Studies in Rio Grande Valley history

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Political History

1800, Baile Scene
by Jessica Cisneros
Historia de Valle Hermoso, Tamaulipas
por
Ernesto Escribano Gómez

El Municipio de Valle Hermoso se localiza 648 leguas cuadradas entre los Ríos Conchos o San Fernando al sur, el Río Bravo al norte, tierras realengas al oriente y al poniente los fondos de la Villa de Reynosa. Esta extensión era la propiedad de Don Antonio de Urizar en 1774. Lo adquirieron doce vecinos de la ciudad de Camargo y uno de Reynosa; los que repoblaron el Rancho de San Juan de los Esteros Hermosos, o simplemente San Juan de los Esteros que había establecido en 1749 y Don Matías de los Santos Coy, vecino de Camargo, quien le dio el nombre. Esta localidad, insignificante hace doscientos veintiún años, se convirtió después (1794) en la Villa del Refugio, más tarde, 28 de enero de 1826, en la Villa de Matamoros, Ciudad de Matamoros a partir del 14 de Mayo de 1834, Heroica e Invicta por decreto del Congreso del Estado del 7 de noviembre de 1851 y Leal por acuerdo del Senado de la República el 28 de mayo de 1852 (por Dn. Eliseo Paredes Manzano, Cronista de la Ciudad).

En esta comarca se formó la Hacienda “El Sauto”, propiedad del Señor Mariano del Conde. Abarcaba la parte de los municipios de Villa de Méndez, la de San Fernando y la de Reynosa. En 1884 la reclamaba como suya el Señor Mariano de la Arena y Conde, además de reclamar también a los herederos de Don Mariano del Conde, las haciendas de San Juan de la Vaquería y Soledad de la Mota, Nuevo León. Esta última es la Villa de General Terán de aquel vecino estado.

La Hacienda de “El Sauto” se componía de dos ranchos: La Costa uno y La Florida otro. De esta nació, a principios del siglo actual, la Hacienda de la Sauteña, que abarcaba terrenos de los municipios de Reynosa, H. Matamoros, San Fernando y Méndez. Este latifundio era propiedad del industrial, banquero y hacendado íñigo Noriega, de los muy amigos de Don Porfirio Díaz; el Señor Noriega era dueño, además, de la compañía industrial de San Antonio de Abad, de las fábricas de San Rafael y anexas y de las haciendas de Xico, La Compañía, Venta Nueva, Zoquíapan, Río Frio, Establo de San Juan y Chapingo; construyó un ferrocarril para unir estos predios. La Sauteña tenía 221,164 hectáreas; otras fuentes le dan 262,000 hectáreas. La “casa grande” de esta hacienda es el edificio que actualmente ocupan las oficinas de la secretaría de recursos hidráulicos en la ciudad de Río Bravo, Tamaulipas.

El Rancho de Los Borregos, propiedad del General Félix Díaz, sobrino del presidente de la República, General Don Porfirio Díaz Mori, pertenecía a Don Íñigo, quien lo obsequió al pariente del jefe de la nación. Este predio fue repartido a los peones del mismo por el General Don Lucio Blanco el 30 de agosto de 1913 en la Heroica Matamoros, quedando este hecho histórico como “el primer reparto de tierras de la revolución”, con anterioridad, 1912, el caudillo del sur, General Emiliano Zapata, dio tierras a los trabajadores agrícolas de una hacienda del estado de Morelos, pero no entregó a éstos sus títulos de propiedad como lo hizo el General Blanco.

Los parientes de Don Íñigo, Quirino Noriega el principal, huyeron a los Estados Unidos, estableciéndose temporalmente en Brownsville, Texas.

El Ing. Don José Duvallon, empleado de la hacienda de La Sauteña, dijo en una conferencia dictada en la Ciudad de Victoria el 11 de septiembre de 1910: “La compañía agrícola La Sauteña se constituyó en la Ciudad de México por la escritura pública otorgada ante el notario Villelo, a veinte de mayo de mil novecientos siete; su capital inicial fue de diez millones de pesos. …”

Pero la Hacienda de la Sauteña existía desde 1902. Lo dice un edicto del juzgado 2o. de Distrito de Tamaulipas con sede en Nuevo Laredo, firmado por el Lic. E. Romero el 30 de diciembre de 1901, por medio del cual cita a los “poseedores de terrenos o fincas de campo que colindan con
la expresada ‘Hacienda de la Sauteiia’ o que posean terrenos que antes hayan pertenecido a esta hacienda; fijándose como punto de partida ‘desembocadura del Río Bravo en el mar’.

