce Manager/Community Development Coordinator. The position, first created in the fall of 1995, served the Chamber, the Community Development Corporation, and the City, with all three entities contributing to its salary. Robert Cepeda was the first to fill the position, followed by John Guevara, and then Paul Chavez.[60]

Badeaux stated that in the period from 1992, when he first became the City Administrator, to 1998 when he was terminated, the City's sales tax rose substantially; new businesses came into Los Fresnos, e.g., Subway Sandwiches, the office complex on Highway 100 built by Don and Dotti Real, and Zarsky Lumber Co.; ten to twelve grants were given to upgrade storefronts; and five to six landscape grants were issued.[61]

From 1994 to 1999, the relationship between the City and the Chamber remained, in Badeaux's words, "a tight marriage." This was due in part because Badeaux was not only a major figure in the Chamber, but also City Administrator. The City continued to provide an office and utilities for the Chamber. The City also provided promotional money for the Rodeo event with donations to the Chamber, which were in turn donated by the Chamber to the Rodeo; however, Badeaux noted these were not large amounts of money.

After Badeaux left his post of City Administrator in March 1998, the City's relationship with the Chamber remained the same. The City was supportive of the Chamber and continued to furnish office space and utilities for the Chamber. However, in the spring of 1999, the Chamber hired Badeaux as its Executive Director; it was a part-time position with a yearly salary of $12,000.[62] With the hiring of Badeaux by the Chamber, the relationship between the City and the Chamber was altered. The City relocated the Chamber office out of City Hall to vacant facilities on Highway 100 owned by the Community Development Corporation and the Chamber maintained its own office.[63] The Chamber's office remained there until 2002 when it moved into space made available for a Chamber office in the Walls Fargo Bank building. The Chamber currently has its office open on Tuesday and Friday mornings.

Robert Cepeda, Chamber of Commerce Manager/Community Development Coordinator from the fall of 1995 to the spring of 1997, recalled the principal

leaders of the Chamber Board of Directors were Jim Cook, Don Badeaux, and Dotti Real. Chamber dues were $300 for governmental organizations, $150 for businesses, and $35 for individuals; individuals had no voting rights. During this period, the façade and landscape grant program to renovate and create a common architecture in the downtown area was the focus of the Chamber. Cepeda remembers only five to six grants for exterior improvement being issued and a few landscape grants. The 4th-of-July Bar-B-Que was discontinued in the mid-1990s, but the Chamber did sponsor a Christmas parade. Additionally, an arts and crafts exhibit with several booths displaying handiwork was initiated. This event was located at Lopez-Riggins Elementary the first year, but in later years it became part of the annual Professional Rodeo event and was located in the Lions Club facility. The Chamber also sponsored a food booth at the Rodeo. Another Chamber activity was the Miss Los Fresnos Pageant. According to Cepeda, only a few key people ran the Chamber during his tenure, with the acquisition of new businesses as one of the Chamber's major objectives. He cited the Medical Clinic on the west end of town, Kalifa's Restaurant, Silver Junction, and the expansion of Julia's Restaurant as four major achievements.[64]

Cepeda noted that the acquisition of new businesses in the late 1990s was not solely the work of the Chamber; the Chamber was only "part of the mix." The Community Development Corporation was also a significant factor. The "CDC" was able to assist business investors in procuring state grants and it supplied information to prospective businesses.[65]

In the years from 1999 to the present (May 2005), Badeaux asserts that the main accomplishment of the Chamber was the expansion of business, citing the commercial complex owned by Robert Salinas—the Ashtree Business Center—which includes many establishments, and the Casa Real Motel, both on the west side of town.[66] The list of businesses which have come into Los Fresnos from 1995 to the present is indeed larger than the number documented in this history; however, the causal factors attracting those businesses may be open to debate.

George Gomez, one of the "old-guard" members of the Chamber, who was quite active in the Chamber in the decade from 1985 to 1995, states that the Chamber continued to be active and involved in the community for the next three or four years (post 1995). Some buildings had their facades upgraded. The Chamber worked hard on bringing in new business, mostly smaller businesses, and there was generally a positive attitude toward the Chamber from the business community.[67]

This writer suggests that the impact and effect of the Chamber regarding the acquisition of business is unclear. One reason is the emergence of the Community Development Corporation, which may have been an equal or even greater force responsible for securing the businesses that came to Los

Fresnos in the post-1995 period. Another, even more important factor, is that the general business climate of the entire Rio Grande Valley changed in the 1990s, especially in the Lower Valley. The 1990s represented growing and expanding economic times, especially from 1995 to the present. With the general economic cycle being on the upswing from 1995 to the present, one would assume that business would grow and the number of businesses would expand; thus, the economic cycle may have been the greater force for business expansion, not the Chamber.

To return to the original questions regarding the impact of the Chamber of Commerce (under its different names) upon the community, it seems impossible to come to a clear consensus of the Chamber's impact. Furthermore, the Chamber has played various roles at various times. In the case of the late 1920s, it appears that the Chamber was clearly a partner in promoting growth and bringing prosperity to the community. In the late 1940s, it seems to be a contributing factor in creating a viable and active community. In the 1960s, and in the latter 1980s through the early 1990s, it appears that the Chamber contributed substantially to help reverse the economic decline and bring new life to the community. In the post-1995 period, the Chamber appears to have had a contributing affect; however, the major factor that brought new business into the community may have been the generally positive increase of the greater economic cycle.

One notable and observable difference in the City of Los Fresnos currently from previous times is its appearance. The City of Los Fresnos today does not match the attractiveness of the City from 1985 to 1995 when the Chamber was active in awarding "Yard of the Month" and "Beautification Award" recognitions. This general decline in the appearance of the City is due in part to the budgetary problems of the City and the reduction in services. Additionally, the exorbitant increase in the water rates by the City in 2002 has been a contributing factor in diminishing citizens' efforts to maintain their yards and property. Nonetheless, some homeowners who lived in the City twenty years would appreciate both the current City government and the Chamber of Commerce's encouragement of property owners to once again make the City more attractive.[68]

To conclude that the Chamber has been the major force effecting economic prosperity of the community would be invalid. Indeed, at times the Chamber appeared to reflect the prosperity of the community rather than be a substantial factor in creating that prosperity. In the history of the community of Los Fresnos, economic prosperity, or the lack of it, seemed to be the result of larger, stronger forces than those attributed to the local Chamber of Commerce. Nonetheless, this writer believes that it is also true that the Chamber played major roles in influencing the local economy and revitalizing the community, especially the Chambers of the 1960s and the 1985-92 period. In the times

of prosperity, the late 1920s, the latter 1940s, and the latter 1990s through the present (2005), the Chamber may have enhanced that prosperity. In the times of recession—the 1960s and 1980s—the Chamber appears to have lessened the difficulties and helped reverse the local downward economic cycles. It was in these times that the Los Fresnos Chamber of Commerce may indeed have provided its greatest benefit to the community.

Former Mayor of Los Fresnos

Endnotes

1 Judith Laughlin Wylie, "Los Fresnos' Oldest House The Laughlin Property" (unpublished paper written in 1981, original copy—Ethel L. Whipple Memorial Library, Los Fresnos, Texas), p. 10.

2 James A. Keillor, "A Brief History of Los Fresnos" (copy of original paper in the Ethel L. Whipple Memorial Library, pp. 2-4) published in *Still More Studies in Brownsville History*, edited by Milo Kearney (Brownsville, Texas: The University of Texas at Brownsville, 1991), pp. 15-16.

3 William Thomas Woodfin, "Story of Los Fresnos," *Los Fresnos Times*, 1 March 1929, v. 1, n. 1, p. 1.

4 *Ibid.*

5 *Ibid.*

6 Miriam Chatelle, *For We Love Our Valley Home* (San Antonio: The Naylor Company, 1948), p. 105.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 106.

8 *Ibid.*, pp. 106-10.

9 *Ibid.*, pp. 108-09.

10 Harry H. Whipple, personal interview by James A. Keillor conducted at the home of Harry H. Whipple, 1 June 1991.

11 Chatelle, p. 95.

12 Chatelle, pp. 110-11.

13 Chatelle, p. 112.

14 Chatelle, p. 112.

15 Chatelle, pp. 112-13.

16 Maria Trinidad Ramirez Silva, personal interview by James A. Keillor recorded on tape and entitled "The Maria Trinidad Ramirez Silva Memoirs," 25 November 1996.

17 Chatelle, p. 112.

18 Harlan Woods, ed., *The Yearbook of the Lower Rio Grande Valley and Northern Mexico*, 25th ed. (Mission, Texas: Yearbook Publishing Company, 1964), p. 86.

19 Ruth Bugge, personal interview by telephone by James A. Keillor, 12 April 1997. Mrs. Bugge and her husband, Harry Bugge, were owners and managers of Bugge Hardware and Plumbing in Los Fresnos, Texas. The Bugges lived in Brownsville, Texas, at the time of the interview.

20 Mary Louise Middleton, personal interview by James A. Keillor, 21 April 1997, transcribed as unpublished document—copy available from James A. Keillor.

21 *Ibid.*

22 Mrs. Joseph Nesetril, "History of the Ethel L. Whipple Memorial Library" (unpublished paper written in 1970, original copy—Ethel L. Whipple Memorial Library, Los Fresnos, Texas), p. 1.

23 Middleton.

24 Nesetril, p. 2.

25 Middleton.

26 Middleton.

27 Middleton.

28 James A. Keillor, unrecorded memoirs and recollections from experiences as a member of the Los Fresnos Area Chamber of Commerce from November 1972 through 1993, save and except periods of inactivity of the Chamber, from service on the City of Los Fresnos Board of Aldermen from 1979-1983 and 1984-1987, and as Mayor of the City of Los Fresnos from 1988-1994.

29 *Ibid.*

30 *Ibid.*

31 *Ibid.*

32 *Ibid.*

33 Los Fresnos Area Chamber of Commerce, Minutes of the meeting of the Chamber, 16 December 1986.

34 Los Fresnos Area Chamber of Commerce, copies of the Minutes of Chamber meetings and other records of the Chamber for the 1985 Chamber year. Key elements were taken from 1985 Chamber records preserved on file by Joyce Keillor. Records on file are from November 1984 through November 1994.

35 Los Fresnos Area Chamber of Commerce, Minutes of the meetings of the Chamber for the 1986 Chamber year.

36 Los Fresnos Area Chamber of Commerce, Minutes of the meetings of the Chamber, 20 January 1987.

37 Los Fresnos Area Chamber of Commerce, Minutes of the meetings of the Chamber for the 1987 Chamber year.

38 Los Fresnos Area Chamber of Commerce, Minutes of the meetings of the Chamber for the 1988 Chamber year.

39 George Gomez, personal interview by telephone by James A. Keillor, 1 June

2005. Gomez was an active member in the Los Fresnos Area Chamber of Commerce from 1985 through the mid-1990s. Gomez served the Chamber in many capacities: Vice President, President, Director, and Chairperson of numerous committees. Gomez lives in Los Fresnos, Texas.

40 Los Fresnos Area Chamber of Commerce, Minutes of the meetings of the Chamber for the 1989 Chamber year.

41 Los Fresnos Area Chamber of Commerce, Minutes of the meetings of the Chamber for the 1990 Chamber year.

42 Gomez.

43 Keillor.

44 Keillor.

45 Los Fresnos Area Chamber of Commerce, Minutes of the meetings of the Chamber for the 1991 Chamber year.

46 Gomez.

47 Gomez.

48 Keillor.

49 Gomez.

50 Keillor.

51 Los Fresnos Area Chamber of Commerce, Minutes of the meetings of the Chamber for the 1992 Chamber year.

52 Los Fresnos Area Chamber of Commerce, Minutes of the meetings of the Chamber for the 1993 Chamber year and other records (a newsletter was initiated called "Chamber Chatter").

53 Don Badeaux, personal interview by James A. Keillor, 31 May 2005. Badeaux arrived in Los Fresnos in August 1992 to assume the position of City Administrator; he became an active Chamber member. He was part of the Business Association group within the Chamber and a Director of the Chamber through the mid-and latter-1990s. He remained City Administrator until March 1998 when he was dismissed by the City Council. In the spring of 1999, Badeaux was hired by the Chamber to be its Executive Director, a position he has held to the present, May 2005.

54 Badeaux.

55 Los Fresnos Area Chamber of Commerce, Minutes of the meetings of the Chamber for the 1993 Chamber year.

56 Los Fresnos Area Chamber of Commerce, Minutes of the meetings of the Chamber for the 1994 Chamber year.

57 Chamber Records, Chamber Office in the Wells Fargo Bank. On 31 May 2005, this writer went to the Chamber office to access the use of the Chamber's records for research for the period 1995 through 2005. The attending secretary stated that there were no Minutes of the Chamber in the office for that period; no records were offered for this writer's use. The record of the Chamber from 1995 through 2005, for

the purpose of this paper, has been obtained by oral interviews.

58 Badeaux.

59 Badeaux.

60 Badeaux.

61 Badeaux.

62 Badeaux.

63 Robert Cepeda, personal interview by James A. Keillor, 2 June 2005. Cepeda held the position of Chamber of Commerce Manager/Community Development Coordinator from the fall of 1995 to the spring of 1997.

64 *Ibid.*

65 *Ibid.*

66 Badeaux.

67 Gomez.

68 Keillor.

"Adios Harlingen A.F.B.!": A Look at a Community's Response to the Closing of Harlingen Air Force Base, 1962-1970

by

Thomas Britten

On March 30, 1961, United States Air Force officials announced plans to discontinue the navigator-training program at Harlingen Air Force Base, and to shut down the installation by the end of 1962. The base facilities would be offered to other government agencies (such as the Veterans' Administration or the General Services Administration), but if they declined to use them, the base would be disposed of by donation or sale.[1] For communities whose economies hinge on the infusion of money and jobs that military installations provide, the words "base closure" are taboo. The unwelcome news spread quickly through the small town, and Harlingen residents were understandably devastated. Reflecting on the event years later, Bob Hansen recalled thinking "I couldn't believe it was closed; it was so suitable for an air base. . . . Harlingen didn't look at all the same as it did before 1962." Long time resident Frances Hury, an employee for Cameron County United Way, recalled that "we depended greatly on the support from the Harlingen Air Force Base." Its closing led to "one of the hardest times we've ever had to deal with."[2] As initial feelings of shock gave way to gloom, Harlingen's civic leaders and business community mobilized in an attempt to make the best of a bad situation. While not completely offsetting the economic and social consequences of the base closure, their hard work and aggressive business recruitment efforts allowed the city to regain its footing as the "gateway" to the lower Rio Grande valley.

Harlingen Chamber of Commerce and city officials had lobbied the federal government as early as 1938 to consider south Texas for a possible military installation, and in 1940 Mayor Hugh Ramsey made a definite proposal to the War Department. Aided by Texas senators Tom Connolly and Morris Sheppard, Mayor Ramsey pointed to the area's mild climate, flat unbroken terrain, and quick access to roads and railways as important factors for decision-makers to consider. On May 6, 1941, Senator Connolly announced that the War Department had selected Harlingen as a site for an air base under the U.S. Army Air Corps' pilot training program. Rather than training pilots, however, the new facility was charged with training aerial gunners to fire powerful 50-caliber turret mounted machine guns. The federal government granted authority to begin immediate construction with an overall appropriation of $3,800,000. The city of Harlingen, meanwhile, agreed to

lease 960 acres of land a couple miles northwest of the city for $1 a year for twenty-four years. By mid-August 1941, 1700 men were employed on the project, with a monthly payroll of over $60,000—a nice economic "shot in the arm" for a community still struggling with the effects of the Great Depression. By the time that the United States entered the Second World War in December 1941, the construction on the field was completed and actual training of aerial gunners had begun.[3]

At the time the Harlingen Army Gunnery School opened, the city had a population of 13,235. Five years later, the city boasted a population of over 25,000. The base also expanded rapidly, and, in May 1942, the federal government authorized another $1,000,000 for new barracks and technical installations. The airfield, described as the "Paradise of the Eastern Flying Training Command," kept recruits busy. Students trained both day and night, firing at stationary and moving targets---usually rayon sheets towed behind other planes. Their bullets were coated with different colored paints to make score-tallying easier. A reporter expressed the dramatic changes that Harlingen was experiencing in romantic terms: "The Rio Grande Valley is now a place where a warm Gulf breeze mixes powder smells with the scent of orange blossoms."[4]

As with dozens of other wartime installations constructed during the war years, the conclusion of hostilities in August 1945 prompted the closing of Harlingen Army Gunnery School. But the beginning of the Cold War breathed new life into many of these facilities, and, in April 1952, the base was tapped once again to serve the needs of the military. The newly reactivated Harlingen Air Force Base had a new mission as well . . .to train navigators to serve in the U.S. Air Force. For the next decade, Harlingen A.F.B. trained thousands of navigators to serve aboard various aircraft deployed at bases around the world. Employing 712 civilian workers and over 2,000 servicemen, the installation's average monthly payroll (for both civilian and military employees) totaled over $1.3 million. With 245 buildings spread out over 1,400 acres, the base also purchased on average over $22,500 worth of water each year, nearly $25,000 worth of gas, and over $123,500 of electricity. Harlingen's population, meanwhile, jumped over *seventy-five percent* from 23,000 in 1950 to 41,000 in 1960. It's no wonder, then, why Harlingen A.F.B. earned the title "The Pride of Harlingen."[5]

Given Harlingen's dependence on the air base for a growing economy, the facility's sudden closure in 1962 cast a pall over city. As the 2,300 airmen packed their duffle bags and moved on to new duty stations, the base's 700 civilian employees scoured the classifieds looking for jobs. Local businesses, schools, and churches felt the effects of the loss almost immediately. As Maria Hughes has written, "everything in Harlingen stood still for some time." Another unwelcome side-effect of the base closure was the estimated

1,400 to 2,000 homes, primarily on the city's north side, which now stood vacant. With hundreds of people looking for work, home buyers were a rare commodity indeed. Who would move to a town where there were no jobs? How was the city to regain its former vitality?[6]

The task of finding answers to these vexing questions fell on the shoulders of the Harlingen Chamber of Commerce and the city's municipal government. Over the course of the next two decades, these two bodies would work together closely to lure new businesses and industries to the lower Rio Grande Valley. The role of the Chamber of Commerce was to find innovative ways to recruit companies to relocate to Harlingen, while city officials ensured that the city's infrastructure, law enforcement, and fiscal policies were conducive to conducting business. In September 1962 the Chamber welcomed David Allex as its new assistant manager. Allex was a "Valley native" who, after attending Texas A&I University and serving in the Army for four years, returned home to take on the task of reinvigorating Harlingen's economy.[7]

Under Allex's leadership, the Chamber of Commerce founded the Harlingen Senior Citizen Foundation (later renamed the Harlingen Industrial Foundation, Inc., or H.I.F.I.), which launched the "Go Harlingen" Program to address the city's depressed housing market. Cognizant of the reality that there weren't enough jobs in the city to entice families to move to the area, H.I.F.I. officials instead geared their marketing efforts to retirees in the north who aspired to live in the warm environs of the valley, but didn't necessarily need jobs. After raising $100,000 to seed the campaign, the H.I.F.I., working closely with the Federal Housing Association (F.H.A.) and the Veterans Administration (V.A.), listed nearly 2,000 homes on the market at a price of $5,850 each. Within two years time, virtually all the homes were sold. It was a promising start.[8]

In addition to the "Go Harlingen" campaign, the Chamber planned a series of other projects to boost the city's image. Hundreds of personal letters were dispatched to industrial firms suggesting they consider Harlingen for new or expanded plant locations, a new convention center was proposed, as was a new regional airport, tourist center improvements, and construction of the Los Indios International Bridge. The goal of David Allex and the Chamber of Commerce was clear: no work was to be done that was not aimed directly at "bringing people and money to Harlingen."[9]

In 1965, Gunnery Sergeant John (Jack) S. Allerton, a Marine Corps recruiter in Harlingen, read about the proposed creation of a Marine Military Academy (M.M.A.) in Arizona. He showed the article to Sam Searles, then a major in the Army Reserve and an official of the Harlingen National Bank. Searles spoke to city and Chamber officials about the academy, and invited M.M.A. organizers to visit Harlingen and the grounds of the former air base. They liked what they saw. Funding for the M.M.A. came from many sources.

The Chamber of Commerce contributed $50,000 to the effort, while J.D. Stetson Coleman, a WWII Marine Corps veteran, bought 26 buildings and about 83 acres from the city for $55,000. He also secured a half-million-dollar loan and paid the interest on it for the first three years. In September 1965, the M.M.A. opened its doors to its inaugural class of fifty-nine students.[10]

Two years later, Harlingen officials welcomed to town representatives from the Waco-based James Connally Technical Institute (affiliated with Texas A&M University) who were interested in establishing a branch campus in the Valley. After the city agreed to donate buildings and land from the former air base, James Connally officials approved the deal, and, in 1967, two instructors and forty students held classes in Harlingen for the first time. In 1969, the Texas legislature passed a bill separating the school from Texas A&M, establishing the Texas State Technical Institute.[11]

In addition to luring new businesses and educational facilities to Harlingen, Chamber of Commerce and civic leaders worked diligently to promote tourism. The Chamber hired a tourism director to oversee activities such as "Operation Shine," which mobilized hundreds of volunteers in an ongoing city beautification effort. Under the Chamber's direction, full-color fliers were produced pronouncing Harlingen the "Capital City of the Fabulous Lower Rio Grande Valley" (or "Magic Valley"). Touting the area's "year-round mild, semi-tropical climate" the pamphlet pictured a variety of outdoor activities---golf, tennis, fishing, boating, water-skiing, and hunting, as well as other attractions—shopping in Mexico, a citrus orchard, a family at the beach, and some old-timers playing shuffle-board. If that weren't enough enticement, the pamphlet mentioned a legend of "pirate treasures, buried in the shifting sands of Padre Island 400 years ago."[12]

In a "comprehensive plan" prepared for the city by the St. Louis-based consulting firm Harlan, Bartholomew and Associates in 1969, tourism was identified as an important component of the local economy. The valley's moderate winter climate was an attraction, particularly for residents of the Midwest and Canada. Harlingen's close proximity to Mexico, meanwhile, had made the city a "jumping off point" for "trailer caravans" heading to destinations south of the border. Planners also singled out the growing "winter Texan" phenomenon as a potential revenue generator. Winter month registrants in the Harlingen Tourist Club increased from 644 in 1961-62 to 1,325 in 1967-68. These visitors remained in the valley for approximately three-to-four months a year, adding an estimated $3,000,000 to the local economy annually.[13]

Harlingen entrepreneur Hank Stanley hoped to tap the expanding opportunities in the recreation and retirement sector. Having observed the "trailer caravans" that passed through the Valley each year, Stanley identified a problem that recreational vehicle (R.V.) owners faced each year: there

was no place to park their campers. Camp grounds and mobile home parks provided limited spaces, but not enough to keep up with the growing number of winter Texans driving south on U.S. 77. Worse still, the camping grounds and mobile home parks provided campers little in the way of entertainment or amenities (other than utility hook ups). The solution seemed obvious. After securing a lease from the city for land situated on another part of the old air base, Stanley established the first exclusive R.V. park in south Texas. The idea was a hit, and during the 1970s, R.V. parks spread across the lower Rio Grande valley. The Harlingen Chamber of Commerce added to the boom with a $50,000 marketing blitz. It wasn't long before people began referring to Hank Stanley as the "King" of R.V. parks and Harlingen as the "Travel Trailer Headquarters of the Southwest."[14]

In the months following the base closure, Harlingen leaders, in an effort to capitalize on the valuable land and facilities that remained unused at the old air base, began pushing the for the construction of a new international airport. Despite protests from neighboring McAllen and Brownsville—whose own airports were reluctant to take on new competition, Harlingen voters in August 1965 approved by a four-to-one margin a $1.25 million bond issue to convert the former Harlingen A.F.B. to a new international airport with jet service. The old Harvey Richards airport (located at the site of the current Harlingen Country Club) was to wind down by the end of 1967 as the airlines moved to the much larger runways of the former air base. By January 1968, the old air base had transformed into the "Industrial Air Park" and new "Valley Municipal Airport."[15]

The response of Harlingen's leaders to the closure of Harlingen A.F.B. was immediate and aggressive. The city's Chamber of Commerce and Harlingen Industrial Foundation, Inc., under the direction of David Allex, worked alongside Harlingen's elected officials to promote home sales through the successful "Go Harlingen" campaign; they facilitated the establishment of the Marine Military Academy and the Texas State Technical Institute at the old air base; and they fought for the construction of an impressive new international airport. They also labored in less visible ways to promote the city. Through letter-writing campaigns, marketing initiatives, and organizing area-wide beautification efforts, they sought to convince both industrial firms and small businesses to consider Harlingen as a good place to live and work. By touting the area's mild climate, close proximity to South Padre Island, and to Mexico, they successfully built upon the budding tourist and "winter Texan" market, bringing desperately needed outside revenue into the lower Rio Grande Valley.

In spite of these efforts, Harlingen's population in 1970 stood at 33,503—twenty percent less than the population in 1960 prior to the base closure. The immediate loss of over 2,000 servicemen and over $20,000,000 in annual

revenue created a damaging ripple effect across all sectors of the economy, precipitating an erosion of another 5,000 residents after 1962. But the decade of the 1970s witnessed a rebound of sorts, and the hard work of civic leaders during the preceding decade seemed to be paying off. The 1980 census counted over 40,000 people in Harlingen, nearly the same number of people that had lived there in 1960. The hemorrhaging of its population had ended, replaced with a slow but steady increase. By 2000, Harlingen's population had grown to over 57,000 people, a respectable forty percent increase over the previous twenty years, but far short of the estimated 70,000-100,000 people that urban planners had estimated that Harlingen would possess by 1990.[16]

A city's "success," however, is obviously measured by more than just population growth. The quality and availability of education and health care facilities, transportation, churches, parks, and a host of other factors must also be considered when making such a subjective evaluation. That being the case, one must give high marks to the men and women who guided Harlingen through arguably the most difficult time in its history. The Rio Grande Valley continues to enjoy one of the fastest growth rates in the nation and "as the Valley grows," observes David Allex, "so too does Harlingen."[17]

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Endnotes

1 Brigadier General Joseph T. Kingsley, Headquarters, United States Air Force, to Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson, 3 May 1961, original letter housed in the Rio Grande Valley Museum, Harlingen, Texas.

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12 David Allex, interview by author; *75th Diamond Anniversary* pamphlet commemorating the History of Harlingen, p. 17; "Welcome Pamphlet" produced by the Harlingen Chamber of Commerce, Chamber of Commerce folder, Rio Grande Valley Museum Archives, Harlingen, Texas.

13 Comprehensive Plan prepared for the Harlingen City Commission and Community Development Committee by Harland Bartholomew and Associates, April 1969, Rio Grande Valley Museum Archives, Harlingen, Texas.

14 David Allex, interview by author.

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17 David Allex, interview by author.

Coping with Obstacles to Development in the Rio Grande Valley: Competitive Issues in Brownsville and Matamoros

by

Anthony Knopp

When asked what was the major obstacle to development in the Rio Grande Valley, former Harlingen Mayor Bill Card replied, "Parochialism." Card noted the long-standing tradition of each Valley city aggressively seeking development projects in isolation from its neighbors and often in direct competition with them, despite superficial efforts at regional cooperation. He cited such egregious examples as the World Birding Center and the Regional Academic Health Center, where open political warfare broke out among the Valley cities.[1] In both cases there was a big "winner," with consolation prizes awarded to the less successful applicants.

A recent example has been the debate over the viability of an arena in the lower Valley. Brownsville and Harlingen would need to cooperate for such a project to succeed, but despite efforts to develop a "Cameron County" arena the project languishes from lack of commitment by the cities.

Resentments continue to run high, and there is little reason to believe at present that a greater spirit of cooperation will develop. However, a recent surge of economic and demographic growth has occurred in spite of the competitive atmosphere.

Although there is some degree of competition on the Mexican side of Valley, particularly in terms of attracting new *maquiladoras*, it is much less evident. Apparently many development decisions regarding the border towns and cities are made at the state and even national level. In this regard it is worthwhile to note that both the last governor of Tamaulipas and his predecessor were natives of Matamoros.

Obstacles to development exist within as well as among the border cities of the Rio Grande. This paper proffers an overview of competitive issues within the cities of Matamoros and Brownsville plus indications of cooperative efforts within and between those cities.

Competitive Issues Within Brownsville

As the economy of Brownsville grew and diversified in the last few decades, the various sectors of the economy, both old and new, began to compete for attention and resources.

Long the economic heart of the city, the downtown retail (and wholesale) businesses suffered tremendously under the weight of peso devaluations,

competition from two malls, and the ability of *Matamorenses* to buy many of the same goods across the border, thanks to NAFTA. Many upscale merchants closed their doors, replaced by those catering to "walk-across" Mexicans by vending low-priced (and often low-quality) items. Downtown Brownsville became a leading center of unpretentious *ropa usada* stores, not an image that city leaders wished to foster.

Brownsville's city fathers believed that preserving and refurbishing downtown was essential to the image of the city as well as to the environment for city hall. In consequence the city government provided funds for a downtown development office and supported preservation of historic buildings with the (sometimes reluctant) support of merchants. The University of Texas at Brownsville has rehabilitated three historic buildings in the downtown area for various uses. The result has been a limited improvement in the appearance of downtown streets, but most of those involved agree that more is needed.[2]

Competing for resources coveted by downtown are the other geographic sectors of the city, the hotel and tourism industry, construction, the manufacturing elements, the maquiladora support and service businesses, and the large education complex. Each of these has experienced rapid and even phenomenal growth in the last decade. After years of trailing behind McAllen and Harlingen in construction, Brownsville took the lead in both residential and commercial construction in 1999 and 2000.[3] Brownsville continued to hold that lead in 2004. According to KRGV-TV reporter Manuel De La Rosa, "The construction boom started in the mid 1990's and since then, the city has nearly doubled in the number of retail businesses and homes built in the city."4

Clearly, much of the construction growth was a result of impressive manufacturing job expansion in the mid-nineties of 22% compared to 3.4% in McAllen and decline of 12% in Laredo.[5] A significant factor in the expansion of manufacturing appears to have been the decision of Brownsville to utilize a ½ % economic development sales tax increase in the early nineties for small payments to manufacturers, a subsidy for airline service, and mall expansion.6

Despite the impressive economic growth the entities involved in promoting growth have not been free from competitive interests. The Chamber of Commerce, the Convention and Visitors Bureau, and the Economic Development Corporation, as well as the various governmental boards and commissions have continually competed for the same scarce resources from taxes and grants. The very limited revenue resources in one of the poorest metropolitan statistical areas (msa) in the U.S. has made it difficult to provide the infrastructure support for the burgeoning demographic and economic expansion.[7] Traffic congestion has expanded dramatically and the condition of streets and thoroughfares has become a source of political controversy.

In recent years evidence of a more cooperative spirit has appeared when a Brownsville entity was competing against other cities for external funding. The city managed to present unified, though unsuccessful, proposals for the Regional Academic Health Center and the World Birding Center, and did receive funding for "consolation prize" projects. Brownsville was successful in attracting permanent airline service and in gaining a third international bridge.

Nevertheless, the lingering tradition of self-interested lack of cooperation continues to manifest itself. Factionalism based on *compadrismo* (excessive loyalty to and dependence on family and close friends) and desire to preserve the status quo by those enjoying social position and elite status underlay the problem. One member of the city commission told this author that the commissioners rarely disagreed on important issues but often quarreled over patronage. Numerous studies and meetings have failed to produce a civic center, so the city lacks facilities for conventions and entertainment. Disagreement on location for a civic center was one source of factional conflict among local politicians.

The census for 2000 shows a 41% increase over the past ten years, resulting in a population for Brownsville of over 139,000.[8] If anything, that growth has accelerated in the 21st Century. This growth may already have produced fractures in the traditional factional alliances as new configurations appear to be forming. Whether this will result in greater cooperation for needed infrastructure development remains to be seen.

Competitive Issues Within Matamoros

In common with other border cities Matamoros has experienced significant political competition in the last quarter century, beginning with the election of Jorge Cárdenas Gonzalez of PARM, the *Partido Auténtico de la Revolución Mexicana*, as *presidente municipal* over the candidate of the PRI, *Partido Revoluciónario Institucional*, in 1980. The present incumbent is from the PRI, but a previous *presidente* was supported by the PAN, the *Partido Acción Nacional*. All parties now find it necessary to nominate candidates with local appeal, in contrast to the previous imposition of PRI nominees chosen by state or national party leaders.

Some of the more notorious competitors have been reined-in or eliminated in recent years. Juan García Abrego, lord of the Gulf drug cartel based in Matamoros, now resides in a prison in Houston. His successor, Osiel Cardenas, resides in a federal penitentiary in Mexico City. Juan N. Guerra, patriarch of a criminal syndicate in the city, was held under arrest (in hospital) by federal official a few years ago. The Matamoros actions were not unique; the Mexican government has sought to undermine the independent power of local *caciques* (chiefs or bosses) in other border cities and elsewhere in the

Republic.

Probably the most powerful of the Matamoros *caciques* was Agapito Gonzalez, head of the *Sindicato de Jornaleros y Obreros Industriales*, the union of *maquiladora* workers. Gonzalez, who died in February 2001, was responsible for obtaining substantial increases in pay and benefits for workers-among the highest of the border cities.[9] The union supported the PRI, and Gonzalez used his political clout to obstruct local officials from undercutting his efforts in dealing with the *maquiladoras*. Nevertheless, concerns that higher wages and benefits in Matamoros would reduce *maquiladora* growth plus Gonzalez' role as an independent *cacique* prompted federal officials to arrest and imprison him on vague charges in the early nineties.[10] The government also attempted to depose Gonzalez as labor leader by supporting a rival union. Ultimately Gonzalez returned to Matamoros and reasserted his leadership of the *maquiladora* workers.[11] From the perspectives of researchers at the *Colegio de la Frontera Norte* office in Matamoros, the city has a more stable and productive labor force due to the higher wages and benefits, thus making it more attractive to potential investors.

Maquiladora employment in Matamoros reached a peak in 2000 at 65,000 jobs, but rapidly declined to 50,000 by 2004. Rolando Gonzalez Barron, former president of the Matamoros *Maquiladora* Association, claimed that the decline was due to the following factors: the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the brief U.S. recession, U.S. financial scandals, and competition from China. "Reynosa and Matamoros were always competing but in 2000, everything just went down," he asserted.[12] Whatever the cause, the decline appeared to have ended by 2005, and some recovery was anticipated.

Like the other border cities, Matamoros has experienced tremendous population growth (to an estimated 500,000 to 700,000) to accompany the industrial expansion. Infrastructure investment has grown but has been hard-pressed to keep pace.[13] Business associations such as the *Cámara de Comercio*, CANACINTRA, and the *Asociación de Maquiladoras* represent distinct interests and are, to some extent, competitive. In the late 1990s researchers at *El Colegio de la Frontera Norte* (COLEF) reported that

> *Un proyecto más reciente y visionario consiste en conformar el Instituto de Planeación Urbana del Municipio, en donde organismos empresariales y de Profesionistas buscan planear el crecimiento de la ciudad sin importar la filiación partidista del Presidente Municipal en turno. La concretización de esta idea representaría la primera conjución entre intereses empresariales y sociales.*[14]

Despite the optimism of the COLEF researchers, even this hopeful development was stunted by a recurring competitive issue: politics. Frequently projects initiated by one municipal administration are abandoned by its successor. This has been the case, apparently, for the *Instituto de Planeación*

Urbana del Municipio. Brownsville officials recall early meetings with *Planeación* representatives but speculated that renewed interaction must await another change of administration.[15]

Cooperative Relations Between Matamoros and Brownsville

Although there has been a long tradition of friendly if not close relations between the twin cities, close relations have become increasingly necessary in the wake of *maquiladora* growth, NAFTA, and environmental concerns. For decades local officials of both cities rarely contacted those on the other side, but that has changed in the nineties. This author personally observed the cordial relations between Brownsville Mayor Henry Gonzalez and Matamoros *Presidente* Ramon Antonio Sampayo on several occasions in the late nineties. In 1999 Marcelino Gonzalez, former editor of *El Heraldo de Brownsville*, wrote, "Current authorities on both Brownsville and Matamoros have now made a common occurrence of consulting with their counterparts across the river to solve common border problems."[16] In December of 1999 Brownsville and Matamoros officials met to share views on the *Instituto de Planeación de Matamoros*, and discussed the integrating of the planning of both cities, although subsequent relations have been limited.

On a distinctly practical level there has been increased cooperation between police and fire departments, and the Brownsville Public Utilities Board obtained permission to extend a power transmission line to Matamoros.[17] Meetings on issues such as environmental and health concerns often involve representatives of both cities. The Cross Border Initiative for Regional Development (CBIRD) has held numerous meetings with representatives from both cities, some of which have focused on the historical obstacles to cooperation and development.[18]

Recent efforts at cooperation for development in Matamoros and Brownsville may be responsible for some of the remarkable economic growth of the last several years, but the possibility exists that most of the growth is unrelated to efforts by civic leaders. Mexican prosperity and NAFTA-influenced trade expansion may explain much of the border cities' development. Still, the efforts at cooperation, both within and between the cities often some hope for a development in which the cities themselves exercise a greater degree of control over their own destinies.

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Endnotes

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Cultural History

The Spirit of Reynosa

A Brief History of the Architecture of Port Isabel and the Laguna Madre Area

by

Edward P. Meza

Throughout its history, Port Isabel has witnessed a rich diversity of architectural styles due primarily to its unpredictable environmental conditions, unique location, and the importation of design by settlers to the area. Weather has always been a factor, from its hot summers to cold winters, unpredictable spring storms and hurricanes. Residents throughout the years have had to consider the natural elements when constructing shelters. Another component shaping architectural design is location. Its close proximity to the mouth of the Rio Grande River, on the banks of the Laguna Madre and the Mexican border, Port Isabel and the surrounding area have been influenced by maritime commerce and military conflicts. Also impacting the style of structures in the area are its native peoples and settlers. Each group that has settled here has brought its culture and traditions from its homeland.

From the area's prehistoric beginnings, natural resources such as the earth, plants, and sea have influenced the style of structures built.[1] For example, the Coahuilitecan Indians who were the first inhabitants of the area built huts out of mud, twigs and grass.[2] In the early 1820s, the first recorded settler of Port Isabel was a cattle rancher named Don Rafael García, who brought influences from the earlier Spanish settlements along the border colonized by José de Escandón.[3] Typical early ranch homes or haciendas were made of mud bricks, stone, and mesquite. The common structures used at this time in Port Isabel (or Frontón de Santa Isabel as the settlement was then known) were described by early settlers as straw huts covered with "raw cattle hides and then recovered with "sacahuiste grass."

With maritime trade, wars, and commerce came styles from Louisiana and the eastern United States. When General Zachary Taylor established Fort Polk in 1846, many of the villagers followed orders from the Mexican Government, and set fire to their homes. Only a few of the structures, most likely jacales (huts made from mesquite and mud), were spared. Fort Polk's structures included one of the largest military hospitals in the United States (186' x 68' surrounded by a 12' gallery). The architectural styles of these structures were of typical military design found in the eastern United States. Sutlers and camp followers occupied some of the remaining homes and built crude sheds and houses.[4] A year later, in 1847, owing to the growth of the fort and its surroundings, Simon Mussina attempted to establish the City of Point Isabel along the Laguna Madre west of the fort. In 1850, the United States Army

evacuated the fort, and by 1851, Mussina's attempts had failed.[5]

However, in 1850 the U.S. government appropriated $15,000 for construction of a beacon and lighthouse at Brazos Santiago. Through much controversy, Point Isabel was selected for the location of the lighthouse instead of Brazos Santiago. By 1851, the customhouse was situated in the former commanding officer's quarters of Fort Polk, and the site selected for the lighthouse was the interior of the main earth bastion of the fort. John E. Garey of Brownsville was contracted to build a 32' X 36' one-story frame house consisting of four rooms and a hall with a gallery, at a cost of $1,400.00. The workmen and materials were sent from Galveston. The Lighthouse served a valuable function as a lookout tower during the Mexican insurrections and the Civil War. Prior to the Civil War, housing in Port Isabel consisted primarily of *jacales*, wood clapboard sided homes, and shanties made from scrap wood scavenged from wrecked ships and debris that had washed ashore.[6]

By 1865, Point Isabel lost it importance as a port due to a military bridge having been built across the Boca Chica Pass to facilitate trade with Bagdad, Mexico (a prosperous shipping town with a population of 15,000).[7] In 1866 and 1867, storms destroyed Bagdad, and once again Point Isabel prospered as a port. Because Port Isabel via the Brazos Santiago had been the official port to Matamoros, French and Spanish architectural styles from New Orleans were common around the area. In the late 1860s the lighthouse was in good repair, part of the lighthouse keeper's house served as an office for the customs collector and some of the remaining houses from the early Point Isabel settlement were said to be occupied by the families of the soldiers of the Civil War. In the 1870s, the Rio Grande Railroad company was founded, and its train station was constructed in the Carpenter Gothic style. Businesses were established south of the lighthouse, and in 1875, a new town plat was developed east of the original town site. Daughters of the early settler and rancher Don Raphael García named the streets. Summer and residential homes were built in various architectural styles popular during this era.[8]

The 1880s brought the modernization of the lighthouse lantern and harbor improvements to deepen the channel began. After the lighthouse was decommissioned, its structure was used as a tourist attraction. During this time, Point Isabel's population was 500 to 700. In the 1890s, the lighthouse was repaired and relit. Charles Champion built a brick Victorian-style commercial building, which represented the New Orleans double galleried brick design. In the early 1900s, a new railroad linking Corpus Christi to Brownsville in addition to the sinking of the lighter Luzon at the railroad wharf led to a decline in shipping traffic. Consequently, the lighthouse was permanently decommissioned in 1905.[9] To attract tourism to the area, the Point Isabel Tarpon & Fishing Club was built in 1906, its architectural style resembling that of the French colonial design. By 1915, the population of

Point Isabel declined to 300. At this time, the U.S. Navy established the Wireless Station, one of the largest military radio stations, which was set up east of the lighthouse on 22 acres. Many of the buildings built during this time were of the Arts and Crafts and Mission styles, popular designs of architecture that used less ornamentation and more lines in their compositions. At this time many of the architectural gems that had once graced the Laguna Madre were in disrepair.