Los Repatriados

Al terminarse la Primera Guerra Mundial (1914-1918) la industria bélica de los Estados Unidos tuvo que convertirse en industria de paz, cambio que provocó allá la crisis en 1929. Al asumir la presidencia de la República, el General Don Lázaro Cárdenas del Río, 30 de noviembre de 1934, se puso en práctica un programa de repatriación para que nuestros compatriotas regresaran al solar nativo y contribuyeran a hacer progresar nuestra patria. En 1935 el Río Bravo se desbordó e inundó la comarca hasta la Laguna Madre, quedando la ciudad de Matamoros como una isla. Vino entonces a la H. Matamoros el Ing. Don Eduardo Chávez Ramírez, con el propósito de construir los bordos de defensa del Río Bravo y un distrito de riego.

Decía el General Cárdenas a las cámaras legislativas el 1o de septiembre de 1936, al leer su informe de gobierno; “... Las obras de defensa del valle bajo del mismo Río, el Río Bravo, en la región de Matamoros, Tamaulipas, obras con lo que se impedirá en el futuro la pérdida de valiosas cosechas a consecuencia de las frecuentes inundaciones, además, con estas obras se abrirán extensas zonas al cultivo.”

El Ing. Chávez explica: “Para la organización del distrito de riego expidió el Señor Presidente, acuerdo presidencial otorgando a la comisión del Bajo Bravo, facultades integrales de todos los ramos de la administración, creando así la ‘primera comisión descentralizada,’ invitando a los repatriados que sufrían duras situaciones en Estados Unidos. Otro tanto de lo que aquí llevó escrito se necesitaría para referir los problemas de la radicación de 50,000 repatriados, dos por la carencia de recursos que padecía el gobierno del General Cárdenas por la crisis de la expropiación petrolera que desataron los poderosos intereses afectados por México”.


Asimismo el Presidente Cárdenas en su informe del 1o de septiembre de 1939, decía: “La repartición se está realizando con método y de acuerdo con un plan que puede asegurar su éxito. Se ha establecido y la Colonia 18 de Marzo, en el municipio de Matamoros, Estado de Tamaulipas, que tiene: 627 jefes de familia y un total de 3,750 personas y cuenta con 900 hombres mayores de 16 años que han sido dotados con una parcela de 10 hectáreas cultivables cada uno.” Este párrafo del informe presidencial puede ser considerado como el acta de nacimiento de la ciudad de Valle Hermoso y su actual jurisdicción municipal.

Los repatriados llegaron y se quedaron despertigados en la cuadrícula grande de la zona agrícola de Matamoros. De los repatriados, dijo el Señor Cicero Mac Kinney en su libro, El Fraud Burlado, publicado en México en 1985, “En el principio de 1939 recibimos la invitación para volver a México, por el Señor Presidente General Lazaro Cárdenas, a través de su representante el licenciado Ramón Beteta, quien nos hizo el ofrecimiento de darnos tierras, créditos y otras facilidades lo que aceptamos de inmediato y comenzamos a organizarnos. ... Que esto les movió a efectuar tres juntas en el local de la escuela Lanier, de San Antonio, Texas, y que en ellas se estipularon las condiciones de su regreso, hasta las que les comprometió a poner a la nueva colonia agrícola que iban a fomentar, el nombre de “18 de Marzo”, lo que conmemora el día de la expedición del decreto de la expropiación petrolera el año anterior. Que la nueva colonia

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se localizaría al norte del Estado de Tamaulipas y que con mucho ánimo y alegría se formó la caravana de repatriados, de cerca de mil personas, que se puso en marcha un día 12 de mayo de 1939.” Apunta Don Simón Herrera, por el escrito del Dr. Vázquez Farias (cronista de la ciudad de Valle Hermoso), que tardaron dos días en el trayecto de San Antonio a Brownsville, y que de ahí siguieron por las poblaciones de Alice y Los Fresnos, del lado de Texas, para alcanzar Matamoros. También recuerda que, recibieron servicios gratuitos para arreglos mecánicos de carros y camionetas de compañeros. Un mal tiempo los hizo permanecer en Matamoros concentrados en las bodegas de algodón y luego fueron desplazándose hasta “Estación de el Control”, donde el 29 de mayo de 1939 empezaron a trabajar para la secretaría, Scop, y allí comenzaron con la ampliación de las brechas de antejo. Este relato nos hace saber que los repatriados al fin se instalaron en el “campamento” Valle Hermoso en la segunda quincena de junio del mismo año, y que les fueron dando posesión de parcelas con “monte” de 12.5 hectáreas a cada uno, las que personalmente fueron desenraizando.