In the 1920s, a new vision of Point Isabel was realized. The Port Isabel Company purchased the lighthouse from J. S. Ford of Brownsville, and then repaired the lighthouse and opened it as a tourist attraction. In 1928, the City was incorporated and the slogan "Building a City where a City Belongs" set the pace for changes as this small fishing village grew into a tourist destination. Streets were paved, canals were constructed, electric lights installed, and industry and mercantile businesses established. The Spanish, Mission, and Mediterranean Architectural styles were brought to the area to mimic the flavor of Florida, then thriving from tourists. At this time, the stylish Yacht Club and Alta Vista Aartments were constructed. Then in 1933, a devastating hurricane hit Port Isabel and much of its architecture was lost. Rebuilding after the storm brought architectural styles that were popular during the mid-1930s including a number of bungalows.[10]

During the 1960s, a federal program called the Urban Renewal Program, in an attempt to upgrade living conditions for the residents of Port Isabel, destroyed a number of the remaining structures that represented important architecture styles that had survived hurricanes and progress. They were replaced with so-called new and improved structures. Evidence of Port Isabel's rich architectural past had been almost eliminated. However, a small number of landowners did not participate in the program. As a result, some of the structures that represent the various architectural styles of the past were saved.[11] Today, one has but to drive around Port Isabel to find a variety of architectural examples from its heyday. The Port Isabel Lighthouse and Keepers Cottage, the Yacht Club, Alta Vista apartments, the Port Isabel Historical Museum (formerly the Champion Store), and private homes around the residential areas stand as a testament to an architecturally diverse history. In order to guarantee the preservation of these properties, the City of Port Isabel has passed an ordinance that would protect the historical district and historically significant property in the area so that our future generations can learn to appreciate the City's colorful past.

Director of Historical Preservation, City of Port Isabel

Endnotes

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(Richardson, Texas: The Descendents of Mexican War Veterans, 1995 –1997), p. 31.

2 Mario Sánchez, *A Shared Experience: The History, Architecture and Historic Designations of the Lower Rio Grande Heritage Corridor* (Austin, Texas: Texas Historical Commission, 1994), p. 19.

3 Martin Salinas, *Indians of the Rio Grande Delta* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1990), pp. 17-18.

4 Steven R. Butler, *Historic Sites of the Mexican War in the United States*, p. 24 –27.

5 "Port Isabel Lighthouse State Historic Structure: Preservation Plan & Program," in *Historic Sites & Restoration Branch – Texas Parks & Wildlife Department* (Austin, Texas: Texas Parks & Wildlife Department, July 1984), pp. 7 –54.

6 Steven R. Butler, *Historic Sites of the Mexican War in the United States*, p. 35.

7 Bernard Doyon, O.M.I., *The Cavalry of Christ on the Rio Grande* (Milwaukee: Catholic Life Publishers, Bruce Press, 1956), p. 110.

8 "Port Isabel Lighthouse State Historic Structure: Preservation Plan & Program," pp. 7-54.

9 Lynn M. Alperin, *Custodians of the Coast: History of the United States Army Corps of Engineers at Galveston* (Galveston: Galveston District, U. S. Army Corps of Engineers, 1977), pp. 140-141.

10 "Port Isabel Lighthouse State Historic Structure: Preservation Plan & Program," pp. 7-54.

11 Various documents and letters in the *Urban Renewel Collection 1960*, Museums of Port Isabel.

The Muse of Art in the Brownsville Region

by

Milo Kearney and Carlos G. Gómez

Just as culture and civilization have been closely linked through history, so have cities an important inspiration for artistic greatness. Certainly other sources, including royal courts (such as that of Hui Tsung in Kaifeng) and religious inspiration (as in the case of the Gupta bronzes), have contributed their share of artistic brilliance. Still, cities themselves have played a prominent role in spurring artistic greatness from sixth-century Athens through fifteenth-century to nineteenth-century Paris. Preconditions for such a development include the unique identity of any particular city, the love of it by its citizens, adequate art instruction, and significant financial support. Brownsville's uniqueness culturally (as a bilingual or as a Mexican-American city) and aesthetically (with a beautiful tropical, resaca-laden setting) would seem to qualify it on the first count as few other American cities. Its recent phenomenal growth, along with neighboring Valley cities, has transformed a largely rural population in the Rio Grande Valley increasingly into an urban one. Brownsville and its surrounding region in recent years have witnessed a certain artistic blossoming. The Mexican or Mexican-American theme, linking this area with other Border and U.S. Southwest cities, highlights a crucial aspect of the local society, while linking local art to a motif well developed elsewhere. Yet most artists want to be mainstream, and work by local Hispanics reflecting the local culture has often been passed over in preference to established Mexican and Anglo styles and themes.[1] This article will consider art in the broadest sense of the word, encompassing "fine art" in the strict academic sense, decorative and popular art, commercial art, and even some merely advertising art. Evoking a tenth muse of art unknown to classical Antiquity, it is dedicated to considering what has been accomplished to date and what the potential may be for the future.

Art Education

The visual arts of the Rio Grande Valley have not received the same emphasis as have literature and music. Yet art instruction, after a slow start, has gradually come to receive more attention in Brownsville. Community participation in artistic creation was spurred by the Brownsville Art League, founded in 1935 by a circle of eight ladies led by Clara Ely and Cala Magill, identical twins.[2] The League's emphasis has been on decorative more than on "fine" art and for Mexican in preference to local Mexican-American art.[3] Charging $6 a year in dues, the group at first met every Thursday in each

other's homes, and took turns teaching art lessons. In the 1940s, they were allowed by Texas Southmost College to meet in the previous Fort Brown morgue building. Here, classes began to be offered daily, plus one night per week. In 1950, the mid-nineteenth-century William Neale house was donated to the Art League by Mimi del Valle, a Neale descendant. The house was moved from Fourteenth Street near Fort Brown to a location to the south side of the Fort Brown Resaca.[4] From the first, the Art League built up an art collection to exhibit. A separate exhibition building was eventually added alongside the historic early 19th century Neale House, where art classes were held. The collection has come to include a Marc Chagall lithograph of a man's head; an oil painting entitled "The Lone Survivor" by N. C. Wyeth (Andrew Wyeth's grandfather); and a sketch by James Whistler.[5]

In 2001, the Art League officially changed its name to the Brownsville Museum of Fine Art to improve its image and enhance the chances of receiving grants.[6] One of the classes currently offered at the Art League is a six-week sketching and drawing class taught by Luis Foncerrada, past president of the Brownsville Museum of Fine Art, who initiated sketching and painting schools in every Mexican state capital as an employee of the Mexican Federal Power Commission's Art Promotion Department. Classes are further offered in portrait painting (by Pat Brenic), porcelain (Katy Cowen), all media (Armando Ortiz, Nerea Gómez, and Sofia Herrera), painting, art history, art appreciation, composition, perspective, and shading.[7] Summer art classes are also available to children ages six through thirteen (taught by Amalia Powell and Diana Bryant).[8] A new Brownsville Museum of Fine Art (scheduled for completion in summer or fall of 2006) is being constructed under the direction of Don Breeden east of the Federal Court House across from the Gladys Porter Zoo. The Neale House and the band gazebo standing next to the old museum will be moved to stand next to the new one. It will be more centrally located and a good place for teachers to take their students. Funding has come from such sources as the 4B Board of the Brownsville Community Improvement Corporation, Wells Fargo Bank, and local patron Mary Yturria.[9]

The Brownsville Museum of Fine Art under its present Director Carol DeMoss is promoting the arts with grants from the Texas Commission on the Arts. Participants go into the schools to work with children. One grant has set up a program for fourth grade students, coordinating art with other academic fields.[10] The Museum offers "Art To Grow," an annual art camp for over one hundred children, as well as basic art classes at the Neale House Studio. For middle school students, it holds an Art and Entrepreneur School.[11] It has provided origami classes for the Boys and Girls Club.[12] It also trains UTB/TSC students and graduates as art educators.[13] The Museum holds a brown bag luncheon the last Friday of each month with artists giving demonstrations of their techniques.[14] Finally, since 1995, the Museum has hosted an annual

Brownsville Independent School District Faulty Art Show, coordinated by Juan García, the B.I.S.D. Specialist for Fine Arts.[15]

Brownsville's example in founding an art league was followed at the western end of Cameron County when in 1959 half a dozen artists founded the Harlingen Art League. From 1970 on, the Harlingen Art Forum has sponsored the first All-Valley high school art competition, with accompanying scholarships. Another of its programs is "Summer Art For Kids." After an attempt to operate an art gallery at a remote location on Raintree Street, a more central Harlingen Art Forum Gallery was opened in 2000 thanks to the generosity of Bill DeBrooke.[16]

In 1978, thirteen local artists founded the Laguna Madre Art League. One of the founders, Doolie Rule, whose husband ran a frame shop in Port Isabel, had been treaching art in her home since 1975. The League began charging people for various painting classes, taught by different teachers from around the Valley in the Port Isabel Housing Authority Building. The membership was limited to residents of Port Isabel, South Padre Island, Bayview, Laguna Vista, and Los Fresnos. The membership is composed mostly of women over forty.[17]

The Brownsville Independent School District

The Brownsville public schools first taught industrial arts, then arts and crafts, and finally art. Rogelio Arredondo was an early teacher of arts and crafts. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, George Truan, originally of Kingsville, taught art at Brownsville High School, and there were additional art teachers at Stell, Cummings, and Faulk Middle Schools. In 1972, El Jardin became the first elementary school to introduce an art teacher. Since the district does not fund elementary art teachers, the administrators of each elementary school must decide whether to hire one. Nonetheless, the teaching of art grew steadily with the constant addition of new schools. In 1975, B.I.S.D. high schools started city art competitions with the establishment of Pace High School. Each school rotated in hosting the competitions. In 1992, Juan García (holding a B.S. in Art and an M.S. in Art, both from Texas A & I University in Kingsville, as well as a Professional Life Principal Certificate) was hired as the first art supervisor for B.I.S.D. Today art is taught at Brownsville's five high schools, three alternative schools, and ten middle schools, and at seven of the thirty-two elementary schools.[18]

In the spring of 2004, Mayra Cruz and Frank Díaz, two native Brownsvillites and recent graduates in Art from the University of Texas at Austin, implemented an arts outreach program in Brownsville called *Fronteras Cruzadas*.[19] This was an extension of the UT-Austin Artsreach residency program. With the help of Juan García at B.I.S.D., students from most of the public high schools as well as from St. Joseph Academy and Valley Christian High School studied art critique under Mayra, and listened to lectures on local culture from such

speakers as Dr. Tony Knopp, Dr. Manuel Medrano, Cristina Ballí, and Joe and Rosa Pérez at the Brownsville Historical Association Museum in June of 2004. An extension of this program begun by Mayra, by then a graduate student at UT-B, in the spring of 2005 was the *Tercera Cultura* program. Mayra Cruz taught students drawing, photography, and acrylics. The thirteen high school students who completed the course came from Brownsville, San Benito, and Harlingen. Classes and cultural lectures were held at the Narciso Martez Cultural Arts Center in San Benito, where the students' work was exhibited at the end of the program in March.[20] An exhibit of the student participants in the *Tercera Cultura* program was held in the summer of 2005 at the Texas Commission for the Arts Center in McAllen, Texas.[21] In April of 2005, Mayra also established a computer blog on "The Art of Brownsville" (http://brownsvilleart.blogspot.com) with artist meetings, art festivals, gallery exhibits, and other events to help to bring local art into motion.[22]

Texas Southmost College

In higher education, the art department of Brownsville's Texas Southmost College (merged in 1991 with the University of Texas at Brownsville) has likewise played a major and growing role in the emergence of the local art scene. In 1948, the twenty-two-year-old Texas Southmost College (originally called Brownsville Junior College) was given the land of the recently vacated Fort Brown. Simultaneously, a course in commercial art was begun.[23] The old fort's jail was turned into TSC's Art Building, with the steel-barred cells now holding art supplies rather than captive prisoners.[24] In the 1960s, Texas Southmost College was still a very small school. Art and the teaching of art, for the most part, was not an important component of the College, and those who did want to study art often did not enroll at TSC. The majority of the art teachers at the College were adjunct faculty who taught classes without any kind of curriculum or educational agenda. As the local pool of public school art teachers went so did the menu of classes that were offered, and with that went the quality of instruction.[25]

In the later 1960s, Harold Swayder, M.F.A. in ceramics from Bowling Green State University, became the first artist/teacher who had an understanding of curriculum and artistic aesthetics. Swayder was a master ceramicist who specialized in both throwing and hand building. Noted for placing facial features on his pottery (most memorably a buxom pottery bust of his attractive wife Teresa), Swayder managed to plant a seed, and with him came constant followers who took advantage of his teaching and later used those acquired skills to transfer from the Junior College to the larger universities. Aside from his duty as pottery teacher, Swayder also often taught drawing, painting, and art history classes, as well as chairing the program, and offering an array of other art courses as needed.[26]

In 1974, George Truan left his teaching position at B.I.S.D. to start teaching

art at Texas Southmost College. Truan helped to mold many of the later local art teachers, many of whom went on to graduate from Texas A & I University in Kingsville.[27] He taught painting, drawing, sculpture, photography, art history, and art for elementary teachers, and served as chairman of the Art Department down to his death in 1992. As a member of the Chicano Art Movement, he led other Hispanics to plug into their heritage through art.[28] George Truan was perhaps the first true art educator the college had. Not only was he an extremely creative artist, but also saw himself as a man who had a dream and saw much potential in his population. As a member of the Chicano movement, Truan used that not only to expose outsiders to the area and it visual art, but, like a true teacher, he made sure that the artwork produced by his students was seen outside of Brownsville. Truan's gift was his ability to respect his students and to make them aware that they were as good as any other students. As an artist, he was a key player in the Texas Chicano Art movement, and he could have been a major artist nationally, but gave that up in order, as he put it, "to serve the local people". He did not have a specific medium, but instead dabbled in drawing and mixed media relief, later taking on a series of projects that involved photography, drawing, and *altares*. During his later years at what became UT-Brownsville (TSC/UTB), Truan spent all of his time teaching art education courses, and helped to inspire many of Brownsville's teachers. Many saw him as a teachers' teacher.[29]

During the late seventies and early eighties, Gilbert Muñoz joined the department as a full time art teacher. Muñoz, too, was a graduate of A&I Kingsville and, like Swayder, specialized in ceramics. The Swayder, Truan, and Muñoz era was basically a time where art classes had two primary functions. One was to cater to art majors and the other was to provide a less challenging curriculum for the general public. It was not uncommon for art instructors to teach between six to eight classes per semester. During this period, some advanced art history classes were offered by Pan American University at Brownsville (see below). The TSC program was small in its offerings, but classes had large enrollments. It was not uncommon for some studio classes to consist of 25 or more students. This was partly due to the leadership of Art Chairman Truan and his ability to represent the program in matters of program development and community relations.[30]

In 1984, Harold Swayder and Gilbert Muñoz left TSC, Swayder moving to Hawaii, and Muñoz to San Antonio. 1985 brought in two new faculty members to replace them: Carlos G. Gómez (born in Mexico City, raised in Brownsville, and with a B.F.A. from Pan American University and an M.F.A. from Washington State University) and Barbara Johnson (with an M.F.A. from the University of Wyoming). Truan's dream was to continue to develop the program by bringing in fresh teaching talent. Johnson was made the 3-D specialist, and Gómez the 2-D specialist. Oddly, Gómez was hired to replace

Muñoz as the ceramist. However, that was changed, and Gómez was given both the drawing and painting duties. Truan specialized in art appreciation and art education classes. TSC was in the lead nationally as far as hiring Hispanic faculty was concerned. In 1985, at a time when a very small number of Hispanics were given the opportunity to teach art beyond the public school level, TSC had two Hispanic art faculty. The adjoining institutions, Texas A&I University and Pan American University, had none. In fact, a survey showed that less then twenty Hispanics taught at the college level in Texas. As a Chicano, Truan saw the need for Hispanic students to see someone like him in the classroom teaching art. His point was that the students, too, could achieve such a goal.[31]

After a year, Johnson left TSC, and in the fall of 1986, Nancy Sclight, with an MFA from the Instituto de San Miguel de Allende, joined the art faculty. At that time still a community college with the dual mission of offering both art major and art non-major studio classes, the program embarked into a new era. The goal was to remove the non-major art courses and to go strictly art major. Gómez basically was assigned the painting and drawing program. Sclight was the ceramist and taught the design classes. The teaching of art history was handled by either faculty or adjuncts. Truan taught art education and art appreciation. This new era had a young, up-and-coming, proven painter in Gómez, and a meticulous potter in Nancy Sclight, who like Gómez had established a track record as a practicing artist. For the first time at TSC, artists who were also teachers worked with students. Real-world experiences were being introduced into the classroom, especially by Gómez, who was also involved in curating, gallery management, and was a student of current issues aside from his interest in Chicano Art. Sclight's attention to detail introduced "old school" and formal techniques to the classroom. The concept of creating top-notch art students was a key factor in the program, as eventually, students would have to transfer to other institutions to complete their education. Gómez once boasted that he had the best painting program in Texas, and he welcomed any competitive measure. It was that kind of ego that was producing "art healthy" students.[32]

The University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College

In 1973, an upper-division and graduate center of Pan American University at Edinburg, Texas, had been established in Brownsville. Although its curriculum did not originally include art, the new campus' statement of philosophy stressed from the first its commitment to "perpetuate the best of American cultural heritage and to blend with it the outstanding features of Latin-American culture."[33] In 1978, upper-division art courses had been introduced. Dr. Milo Kearney, the University's sole history professor, had also taught the art history (including a survey History of Art, as well as Ancient

Art, Medieval and Renaissance Art, Asian Art, and a Comparative Art History of Western Europe and the Far East), while Minerva García and Juan García, adjuncts taken from B.I.S.D., had taught courses in art technique. When, in 1989, the University of Texas at Brownsville had been created, it had offered a minor in Art and a teaching certificate in Art.[34]

In 1991, the University and College merged to form the University of Texas at Brownsville/Texas Southmost College. This was a significant event for fine arts teaching in that it allowed the TSC art department to offer upper division art courses and a degree in art. As promising as the change was, to a great extent it froze the momentum that Truan had worked hard to create. As quickly as the partnership began, so did the changes in the program. George Truan was no longer the art chair, but was relegated to faculty, the art program being combined with a struggling music department in a new Fine Arts Department. While the change for the university was an exceptional and much needed event, to an extent it created a situation in which the music branch of the Fine Arts program evolved, while the art branch did not. It seems that for the time being art had lost its voice, sense of direction, and coordination. Despite this, the new focus was in creating the degree and developing curriculum in both areas. For the first time, the art faculty could follow the progression of a freshman turning into a senior, and in 1995 the program had its first two graduates—Mary Daughters and Janet Evans. Sadly, in the early nineties, George Truan passed away, and whatever voice the art program had retained was lost. The art faculty and the new Fine Arts Chair, Terry Tomlin, had to grapple with the new situation. Despite programming differences, Gómez wrote the art degree plan, and Tomlin wrote the proposal for a BA in Art.[35]

Truan's position was filled by the hiring of Joan Price, a PhD in art history from the University of Wisconsin at Madison. Price was at that time the only specialized art historian in South Texas. Yet course offerings were still limited to painting, drawing, ceramics, design, and a small menu of art history classes. Sections in printmaking, photography, and computer imaging were occasional, taught by quality adjuncts like Brad Doherty (photography) and Noel Palmenez (printmaking). Art appreciation, once the duty of full time faculty, was relegated to adjuncts overseen by art historian Dr. Price. As time went by, faculty found a greater sense of artistic productivity, encouraged by the annual art faculty exhibition at the campus' Richardson Art Gallery. Here Gómez premiered his annual body of, in many cases, more then 30 works. Both Gómez and Sclight's work matured. Sclight's work specifically went from simplistic geometric shapes to complicated mixed-media shapes. Gómez has been written about in three books and has been publicly acknowledged as an avant-garde Chicano artist. The artistic output by Gómez and Sclight served as a standard to the department's students. The period of the middle

nineties saw much growth in the course offerings of the program. The shift to serving a traditional student made it possible for the program to expand course schedules. The program outgrew the Art Building, so that courses were offered in different campus buildings. Under Tomlin's chairmanship, the program began to regain a voice with the administration.[36]

In the late nineties, Dr. Sue Zanne Urbis took over as Chairman of the Fine Arts Department. Endowed with extraordinary energy, Urbis advocated breaking up the Fine Arts into two departments. Furthermore, her ability to understand the business end of budgeting and university financial bureaucracy made it possible for the department to provide better service to its students. The painting program and two design programs were moved to Rusteberg Hall, with the intention of moving all of the art instruction there. The program offered its first three graduate courses. A combination graduate class of painting and drawing became a frequent course offering, and the ceramic and art history programs steadily grew. While the department has no graduate degree, there is an attempt to hire a PhD in Art Education with the intentions of creating an M.A. in Art Education. The M.A. in Art Education would be the only one offered south of San Antonio. In 2001, a new faculty member joined the program, and officially the sculpture program had a steward. E. George Lorio, M.F.A., enthusiastically jumped into the task of developing the new program. The addition of Lorio brought to the program a typical instructor with mainstream beliefs.[37]

The Visual Arts program has gone through a slow but definite growth curve. With four full time faculty members and a soon-to-be-hired "true" art educator, the program offers quality programs despite the humble facilities and lack of budget support. Every year, the program graduates students, some of whom have seen admittance to terminal degree programs at division I universities. Alma Rocha received an M.F.A. from Washington State University in 2004, and Helen Cruales was accepted in 2005 to Michigan State University at Lansing. Others have successfully enrolled at smaller universities to pursue their M.F.A. degrees. As the program develops, and especially if the plan of breaking up the Fine Arts department into two freestanding programs comes to fruition, the expectation is that the Visual Arts will come into their own as a quality program.[38]

The new faculty addition will be a welcome one to the program. The potential of developing the first Masters in Art Education degree in South Texas should attract a large and diverse student population that could well establish the program. The attempt by the faculty to expand its facilities is critical and could well turn the program from a small one into a large one. The addition of ADB Bret Lefler as an Art Education Assistant Professor in the fall of 2005 will help the program to stay competitive with the surrounding four other colleges.[39]

Art Exhibition

While Valley writers and musicians have won national fame, Valley artists have only very recently received attention outside of the area. Even in 2004, a Borderlands Conference in Kingsville included Chicano art from San Diego to San Antonio without the slightest reference to the Rio Grande Valley.[40] However, outlets for artistic expression for local talent are increasing.

At the start of the 1960s, the Harlingen Art Forum launched the annual July Beachcombers Fine Art Show at South Padre Island, the longest continuous running fine arts exhibit in Texas. (For the record, in the strict sense, academic artists do not accept such shows as representative of "fine arts," but more as decorative arts.[41]) The event began unofficially in the summer of 1960 when several cabanas were rented on a day rental basis for use in showing the paintings of Harlingen Art Forum members. The event became official the following year. With the growth of the Island, the number of cabanas grew until the construction of a civic center on South Padre Island obviated their use. By the 2005 Beachcombers Art Show, some 100 artists from across Texas were exhibiting their works.[42] The program also provides educational programs for children and adults and scholarships for high school students.[43]

In 1971, the Brownsville Art League instituted an Arts and Crafts Show every November and an International Student Art Show every March/April (the latter instituted in 1971). Awards are granted.[44] International artists are brought in for the latter event.[45] The Brownsville Museum of Fine Art, built next to the Neale House at 230 Neale Drive, now houses this event. The 34th international art show in this series in March 2005 featured 380 original pieces of art and offered over $2,500 of prize money. Anita Diebel, a Rockport artist, served as workshop instructor, special exhibitor, and judge. The $25 charged for each ticket was used to support the Brownsville Museum of Fine Art.[46] The Brownsville Art League also exhibited Frank and Mary Yturria's collection of Russian art.[47]

At the start of the 1970s, the Brownsville Art League was still alone in offering competitions and art shows for students. Since then the Brownsville Historical Museum has provided space for the Brownsville Independent School District to exhibit student work.[48] In 1995, an annual B. I. S. D. Faculty Art Show was instituted, showing the works of public school art instructors at the Brownsville Museum of Fine Arts.[49] From February 18 through March 31 of 2005 an art exhibit at the Historic Brownsville Museum at 641 East Madison Street entitled "Dos Generaciones" featured the art of Oscar Zamarripa and his daughter Alejandra. The work of these two artists from Guadalajara, Mexico, included sculpture, ceramics, and jewelry. *Amigos Artistas* (see below), primarily a promoter of "fine art," shared the credit for sponsoring this show.[50] Simultaneously, on 21 and 22 February 2005, the Brownsville Heritage Museum at 1325 East Washington Street hosted

a free visiting show of photos of thirty centuries of Mexican art. A twenty-minute video overview was also available to visitors.[51] In October 2005, the Brownsville Junior Service League hosted an art contest at the Ringgold Civic Pavilion for children ages five through twelve. The art was to depict historic Brownsville and community service projects, with the winning works to be featured in a 2006 calendar.[52] From 2 December 2005 through 2 January 2006, Priscilla Rodriguez, the new Director of the Brownsville Heritage Complex, launched the Brownsville Heritage Museum's first Artful Holidays Weekend Coffee and Culture series. It began with Rodriguez giving a lecture on Mexican *nacimientos* (nativity scenes). The next day, the museum held its first art market to sell works by local artists.[53]

Since its founding in 1978, the Laguna Madre Art League has held a show every February.[54] The locale for the show has shifted through the years. For example, in 1987 the group held a show at the first bank on South Padre Island.[55] The next year, they held a show at the Island's Sunchase Mall.[56] In 2005, the show was held at the Port Isabel Community Center behind the Public Library on Yturria Street. Admission is free, but they raffle off a painting, giving the profit for a High School art scholarship.[57] From 1985 to 1987, the League also held a February Arts and Crafts Show at South Padre Island's old Pavilion (now demolished). However, when the State began to tax artists for the items they sold, the show was discontinued.[58] In August 2005, Port-Isabel artist Virginia Eggert painted an acrylic sea turtle scene from scratch in a couple of hours at a Conservation Awards banquet sponsored by Sea Turtles, Incorporated and held at Louie's Backyard on South Padre Island. The proceeds from the sale of the painting were donated to the rehabilitation center for injured sea turtles.[59]

Since the early 1990s, UTB/TSC faculty art exhibitions have regularly been held in the Richardson Art Gallery on campus, housed in the campus Art Building. The Richardson Gallery has been in existence since the remodeling of the Fort Brown Building in which it is housed, but a TSC gallery existed since the George Truan days. It is perhaps the only true voice for uncensored fine art. Some big-time artists, including Kirk Mangus and Benito Huerta, have hung their works in the Richardson Gallery, which has also housed traveling museum shows and multiethnic artists. There have been four gallery directors: George Truan, Nancy Sclight, Carlos Gómez, and now Teresa Eckerman-Pfeil. The gallery exhibits all levels of visual artwork ranging from student shows to professional exhibitions.[60] TSC (now UTB/TSC) faculty members have exhibited their work here since the 1970s, as well as nationally, and internationally. For example, in March 2005, a Studio Faculty Art Exhibition featured the work of three university faculty members: Nancy Sclight, Noel Palmenez, and George Lorio.[61] Nancy Slight's work focused on ceramics evoking a cosmic theme, with titles including "Far Side of the Moon,"

"Summer Solstice," and "Super Nova." George Lorio contributed sculptures on a botanical motif such as "*Mano de Nopal*," showing a hand and wrist with thorns. Noel Palmenez's paintings, with such titles as "*Música en los Huesos*" and "*Milagros de la Guerra*" drew on his culture. His "*María*" was a tribute to Hanna High School's beloved *estudiantina* teacher and Christian poet María Aurora Arrese, who died young of cancer. It showed María playing a guitar surrounded by birds, butterflies, a sleeping cat, hibiscus flowers, a wilting plant, a setting sun, and a dark blue moon, with a little note reading "*Le canto a mis estudiantes y a la luna y al sol.*"

In April 2005, a Studio Senior Art Exhibition displayed the works of Ana María de la Garza and Rebecca Achard Welsh.[62] The same month, awards were granted for contributors to a student art show in the Richardson Gallery. Two categories of entries were involved: two-dimensional and three-dimensional works.[63] From 28 March through 1 April 2005, for National Farmworkers Week, the College Assistance Migrant Program, C.A.M.P. Club, the Dean of Students, and the Student Government Association of UTB/TSC sponsored a Cesar Chavez depiction contest.[64] From 1 February through 3 March 2005, the Patron of the Arts presented a third exhibit at the UTB/TSC Richardson Art Gallery of the work of Kirk Mangus, a nationally known artist.[65]

In 2001, Dr. Romeo Montalvo, Jr., a Brownsville pediatrician and collector of Hispanic and Latin American art, founded *Amigos Artistas*, of which he is also President. *Amigos Artistas* brought more awareness of art to the students and residents of Brownsville, presenting an annual exhibit of the works of Latino artists on the third week of February, about the time of Charro Days.[66] Their first show in 2002 featured the art of Brownsville's Carlos Gómez and César Martínez of San Antonio in a show called *Dos Caras del Sur de Tejas*. Pairing the work of an internationally-known Chicano artist with that of a local one inspired up-and-coming local Mexican-American artists in their efforts.[67] The next year, the art of George Truan was featured, followed in 2004 by the work of Felipe Morales of Oaxaca. In 2005, the art of Guadalajara's father-daughter team Oscar and Alejandra Zamarripa was displayed. In April of 2005, *Amigos Artistas* sponsored an art show at IBC Bank at El Ranchito Park on Paredes Line Road in Brownsville. About forty artists displayed and sold their work, with no charge for either the artists or the viewing public.[68]

Private galleries have helped to popularize local artists. Now closed, Monrho's Gallery, located in the 1890 Kowalski-Fernandez house on East Elizabeth Street, had displayed work by local artists, as well as regional, national, and international art.[69] Toni (Mrs. Bill) Hudson has done much to promote local art. An artist herself, in October of 2005 she sponsored an exhibit called "Healing Colors of the World" at the Imagenes Art Studio, which she runs, at the Brownsville's Paseo Plaza Building at 2701 Paredes Line Road.[70] On 27 November 2005, she held a "Stunning Strokes" exhibit of local artists' works at the same location.[71]

The growth of an architecturally stunningly beautiful campus for UTB/TSC offered a great potential for the addition of mural, statuary, and canvas art by our local artists. At the initiative of Dr. Juliet García, President of UTB/TSC, two large paintings were added to North and South Buildings on the occasion of their renaming ceremony in honor of Mary Rose Cardenas in November 2005. Both paintings were the work of Carlos Gómez. His painting entitled "Homage to Don Americo Paredes" was hung on the stairwell wall in South Building, and his "A Painter's High" was put up in North Building. At the ITECH campus, two of Nancy Sclight's industrial sculptures, appropriate to the industrial trade programs taught there, were put on display, and several of Carlos Gómez's students painted a mural on a technological theme. Works were also placed on the walls of SET-B Building, as well as at other campus locations. Chip Dameron, the Dean of Liberal Arts, encouraged artists to do still more to enhance the campus.[72]

A new major venue for the art of the Brownsville region appeared with the establishment of the Narciso Martínez Cultural Arts Center at 225 East Stenger Street in San Benito (an institution dedicated to promoting the cultural heritage of the *Mexicano* community). The Center was started in 1991 by Rogelio Núñez (who conceived the idea and acted as the Center's first Director) with the help of David Garza and Dr. Ramón de León. Born and raised in San Benito, Núñez earned a B.A. and an M.A. from A & I University in Kingsville. While a student, he became involved in the Chicano movement's activism as a member of the *Raza Unida* Party and Club. Influenced by San Antonio's Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center and Director of San Benito's *Proyecto Libertad* since 1990, Núñez's plan for the Narciso Martínez Center was to bring more awareness of Mexican-American contributions to the arts.[73] Music was the main emphasis, the Center being named for conjunto artist Narciso Martínez, who shortly before his death played at the inauguration of the Center on 29 October 1991, scheduled on his birthday. Nonetheless, the idea was to encourage all the arts. For the first couple of years, the Center was located in a couple of offices in the old Cameron County Building. Paintings by UT-Pan American Masters of Fine Arts students were displayed even then in the hallways. After the Center moved into its present location, more space was available for art exhibits. Funding has come from private donations, with additional funds for special projects having been given by the Texas Commission for the Arts, by Humanities Texas, by Texas Folklife Resources, and by the National Endowment for the Arts.[74]

David Champion, Jr., served as the first formal director of the Narcisco Martínez Center from 1995 to 1999, and was a key player in bringing national attention to it.[75] While Champion's initial attraction to the experiment came from his interest in accordion music, he expanded the Center's programs to encompass literature and the visual arts.[76] In 1998, the Center presented an

exhibit of Carlos G. Gómez's work called "The Good Mexican." This opened the door for other such art shows, and the function of the Center became dual (auditory and visual). The Smithsonian's Cynthia Vidaurri attended and expressed strong approval.[77]

Cristina Ballí became Director of the Center in 2004. In 2005, the Center's clientele was mainly from Harlingen (23%), Brownsville (23%), and San Benito (19%). 15% was from Hidalgo County, 10% from elsewhere in Texas, and 5% from outside of Texas.[78] The first exhibit of the above-mentioned *Tercera Cultura* program of student art was held from 6 March through 6 April 2005 at the Narciso Martínez Cultural Arts Center.[79] In June of 2005, the Narciso Martínez Center offered an exhibition of art by thirteen artists featuring the opossum, a creature reverenced by the Aztecs. The opening of the exhibit was accompanied by music related to, and a reading of poetry about, the opossum.[80] Jim Bob McMillan, the Assistant Director for the Texas Commission for the Arts, has suggested organizing a traveling exhibit of local art, a suggestion that the Narciso Martínez Cultural Arts Center Director Cristina Ballí is hoping to implement.[81]

As to the coastal communities, the Laguna Madre Art League sponsors art shows through the year at either Light House Square in Port Isabel or in the Port Isabel Community Center.[82] The annual summer Beachcomber Art Show on South Padre Island was started by the Harlingen Art Forum in the 1970s. Originally held at the now demolished Isla Blanca Pavilion, it has since shifted to the South Padre Island Convention Center. Until recently, it featured visiting artists. However, there are now sufficient numbers of resident artists to give the show more of a local flavor.[83] Port Isabel's Purple Parrot Gift Shop and Gallery on the Lighthouse Square at 419 East Maxan Street features local, regional, and Mexican artists.[84] Ralph and Kitty Ayers are the owners. Ralph retired from Rutgers University's television department and moved here to his wife's home area in 1991, teaching art appreciation classes at UTB. The idea to open their gallery in the year 2000 was inspired by Kitty's experience in the 1990's as manager of a short-lived gallery opened by Mike Kidwell on Padre Island. Artists give their works on consignment, and are allowed six months to sell. Ralph Ayers is trying to establish an Arts Council to win grant money. One project he would like to see carried out is a statue to Don Cencho, a water carrier in 1846 at the time the Port Isabel lighthouse was built.[85]

Creativity

So many works of art have appeared in eastern Cameron County in the past generation that only a few examples can be cited in the following sections of this paper.

Creativity in Statuary

Padre Island's most famous statue is that of the "*Cristo de Brazos*

Santiago," erected in the 1990s to commemorate local fishermen lost at sea. The statue's arms are outstretched, with the face looking out to sea. It stands on huge granite blocks on the south side of the Brazos de Santiago Pass just inside the jetties. A bronze circle at the base carries an inscription in Spanish and English, reading: "*Padre recibe las almas de estos pescadores valientes, que navegaron por este pasillo y que nunca regresaron*/ Father receive the souls of these brave fishermen who have sailed through this pass and never returned." Gifts of flowers stand around the statue. In 2004, Port Isabel held a Porpoise Pachanga, a trendy project (typical of coastal resort art) that placed thirty-some painted porpoise statues around the town. Each statue was exactly the same, but a contest was held for the right of one artist each to be commissioned to paint one of the porpoises. Each winning artist painted his statue in a distinctive style. The paint sprayed on the statues was supposed to last a half-century or so. So far, none of the statues have been vandalized. They are rotated regularly to exhibit all of them fairly and equally. The project was featured in *Texas Monthly*, *Texas Highways*, and *Coastal Living*.[86] In April 2005, a statue showing children climbing a mountain was unveiled in Brownsville's Dean Porter Park.[87]

Creativity in Mural Art

Before launching into local efforts in mural painting, it should be pointed out that most murals are not "fine art," but range from commercial to decorative purposes.[88] Murals evoking local culture date back at least to Roy Keister, who taught portrait painting at the Brownsville Art League. A Chicago-trained painter and commercial artist, Keister moved to Texas in the late 1940's to do advertising for citrus companies.[89] In 1953, Keister painted the (truly "fine art") mural in the then Jacob Brown Memorial Civic Center, now the property of the University of Texas at Brownsville/Texas Southmost College.[90] The Gateway Mural on the Gateway Bridge was created as a part of a General Services Administration federal project.[91]

Many murals done in Brownsville since 1984 are the work of G. Marcus Blackwell. Born in Munich, Germany, of an Air Force father, he grew up in various countries, but graduated from San Benito High School. After a stint in the Army in Vietnam, Blackwell studied art at the University of Hawaii. Settling in Brownsville in 1984, he began a career of decorating local establishments with mural art. He also has done many sets for Camille Playhouse, where he also performs as an actor. A few examples of his local work might be mentioned. One mural wraps around three sides of the pool at Fairway Executive Inn, showing a tropical lagoon from underwater to the land to the sky above, with mermaids amidst sea life and birds. Cats Bar at the Sheraton Hotel features a mural with cats playing music. A mural in the nursery of the Vinyard Church shows Noah's Ark with Noah and the animals

coming out after the flood. The lobby of Bruce Aiken Elementary School has a mural, displayed in full color in *The Brownsville Herald*, showing local historian Bruce Aiken reading a book in the midst of the scenes of Brownsville history he had described in his writings.[92]

Local establishments boasting murals evocative of regional culture included the innovative Captain Bob's Seafood Restaurant at 2704 Boca Chica Boulevard, later changed to a paint store. This restaurant, owned by Robert Sánchez, began as a tiny corner drop-by that steadily grew with such go-getting methods as placing a promoter in a shrimp costume on the sidewalk to wave at passing cars (to the special delight of such children as our three-year-old grandsons, who would beg to drive by to see the shrimp still one more time). Michael ("Miguel") Kiff, an ex-shrimper and self-taught airbrush artist, covered the restaurant's walls with murals featuring the shrimping industry and showing such local politicians as the late Brownsville Navigation District Chief Executive Officer Raul Besteiro and Cameron County Judge Gilberto Hinojosa. Kiff grew up partly in Brownsville, and now lives in Los Fresnos, where his home includes an art gallery on its second floor. He has also decorated establishments on South Padre Island. At Louie's Backyard, he painted an aquarium filled with sea creatures, while his murals showing Egyptian scenes, the ocean, the jungle, and outer space are to be found at Surf Stop. Commissions from such establishments have allowed Kiff to survive as a local painter. Kiff also produces oil and water paintings and wooden and metal sculptures.[93] Kirk Anders did a mural on the side of the Port City Mercantile Building on Light House Square in Port Isabel, showing a collage of Port Isabel history in a realistic style. Kirk and his wife had a pottery shop and studio on the same Light House Square.[94]

An effort was also made to redirect the tagging or graffiti writing (with spray paint) of walls around the region into a more aesthetically pleasing artistic product. The 21st Century After School Program (with Michael Benavides as Site Coordinator) and students from the Joe Callandret Positive Redirection Center re-channeled tagging efforts into such decorative projects as a 15-foot-high mural completed in 2004 on a wall behind the START Center in San Benito. The mural includes the slogan "Reading is knowledge," and depicts local legend Freddy Fender holding a guitar. Using materials provided by the 21st Century, the students were supervised by Sam Deese, who was preparing for a career as an art teacher. In another project, these students painted the school's logo on a wall of the Positive Redirection Center building.[95]

A boost was given to local mural art by a tardy arrival to the Valley of the Chicano art movement. Launched in the late 1960s in California under the influence of the great Mexican mural artists of the Mexican Revolutionary period (Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros, and José Clemente Orozco), Chicano muralism at first centered on a call for political activism for the

oppressed Mexican-American worker. The movement rapidly spread through the large urban centers of the U.S. Southwest and as far as Chicago.[96] One San Antonio mural depicted the Rio Grande Valley's insurgent hero Juan Cortina as a victim of the Texas Rangers.[97] By the time Chicano muralism became notworthy in Brownsville, it had lost its original thrust of proletariat revolutionary ideology aimed at oppressed groups in favor of bourgeois cultural assertion with an appeal to mainstream American society.[98] In September of 2002, University of Texas at Brownsville students Lucy Quesada and Alonzo Garza, students of Professor Carlos Gómez, unveiled their mural on the north outside wall of Brownsville's Greyhound Bus Station. The project is one of a series of murals funded by the Greyhound Community Reflections Mural Program, established by Greyhound Lines, Inc., and the National Council of La Raza for the creation of Latino community murals around the United States. This colorful mural presents such images of local folk culture as a *charro* on horseback, folkloric dancers, jalapeño peppers coming out of a *molcajete* (mortar), and Gorgas Hall, one of the historic buildings on the University of Texas at Brownsville campus.[99] Two other murals also dealt with local culture: one in UTB/TSC's ITEC Center in the old Amigoland Mall and the other in the J. T. Canales Elementary School.[100]

Murals were also painted decorating the new Children's Museum and Ringgold Civic Pavilion in Brownsville's Dean Porter Park.[101] Violet Springman, who came to Brownsville in 1955 and married local boy Puyi Springman, painted tiles of Mexican folk costumes to decorate a wall in the Pan American Round Table's Costumes of the Americas Museum in Dean Porter Park.[102] In the spring of 2005, Alina Rae Abete, a student at Lopez High School, contributed by painting a mural depicting birds and some other animals typical of Brownsville at the Nature Conservatory.[103] The new Brownsville Greyhound Bus Station is going to incorporate a mosaic mural done by Brownsville children and two of Carlos G. Gómez's university students (Robert Mendoza and Julio Martínez).[104] Gilberto Losoya, a sexegenarian Brownsville native who owns Casper's Commercial Signs, painted a 16 X 60 foot wildlife mural on the exterior side wall of Herman's Optical at Paredes and Price Roads. His latest mural places Pope John Paul II beside the Virgin of Guadalupe.[105] The Museum of Fine Art' summer art camp, established in 2003, led to the painting of a mural on a novel theme on an exterior wall of Lopez Grocery Store # 1, at 14th Street and Ringgold. Children from the Buena Vida Housing Authority, ranging from preschool to age fifteen, depicted the history of the López family, including the wedding of store founders Pipo and Tomasita López (complete with an inebriated guest being held up by others), the first López store, a horse-drawn wagon pulling produce, a simple early Borderlands church and ranch, washtubs, sunflowers, pigs, cows eating cactus, and kids playing soccer.[106]

A letter to the editor printed in *The Brownsville Herald* in January of 2005 expressed a wish for more emphasis on local motifs in Brownsville decorations. The letter read: "Once again Sunrise Mall decorated the main entrance with a British castle for the holidays. Why don't mall officials celebrate Christmas in Brownsville with what is around the community? A "Brit" is not going to put something in his mall about Brownsville or Texas, right? Why can't corporations utilize local artists in our area that could select murals, decorations, etc., that would enhance Sunrise Mall with what is around our community?"[107] However, Sunrise Mall did choose to paint the temporary interior walls of spaces yet to be rented out as stores with color sketches by commercial artist Don Breeden of Brownsville landmark buildings. Breeden also designed a 40-foot-long mural at the Civic Pavilion showing Brownsville history from early times to the present.[108] Following the lead of Los Angeles, some of whose freeways boast art works, the city of Brownsville commissioned Don Breeden to decorate the Expressway, newly expanded in 2005. Funding for the project came from the Texas Department of Transportation. Such Breeden designs for molds as local historic buildings, palm trees, cannons, and a symbol for the Rio Grande are being repeated multiple times on retaining blocks on the four outside walls of the Expressway at each underpass from Highway 802 to Sixth and Seventh Streets (joined at the Expressway into a single intersection plus a bike trail crossing). From here, a linear park with the end of the bike trail will include an outdoor theater of colored and textured concrete based on the Vauban-fortress type polygonal plan of Fort Texas (i.e. early Fort Brown).[109]