**El Distrito de Riego**

El distrito de riego del bajo Río Bravo se encuentra en el extremo noreste de Estado de Tamaulipas. La organización de las colonias, así como el estudio de las tierras de cultivo, fueron hechos por la dirección de las obras de la defensa del bajo Río Bravo, Tamaulipas, dependiente de la secretaría de comunicaciones y obras públicas, con su carácter de agencia de colonización, títulos dados por la secretaría de agricultura y fomento. Los terrenos fueron enajenados en favor del Gobierno Federal por el Estado de Tamaulipas. Su fraccionamiento y colonización fueron hechos de acuerdo con un reglamento expedido en México, D.F., el 29 de julio de 1940. El envío de los primeros colonos fue prematuro, pues llegaron dos meses antes de la fecha fijada, sin haber sido terminados los estudios de las tierras y existiendo, por lo tanto, el peligro de encontrarlas inútiles para el cultivo. Los colonos, hombres y mujeres vivieron en comunidad, amontonados en pequeñas casas y esperaron allí la designación de sus tierras. Posteriormente comenzaron los trabajos de desmonte y limpieza de las parcelas, recibiendo los propios colonos sus salarios.

**Las Primeras Aguas del Río Bravo Para Tierras Mexicanas**

Los ciclones de 1932 y 1933 habían devastado la región, y en 1935, precipitó una gran inundación; las aguas se extendieron hasta la Laguna Madre y Matamoros quedó como una isla en la que se refugiaron los habitantes de los escasos ranchos circundantes. El Gobierno Federal por conducto de la Secretaría de Comunicaciones y Obras Públicas, dispuso que mediante algunas obras se derramaran salarios. El Ing. Eduardo Chavez opinó que la derrama de $200,000.00 autorizados podría ser a la vez para ejecutar una obra provechosa: se trazaron entonces los primeros kilómetros del bordo mexicano que equipará al bordo americano, ya para entonces construido, que era el que precipitaba todo el impetu de las crecientes sobre el lado mexicano. En la última semana del mes de octubre de 1935, quinientos hombres trabajaban en la brecha sobre la que enseguida se empezó a levantar el bordo.

**Brecha 120 con Kilómetro 82**

A 35 kms. al sur del campamento general de repatriados del control, se cruzan estas importantes vías. El primer campamento se instaló frente al sitio donde se construiría más tarde el edificio
del Banco Longoria, S. A., el 18 de marzo de 1939, en los terrenos de la colonia agrícola “18 de Marzo”. Esta, la de “Anáhuac” y la de “Magueyes”, fueron el esqueleto, la estructura básica de la comarca agrícola de Valle Hermoso. Al año siguiente formalizaron su representación social creada para defender mejor los derechos de los colonos, vender mejor sus productos y obtener beneficios comunes; la inauguración solemne fue el 27 de noviembre de 1940, por el Señor Dr. José G. Parres, secretario de agricultura y fomento, en nombre y representación del Sr. Presidente de la República, General Lázaro Cárdenas.

**Avance de Valle Hermoso a Partir de 1950**

En 1950 la junta de mejoras materiales de Valle Hermoso verificó actividades y colectas populares para reunir fondos y así pudo construir las banquetas y los cordones de la plaza. Estos trabajos fueron inaugurados el 20 de noviembre del mismo año por el Sr. Ernesto L. Elizondo, Presidente de la H. Matamoros. En mismo año se iniciaron la construcción de la primera escuela secundaria, a iniciativa del profesor Manuel Parreno, director de la escuela primaria “18 de Marzo”; cuarenta y seis fueron los primeros alumnos. El 23 de diciembre el presidente inauguró el servicio de luz y energía eléctrica. Este nuevo servicio lo proporcionaba la Compañía Eléctrica de Matamoros, S.A., cuyo gerente era Don Rubén A. Martínez. En ese año había en la región de Valle Hermoso un comercio activo que demostraba la prosperidad de la zona agrícola, así como cinco plantas deseperitadoras de algodón, cuya presencia confirmaba la categoría económica de la comarca; éstas eran: Algodonera Bajo Bravo, S.A., en Empalme; Algodonera Valle Hermoso, brecha 120 con 80; Industrias Figueroa, S.A., en la colonia Anáhuac y en la brecha 120 con 82; y en 120 con 70, y M. Huerta e hijos, S. de R.L., en la colonia Anáhuac.