Creativity in Canvas Painting

Brownsville's unique culture has provided the inspiration and subject matter for much of its art. The two main fads in American art in the period between the two world wars (Surrealism and Mexican mural art)[110] as well as the two schools of painting in vogue in the two-and-a-half decades after World War II (Abstract Expressionism and Pop Art)[111] were generally ignored locally in favor of realist paintings. The eight ladies who formed the Brownsville Art League in 1935 painted such typical Brownsville scenes as the old houses and local plants, including cactuses and palm trees.[112] Port Isabel's Virginia Eggert exhibits her Realistic watercolor scenes of shrimping and the coast at such shows as the Brownsville Museum of Fine Art's Bird Life Art Contest.[113] Laguna Vista's Marge Ford specializes in such Texana watercolor and acrylic scenes as fields of bluebonnets.[114] South Padre Island's Beth Fedigan produces semi-tropical nature paintings of the Rio Grande Valley and of Hawaii (where she has also lived). She is known for her oil and acrylic stylized and brilliantly colored scenes of tropical fish.[115]

Some artists who grew up in Brownsville have found success in other parts

of the country. Carlos Gómez, the above-mentioned UTB/TSC Professor of Art, has exhibited widely in shows alongside monumental artists, including both in Texas cities including Harlingen, Kingsville, Houston, Austin, San Antonio, and Fort Worth, and in such cities beyond Texas as Norman, Oklahoma; Wichita, Kansas; Kenosha, Wisconsin; Boise, Idaho; Bernegat Light, New Jersey; Newport, Rhode Island; and Washington, D.C. In February 2006, the Richardson Art Gallery presented an exhibited of his work entitled "The Chupacabra Chronicles: Exposed," 27 works on canvas and several on paper featuring the Rio Grande Valley's folkloric monster as a metaphor for the misunderstood Mexican American.[116] Mention might also be made of Teodoro Estrada (who now lives in Houston and creates art evocative of chocolate candy)[117] and of Julian Schnabel (regarded as the world's premiere contemporary artist,[118] who now lives in New York City producing neo-expressionistic paintings on broken plates and crockery attached to a wooden framework).[119] Letty Villarreal has been especially note-worthy for popularizing local themes outside of the area. Trained at Vassar College, Letty resettled from Brownsville to Denver, where she produces abstract paintings (both on canvas and murals). Many of her works are rooted in such Brownsville themes as drug trafficking, border patrolmen, border checkpoints, drought, and the clash of the third and first worlds. Her choice of colors emphasizes the blue, gray, and green pastels used on many of the houses in the poorer parts of town.[120] Other examples include José Solís, a partner of Estrada, Alfredo Bustinza (an M.F.A. from Rutgers who has enjoyed great success on the East Coast), and Oscar Galván (now living in Austin).[121] Bustinza, who after graduating from Hanna High School in 1976 received a bachelor of fine arts from Texas Tech University and a master's in fine arts from Rutgers University in 1983, received international recognition. He had just returned to Brownsville, where he led a mural project at the Good Neighbor Settlement House, when he died tragically at age 48 in 2005.[122]

In one notable reversal of the trend, an artist of national renown resettled from elsewhere to Brownsville, although the indifference with which her presence was met is an indication of why she was a unique case. Carlota Petrina (née Charlotte Kennedy), a mural artist from New York and Italy, chose to make Brownsville her home for the final years of her life from 1988 to 1997. Here, her son Tony Petrina converted a seedy hotel near the University of Texas-Texas Southmost College campus into the Carlota Petrina Museum, featuring her large canvases. The themes are Italian, many of the paintings illustrating either the sixteenth-century Torquato Tasso's epic poem *Gerusalemme Liberata* or scenes of Venice. The style is influenced by the Impressionist period. Today, the museum is dilapidated, and the paintings in danger of being lost.[123]

Creativity in Published Illustrations

Carlos Gómez, Professor of Art at the University of Texas at Brownsville/ Texas Southmost College, has also won recognition nationally for published illustrations. For example, one of his paintings, of a bird perched in front of an abstract cloud-like pattern, was included in the 2004 book *Chicano Art For Our Millenium*.[124] He is included in *K-8 Spotlight on Art*, *Contemporary Chicana and Chicano Art Work* (Arizona State University, 2002), *The Artist's Bluebook 2003*, and *Chicano Art For Our Millenium* (Arizona State University, 2004). Carlos also illustrated one of the books in the present series, namely *Studies in Matamoros and Cameron County History*. The illustrations are photographs of oil paintings on canvas, the style is surrealistic and thought provoking, while the themes treat both specifically local and generally Mexican-American culture. The cover picture, entitled "Paint With Passion," evokes the Laguna Madre, interpreted with pyramidal waves and clouds composed of components of wild flowers. The final illustration, called "Green Jay, do you know what love and passion are all about?," also evokes the Laguna Madre, this time with a storm approaching in the form of ominous lumpy shapes. Mexican-American religious themes include "*Madonna Morena*" (with the Virgin and Child backed by multi-ring halos) and "Madonna with Wood Cross" (also emphasizing textured patterns). More general religious motifs are worked in "The Mystery of Life" (showing detached body parts together with weird beings); "Deposition from the Cross" (with Christ slumped lifeless next to anonymous feet); "*La Biblia Es Bella Pero El Humano No*" (showing a room dissolved into senseless patterns around a solely-surviving television set); and "The Resurrection" (depicting Jesus rising from the meaningless patterns of the grave into new life). The universal interest in the human body is worked into another study in patterns in "Woman with Long Hair," "Ebony Nude," and "Nudescape."[125] Paintings of Brownsville artist Celina Hinojosa were included in both *Contemporary Chicana and Chicano Art* (2002), where the back cover shows one of her paintings, and in *Chicano Art For Our Millenium*. Both works are in the George Grosz/Diego Rivera style, showing caricatured human figures in a brightly-colored canvas.[126]

Don Breeden is the owner of Breeden Art Gallery and Frame Shop on Boca Chica Boulevard in Brownsville, which showcases his wildlife paintings and drawings, done in various media.[127] Born and raised in Brownsville, Breeden received a Bachelors of Fine Arts with a major in commercial art from the University of Houston in 1972. After four years as an illustrator and production artist in Houston, in 1976 he returned to Brownsville to work for an advertising agency, and in 1978 opened his own art studio. The following year, he launched Breeden Advertising, joined by Brad McCumber in 1982. His first illustrations were pen and ink prints of South Texas wildlife. His focus subsequently extended to Brownsville's historical buildings after he

was commissioned to do a series of twenty of these by the National Bank of Commerce. His drawings of these buildings are now displayed at the Boca Chica Luby's Cafeteria, at the downtown Information Center, on the walls in front of the un-leased space at Sunrise Mall, and at the Special Events Center. Breeden's illustrations have included a historical guide to Brownsville, a guide to the birds of Brownsville, a fishing guide to the region, a guide to the area's wild flowers, narwhale drawing for *National Geographic*, and commemorative Charro Days posters.[128] He did illustrations for Frank Yturria's book *Life and Times of Colonel Manuel María Yturria;* for William Adams and Anthony Knopp's book *Portrait of a Border City: Brownsville, Texas* and for *Studies in Brownsville and Matamoros History* (edited by Milo Kearney, Anthony Knopp, and Antonio Zavaleta).[129] Breeden's illustrations have made a major contribution to the linking of Brownsville and art by giving an unmistakeably local stamp through their subject matter.

The illustrator of the present volume, Eduardo Ibarra, was born and raised in Brownsville. He was trained at the Kansas City Art Institute at the Rockhill Nelson-Atkins Art Gallery in Kansas City, Missouri. He is presently teaching art at Vela Middle School, and working on a Masters degree in art under Gómez at UT-B. He feels a special influence from the work of the Mexican revolutionary mural artists Diego Rivera and Clemente Orozco.[130] In July of 2005, some twenty of his paintings were displayed in a show entitled "All About Me" at the Richardson Art Gallery. Beside painting his own headstone with an optimistic dating of 1971-2071 for his life, he emphasized self-portraits. One painting, called "In Bed," showed Ibarra in bed with five companions.[131]

Dr. Peter Gawenda, German-born Professor of Education at the University of Texas at Brownsville, as well as previous Assistant to the President and Director of Institutional Planning and Research, has illustrated various books on Border themes. Gawenda paints and sculpts with modern and conventional media, and illustrates as well. He has exhibited his work in the United States, Germany, France, the Netherlands, and Mexico, among other countries.[132] Gawenda also provided sketches for six of Milo Kearney's books.[133] Kearney, written up in the *Houston* Post for his illustrations in 1952,[134] and a sketch artist for a Smithsonian Institute archeological expedition on the Crow Creek Sioux Reservation in South Dakota in 1958, provided sketches for four of his own books as well as for the journal *Novosantanderino* and for UT-B's Liberal Arts *News Strips*,[135] while his wife Vivian contributed illustrations to four of the books.[136]

Larry Haines and Danno Wise are two wildlife illustrators and friends based at Port Isabel. Larry owns a fly-fishing shop *cum* art gallery in that town. He was the feature artist at the 2005 Border Fest held in March at Hidalgo, Texas. A graduate in Fine Arts from the University of Houston,

Larry has illustrated various nature magazines, including *Field and Stream* and *Outdoor Life*. He did a birding series for the Audubon Society. He also won the first snook (a Gulf of Mexico fish) conservation sporting stamp prize in Florida. (Every year, the Federal and State governments award prizes in highly competitive contests for sport designs for stamps to be sold at the U.S. post offices. The proceeds from the sale of these stamps are used for conservation. Anybody buying a hunting or a fishing license must buy such a stamp. For example, anybody wanting to fish for snook in Florida's Gulf Coast waters must first purchase a snook stamp.) Haines has a series of his Rio Grande Valley bird paintings at his gallery, as well as showing them at other galleries across the state.[137] Danno Wise came to the Rio Grande Valley from Houston in 1994. After working for a time as a fishing-and-snorkeling guide, scuba diver, tour boat operator, dolphin watch boat captain, and bar tender, he became manager of Outrageous Concepts' silkscreen production camp, designing t-shirt illustrations for customers. With a background of art classes, including at the University of Texas at Brownsville, Danno was able to branch out to do free-lance silk-screen illustrations for other companies as well. He also did work for the *Port Isabel-South Padre Island Press*, most notably launching its illustrated children's column called "Coast Wise Kids." This column gave children pictures of marine life to color. Danno also began a monthly illustrated article called "Tackle Tips and Techniques" with the *Texas Outdoor Journal*, and signed a contract with the Doyen Literary Services of Iowa to do a variety of book illustrations.[138]

The Recent Acceleration in Local Art Activities

Why has the Brownsville area experienced an increase in artistic activity recently? This region long remained culturally marginal from the rest of the United States, due to its poverty, its under-population, and its isolation by the Wild Horse Desert from the rest of Texas and the nation. Recent years have seen a population boom from Mexican immigration, an increasing popularity of and development of South Padre Island as a tourist haven, and a population shift to the southern part of the United States. Furthermore, when a survey in the late 1980s concluded that the Brownsville region had one of the lowest quality of life ratings for the State of Texas, various local people (especially some who had gone off to college and returned committed to improve life here) reacted. Joining in committees, they gave a big push that started the first city library and the University of Texas at Brownsville (itself a major stimulant to artistic achievement as the merged UTB-TSC). The momentum from this push has now spilled over into such secondary projects as art projects to beautify the city.[139] The board of directors of the Brownsville Art League is working to get more people involved in art.[140] These developments have been accompanied by a recent eastward spread of Chicano cultural

development from southern California to El Paso and now to the Rio Grande Valley. This phenomenon has given an additional push to the region's artistic productivity. Alongside the older tradition centered in the art leagues and often emphasizing the work of older Anglo women, younger artists especially have been stimulated by such Chicano-inspired efforts as *Amigos Artistas*, the Narciso Martínez Cultural Arts Center, and the university program directed by Carlos G. Gómez. Gómez is curating a gig entitled "The Brownsville School" at the Kellogg Gallery to take place in Pomona, California 10 March through 22 April of 2006, including Gómez, Noel Palmenez, Alma Rocha, and George Lorio.[141]

The Potential for Future Development

Despite a slow start compared to Valley literature and music, local art is beginning to blossom. Much more could be done. The university and city might set aside more of their budgets for public art. Many artists have to leave the area to pursue their dreams due to lack of support. It will help when more trained professionals are hired and brought to the area. Aesthetics, not politics, needs to guide the selection of artists and works.[142] In the past, the conservative nature of the region has tended to promote artwork of flowers, birds, animals, and old buildings at the expense of social, political, and aggressive artwork, discouraging artistic imagination.[143] Concern has been expressed for a perceived decline in commercial-based art, with only a few galleries surviving, leaving local artists with little outlet for the sale of their work.[144]

All the same, the many recent developments noted in this article are encouraging. As Mayra Cruz notes, there is an enduring creative push on the part of local artists.[145] Brownsville artist Lucy Quezada is hopeful that Brownsville might imitate McAllen's Art Walk, where galleries, studios, and restaurants exhibit local art works once a month.[146] The potential of the region for attracting a major artist colony is just beginning to be realized. In future years, the region could possibly become famous nationally for its artists, with the emergence of a distinctive and internationally renowned Lower Rio Grande Valley style of art.

The University of Texas at Brownsville

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Street Names of Brownsville

by

Mimosa Stephenson

I have long been fascinated by the street names in Brownsville because of their allusiveness, relationships, variety, sentiment, and surprises. As James Zavaleta pointed out to me, there is a Lois Lane, and Milo Kearney noticed that leaving Brownsville on the freeway one passes Stillman Road only to meet Merryman Road. My favorites are Eleanor, Bess, Mamie, and Roslyn off Truman Street near Gonzalez Park. As Reba McNair (whose family named those streets) noted, after finishing the presidents, it is time for the first ladies. I lived four years in Lubbock while going to graduate school and found a grid with numbered streets running east and west and A, B, C followed by Akron, Boston, Canton running north and south. That pattern is sensible and makes addresses easy to find, but Brownsville's streets, running diagonally (because of the river) so that early maps speak of N.W. Adams and S.E. Jefferson with some streets numbered but most streets named for people, plants, and places, are more colorfully named. Naming streets is a work in progress, from the time the first streets were laid out in 1848. The early names remain in the center of town while the new names radiate out, though they are prevented from spreading south by the winding Rio Grande. Street names are also subject to change as new voices are born and rise to influence. Brownsville's street names contain within them a good bit of history, some appreciation, some whimsy, much honoring of children and wives or selves, as well as awareness of vegetation and location.

Everybody seems aware that St. Charles is named for Charles Stillman, founder of Brownsville, and St. Francis for his father, who brought Charles here in his teens to work in trade with him. Francis Stillman died in 1838, ten years before Charles laid out Brownsville. The St. before the names seems problematic as a hardheaded businessman of thirty-eight is not likely to consider himself a saint, and even less likely to call himself one, but he might refer to the saints to make it look as if he were not naming himself. James Zavaleta says he has heard repeatedly that the sign painter who made the first signs assumed the names referred to the saints because he knew Brownsville was heavily Catholic. Chula Griffin has another explanation: The error came from the street signs' being painted by a Mexican, who was used to *Calle* before the name of a street as in Calle Planeta in West Brownsville today. This painter took *Charles St.* thus to be *St. Charles* and put the *St.* for street first. Generally Elizabeth Street is reported to have been named for Elizabeth Pamela Goodrich, who married Charles in 1849, but the supposition that he was engaged to her a year before he married her seems based on the street's

being named Elizabeth.[1] According to William Neale, George Lyons, whom Charles Stillman hired to lay out the town with building sites along the streets, named Elizabeth after his wife, who died while he was planning the city.[2] Neale should have known as he arrived in the area in 1834,[3] and in 1846 set up a stagecoach run between Point Isabel and Brownsville.[4] If the street is named after Elizabeth Stillman, the designation is ironic as she hated the place and left in 1853, taking her two children James Jewett and Isabel Goodrich with her, never to return. That Elizabeth is separated from St. Charles by Levee (it still runs into the levee by the Gateway Bridge) lends credence to the Neale claim. One other street runs parallel and south of these four, Fronton, so named for El Frontón or Point Isabel.

Brownsville and Fort Brown are named after Major Jacob Brown, who died May 9, 1846, hit during a bombardment from Mexican artillery as he led in the defense of "Camp Opposite Matamoros," as Zachary Taylor called his earthen fort.[5] But many other officers are remembered in the street names of the city. Ringgold Road is named for Major Samuel Ringgold, who was killed at the Battle of Palo Alto in 1846. The University of Texas at Brownsville with Texas Southmost College has taken over the old Fort Brown property, and as might be expected, the names of the streets are connected to the fort. Ridgely Road beside the university is named for Capt. Randolph Ridgley, who survived Palo Alto but was later mortally wounded in a fall from a horse.[6] May Street commemorates Captain Charles A. May, who participated in the Battles of Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma under General Zachary Taylor,[7] himself commemorated on campus with Taylor Avenue. (Taylor is also listed with the presidents.) Gorgas Drive takes its name from Major General William C. Gorgas, who worked to find a cure for yellow fever while a surgeon at the fort.[8] Several more such streets have disappeared to make way for buildings and sidewalks on the campus: Kerr Street after Capt. Grogan Kerr of the Second United States Dragoons serving under Taylor;[9] Cross Street after Colonel Trueman Cross, assistant quartermaster-general killed, robbed, and mutilated on reconnaissance (or as rumor has it, when going to see a señorita) April 9, 1846;[10] Heintzelman Road (later Garland Drive and now the Paseo between the North and South Buildings) after Major Samuel P. Heintzelman, who arrived in Brownsville December 5, 1859, sent to contend with Juan Cortina;[11] Porter Drive on the side of the campus next to the river, now federal property and off limits, but probably named after Lieutenant Theodoric Porter, who died under attack by Mexican forces while on a mission to look for Colonel Cross.[12] The Johnston Drive on some maps could be named for Colonel W. T. Johnston, commander of Fort Brown in March 1929 at the time the municipal airport was opened. Carl S. Chilton, Jr., says Charles Lindberg was Johnston's guest when Lindberg flew the first international airmail from Mexico City to Brownsville.[13] According to Dan McClanahan, McKintosh

Road takes its name from an infantry commander under Taylor, and the Military Highway was so named as it was designed to carry supplies to Fort Ringgold near Rio Grande City.[14] Robert B. Vezzetti says that George B. McClellan built the Military Road (later highway) from Fort Brown to Davis Landing, which is near present-day Rio Grande City.[15]

Other street names have historical roots from the early days of Brownsville. One of the oldest names belongs to Ramireño Lane, tucked away across the railroad tracks in West Brownsville. The Ramireño Ranch, which William Neale says was one of the oldest ranches in Cameron County,[16] lay northwest of the city limit line before there was a Brownsville here, but Gilbert Salinas (citing Kino Camarillo) says the name of the street comes from Jose Tomas Ramirez, founder of the neighborhood. Camarillo said that El Ramireño (as the neighborhood in West Brownsville is called) was built in Matamoros but found itself on the northern side of the river when it changed courses.[17] Vezzetti writes that Paredes Line is so named because it follows the controversial boundary line of Captain Jose Miguel Paredes, who had purchased ten sitios of the Espiritu Santo Grant from Maria Francisca Cavazos. George Lyons (who may have named Elizabeth Street) also surveyed this property and set up the line.[18] John McAllen lived in Brownsville before he developed a townsite on the land near the new rail line west of present-day McAllen.[19] However, like a parallel street in Weslaco (itself a shortened version of W. E. Stewart Land Company), McAllen Street may be named after the town that is named after the person who lived and prospered in Brownsville. Ruby A. Wooldridge and Robert B. Vezzetti say that he was a Scot who arrived in Brownsville in 1850 and developed large ranching interests.[20] Another such second-hand street name is Matamoros, named for the twin city across the border, which itself is named for Mariano Matamoros, a martyred priest who died during Mexico's revolutionary war.[21] Cameron Avenue obviously comes from the name of the county as it is next to Willacy, Duval, Kleberg, and Nueces. Still, the county is named for Ewen Cameron, who led the Mier Expedition into Mexico in December 1842. In this infamous episode the defeated men were captured, escaped, but later recaptured, then forced to draw black and white beans to see who would be executed. Cameron drew a white bean but was executed anyway.[22]

Also going way back are two Brownes, Avenue and Street, on which Agnes Browne, great granddaughter of James G. Browne, pronounces the definitive word. Browne Avenue, east of town running parallel to Indiana, commemorates James G. Browne, who was a carpenter and building contractor for Taylor during the Mexican-American War, and remained after the war was over. Elected sheriff in 1858, he also became a county commissioner and tax assessor-collector.[23] Wooldridge and Vezzetti say that he helped Taylor erect barricades and his brother William Nicholas Browne was the town's first

undertaker.[24] Agnes says that James G. had title to a lot of land from Share 19, running to the river. Browne Street, just west of and parallel to Central Boulevard, is named for Albert A. Browne, James G.'s youngest son. He was a mayor in the 1920's and before that a municipal judge; he also built the Cameron Hotel. Agnes says that when he tried to move his house from East Washington to West Brownsville during the rainy season, the house was bogged down in the mud on West Jefferson for months while her cousins lived in a small house. When the house finally made it to the West Brownsville site, the Browne name was given to the street. Rene Torres told me that Albert Browne played baseball as Rene came across his name in stories of the early part of the twentieth century.

Russell and Rentfro memorialize other old families. According to Daniel Rentfro, Sr., William Jarvis Russell came to Texas in 1826, later fighting in the Texas Revolution. During the Civil War he shipped his cotton from Baghdad at the mouth of the Rio Grande on the Mexican side. His two sons came with him, and liking the Valley, they stayed. William H. Russell built the Russell House at 602 East St. Charles in 1872.[25] His brother Thomas was the grandfather of the Vivier and Robert B. Rentfro families of present-day Brownsville.[26] Russell Street used to be Rentfro Street, but there was also a Rentfro Boulevard. Dan says Albert Besteiro called him in the sixties to say that the name of one of the two Rentfros in Brownsville needed to be changed as an ambulance had gone to the wrong address. Dan told him to leave Rentfro Boulevard as it was because several Rentfros lived there, but to change the name of the street by Russell Elementary to Russell as the school was there and as his mother was Eleanor Russell, a descendant of William Jarvis. This was done, and Rentfro Boulevard off of Boca Chica is still named for Robert Byron Rentfro, who, according to Dan and Lenora Rentfro, owned the property and was mayor from 1929-1939.

Charles Stillman is credited with naming the streets to the north of Elizabeth after the presidents, obviously a popular choice in the mid-nineteenth century as Harlingen follows the same pattern, but we see a few deviations from presidential order. As might be expected, John Quincy Adams is left out. Ringgold Street (Ringgold Road is an old Fort Brown Street that now runs through the UTB campus.) comes between Taylor and Filmore. (My four maps spell it with one *l*, but the encyclopedia says Fillmore for Millard.) Buchanan would be under the freeway, but it isn't on maps before or after the freeway was built. Andrew Johnson has been left out of his proper spot though a Johnson is found between Hortencia and Roosevelt. Johnson is the one who nearly lost the presidency to impeachment, whose rescue John F. Kennedy covered in *Profiles of Courage,* so perhaps the omission after Lincoln was deliberate. Morton comes between Cleveland and McKinley. The choice, though surprising, makes sense given that the president between is

Benjamin Harrison and a Harrison Street had already been named for William Henry. Levi P. Morton was Benjamin Harrison's vice-president (1889-1893). Southmost Road comes between Harding and Coolidge, which runs beside Porter High School and seems to end the list. According to Reba McNair, the Cardenas family added Truman located off Roosevelt, which leaves out Hoover, but he was not very popular after the depression. Kennedy (west off the Military Highway) and Carter (Rio del Sol) would seem to be coincidences as there is no Eisenhower either.

Maps of the first half of the twentieth century give street names that have disappeared. As late as 1926 the streets west of and parallel to Palm Boulevard (simply Boulevard on 1914 and 1919 maps) were named to remember historical figures rather than numbered: St James, Stillman, Belden, Hale, Shearman, Sterling, Dalzell, Carson, Forto, Kelly, and Woodhouse in that order going west.[27] Bruce Aiken says that St. James was named for Charles Stillman's son James Jewett,[28] born in 1850, who worked with his father and later founded the National City Bank of New York.[29] Samuel A. Belden partnered with Charles Stillman in the Brownsville Town Company selling building lots in the new town.[30] Chula Griffin says Hale was an attorney, but she doesn't remember his first name. Robert Dalzell was one of the owners of the King, Kenedy steamboat line,[31] and according to Chula Griffin a steamboat captain. Thomas Carson was a business manager for Stillman and served as mayor from 1879-1904.[32] Agnes Browne says that Emile Forto was a lawyer, a contemporary of Stillman's, whose wife was a Kingsbury. Milo Kearney and Anthony Knopp call him Emilio.[33] Carl Chilton suggests that Kelly might refer to a Captain Kelly who was a steamboat captain in the late 1800's. According to Kearney and Knopp, Captain William Kelly bought the steamboat company of Miflin Kenedy and Richard King.[34] In 1855 Charles Stillman had a half interest in Woodhouse & North, General Merchants with his nephew Frank S. North and Humphrey E. Woodhouse.[35] Sadly those streets now go by colorless numbers.

Interestingly the Sanborn October 1926 map shows the alleys given temporary names as streets, for, according to Bruce Aiken, poor people bought lots that fronted on the alleys.[36] The streets are listed as follows: Fronton, Kilgour, St. Francis, Luth (or McGill on another map), St. Charles, Boyne, Levee, Elizabeth, Washington, Bombay, Adams, Betturbet, Jefferson, Cavan, Madison, Antrim, Monroe, Pueblo, Jackson, Standish, Van Buren, Blue Bell, Harrison, Laura, Tyler, Sioux, Polk. Those "streets" are now alleys, but the names have disappeared. The Antigo Place on this 1926 map is located about where present-day International Boulevard runs.

Also named for historical figures are the one-block-long streets just south of Boca Chica and off the frontage road on the west side named after Mexican heroes, mostly from the war for independence in the second decade of the

nineteenth century: Hidalgo (Miguel Hidalgo, the priest who gave the grito beginning the Mexican war for independence from Spain, September 16, 1810), Allende (General Ignacio de Allende, Hidalgo's chief lieutenant, who was captured and beheaded during the war), Iturbide (Agustin de Iturbide, self-proclaimed emperor of Mexico 1822-23, had been on the royalist side but joined the cause for independence; after serving as emperor for a year, he was forced to abdicate and was eventually shot), Morelos (José Morelos y Pavón, Roman Catholic priest and independence leader, captured and executed in 1815), Guerrero (Vicente Ramón Guerrero Saldaña, leader during the war, second president, after a rebellion was executed in 1831), Juarez (Benito Juárez, president 1861-63 and 1867-72, led the fight against Maximillian and the French), Bravo (Nicolás Bravo, another leader in the war for independence, became vice-president under Guadalupe Victoria in 1824), Lerdo (Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada, the president following Juárez).

Many streets have been named after local prominent citizens and because of power and influence. October 17, 1981, the southern part of 12th Street was named Sam Perl Boulevard for a prominent and well known citizen and developer who was a leader in Brownsville's Jewish community and who owned a clothing store. The Cameron County Commissioners' Court named Stillman Road November 8, 1971. According to Valerie Stillman Tidwell, Stillman Road is so named because she and her mother Catherine Stillman have homes there, and her mother was asked what she wanted the street named. The sign on the freeway says Stillman Road, but maps and street signs call it Dennet Road, after Jesse Dennet according to J. B. Coulter. Dennet owned a bank at the corner of Elizabeth and 6th Street. He came in the teens of the last century and was a charter member of the Rotary Club. Vermillion Avenue does not refer to the color as I had always assumed, but (according to Agnes Browne) to Fred Vermillion, who owned a good bit of land in the area and who started the Vermillion Restaurant. Dan Rentfro thinks Simpson must have been named for David Simpson, owner of a Buick dealership. Larry Brown says Father Mestas Drive is named for a priest at Our Lady of Good Council who was active in his parish and who helped obtain the right of way for the road, part of the land coming from that church. Tony Knopp says Pablo Kisel was a prominent Jewish man in town who owned the land in the area where the street is and wanted to develop it.

Near the airport are several streets named after men to be remembered, whose first and last names are used to designate the street: Les Mauldin was a pilot and aviation pioneer involved in construction of the airport and at one time its manager;[37] his daughter Junie Ginn told me that her father worked there when the airport opened, but that he went to San Antonio when Pan Am took over the airport); Teofilo Crixell, another airport manager;[38] Emery Watts (Carl Chilton says that during the nineteen forties and fifties he was a

city manager); and of course Billy Mitchell, a controversial pioneer in aviation who argued during and after World War I that wars would be fought with air power in the future and who visited Brownsville, staying in the Commandant's House.[39] José Colunga Jr. Street is named for the father of the Joe Colunga (He is José Colunga III) presently on the Brownsville School Board. Joe tells me his father and grandfather (José Colunga, Sr.) started the Brownsville Transportation Company in 1937 and the brothers José, Jr.; Emilio; Luís; and Frank worked in the family business for forty years before being bought out by the city. The street is so named because the headquarters of the business was there.

Dan McClanahan lists several streets named for people who contributed to Brownsville: Nell Palmer Drive after a Garden Park Elementary School principal; Hipp Avenue for Arthur Hipp, a city commissioner; Fay Street and Rockwell Drive for Fay Rockwell, a city engineer; Sloss Drive for Jesse Sloss, a city manager; and Aldridge Avenue for Bill Aldridge, a city commissioner. McClanahan also says that Emmanuel Ballard (priest and civic leader) is remembered in Fr. Ballard Drive, Camille Lightner (of the Earl C. Sams family and Camille Playhouse) in Camille Drive, M. L. Dew (businessman and developer) in Dew Street, Col. Frank Lockhead (Red Cross chairman here after World War II) in Lockhead Drive.[40] I learned from Dr. B. J. Coulter that Cleve and Clyde Tandy from the family that started the Tandy Corporation, of which Radio Shack is a part, were produce growers from Los Fresnos. Carl Chilton told me that Cleve Tandy lived in the part of town where Tandy Road is located (roughly parallel to Alton Gloor north of Walmart). Richard Walker told me that George Saenz Road is named for a school teacher and principal at Palm Grove who was involved in community organizations and felt a commitment to look after the poor. A different George Saenz said he was a principal at Victoria Heights and R. L. Martin Elementary Schools. Rene Torres was my informant about Ruben Torres Sr. Boulevard, named after his older brother, a state representative who was the first Hispanic on the Board of Pardon and Paroles. He also served as Superintendent of the Point Isabel School District. In March 2004, FM Road 511 was named for Eddie Lucio, who represents Brownsville in the Texas Senate.[41]

Ralph Cowen told me some of the story of his own family related to the street names. Neale Drive is named for William Neale, a mayor,[42] and the author of a book that claims that the name for Elizabeth Street comes from the wife of George Lyons. Ralph told me that Neale was his great great grandfather as Louis Cowen married Neale's daughter Isabel. Ralph said that this ancestor held six different citizenships without moving or filling out any paperwork: England from birth, Mexico after living and trading in Matamoros, Texas after the Texas Revolution, United States after Texas was annexed, Confederate during the Civil War, and United States again after the

Civil War. Ralph is the grandson of Louis and Isabel's son Raphael Centennial Cowen (Centennial because he was born July 4, 1876) and Lucille Gray Thomas Ford (Ford because her maternal grandfather Rip Ford adopted her after her parents died). Ralph's name is Louis Raphael Thomas Cowen after all these ancestors. He told me there used to be a pedestrian entrance to Fort Brown called Cowen Alley near where 14th Street is today between Elizabeth and Washington. It was so named because his grandmother Lucille Cowen's house was there. Lucille was given the house by her aunt Petra Vela, who had married Miflin Kenedy.

While some streets refer to a person who lived there, other names tell what is found there. Gilbert Salinas cites Bill Young in accounting for the name of Boca Chica Boulevard. Young cites the last battle of the Civil War, fought near Boca Chica Beach, which was termed by local people "The Battle of the Boca Chica Pass" because the Rio Grande had two mouths, the smaller one near the end of present-day Highway 4 being referred to as *boca chica,* the little mouth of the Rio Grande. Young also says that Central Boulevard is so named because it is near where Brownsville was developing after World War II, International Boulevard is so named because it leads to Mexico, and Southmost refers to the street's location.[43] McClanahan says that Barnard Road led to Barnard's Dairy; Pipkin, Philen, Shidler, Stovall, Bretz, and Gilson are named after property owners on those streets; Market Square was around the old city market; Club House Drive used to have a community center; and Stanolind is a shortening of Standard Oil of Indiana, which used to have a refinery there. A Brownsville map shows that Villa Maria Boulevard goes where the Catholic girls school used to be, St. Joseph Drive leads to St. Joseph Academy, and Fish Hatchery Road goes by the State Fish Hatchery. Mark Lund notes that Old Alice and Old Port Isabel Roads were the stagecoach roads from Brownsville to those cities long ago. Elvie Champion told me that Champion Road is named for Augusto and Lydia Champion who owned the acreage and lived where the street was constructed. She also pointed out to me that there is a Champions Drive in Valley Inn and Country Club referring to golf champions. (St. Andrews is also in VICC to point to the famous golf course in Scotland.) Elvie also believes that King Street near Gladys Porter Zoo must be named for "Snake" King, who kept many animals in that area of the city. Mike Gonzalez says Columbus gets its name from the Knights of Columbus Hall at the corner of Columbus Drive and Old Port Isabel Road. According to B. J. Coulter, R. L. Ostos Road (which is at the port) is named after a man who came when the Port of Brownsville was opened in 1936 and worked his way up until he established a stevedoring business at the port. Elaine Coulter said that Hockaday Road (between S. Browne and W. Oklahoma on the east side of town) is so named because the Ed Hockaday family lives there. B. J. Coulter told me that Roberto Vargas Drive, the street behind the Public Utilities Board

offices, is called after a man who worked at PUB. The University of Texas at Brownsville has named the new extension of East Street and entrance to the university University Boulevard.

The Cowan Terrace subdivision is also named for the persons who owned the property and lived there. Katy Cowan told me that Cowan Terrace, East and West, are named after her father-in-law, James Hamilton Cowan, Sr. He dealt in real estate, built a home on the resaca, and grew citrus until a hard freeze in the late twenties or early thirties killed his trees. After that he went into the dairy business. After he and his wife died in 1959 and 1960, the heirs subdivided the land. I live on Heather Lane, the one-block street between the two Cowans. Katy suggests that Heather must refer to the moors of Scotland where "Grandpa" came from.

Many developers have been building rapidly as the city has expanded, mostly to the north. Mark Lund of the City Planning Department told me that a person who has the money to buy land and subdivide it may name the streets anything he (or she) likes. The most common choice is for the developer to name streets after his wife or his children, but he may choose other people. Billy Faulk told me that Hortencia Boulevard and Dan Street were named by his father, Harry Faulk, for neighbors. Mike Gonzalez told me that Valentín Longoria named Rosalee, Yolanda, and Maria Elena off of Old Port Isabel Road and Columbus Drive after his daughters. Janette King told me that Hope King Road is named after her mother as her parents Donald and Hope King developed the area. According to McClanahan, Emilio Hernández named Eloy Street and Circle for his son, and Howard Cummings named Keith Lane for his son, Jo Ann Lane for his daughter-in law, and George Wilson Lane for his father-in-law.[44] Bob Anzak built in Brownsville Country Club and named one street, Geraldine, after his wife. Arnold Benson told me he named his subdivision Gabrielle Gardens after his younger daughter and the streets Nahessi Place after his older daughter and Benson Drive after his family and his company. According to Mrs. Ralph Cowen, John Cowen has recently named two streets where he is developing Benjamin Cowen and Megan Cowen after a son and a daughter. I counted some of the most oft-used types of names, but an accurate count is impossible because of names that are used as both first and last names, such as Scott; names like Victoria that name both girls and cities; and names that are used for both boys and girls, like Dana. But here is my informal tally: 141 girls' first names, 107 names of trees, 76 boys' first names, 75 cities, 38 fruits, and 26 flowers.

Marcelo Hernández, a Cuban, developed Brownsville Country Club; therefore, it is not surprising to find Cuba Street or even in Brownsville (after St. Charles and St. Francis downtown) to find San Marcelo. According to McClanahan, Sagua la Grande is the town where Marcelo Hernández was born.[45] Also several of the names in the subdivision refer to Cuban provinces:

Camaguey, Cienfuegos, Habana, Matanzas, Pinar del Rio, and Sancti Spiritus. Santa Clara is the capital of Villa Clara, another Cuban province. Oriente is a name for the eastern states of Cuba. Varadero, Artemisa, Las Canas, Las Villas, Isabella, Guanajay, Quemado de Guines, San Diego, and Soroa are names of Cuban towns and cities. José Martí was a writer and patriot of Cuba, and Tula is a woman's name in a popular Cuban song.[46] Other street names are from Spain, such as Toledo, Barcelona, Cadiz, Cifuentes, Bilbao, Burgos, Pamplona, Santillana, Valladolid, Valtierra, Villafranca, Navarra, Tordesillas, Tudela, Mayorca. (Coria across town parallel to Central Boulevard takes its name from another Spanish city.) Still more are Mexican place names: Cancun, Hermosillo, Jaumave, Chipinque, La Paz, Morelia, Saltillo, Yucatan, Quintana Roo, Chiapas, Tabasco, Oaxaca, Michoacan, Jalisco, Guadalajara, Nayarit, Zacatecas, Durango, Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Tamaulipas, Campeche, Jalapa, Toluca, Merida, Madero, Uruapan, Mante, Torreon, Fresnillo, Matehuala, Chetumal, Zamora, Salvatierra. Presumably the others would be names of cities also, but I could not find them as cities. Villa del Sur is the name of a mineral water; Villa del Sol is the name of a chain of hotels in Zihuatenejo (Mexico), Bolivia, Costa Rica, and Corpus Christi (Texas); Palmira is a city in Colombia; Varela is a Spanish surname, and Virtudes is most commonly associated with the seven cardinal virtues.

As in the case of Brownsville Country Club, groups of streets often have a theme that helps searchers find a domicile. Mark Lund pointed to the streets where he lives: Camwood, Cypress, Parkwood, Poplar, Willow, Magnolia, Mulberry, Holly, Sycamore, Cypress, Cottonwood. Next to them are colleges: Yale, Harvard, Tulane, Greenbrier, Loma Linda, Stanford, Marquette, Villanova, and Carthage. Off Old Alice where it reappears north of Alton Gloor are a group of streets named for rivers: Pecos River, Guadeloupe River, Blanco River, Maravillas River, Navidad River, Frio River. Off Dana are a group of meadows: Meadow Brook, Meadow Land, Meadow Ridge, Meadow View, Meadow Creek. Off West Alton Gloor are a group named for European cities: Capri, Naples, Normandy, Pompeii, Paris, Rome, Malta, Athens, Gibraltar, Venice, Lisbon, Vienna, Marbella, Mayorca, Avila, Riviera, Frankfort, Andorra, Valletta, and Madrid. Off East Alton Gloor are a group named for winds: Crosswind, Applewind, Trailwind, Windwood, Riverwind, Gulfwind, Ripplewind. Off Old Alice are a group named for birds: Mockingbird, Whitewing, Cardinal, Oriole. Reba McNair told me that Louis Lapeyre developed the area off Lincoln Street with the streets named for metals: Avenida de la Plata, Avenida del Oro, Camino Cobre, Camino Bronce, Camino Nikel. Those streets are adjacent to Lemon, Grapefruit, Orange, and Tangelo. Another subdivision off Indiana east of town uses the citrus names left out: Ruby Red, Star Ruby, Marrs, Valencia, Mandarine, and Limon, with Mango, Pera, Ciruela, and Guayava thrown in for good measure. Close by

are Kiwi, Tamarindo, Nectarin, Ceresa, Platano, and Fresa. Going east on Boca Chica the driver finds a series of streets named for the states Winter Texans come from: Iowa, Minnesota, Dakota, Illinois, Indiana, Oklahoma (Elaine Coulter said that many of the people were from Oklahoma when she grew up on that road); and others are scattered about on the east side of town: California, Utah, Arkansas, Alabama, Maine. Crossing them are Texas heroes, Bonham, Houston, Travis. Other Texas heroes are found off Padre Island Highway: Bowie, Milam, Crockett, Fannin. Alamo and Austin are there too. Off 511 in Rio del Sol the streets use Canadian names: Calgary, Alberta, Ottawa, Edmonton, and Winnipeg, but some American cities are mixed in: Bismark, Boise, Cheyenne, Denver. On the west side of town off Ruben Torres Boulevard is a group of streets with names relating to hunting: Quail Hollow, Old Spanish Trail, Hunters Quest, Deer Haven, Fox Run, Red Fox, Grey Fox Circle. Nearby on the other side of Boca Chica is La Galaxia with a series of street names related to space in Spanish: Calle Espacio, Calle Terrestre, Calle Pluton, Calle Planeta, Calle Galaxia, Calle Cometa, Calle Cielo, Calle Luna. Far across town off Morningside Road are the astronauts who have ventured into space: Armstrong, Aldrin, Cernan, Lovell, Glenn, and Sheppard. Nasa and Apollo are there too. Out near Oliveira Park are a group of nobility and royalty in Spanish: Calle Princesa, Calle Reyna, Calle Duque, Calle Condesa. I especially like Milpa Verde (cornfield) with its wild animals: Gazelle, Impala, Leopard, Jaguar, Llama; its saints: San Joaquin, Santa Isabel, San Eugenio, Santa Monica, San Cristobal, San Eugenio, Santa Fe, Santa Cruz; its fruit: Sandia, Naranjo, Lima; and its flowers, some in English and some in Spanish: Daisy, Zinnia, Gardenia, Jasmine, Clavel, Tulipan. Streets are even named for literary figures as in the section off Paredes Line with names from Cervantes' *Don Quixote*: La Mancha, Molino de Viento, Sancho Panza, Don Quixote, Rosinante, and Dulcinea. Off Old Port Isabel Road are Robin Hood and Alan-A-Dale, and near Gladys Porter Zoo is Avalon from the story of King Arthur. All the streets in a new subdivision, Ocelot Grove, in the Southmost area are named for non-domestic cats. The ocelot is a local feral cat, but the others are Jaguarundi Road, Tiger Drive, Panther Drive, and Lynx Road.[47]

On an April 1975 map prepared for National Bank of Commerce by Richardson Advertising Agency, another interesting group of street names appears (off Southmost Road slightly southeast of Morningside): Besteiro Drives South, East, and West; Lucy; Mina; and Pila, after Raul Besteiro and his three daughters. Besteiro, long-time Brownsville Independent School District Superintendent and Port of Brownsville Director, once owned the land where the streets appear on the map. Presumably the map shows streets that were planned but never constructed, for the streets there now are named Sierra Madre, Monterrey, and Monclova; and they are not laid out with the

same pattern as the streets on the earlier map.

Renato E. Cardenas, his wife Mary Rose, and their children have built several subdivisions. Reba McNair told me her father does not like complicated names for streets. He named streets in Southmost Reba, Elsa, Ricky, and Rene, his four children. Another is Elda after Mrs. Cardenas's sister. He also called a group of streets after palm trees: Palmera, Altas Palmas, Isla de Palmas, Palmas Verdes, Palma Caribe, Palma, Palma Blanca. California Estates streets have saints names, some of them California cities: Santa Rosa, Santa Maria, Santa Lucia, Santa Paula, Santa Anita; and streets in Dakota Estates are named for cities in the Dakotas: Bismark, Fargo, Sioux Falls, Minot, and Pierre. Cardenas also built the subdivision off Coffee Port named for kings: Rey David, Rey Carlos, Villa del Rey, Rey Enrique, and Rey Fausto. Another section off Robindale uses Rey Salomon, Rey Jorge, Rey Juan Carlos, and Rey Jaime. A more recent development off McAllen Road on the north side of town is named for Mrs. Cardenas as the area is called Rose Garden and the streets are Tiffany and Picasso after types of roses and then Red Rose, Peach Rose, Pink Rose, Cream Rose, Sweet Rose, Cute Rose, and Love Rose. The Cardenas' latest subdivision, Villa Los Pinos, has mostly streets named for pines though the main street into the subdivision, which already boasts Olmito Elementary School, is Arroyo Avenue. Other streets are Pine Creek Drive, Pino Verde, Pino Blanco, Pino Azul, Blue Spruce, Noble Pine, Georgia Pine, Austrian Pine, Red Cedar, Alabama Pine, Highland Pine, Red Pine, Florida Pine, Ponderosa Pine, White Pine, Yellow Pine, Carolina Pine, and Scotch Pine.

A current developer, Marty Heaner, according to his wife Glenda, takes down interesting names when they are traveling. He told me he looks in phonebooks, newspapers, and magazines. He got the name Lakeway from a subdivision with a golf course developed around a lake in Austin. In Brownsville the subdivision is built around a Resaca. Beaver Pond comes from a beaver dam that was there before the resaca was dredged in developing the site. Other names like Cedar Ridge, Elm Ridge, Sandy Hill, Live Oak, Turtle Creek, Bluewing, and Pepper Tree just sound good. In the Palomar Subdivision, Staunton Street was named by W. E. Heaner for Staunton Military Academy in Virginia, where his son went to school. Fairfax comes from Fairfax Hall in Virginia, where Marty's sister went to preparatory school. Lewis is Marty Heaner's first wife's maiden name. Briarwyck comes from a Houston newspaper and Knobhill from the San Francisco area. Marty chose Applewood, Sugargrove, Sugartree, and Lazy Creek because he liked the sound.

Bill Hudson' wife Antonia told me he named Calle Concordia after the dusty little town where she was born between San Pedro de las Colonias and Torreon in Coahuila. The subdivision Bill is developing north of Ruben

Torres Boulevard has a Hudson Boulevard for the family name; a Hubert for his father; and Michaelwood, Vanessa, and Howland (the son's name is John Howland Pell, but there is already a John Street) for his three children. Two other family-related names are Ticonderoga and Champlain. Bill is a trustee of the Fort Ticonderoga Historical Museum in upstate New York. His great, great, great, great grandfather bought the fort, now a public trust. The fort has tremendous significance in American history as May 10, 1775, Ethan Allen captured the fort from the British, initiating the Revolutionary War. Champlain is here because the fort is on Lake Champlain. Bill says one subdivision is named for wines because he is a "wineophile": Chablis, Chardonay, Burgundy, Bordeaux, Noble; and a Vineyard Drive connects some of them. Duck Pond Drive comes from Duck Pond Road on Long Island, a place Bill says is fond in his memory. Another street is named Abbey Road after the Beatles album. Some of the streets point to South American places: Calle Costa Rica, Calle Portaleza, Calle Norteña, Calle Belem, Calle Buenos Aires, Calle Santiago, Calle Venezuela. Another group comes from types of clouds: Stratus, Cumulus, and Nimbus. In Havenwood, we find Sweet Street, Tranquil Trail, Havenwood Boulevard, and Greenhaven Lane, all places that sound quiet and safe. Also there is Fleet Street from the street in London. Beside them is Draper Drive, named for the singer Rusty Draper. The most enjoyable Hudson story relates to Deerfield, named for the deer that attached itself to the cows grazing in the pasture before it was subdivided. Apparently it thought one of the cows was its mother. Now Deer Trail and Deer Run Circle run in front of contemporary dwellings.

John Gloor also looks at maps he finds at Waldenbooks and Circle K's, maps of Alice, Houston, Corpus Christi, San Antonio, and even London. His names are among my favorites as they have the romance of the Wild West. He saw a Rustic Castle Road in Dallas, which he changed to Rustic Manor in Brownsville. A Mystic Rock became Mystic Bend, and he just liked Wilderness. The Woods also includes Sugar Mill, Plantation Drive, Colony Trail, Frontier Trail, Shoe String Gap, Saw Mill Draw, Enchanted Path, Autumn Mist, Lamp Light Pass, Peppermill Run, Trappers Chase, Lovers Lane, Whisperwind Way, Firefly Place, Wishingwell, Dragonwick, Surrey Lane, and Country Aire. Following Stagecoach Trail north takes the driver into Cross Country Trails with Abilene Trail, Broken Spoke Lane, Rusty Nail Drive, Diamondback, and Hitching Post. Of course the major street that gives access to those subdivisions is named for Alton Gloor, John's father.

Some names have religious significance, such as Deo Gratia ("By the grace of God"), Deo Volente ("God willing"), Deo Juvante ("With God's help"). Bob Anzak told me his brother and his brother's wife, Ronald and Laura Anzak, named Arien Court after their zodiacal sign. I counted forty-eight saints, but some of these—St. Charles, St. Francis, and San Marcelo—

probably have no religious significance. Others like San Francisco, San Diego, and Santa Monica may just be names of cities. We hear a different story about St. James Street, San Diego Avenue, and Santiago Lane, three names meaning the same thing in three different languages. Dan Rentfro told me that St. James is the Patron Saint of Spain, and that Brazos Santiago, the natural deep-water channel passing into the Laguna Madre was protected by the "arms of St. James." Perhaps that's why St. James deserves three streets named after him.

Many streets in present-day Brownsville were once county roads, which either came to be known by local citizenry for someone who lived or owned property on the road or were named by the Cameron County Commissioners' Court at someone's request. A case in point is Coffee Port, so-called as the road from the house of a man named Coffey to the port. In the Cameron County Commissioners' Court Minutes for December 13, 1926, the construction of two miles of a road from "the Cottingham or Coffey place to Paredes Road along Resaca de Guerra, a distance of approximately two miles," is authorized but the road is not named. November 19, 1931 the Commissioners' Court authorized funds for an extension of Coffee Road to 14th Street without ever officially naming the road. Obviously "Port" was added when the road was extended to the port. Naming of other streets by the Cameron County Commissioners' Court is duly noted in the minutes: October 16, 1952, changing the New Port Isabel Cut-off to Robindale at the request of property owners and residents; December 14, 1959, naming a section of State Highway 48 that had been erroneously called "14th Street Extended" to Brownsville Port Road (now Padre Island Boulevard); July 3, 1979, extending the name Milpa Verde to cover a section that had been called Esperanza Lane, hoping to clear up confusion by making "Milpa Verde one continuous Road"; July 31, 1979, changing Utah to Aurora; November 14, 1979, naming Alaska Road between Browne Avenue and SH 1419 at the request of the Post Office; November 26, 1979, naming a section of Morningside between 511 and 1419 Florida; May 29, 1980, renaming Bowie (between Central and Iowa) Zavala Road; August 8, 1983, changing Ebony Lane Road to Hockaday Road.

Apparently few rules apply in street naming. Duplications in the A's are Acacia Street, Acacia Drive, and Acacia Lake Drive; Alamo Avenue and Street; Alice Circle and Road besides Old Alice Road; Anchor Drive and Road; Artemisa Avenue and Court. We have John Avenue and Johns Avenue, San Juan Drive, and St. John Street; also Katherine and Catherine. There are three Centrals—Boulevard, Avenue, and Circle—, two Centers (Boulevard and Drive), Centerline, and Central Park Drive, none of which are in the center of town. Broadway traditionally runs parallel to Main downtown, but Brownsville has no Main Street, and West Broadway is far to the southwest. Midway Drive, North Drive, and South Drive are all on the southwest side of town near Broadway. We have Mesquital Avenue, Mesquite Branch, Mesquite

Grove, Los Mesquites, and three Mesquite Streets (one off South Drive near the conjunction of Alton Gloor and the Military Highway, one in a new subdivision off 77/83 north of town near FM 511, and one southwest of the railroad tracks in West Brownsville). The name is so popular that in the *Rio Grande Valley Atlas*, 4th ed., I found 58 Mesquites. Another problem, which Mark Lund pointed out to me, is that the same street has been called El Jardin Heights, Flor de Mayo, Tejon Road (Tejon means raccoon), and Alton Gloor. All of these idiosyncrasies confuse people in the post office and looking for someone, but they do add to the personality of the town.

This paper is unfinished as the subject is not exhaustible with streets and their names being added and changed everyday. Several I tried to find but failed. The name I worked the hardest to identify is Morrison Road, named while it was still in the county. I talked with Irvine Downing, but he says that he only proposed an addition to an existing road and does not know where the original name came from. I found it in the Cameron County Commissioners' Minutes in the eighties, but I could not find it named.[48]

The names of Brownsville streets reveal the values and the interests of the people who had the power and influence to choose them. They define our sense of place and provide our identity. They illustrate a love of language and of words that makes us human. All of us have a desire to make a difference. Those whose names appear on the streets of Brownsville are remembered every day. Riverside and Boca Chica remind us of our geography, Hibiscus and Milpa Verde depict our flora, and Seagull Drive and Quail Trail note our fauna. International, which ends at the Gateway Bridge to Matamoros in Mexico, reminds us that we are not isolated in our particular space but that we are part of a global community. We choose our houses and not our street names when we seek a place to dwell, but those names help us to find one another.

The University of Texas at Brownsville

Endnotes

1 H. Minot Pitman, *Charles Stillman, 1810-1875* (New York: Printed for Chauncey Devereux Stillman, 1956), p. 13.

2 John C. Rayburn and Virginia Kemp Rayburn with the Assistance of Ethel Neale Fry, eds., *Century of Conflict, 1821-1913: Incidents in the Lives of William Neale and William A. Neale, Early Settlers in South Texas* (Waco, TX: Texian P, 1966), p. 54. The Rayburns say the book was written by William A. Neale from his grandfather's notes and from conversations of the two Neales.

3 "Historical Notes on Old Brownsville," Map of Brownsville (Richardson Advertising Agency, April 1975).

4 "Riding the Stage Through the Brush Country of South Texas, 1846-1904,"

Journal of Shortline Railroads 1.2 (Aug./Sept./Oct. 1996), p. 7.

5 Betty Bay, *Historic Brownsville: Original Townsite Guide* (Brownsville Historical Assn., 1980), p. 17.

6 "Ridgley Rd. Traces Here," *The Brownsville Herald,* 24 August 1958, p. 6-C.

7 "Street Was Named for Early Hero," *Brownsville Herald,* 24 August 1958, p. 7-C.

8 Bay, p. 28.

9 "Kerr Street," *The Brownsville Herald,* 24 August 1958, p. 5-C.

10 Joseph C. Sides, *Fort Brown Historical: History of Fort Brown, Texas Border Post on the Rio Grande* (San Antonio, TX: Naylor, 1942), pp. 64-65.

11 Bay, p. 80. Another street that used to be on the campus is Page, which I have not identified.

12 Sides, p. 65.

13 Carl S. Chilton, Jr., *Fort Brown: The First Border Post* (Brownsville: Brownsville Historical Assn, 2005), p. 121.

14 Dan McClanahan, "Brownsville Streets Named for Shrubs and Heroes," *The Brownsville Herald,* 5 Nov. 1980, p. 10B.

15 Robert B. Vezzetti, ed., *Tidbits: A Collection from the Brownsville Historical,* 155. This book is a collection of small pieces from the Brownsville Historical Association/Stillman House Newsletter.

16 Neale, p. 52.

17 Gilbert Salinas, "Taking It to the Streets: History Flows Through the Streets of Brownsville," *The Brownsville Herald,* 13 April 1997, p. 19A.

18 Vezzetti, pp. 18-19. Gilbert Salinas cites Bruce Aiken as saying that nobody knows where the name of Paredes Line comes from and then listing four theories: the surveyor's name was Paredes; the street was considered a wall (*el pared* in Spanish); it is named after Mariano Paredes, a Mexican president; it is named after a former fort in Matamoros.

19 Bay, p. 159.

20 Ruby A Wooldridge and Robert B. Vezzetti, *Brownsville: A Pictorial History,* (Norfolk, Va.: Donning, 1982), p. 95.

21 Wooldridge and Vezzetti, p. 12.

22 Jerry D. Thompson, "Historical Survey." *A Shared Experience: The History, Architecture and Historic Designations of the Lower Rio Grande Heritage Corridor*, ed. Mario L. Sánchez, 2nd ed. (Austin, TX: Los Caminos del Rio Heritage Project and the Texas Historical Commission, 1994), pp. 39-40.

23 Bay, 93, pp. 162-63.

24 Wooldridge and Vezzetti, p. 25.

25 Bay, p. 156.

26 Wooldridge and Vezzetti, p. 68.

27 *Insurance Maps, Brownsville, Texas, Cameron County* (New York: Sanborn Map Co., March 1914, May 1919, October 1926, September 1930).

28 Bruce Aiken. *Ballots, Bullets and Barking Dogs: Brownsville—Yesteryears,* (Brownsville:Privately Printed, 1996), p. 112.

29 *Street Directory of Brownsville, Texas with Map Showing Location of Streets and Other Information* (Clark Printing, 1921); *Map for Brownsville, Matamoros and the Rio Grande Valley (*Richardson Advertising Agency, Nov. 1, 1971).

30 Pitman, p. 9.

31 Bay, p. 132.

32 Milo Kearney and Anthony Knopp, *Boom and Bust: The Historical Cycles of Matamoros and Brownsville* (Austin: Eakin P, 1991), p. 176.

33 Kearney and Knopp, p. 179.

34 Kearney and Knopp, p. 159.

35 Bay, p. 41.

36 Aiken, p. 112.

37 Carl S. Chilton, Jr., *70 Years of Airport History in Brownsville, 1929-199* (City of Brownsville, 2000), p. 101.

38 McClanahan, p. 10B.

39 Chilton, *Fort Brown,* p. 141. John Hawthorne first pointed out to me Billy Mitchell's foresight in recognizing the danger planes presented to ships. Mitchell was ahead of his time in recognizing that naval power was no longer sufficient but that airpower would be necessary in the future.

40 McClanahan, p. 10B.

41 "State Road Named for Lucio," *The Brownsville Herald,* 24 March 2004, p. A3.

42 McClanahan, p. 10B.

43 Salinas, p. 19A.

44 McClanahan, p. 10B.

45 McClanahan, p. 10B.

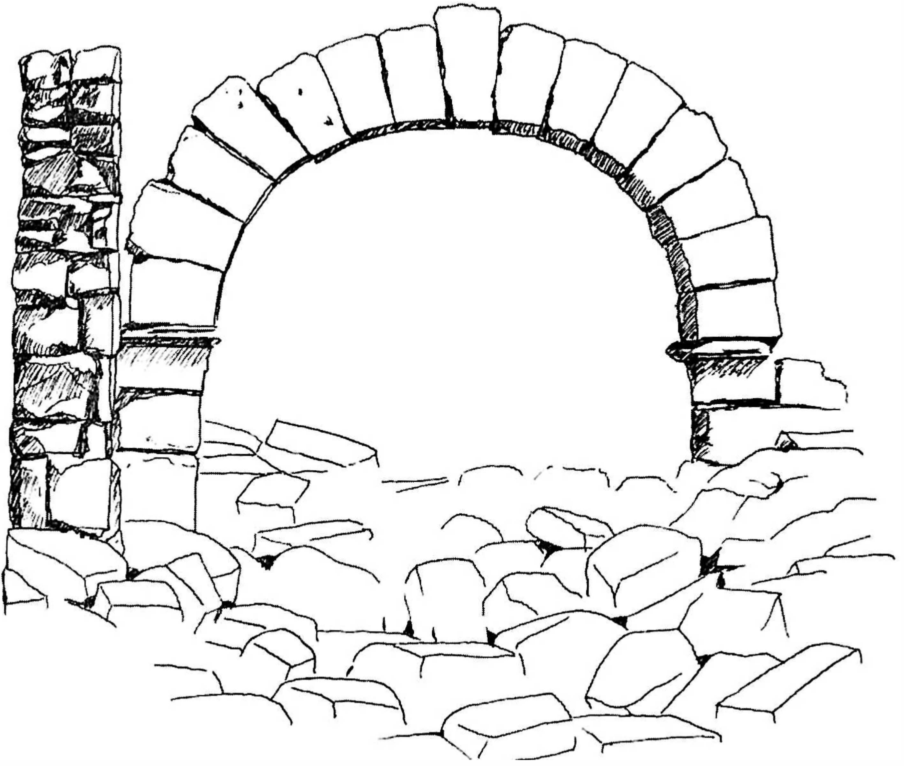
46 Eduardo del Rio helped me with the names in Brownsville Country Club.

47 Gilberto Salinas, "New Subdivision Names Streets After Local Cats," *The Brownsville Herald,* May 17, 2005, p. A5.

48 Informants for this article included Mike Gonzalez (5-2-05), Valerie Stillman Tidwell (5-4-05, 5-10-05), Milo Kearney (5-2-05), Bob Anzak (5-3-05), Tony Knopp (5-10-05, 6-29-05), Yolanda Gonzalez (5-10-05), Glenda Heaner (5-11-05), John Gloor (5-10-05), Mark Lund (5-10-05), Reba McNair (5-10-05), Antonia Hudson (5-10-05), Bill Hudson (5-11-05), James Zavaleta (5-11-05), Javier García (5-11-05, 5-12-05, 5-13-05), Rene Torres (5-12-05, 6-3-05), John Hawthorne (5-12-05), Marty Heaner (5-12-05), Eduardo del Rio (5-13-05), Carl Chilton (5-31-05), Annie Hall (5-30-05), Katy Cowan (5-31-05), Marvin Fallin (5-31-05), J.B. and Elaine Coulter (5-

31-05), Joe Garrito (6-1-05), Agnes Browne (6-1-05), Chula Griffin (6-1-05), Larry Brown (6-1-05), Jack Moser (6-1-05), Arnold Benson (6-1-05), Irvine Downing (6-1-05), Eddie Santillan (6-1-05), Junie Ginn (6-1-05), Janette King (6-1-05), Richard Walker (6-1-05), George Saenz (6-1-05), Daniel Rentfro, Sr. and Lenora Rentfro (6-2-05), Ralph Cowen (6-2-05), Elvie Champion (6-2-05), Billy Faulk (6-2-05), Jose Colunga, III (6-15-05), and Alma Knopp (6-30-05).

Social History



The Spirit of Mission

From Terror in Eastern Europe to Southern Texas: Holocaust Survivors in Brownsville

by

Helmut Langerbein

When Gezer Palfy arrived in Miami in 1949, the United States immigration officer asked him to spell his first name. Gezer replied, "It starts with a 'G' and ...," but was soon interrupted by the impatient official, "It sounds like George." Gezer decided quickly, 'That's it, I'd be known as George from now on.'[1]

George Palfy had escaped from the Nazi implemented Final Solution of the Jewish Question, the systematic extermination of the European Jews, with a new name, and soon, a new existence, but he still vividly remembers his youth in Bratislava, Czechoslovakia, and his experience in the concentration camps of Sebec, Auschwitz, Gleiwitz, and Blechhammer. Like the other Holocaust survivors residing in the Rio Grande Valley, Palfy credits his survival to the hope of reuniting with other family members, the will to live, courage, and perhaps most of all, sheer luck. It was not just coincidence, however, that brought these survivors to Brownsville. Rather, family ties to Latin American countries, the ability to learn Spanish quickly, and business connections also affected these people's decision to settle in this border city.

I have found all but one of the local survivors through their membership in the Temple Beth-El, and I have conducted a series of interviews lasting from November 3, 2004 to April 19, 2005.[2] Although these interviews constitute the major source of information for this essay, there are some obvious problems with the testimony of persons who are already in their late seventies or early eighties, especially if it is collected more than sixty years after the events. As the eighty-year-old Abraham Moszkowicz acknowledges, "Today you remember a little bit, but you may confuse one story with another because everything was similar, and this was a long time ago."[3] Yet the local survivors' willingness to admit that they did not exactly remember certain events, persons, or dates only strengthens the fact that they tried their best to truthfully recall their experience. They have kept different identification cards, visas, and similar documents, as well as other memorabilia to verify their information, while three carry the permanent reminders of their suffering, the tattooed concentration camp identification numbers, on their forearms. One must also consider that the horrible ordeals they had to endure in their formative years must have left lasting impressions. I have attempted, furthermore, to compare and corroborate individual accounts with the existing literature.

Before I sit down to talk with Samuel Silberman, he points out that he

does not consider himself a Holocaust survivor. "That would be sacrilege to the millions who suffered and died simply because they were Jews," he explains, "I, however, never met a Nazi during the war. I suffered only as a Polish citizen, not as a Jew."[4] His Polish countryman Joseph Liebermann agrees. Nevertheless, I have included the latter two individuals because they grew up in the western parts of Poland that were occupied by the Germans in September 1939.

A German bombing raid on Samuel Silberman's hometown of Tyszowce in the early days of the war triggered a pogrom of the local Polish population that left his family's house burned. The violence against the local Jews certainly anticipated future German repression, but it also attests to the power and prevalence of anti-Semitism in pre-war Poland.[5] Surprisingly, the local Catholic priest took in Silberman, who was twenty-one years old at the time, and his family. And despite the fears of its Polish population, Tyszowce must have been of no interest to the Germans, even to the notorious special SS task forces (*Einsatzgruppen*), because they never bothered to come to this small, peripheral place located close to the demarcation line to the Soviet occupation zone and sixty miles from the district capital, Lublin.

In the spring of 1940 Silberman visited his aunt in the Soviet occupied part of Poland to investigate living conditions. But while away from his home, the Germans had completed the civil administration of the General Government territory (*Generalgouvernement*). This entity was governed by Hans Frank, renowned for his brutality, corruption, and inefficiency and later executed at Nuremberg for presiding over a relentless extermination of Poles and Jews. The creation of this German colony closed the border and Silberman found himself trapped on the Soviet side. Initially, he managed to live relatively well by learning the language of the occupying Russian army and selling food, watches, clothes, and other items to Red Army officers, but he and other Poles were soon sent to work in the fields of the Ukraine and later loaded onto unheated cattle cars and deported to Western Siberia, where they had to work in the forests and survive on small rations. Ironically, these deprivations saved Silberman from the fate of most Polish Jews, including the parents and sister he had left behind in Tyszowce.

Poland and later the General Government had become, as Ian Kershaw noted, "a training-ground" where the SS could operate loosened from all remnants of law and constraint.[6] The overall goal of the five (later six) SS task forces that had pushed into Polish territory directly behind the German army was "elimination of the leading strata of the population, the nobility, the priests, and the Jews."[7] Yet in the beginning the SS units were to register the Jews and their property and establish ghettos with a Jewish self-government, the Jewish Councils (*Judenräte*).[8] The SS organization then gradually tightened the screws and intensified its radical activities until the decision to

kill all Jews in specially designed extermination camps would be reached.[9]

In the meantime, on June 22, 1941Germany invaded the Soviet Union, and Poland and Soviet Russia became allies. Thus all Polish deportees including Silberman were released. He decided to spend the rest of the war in Tashkent and Samarkand, where he volunteered several times for the Polish army but was never called up. After the war, he briefly returned to a completely destroyed Tyszowce where he learned that his entire family had perished in Belzec. After another five years in Displaced Persons (DP) Camps, the United States granted Silberman an immigration visa. His honesty and refusal to classify himself as a concentration camp survivor, as he could easily have done and as his fellow DPs had advised, had made a positive impression on the investigating immigrations officer.

Silberman finally arrived in New Orleans in June 1950, then moved on to Houston, where he found work in a clothing store and learned Spanish. Ironically, his Anglo co-workers thought that he was Mexican, while his Mexican co-workers believed that he was Anglo. Two years later, he opened his own clothing store in Brownsville, which provided the basis for nine other similar businesses in the Rio Grande Valley. The expansion of his business in the border region was greatly facilitated by his knowledge of Spanish, which he improved significantly after meeting his Argentinean wife, Eva, in 1960.

Joseph Liebermann's path to the Rio Grande Valley was very similar. Like Silberman, he had crossed over the demarcation line, was deported to Siberia, released in June of 1941, spent some time in Central Asia, and returned to Poland after the war. He then briefly went to Israel, studied electrical engineering in Germany and was awarded a scholarship to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Liebermann was hired by RCA right out of college, married, and eventually opened an electronics business in McAllen.

While Silberman and Lieberman managed to escape the grip of the Nazis because they had been at the right place at the right time, George Palfy and Leon Horn are survivors of Auschwitz who still carry the reminder of their ordeal, the numbers B 13230 and 161217, respectively, tattooed on their right forearm. Although Palfy came from a large city in Czechoslovakia and Horn came from a small *shetl* in Eastern Poland, their experiences first in different labor camps, then in Auschwitz, and finally, on death marches to Germany were very similar. The following account focuses primarily on George Palfy.

Born March 6, 1931, Palfy was the only son of a fruit wholesaler in Bratislava. His childhood was unremarkable until 1939, when the Germans took over the Czech parts of the country and sponsored the puppet regime of Joseph Tiso in Slovakia. Slovakian Guards arrested Palfy's family and brought them to the labor camp of Sebec. Life in Sebec was relatively easy for the Palfys because George's father was put in charge of supplies and allowed to move independently outside of the camp, while George continued to go to

school. But in 1942 Sebec became a transit camp on the way to Auschwitz. George witnessed Jews from all of Czechoslovakia come and go, and rumors about the death camps, the gas chambers, and, in particular, the infamous physician Dr. Josef Mengele, were circulating in Sebec.[10] Palfy believes that it was his father's business connections that enabled his family to remain there until October 10, 1944, when they were loaded onto cattle cars. Palfy explains the devastating mood, "There wasn't much talk about it, but we had heard from all the other people who had been sent on the transports… Auschwitz was a death camp and the people who went never came back."[11]

Upon arrival in Auschwitz the deportees had to line up on the platform for selection. Palfy would see his mother for the last time when the men and women were separated. Palfy immediately recognized the officer in charge as the notorious Mengele. The SS officer found Palfy senior, who claimed to be a mechanic, suitable for work, then turned to George. Palfy, who was twelve years old at the time, remembers the following scene that saved his life. Mengele asked in German, "How old are you?" "I am eighteen years old," Palfy replied nervously. Mengele immediately struck him across the face with his gloves, a blow so vicious that it almost knocked Palfy over, but ultimately decided, "You can go to work, you can help us in the kitchen, you will become a kitchen aid."[12]

This episode on the platform of Auschwitz did not differ much from the first encounter with the feared "Angel of Death" experienced by countless other deportees. Perhaps the most prominent among them is Elie Wiesel, the later Nobel Peace Prize winner, who had stood before Mengele only a few months earlier than Palfy, in May, 1944. Wiesel describes Mengele as "a typical SS officer: a cruel face, but not without intelligence, and wearing a monocle." This time Mengele used a conductor's baton to point to the left or right in order to determine who should live and who should die. When it was Wiesel's turn, Mengele asked in a paternal tone, "How old are you?" "Eighteen," replied Wiesel, who was fifteen at the time, with a shaky voice. "Are you in good health?" "Yes." "What's your occupation?" "Farmer," Wiesel lied. Mengele's baton pointed to the left, to life, and the conversation was over.[13]

After their selection, both Palfys were transferred to Birkenau to receive their tattoos. Ironically, while the Nazis intended the numbers B 13229 (father) and B 13230 (son) to be a symbol of dehumanization, the Palfys saw them as a sign of hope. If the Nazis bothered to brand them like cattle, at least they would not immediately put them to death. This assumption proved to be correct because they were moved to Gleiwitz labor camp. Gleiwitz is located on the former German-Polish border. Its radio station had achieved special meaning because it had been attacked by an SS command dressed in Polish uniforms in the night of September 1, 1939. Hitler publicly blamed the attack

on Poland, and ordered his army "to shoot back," thus beginning the Second World War and leading to the extermination of the European Jews.[14]

In Gleiwitz, Palfy was indeed employed in the kitchen. His position not only enabled him to find some extra food for him and his father, who had been assigned to a labor gang, but also allowed him to stay inside and thus conserve energy. But by December, 1944, the Russians had reconquered most of Poland and Czechoslovakia and threatened to overrun the remaining German defenses. As so many other camps close to the approaching Red Army, Gleiwitz was dissolved and its inmates sent on death marches.

Daniel Jonah Goldhagen in his controversial *Hitler's Willing Executioners* argues that the term "death marches," which was coined by the Jewish victims themselves, meant that these marches had only one intended result, death of the participants.[15] Even though most Holocaust scholars dismiss Goldhagen's eliminationalist thesis,[16] Palfy's experience on the march from Gleiwitz confirms Goldhagen's conclusion about the death marches. The war was all but lost, the German administration was collapsing, and in the overall chaos towards the end of the Nazi reign it would have been easy for the SS guards to simply abandon the camp and release the prisoners. Yet even in this situation they continued to torture, brutalize, and slaughter their Jewish victims, which can only be explained by deep-seated hatred and sadism.

Palfys and their fellow Gleiwitz inmates were fed a meager breakfast of bread and coffee and driven into the cold winter day wearing only their thin prison garb and wooden shoes. Whoever stopped walking or fell behind was shot by the merciless guards. Palfy recalls being almost unconscious from cold, hunger, and exhaustion, but he refused to give up. When they reached Blechhammer camp, the prisoners were allowed to spend the night inside. By the next morning most prisoners had died of exposure and exhaustion. The Palfys also pretended to be dead, hiding among the bodies and thereby fooling the ever zealous guards who had returned to check on their victims. Two days later, on January 2, 1945, the Russians liberated the only two survivors of this death march.

After the war, the Palfys went to Poland, where they learned that George's mother had perished in Auschwitz. They returned to Bratislava and tried to obtain a visa to the United States. But the occupying Russians would not let them go there. Palfy's father, nonetheless, used old business contacts to France which allowed the two to travel to France, then England, Jamaica, and Cuba, edging their way ever closer to the United States. From Cuba they awaited permission to immigrate, but that was only granted after another two years when Palfy's father married an American woman. In the meantime, Palfy had picked up the Spanish language, an asset that would have a decisive impact on his future. Both Palfys became American citizens and were allowed to go to Miami and on to New York. Palfy then enlisted in the US army in 1952 and

was stationed in Fort Hood, Texas. As part of his benefits, the army sent him to RCA electronics school. Palfy remained with RCA after his discharge and continued to work for its plant in the Rio Grande Valley.

Another former concentration camp prisoner, Abraham Moszkowicz, or Buchenwald Number 84978, would eventually also work in the electronics industries of the Rio Grande Valley. Moszkowicz was born in Kielce, Poland, on May 4, 1925, but moved to Lodz as a little boy. Lodz was Poland's second largest city, located eighty miles southwest of Warsaw, and an important center of textile and other industrial production. Moszkowicz remembers being a member of the Jewish boy scouts and growing up near the ethnic German quarter close to the university where "you could go on the street and just talk German."[17] The family's landlord and close friend, who visited often and brought cigars and cigarettes for his father, was a German.

Generally friendly relations with local Germans changed, however, when the German army entered the city on September 8, 1939. A month later, a Hitler decree annexed the city and the surrounding area to the Greater German *Reich*. Germanization measures, including the removal of the Polish population and the settlement of ethnic Germans commenced immediately thereafter, while anti-Jewish ordinances such as prohibition of religious ceremonies in the synagogues, a curfew, the wearing of the Star of David, and the marking of all Jewish businesses were instituted. In honor of the World War I General Karl Litzmann, who had been killed there in 1915, the name of the city was changed to Litzmannstadt, and German was proclaimed as the official language.[18]

For the Moszkowiczs' contacts to former German friends and business associates died and, like the rest of the city's population, they faced severe food shortages. But Moszkowicz's boy scout training that enabled him to sneak undetected into houses and storage facilities, his German looks (he was blond and blue-eyed), which made it easy not to attract suspicions when he took off his arm band with the Star of David, and his knowledge of both Polish and German began to pay off. Moszkowicz recalls that during the time before the full establishment of the ghetto, "I stole, I go to places, I stole food, and when I came home, it's like in heaven, bread and potatoes."[19] Nevertheless, his raids remained dangerous, and he was caught seven times by the German army. The Germans never recognized him as a Jew and put him to work, but he was always able to escape. He also quickly became smart enough to steal only bread and potatoes and avoid the heavily guarded meat products.

Moszkowicz's life as the family's bread winner ended in December 1939, when the Germans began to force the Jews into an enclosed section of the city. Moszkowicz remembers that he was woken up on a cold winter night, "Get out! Every one get out! You cannot take nothing with you!"[20] After the ensuing chaos, the family and the other Jews of the quarter gathered on the streets. The

Germans separated Moszkowicz from his parents and younger brother, whom he would never see again. The fourteen-year old boy immediately grasped this ominous moment. 'I understand I have to take care of myself; I'm responsible for everything I do now,'[21] he thought.

Whereas most of the other Jews became subject to compulsory labor in the textile factories and workshops of the ghetto, Moszkowicz had to work twelve-hour shifts in the Hasak ammunition factories producing artillery shells for the German army. Both German and Polish foremen supervised the workers and punished every mistake in the operation of the heavy, automated equipment or the produced shells with beatings. Daily food rations consisted of one eighth of a gallon of watery soup and a small slice of mushy bread baked from potato skins.

Sadly Moszkowicz could consider himself lucky because he belonged to a select group of "productively active workers." According to a report by the Nazi ghetto manager, Hans Biebow, these workers were at least entitled to the "potato scraps that had been delivered for horse fodder."[22] The food situation for the rest of the ghetto population, especially in the winter of 1940/41, looked even more desperate. On average, ghetto Jews were fed on 23 *Pfennige* per day, which was less than half the German prison fare. In addition, Jewish allocations on paper were usually higher than actual deliveries. As a result, the death rate was rising and even German officials noted that "one could no longer demand of a Jew that he work."[23] This desperate situation slightly improved by March 1941, when food allocations at least reached the German prison fare.[24]

But by this time Moszkowicz's entire shift had been transferred from Lodz to Czenstokhova, where they continued to produce artillery shells under similar conditions for another Hasak ammunitions plant. After about a year at this factory, the SS guards had Moszkowicz and the other workers line up for an inspection. Moszkowicz knew that something was going to happen because he had witnessed how other groups of Jewish workers had been sent away, never to return. Rumors had it that those selected had been machine-gunned in a nearby forest. Moszkowicz was scared to death, knowing that there was nothing he could do but stand and accept his destiny. Then three high-ranking SS officers, the "big guys,"[25] as Moszkowicz calls them, announced that they had been chosen for a special work assignment in Germany. Of course, similar explanations had been given to the Jews who had disappeared before, and SS officers throughout the entire Nazi occupied territories had promised Jews that they would be resettled, yet this time the "big guys" did not lie. Moszkowicz and a small group of about forty other Jews were indeed transported to Buchenwald, where they were to build fighter planes for the German air force.

On January 16, 1942, at about the same time Moszkowicz was shipped to

Buchenwald, the first deportations from Lodz to the newly built extermination center in Chelmno, located less than forty miles to the east, commenced. Three more great waves of deportations from February 2 to April 2, 1942, May 3 to May 14, 1942, and September 1 to September 12, 1942, further decimated the ghetto population. As the last ghetto in Eastern Europe to be liquidated, Lodz was finally dissolved on August 28, 1944, its remaining inhabitants gassed in Auschwitz and the reopened facility in Chelmno. Of the 165,000 of the original ghetto population, the almost 25,000 Jews brought in from the surrounding areas, and the 20,000 Western European Jews and Gypsies who had been deported to Lodz beginning in the fall of 1941, only 800 survived.[26]

Meanwhile, Moszkowicz had arrived at Buchenwald, where he was deloused, received his prisoner's garb, consisting of the characteristic striped suit and wooden shoes, and his identification number, 84978, before he was admitted into the main camp. Moszkowicz does not exactly remember his block number, either eighty-five or seventy-five, but he knows that his entire group was herded into an already crowded barrack. It was up to the prisoners to make room for the new arrivals, otherwise the prisoner foreman (Kapo) would do so by force. Moszkowicz eventually settled for a third-level (of four) bunk close to the back that he had to share with three others. During the day, he and his block mates were marched to a huge factory hall to assemble fighter planes. Moszkowicz had attracted the special attention from the German engineer who trained him, most likely because of his quick learning ability and his small, nimble hands – Moszkowicz was an emaciated and skinny sixteen-year old who would never grow much taller than five feet - that could reach into the smallest corners of each fuselage. This engineer affectionately called him "little Maurice (*kleiner Moritz*)"[27] and often rewarded him with small amounts of extra food.

One day in April, 1945, SS officers summoned Moszkowicz and demanded that he would fix a defective aircraft. Moszkowicz located the problem in the left wing of the plane, but tried to explain to the "big guys" that he was unable to repair it. The engineer then took Moszkowicz aside and reminded him that he was the only one who could do the job. Moszkowicz insisted that he could not do it, but the engineer pleaded, "They're going to kill you and they're going to send me to the front. Do you want that to happen?"[28] So motivated Moszkowicz went to work, but soon cut his hand severely with a sharp aluminum sheet protruding from the inside of the plane's wing, which would leave a three-inch long scar on his right hand. The bleeding stopped only by some dirty rags, the SS men made him continue his work until he had repaired everything.

Despite this success, Moszkowicz returned to his barrack in physical and, even more important, mental agony because he knew from experience that the

Nazis would kill every one who would no longer be able to work. Fortunately, the brave German engineer saved Moszkowicz's life. He brought him to a German physician in a nearby village. The doctor immediately diagnosed the early stages of gangrene, cut the affected flesh, and supplied Moszkowicz with a sterile bandage and the proper medicine. Back in the camp, the SS granted Moszkowicz a week to recover, which he spent peeling potatoes and finding some extra food in the kitchen. He again owed this special treatment to the engineer's request not to harm his best worker. At this time the prisoners could already hear the rumbling of the heavy artillery at the front. Soon thereafter, the SS left the camp and Moszkowicz noticed American jeeps entering. He could hardly believe it, "They came in, black soldiers and black women with red crosses, and they carried me away because I could not walk by myself."[29]

The day Buchenwald was liberated by the US army, with help from the prisoner resistance, was April 11, 1945. Only a few days earlier there had been an American bombing raid and the SS had decided to liquidate the camp. Prisoners received no more food and were led on death marches every day. On April 10, the remaining 20,000 inmates were to be evacuated all at once, but another bombing raid delayed departure until the next morning. Around ten o'clock that morning, the prisoners were assembled on the central square. Suddenly bombs exploded, grenades burst, armed prisoners attacked their guards, and firefights ensued. At noon, the SS had fled and the resistance had taken over the camp. By six o'clock in the evening, the first American vehicles entered the camp.[30]

On that day, April 11, 1945, Moszkowicz weighed only sixty pounds. US army soldiers had to gradually nurture him back to life, first with intravenous fluids, then with liquids such as soup and porridge, and finally solid foods. Moszkowicz proudly shows a photo of him and a group of seven GIs, who had to carry him piggyback for weeks because he still could not move on his own. Moszkowicz fully recovered only after a stay at the German spa Schloss Langenzelle near Heidelberg, the subsequent transfer to a new DP camp in Stuttgart, and another camp in nearby Backnang. But he eventually could enjoy his new found health, "You feel free, you have more strength, you can walk, and you can do everything you want to do."[31]

Moskowicz decided to search for his family. With a group of three friends, whose faces he still remembers clearly, he set out to visit Warsaw, Cracow, Lodz, and Kielce, but upon crossing the Polish border, the group heard the terrible news of the Jews killed by Poles in Kielce. Torn between the desire to find news of their relatives and the renewed danger for Jews in Poland, they heavy-heartedly chose to return to Backnang, arguing that "having survived one thing, we don't want to survive another thing."[32]

The infamous Kielce Pogrom symbolized the intense anti-Semitism

that continued to permeate Poland even after 1945. It occurred on July 4, 1946, when a Pole wrongfully blamed Jewish survivors and repatriates for kidnapping his son. The enraged local Polish population responded by burning the synagogue and Jewish homes and by torturing and killing Jews. As a result, forty Jews were killed and more than seventy injured.[33]

During the following two years in Backnang, Moszkowicz established connections with a Jewish organization that brought Russian Jews and other survivors to Palestine, where he helped found a *kibbutz*. Grateful for his survival, he considered his work on behalf of other survivors a special duty. Moszkowicz also helped the American authorities hunt down former Nazis. Having suffered almost six years under the Nazi yoke, it was easy for him to recognize former SS members. "You could see it in their faces," Moszkowicz explains. "I knew it instinctively, I asked them to expose their SS tattoo, and I hardly ever went wrong."[34]

Moszkowicz's reasoning and behavior here parallels the famous Nazi hunter, Simon Wiesenthal. Like Moszkowicz, Wiesenthal came to the conclusion that "survival is a privilege which entails obligations. I am forever asking myself what I can do for those who have not survived."[35] Wiesenthal decided to gather and prepare evidence on Nazi atrocities for the War Crimes Section of the US army, which was later utilized in numerous trials. Among the most prominent Nazis his work brought to justice were Adolf Eichmann, the technocrat who organized European-wide deportations to the extermination centers, Franz Stangl, the commander of Treblinka, and Karl Silberbauer, the SS officer who arrested Anne Frank. Wiesenthal also headed a Jewish relief organization and the Jewish Historical Documentation Center. Today the Simon Wiesenthal Center and its offices throughout the world continue the memory of the Holocaust and work with the worldwide defense of human rights.[36]

With the hope of finding other European family members constantly fading, Moszkowicz finally decided to join the Mexican branch of the family. He left Europe in early 1948 and after a journey via the Canary Islands, Iceland, the Bermudas, and Cuba, arrived in Mexico City on August 29. His relatives threw him a great welcome party, but Moszkowicz did not want to depend on them for too long. He learned Spanish from a Mexican, whom he paid two dimes for daily shoe shines, then worked in different jobs until he established an electronics business. In 1954 Moszkowicz married his wife, Esther, had children, and continued to expand his business, scouting locations and opportunities in Mexico and the United States. In 1965 he finally made the decision to move his family and his business to Brownsville because it was close to the border and allowed for easy access to both countries. Most important, however, Brownsville and the United States offered something for Moszkowicz's children that he never had for himself, a childhood and an

excellent education.