Los poblados que formaban la unidad geográfica-económica de Valle Hermoso eran las colonias agrícolas Anáhuac, Magueyes y 18 de Marzo, los poblados el Realito, Empalme, Fortunato, Zazu, y Villa Cardenas, y los ejidos la Capazon, Urbano de La Rosa, La Chapeña, Rodríguez, Altamirano, Molina, Enríquez, Dieciseis de Septiembre, El Esfuerzo, La Ensenada, Liberación del Campesino, Ricardo Flores Magón, Doce de Octubre, El Abandono, Benito Juárez, Alvaro Obregón, Nueva Victoria, El Porvenir, La Flórida, El Moquetito, El Llano y el nuevo centro de población El Platanito. (Después se crearía el ejido Praxedis Balboa: 1967.)


**Oposición en la Heroica Matamoros**

Los representantes de los sectores económicamente activos de la Heroica Matamoros se opusieron con vehemencia a que Valle Hermoso obtuviera su autonomía municipal, y trataron de hacer inoperante el decreto num. 462. en la prensa regional (H, Matamoros y Reynosa) Pagaron la
publicación de un curso dirigido al H., Congreso del Estado dando sus puntos de vista, contrarios al propósito independentista de los vallehermosenses, argumentando que el decreto citado era lesivo para Valle Hermoso, ya que no se habían hecho estudios de sus aspectos económico, agrícola, demográfico, y territorial, a fin de saber si los dos municipios pueden subsistir dentro de una pequeña demarcación territorial. A este efecto el oficial mayor del gobierno, Lic. Don Ciro de La Garza Treviño, solicitó al director de agricultura y ganadería del Gobierno del Estado, se realizarán los citados estudios.

En esta incertidumbre se pasaron los vallehermosenses dos años, hasta que el 10 de marzo de 1953, se reunieron en la plaza municipal de Valle Hermoso más de quince mil ciudadanos exigiendo el municipio libre. Este movimiento independentista estuvo alentado siempre por el Lic. Don Flavio Navar y Urtusástegui. En medio del entusiasmo general se recibió un mensaje del Gobernador Don Horacio Terán invitando a los miembros del comité pro-municipio libre de Valle Hermoso a su despacho en el palacio de gobierno el día 3 de marzo. En dicha reunión se puso de manifiesto la presión del comité, logrando que el jefe del ejecutivo dispusiera que los legisladores discutieran el asunto y resolvieran en consecuencia en una sesión urgente. Y en presencia de los vallehermosenses los señores diputados opinaron que el c. gobernador debía mandar que se compliese el decreto num. 462. Para este efecto se determinó el decreto num. 200, ya que se tenía que modificar los límites del nuevo municipio, ya que en el decreto num. 462 se habían dado límites equivocados del municipio.

La Solemne Ceremonia Oficial

El 18 de marzo de 1953 en el edificio de la representación social de la colonia “Agrícola 18 de Marzo”, esquina suroeste de las calles de Hidalgo y Segunda, el licenciado Don Manuel Lerma Betancourt, Secretario General de Gobierno, en representación del c. gobernador del Estado, Lic. Don Horacio Terán Zozaya, declaró legitimamente instalada y en aptitud de ejercer sus funciones, la junta de administración civil del municipio de Valle Hermoso, que actuaría hasta finalizar el trienio 1952-1954, dentro del territorio señalado por el decreto num. 200 por el H. Congreso del Estado, el día 4 de marzo de 1953.
How the Teachers of Matamoros Formed *la Union Tamaulipeca*
by
Alma Ortiz