Like Abraham Moszkowicz, Judith Neumann and Zigmund Cojocaru also spent their adolescent or early adult years in ghettos and labor camps and never had the opportunity to obtain a formal education. They survived the Holocaust in Transnistria, a Romanian administered district between the rivers Dniestr and Bug in the southern corner of Ukraine.[37]

Judith Neumann was born on May 26, 1921, in Suchava, a small village in Romania. Her father, whose family traced its ancestors to Germany and Poland, had fought for Austria-Hungary in World War I, now worked as a wholesaler. He bought wheat from the Romanian farmers and shipped it to Germany and other countries. Neumann clearly remembers her family's beautiful home, the huge grain storage facilities owned by her father, and a cousin who taught her to speak English, French, German, and some Spanish.

Her carefree life changed, however, when Ion Antonescu, the Romanian dictator, decided to fulfill his dreams of a "Greater Romania," in which there would be no room for Jews, through an alliance with Hitler's Germany. From 1940 onward nationalist aspiration and traditional anti-Semitism led to a radicalization of anti-Jewish measures. Jews had to wear a yellow Star of David and were not allowed to congregate. The rural population and police forces became increasingly hostile and only waited for the chance to inflict pain and misery on the hated Jews. The opportunity for large-scale violence against the Jews presented itself in the summer of 1940 with the surrender of Bessarabia (Moldova) and Bukovina to the Soviet Union, which had been a condition of the 1939 agreement between Hitler and Stalin.[38] In fact, in the years leading up to the decision for complete eradication of the European Jews in August, 1941, the Romanians often acted even more radical than their German models. As Joseph Goebbels, Hitler's Minister of Propaganda, noted in his diary on July 20, 1941, "As for the Jewish question, today in any case one could say that a man like Antonescu, for example, proceeds much more radically in this matter than we have done until now."[39]

Neumann and a group of friends were affected by this radicalization of anti-Semitism in the fall of 1940 when they were arrested and taken to the local police station. She was severely hit because she refused to admit that she hated Jewish communists. She was then sent to a prison where she was again repeatedly beaten, but did not confess to having committed any crimes. After a few months, her father was able to secure her release through bribing of Romanian officials.

Neumann could not enjoy her newfound freedom for too long because beginning on October 6, 1941, more than 130,000 Jews from Romania, which now included the re-acquired territories of Bukovina and Bessarabia, were deported to fifty-three small ghettos located around the city of Mogilev in the northern part of Transnistria. This area had already been "cleared," to

use the Nazi euphemism for mass murder, of its approximately 160,000 local Jews by the German special task forces, ethnic German auxiliary formations, and the Romanian army in the late summer of 1941. Not surprisingly, the forced exodus of the Romanian Jews also turned into genocide. Surviving diaries, memoirs, and other documents attest to the suffering inflicted on the deportees. "One is shocked by the depths of human cruelty, by the measures taken to humiliate thousands of innocent people, by the utter misery inflicted on the expelled Jews. The roads of Transnistria were littered with corpses left unburied or covered by snow,"[40] writes Dalia Ofer.

On a day in October of 1941, Judith Neumann and the other Jews of Suchava were also herded to the train station and loaded onto cattle wagons without food, water, or sanitary facilities. She remembers that her family was on the third of three trains. After days of traveling, they crossed the Dniestr in small boats, and then marched on foot to Mogilev and the small ghetto of Shargorod. Romanian soldiers with rifles and bayonets flanked the marching columns of deportees and beat, stabbed, or shot every one who stopped walking. Neumann herself was hit several times. But they continued the march for days with only small rations of bread and water. When they arrived at their final destination, Neumann, her parents, her two brothers, and the other deportees could not find suitable shelters because the entire region had been heavily bombarded and stripped of all valuables by the advancing German and Romanian troops. Thus, people settled down in pig barns, cow sheds, horse stalls, and makeshift tents. To compound the hardships, the ragged and downtrodden Romanian Jews did not speak Ukrainian and were met with hostility by the local population.

Only later would the deportees find somewhat better dwellings. Yet, they were still cramped together in small rooms. Neumann shared a room hardly big enough for one person with her parents and brothers. Shargorod and the other camps and ghettos in Transnistria furthermore lacked basic sanitary facilities, clean water, and detergents for disinfection. People moved about naked because they sold their clothes for food, children wore rags, and, as Cojocaru did, wrapped their feet in newspaper for warmth. Neumann describes the misery, "It was a complete mess, I mean, it was a mess. At least we had some money to buy food, most others did not."[41]

During the first winter, between thirty and fifty percent of the Jews perished in a terrible typhus epidemic. Neumann remembers, "There was no medicine. There was no hospital. People died by the … [she starts weeping and does not state a number]. We only saw dead bodies."[42] She herself acquired the disease in late 1943 but was saved in the spring of 1944 by the advancing Red Army. In the end, despite the cruelty, brutality, and bestiality, the extermination of the Romanian Jews was somewhat "less successful" than the Final Solution in other Eastern European Countries. Forty percent, including Neumann, her

family, and Cojocaru, survived because fortunately Romania, the only other country to become directly involved in the Nazi mass murder campaign, lacked the efficient German organization.

After the war, Neumann and Cojocaru briefly returned to their destroyed homes and continued animosity from their former neighbors in Romania. Both immigrated to the new state of Israel, found their respective spouses and started new lives. Cojocaru became a soldier (sergeant-major) and fought in the Six Day War of 1967. Soon thereafter, he went to the United States. Looking for warm weather, friendly people, and business opportunities, he moved to Brownsville in 1971.

Neumann had arrived there fourteen years earlier, in 1957. She had left Israel, where she had worked as an accountant in a chocolate factory, because her husband had lost his business there and, on recommendation from his brother in Texas, had subsequently taken a management apprenticeship position in a Laredo textile store. Upon completing his training, he was appointed manager of a new Brownsville facility. Judith, who already knew English and Spanish, joined her husband to become the bookkeeper of the company.

Although the previous accounts of survival and resilience are unique, the final two survivors stand out from the Brownsville group: Vivian Kearney (formerly Zgodzinski), who was born in the Warsaw ghetto, and Michael (formerly Mordechai) Begum, who testified for Stephen Spielberg's *Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation*.[43] When Vivian (originally named Wieslawa) was born on September 24, 1942, deportations from the Warsaw ghetto to the death camp of Treblinka (which had started in July 1942), had already significantly decimated the population that had reached its maximum of 455,000 in the spring of 1941. Vivian's father, Wowek Kundorf, who had worked as a handyman in a hospital, had fallen victim to the regular German deportations when her mother, Esther Hoffman, had been eight months pregnant. When even closer to giving birth, Esther herself had escaped one of the German *Aktionen* only by sheer luck. Walking to the *Umschlagplatz*, the train station reserved for the deportations from the ghetto, a boy recognized her and asked a German guard, "I know this woman. She's going to give birth any moment now. Do you really want her to give birth right here in line?" The guard was uneasy with that prospect and let the boy take Esther back to the ghetto.[44]

The German word *Umschlagplatz* literally means "location of trans-shipment or transfer point of cargo." Its use again underscores that the Germans thought of the Jews not as human beings but rather as cargo, goods, or chattel to be transported, shipped, and handled wherever they saw fit. It is perhaps even more noteworthy that Vivian herself frequently uses the term, indicative of how much the Jewish victims had apparently internalized the

degrading euphemistic language of their oppressors.

Only a few days after Esther had been saved from deportation, she gave birth to Vivian. However, it was Vivian's aunt, Freda Hoffman (who had already been taking care of the sickly Esther and a number of other family members and friends), who took charge of the newborn baby. It was particularly frightening to the household members (who used to hide in a bunker underneath the apartment whenever the Germans raided the ghetto) that the infant's crying might betray them. Vivian had been given morphine (which they probably had acquired from the hospital where Wowek worked) to keep her quiet, yet that did not seem a viable option in the long run. The family decided to smuggle the baby out of the ghetto and place her with a Polish orphanage, which required outside Polish contacts.

As Sam Silberman, Abraham Moszkowicz, and many other Polish Jews had experienced during and even after the Holocaust, the Polish people in general did not look favorably upon the Jews, and many were outright hostile. Vivian's parents and foster parents, however, had become members of Warsaw anarchist circles long before the German occupation and could therefore rely on the help of their Polish anarchist friends. It fell upon Vivian's Aunt Freda, who was young and healthy, and even more importantly could pass as German because of her good looks, light brown hair, and green eyes, to smuggle her out of the ghetto. Nevertheless, leaving the ghetto was punishable by death, and many Jews who had attempted to flee had been publicly executed. Thus, Freda was understandably nervous when on a Sunday afternoon, shortly before the ghetto uprising in April 1943, she left the baby with a Jewish policeman who had been bribed, climbed over the ghetto wall, and then picked up the baby that had been lifted over the wall by the policeman. Freda then took several streetcars, playing the nonchalant, flirty girl whenever German soldiers appeared, and finally dropped Vivian off at the doorstep of a Gentile friend (who was not at home at the time) who had promised to place her in a Polish orphanage, and returned to the ghetto. Soon thereafter, Freda, Esther, and the rest of the family were discovered and deported. While Esther and the others vanished (most likely in Treblinka), Freda managed to jump from the train and survive by passing as a Pole, taking on the name Franziska, and working for local farmers as well as a Catholic convent.

In the meantime, the infant Vivian had indeed been placed in the orphanage. She had fallen so ill that in mid-1945, when she was two-and-a-half years old, she could still neither walk nor talk. In the summer of 1945, with the war at an end, Freda, not knowing what had happened to her niece, had gone to the agreed-upon orphanage in Warsaw. However, she found that it had been destroyed (like so much of Warsaw) in the Warsaw Uprising. A passing woman, seeing Freda crying in the street, asked if she were looking for the orphanage, and told her that it had been moved from Warsaw to Lodz before

the Uprising. Traveling to Lodz, Freda found her niece, her only surviving relative in Poland. A few months later, the two joined another surviving family member, Freda's sister Manya Hoffman, in Paris. Despite the pain of having lost more than forty family members in the Holocaust, they rejoiced at the news that Freda's later husband, Stephan Zgodzinski, who had been arrested by the Germans already in 1939, had also miraculously survived the war.

During the chaos of the German *Blitzkrieg* attack on Poland in September 1939, Zgodzinski had had the presence of mind to enter an abandoned Polish military office and obtain a Polish military identification card. He had chosen the last name Zgodzinski because his Hebrew name means peace, and the Polish word for peace is *zgoda*. He then picked Stephan for his first name. Being blond and blue-eyed, he was certain that he would not be recognized as a Jew. His assumption was correct; he was arrested as a member of the Polish army and sent to a labor camp in Southern Germany. From there he was able to escape and cross into Switzerland, where he worked for farmers throughout the war. He and Freda married in 1946 and subsequently lived with Vivian, Manya, and her husband in Paris.

Vivian's own memories start around this time in Paris. She clearly remembers being taken to school, playing in the Jardin de Luxembourg, and particularly, the dark stairway of her apartment building that terribly frightened her when she was sent alone to the nearby bakery. Her family was scared even more by the Korean War, which, they feared, could quickly escalate into the next European and world war. Therefore, they left Europe and joined another surviving family member in Montreal, where Vivian grew up.

In 1961, while studying French and Spanish at McGill University, Vivian met her future husband, Milo Kearney, in a Latin class. Milo was spending a year in Montreal, and was pleased to meet what he thought was a native French speaker. Vivian, on the other hand, did not buy Milo's claim to be from Texas, "Where are your boots, where is your hat, and where is your accent?" she teased.[45] They started studying together, fell in love, and Vivian followed Milo when his schooling led him first to Berkeley, California, and later to Germany.

Like many other survivors, Vivian's family had been apprehensive about everything related to Germany. They had refused to buy German products such as cameras, scissors, or knives, although they realized that they were the highest quality products available. Now they were definitely concerned with Vivian going to the country that had destroyed so many relatives and friends. Vivian herself felt quite uneasy and worried when she arrived in Munich, "Would there be a Nazi waiting for her at the train station, threatening, 'I didn't get you before, I'll get you now?'" she wondered.[46] But it was Milo who met her there, and he soon introduced her to his German friends and Germany. Vivian noticed that German culture, including the food and the

manner of speaking, were closely related to the Jewish culture she knew and quickly started to like the country and its people. In 1970, Vivian and Milo were married in Munich, and Milo became a professor at Pan American University in Edinburg, Texas, where their two children, Aviva Kathleen and Wowek Sean, were born. In 1973, Milo transferred to the University's new campus in Brownsville, and the Kearneys settled into their new home.

Michael Begum also remained apprehensive about Germany and German products for the longest time. Yet like Vivian Kearney, he has learned to distinguish between fervent Nazis and ordinary Germans, especially if they were born after the war. In contrast to the other local survivors who had engaged in some form of resistance against the Nazis, Begum had joined the Russian partisans and thus is the only one who committed acts of active resistance. Begum was born in Parafianovo, a small town in Belarus, on June 22, 1922. His birthday thus coincidentally fell on the very day that nineteen years later would change his and so many other lives forever, the German invasion of the Soviet Union.

Begum, who had started his medical studies at the University of Minsk in 1940, returned to Parafianovo for the summer of 1941. His fateful birthday began with a German bombing raid. Surprised and shocked like the rest of the country, he naively exclaimed, "Look, mother, they are celebrating my birthday with fireworks."[47] Three days later, the German army occupied the city. By July, the Germans created a small ghetto, Jews had to wear yellow badges, the special SS task forces began murdering the Jewish elite, and Jewish labor gangs were established. Begum was assigned to clean German military quarters.

Life in the ghetto was characterized by permanent terror, a minimal degree of reliable rules, and spontaneous acts of murder and random cruelty by the Germans. Moreover, the special SS task forces committed several massacres. One such action, in which his parents perished together with 200 other Jews, began in the early morning hours of May 31, 1942. Before being sent to the execution site, however, Begum was able to escape into the nearby forests. He survived on his own for more than three months, a feat that is even more remarkable considering that local peasants would generally not support Jews and sell the little food they had only at gunpoint.[48]

The special SS task forces themselves have documented their operations in the Soviet Union, including the executions of Jews and the number of Jews murdered, in their Operational Situation Reports from the USSR (*Ereignismeldungen aus der UdSSR*) and the succeeding Reports from the Occupied Eastern Territories (*Meldungen aus den besetzten Ostgebieten*). These two series of top secret documents have been the standard source of information for the activities of the special SS task forces and German occupation policy in the Soviet Union. They are a valuable historical tool

because they were drafted at the time of the events, and all events mentioned were later confirmed by other sources. A massacre committed in Parafianovo, however, cannot be found in these reports. On the other hand, it could have taken place at another date, another nearby location, or it could have been omitted from the reports. Such inconsistencies were not uncommon because of errors committed due to the time elapsed between the individual, actual report from each killing unit and the finalized summary reports from all units that have entered the historical record. Historians have also noted some problems of transmitting the reports properly by radio as well as simple clerical errors.[49]

In September of 1942, Begum made contact with a group of partisans. Although he was circumcised and had good reason to fight his barbaric oppressor, the partisans remained suspicious and accepted him only after he had killed his first Germans. The less than enthusiastic welcome Begum found with the partisans was typical for all partisan forces in Belarus. Most partisans were reluctant to admit Jews who had fled from the SS massacres and the ghettos because they usually did not contribute weapons, because they came with their families, because they might attract extra German attention, and worst of all, because of existing anti-Semitism. Even those Jews who came armed, like many escapees from the large Minsk ghetto did, and without families, like Begum, often faced discrimination. According to scholars and survivors, Jewish partisans were executed by their units for infractions such as wearing rings, losing their rifles during flight, or sometimes for no particular reason at all, whereas partisans from other nationalities who had committed the same offenses were not. To add insult to injury, the post-war Soviet literature purposely downplayed the effectiveness and contributions of Jewish partisans.[50] Nevertheless, Begum became fully integrated into his unit and participated in various acts of sabotage and ambushes for the rest of the war. He was later awarded three Soviet medals for bravery.

Interrupting the vital supply lines for the German Army Group Center at a critical junction of the war in the summer of 1944 was the most important contribution to the Soviet war effort by the Belorussian partisans. But the carefully planned and executed assassination of the territorial governor (*Gebietskommissar*) Wilhelm Kube by his house keeper and mistress, Yelena Mazanik, in which Begum's unit was involved, became the most celebrated partisan operation in Belarus.[51] Kube had become a primary target because his power struggle with the head of the local security police forces, SS Lt. Col. Eduard Strauch, in which both accused each other of "being to weak on the Jews," had made the Germans even more murderous than usual.[52]

Begum remembers another particular event of the war. It was in August, 1944, when the Red Army had crushed German Army Group Center and small groups of German stragglers tried to make their way back to the west

through partisan territories. While on a scouting mission, Begum accidentally ran into four German soldiers. Threatening that hundreds of his comrades were waiting in ambush, he managed to take the Germans prisoner. When they inquired about his national origin, Begum replied in German that he was a Jew. One German responded, "Then we are indeed *kaputt*,"[53] begging for their lives. Begum recognized the Germans as *Volkssturm* members, older men drafted as part of Hitler's desperate last minute effort to stem the tide of the war, and promised not to harm them. He claims that he kept his promise, but his benevolence was an exception among partisans. According to the literature, especially Jewish partisan groups took their revenge on the retreating Germans and hardly any German survived capture.[54]

In 1945 Begum crossed into Poland and then moved on to Czechoslovakia and Austria. He spent the next four years in DP camps and immigrated to the United States in 1949. Begum began as a dishwasher in New York, but soon moved on as a management trainee for Franklin Stores. He managed franchises in Nogales, Laredo, Harlingen, and in 1954 finally arrived in Brownsville. There Begum started a clothing company and still works in that line of business. From a joke told at the beginning of our interview, it was evident that despite all deprivation and hardship, the eighty-two-year-old had not lost his sense of humor. "I have survived the Holocaust, I have survived two failed marriages, but the rents here are really killing me."[55]

Although the *Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation* and similar organizations have created extensive libraries containing the visual and oral testimony of Holocaust survivors worldwide, the nine survivors residing in Brownsville, with the exception of Michael Begum, never had the opportunity to officially "bear witness." Their testimony, however, made it possible to trace their paths from a war-ravaged Europe to the Rio Grande Valley and thereby illustrate individual and unique responses, first to the multi-faceted horrors of the Holocaust, then to the challenges of establishing new and better lives in the United States. And while their testimony describes the depths of human cruelty and suffering, it also serves as a monument to the indomitable power of the human spirit.

The University of Texas at Brownsville

Endnotes

1 Personal interview with George Palfy, November 19, 2004.

2 The interviews would not have been possible without the help of Gay Greenspan, the administrator of the Temple Beth-EL in Brownsville.

3 Personal interview with Abraham Moszkowicz, November 9, 2004.

4 Personal interview with Samuel Silberman, November 3, 2004.

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8 Heydrich's circular letter to the special task forces dated September 23, 1939. See Yehuda Bauer, *A History of the Holocaust*, Danbury, Franklin Watts, 1982, pp. 148-151.

9 Among a number of excellent studies of the Holocaust, Raul Hilberg's *The Destruction of the European Jews,* rev. ed., 3 vols., New York, Holmes & Meier, 1985, remains the most comprehensive and detailed work.

10 For an excellent study of Mengele's sadistic character, see Robert Jay Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors. Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide*, New York, Basic Books, 1986.

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12 *Ibid.*

13 Elie Wiesel, *Night*, New York, Bantam Books, 1986, p. 29.

14 See Krausnick and Wilhelm, *Die Truppe des Weltanschauungskrieges*, 35; Heinz Höhne, *Der Orden unter dem Totenkopf. Die Geschichte der SS*, Hamburg, Verlag Der Spiegel, 1966, pp. 242-44; and Eric A. Johnson, *Nazi Terror: The Gestapo, Jews and Ordinary Germans*, New York, Basic Books, 1999, pp. 55, 303.

15 Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners. Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1996. For the death marches, see pp. 327-371.

16 See Robert R. Shandley, ed., *Unwilling Germans? The Goldhagen Debate.* Minneapolis, University of Minnesota, 1998.

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18 Lucjan Dobroszycki, ed., *The Chronicle of the Lodz Ghetto*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1984, introduction; and Christopher R. Browning, *The Origins of the Final Solution. The Evolution of Nazi Jewish Policy, September 1939-March 1942*, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 2004, pp. 114-120, 152-158.

19 Personal interview with Abraham Moszkowicz, November 9, 2004.

20 *Ibid.*

21 *Ibid.*

22 Quoted in Browning, *The Origins of the Final Solution*, p. 155.

23 Quoted *Ibid*, 157.

24 See *Ibid.*, pp. 155-158.

25 Personal interview with Abraham Moszkowicz, November 9, 2004.

26 For the history of the Lodz ghetto, see Isaiah Trunk, *Ghetto Lodz* , New York, YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, 1962; Josef Wulf, *Das letzte Getto auf polnischem Boden*, Bonn, Bundeszentrale für Heimatdienst, 1962; Mendel Grossmann, *With a Camera in the Ghetto,* New York, Ghetto Fighters' House, 1972; Lucjan Dobroszycki, ed., *The Chronicle of the Lodz Ghetto;* Alan Adelson and Robert Lapides eds., *Lodz Ghetto. Inside a Community Under Siege,* New York, Viking Press, 1989; Manfred Schulze and Stefan Petriuk, *Unsere Arbeit-Unsere Hoffnung. Das Getto in Lodz 1940– 1945*, Schwalmtal, Phil-Creatic GmbH, 1995.

27 Personal interview with Abraham Moszkowicz, November 9, 2004.

28 *Ibid.*.

29 *Ibid.*.

30 See Wiesel, *Night*, pp. 108-109.

31 Personal interview with Abraham Moszkowicz, November 9, 2004..

32 *Ibid.*.

33 Zimmerman, *Contested Memories,* Part VI, "The Aftermath."

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35 Simon Wiesenthal, *Justice not Vengeance,* London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1989, p. 351.

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39 Fröhlich, Elke, ed., *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels: Sämtliche Fragmente*, Saur, Munich, 1987, vol. II, 1:269, 278.

40 Ofer, "The Holocaust in Transnistria," p. 139.

41 Personal interview with Judith Neumann, November 9, 2004.

42 *Ibid.*.

43 Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation, Interview Code 21493.

44 Personal interview with Vivian and Milo Kearney, April 19, 2005. Vivian Kearney's aunt and foster mother, Freda Hoffmann, has related the story to Vivian and her husband, Milo. On the Warsaw ghetto, see Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, vol. 1, pp. 193-274, 501-570; Browning, *The Origins of the Final Solution*, pp. 111-113, 121-131; Raul Hilberg, Stanislaw Storan, Josef Kernisz, eds.,

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48 Hans-Heinrich Nolte, "Destruction and Resistance: The Jewish Shetl of Slonim, 1941-44," in Robert W. Thurston and Bernd Bonwetsch, eds., *The People's War: Responses to World War II in the Soviet Union*, Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 2000, p. 44.

49 Ronald Headland, *Messages of Murder. A Study of the Reports of the Einsatzgruppen of the Security Police and the Security Service*, 1941-1943, pp. 92-100; Helmut Krausnick and Hans-Heinrich Wilhelm, *Die Truppe des Weltanschauungskrieges. Die Einsatzgruppen der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD 1938-1942*, Stuttgart, Deutsche Verlags Anstalt, 1981, pp. 333-341.

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52 See Uwe Gartenschläger, "Living and Surviving in Occupied Minsk," in Robert Thurston and Bernd Bonwetsch, *The People's War*, p. 17.

53 Personal interview with Michael Begum, November 18, 2004.

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Marshall C. Nichols, Manager of the Charro Drive-In, 1950-1961

by

Javier R. García

Drive-in theatres, once called "ozoners" for their high-rise screen towers, emerged all across Texas and the United States after World War II. In November, 1949, Howard Metzger's Star Drive-In on U.S. 77 (beyond the present Ruben Torres Blvd.) was entering its second year with complete renovations to contend with Brownsville's second drive-in built by Claude Ezell and W.G. Underwood's (U&E) drive-in theatre chain, the Charro Drive-in. Ramps (which cars drove up on to view the screen from an incline) had been paved. A huge loud speaker mounted beneath the screen was made obsolete after new R.C.A. speakers with individual controls were installed and three swing sets for the kids were added. Every ticket holder received a free bag of popcorn and a candy bar for the Star's second anniversary.[1]

Drive-in theatres were popular for a number of reasons. A family could watch two movies from the comfort of their car for less than the cost of a single movie in an indoor theatre. There was no need to hire a babysitter, the kids could put on pajamas, and Mom could prepare food at home to eat in the car. Two speakers with a knob to adjust the volume sat on poles hung to the side of the door. People could talk out loud, and smokers could light a cigarette if they chose to. Most car interiors were spacious and designed for comfort; a typical car had bench seats, which allowed occupants to sit side by side. A teenager could borrow Dad's car in anticipation of making a good impression or of "making out" with his date, or both. Drive-ins became stereotypically known as "passion pits," but it was family attendance that made them ideal. A walk to the snack bar might end by returning with arms full of hot dogs, popcorn, candy, and drinks. It was also a place to meet up with friends and catch up on the latest news. While most people sat in their cars, the drive-in bustled with activity for those who arrived early. In later years, people preferred folding chairs and blankets as a comfortable way to enjoy movies under the stars. If you had a pick-up truck or van you could park at the rear with the end of the vehicle toward the screen and lie outside on blankets or sleeping bags. Others found relaxing with an ice chest of beer a fun way to spend a night while watching a thrilling action film. Standard movie fare was westerns, comedies, action or horror flicks. Some "sophisticated" audiences may have preferred an indoor theatre exclusively, but the experience of being at the drive-in was much more of a social event.

From its beginning to its demise, the Charro was truly a unique outdoor

theatre that offered the best in American movie drive-in experiences. The Charro Drive-In opened on November 4, 1949, as the Rio Grande Valley's largest drive-in, with a 50 by 40 foot screen. A large neon-lit marquee stood high on three steel poles near the entrance on Boca Chica. The screen tower had a mural that displayed a horse rising on its hind legs with a *charro* cowboy sitting on top, and a colorfully draped serape behind the saddle. There was also a cactus plant in the forefront and a road leading to a Spanish mission in the desert background, with a blue sky tinged by clouds. The mural was lit by fog lights and neon within a box frame around the perimeter.[2] Muralists were often commissioned to paint western motifs by major drive-in chains in the southwestern states. Charro Drive-In builders were: (1) in Brownsville: Morris Lumber Co., Brownsville Sheet Metal Works, Launer's Welding Shop, Jean L. Miller Painting, Paperhanging, Decorating and Stevens Paint and Glass Company; (2) in San Benito: Hartin Brothers Plumbing, Henderson-Goode electrical contractors; (3) in Donna: Acme Neon Company; (4) in La Feria: Somers Paving & Roofing Company; and (5) in Dallas: Forner and Jordan- General Contractors and Designers, Hardin Theatre Supply Company (film projectors).[3]

Dave Young, Sr., acted as spokesman for the U&E Corporation. The Charro was the seventeenth theatre to be built by them. It was built to park 550 cars with separate speakers for each. Like the Star Drive-In, each speaker had a volume control. A modern snack bar, restrooms and playground were also provided.[4] The playground had swings, two merry-go-rounds (one bigger than the other), and a see-saw.[5] Playgrounds brought cars in early. Wooden chairs were set in front of the snack bar for patrons. Walk-ins and kids sent by older siblings or parents so they could have some time alone watched movies from there. The use of a bottle warmer for babies was available in the snack bar free of charge. The paved parking area eliminated the nuisance of dirt and dust from moving cars or wind.[6] Seeing the Francis Ford Coppola movie "The Outsiders" one can understand what watching a movie from wooden chairs was like.

The first movie to be shown was the "The Sea Spoilers," starring John Wayne with Nan Grey and Fuzzy Knight.[7] Admission was 44 cents for adults and 9 cents for children. The four cents of the admission price went for taxes, but was later excised.[8] Movies were scheduled to be shown year-round, rain or clear. Eddie Abete II, who worked as a carpenter when the Charro was being built, was hired as the chief operator (or main projectionist) from the day it opened.[9] The Star Drive-In advertised a second run feature of "The Stratton Story" for its second anniversary screen attraction. First-run movies were always booked by the Interstate Theatre Circuit for the Majestic. While the Majestic was a first-run theatre and the Charro a second-run theatre, the Charro occasionally showed first-run movies, when available. If customers

missed a showing at the Majestic, or, more likely, preferred watching a movie at the drive-in, it was an average of two weeks before they would get a second chance to see it at the Charro.

Movie bookings took place in U&E's main office in Dallas. Percentages could range an average of 25-40% of gross for the drive-in. Nichols, the first manager, quoted Claude Ezell as stating at one of their meetings that he would "never pay 50% for a movie."[10] This rate was negotiated according to predicted box office earnings. The rate did jump significantly higher in later years, after the drive-in chain came under different ownership.[11] In Nichols' time, a flat-rate for which a movie could be rented was $25 dollars. This rate more than doubled during the mid 1960s and late 1970s, when E. M. Cuellar managed the drive-in; $50-60 was paid to a distributor for seasonal movies such as those shown around Halloween.[12] Ticket prices changed throughout the years, but always remained economical.

Dave Young, Sr., slated as a pioneer Brownsville motion picture theatre operator, acted as spokesman for U&E. Young was part owner of the Charro when it opened (on a site next to H.E.B. on Boca Chica). It was a business practice of U&E to seek a partner established in the theatre business in every small city or suburb, where they opened a theatre. Other theatre chains in the valley were the Interstate Circuit, Inc., and Ruenes Theatre Circuit owned by the Ruenes family, which had a chain of Spanish language theatres. Ramon Ruenes, Jr., opened the Victoria in 1945 (14th & Madison) and later bought the Fiesta in 1965 (first owned by Ezell in 1954) and renamed it the Ruenes Drive-In (located where the H.E.B. on Southmost Blvd. now sits). Eddie Abete II later entered a partnership with Barney Hale to run the Grande Theatre with his family while still working at the Charro. The Grande Theatre (Alamo Clothing Co. building today) on Washington St. near 11th was formerly the Rio and the Dittmann Theatre. The Queen on Elizabeth St. and the Capitol on Levee St. had been around since 1926 and 1928 respectively and were owned by Interstate by this time. By the mid 1950s there were ten theatres operating in Brownsville. Beginning late in 1949, the Charro Drive-In was the newest and most exciting drive-in to be built in Brownsville.[13]

The Charro was temporarily managed for six months until a managership change was implemented by U&E. Marshall Nichols had worked as a projectionist while in the Navy. He was in Pearl Harbor, went to Japan in 1945, and then returned to Austin in 1946. In 1949 he took a job as an assistant manager for the Chief Drive-In (opened in Austin 1946) owned by U&E, while holding another job. However, Nichols had wanted to operate a theatre on his own. Al Reynolds, General Manager of U&E theatres, offered Nichols the opportunity to manage the Burnet Road Drive-In, which was being planned. Nichols was present during the construction and completion of the theatre, but then got a call from Reynolds asking him if he would be

interested in managing the Charro being built in Brownsville in April 1949. He accepted the offer in a matter of minutes and soon realized that he made the right decision. He was twenty-seven years old.[14]

On Friday, Cinco de Mayo, in 1950, Marshall Nichols became manager of the Charro Drive-In. He was met by Dave Young, Sr., who had been in the theatre business forty years by this time. Young is remembered by Nichols as being a "very kind man" who referred to him as "son" since the day he arrived to manage the business. Dave Jr. and family managed operations of the downtown Iris and Mexico Spanish language movie theatres on Washington St. near 11th St. The Mexico Theatre was the former Dreamland Theatre built in the early 1900s and El Tiro in the late '30s.[15] Marshall and his wife Bertha, along with their dog, rented a small apartment owned by rancher Will Cabler across the street at 2365 Boca Chica. In 1952, the Nichols' were expecting their first child (Marsha) so his father, Homer Nichols, helped him build the living quarters within the Charro screen tower. After their twins, John and David, arrived in 1954 they went back to the drawing board to expand the apartment to fit the family of five. Three rooms were added out toward the playground area. It had three bedrooms, a kitchen, bathroom, living room and office by the time Nichols was satisfied, and he earned a salary without ever having to pay for utilities or rent – courtesy of Ezell and Associates.[16]

Drive-in towers with live-in apartments were not unusual. Jack Corgan, the well known Dallas architect who started designing indoor theatres and had redesigned the theatres for the opening of the Teatro Mexico and Grande Theatre, also became well known for his designs of drive-ins with live-in quarters. Some examples were the Belknap in Ft. Worth and the Pike in Westview.[17] Forner and Jordan, General Contractors and Designers of Dallas, designed the Charro with a telephone pole frame that became the standard at the time, and Nichols built right into this. By the mid 1950s Ezell modified the screen to accept the introduction of wide-screen movies such as 20th Century Fox's CinemaScope put out by Hollywood to attract people away from their televisions. Projectors had to be modified to accept the new four-track magnetic sound on 35 mm film by adding new sprockets and lenses along with a sound reader. Before this, film was 35mm and had an optically encoded sound track. Films in this new format were only rented to theatres that modernized their equipment to accept the innovation. The screen was widened with a slight curve appropriate to the extended film format. Claude Ezell hired a sound engineer to design speakers with two cones in some of his theatres to improve the sound quality. These new speakers could be hung from the rearview mirror to emit stereo sound. "The Robe" (1953) was the first movie exhibited in this format. Other formats such as Paramount's VistaVision, MGM's Panavison, and Warner Brother's Warnerscope soon followed.[18] Wide screen movies attracted people to see for themselves what

the hoopla was all about and the wider picture was an improvement. It was also around this time that wooden chairs near the newly renovated snack-bar were later replaced with long benches secured to a cement slab for safety and convenience.[19]

One of the first things Nichols did as manager was to contact the Lutheran Church in Brownsville. He had a platform constructed for Easter Sunrise Services, which were held each year he was there. The minister stood at the pulpit where the playground was, on a platform decorated with flowers, and a palm leaf cross was projected onto the screen. The microphone was wired into the speaker system for parishioners to listen to the sermon from their cars. Free coffee was also served. Baby contests, fireworks, and Easter egg hunts were all part of the celebration. This was something Nichols carried over from the Chief Drive-In in Austin.[20]

Nichols' ideas were accepted with enthusiasm from the main office in Dallas. Once a month, visitors were given tickets for a drawing. Walter Hunter of near-by Hunter Hardware & Electrical Service, who became acquainted with Nichols after supplying him with all he needed to build his home inside the Charro, was happy to donate prizes to give away. One big prize among the hardware goods was a lawnmower. In other drawings some lucky man or woman might also walk away with a Zale's Jewelers wristwatch valued at $37.50 on the last Monday of each month, while another lucky person could go hunting after winning a rifle from Batsell's Sporting Goods. Music was played during intermission from 78 rpm records donated by Cisneros Radio Service on 12th and Washington. Alfredo Cisneros gave Nichols five or six records a week, which eventually took up so much space that some became raffle prizes. For Thanksgiving and Christmas, turkeys were given away courtesy of Glen's Grocery on Boca Chica Blvd. A slide show of advertisements for these businesses flashed on the screen before cartoons and movie trailers (previews) signaled the beginning of a movie.[21]

In another joint venture, Nichols allowed a Mobil gas service station owner to appoint one of his attendants to stand at the "island" at the entrance of the drive-in next to a big Mobil sign to clean windshields for free. The sign read: "YOUR WINDSHIELD CLEANED: Courtesy [of] your friendly Mobilgas Dealers." In those days gas station attendants washed windshields, pumped fuel into automobiles and checked the engine oil and tire pressure level with a friendly smile. They wore a typical cap and buttoned shirt with the company insignia (in this case a red Pegasus horse). Some wore bow ties and polished shoes. Image was everything. Gulf, Shell, Standard, Phillips 66, and Texaco were a number of the fuel companies at the time, and gasoline cost about 35 cents a gallon. It was good for business in every direction around the drive-in, and promotions like this especially pleased Ezell and Associates, who saw that the Charro exceed profits above other Texas-owned drive-ins

beneath the stars.[22]

The arrival of the H.E.B. in the early '50s included bright parking lot lights next to the drive-in which triggered customers' complaints. However, H.E.B. gladly made an adjustment to reduce the bothersome glare at night. Another alteration was made after A&W Rootbeer and a few other satellite businesses opened next to the drive-in. A "blind" barrier was erected to reduce light from the direction. Star Electric, which was directly across Boca Chica from the drive-in, had a television display. People who didn't own one yet would like to sit outside the windows and watch a little TV. Television had arrived, and Brownsville was emerging, but the Charro still had quite a few good years to go. Nichols once placed an ad to point out the pale comparison of puny 21 inch televisions that were new on the market to the Charro screen's many thousands of inches.[23]

The Charro was like a mini-circus at times. Nichols once booked Berocini, an acrobat who climbed up a tall pole with a little seat on top. When he sat atop of it he would sway the pole from side to side and gradually lean farther from left to right. This death-defying act went on for about a week. Ezell was always looking for new ways to attract people to his theatres, and Nichols was the right man to make the Charro the foremost theatre in the Rio Grande Valley. One of the biggest attractions was the mechanical elephant that traveled from one of Ezell's drive-ins to another.[24]

During a vacation in England one year, Claude Ezell saw a mechanical elephant, and knew at once he had to have one for his drive-ins, so he purchased it. The elephant arrived in Houston several months later, and was placed on a custom trailer built to haul it around to different drive-ins. It had a British-made motor inside that moved the legs of the beast to roll it forward. Kids were given rides toward the exit, and although the elephant moved forward without a hitch each time, it could not turn, so every time it reached the exit it had to be reversed to the starting point for the next eager kids in line. It was a popular attraction that lasted one unforgettable week for those who saw it. Another ride for the kids was a miniature Model-T Ford. It was also used in a Charro Days parade.[25]

Howard Metzger's Star Drive-In was bought by Ezell in 1952. The name of the drive-in was not changed. Metzger had been a regular visitor of the Charro and a friend of Nichols, but the Charro drew many customers away from the Star, and eventually Metzger sold his drive-in to Ezell. Management was taken over by Nichols. In 1954 Ezell and Associates built the Fiesta, which was also managed by Nichols and owned by Dave Young. The Star Drive-in was closed and demolished around this time. Assistant managers Gilbert Borja followed by Albert Gomez helped Nichols with each drive-in.[26] Eddie Abete II and Nichols' father were carpenters on the Fiesta project. Eddie's brother "Chuy," who started as a "soda jerk" (concession counter

clerk) at the Charro, became the main projectionist there.[27] The Fiesta showed Spanish and English movies. The first two movies projected onto its screen were "*Baile Mi Rey*" (1951), starring Adalberto Martínez and "Copper Canyon" (1950), a western with Ray Milland and Hedy Lamar.[28] These were not first-run films, but they managed to attract Spanish- and English-speaking audiences.

Having to concoct ways of packing the theatre came easy for Nichols. He had an old truck that was worse for wear until he came up with an idea to use it. After repairing its rusted fenders, he went to Hunter's Hardware and bought cans of different colors of spray paint to coat the truck fenders, doors, top, hood and every other section a different color. "Charro & Fiesta Drive-In Theatres" was painted on each door, and billboards were propped up each side of the pickup to advertise which movies were playing. The left side of the front-end read "Snack Bar Food and Refreshments" and on the right, "Family Fun at the Drive-In." Al Cisneros let Nichols borrow a large P.A. speaker mounted on the truck to announce the coming attractions. He took the idea one step further. One week, when "Li'l Abner" (1959) was the attraction, Nichols recorded music from the film, and played it over the P.A. system. After a short while, there was no mistaking Nichols in his colorful truck for anything else traveling through the streets of Brownsville.

Once, Nichols found himself on an escapade that took him to different parts of Texas, which he'll never forget. It was around 1953-54 when Ezell saw a photograph of two cute little baby donkeys that appeared on the pages of *Life Magazine*. Ezell, always on the prowl for new ideas, spoke with Nichols, who had also seen the photo, and asked him if he could get some. Nichols, who could deliver on just about every promise he made to Mr. Ezell, was not so sure about making one this time.

He had a flashback to a time shortly after coming to Brownsville. Ezell had been stocking monkeys in cages at his drive-ins for major cities such as Dallas, Austin, and Houston. People could buy peanuts and feed the monkeys, which ran around the cages and made a filthy mess to clean up after. When the threat of unpredictable Texas winter freezes approached, monkeys were relocated to Brownsville under the care of William Abraham King, better known as "Snake King." The aging W.A. King had become a local legend during the early 1900s, when he had began raising snakes and added wild cats, javalinas (wild pigs), monkeys and birds to his menagerie at Snake Village, where the Palm Village Shopping Center is today. King would supply monkeys to Ezell, and cage them for the winter. However, one year he sold the monkeys to a buyer who wanted all of them. He expected to have a fresh supply for Ezell in the spring, but, when Ezell asked for the monkeys, he didn't have any. Nichols was called from the main office and ordered to find the Snake King and compel him to get the monkeys. That was when Nichols

met W.A. King. After Snake King rattled away for a duration to assure Nichols that Ezell would get his monkeys, Nichols told him, "You better get Mr. Ezell his monkeys or he is gonna be on your back and mine, too!" Mr. Ezell never got his monkeys, so when Nichols was asked to find baby *burros* he was faced with another predicament.

Ezell gave Nichols until December to come up with the baby donkeys for their annual convention in Galveston. It took a while, but he finally managed to find the cutest baby *burros* worthy of Ezell's expectations. After loading the baby *burros* onto a little trailer and picking up a friend (Jeff Wolf who managed the Gulf Drive-In in Corpus Christi), the two drove to Galveston. Their dilemma was in keeping the *burros* hidden from everyone staying at the motel while the convention progressed from one function to the next so they took a room at the far end. When they snuck the donkeys into the hotel, Nichols managed to evade the detection of curious motel personnel by holing up in a room or vacant space where they could hide while his friend looked out to make sure the coast was clear. The plan was to unveil the baby *burros* at the end of the banquet. When they did, they were such a spectacle that Ezell insisted on having some at every one of his theatres! Again, Nichols found himself looking for the same guy he had looked for all the way to Reynosa to find and place an order for 100 baby *burros*. The man from Reynosa claimed he could get that many, but it would take some time, because he'd have to travel the interior of Mexico to find them all. When he finally returned with a hundred *burros* not all of them were babies. They had to be quarantined for a period of time, so Nichols got permission from Mr. Cabler, who owned a ranch north of Brownsville on Paredes Line Road, to corral the *burros* on his land. Mr. Ezell wanted two *burros* for each of his drive-ins so Nichols rented a truck that could hold about twenty-five *burros* at a time and went to pick up his buddy Jeff Wolf in Corpus Christi again. This road trip took them to Houston, Beaumont, Port Arthur, Dallas, Fort Worth, Waco, Austin, San Antonio, and elsewhere until the truck was empty. They returned and loaded up the truck again, and traveled another route to various theatres. These *burros* would be the main attraction for kids until some time when they grew too big and would be given away as prizes. Later, Nichols staked a couple at each end of the Charro near a pond and sold a few. They were so popular that he bought more, turning in a little profit for himself. However, soon all he could get were full-grown *burros* that were not worth the trouble of maintaining.