The study of the history of education in Matamoros has generally dealt with the founding of schools and other educational trends and demographics. The history of the *Magisterio* or the teachers’ union has been the basis of significantly less study and research. The majority of the literature on the history of the teachers’ union is basically local news stories written by fellow teachers and local historians to commemorate the day of the teacher. In recent years local historians like Cirila Quintero and Alma Guerrero-Miller have written about *sindicalismo* in Matamoros and about the *maquiladora* union, the *Sindicato de Jornaleros y Obreros Industriales* (*SJOI*). These works have sparked interest in the emergence of unions in Matamoros. In light of these works, the study of the rise of the teachers’ union in Matamoros is important since its emergence occurred around the same time that the *SJOI* was being created. It is quite possible that the impulse to unionize these two worker groups may have resulted from state and national trends and the political climate of the time. Other considerations like the urbanization and growth of Matamoros may have sparked unionization also. In order to trace the parallels between both these union movements, a history of the teacher union movement is an important first step.

One of the major factors affecting the development of education in Matamoros has been isolation from the rest of Mexico. This isolation has contributed to a lack of response from the national government when petitions have been made by the local community to improve its educational facilities. The state and federal governments have been slow at times to join and “support” the local educational system financially. The unionization of teachers in Matamoros emerged under this condition of isolation. In order to better their conditions, Matamoros teachers had to unite and organize themselves even though they had a very limited tradition of union organization.

One of the earliest examples of teacher organization, although on a very small scale, occurred in 1903. Earlier, in 1871 and in 1878, the state government decided to end the support it had granted the Institute of San Juan. The local government had attempted to finance the school, but the funding was inadequate. In 1903, two teachers led a protest movement demanding a salary increase. Since the state government of Tamaulipas had suspended its funding of the school, the city of Matamoros eventually found a way to increase the teachers’ wages. It is from this limited experience in union tactics that the organization of the early teacher unions emerged.

The coming of the railroad to Matamoros increased the population growth of the area. As a result of the growth of the population the Governor of Tamaulipas, General César López de Lara, chose Matamoros to build the Colegio Modelo in 1922. With the emergence of Emilio Portes Gil as governor of the state, Tamaulipas experienced a more stable political environment. As the leader of the new Frontier Socialist Party, his programs attempted to “transition Tamaulipas to a post-revolutionary Mexico” and thus diminish the isolation of the state. His programs included the betterment of educational facilities and opportunities. This began to take place in 1925 when under his leadership the construction of new schools occurred. Serving as President of Mexico from 1928 to 1930, his influence was felt extensively by Matamoros teachers and other workers in the state who would later attempt to unionize to improve their economic and working conditions.

One of the major causes for discontent occurred with the creation of the first middle school in
Matamoros. In 1930, Matamoros had five elementary schools, two of which were boys’ schools: the Escuela Modelo and the José Arrese. Two other schools were girls’ schools named the Josefina Menchaca and the Josefa Ortiz. The fifth school was a coeducational school named Mariano Matamoros. These schools were all state supported schools and thus its teachers were employed by the state. As the population of Matamoros grew in 1930 to 24,995 people, community leaders felt the need to create a middle school for grades seven through nine. A major proponent of the proposed middle school was Dr. Manuel Rodríguez Brayda, who with the backing of the Matamoros mayor traveled to Mexico City to try to get support and financing from the federal government for the school. The Director of Outlying Secondary Schools informed Brayda that the school could be built if Matamoros raised about 20,000 pesos. Brayda quickly sought out two friends from Matamoros who were serving in the national Congress. Práxedes Balboa and Manuel Tárraga were able to use their influence to get approval from the national government to fund the middle school. The school was named the Escuela secundaria federal numero 1 Juan Jose de la Garza, and it was opened on February 14, 1931.

Along with the school came the first Matamoros teachers who worked for the federal government. As a result, teachers who worked in the federal school received higher wages than teachers working for state supported schools. The discrepancy in salaries was considered unfair by many teachers who felt that both federal and state teachers performed the same work load. Matamoros teachers also had other areas of contention. Teachers at this time were paid once a month instead of the current bi-weekly pay schedule to which Mexican teachers are now accustomed. Their salary was usually not paid to them on time, leaving their families in hardship for several months until their wages were paid. Backed by the state government, the local government had the authority to terminate teacher contracts, and in this sense teachers were under the whim of the mayors or other political bosses of their municipality. These were the people who generally decided who would work and where.