One time, while traveling down Highway 77 with his donkeys, a crisscrossing motorist suddenly crossed the dividing line. Nichols cautiously slowed down and turned the steering wheel because he had a trailer of donkeys he didn't want to spill all over the road, but the other driver haphazardly turned in his direction and forced himself off the road after crossing in front of

Nichols, who had no other choice but to make a hard turn to avoid a collision. Nichols, who was more worried about his donkeys than he was about the other motorist, managed to get back on the road from the embankment. Unfortunately, some *burros* had spilled out of the truck. He exited the truck and saw some little *burros* trapped at the bottom of the embankment but he went to check on the motorist first anyway. When he noticed how drunk the driver was he told him, "The heck with you, I'm going back to my jackasses!" He pulled them up quickly one by one and loaded them back on the truck, which proved to be quite a challenge. Nichols credits Ezell's monkeys, mechanical elephant, and baby *burros* with making his drive-ins the best in Texas.

A man with the surname of McBride, who worked for Ezell, did the mural for the Charro. He also did the Chief in Austin, which had an Indian on a horse. After a few years, Ezell, who began preferring a new scheme to prompt kids into coaxing their parents to pull in to the drive-in, approached Nichols with the suggestion of repainting the fading Charro mural with a large clown's head like Dallas' Chalk Hill Drive-In, but Nichols strongly objected. When the muralist arrived, he agreed the best thing for him to do would be to touch up the mural, and it was repainted to look as good as new.

One night, the cashier gave Nichols some bad news. She told him, "Mr. Nichols, they're stealing from you." He was surprised and asked, "What do you mean 'they're' stealing from me?" Before a ticket booth was built for the Charro, car attendants ("car hops or ticket boys") approached cars to collect fees and carried dimes and nickels for change. Adults were charged 40 cents for admission. The cashier explained that the attendant was selling a single ticket with cars having two or more people in them. The attendant would come for change of fifty cents or a dollar and take a dime or sixty cents back to the customers. Nichols found it difficult to believe her story until another employee told him that the accused attendant attempted to persuade him to get in on the scheme. Nichols thought of putting the accused attendants to the test, so he came up with an idea.

The next weekend, he bought a few rolls of half dollars and used his pocket knife to etch out a tiny "x" on the back of the coin. In the 1950s, the backs of half dollars either had a Statue of Liberty or Liberty Bell. He showed the coins to the cashier and instructed her to drop half dollars with the mark into a separate box if either attendant returned with them, and not to use any other half dollars except the ones that he had marked. She excitedly replied, "Okay! This is going to be fun!" That night cars filled the lot while Nichols sat on the rails near the entrance and watched as two car attendants worked their mischief. The longer he sat on those rails the more change he could hear rattling in the pockets of two of the boys. Nichols told his chief projectionist, Eddie Abete II, what he had observed and that once business slowed down he

intended to summon the two boys to his office, and needed Eddie as a witness. He called to the attendants to say he wanted to talk to them for a minute. "First of all, I want for you two boys to empty your pockets. Just place one pile here and another one there." The boys emptied their pockets full of dimes and half dollars on the table. Eddie just stood wide-eyed looking at the two piles of coins. Then Nichols told them how he had marked the half dollars with "x's" and said, "Now I want to see how many x's are on these half-dollars." "Well, I brought those from home," an attendant lied. Every half dollar Nichols lifted from each pile was marked. The dimes were used for change so the attendants would not have to return to the cashier.

Employees' families were allowed in free, and the boys' parents just happened to be at the Charro that night. Nichols asked the cashier to page their parents to join him and the boys in his office. After Nichols had a talk with the parents, they were embarrassed and apologetic. Even though the offense was serious, Nichols wasn't angry. He felt the boys had learned their lesson and let it go at that. Similar experiences such as this followed while he remained in the business and he came to know all the tricks. Throughout his years, he took pride in giving teenagers a start in the workplace. One kid preferred working the box office instead of attending vehicles so he could do his schoolwork after cars rolled in, which Nichols wholeheartedly approved of. The kid made straight "A's" in school and beyond. Former kids that worked at the drive-in would later pay a visit to thank Nichols for giving them a start at the Charro.

There was a boy who lived nearby and repeatedly hopped the fence to sneak in. Nichols had had enough of the boy. One night Nichols walked him out to the exit, tapped the boy on the shoulder with his flashlight, and warned him, "I'm telling you for the last time. Don't you ever come back in this theatre again!" The boy left without any trouble, but a few nights later Nichols got a call from the boy's father who threatened to sue Nichols for "assaulting" his child and a slew of other charges. Nichols, unsure what to make of the man's ranting and raving, listened without saying a single word. The man suddenly stopped for a second and asked, "Well, are you still there?" "Yes sir, I'm still here" answered Nichols." The man continued, "Well, I'm going to file a complaint against you on Monday! You better be there to answer for yourself!" Nichols showed up at the courthouse and had a talk with Assistant District Attorney Aldolfo Betancourt, and told him about the call. "Well, if he wants to sue you that's his privilege. If the boy has a black-eye or some marks on him, then I can't do anything but charge you with a crime." Nichols also added that the boy had repeatedly been warned to stop sneaking in. As it turned out, the man who made the threats never filed, and that was the end of the story.

During shrimping season, the Charro would get a number of shrimpers

returning from the port who would buy mass quantities of concessions as if they hadn't eaten for eons after returning from a trip out on the Gulf of Mexico. One problem in his business was that people would sometimes leave with speakers still attached to their car doors and yank them off their poles. In other cases, speakers were stolen. Late one night, the concession stand was already closed and Nichols sat in his car watching the movie as he sometimes did before the last show ended. He noticed two boys step out of their car and stand next to a speaker pole. What struck him as peculiar was that the driver had moved the car forward a bit, and, soon after, the two boys quickly ripped the speakers off the pole and jumped into the car. When the car sped off, Nichols was right behind them. He chased them out of the lot and down Boca Chica Blvd., then Paredes Line Road and through several neighborhoods, staying right on their tail until they threw the speakers out of the window. Nichols pulled over to pick up the speakers and called the police. When they arrived they asked, "Got dang Nick, whatcha got?" Nick showed him the numbers of the license plate he had written, and it was traced to the driver who gave the name of his friend who actually stole the speakers.

When Nichols was called to court to see the Justice of the Peace he arrived holding two speakers in his hands. It looked like the perpetrator had been in a cell for a couple of days and after Nichols explained to the judge what had happened, the judge asked the boy, "What did you take those speakers for?" The young man replied, "Well sir, uh… we, we shouldn't have done it, but we use them on our shrimp boats. We hook them up to the radio while we're out on the shrimp boats." The judge then asked, "Mr. Nichols. How much are those speakers worth?" Nichols thought for a second and said, "Well, they're eight dollars and fifty cents a piece." The judge said, "Well, you have to fix those things and put them back on the post. What do you think that will cost you?" Nichols figured about $10.50, but when the judge did the math he blurted out "$50." When the boy told the judge he didn't have $50, the judge guaranteed him that he'd be able to work it out and added a stern warning for the boy to never return to Mr. Nichols' drive-in theatre again, before ordering the bailiff to escort him out of the courtroom.

Nichols left the courthouse, and went back to business. A few weeks later, he drove up to the Charro and the boy was waiting for him on the drive way. He shook Nichols by the hand and said, "Mr. Nichols, I want to apologize for what I did that night." Nichols laughed and said, "You got caught. That's what you did." They recalled the humor of the incident, and the boy continued, "I'll never do anything like that again for the rest of my life! I was sentenced to two weeks, five hours and fifteen minutes in the pokey for what I did." Nichols was shocked. "My God, they gave you that much time?" The boy said, "Yep. None of my friends would bail me out, so I just sat down there all that time." Then he asked, "Can I go back into the movies?" Nichols

didn't have to think about it for a second. "You sure can! Come to think about it, go in there on me." The boy was so grateful that he made a promise to bring a gift of shrimp to Nichols the next time he returned from the Gulf. From then on the Nichols family was supplied with free loads of fresh fish and shrimp every time the young man returned from a shrimping trip out on the Gulf.[29]

Drive-in managers sprayed nightly with a fogging machine prior to each showing. After heavy rains, stagnant retention ponds, ideal pits for mosquitoes to breed, developed. That and a field of high grass and weeds made mosquito population control difficult, but the theatre was opened year round.[30] After the use of DDT was discontinued in the '70s, mosquitoes returned with a vengeance during Brownsville's hot summer months.

In 1961, Nichols was visited by a regional theatre manager and told he would be transferred to Houston with an offer to advance his position. Nichols loved living in Brownsville and didn't want to leave, but accepted the offer. His last day came on the 18th of December. He was transferred to Houston as a manager for seven drive-in theatres in that city. During Nichols' management of the Charro Drive-In, he saw it change ownership from U&E to Ezell and Associates, Lone Star Theatres, and Stanley Warner Theatres thereafter. After leaving Brownsville, corporate ownership of theatres he operated was bought by the Pacific Theatres chain.

In Brownsville, Nichols had begun a family, made many friends, and enjoyed the climate and authentic Mexican dishes such as *cabrito* and Serrano peppers. He will never forget Dave Young senior, whom he considered to be like a second father. Young once told Nichols, "Your'e the damndest gringo I ever saw - you eat those Serrano peppers better than the natives!" He will always remember Dave Jr., Walter Hunter and his son, Paul, of Hunter Hardware and Electric. While he lived in Brownsville, he learned enough Spanish to order food and hire Spanish-speaking employees to help out at the theatres. He stayed in the business for twenty-five more years (the final fourteen with General Cinema until retiring in 1989), and continued seeing real-life situations far more interesting than those of us who sit on the edge of our seats with our eyes fixed on the big screen waiting to see what happens next. The last man to manage the Charro was E. M. Cuellar. Main projectionists were Tony Abete and Eddie II's sons Eddie III, David and Albert. Their mother, Carmen, who was at the opening of the Majestic, had experiences at other Brownsville theatres, and stayed in the business until retiring as manager at the Northpark Cinema 2.[31]

The Charro Drive-in has disappeared, along with the other Brownsville theaters of its type. Today the drive-in era lives on only in the fond memories of the city's older residents, many of whom wish it were still extant.

Library Assistant, The Arnulfo Oliveira Memorial Library

Endnotes

1 "Charro Drive-In Theatre." *The Brownsville Herald*, 23 October 1949 and Star Drive-In ad 3 November 1949.

2 Interview with Marshal Nichols on 4 June 2005.

3 Ads appearing throughout *The Brownsville Herald* 4 November 1949.

4 "Charro Drive-In Theatre." *The Brownsville Herald*, 23 October 1949 and Star Drive-In ad 3 November 1949.

5 Interview with David Abete, projectionist at the Charro on 9 April 2005.

6 "Charro Drive-In Theatre." *The Brownsville Herald*, 23 October 1949 and Star Drive-In ad 3 November 1949 PAGE and interview with e-mail from Edward Abete III.

7 Ad announcing the grand opening of the Charro-Drive-In, Brownsville Herald 4 November 1949, p. 9.

8 Interview with Marshal Nichols on 4 June 2005.

9 Interview with Edward Abete III.

10 Interview with Marshal Nichols on 15 July 2005.

11 Interview with E.M. Cuellar (who worked as a "ticket boy," assistant manager and manager from September 1964 to closing of Charro in July 1979) on 21 March 2005.

12 Interview with Marshall Nichols 15 July 2005 and E.M. Cuellar 6 August 2005.

13 Unpublished manuscript for *Brownsville Sneak Peeks, Snack Bars, Theatres and Drive-Ins* by author.

14 Interview with Marshal Nichols on 4 June 2005.

15 *Ibid.*

16 *Ibid.*

17 *Ibid.*

18 *Ibid.*

19 *Ibid.* Homer Nichols and Eddie Abete II also worked as carpenters on this project.

20 *Ibid.*

21 *Ibid.*

22 Interview with and photograph loaned by Marshall Nichols.

23 Interview and photograph loaned by Marshal Nichols on 15 July 2005.

24 Interview with Marshal Nichols on 15 July 2005.

25 *Ibid.*

26 *Ibid.*.

27 Interview with David and Edward Abete III 19 July 2005.

28 Interview with Jesus Abete on 11 August 2005.

29 Interview with Marshal Nichols on 4 June 2005.

30 Interview with Marshall Nichols 15 July 2005 and E.M. Cuellar 6 August 2005.

31 Interview with Marshal Nichols on 15 July 2005.

A *Mémoire* of the Brownsville *Alliance Française*

by

Milo and Vivian Kearney

Brownsville's tendency to harbor and nourish offbeat groups is one of its most endearing features. These unconventional eddies help to give Brownsville its distinctive flavor. One such group of the past two decades has been the Brownsville French circle. As a slice of Brownsville life at the turn of the twenty-first century, this vignette of a group's *joie de vivre* is worthy of recording.

The *Fleur de Lys* French Club was established in 1987 by the brainstorm of the efforts of Barbara Hartstock (a retired French teacher from Cleveland). Barbara rallied the support of Mady (Marie Madeleine) Eydt Scott (an emigrée from Luxembourg and Montréal who served as President[1]), Vivian Kearney (a Brownsville French teacher and TSC adjunct in French raised in Paris and Montreal), and Vivian's husband Dr. Milo Kearney (a Professor of history at UT-B).[2] The club was inspired by the first *Edelweiss* German Club, a UTB/TSC endeavor of Dr. Peter Gawenda that lasted from 1986 to 1989, which had shown how much fun such a European cultural club could be.[3] The *Fleur de Lys* sponsored such events as a puppet show of Rutebeuf's play "Théophile" by Vivian Kearney's Hanna High School French students, a lecture on Luxembourg history by Mady Scott, a picture lecture on French Gothic cathedrals by Milo Kearney, wine-and cheese-tasting parties, and *quatorze de juillet* (Bastille Day) picnics.[4]

The *Fleur de Lys* was discontinued in the 1990s, to be replaced by a local *Vallée du Rio Grande* Chapter of the international *Alliance Française*, certified by the French Consulate in Houston.[5] Kay Ellen Greenwood, a Harlingen High School French teacher, had studied under Claude Boutin at the *Alliance Française* in Houston. Monsieur Boutin gave her name to Gerard Saunier, the Cultural Attaché at the French Consulate in Houston, and Monsieur Saunier contacted her in connection with the possibility of organizing an *Alliance* in the Rio Grande Valley. The founding meeting was held in 1995 with eleven members present: Kay Greenwood, Barbara Hartstock (the driving force behind the organization and its secretary until her death in 2002), Lorraine Walsh (the first treasurer, whose lawyer son graciously provided free of cost the legal work needed for certification as a non-profit corporation by the State of Texas), Jean ("Jeanne") Schmelling (a Brownsville French teacher), Dr. Mary Ricciardi (a French teacher at Harlingen's Marine Military Academy), Terry Stinson (the first president, an exuberant Porter High School French teacher), Louise Gregg (a hospital chaplain), Carmelo García (hailing from Barcelona and the former host of Matamoros' *Alto Voltaje* radio talk show),

Ed Aguilar (a Professor of French at Texas Southmost College), and Vivian and Milo Kearney.

In 2005, George García was president; Helen (Hélène) Sovkoplas secretary; Luis Foncerrada record-keeper (with albums of pictures and newpaper items accumulated through the years); Jim ("Jacques") Breidenbach treasurer; and Milo Kearney sponsor of the UTB/TSC student branch of the *Alliance*. Mario Muñoz, who occasionally attended, announced the meetings on KMBH-FM National Public Radio. The monthly meetings were held most frequently in South Building on the UTB/TSC campus. Members joined in giving lectures, such as one on the French contribution to the development of the early automobile by Eduardo Valverde (Harlingen owner of an antique car collection). Members David and Carol Butler, missionaries, spoke on their many years of experience in different countries of former French Africa. Since this was the only chapter of the *Alliance* in the Rio Grande Valley, it also held some meetings up-Valley. Visits were made to McAllen and to Edinburg to take part in activities of the McAllen French Club. The November meetings traditionally were held as a part of the medieval fair held at the South Texas Historical Museum in Edinburg, and various get-togethers were also held at the Marine Military Academy in Harlingen and on South Padre Island. A wine tasting party was held at the Greenwood's home in Harlingen. Summer swimming pool get-togethers were held at the Los Fresnos ranch of Keefe and Marsha Blasingame. The group on occasion also got together to movie houses showing French films and films on French culture such as one about the French saint Thérèse de Lisieux.

Visiting lecturers included UT-Pan American's Dr. Stella Béhar (with a talk on French North African literature), and UTB's Dr. Mimosa Stephenson (speaking on "La Princesse de Cleves and Madame Bovary"), Dr. Bill Adams (on Napoleon at Austerlitz), and Dr. Helmut Langerbein (on "the Dreifus Affair").[6] In 1998, a former soldier from the French Foreign Legion spoke about the Foreign Legion at the Marine Military Academy in Harlingen. For years, in the spring, the *Alliance* also sponsored, hosted, assisted, and judged the annual Rio Grande Valley French Competition for the Valley high school French classes at the Marine Military Academy.[7] Categories judged included *pétanque* (French bowling), vocal and instrumental music, paintings, pencil sketches, posterdrawings, and three-dimensional art, interaction in French at three levels, three levels of recitation, French cuisine, skits, the national French exam, and a culture competition. A French lunch was provided in the Academy's cafeteria. In 1999, the club gave a reception for the French guitarist Judicaël Perroy after his performance at UTB's SETB auditorium.[8]

The *Alliance* celebrated French holidays, including the *Fête de Noel* (Christmas), the *Fête des Rois* (Three King's Day), and the *Quatorze Juillet* (Bastile Day) with French food and song.[9] The *Fête de Noel* traditionally

was held in the fellowship hall of the Episcopal Church of the Advent, and the *Fête des Rois* at the Casa Carlota Petrina (provided compliments of *Alliance* member Tony Petrina, artist, writer, and home renovator from New York, France, and Italy, and of his famous artist mother).[10] Meetings featured lectures, slide shows, French films (with English subtitles), wine-tastings, *Fêtes du Chocolat*, swimming parties, and songfests. In 1998, the club donated $200 of books in French and about French culture to the UTB library, and other donations followed.

The student branch of the *Alliance* gave two costumed historical presentations a year (at the November Medieval Fair held at the South Texas Museum of History in Edinburg, Texas, and on campus).[11] Themes ranged from "the Gallic Wars" through "the Dark Age Barbarians,"[12] "The Wars of the Roses,"[13] "The Spider Kings of the Late Middle Ages," "Catherine de Medici and her Brood," "Madame de Pompadour and her Friends,"[14] and "the Leaders of the Third Crusade"[15] to "the Caesars and their Women."[16] In 1997, Lea Salazar (now Mrs. Jesse Saldívar) fought a duel in costume with another student. Tony Pineda put in several memorable performances, including as the villainous Richard III (when his hump kept falling down his back -- the hump that became a rump -- and had to be readjusted by the other players) and as a foppish, cosmetic-smeared Caligula (with a toga that kept sliding off his drunken arm, a wreath placed at a rakish angle, and a hobbyhorse pet representing the steed that Caligula had made a Roman senator). Mac Franklin as the glutton Edward IV kept biting voraciously into a paper maché leg of mutton. One year, a group of students from Vivian Kearney's UTB French class regaled the audience with a costumed presentation of vocal and instrumental medieval music.

The *Table Française*, another initiative of Barbara Hartstock,was an associated activity sponsored by the *Alliance Française*. While the Alliance held monthly meetings (except for the summer months) in English for anyone interested in French culture and history, the Table was strictly for practicing and improving speaking in French. For many years, it was held every week at a reserved table at Luby's Cafeteria at Sunrise Mall in Brownsville at 1:00 PM. A sign reading *Alliance Française* set up on the table announced the location. The *Table* provided ongoing practice in French for such local French teachers as Harris and Kathy Lasseigne (Harris is a Louisiana Cajun shrimper and a French teacher at Porter High School, while Kathy teaches French at Pace), Marie Elisabeth Holman, and Esther Olson, and occasionally for students as well. Anyone was welcome to buy something to eat or drink and then join the table with the sign marked "Alliance Française." The only rule was that every word had to be in French.

Also associated with the *Alliance* was the revived *Edelweiss* German Club, an adjunct university club working with the *Alliance*, aimed at people with a

German interest. While the main attention was given to French culture and history, occasional focus was directed at German history and culture to boot. Giesela Gielisch, a *Berlinerin*, was one enthusiastic member. Other enthusiastic practicioners of German (with various levels of proficiency) included Barbara Hartstock, Mady Scott, George García, Joe di Grazia, and the Kearneys. For several years, when there was enough interest at the *Table* Saturday meetings, those wanting to practice speaking German would adjourn to a separate table and eat their meals while conversing in that language instead.[17]

Alliance participants also took trips together. Terry Stinson and Milo Kearney both led groups to France in 1995, and Kearney led another tour to France (as well as to many other countries from Russia to England) in 1998. Other vacations with *Alliance* members got carried away to non-French countries from Italy to India, China, and Japan. There was a day trip to visit the historic 1899 Laborde House (built as the home of François Laborde and now a hotel) in Rio Grande City. One overnight trip (in Luis Foncerrada's van) was to the Alsatian colony of Castroville, west of San Antonio, for Alsatian food, worship at the Church of Saint Louis, and the festivities of the annual Alsatian festival.

A few of the most involved of the many members through the years might be remembered in cameo sketches. First and foremost was Barbara Hartstock, along with her supportive husband Bob. A retired French and German teacher from Cleveland, Ohio, and a great lady, Barbara, down to her death in 2002, was a never-ending source of leadership, energy, and inventiveness. She spoke of the club with an aristocratic air that made membership in the *Alliance Française de la Vallée du Rio Grande* sound like acceptance into the *Académie Française.* Barbara exuded an aura of great authority, and when she gave a direction, friends, acquaintances, and strangers all obeyed without protest. The result was always enjoyable. She had a passion for singing, and at one point on a shared vacation on the Vierwaldsee in Switzerland, she had a whole boatload of German tourists heartily singing "*Eine Seefahrt, die ist Lustig*" ("A Boat Trip is Fun"). Everyone remembers the high standards Barbarbara Hartstock set for the group, and misses her presence.[18]

Mady Eydt Scott, born in Luxembourg and raised in part in Québec, added sparkle to the group with her bubbly personality. One Charro Days, she enchanted the crowds on Elizabeth Street by periodically bursting out of a German cookoo clock on a German float (for the Edelweiss German Club then still sponsored by Dr. Peter Gawenda) giving a loud "cookoo" cry with outstretched "wings." George García, long the *Alliance* President, and his wife Mary García, both librarians with B.I.S.D., have provided a mood of relaxed merriment that has put new visitors immediately at ease. Trained in French in Provence and in German in Munich, George has been ideally suited to jump back and forth in his presentations between the three languages (as

well as Spanish), as he presided over the combined *Alliance* and *Edelweiss* meetings.

Jacques (Jim) Breidenbach, the *Alliance* Treasurer and a teacher of French and Spanish at Pace High School, contributed a well-informed point of view with a soft-spoken voice. Jacques was also a superb saxophonist who played for the *Alliance*'s musical get-togethers (as well as for a spin-off group of regular Friday night jammers). Jacques also addressed the group on the subject of Claude Debussy. Jane Harding, a retired French and music teacher, often provided the piano accompaniment for the group's musical evenings. Joe di Grazia, a teacher at both Canales Elementary School and the UT-B Language Institute, beside bringing knowledge of several languages, a fine singing voice, and notable acting talent, contributed a lecture on Dada. Luís Foncerrada, an artist retired to Brownsville from Mexico and a past president of the Brownsville Museum of Fine Art, where he taught sketching, gave lectures many years on various French artists (including Toulouse Lautrec, *Art Nouveau*, Gustave Doré, Cézanne, Matisse, and Monet). Luís recalled how he came to be involved with the *Alliance* in these words:

> In the center of Sunrise Mall, I don't remember how many years ago, I found a man sitting on one of the benches reading a paper. I used to sit on those benches to look at the people passing by, at the un-matching couples, the pretty girls, and the incredible amount of different shapes of human beings. Then I realized that the newspaper the man was reading was written in French, and since I had always been interested in France and the French language, I asked him if it were a French paper, and he answered by inviting me to join the *Alliance* and the weekly meetings of the French Table.[19]

Rit Tourigny, a New Englander of French extraction brought to Brownsville by employment in a maquiladora, and subsequently the site materials manager at Valley Baptist Health Systems in Brownville, lent a gift for gab and a sense of fun to the club. In a sense, Rit took over the slot of humorist vacated by Hugh ("Hugues") Caddess, a wry wit and an ex-surveyor who had once worked in the French Sahara, after Hugh moved to San Antonio. Hugh had hosted many an evening of French film viewing in his home. He subsequently regularly sent *Alliance* members jokes by e-mail. Rit also took over the slot of Tom Lafleur (Library Director at UTB before moving to Laredo) as representative of the New England French contingent.

The long-standing club secretary was Hélène (Ellen) Sovkoplas, co-owner with her husband of the Motel Citrus on Central Avenue as well as a French teacher at Villa María Catholic School. Raised in Nigeria and French Switzerland, Hélène was a multi-lingual and multi-cultural wonder, with remembered anecdotes from many cultures around the world. Her conversation was one of the main drawing points of the weekly French Table. Her son Carl

contributed to the *Alliance* participation in the medieval fairs held in Edinburg each November by dressing in a kilt and playing Scottish songs on his bagpipe. Dr. Mary Ricciardi, French teacher at Harlingen's Marine Military Academy, repeatedly played hostess to the *Alliance* for meetings and presentations in the auditorium and other rooms on her campus. She also involved *Alliance* members as judges in the annual Valley-wide contest of high school French students. Dr. Ricciardi also spoke to the club on Vichy France.

Another core *Alliance* member was Jean (Jeanne) Schmelling, a French teacher at Hanna High School. Jeanne delighted the club with her highly dramatic readings of poems by Jacques Prévert and other French writers. Ed Valdez also enlivened the group's conversations. Vivian Kearney for her part gave presentations on Blaise Pascal and on France's Catholic Revival Movement (as her husband did on such subjects as the architectural history of medieval castles and medieval cathedrals, the French and English competition in colonial America, and the disastrous impact on twelfth century governments of ladies shaped by the Chivalric Love Movement).[20] For three years, Suzanne LaLonde, then a French teacher at UTB/TSC, acted as co-sponsor of the student group.[21] Dr. John Rogans, an English-born ex-engineer and retired physician, has most recently added to the group's international flavor. Mary Elizabeth Holmann and Noe Hernández have also been regularly attending additions of the past year.

Non-student and UTB/TSC student members together formed the bulk of actors, singers, and instrumentalists for another spin-off activity in 2005, two productions of Milo Kearney's musical play "Red Beard of the Rio Grande," one at the Kenedy Ranch Museum in Sarita and the other at the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center in San Antonio. (The Bravo Opera Company of the UTB music department had staged the first production the year before.) Everyone did a wonderful job, of which a few of the *Alliance* members might be mentioned as examples. Mr. and Mrs. Ted and Carol du Bois (Brownsville real estate agents, both descended from French Huguenot stock resettled in the eighteenth century to New York) and Tracy Luikhart lent their voices and hilarious acting skills. Marie Els (a French-Canadian former singer with the Montreal Opera and a French teacher at Valley Christian Academy) contributed her sweet professionally trained voice. Jane Harding and Kathleen Anzak played keyboard, and Jacques Breidenbach saxophone. Joe di Grazia took the part of Rip Ford with a strong Texas twang. Of the student *Alliance* group, Justin Lawrence played guitar, Tony Pineda portrayed the title role, James Zavaleta played the German-born Adolphus Glaevecke with a heavy German accent, Emily Vásquez was the excitable Mrs. Glaevecke, and Ric Zamorano, Marco de León, and Joel Chirinos made the audiences laugh with their portrayals of jovial, inebriated cowhands.[22]

In short, Alliance members are an eccentric little group of friends who

shared a passion for French culture and an enjoyment of the funny occurrences that come their way. For example, there was the time a drunk wandered into one of the *Fête des rois* celebrations and kept screaming at the piano player (who was the liveliest imaginable of that breed) to "pep it up." Another time, there was an unfortunate confusion over which room on the UT-B campus was to be used. A crowd stuffed into one room wondered why the speaker never showed up, while in another room down the hall the speaker, addressing two or three listeners, wondered why an audience failed to appear.[23]

One custom observed many Aprils was the *Fêtes du Chocolat* (Chocolate Festivals), one year held in Jeckel Hall of the Marine Military Academy auditorium together with an evening of ballet and belly dance presented by the Valley Christian Dance Group. There were all sorts of chocolate candies, chocolate with milk, chocolate with water, chocolate cakes, and in short, chocolate everywhere.[24] The *Fêtes du Chocolat* are part of the French celebrations for 1 April. The equivalent of our April Fools Day in France is called the *Poisson d'Avril* (April Fish). One of the customs is to stick a cut-out figure of a fish on somebody's back so that he or she will walk around with it without knowing it, making him or her the equivalent of our April Fool. Doing this without being detected never proved to be feasible at our *Alliance* meetings somehow.

Our French might not always have been *de rigueur*, but we never experienced a *moment ennuyeux*.

The University of Texas at Brownsville

Endnotes

1 Recollection of Madeleine ("Mady") Scott, *Fleur de Lys* President.

2 Milo and Sean Kearney, "A Historical Sketch of Brownsville's Franco-Americans," in Milo Kearney (Ed.), *Still More Studies in Brownsville History* (Brownsville: The University of Texas at Brownsville, 1991), pp. 85-102.

3 Milo and Sean Kearney, "A Historical Sketch of Brownsville's German-Americans," in Milo Kearney (Ed.), *Still More Studies in Brownsville History* (Brownsville: The University of Texas at Brownsville, 1991), pp. 103-127.

4 Milo and Sean Kearney, "A Historical Sketch of Brownsville's Franco Americans," in Milo Kearney (Ed.), *Still More Studies in Brownsville History* (Brownsville: The University of Texas at Brownsville, 1991), pp. 85-102.

5 Sergio Chapa, "A piece of Europe: Group meets to speak French, study country's culture," *The Valley Morning Star*, Harlingen, 16 May 2004, p. A2.

6 "Club Spotlight," *The Collegian*, UTB/TSC, 2 February 2004, p. 2.

7 *Newsletter of the Alliance Française de la Vallée du Rio Grande*, Vol. 2, No. 2, Avril de 1998.

8 *Patron of the Arts proudly presents the renowned French guitarist Judicaël Perroy*, UTB/TSC announcment, February 1999.

9 Recollection of Helen (Hélène) Sovkoplas, *Alliance* Secretary.

10 "Pintora Carlota Petrina", in *El Bravo*, H. Matamoros, Tamaulipas, Mexico, 3 de Mayo de 1995, p. 2-F.

11 "Club Spotlight," *The Collegian*, UTB/TSC, 19 November 2001, p. 6.

12 Helen Craules, "Students to portray barbarians at Medieval Fair," *The Collegian*, 11 November 2002, p. 16.

13 Abraham Figueroa, "Students to portray key figures in the War of the Roses," *The Collegian*, 15 November 2004, p. 14.

14 Analiz Gonzalez, "Presentation features students as French revolutionaries," *The Collegian*, 17 March 2003, p. 11.

15 Priscilla García, "Students to play leaders of Third Crusade," *The Collegian*, 17 November 2003, p. 10.

16 Priscilla García, "Students to portray dynasty of Caesars," *The Collegian*, 1 March 2004, p. 7.

17 "Club Spotlight," *The Collegian*, UTB/TSC, 23 October 2000.

18 An observation especially of George García, Joe di Grazia, Luis Foncerrada, Hélène Sovkoplas, Jean Schmelling, Jane Harding, Mady Scott, and Vivian and Milo Kearney.

19 Recollection of Luís ("Louis") Foncerrada.

20 *The Brownsville Herald*, 16 February 1995, p. 2A; "Lecture," *The Collegian*, 4 May 1995, p. 2.

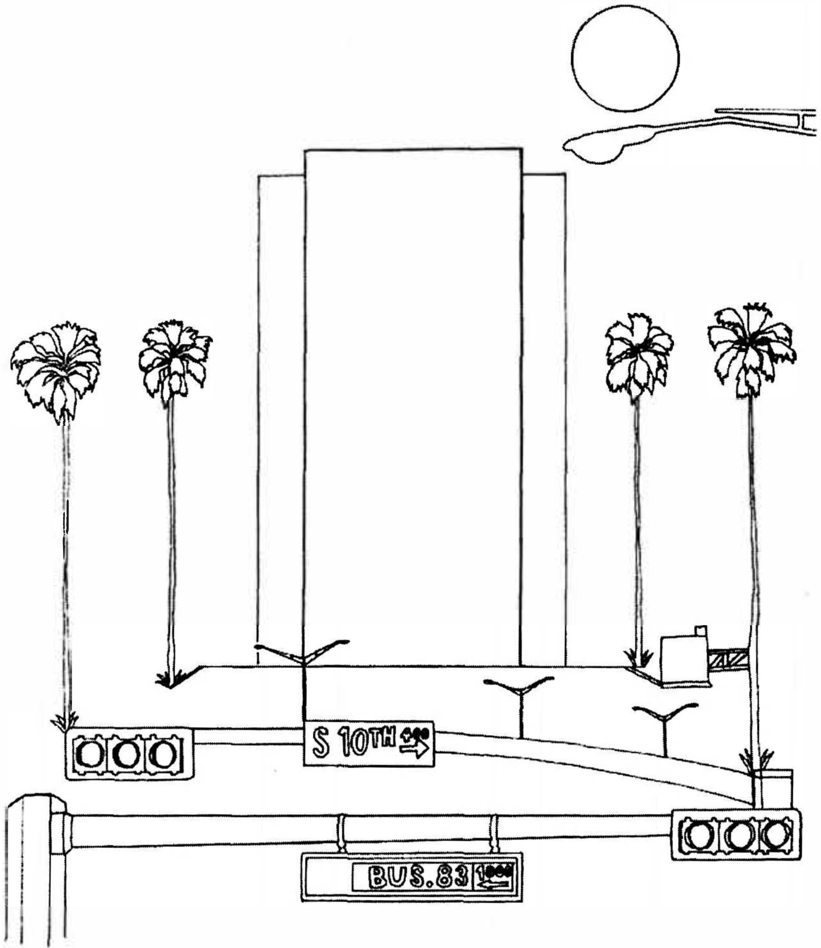
21 "Club Spotlight," *The Collegian*, UTB/TSC, 24 September 1999, p. 5.

22 Jim McKone, "Best things are free at Sarita's museum Saturday," *The Monitor*, McAllen, Texas, 6 May 2005, p. 16F; "Kenedy Ranch Museum to present Historical Perspective Saturday," *The Kingsville Record*, Kingsville, Texas, 4 May 2005, p. 3A; "Red Beard presentation," *The Collegian*, UTB/TSC, 25 April 2005, p. 14; and Elda Silva, "Festival starts at the grass roots: The bill at Guadalupe's TeatroFEST includes solo acts and the story of a folk hero," *San Antonio Express News*, San Antonio, Texas, 22 June 2005.

23 Recollection of Hugh ("Hugues") Caddess.

The Ghost of Barbara Hartstock presiding over some of the Alliance Members gathered at one Table Française in August of 2005 (Top row: Joe di Grazia, Marie Els, Rit Tourigny, Luís Foncerrada; 2nd: Hélène Sovkoplas, George García, Jacques Breidenbach, Jane Harding; 3rd: Milo Kearney, Vivian Kearney, and Jean Schmelling)

Biographies



The Spirit of McAllen

Tombside Tales
by
Chula T. Griffin

Cemeteries are for the living, a trust between the past and the present. They are libraries of cultural history whose records are very fragile, but if studied, reveal many interesting facets of local history. Our old city cemetery is a treasure of stories just waiting to be researched. Here are two I hope you will find interesting:

A Love Scandal That Climaxed in a Duel

This story from the grave is about an historic love scandal that culminated in a fatal duel and has continued to titillate the imaginations of Brownsville and Matamoros citizens for over 125 years. Just mention the word "duel" to any of the Brownsville "old timers" and they will most likely respond with the question "Who do you think she was?" With the death of all the principals and the passage of time, the identity of the *femme fatal* who caused the "affair of honor" to be fought has been lost to all but a few who have passed the story down within their family. Of course, even at the time, "her name" was only whispered and has never been found in print, for in the genteel days of the late 1800's a lady was treated with great respect, and her name would never be committed to public print.

When the citizenry of Brownsville and Matamoros awoke on February 6, 1878, they were in for the shocking news that at dusk, the evening before, two prominent citizens who had called each other friend had fought a duel to the death in Matamoros. Gossip and speculation was the order of the day for weeks and years to come. A most scandalous affair of the heart, involving a beautiful but flirtatious wife of a Fort Brown Army officer, a dashing Creole attorney, and a Mexican General, erupted into a violent end causing a hasty grave to be prepared at Lot 2 Block 4 in the City Cemetery.

The grave was for Nestor Maxan, a Creole from New Orleans who had come to Brownsville to join in a law partnership with Stephen Powers. A veteran of the U.S. Army, Powers had come to this area with Zachary Taylor and had stayed in Brownsville after the Mexican-American War ended. Powers became the most prestigious attorney in the Valley representing Richard King and others in their quest for cleared land titles. With the politically powerful Powers, young Maxan's future looked bright. His talents included music, and he played in an orchestra, which had as its pianist the wife of a Fort Brown Army officer.

Another member of the orchestra was a well-respected Mexican Army officer, who had fought with Maximilian and now lived with his family in

Brownsville, General Miguel de la Peña. Both the young lawyer and the General became enamored of the Army officer's wife, according to the many references and eyewitness accounts about the affair. The lady, it appears, encouraged the attention of both men. Tempers flared as passions rose. On the advice of mutual friends, the young lawyer and the General agreed as "gentlemen" to cease their attentions to the pianist. Some accounts say they shook hands on it. They would never see her alone again.

From an aged copy of a March 3, 1878, edition of the now defunct *Brownsville Democrat* newspaper, in which de la Peña had attempted to defend himself against public criticism after the duel, de la Peña denied that such an agreement was ever reached. The following details come from the memory of our dear friend, the late historian Joe Vivier, whose family owned the old Opera House.[1] We all remember Joe as the personification of a gentleman, and Joe (as a gentleman would do), while knowing the name of the lady involved, took her name to the grave with him, never even telling Bessie Earl, his wife. He did confirm that the *affaire d'honneur* was over the beautiful wife of an army officer stationed at the Fort and that de la Peña first came to Maxan's house and named him his rival for the attentions of the lady.

Quoting Joe, "One Sunday afternoon (after the supposed agreement), the General saw Maxan, in company with others (including the pianist), strolling on Elizabeth Street. De la Peña became incensed once again and in a fury went to the home of Maxan, on the west corner of 7th and Washington Streets, making accusations. Maxan cautioned de la Peña to lower his voice, that his family was at home, and demanded the discussion continue elsewhere. They met to continue the discussion on 7th Street under the Convent Bridge. As one party offended the other, the public retraction the other wanted was refused, which left them both to 'stoically resolve to do the duty incumbent on us.'

To avoid bloodshed, de la Peña, who was a much better shot than Maxan, proposed that arbitrators be selected to settle the dispute, perhaps Maxan's own partner, Judge Powers." The dispute was apparently so simple as to be rooted in inferences or accusations made by Maxan about de la Peña and the mystery woman. When asked to settle the disagreement, Maxan became so frightened and alarmed at the proposition that, stretching forth his arms in a most excited manner, he exclaimed: 'Kill me. Rather kill me.'" Before the duel, de la Peña was concerned about the reputation of the lady involved, for in a letter to Dr. Combe he wrote, "I cannot divulge, never will I dishonor myself by divulging, not even to those who assist me in this matter, the truth about this affair in which the good name of a woman is involved." Those who knew the identity of the mystery woman apparently took it to their grave, an indication her family may still live in the community.

So a duel was arranged. Seconds were chosen: Dr. Combe and Elijah ("Lisha") J. Kenedy, younger brother of Mifflin Kenedy, served de la Peña;

Captain William Kelly, and Dr. Wolfe served Maxan. Because of Texas' anti-dueling laws, the two men agreed to fight with pistols in Matamoros, at Puertas Verdes, 1600 yards from the Customs checkpoint, near a scattering of *jacales*. From the several very detailed accounts penned by those present at the duel, we can envision the February evening. In General de la Peña's own words:

> Maxam, Kelly, and Wolfe were already there and Mr. Kelly called attention to our slight delay. Captain Kenedy arrived alone in one carriage, and Dr. Combe and I were together in another carriage. We were mild and moderate before the combat, on the ground we could only be firm and resolved. There was quite a fresh wind blowing at the time...it was at the back of my adversary and full in my face. The seconds each tossed coins to determine where his principal was to stand and who was to call the signal for firing. Captain Kenedy won the former decision and Dr. Combe the latter. Maxan showed himself to be brave and dexterous. He took the usual position and I did the same. We presented our right side to each other and we drew ourselves up and settled ourselves perfectly in our respective places. Maxan's first shot passed near me.

A newspaper article relates that, after Maxan's first shot, the General fired his pistol into the air and said, "My honor has been satisfied." But Maxan was humiliated and further outraged. "I have come here to fight to the death" he declared. "I seek no mercy from the likes of you." General de la Peña relates:

> At the second shot I was grazed by my adversary's ball, but I did not move, nor let it be suspected, until after the fall of Maxan, when I told Dr. Combe and he took off my coat to examine me. His (Maxan's) second shot would have broken my backbone had the distance been closer...The moment of the third shot...according to my knowledge and belief...happened as follows: To the usual proposition transmitted to me from Mr. Kelly, that both of the principals had proved ourselves gentlemen, I answered, somewhat exasperated, that being a gentleman, I did not need to give such proof, and that I had not come to the grounds with any such object. I hope this proves that I was not bloodthirsty...it only proves that Mr. Maxan and I were stoically resolved to do our duty. Maxan was restless and nervous. He left his place, walking back and forth along a fence. We again presented ourselves and settled ourselves perfectly. We fired our third shots. I kept in my place and from it I did not move until the carriage with the remains had passed and we had saluted it by taking off our hats.

The General's third shot mortally wounded Maxan in the chest. Dr. Wolfe asked Dr. Combe to examine the victim. Dr. Combe said after the examination, "You have a dead principal here." De la Peña's letter continues,

"At this instant the sun was setting in the West. Captain Kenedy started out ahead of the carriage containing the remains, to look for some proper place to leave them."