The first teachers’ union in the state of Tamaulipas was the Tamaulipecan Teacher’s Union (UMT) which emerged in Tampico in 1934 under the leadership of Gil Peña of Victoria. Among the co-founders were two Matamoros teachers: Celia Zúñiga and Josefina Zúñiga. The majority of the teachers of the state, including Matamoros, did not readily join the union because of prevalent political apathy. Many teachers were afraid of being unjustly terminated by the state for participating in the teachers’ union. Thus only a few “radical” elements joined the UMT. Celia Zúñiga stated in an interview that the UMT at the time was a secret society because if their activities had been out in the open the state would have crushed them. She described the UMT as acting in a “reserved manner” during their early years.

The UMT’s early objectives were to stabilize teachers’ work assignments since their contracts were not secure and to ensure that they would be paid on time. An increase in the teacher salary was also sought since teachers were paid only $45.00 pesos a month. The members of the UMT were routinely accused of being “agitators” and “communists.” Arrest warrants were commonly issued against them, and at times they were also attacked. These practices worked against the UMT, and their first strike failed. As a result many teachers’ contracts were terminated, and some teachers (including Abelardo Gómez) had to leave the state to find work. Gómez had to move to Coahuila for a while after being fired for participating in the strike.

The UMT in 1935 joined followers of Emilio Portes Gil in ousting the appointed governor of Tamaulipas, Dr. Hector Villarreal. Although they were not able to accomplish their stated objectives, they did obtain political recognition as a teachers’ union. The next Governor of the state was Enrique L. Canseco, who the UMT thought might be sympathetic to the teachers’ plight.
Unfortunately, he was not. This ultimately resulted in a strike. During this third strike, Celia Zúñiga was unable to stop all the activities in the educational facilities in Matamoros. It was also during this period that thirteen teachers from the rural areas of Matamoros were unjustly terminated, and three Matamoros teachers were suspended. Although the strike was not totally successful in Matamoros, the state government decided to accept some of the petitions including the federalization of teachers.13

The year 1936 was an important one for unions in Matamoros as it was marked by the founding of the Confederación de Trabajadores Mexicanos (CTM). A chapter of the CTM, the Federación Regional de Trabajadores de Matamoros (FRTM), also emerged under the leadership of Eliseo García Flores. The secretary of education of the FRTM was a new member to the UMT, Estéban Alvarado de los Reyes, who would later be a prominent figure in the union leadership in Matamoros. By the end of 1936, Governor Canseco seemed to be relinquishing his promise to the teachers of the state. This resulted in the bitterest and hardest fought strike for the UMT. This fourth strike began on December 4th, 1936 as the UMT sought the federalization of education in Tamaulipas. By this time the UMT had learned from their experiences in other strikes. In Matamoros, the membership of the UMT had not necessarily grown, but Celia Zúñiga was able to take control of the five elementary schools in Matamoros although she had very few teachers at her side. Her success was partly due to the help of unions allied to the FRTM, which included the Jornaleros y Obreros Industriales and even a union of bakers. During the night that Zúñiga took control of the schools, she invited the teachers to a meeting to explain to them how the UMT was fighting to secure their employment, increase their wages and better their working environment. Once the teachers accepted the state of strike, the UMT created a strike committee presided by Estéban Alvarado. Other committees were established and food was provided to out of town teachers. A schedule was drawn up and teachers were assigned guard duty around the clock at their schools.14

The strike lasted until February 15, 1937, and it was so hard fought that Estéban Alvarado did not get to see his son until three months after his birth. The UMT was successful, resulting in forty-five Matamoros teachers receiving their federal appointment.15 The UMT also obtained the payment of teacher salaries during the time of the strike and the salaries they were owed for four months before the strike.16

It is important to understand that the federal government was also in favor of federalizing public education. The Mexican government presented the option to federalize education to each state. The Secretary of Public Education, José Vasconcelos, had called for the implementation of socialist education, which had been stipulated in Article Three of the Mexican Constitution. By taking over education from the states the federal government could keep tighter control of education. Teachers were an integral part of the Mexican Revolution’s goals since many worked in rural communities educating the masses and instructing them on the Mexican Revolution ideals as well. The state government did not readily support federalization since it would diminish its ability to control education on a state and local level.17