Joe Vivier explained that "Mr. Maxan was taken to a building in Matamoros owned by H.E. Woodhouse and placed on a bed of a Mr. Harris. He was officially declared dead at 5:45 that evening. The body was brought to Brownsville where it lay in state at the family home." Milo Kearney and Anthony Knopp relate the local folklore account in their book *Boom and Bust*: "The survivors brought the corpse across the river on the ferry, sticking a cigar in Maxan's mouth and pretending that he was drunk. They left the corpse propped up on Maxan's porch. It was eventually taken to Father Parisot at the Immaculate Conception Church for burial."[2]

Accusations and denials, gossip and truths, anger and betrayal were but some of the emotions that ripped the twin cities after the duel. Friendships were strained since both men were popular in both towns. De la Peña, in a letter to Dr. Combe, admitted shame and fear to show his face in Brownsville, which was his home and the birthplace of most of his children. He blamed his and Maxan's inability to back out of the duel on "pride" and said, "I mourn and will continue to mourn my friend. I deplore more our mutual blindness. As weak but honorable men, we may be exonerated, but as Christians, never."

An interesting side light of the duel is the opportunity Maxan's death provided another young lawyer. The 28-year old James B. Wells of Corpus Christi joined Stephen Powers and succeeded him as the Brownsville attorney for the King Ranch. Wells also became the political boss of South Texas and is one of the best known persons in South Texas History. The Sexton Records of Burials at the Brownsville City Cemetery reveal that eventually all of the witnesses of the duel were buried at the Cemetery...possibly even the temptress, whose name has been taken to the grave by those who once knew her. The exciting lives these men lived, in the early days of Brownsville, offer us still more tales from the Grave.[3]

Why are Pancho Villa's Soldiers Buried in Brownsville?

Six startling entries appear in the 1915 Sexton Records of Burials at the Brownsville City Cemetery:[4]

> Adelaido Ávila - 39 years, died 3 April 1915, of gunshot wound in the left leg...VILLISTA.
> 2nd Lt. Alfonso Colón - 37 years, died 6 April 1915, wound under right arm...VILLISTA.
> Bernardo Marquez - died 30 March 1915, wound in abdomen... VILLISTA.
> Pvt. Dionisis Ornales - died -28 March 1915, intestinal wound. 3rd Reg 2nd brigade...VILLISTA.
> Pvt. Juan Peraly - 19 years, died 9 April 1915, gunshot wound...

VILLISTA.
Manuel Escovedo Vely - died 17 April 1915, head wound...
VILLISTA.

When and why these soldiers of Pancho Villa came to be buried in a Brownsville cemetery is a story with roots in the bloody Mexican Civil War.

This war was a struggle that began in 1910 over who was to succeed the aging President Porfirio Díaz. By 1915, rumors of German spies, *bandit raids* on this side of the Rio Grande, and the infamous *Plan de San Diego* already had Valley citizens on the verge of panic. On the morning of March 27, 1915, residents of Brownsville heard the clatter of machine guns and small arms fire. People lined the riverbank, businessmen perched on rooftops (especially the Grammar School Clock Tower) and young boys clambered high into trees to watch the battle raging just yards away in Matamoros. Bullets whizzed past like bees...several onlookers were injured. The fierce battle continued for four hours with hundreds of soldiers dead and wounded.

After seeing the carnage just across the Rio Grande, Brownsville citizens subdued their own fears and launched a massive humanitarian effort to tend the wounded *Villistas*. Officers and soldiers were tended at a makeshift hospital set up at the Mexican Rancho *Las Rucias*, but the massive numbers of wounded simply overwhelmed limited capabilities. Matamoros, in the hands of the *Carranzistas*, refused to assist the wounded *Villistas*. The one thing left to do was to move the wounded across the river where better care could be provided and fresh graves could be dug at the Old Brownsville Cemetery. What brought the bloody battles to Brownsville's doorstep?

From Milo Kearney and Anthony Knopp's book *Boom and Bust* we get the background for the two battles (including an earlier scuffle at Reynosa) in which 150 Villa soldados were killed and 232 wounded. The Siege of Matamoros was a result of a quarrel between Venustiano Carranza and his former subordinate, Pancho Villa. In early March, Villa ordered his generals to move an army of 3,000 men from Monterrey to capture Matamoros. Fleeing ahead of the *Villistas* was the defeated, exhausted, and demoralized Carranzista army, trying to reach the safety of the walled city. Matamoros was under the command of Carranza's General Emiliano P. Nafárrate, a courageous and clever tactician, who was greatly outnumbered by the *Villista* forces. However, his cunning made up for his lack of manpower. The *Villistas*, under General José Rodríguez, were camped at *Rancho Las Rucias* (located outside Matamoros across the Rio Grande River from the end of Palm Boulevard. This *rancho* should not be confused with the community of *Las Rusias* near Los Indios a few miles upriver from Brownsville).

On the morning of March 27,1915, General Rodriguez launched the attack against the stout walls of Matamoros. Soon the *Villistas* found an opening into the city through an unguarded alley and moved into it, not knowing it was a

Nafárrate trap. As the *soldados* poured through the gap, a hidden machine gun ripped their ranks to shreds. The wily general, astride his dapple gray horse *Borracho*, fearlessly led his men in repulsing the attackers, shouting for them to hold firm.

Villista tactics depended on cavalry charges that earned them fame as "Centaurs of the North." Three times the *Villistas* charged within the four hours that straddled High Noon. Some of the bullets shot wildly across the river, hitting Brownsville homes and wounding several people. However, the valient effort was to no avail. With 250 men killed, the *Villistas* lost heart for another direct assault on Matamoros and retreated. Only twelve of Nafárrate's men were killed and ten wounded.

General Nafárrate feared the Americans might interfere and allow the *Villistas* to cross the river and launch another attack on Matamoros from the left bank. He warded off this danger by warning the U.S Consul that he would aim his machine guns at Brownsville if the *Villistas* were allowed to cross. This threat, plus the stray bullets that ripped through Brownsville, did not endear Nafárrate to the people of Brownsville, and probably did much to arouse sympathy for the battered *Villistas*. Not being able to attack from the left bank, General Rodriguez tried to take advantage of a lightning storm to attack the walls at night. In spite of the storm, the few defenders were on their toes and repulsed this attack, also. Both sides sustained great losses.

The power balance shifted on April 10 when a 400-man *Carranzista* contingent arrived and reinforced Matamoros. This narrowed the odds to one in four in favor of the *Villistas*. Nafárrate felt bold enough to sortie against the Villista camp. At dawn on April 13, through rain and mud, he took the sleeping *Villistas* by surprise and chased them down the road that led to Rio Bravo. Enough was enough. Nafárrate was too clever. The *Villistas* remained in camp at *Las Rucias* until they boarded a train for Monterrey on April 17. The three-week siege of Matamoros was over.

However, what was the fate of those wounded *Villistas* who were denied aid in Matamoros? From issues of *The Brownsville Herald* of late March and early April 1915, we find the record of humanitarian efforts made on behalf of the *Villistas*:

> The people of Brownsville responded quickly. Cars were sent to Rancho Las Rucias. Others went to a point on the left bank opposite the ranch to transport the wounded to impromptu hospitals that had been arranged for in Brownsville. The great number of wounded was unexpected. A house on 9th and Fronton was soon filled to capacity and other places had to be secured.
>
> Mr. Manuel Besteiro, owner of a large building at the corner of 10th and Adams (across from the Adams Street Fire Station) offered the use of the second floor as a hospital. The second floor, which formerly

was used as a skating rink, was sufficiently large to hold cots and pallets on the floor for the wounded.

Dr. James L. Rentfro was appointed agent for the American Red Cross. He arranged for all of the wounded to be concentrated in Besteiro's building where they were given medical and surgical attention, as well as being clothed and fed. Nurses were sent for through Red Cross offices in Washington to assist those who had already volunteered their help.

Mr. H.C. Harrison was placed in charge of the administrative work involved in securing supplies needed to establish and maintain the hospital for weeks. He contacted the U.S. Army which provided needed medicines and bedding.

Brownsville responded to the call of local coordinators, Mrs. H.B.S. Randall and Miss Hortense Nixon providing toilet articles, shoes and clothes. As the work of caring for the men increased, the ladies of Brownsville visited the wounded, offered to write letters, cheered them with messages of encouragement, and eased their fears and pain. Father Francis Bagnard of the Immaculate Conception Catholic Church arranged to say a mass at the hospital. Rev. H.L. Ross, a Presbyterian missionary, also held a service for the men, complete with a choir.

Slowly, the men recovered enough for them to be discharged. The U.S. Immigration Service arranged for auto transport across the river to the *Villista* camp at *Las Rucias*. By mid-April the wounded who were able to travel joined the remnants of Villa's army and left *Las Rucias* by train for Monterrey. "Not since the first battles of the Mexican-American War had so many wounded Mexican soldiers been concentrated in an American city," read a story in *The Brownsville Herald.* Those early residents of Brownsville had reached out to their fellow man with great sympathy and courage.

What became of the six who died and remained behind? Many other soldiers had died here and were taken home to Mexico. Were there no families or relatives to mourn or to care? Or were they simply forgotten? We will probably never know. But then again, they might re-emerge for another Tombside Tale.[5]

Endnotes

1 September 24, 1992.

2 Milo Kearney and Anthony Knopp, *Boom and Bust: The Historical Cycles of Matamoros and Brownsville* (Austin, Texas: Eakin Press, 1991), p. 177.

3 My thanks to George Gause, UT/Pan American Special Collections Librarian, for making available to me the Rio Grande Valley Historical Collections of letters written by persons intimately involved in the affair. The letters are held by the Rio

Grande Valley Historical Society. Copies may also be found at the Brownsville Historical Association. And many thanks for news clippings such as "The Valley's Past: Historians Search for Documents" from *The Valley Morning Star*, Harlingen, Texas, February 3, 1983, p. D5, by Greg Fieg.

4 Chula T. and Sam S. Griffin, *Record of Interments in the City Cemetery of Brownsville, Texas*, Brownsville Historical Association, Brownsville, Texas.

5 Chula T. Griffin researched and wrote these cemetery stories for the Cameron County Historical Commission *Newsletter* some years ago. Carmen Zacarías, the former Executive Director of the Brownsville Historical Association, reworked them for this publication.

Culture Pioneers of the Valley Narciso Martínez and Américo Paredes

by

Manuel Medrano

Corridos are often written about heroes. In an age marked by disillusionment, when hero status is accorded to sports celebrities and Hollywood actors, it is important to understand the concept of "hero." A hero is a person who has done something brave or outstanding. In the Rio Grande Valley, Narciso Martínez and Américo Paredes indeed fit the criteria. Although they both became heroes by different paths, Martínez as a musician and Paredes as a folklorist, their mutual respect and their river and Valley roots connected them to each other and to this place that once was and in some ways still is Mexico.

Manuel Peña, author of *The Texas-Mexican Cancionero*, refers to Narciso Martínez as the "father of conjunto music."[1] Oscar Hernández, considered by many as the premiere accordionist in the Valley today, describes Martínez as "a true pioneer."[2] Sabino Salinas, long-time musician and former member of Martínez's *conjunto*, remembers him as "*mi amigo*,"[3] and the late Américo Paredes, prolific scholar and professor emeritus at the University of Texas at Austin, recalled that "Chicho" Martínez was modest, unassuming, and "a very good person, very unaffected by his fame."[4]

Narciso Martínez was born in Reynosa, Tamaulipas, Mexico, on October 29, 1911, to Anastacio and Zenobia Martínez. On December 31 of that year, he was brought to McAllen, the Texas border city across from Reynosa, and he lived in Rio Grande City, a few miles north, until the mid-1920's. As a youth, he worked in the fields of south Texas from Brownsville to Corpus Christi. Martínez was the fifth of eight brothers, and everyone that was old enough worked, but even so, sometimes "there wasn't enough money to buy soap for the women to wash clothes."[5] As Martínez recalled, "*Mi papá fue un hombre muy pobre. Trabajaba para comer, para vivir*" [My father was a poor man. He worked to eat, to live.][6]

It was while working in the fields that Martínez was exposed to music by other field workers who whistled tunes while harvesting crops in the hot south Texas sun and by his older brother, Santos, who played the accordion, the instrument that Martínez would master for the rest of his life.[7] Like many other rural Tejano musicians of that era, he learned to play music by ear (lírico).

In 1926, the family moved to La Paloma, a small town about twenty miles north of Brownsville, Texas. La Paloma would be home for Narciso Martínez for most of his life, but in 1928, he left the Valley to live in the Corpus Christi

area "in tiny settlements like Bishop, Chapman Ranch and Riviera."[8] There he listened to the polka music of Central European immigrants such as the Germans and Poles. These years were also significant for much more personal reasons. He began to play the accordion, and in 1929, he married his lifelong partner, Edvina.[9] There are varying accounts about when he bought his first accordion. One account indicates that he purchased his first new accordion, a one-row button model Hohner in Kingsville, Texas in 1930.[10] Another account indicates that he bought his first new accordion in Brownsville, Texas, in 1935, from Enrique Valentín, a local businessman and record promoter. Martínez recalled that it cost twelve dollars, and that he purchased it on installments.[11]

What is certain is that Valentín saw in both Martínez and Santiago Almeida, his bajo sexto (12 string bass guitar) player, musical talent that would lead to a successful recording career with Bluebird Records. Valentín drove them to San Antonio for a trial session that produced "*La Chicharronera*," a polka. This recording was the first of many popular recordings on the Bluebird label over a five-year period.[12] Nearly all of his recordings were instrumentals and nearly all were produced in San Antonio in multiple recording sessions that, on occasion, produced as many as twenty titles.[13] It was also Valentín who nicknamed Martínez "*El Huracán del Valle*" after the powerful hurricane that had struck the Valley two years earlier in 1933.[14]

Martínez and Américo Paredes met for the first time during the 1930s. Paredes, an accomplished *cancionero* (singer) and musician in his own right, sang on the local radio station and at community functions and festivals in the Brownsville area. In 1938, both performed during the first Charro Days Festival, a four-day celebration recognizing the common history and culture of the two border cities Brownville and Matamoros. Paredes recalled that they became friends and at times would see each other at "the singles dances."[15] Paredes later married local singer and recording artist, Consuelo "Chelo" Silva.

The government rationing of plastic during World War II put Martínez's recording career on hold. After the war, however, he began to record with Discos Ideal, a San Benito, Texas, company owned by Armando Marroquin and Paco Betancourt. Martínez and Almeida helped to launch the company by accompanying the duet of Carmen and Laura on their initial four recordings.[16]

Martínez recorded with various recording companies until his death, but his prolific recording days ended in the 1950's. His popularity as a performer, however, did not. Throughout his life, in addition to working as a manual day laborer and even for a few years as a Brownsville zookeeper, he played at hundreds of public and private gatherings, including "bailes de negocio" (dances for business), quinceañeras and weddings. Of the days before the

conjunto, Martínez recalled:

> *Tocaba el sabado y el domingo de sol a sol, por diez pesos por las dos noches. Tocaba solo. Después empecé un conjunto con acordeón, bass, drums y bajo sexto y fui uno de los primeros de hacer esto in el área.* [I played alone on Saturday and Sunday from sundown to sunrise for ten dollars for the two nights. Later I began a *conjunto* with accordion, bass, drums and a 12 string bass guitar and was one of the first to do so in the area.[17]

This was an era in which *conjunto* musicians made nominal sums for recording and performing while their recording companies made nearly all of the profits. The musicians were paid in lump sums for recording sessions and then usually performed only on weekends when most of their audience did not work. Additionally, "they were considered entertainers who were there to fulfill a social function and never accorded stardom privileges." Good musicians were rewarded by large turnouts at dances and by being asked to perform in the future, not by loud applause or much fanfare.[18]

Narciso Martínez and his *conjunto* were also among the first to tour outside Texas. They performed in the bordering Mexican states of Tamaulipas and Nuevo León, in the American southwestern states of Arizona, New Mexico and California and in the Great Lakes states where some of the Mexican-American population had emigrated during the early 1900's.

When the *conjunto* music he had launched became popular throughout Texas and nationally, Martínez received numerous awards for his musical contributions. In 1982 he was recognized by the Tejano Conjunto Festival of San Antonio as its annual honoree. In 1983 he was the honoree at the First *Norteño* Festival of Austin and the recipient of "*El Coloso*" Award from the Texas Association of Spanish Broadcasters. That same year he received the prestigious National Endowment for the Arts award for lifelong achievement.

On his eightieth birthday, Narciso Martínez performed at the inauguration of the Narciso Martínez Cultural Arts Center in San Benito, Texas, named in his honor. Rogelio Nuñez, co-founder of the center, remembers asking Martínez to play for one hour, but Martínez played for two hours.[19] Approximately one month later I had the privilege of interviewing and videotaping him in his La Paloma home. He reminisced about his personal life and about his musical career. At times Edvina, his wife of over 60 years, sat by his side. Both spoke about their marriage, their children and their grandchildren. He said that since 1982, he had performed yearly at the Guadalupe Music Festival in San Antonio and that people still applauded and still respected him. "*Hasta ahorita me aprecian como si fuere cosa buena*" [Even now they appreciate me as if I were a good thing.][20]

He recalled performing with orchestras in California in San Bernadino and

in Fresno at a dance hall called La Palma and in Oakland, at what he called a luxurious palace with marble floors, for an entire weekend. "*Yo nunca creiá que un hombre pobre como yo tocaría en lugar como ese.*" [I never believed that a poor man like me would ever play in a place like that.][21] He concluded by saying, "*Soy viejo de edad, pero joven de corazón. Estoy seguro que lo que podía hacer con la música hace 25 años, todavía puedo hacerlo.*" [I am old in age, but young at heart. I am sure that what I could do with music 25 years ago I can still do.][22] This was his last formal interview.

Rolando Hinojosa, leading Tejano novelist, acknowledges Américo Paredes as one of the leading corridor scholars in the country, as his friend, and as "*un hombre derecho*" [a righteous man.][23] In that regard, Paredes is very much like his friend "Chicho," a well-respected, much-admired man, ever mindful of his craft, but never forgetful of his origins. In other ways they were different.

Américo Paredes was born on the U.S. side of the Rio Grande in Brownsville, Texas, on September 3, 1915. His ancestors were Sephardic Jews who came to northern México with the Escandón expedition in 1749. His father, Justo Paredes Cisneros, was a rancher in Tamaulipas, and although Paredes was born in the United States, the formal memories about his youth include "...the summers at the rancho in Tamaulipas where he listened to the old people tell their stories... For nine months of the year we were Americans, and for three months we lived like Mexicans."[24] Very early in his life he developed an appreciation for the cuentos and corridos that he felt were not only important to listen to, but important to preserve. While Narciso Martínez was working in the fields of South Texas, Paredes was attending an elementary school in Brownsville. He recalled, "Everybody spoke Spanish even though we were not supposed to...My first grade teacher was Miss Josephine Castañeda [sister of noted Texas historian, Carlos Castañeda.][25] During the first years of the Great Depression, when Martínez was earning some money as a young accordionist, Paredes was attending Brownsville High School. His years there were marked by both frustration and achievement. As a junior he failed his English class because he did not like or understand Walt Whitman, yet he won a statewide poetry contest sponsored by Trinity College for his poem "A Sonnet Tonight."[26]

Shortly before his high school graduation he confided in his English teacher that he wanted to pursue a doctorate in English at the University of Texas at Austin. He remembers his disappointment when she replied, "You have a facility with language. Why don't you try to get a job with the local newspaper?"[27] With no personal funds and no scholarship opportunities available to him, he decided to stay in Brownsville. In the mid-1930's when Martínez began recording for Bluebird Records, Paredes worked for Pan American Airways, drove a delivery truck, wrote for the local newspaper and

sang *corridos* and other songs on the local radio station for what he described "the magnificent sum of a dollar a minute."[28] He also attended Brownsville Junior College and received an Associate of Arts degree in 1936. Periodically, the paths of Paredes and Martínez crossed at local dances and community functions.

During World War II, while Martínez continued to perform at outdoor dance sites including La Villita in San Benito and La Gloria, Las Brisas and El Mesquitón in the Brownsville area, Paredes participated in the war effort by serving in the Criminal Investigation Division in Seattle, Washington. Discharged in 1946, Paredes later worked with the international branch of the American Red Cross and spent time in China and Korea. He then returned to Texas to continue the formal education that he had begun in the 1930's. He received his Bachelors degree in 1951, his Masters degree in 1953, and his Ph.D. in English in 1956. His dissertation, *With His Pistol in His Hand*, was first published in 1958. Envisioned originally as a historical novel, it was published as the historical story of a ballad hero, Gregorio Cortez. Cortez embodied the essence of border ballad heroes like Cheno Cortina and Jacinto Treviño, who were directly affected by what David Montejano describes as "a marked tension between the pursuit of commercial interests and the maintenance of peace" in South Texas beginning with the Texas Revolt in the 1830's and continuing long after the U.S.-Mexican War.[29] It is also "the story of a ballad, 'El Corrido de Gregorio Cortez,' its development out of actual events and of the folk traditions from which it sprung."[30]

Paredes eventually taught English and anthropology at the University of Texas at Austin. He was especially proud of helping to found the Center for Mexican American Studies and the Center for Folklore Studies there. He received national and international acclaim as a folklorist and scholar. In 1990 he was awarded *El Águila Azteca*, the highest award bestowed upon a foreigner by the Mexican government, for his extensive scholarship about Mexican folklore and the *corrido*. In 1984 he retired from teaching and became a Dickson, Allen and Anderson Centennial Professor Emeritus.

Shortly after his retirement Américo Paredes saw Narciso Martínez for the last time. Martínez had been asked to perform in Austin, and Paredes asked him to stay in his home the night before. Martínez arrived tired from the drive from the Valley. They spoke briefly and Martínez retired for the night. The next morning they ate breakfast and chatted briefly, and Martínez left for his performance.[31] These two men, who as young men in the 1930's, had began their illustrious careers in the Valley and had helped to launch a quiet cultural revolution in the process, were now in their seventies.

In 1992 Martínez became ill because of pulmonary complications. The last few weeks of his life he spent virtually confined to a hospital bed. All that time he had his accordion in his room. On May 5th an hour before he died, he

asked for the accordion and played "*La Chicharronera*" for the last time.[32] At his funeral in La Paloma, three generations of friends, family and musicians grieved his passing and celebrated his life by playing his music, but Paredes, himself in poor health, was unable to attend.[33] He once described Martínez in his comedia "*Tres faces del pocho*" this way.

> The scene is a little rundown 3.2 beer joint on the border: *Los Agachados*. The bar is in the rear, facing front. Lights come up to the tune of a very fast polka played by Chicho Martínez (El Huracán del Valle) on a wheezy old accordion, accompanied by a *bajo* player who is obviously having trouble keeping up with Chicho.[34]

The joke, of course, is that Martínez never played in cantinas and that he would purchase a new accordion every six or seven months. Paredes had lost a friend whom he respected and admired.

To Paredes retirement from teaching, however, was not retirement from a lifelong passion for writing. In fact, five of his books have been published since 1984. In 1990 a book he began in 1936 and completed in 1940 was published by Arte Público Press. *George Washington Gomez* is set against the Great Depression, the onset of World War II in Europe, and set also against the over 100 year old conflict of cultures in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas, not far from where the Rio Grande empties into the Gulf...seen through the eyes of a young writer, true to his times, to his family, and ultimately, to us, the readers.[35]

In 1993 the Center for Mexican American Studies in conjunction with The University of Texas Press published *Folklore and Culture on the Texas-Mexico Border*. Richard Bauman, distinguished professor of folklore and anthropology at Indiana University introduced it as "...an inspired and inspiring writing which illustrates the cross-disciplinary richness of Paredes' perspective – a synthesis of folkloric, anthropological, literary, and historical theory and method.[36]

Despite a bout with prostrate cancer, quadruple bypass surgery in 1996, and an assortment of age-related medical problems, Paredes continued to do what he had done since his days at Brownsville High School in the 1930's – write about the border and its people. Once a week he boarded a shuttle bus in front of his Austin home and rode to and from his office at the University of Texas. In January 1998, he completed "*Mi Tía Pilar*," the first of a collection of autobiographical reminisences for a forthcoming book of short stories.

Although a resident of Austin since the early 1950's, Paredes fondly remembered the Valley, northern Mexico and what he had on occasion called Jonesville on the Grande, "*mi pueblo dulce y romancero*" [my sweet, romantic town,][37] Brownsville. "It is my hometown. It is in me. It is part of me."[38]

Américo Paredes died on May 5, 1999. His family complied with his last wishes: cremation and a private funeral in Austin, TX. The public mourning,

however, was universal. In June a memorial was held at The University of Texas in Austin at the Joe E. Thompson Center. The center was filled with people who came to grieve and to celebrate their millennium man. His widow, Amelia, and his three sons, Américo, Vincent, and Allen, as well as their families, were in attendance. Conjunto Aztlán performed some of his favorite corridos, and Tish Hinojosa sang her corrido "para el hombre del corrido." Those in attendance reminisced and remembered the man, who, for much of his life had raised, carried, and defended their cultural flag with a dignity that both friends and foes could not help but respect. It was with this same dignity that Don Américo and Doña Amelia, who passed away only a few months later, were finally laid to rest. Throughout much of his life Américo Paredes had spent time at South Padre Island. La Isla had been a place for summer visits for the Paredes family for many years and Thanksgiving respite for family reunions during his last years. His sons and their families have continued this tradition. On November 26, 1999, his three sons, their families, some of the Paredes' relatives from Brownsville, my nephew, and I accompanied Don Américo and Doña Amelia on their last physical voyage. After meeting at Manfred del Castillo's home in Brownsville, we drove in a caravan of four-wheel drive vehicles and vans to Boca Chica Beach. The street ended at the same Gulf where explorers, pirates, colonists, soldiers, turistas, and even narcos had stopped before. We turned left, drove on the beach and reached the mouth of the Rio Bravo at about 11:45 a.m. There, near the collapsing sand of the river's edge, something occurred that I will certainly never forget. Vincent read "El Rio Grande," a poem Américo had written over 60 years before. I read "Don Américo," a poem that I wrote shortly after his death.

The Rio Grande

Muddy river, muddy river,
Moving slowly down your track
With your swirls and counter-currents,
As though wanting to turn back,
As though wanting to turn back
Towards the place where you were born
While your currents swirl and eddy,
While you whisper, whimper, mourn;
So you wander down your channel
Always on, since it must be,
Till you die so very gently
By the margin of the sea.
All my pain and all my trouble
In your bosom let me hide,
Drain my soul of all its sorrow
As you drain the countryside,
For I was born beside your waters,

And since very young I knew
That my soul had hidden currents,
That my soul resembled you,
Troubled, dark, its bottom hidden
While its surface mocks the sun,
With its sighs and its rebellions,
Yet compelled to travel on.
When the soul must leave the body,
When the wasted flesh must die,
I shall trickle forth to join you,
In your bosom I shall lie;
We shall wander through the country
Where your banks in green are clad,
Past the shanties of rancheros,
By the ruins of old Bagdad,
Till at last your dying waters,
Will release their hold on me,
And my soul will sleep forever
By the margin of the sea.[39]

Don Américo

Hombre derecho con tus raíces en tu corazón
Te recuerdo
Hombre educado y honrado de dos países y de dos épocas
Te aprecio
Hombre que cruzastes las líneas del tiempo
Y el río del destino
Salvando almas sin heroes
Te respeto
Cancionero que me cantaste mis canciones
Poeta que me escribistes mi dolor
Profesor que me enseñastes mi cultura
Amigo que me regalastes mi orgullo
Te celebro siempre y
Te olvido nunca.[40]

At high noon, Vincent and I took off our shoes, rolled up our pant legs, and walked to a juncture where the blue-green gulf waters lapped into the rushing brown waters of the river. There, Vincent released the ashes of his father and of his mother. A flowing current carried the ashes toward what once was Nuevo Santander south the Rio Bravo. As we returned from that point in time to the others waiting on the shore, a lone, viejita pescadora wearing a migrant bonnet searched for a spot among the veterano fall fisherman. They stood next to their rod holders with cañas and carretas, poised for the strike from the elusive *curvina*. There are moments in our lives, where time

does seem to stand still and there are people in our lives, whose dignity and passion for justice transcend the time of their physical presence on this earth. November 26, 1999 was one of those moments, and Don Américo was one of those people.

In a way the *cancionero*, who spent most of his life preserving the *corrido* and its rich cultural tradition, and the *acordeonista*, whose *conjunto* music has echoed along the border for three generations, continue to cross paths in the Rio Grande Valley. Paredes once wrote about eighteenth century people "who traveled up north to the Rio Grande, drank of its waters, and traveled no more."[41] In a recent essay Rolando Hinojosa wrote,

> We have a saying here in the Rio Grande Valley: "*Es el agua,*" "It's the water," the Rio Grande water. It claims you, you understand? It's yours and you belong to it, too. No matter where we work, we always come back. To the border, to the Valley. *Es el agua.*[42]

Is hero too strong a term to describe Narciso Martínez and Américo Paredes? Before I interviewed them, I might have thought so, but when I sat face to face with "*El Huracán del Valle*" in his La Paloma home and listened to him perform "*La Chicharronera*" as if he were playing it for the first time at an outdoor dance and realized what his music meant to my father's generation of working people and what he means to me and to my son, I thought differently. And when I sat face to face with Américo Paredes, who sang and wrote for my mother's generation, whose literary courage inspired the Chicano generation and today's Latino generation, and who still had the fire of a young poet in his eyes. I thought about how privileged I was to have met not only one hero, but two.

The University of Texas at Brownsville

Endnotes

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Filemón B. Vela: Justice on the Border
by
Roman R. Pérez

The history of human society provides many examples of people who have raised themselves from modest beginnings to positions of wealth, political power, or other prominence. Although to the casual observer of these achievers' lives their successes may seem to have been inevitable, as Justice Felix Frankfurter suggested, their achievements were most likely the result of effort.[1] As appealing as that quality of persistence is in trying to explain why some individuals achieve when the masses fail, it raises yet another question: why do those particular people possess the compulsion to succeed when so many others do not? What motivates them to persist? This article will examine the life and personality of Filemón B. Vela, a Mexican-American born into a poor Rio Grande Valley family during the Great Depression. Eventually, this *Mexicano* became a lawyer, an elected city commissioner and state district judge, a federal district judge nominated by a President of the United States and confirmed by the United States Senate, and was a man widely admired and respected, not only in the Valley, but throughout Texas. His story does not begin and end with his birth, his emergence as a federal district judge, and his unsuccessful fight with cancer, far from it. In examining his life further, this article will attempt to answer the question of why Judge Vela was so persistent in his ascension from poverty to prominence. It will explain what triggered his obsession to succeed and illustrate that this aspect of his personality evolved into such an emotional commitment that he would not give up.

Early Life

Filemón B. Vela was born in Harlingen, Texas, on May 1, 1935, to Roberto Vela, Sr. and Maria Luisa Cardenas Vela. Filemón was the second youngest of nine children, three girls and six boys.[2] Roberto worked as a bookkeeper in Mexico and would later open his own bookkeeper office in Harlingen. As a bookkeeper, he would work on a hodgepodge of tasks like filling out tax forms mostly for impoverished clients and assisting Mexican nationals who wanted to become U.S. citizens or legal permanent residents. His pay was a meager $15 per week. This was the base income of Roberto and Maria Luisa who had to support their large family.

Roberto was a traditionalist as a husband and a father. He would be the family's breadwinner while his wife stayed at home, doing her daily housework and tending to their children. Moisés Vicente Vela, who was the second oldest son and would serve as a mentor for Filemón Vela throughout his life, says that his father was not an alcoholic but did drink. In fact, the

coffee that Maria Luisa would make for her husband and children would be drunk using empty liquor containers as coffee cups.[3]

When Filemón was eleven years old, his mother died of a heart attack.[4] She, along with her daughter, Maria Luisa, and her son, Moisés, had apparently been selling food at a church function at the Immaculate Heart of Mary Catholic Church. When she began feeling obvious signs of discomfort, a church friend, who owned a vehicle, offered to take the three back home. While driving home on North Commerce Street, she stopped breathing. They made a U-turn towards Valley Baptist Hospital. Seventeen-year-old Moisés rushed into the hospital and asked for help, but the nurse he pleaded with would not budge saying she would not go out if his mother was already dead. She did not say it but Moisés knew it at the time and the family would later realize that the nurse had violated her duty to assist the sick because the woman was a *Mexicana*. Discrimination defined much of Harlingen's past. [5] Without a doubt, this emotional experience remained with Filemón for the rest of his life as it did for all of the Vela family. Yet, as Moisés pointed out, Filemón and the family never forgot her.[6] Maria Luisa had been an ardent Catholic who had instilled a commitment to the faith in young Filemón and his siblings. Filemón especially would rarely miss Sunday Mass in constant tribute to his mother.[7]

Both his mother and father emphasized learning, the need to concentrate on achieving in school. Filemón's father was good to his children, but he did not put up with any nonsense from them. He expected that his children would do well in school and stay out of trouble. This commitment was not lost on Filemón. [8] "I would say it was unusual for a person [of his socioeconomic status and ethnicity living in the Valley around the mid-twentieth century] to finish high school, certainly we weren't supposed to attend college, but I believe there was a moving force and that was my father."[9] Education and religion would always play a vital role in his becoming a well-respected man among his community and with whomever he came in contact.[10]

Aside from the death of his mother, two other monumental events affected the childhood of young Vela—World War II, in particular Pearl Harbor, and the Great Depression—and would shape his personality as an adult. Ever the quintessential patriot, Vela knew that the United States would endure after the terrorist attacks on September the 11th, 2001. In an interview just two weeks following the tragedy of 9-11, he compared it to the similar national calamity that occurred when he was only six. He held "the sense of the same feelings, the same sensitivities, the same concerns, the same apprehension, and the same fears."[11] His patriotism first appeared at that early age. He later served his country with pride after being drafted into the military after attending The University of Texas at Austin.

The Great Depression affected young Filemón directly in that he shared

one large, uncomfortable bed with five of his brothers.[12] The Honorable Judge Vela recalled that:

> When I was a child we were not born into having electricity. We did not have electricity the first few years of my education. We actually used lamps with kerosene . . . We were quite like the rest of the world, since all my brothers were born during the depression. We were economically living in very difficult times but very happy times I must say.[13]

Filemón's future wife grew up less than a block away from his Harlingen home. Blanca Sánchez was born on May 26, 1936, a little over a year after Filemón. She related that her parents trusted the Vela children to watch over her for whatever reasons. The two family patriarchs were *compadres*.[14] No romantic interest existed between the two future leaders of Brownsville when they were children or adolescents. The Judge said that they were not high school sweethearts, and when they attended community college, they were just friends.[15]

Already in the 1940s, his father, Roberto Sr., fought the Harlingen School District to allow *Mexicanos* to attend all-white schools and integrate. According to Moisés, only three Mexican-American families were allowed to attend the all-white Austin Elementary School, and the Vela family was one of those families.[16] It seems that Filemón gained his fighter instinct from his father. Like his father, Filemón would not stand for discrimination, or for good education to be inaccessible to anyone for any reason. Later from the bench he would dictate to the Brownsville Independent School District that they would have to educate illegal aliens and he ruled that they should accommodate the education of a paralyzed boy years before the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.[17]

Filemón benefited from his father's fight for integration and attended Austin Elementary where he excelled as a student. Moisés remembers that he and his other siblings never failed classes in elementary and middle school. The exception came when Filemón failed biology in high school.[18] At that point, he was startled into remembering his commitment to his late mother. He retook the course and passed. He was determined not to flunk out or to drop out of high school, although failing biology did cause him to graduate a year after he was supposed to.[19] The persistence that would drive Filemón the rest of his life was becoming a fundamental principle. Not everyone believed his persistence would lead Filemón anywhere. One of his teachers stated plainly that "he would 'never amount to anything'" after graduation.[20] In high school and at college, it became evident to those around young Filemón that he had a knack for socializing. Whenever someone wanted to run for something, they always made sure that Filemón was their campaign manager because he never lost.[21]

He graduated from Harlingen High School in 1954.[22] His father expected that he would go to college like his older siblings, who were his immediate role models, and Filemón did not want to let his family down.[23] As a father, his children would be in the same situation. Filemón's son, Rafael, explains that although he was not forced to attend college, his parents expected him to do so, but did not force him.[24] Filemón's children, in contrast to him, were able to attend an out-of-state university directly following high school.[25]

Not having the financial means to leave the Valley, Filemón enrolled at Texas Southmost College, a community college about twenty miles south of Harlingen in Brownsville, Texas. The College had recently changed its name from Brownsville Junior College to Texas Southmost College, and it was situated on the grounds of the old Fort Brown. Everyday that he had class he would have to walk over to the Azteca Theatre in Harlingen to meet the bus by 6:30 in the morning![26] Students who lived in La Feria had to wake up even earlier, since the bus picked them up before it arrived in Harlingen.[27] The bus would travel down from Harlingen to San Benito and then over to Los Indios as close to the river as possible, following the Old Military Highway path. They would travel to Central Boulevard, which signaled the end of the Old Military Highway. On Central, they would take the bus down to Elizabeth Street that would lead them straight to the small campus.

Once they reached Texas Southmost College, he and the rest of the students would then make it to their 8 o'clock class. If one did not have a class, he would usually wait all day until his class met. There was no air conditioning to relieve him and his fellow students from the humid heat for which Brownsville and deep South Texas are famous. They tended to eat cold cuts for lunch. The bus would pick them up around 4:30 in the afternoon and reverse the trail back home. When Filemón went to summer school, he would have to attend every weekday and even Saturday.[28] Texas Southmost College would later honor him as "TSC Distinguished Alumnus" in 1998.[29] Immediately after attending TSC, he went on to the University of Texas at Austin. He stayed at UT for only a year and took courses that would ultimately prepare him for law school. He did not receive a degree from UT however.[30]

The Military, the Law, and Love

After attending UT-Austin, Filemón was obliged to take a two-year detour in 1957 when the military drafted him, a rite of passage for many Mexican American youths. For him there was no deferment for studying at a university.[31] He described Fort Leonard Wood in Missouri as "a genuine hell hole, but a fantastic experience."[32] His brother Moisés described his younger brother as always being large and about 280 or 290 pounds.[33] He told his wife Blanca that the military tired him out with the required running.[34]

As soon as he finished his service in the military in 1959, he moved to San Antonio, where he attended St. Mary's University School of Law. In a 1996

interview, the judge specifically credited an unnamed lawyer who spoke at a political rally for creating yet another future lawyer in Vela.[35] As described before, his father's job had entailed quasi-paralegal work, doing "accounting and a lot [of] income tax work and a lot of immigration work."[36] Thus, Moisés Vela believes that his father helped instigate Filemón's love of the law as it did for Moisés and Carlos, the youngest Vela child and a fellow lawyer.[37]

It is when he began attending St Mary's that the friendly relationship which Filemón and Blanca had had all of their lives progressed to a loving relationship. Their love for each other would last the rest of his life as they would grow old together. In 2001, Mr. Vela explained:

> Our relationship was more platonic; it was not boyfriend girlfriend [sic]. It was after I went to the military and was in law school that we then sort of noticed that we were a block away from each other and sort of took a romantic interest in each other. We have had that romantic interest now for nearly 40 years because we have been married nearly 40 years.[38]

While he was in San Antonio, Blanca wrote to him from the valley. He would type out his letters, giving it that professional look a young lady might not appreciate. She wrote to him in her own special handwriting. They wrote this way until finally she wrote back asking him to write to her without using the typewriter. He obliged and wrote back in his own very unique handwriting. She wrote back and asked if he would return to his typing because she could not read what he had written her, but Filemón did not feel angry that she had attacked his faulty penmanship. Filemón quickly answered the request and returned to typing out his letters.[39]

As the courtship progressed, it was obvious that these two were heading down the path to marriage. Normally, a young Mexican-American male would go with a chaperone or with his father to ask for the hand of the woman he loved from her father. It was not uncommon for the fathers and other family member to drink a few adult beverages before sitting down to talk about the possible wedding.[40] Asking for a girl's hand in marriage could be very difficult, especially if the young woman was the oldest daughter in the family, as Blanca was. Luckily for young Filemón, this process would be easy because it was well known that a wedding would occur sooner or later. The two families met at her home, and Filemón notified one and all that he desired to marry Blanca. The Sánchez's patriarch happily agreed to allow his oldest daughter to marry Filemón. The two families rejoiced over the happy news.

Filemón graduated on Friday, January 26, 1962, in San Antonio. He and Blanca married each other two days later, on January 28, 1962, in Harlingen. They had a traditional Catholic Mass at the Immaculate Heart of Mary Catholic Church. The night before the ceremony, Blanca made Filemón mop up the parish hall floor in preparation for the wedding reception the next

morning.[41] During this time in Catholic history, one could not receive the sacrament after eating, so they married at seven in the morning. When asked if the bride's family had paid for the wedding, Mrs. Vela simply said, no, that she and her groom split the cost of the wedding pretty much evenly. Mrs. Vela also pointed out that because it was not a big wedding, the cost was not exorbitant. They walked across the parking lot to the parish hall and had a simple reception with cake and *pan de polvo*.

A Young, Married Lawyer, Discrimination, and Politics

Blatant segregation and discrimination existed in Harlingen while Filemón and Blanca were growing up. Aside from the case mentioned above where Maria Luisa had not received the proper medical attention before she died, other examples of inequality existed. A simple railroad track along Commerce Street separated the English-speakers from the Spanish-speakers. Around the time of the wedding, Blanca took it upon herself to attempt to find an apartment where the young married couple could live. She found a nice apartment in the English-speaking side of Harlingen. She called a few times and asked about the apartment. Each time the person who answered the call said that the apartment was no longer available.

Blanca noticed after each call that the lady still advertised the apartment as vacant. After she mentioned this to her "rabble-rouser" husband, he told her that he would take care of it.[42] He called and inquired about the apartment. When the respondent answered, she asked him what his last name was. He said, "Vela." She asked what his employment was. When he answered that he was just about to become lawyer, she seemed more receptive to allowing him to have the apartment. Vela then abruptly told the lady that he was no longer interested in the apartment, and that he would rather live in the Spanish-speaking part of Harlingen than in her apartment.

However, even in the early 1960s, the Spanish-speakers had no political voice to protest such treatment. Blanca Vela attributes this lack of voice to the use of the poll tax. In 1962, when Filemón, the young lawyer, ran for state representative against the Dean of the State House, Menton Murray, Sr., the Vela campaign had to find ways for their supporters and voters to be able to pay for the tax.[43] Filemón identified with and lived among the Spanish-speakers.[44] Without a doubt, Filemón witnessed this *de facto* segregation, and this did not sit well with him.

As a lawyer, Filemón would be a civil rights activist in the Valley as president of the local Political Association of Spanish Speaking Organizations, known as PASSO for short. He fought for civil rights in his some of his cases. When he moved to Brownsville, he moved into politics. He ran for city commissioner in 1971,[45] winning easily.[46] While he served his only term between 1971 and 1973 as city commissioner, he maintained his law practice up until 1974 when he began his candidacy for Texas state district

judge.[47] As a city commissioner, he had trouble with some of his fellow city commissioners. The other commissioners seemed not to see how the future of Brownsville would be affected by some of the decisions that they made. For example, when Brownsville determined not to welcome Southwest Airlines to their airport, despite Commissioner Vela's objections, Southwest Airlines went to Harlingen, and greatly improved their airport.

Secondly, the city did not join the county government in building the Gateway International Bridge. Commissioner Vela saw the opportunity to work with Cameron County in order to gain a valuable source of revenue that the city ultimately lost out on. Both of these issues hurt the chances for Brownsville to grow. Filemón's persistence failed him in this instance because of his inability to convince his fellow commissioners to do away with their "political reasons" and to do what would have ultimately been better for Brownsville's future.[48] As his first term as a Brownsville City Commissioner came closer to an end, he began to think about a run for Brownsville Mayor. He asked his wife for her opinion:

> Interestingly my wife was not very encouraging at the time in . . . regards to my seeking . . . the position of the mayor . . . We had three young children at the time and obviously there were many concerns then to tell the fact that I should be close to home. And, already I had been a City Commissioner [and] a lot of my free time was consumed, and you do that and sacrifice your family. But that same lady who did not encourage me to run some years later decides just about two years ago [in 1999] to run for mayor herself. But this course is after she is a mother and a grandmother, and no one is at home. And, she won! And so that is interesting how she became mayor, and I never became mayor.[49]

His political involvement did not stop in 1973 when he ended his service in Brownsville City Hall. In 1974, he decided to run for state district judge. He demonstrated his humility when he admited that he never thought he would win. He philosophically looked at the race as a way to leave politics, should he happen to lose.[50] In this case, however, he ran unopposed. Judge Vela explained that, "I had some opposition for a while, but they withdrew."[51] His brother Moisés believes that Filemón "chased away the competition" by just being in the race, for he was a formidable competitor and candidate.[52] The glee shown in Moisés eyes and gestures demonstrates that he is quite proud that his brother won unopposed this first time and every time he ran for re-election.[53] The new judge was only "one of seven or eight [Hispanics] in the history of Texas" to reach the level that he did in 1975.[54]

Filemón did not relish all aspects of being a state district judge, commenting that "you hurt people, you send people to the penitentiary."[55] He liked being a lawyer more than being a judge because he "could [act as] advocate" for

causes and for people.[56] As a state district judge, one of his most enjoyable activities was when he "recite[d] over adoptions."[57] He remained a state district judge until 1980 when his life took a different turn, which would be an unexpected blessing not only for him but for his family and community.

The Call to the Federal Bench

In 1979, while Mr. and Mrs. Vela were traveling in Mexico City, they received word that Senator Bentsen wished to speak with Filemón in Washington. They packed up their bags and traveled back home to Brownsville. Then they flew to Washington D.C. to meet with the Texas senator. Meeting with the Velas in his office, Senator Bentsen told them alongside the wall were stacks of folders of people who wanted to be federal judges. Vela, of course, had no folder there because he did not seek the federal judiciary. Bentsen pointed to him and said, "I want to nominate you to be a federal judge."[58] A surprised Vela said that he was honored, and he agreed to go along with the process towards his nomination for the federal judiciary. The Velas returned home to Brownsville and began the arduous preparation for his nomination confirmation.[59] Soon, President Jimmy Carter took Bentsen's advice and nominated Filemón Vela to be a federal district judge in the Southern District of Texas. On January 22, 1980, President Carter sent his nomination to the U.S. Senate.[60]

Just because one is nominated does not guarantee appointment to the bench. According the Article Section of U.S. Constitution, the Senate must consent to the presidential nomination. This meant that Senate's Judiciary Committee would investigate Vela and other nominees and would hold confirmation hearings for the nominees. Afterwards, they would vote to see if the nominees should be sent to the full Senate for an up or down vote. When Vela went to the Washington again for his only confirmation hearing, he took his wife and mother-in-law. He sat alongside two other Carter nominees. According to Mrs. Vela, her husband seemed to have the easiest questions compared to the other two. In fact, he was asked only two or three total questions throughout the whole hearing. He was the second to answer questions. Republican Senator Robert "Bob" Dole of Kansas sat on the committee. His only question to Filemón was not directed at the nominee. It was directed at Vela's mother-in-law, who sat in the audience with her daughter, Blanca. Dole asked her, "Do you think your son-in-law would be a good federal judge?" Mrs. Sánchez simply answered, "*Sí!*" With that, Vela had Dole's support.[61]

After the hearings, they family returned back to Brownsville and waited weeks before they would find out if Vela would become the third Mexican-American federal district judge in Texas's Southern District.[62] On June 18, 1980, the U.S. Senate confirmed his appointment, and Filemón Bartolome Vela received his commission.[63] Only two Hispanic federal judges had preceded Judge Vela to the federal bench in the Southern District of Texas. Reynaldo G.

Garza, Jr. had been appointed in 1961 and James De Anda had been appointed in 1979.[64] The Honorable Judge Filemón Vela was the second federal judge who had attended Texas Southmost College, the first being Judge Reynaldo Garza. Judge Vela was the first law school graduate of St. Mary's University to become a U.S. federal judge.[65]

The Life of a Federal Judge and His Personal Life

Judge Vela replaced Reynaldo Garza as a federal district judge.[66] Having to replace a judicial pioneer in the history of Brownsville and of Mexican Americans throughout the nation could be difficult for any person.[67] Vela would not take the honor of being a federal district judge lightly. It was not unlike Judge Vela to phone Rev. Laurence Klein and ask, "Father, pray for me. I have a tough one today."[68] Echoing similar remarks he had about adjusting from being a state district judge to being a federal judge, he told Dr. William L. Adams, "Of course it [sentencing men to long terms in prison and watching them shuffling in shackles] hurts me. Of course it hurts me . . . and the day it stops hurting me is the day I stop being a judge."[69] He was a diligent worker,[70] and his strong work ethic came to fruition even as a senior federal judge. His replacement, Judge Andrew Hannan, noted, "He'd go nuts if he didn't have his work . . . No matter how early you came to the courthouse, there was one car here first and it was always his."[71]

Vela did not allow tardiness from the lawyers who came before his bench. Even attorneys representing the United States government were not immune from his wrath. Early in his career as a regular federal district judge in February of 1982, he charged the U.S. Attorney's office with contempt of court for showing up late to [routine] sentencing proceedings."[72] After Vela had become a senior status federal judge, a juror in a marijuana possession case had arrived two hours early. He became hungry and went home to eat breakfast, as he explained to Judge Vela. Furthermore, he thought that the alternate juror could take his place. Judge Vela, who was not amused, charged the juror with contempt of court. His sentence would have lasted for three days had not a magistrate judge heard his case after the juror was in custody for four hours and "released him from duty and detention."[73]

Vela agitated people in Laredo when he punished and admonished a juror who was ten minutes late to court. He explained to the juror that he could have called the courthouse and not have held up the session. "The juror claimed he was a disabled veteran with a collapsed lung and a limp and had to wait for his disabled mother to arrive from a doctor's visit . . . and she was blind."[74] Apparently this sad story did slightly impress Judge Vela because he fined him only $100 instead of imprisoning him for three nights. He declared, "I want everyone in Laredo to know that if you're late (to his court) you're going to jail." Thus he made sure his court ran smoothly and that court attendees had

the utmost respect for the system.

When he ascended to the federal bench, his wife would end up being on boards around the area because as a federal judge Filemón Vela could not sit on any boards. He could not involve himself in politics. When his wife would run for Brownsville mayor he could not even help with the campaign.[75] According to Rafael Eduardo Vela, he knew that his father was a good and somewhat powerful man, although his father did not let it go to his head.[76] His older brother explains that Filemón was a loving person who did not wear his judgeship on his sleeve. He could have a regular conversation with just about anyone.[77] Hunting and fishing has always been a very manly activity and has been part of the South Texas tradition for as long as anyone can remember, so it should come as no surprise that Judge Vela would hunt and fish. Some of Moisés' fondest memories are of being able to go hunting with his brother later on in life. He explains honestly that his brother was an average shot and never took home the big buck. They would fish more often than hunt because the deer-hunting season was much shorter.[78] Rafael stated that his father seemed to gain more pleasure out of seeing his sons hunting and fishing than doing these activities himself. They often hunted deer on part of the Laguna Seca Ranch about fifteen miles north of Edinburg.[79] This ranch has been part of the very large and extended Vela family heritage since the middle nineteenth century.[80] One of his hunting buddies was none other than federal district judge and federal appeals court judge Reynaldo Garza of Brownsville.[81]

On Education Outside of the Federal Bench

As previously mentioned, education always played a role in Vela's life from the days when his mother and father made sure that he went to school.[82] He recognized that education needed to play an important role not only in his life but also in the lives of all Americans and of all people in the world for that matter. As for the greatest problem that faces Brownsville, Judge Vela said it is:

> The same problem that faces all of our communities in the Valley: education, completing high school. There is one underlying problem in society: not enough people are finishing high school and going on to college. Every major problem that faces this society—crime, welfare, single mothers—is caused mainly by people who don't finish high school.[83]

Throughout his tenure as a state judge and a federal judge, he was a tireless proponent of education and would find ways to urge students not to give up the fight to obtain a high school diploma and beyond.

In March of 1986, Judge Vela asked Dr. Juliet V. García, who had just been selected as the new Texas Southmost College president, if she had anyone in

mind to help him promote education among high school students in the area. Dr. García "told him 'heck no, I'll do it' – the concern [for education] has to start at the top."[84] They had decided to target high school students by filming educational videos that would urge them to successfully finish high school and look to the future by attending an institution of higher learning. They would also tell them not to drop out of school in order to work. By accepting Dr. García's help in this cause, Judge Vela implicitly endorsed Dr. García's wish "to say [to the high school students] that it's OK not to have the money right now because in the long run, if they stay in school, the money will come back to them double-fold." [85]

Concerning Texas Southmost College, in the early 1990s Judge Vela did not favor the idea of a partnership between Texas Southmost College, his alma mater, and the University of Texas at Brownsville, which was to be created as a branch of the UT System. He took his point of view straight to the top, and asked the then TSC President García, the first Mexican American woman president of a college or university in the United States, his famous question of "Why?" He made a passionate plea for keeping a sovereign community college, arguing that Brownsville could not lose control of its education at the hands of distant Austin. Dr. García argued that the benefits of the UT System in conjunction with a TSC Board of Trustees who make sure the voice of Brownsville and the surrounding communities were heard outweighed the benefits of a status quo community college. After their discussion and his reflection, Judge Vela sided with Dr. García and wholeheartedly supported the idea of the partnership.[86]

Judge Vela constantly urged the young people of the Lower Rio Grande Valley, Houston, and Corpus Christi not to go the way of criminals and/or use illegal drugs. The Judge wanted them all to follow the right path in life and to live a crime-free lifestyle. He brought convicts, who received a reduction in their sentencing in exchange for their participation, to Rivera High School in the late 1997. Judge Vela had them explain what they did for which they were sent to prison and what their experiences there were. He asked the convicts if they were gay or straight to make sure the high school students would know what could await them in prison. The one male prisoner feared being gang-raped. One female convict said she was straight. Judge Vela responded, "Well, who would want you now?"[87] The judge pulled no punches.

The presentation was not without controversy, as some believed that teenagers could not handle the blunt talk about the consequences of choosing a life of crime and drugs. A researcher at the Texas Commission on Alcohol and Drug Abuse believed some students still might view the stories criminals told as a way to gain fame and attention and want to mimic those lives in the future. A principal who deals everyday with teenagers argued on the other hand that the stories that Vela brought to the student's attention were the only

way to guarantee that the students could be persuaded to heed the teachers' warnings.[88]

On Education and His Federal Decisions

Judge Vela's contact with the issue of education also found application in the federal courtroom. Several important questions came before his bench over the course of his roughly twenty-four years on the federal bench. One of the first cases ever before Judge Vela dealt with B.I.S.D. and the right of illegal immigrants to education. In July 1980, around the time of Vela's confirmation, a Houston-based federal judge named Woodrow Seals eliminated a Texas state law forbidding the aliens access to Texas public schools. Brownsville sought a way out of this decision because it could not afford having illegal aliens in their poor school district. It felt the federal government should pay for part of the cost since it ruled against the Texas law. President Carter refused to help with federal money.[89] *The New York Times* reported that B.I.S.D. filed papers with the U.S. Supreme Court asking for an exemption from the Houston ruling. In early October, the U.S. Supreme Court declined to go against the Houston federal judge. It did, however, allow Brownsville to plead its case to a local federal judge for a stay and possible remedy. B.I.S.D.'s main lawyer, Tony Martínez, filed in Judge Vela's court, saying "that the flow of illegal aliens would render the district 'unable to provide the standard of education which it considers proper.'"[90]

On October 13, Vela issued a temporary injunction to stop illegal aliens from enrolling any further in B.I.S.D. until they had a hearing with him. The illegal aliens already enrolled could stay. For the October 21st hearing with Vela, B.I.S.D. lawyers planned to use the basic argument that B.I.S.D. was "overcrowded and short of money."[91] Texas Rural Legal Aid and a lawyer in the Houston case filed papers in Judge Vela's court arguing "Vela lacked authority to grant Brownsville the exemption."[92] They represented illegal aliens and sought to have the case returned to Seals, who had ruled in their favor in the past.[93] The day after the hearing, Judge Vela ruled in favor of the illegal immigrants and forced B.I.S.D. to begin reenrolling the illegal immigrants within thirty days. In his verbal ruling, Judge Vela believed "the problems in the Brownsville School District [were] not only undocumented students but in other categories" and for him "to give a permanent injunction (against enrollment) would be discriminatory and illegal."[94] On January 15, 1980, Judge Vela formally submitted his written opinion. There he said B.I.S.D. should have foreseen the overcrowding of its schools. It would have occurred with or without the illegal alien's attendance because of lack of planning. Furthermore, he accused the Immigration and Naturalization Service of having a "failure of will" to stop immigration.[95]

This particular case meshed two issues in Judge Vela's personal life. His mother was not a U.S. citizen, but rather a legal resident of the United States.[96]

Thus, it is understandable that Judge Vela seemed to have a soft spot for immigrants. Secondly, the case dealt with education, which probably brought back memories of his mother wanting him to obtain a strong education.[97] His decision should not have been a surprise because of his childhood background and his persistent support for education for all.

The day after the thirty-day grace period, one sensed the anger some Brownsville residents felt through its representation in the school board. Its president, Rolando Olvera, told his constituents, "You can rest assured we're not going to take this sitting down."[98] Tony Martínez did not say what specific options the board had in fighting Vela's decision.[99] Apparently, the board took the option of having the state attorney general assist them in appealing Vela's decision all the way to the Supreme Court. In June 1981, Texas Attorney General Mark White convinced the U.S. Supreme Court to hear the Brownsville case along with a case involving Tyler, Texas. In that case, Tyler ISD had charged illegal aliens $1,000 to attend their public schools.[100] One full year later, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled against the Tyler and Brownsville Independent School Districts. It held that all illegal immigrants had a right to a free public school education.[101]

One year later, the Judge dealt with the right to accessible education for the disabled, a decade before President George H. W. Bush signed the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.[102] In August 1981, Vela heard a case in which the parents of a seven-year old paralyzed boy sued the Brownsville Independent School District (B.I.S.D.). The boy, Raul Espino, Jr., would come to be known as "the boy in the box."[103] His parents filed a grievance against the school district under "a law requiring school districts to educate handicapped children in the 'least restrictive environment.'"[104] B.I.S.D. had paid for a Plexiglas box for the disabled boy when he was in first grade. The box would protect him, but Raul Jr.'s parents wanted him to interact with other students and not be mocked or seen as a curiosity by his classmates. In Vela's Court, Dr. Emmett Hutto, a Harlingen psychologist, stated that the entire classroom needed air conditioning to allow Raul to interact with the other children instead of the boy sitting in a cubicle next to a window air conditioner. The boy's mother told Judge Vela that she thought the classroom should be air-conditioned. At the time, Brownsville elementary schools had air conditioning only in designated handicapped classrooms.[105] Superintendent Raul Besteiro feared air-conditioning one non-special education elementary classroom would cause an uproar of animosity from the other teachers and parents. Judge Vela quickly rebutted that although only the high schools had air conditioning, the middle and elementary schools had not caused a commotion.[106]

A couple of weeks later, Judge Vela ruled that the school district had thirty days to provide an air-conditioned environment. The cost of providing air

conditioning in only the one classroom at Egly Elementary was $5,700. Vela noted that placing the child in a cubicle separated from the other children would "hardly ever be appropriate."[107] B.I.S.D. seemed unwilling to set precedence or pay close to six thousand dollars yearly to accommodate Raul Jr. further. B.I.S.D. Board of Trustees voted to appeal Vela's activist ruling at the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals. A minority of the B.I.S.D. Board of Trustees felt the district could suffer harm in the public opinion arena and hinder the educational system in general. They felt they should just abide by Vela's ruling. On the other side, B.I.S.D. Trustee Rolando Olvera believed that B.I.S.D. had "gone the extra mile" and now should "concentrate on educating other children."[108] B.I.S.D. Trustee Joe Rodríguez "felt like it was time to move onto other things. We have big problems with 2,000 new students. We've spent a lot of time on this one."[109] While they appealed, B.I.S.D. offered the family of "boy in the box" a chance for him to attend private Windsor School at B.I.S.D.'s expense, which was $1,300 annual tuition. The offer also came with free transportation and health care. The boy's mother was unsure of the offer. Mrs. Ana Espino reasoned, "We're [the parents are] not asking for too much. It's just an air-conditioned room. And yet they're willing to pay for a private school."[110] Ultimately, Judge Vela ruled that the family either took the fair offer or lost the case because he saw B.I.S.D. as trying to make "a good faith" effort at accommodating the boy.[111] The Espino family accepted the offer in mid-September.[112]

Judge Vela loved to talk to students and explain the importance of obtaining an education. He would tell them how much he wanted them to achieve because they had it in them to "soar"; to him, "everybody is born an eagle."[113] In analyzing Judge Vela's legacy, one can see that he knew that "eagles," i.e., students, sometimes needed assistance. From the federal bench he gave students the boost and an opportunity to gain an education. In the two B.I.S.D. cases above, Vela ruled against B.I.S.D. because it would not accommodate his goal of achievement through education for all. With this in mind, B.I.S.D. honored Vela by naming a new middle school after him and choosing the eagle as its mascot.[114]

On Immigration

Immigration cases are very important in the Southern District and the Rio Grande Valley because of their close proximity to Mexico. Judge Vela took immigration cases seriously, as he did all cases. Early on in his tenure as federal judge, he ruled to require the Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS) and the Border Patrol to inform El Salvadoran and Guatemalan refugees of their right of asylum because of their respective countries' war situation. Later in 1988 and 1989 during the transition from the Reagan Administration to the Bush Administration, he heard a case involving the illegal smuggling of El Salvadorans from war torn Central America. The Reagan Administration

decided to limit the number of Central Americans who could claim political asylum and travel away from their detention camps located in and around Cameron County. Giving immigrants a sign of hope, Judge Vela temporarily halted the policy from being implemented.[115] The Church allowed many refugees to live on its property at their Casa Oscar Romero shelter.[116] With his ruling, scores of illegal aliens moved out of their detentions northward throughout Texas and the United States.[117]

One month later, Judge Vela ruled that the federal detention centers could be reopened in Brownsville and surrounding areas. Already 100,000 Central Americans had poured into the area. These people had to stay in the Rio Grande Valley while INS processed their papers. "Brownsville Mayor Ygnacio Garza said he was unhappy with the ruling. 'We [the City of Brownsville] still think the federal government has an obligation to help house and feed and take care of the medical needs of Central Americans who now in all likelihood will begin accumulating again.'"[118] Obviously, this was not the first or the last time Judge Vela's rulings upset area politicians.

In an incident grabbing national headlines, Border Patrol officers stopped Judge Vela on his way to the Laredo courthouse from Brownsville. Three of Vela's aides had ridden with him. The agents felt that too many people occupied the car. Cameron County Judge Gilberto Hinojosa stated that the border area "feels like occupied territory . . . It does not feel like we're in the United States of America."[119] Later in August of the same year, agents stopped him because of the dark tint of his car windows.[120] Vela commented, "It makes you wonder whether they [the Border Patrol] are really interested and recognize they must conform their conduct to the law. You've got to believe that it's not a coincidence that twice in one year they stop a federal judge for no reason at all."[121] However, Judge Vela never went as far as to call either incident proof of the "occupied territory" theory offered by Hinojosa.[122] This did not prevent the National Council of La Raza from using his story in front of the U.S. Civil Rights Commission for their gain in saying that federal authorities applied wrongful racial profiling in their patrols around the American Southwest.[123]

One of his favorite things to do as judge was to swear people in for either a federal or state office or to become U.S. citizens. In fact, he felt sad and hurt when his wife picked their daughter-in-law, State District Judge Rose Vela from Corpus Christi, to swear her in as mayor of Brownsville. She asserts that he took a special interest in immigration as many naturalized citizens can attest and took great pleasure in swearing in citizens. He worked very hard to make their ceremony the best and most memorable possible.[124] In 1988, he took the time to give a special cake to 98-year-old Clara Escobedo de Martínez. At an INS luncheon celebrating her naturalization, a note on the cake from Judge Vela and INS read "Congratulations Citizen Clara."[125]

History will recognize Judge Vela as the first federal judge since the John F. Kennedy era to impose the death penalty even though his religion told him to oppose the death penalty. The death penalty had been ruled unconstitutional at the federal level in 1973 because of the execution of too many minorities. Fifteen years later, the courts reinstated its use.[126] On August 2, 1993, Vela sentenced Juan Raul Garza to death and instructed him "to start making peace to [his] God."[127] A federal jury had found Mr. Garza guilty of killing three men and being drug boss along the U.S.-Mexico border. The charge of murder, which carries the federal death penalty, he flatly denied a year later. On May 27, 2000, after years of legal maneuverings, Judge Vela set the date for Garza's death for August 5, 2000.[128] During the hearing, "U.S. Attorney, Mervyn M. Mossbacker, Jr., joined the defense in asking that he not [set Garza's death]. Mossbacker noted that it would be the first federal execution in more than three decades . . ."[129]

President Bill Clinton's Press Secretary, Joe Lockhart, announced on June 30, 2000, that "until 'the process is complete, there won't be' an execution" of Garza by the federal government.[130] Unsure if the courts had issued the death penalty sentence at a highly disproportional rate, the Clinton Administration called for a temporary delay on the federal government administering the death penalty.[131] Garza had been sentenced to death in Texas, and he was "one of seventeen minority inmates out of the twenty men [then] on death row."[132] Judge Vela found no acceptable "claims of racial bias in Garza's case. 'In this particular case, the judge was Hispanic, the defendant was Hispanic, a majority of the jurors were Hispanic and the victims were Hispanic,' he said."[133] The new Bush Administration found no merit to further delay implementation of the lethal injection on Garza. The night before Juan Raul Garza's execution, Ari Fleischer, President George W. Bush's Press Secretary, announced, "The President found no grounds to grant clemency in this case."[134] The Supreme Court refused to assist Garza twice on that same day. Had Timothy McVeigh's execution been delayed in June 2001, then Juan Raul Garza of Brownsville and of Mexican American descent would have become the first federal prisoner executed by the federal government in four decades. As it was Tuesday morning of June 20, 2001, Garza became the first minority federal prisoner executed in four decades.[135]

Judge Vela did not always sentence murderers to death, sometimes advocating leniency, and he was deliberate in his sentencing practices. In a murder-for-hire case, Judge Vela sentenced Dora G. Cisneros to life in prison,[136] after she was found guilty of paying a *curandera* ("folk-healer") to arrange for the murder of Joey Fischer, a teenage ex-boyfriend of her daughter.[137] The death sentence could not be considered because of a technicality: Cisneros was charged only for "using an interstate communications device – a

telephone – as part of a murder-for-hire plot. The charge carries a maximum sentence of life in prison."[138] Judge Vela explained to her and the court that he could not sentence her to "less than life . . . I [Vela] don't think given its gravity and seriousness, that the case warrants anything less. All of us who were acquainted with you and all of us from my community have just one question – 'Why?'"[139]

The death sentence given to Garza placed Judge Vela, a devout Catholic, at odds with his own Catholic Church dogma. Justice Antonin Scalia, himself a Catholic, has questioned the reasoning behind the Church's anti-death penalty position.[140] Judge Vela, however, has not, since he is a pro-life advocate and is personally against the death penalty. During the hearing to set the date of Garza's execution, Vela went so far as to announce to the court "that he was 'not a proponent of the death penalty.'"[141] He ostensibly decided not to impress upon the federal judiciary his personal religious beliefs.

Judge Vela did not discuss his reasoning for any judicial decisions or specific cases with anyone, including his family.[142] When asked about his judicial views in a transcription of a 2001 interview for the John Hunter Room at the Arnulfo Oliveira Memorial Library, his answer is left blank. This adds to evidence of his lack of discussing cases.[143] As his wife has noted, her husband could separate his personal beliefs and the law. To him, it did not matter that his Church did not like his decision because he defended the Constitution and the federal laws when he sat on the bench and swore his oath of office.[144]

Legacy

At the age of 68, Vela's life ended in his birth city. In April 2004, immediately after landing at Harlingen airport, coming from treatment in Houston for stomach cancer, Judge Vela passed away.[145] He left behind a family who loved him and a legacy that will long be remembered. He was an independent person who made sure that his family did not know about his legal cases, while he continued being a father, husband, brother, and role model. He could rule against Catholic Church doctrine (in the case of death penalties) while on the bench, but still attend mass every Sunday. He believed in being American and standing behind his country when his country called for him.

Vela, like so many other American giants, came from humble beginnings, and fought his way into a leadership role. His indelible mark will be continue to be felt in the Lower Rio Grande Valley because many youngsters will walk through his middle school and know that he fought for education. He created a scholarship to help his "Eagles" soar, making sure that his scholarship is open to any student who has attended Filemón B. Vela Middle School. A few weeks after his death on May 24, 2004, his wife proudly bestowed the scholarship on several grateful students.[146] In death, he is making sure that

children are going to college. In his words: "As a society . . . we are 'not finding the greatness and uniqueness of each person that really exists.'"[147] Considering the high regard in which Brownsville and the Lower Rio Grande Valley held him, one must place an addendum to Vela's quote, because surely "greatness and unqueness" exuded through out his life and personality.

Endnotes

1 "Felix Frankfurter Quotes," Brainyquote.com (2004), 12 July 2004, http://wwww.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/f/felixfrank116762.html.

2 Vela, Filemón B., Transcript of interview with Erika Lea Salazar, 26 September 2001, p. 1.

3 Vela, Moisés Vicente, Personal Interview with Roman R. Pérez, 28 July 2004.

4 Age is from "Quotes from Judge Filemón Vela," Team4News.com, 20 July 2004, http://www.team4news.com/global/story.asp?s=1782547&ClientType=Printable. Cause of her death is from Vela, Moisés Vicente, 28 July 2004.

5 Vela, Moisés Vicente, 28 July 2004.

6 *Ibid.*

7 Vela, Blanca Sánchez, Personal Interview with Roman R. Pérez, 24 May 2004.

8 Vela, Moisés Vicente, 28 July 2004.

9 "Quotes from Judge Filemón Vela," Team4News.com, 20 July 2004, http://www.team4news.com/global/story.asp?s=1782547&ClientType=Printable.

10 Vela, Rafael Eduardo, Personal Interview with Roman R. Pérez, 24 May 2004.

11 Vela, Filemón B., p. 1.

12 Vela, Moisés Vicente, 28 July 2004.

13 Vela, Filemón B., p. 1.

14 Vela, Blanca Sánchez, 24 May 2004.

15 Vela, Filemón B., p.5.

16 Vela, Moisés Vicente, 28 July 2004.

17 The topic of discrimination will be discussed under the heading of "A Young Married Lawyer, Discrimination, and Politics". The topic of education will be discussed later under the two "On Education" headings.

18 Vela, Moisés Vicente, 28 July 2004.

19 Vela, Blanca Sánchez, Personal Interview with Roman R. Pérez, 16 June 2004.

20 Adams, William L. and Anthony K. Knopp, *Portrait of a Border City: Brownsville, Texas* (Austin, Texas: Eakin Press, 1997), p. 260.

21 Vela, Blanca Sánchez, 16 June 2004.

22 "Judge Filemón Vela Dies," Team4News.com (13 April 2004), 20 July 2004

http://www.team4news.com/global/story.asp?s=1782444&ClientType=Printable.

23 Vela, Moisés Vicente, 28 July 2004.

24 Vela, Rafael Eduardo, 24 May 2004.

25 Vela, Blanca Sánchez, 24 May 2004.

26 Vela, Filemón B., p.2.

27 Vela, Blanca Sánchez, 24 May 2004.

28 Vela, Filemón B., p.2.

29 Date comes from "The University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College 2004 Spring Commencement program," 15 May 2004, p. 4.

30 Vela, Blanca Sánchez, 16 June 2004.

31 Vela, Moisés Vicente, 28 July 2004. Several sources such as Adams and Knopp, p. 260, mention that Filemón joined or enlisted in the military. In a September 2001 interview previously cited, Judge Vela simply states that he "went to the military." The word "draft" seems like something that he might have used, but for some reason he did not use it to describe his joining the army. This could be because he wanted to make sure that people knew he went to the military without regret or resentment. In both interviews with Blanca Vela, she never says that her husband was drafted either. At this time, they wrote to each other as friends and were not more than that. She does assert that he was "out of shape" before and during his stint with the military. If he had enlisted, the military might not have taken him because he was "out of shape." It seems that the military would have accepted him only because of the draft. Moisés Vela specifically states his brother, like himself, had been drafted and that is the only reason he did not continue his schooling at UT-Austin. He makes a valid argument because it seems out of character for Filémon to abruptly leave something undone like attending UT-Austin. He never did return to school there. For this reason, we choose to say that Filémon had been drafted into the military. Either way drafted or enlisted, he joined the military and served his country, testifying well of his character-that he sacrificied his education to make time to serve.

32 Adams and Knopp, p. 260.

33 Vela, Moisés Vicente 28 July 2004.

34 Vela, Blanca Sánchez, 24 May 2004 and 16 June 2004.

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41 Vela, Blanca Sánchez, 16 June 2004.

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50 *Ibid.*. We should mention that the transcript words here do not seem to flow together. Even with this, we believe our interpretation is correct.

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52 Vela, Moisés Vicente, 28 July 2004.

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60 "Vela, Filemón Bartolomé," FJC.gov, 20 July 2004 http://www.fjc.gov/servlet/uGetInfo?jid=2458.

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64 I deduce this fact using the website http://www.txs.uscourts.gov/history/histjudg.htm for the dates of their appointment. Looking at all of the judges listed in the Southern District of Texas on this website and viewing their individual biographies using the Federal Judicial Center's website <http://www.fjc.gov> one sees all of their ethnicities and find that only Garza and De Anda preceded Judge Vela to the Southern District Court as Hispanics/Mexican Americans.

65 Vela, Blanca Sánchez, 24 May 2004.

66 "Vela, Filemón Bartolome," FJC.gov, 20 July 2004 http://www.fjc.gov/servlet/uGetInfo?jid=2458. On page 175, Fisch states Reynaldo "Garza's own successor on the district bench, James DeAnda, left the court for the financial security of private practice." While it may be true that Judge DeAnda left the court, he was not Garza's

successor on the federal bench. Being the first Mexican-American federal judge, Garza became the standard-bearer for all future Mexican-American federal judges as Fisch rightly points out. Fisch's error in saying Garza's Mexican-American successor was DeAnda damages, to a certain extent Mexican-Americans because it seems that this minority group would rather make more money than serve their country, which is certainly not true. With regard to Judge Vela, he replaced Garza in Brownsville, Garza's hometown, and served in Garza's courthouse and chambers. DeAnda did not.

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Yolanda González Zúñiga: Una Mujer de Acción

por

Elia García Cruz

La historiadora, investigadora, y genealogista Yolanda González Zúñiga nació en Brownsville el 20 de noviembre de 1929. Su padre, el ingeniero Ernesto González Salinas, oriundo de H. Matamoros, Tamaulipas, trabajó durante muchos años como ingeniero en la Casa Támez en Anáhuac, Nuevo León. Su madre, la señora Manuela Zúñiga Reséndez, originaria de Brownsville, perteneció a la quinta generación de las personas que poblaron esta región. Entre sus pasatiempos favoritos destacan la geografía, la historia, y el dibujo, además de su gran pasión por los árboles genealógicos, pasión que heredó de su padre quien fuera el pionero de esta importante actividad en la franja fronteriza del noreste de México. Cuenta la historiadora que su madre le decía que de sus cinco hermanos ella era la más apegada a su padre, y la que más interés mostraba por lo que él hacía.

> *Cuando yo tenía cuatro años, empecé a ayudarle a construir los árboles mágicos como yo les decía, porque eso eran para mí. Primero tuvo que enseñarme a leer, usando para ello periódicos en los cuales yo reconocía las letras, las recortaba y pegaba formando palabras. El aprender a leer me facilitó el trabajo. También aprendí a dibujar porque mi padre hacía muchos planos y yo le ayudaba. El era genealogista e historiador. Yo quedaba maravillada de cómo mi padre dibujaba primero las raíces, después el tronco, las ramas, y hojas, para finalmente escribir en ellos los nombres de las personas que estaba estudiando.*[1]

Comenta Yolanda que a su padre le buscaba mucha gente proveniente de varias ciudades tanto de México como de los Estados Unidos, trayendo maletines llenos de documentos para que les ayudara a rastrear sus orígenes y formar así su árbol familiar.[2]

Estudió en la Escuela Primaria San Francisco de Brownsville. En ese tiempo, esa escuela era un convento pequeño, atendido por monjas. Su maestra fue la hermana Lawrence Muñiz, descendiente de la familia Ballí. Posteriormente asistió a la Escuela de la Resaca. Al terminar la preparatoria, ingresó al Texas Southmost College, donde el director de la mencionada institución le ofreció trabajo en la biblioteca.

> *Pero yo le dije que no podía, porque estaba haciendo los árboles genealógicos de mi padre.*

"Eso que tú haces es muy importante. Puedes hacerlo allá en la biblioteca mientras trabajas," le dijo el director. Fue así como se le asignó un espacio para

que atendiera a quienes solicitaban su ayuda para buscar a sus familiares. En varias ocasiones ella fue testigo de momentos felices, cuando dos familiares se encontraban por primera vez y reconocían su parentesco, después de haber vivido ignorándolo.[3]

Su trabajo en la biblioteca fue primero como encuadernadora de libros; al realizar esta tarea descubrió que había libros muy valiosos que necesitaban remedio inmediato porque se estaban deshaciendo. Habló con el director y le explicó el problema y la necesidad de clasificar y ordenar los libros, porque, según afirma esta talentosa dama, cuando se fundó la biblioteca, la gente donó muebles y libros, los cuales fueron colocados en los estantes sin clasificar; esto hacía difícil encontrar lo que la gente necesitaba. Se le ocurrió que los estudiantes podían ayudar en esta tarea, por lo que pronto los estudiantes hicieron tarjetas que explicaban los temas de los libros. Posteriormente se clasificaron por orden alfabético.[4]

Durante los casi cincuenta años que laboró en la biblioteca, pasó por todos los departamentos, por lo que conoció muy bien su funcionamiento. Cuenta que organizaba exposiciones de libros, talleres de manualidades, y otras actividades tendientes a incentivar la asistencia de la gente a la misma. Su fama como pionera en la formación de árboles genealógicos ha ido creciendo, y de varios puntos de ambos países la gente acude a ella en busca de ayuda para formar su árbol de familia. Ella ha dedicado mucho de su tiempo a dar pláticas a los estudiantes de la Universidad de Texas y de otras instituciones que solicitan sus conocimientos sobre genealogía e historia. Se le conoce también como la "Dama de los Fantasmas" porque trabaja con gente que ya murió y porque cuenta historias de aparecidos en los terrenos del Fuerte Brown, lugar que actualmente ocupa el Campus de la Universidad de Texas en Brownsville.[5]

El Doctor Anthony Knopp, historiador de la UTB, afirma que Yolanda trabajó primero en la primera biblioteca de la de la ciudad, "Zacarías Taylor", y después en la biblioteca del Texas Southmost College, hoy Arnulfo Oliveira.

> *Cuando empecé a impartir cursos de graduados en la enseñanza de la Historia de Matamoros y Brownsville, y necesitaba investigar y buscar información histórica para escribir libros, Yolanda era la encargada del Hunter Room, lugar donde se encuentran los libros más valiosos de Historia de México y Estados Unidos. Ella conocía bien todos los libros, periódicos, y revistas de historia que podían servirme. Fue una entusiasta investigadora sobre la historia de Brownsville y su herencia.*[6]

También afirma que ella por muchos años fue la encargada de arreglar el árbol de Navidad en la Casa Stillman, y con frecuencia tenía algo para exhibir en el Museo Histórico de Brownsville como trajes típicos tradicionales de distintos lugares, libros y otros artículos para el altar de muertos y otras

tradiciones. [7]

Coincidimos con el Dr. Knopp, quien opina que lo más importante en la obra de Yolanda González ha sido su participación de enlace en las relaciones entre los historiadores de Brownsville y Matamoros, especialmente en las organizaciones de las dos ciudades, ya que fue Vicepresidenta de la Asociación Histórica de Brownsville y Presidenta de la Sociedad Tamaulipeca de Historia y Geografía y Estadística de H. Matamoros, Tamaulipas. Participó como organizadora de las Fiestas del Bicentenario de la Independencia los Estados Unidos, en 1976. Asistió como conferencista en los festejos de los Cuatrocientos Años de la fundación de la ciudad de Monterrey, Nuevo León, en 1996. En estos festejos fue entrevistada por los diferentes medios de comunicación y se dio a conocer a nivel internacional. [8]

La revista *Contenido*, editada en México, de octubre del 2004 la menciona como pieza clave en la resolución del pleito por las tierras de la Isla del Padre, promovido por mexicanos que habían sido despojado en 1848 por el gobierno estadounidense. El caso más conocido y que está a punto de resolverse es el de la Familia Ballí, y por lo tanto la investigadora tiene más trabajo que nunca, ya que mucha gente cree que ella tiene el dinero y acuden a ella para solicitar la parte que les corresponda.[9]

Cipriano Cárdenas, Jefe del Departamento de Lenguas Modernas en UTB, la describe como una dama elegante y culta, a quien conoció cuando estudiaba el bachillerato en la mencionada institución, la cual en ese tiempo era Texas Southmost College.

> *Ella ya trabajaba en la Biblioteca. Ha hecho una aportación muy valiosa en la genealogía. Creo que se interesó más en esa actividad debido a los fraudes que se presentaron con la gente que fue despojada de sus tierras o que fueron obligados a vender muy baratas sus propiedades, como es el caso de la señora Leonor Muñoz Salinas, tía mía en segundo grado, quien alegaba que el Rancho de Los Tomates, del cual fueron despojados, pertenecía a su familia, ya que hubo una época de mucha violencia en Brownsville en 1848. A raíz del Tratado de Guadalupe Hidalgo, se presentaron muchos abusos y fueron despojados de sus tierras muchos mexicanos. Ojalá que esos problemas se resuelvan pronto y le den a la gente lo que le pertenece.*[10]

El Señor Cárdenas menciona también que la historiadora y exbibliotecaria de la UTB con el tiempo ha recibido el reconocimiento merecido por su labor, ya que es importante saber quiénes somos y de dónde venimos y conocer cómo vivieron y que hicieron nuestros antepasados. [11]

Actualmente vive en Brownsville, Texas, con su esposo el señor Alfonso Gómez Argüelles, con quien se unió en matrimonio en 1997. Aunque se jubiló de su trabajo en la Universidad en 1998, continua trabajando con las

personas que acuden a ella para buscar sus raíces, ya sea para formar su árbol genealógico o para reclamar alguna herencia.[12]

Notas

1 Entrevista personal con la Investigadora y Genealogista Yolanda González Zúñiga en noviembre del 2004.

2 Entrevista personal con la Investigadora y Genealogista Yolanda González Zúñiga en noviembre del 2004.

3 Entrevista personal con la Investigadora y Genealogista Yolanda González Zúñiga en noviembre del 2004.

4 Entrevista personal con la Investigadora y Genealogista Yolanda González Zúñiga en noviembre del 2004.

5 Entrevista personal con la Investigadora y Genealogista Yolanda González Zúñiga en noviembre del 2004.

6 Entrevista personal con el Doctor Anthony Knopp, Historiador de la UTB. Universidad de Texas en Brownsville.

7 Entrevista personal con el Doctor Anthony Knopp, Historiador de la UTB. Universidad de Texas en Brownsville.

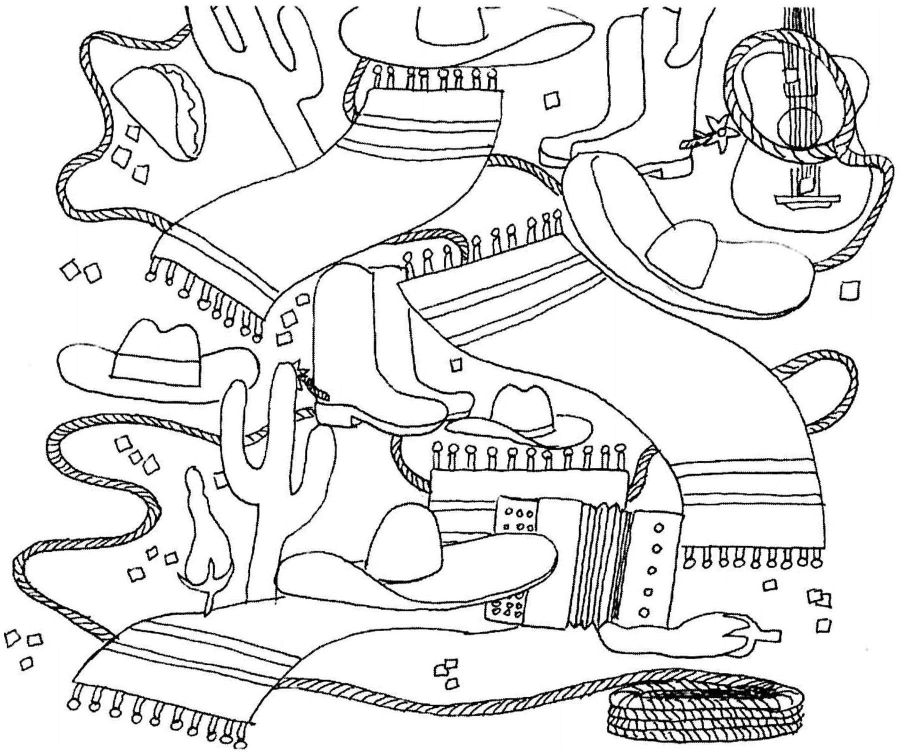
8 Entrevista personal con el Doctor Anthony Knopp, Historiador de la UTB. Universidad de Texas en Brownsville.

9 Revista Contenido mes de octubre 2005.

10 Entrevista personal con el Señor Cipriano Cardenas, Jefe del Departamento de Lenguas modernas en la UTB, Universidad de Texas en Brownsville en el mes de julio del 2005.

11 Entrevista personal con el Señor Cipriano Cardenas, Jefe del Departamento de Lenguas modernas en la UTB, Universidad de Texas en Brownsville en el mes de julio del 2005.

12 Entrevista personal con la Investigadora y Genealogista Yolanda González Zúñiga en noviembre del 2004.



The Spirit of the South Bank