Federalization of education also allowed the UMT to establish ties with other union groups. After federalized education was in place, the Waiters’ Union, one of the state’s oldest unions, recognized the UMT, aligning it with the Regional Federation of Workers of Matamoros (FRTM). As a result this meant that the UMT could count on the help of other unions associated with the Confederación de Trabajadores Mexicanos. Once teachers had obtained federalization of their contracts, they gained greater stability of employment, but a need arose to organize on a national level in order to successfully lobby the federal government for future benefits since the federal
government would now become the caretaker of education in Tamaulipas. They quickly set out
to connect themselves with other national unions like the Confederación Nacional Campesina
(CNC) and the Sindicato Mexicano de Maestros y Trabajadores de la Enseñanza. Problems
were already arising after the federalization agreement was signed by the UMT and the federal and
state governments. Celia Zúñiga stated that there were at least seven strikes after the agreement
was signed as the UMT tried to include teachers not included in the federalization agreement. As
the UMT sought connections with other national unions, Mexican President Lázaro Cárdenas and
others were afraid that it might lead to the organization of a national union of workers, teachers
and farm laborers. A union of these three groups, they feared, might be too powerful to control;
thus President Cárdenas took steps to stop such a union from organizing.

As a result, on December 5, 1938, President Lázaro Cárdenas enacted the Ley Tutelar de
los Trabajadores al Servicio de los Poderes de la Unión. This law grouped teachers as federal
workers, which meant they could no longer associate with unions that worked for private industry.
This law affected teachers negatively since their union, the UMT, had connections and ties to
local unions who were partly responsible for the UMT’s success in the 1937 strike that won them
federalization. This also stopped any type of unionization of teachers, farm laborers and workers
in the same union. That same year, the Federación de Sindicatos de Trabajadores al Servicio del
Estado was founded. A meeting of the different teacher organizations was called in order to create
a national union of teachers in 1939. After several attempts the first national teachers’ union was
founded, called the Sindicato Único Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación (SUNTE). Conflict
and differences between the directors and the representative body resulted in the limited life of
this organization. Another National Congress was called to unite the different teacher unions,
which lead to the formation of the Sindicato de Trabajadores de la Educación de la Republica
Mexicana (STERM). This group contained the same membership as the SUNTE, and as a result,
conflict erupted again. This time internal calls were made for the federal government to intervene.
Finally on December 30, 1943, Mexican President General Manuel Ávila Camacho invited the
different groups to participate in a Congreso de Unidad which resulted in the establishing of the
Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación (SNTE) with Luis Chávez Orozco as its
Secretary General.

A comparison of the SNTE with national teacher unions in the United States (like the
American Federation of Teachers) will show basic fundamental differences. Teachers in Mexico
do not choose to join the SNTE since their membership is automatic and begins when they
first obtain their teacher credentials from the Secretaria de Educación Pública. Union dues
are deducted monthly from teacher salaries by the Secretaria de Hacienda or local municipal
governments. The funds are controlled by the main governing body of the SNTE, the Comité
Ejecutivo Nacional, which decides how the dues will be spent and how much each local chapter
will receive. Mexican teachers rely on the SNTE for several important functions (like changing
employment, demanding rights granted to them through seniority, obtaining loans from their
pensions, and settling retirement matters). Expelled teachers are stripped from all benefits and
rights granted by the SNTE.

The statutes of the SNTE to a great extent discourage the creation of any other union from
taking the SNTE’s place since the new organization’s membership would have to be made up
entirely from teachers expelled from the SNTE or teachers who never were members of the SNTE.
In order for the Tribunal de Conciliación to recognize the new union officially, it must have more
members then the SNTE. Thus the probability of another union emerging to take the SNTE’s place
is highly unlikely. These provisions in turn make the SNTE and its leadership very powerful since
it does not allow dissident groups much of a voice in its dealings with the government.\textsuperscript{22} The SNTE also gives its members little opportunity for independent action. In order to call a national strike the petition must be presented to the \textit{Comité Ejecutivo Nacional} only after it has passed the other committees. The \textit{Comité Ejecutivo Nacional} can also temporarily block the promotion of particular members to higher positions in the SNTE and can boycott whole delegations for failing to follow its directives.\textsuperscript{23}

Matamoros teachers have lived quite a transition from the early days of the UMT. In the 1930's the UMT leadership tended to be leftist in ideology, fighting for the ideals of the Mexican Revolution. As federalization of education took place, and teachers were incorporated into the SNTE, teachers in Matamoros and the rest of Mexico developed a relationship with the \textit{Partido Revolucionario Institutional}. This connection began in 1942 when the \textit{Confederación Nacional de Organizaciones Populares} (CNOP) of the PRI was established. Teachers were members of the \textit{Federación de Sindicatos de Trabajadores al Servicio del Estado} (FSTSE), thus when that group was incorporated into the CNOP, teachers were given a place in the ruling party.\textsuperscript{24} Although some supporters of other political parties have occupied high positions on the SNTE, the key positions have been filled by people who have aligned themselves politically with the official party and thus share the same goals as the President of Mexico and the rest of the government.\textsuperscript{25}

Celia Zúñiga is an example of the transition that took place between the UMT and the SNTE. As one of the original founders of the UMT she was considered a radical, and had definite leftist tendencies. Teachers in cities like Matamoros were usually more conservative in ideology, including Ester González Salinas, the distinguished principal of the Colegio México.\textsuperscript{26} Teachers from rural areas, in contrast, were more radical in their beliefs, and identified more with the ideals of the Mexican Revolution, which included the distribution of land and other policies. Zúñiga identified with the political beliefs of the rural teachers, and pushed for the unionization of Matamoros teachers in order to upset the status quo by improving the working conditions of teachers and furthering her political ideology. When teachers became members of the SNTE, Zúñiga became a member of the PRI. She became inspector of schools in Matamoros in charge of all the elementary schools in the city, and remained in that position for the next twenty years. She remained active in the SNTE and became part of the status quo she had fought to change. Many other teachers made the same transition through the years with the SNTE. Although today individual teachers might support different political parties, their union as a whole is a supporter of the PRI.\textsuperscript{27}

A close connection exists between the PRI and the leadership of the SNTE. Many leaders of the SNTE take advantage of the visibility and connections their positions grant them to run for political office, usually under the PRI banner. At times, it may appear that the SNTE is a government sponsored union that has little liberty to act independently from the government.\textsuperscript{28} Some argue that this is not the fault of the union itself, but of the political use the government (the PRI) has made of the union. The Secretary General of the Sección 30, which represented the State of Tamaulipas in 1978, Filemón Salazar, stated that for a long time he thought that the union was divided into a union component and an official government component. Once he became Secretary General, he realized that both components were really the same thing.\textsuperscript{29}

As a result of this close alignment, teachers feel that their interests are not necessarily best served by the leadership of the SNTE. In May of 1996, the teachers of Matamoros and the rest of the state became embroiled in a dispute over pay increases if they should pursue the \textit{Carrera Magisterial}. Teachers felt that the pay increases were not being given fairly, and that the procedure and requirements to get the raises kept changing. Many teachers as a result were supporting
strikes and walk outs on their campuses. The SNTE has attempted to help alleviate the situation by assembling a Comité de Lucha Magisterial to negotiate with the government. Unfortunately, many members of the SNTE have little faith in that negotiating body since its leadership has not followed through with their promises to their membership, and seem more preoccupied with pursuing their own agendas and careers. Historian Oscar Rivera Saldana, in a recent interview, stated that Mexico is experiencing a period of political transition, and that, as a result, the SNTE is also undergoing a transition. He feels that the SNTE needs to change in order to remain a viable teachers’ union.

The establishing of the first teachers’ union in Matamoros was a difficult task to accomplish. It is clear that the Union Tamaulipec a was successful in their 1936 strike because of the help of other unions that had organized in Matamoros at the time. In this sense la Unión Tamaulipec a benefited from the rise of other sindicatos in Matamoros, and was hurt when its ties to these local unions ceased. When the UMT joined national unions like the SNTE, their power diminished since they were now tied to federal obligations. The very demand for which the UMT fought, namely federalization, resulted in its inability to continue to work with local workers’ unions. La Unión Tamaulipec a no longer exists, but those unions that helped them in the 1936 strike, like the Unión de Jornaleros (SJOI) still remains in full force.

Endnotes

2 Kearney, p. 8.
3 Kearney, p. 10.
4 Alma Guerrero-Miller, and Cesar Leonel Ayala, Por eso ... ! (Matamoros: Centro de Investigacion Multidisciplinario de Tamaulipas/Sindicato de Obreros y Jornaleros de Matamoros, 1993), p. 27.
5 Kearney p. 10; Guerrero-Miller pp. 27-29.
7 Guerrero-Miller, p. 35.
8 Kearney, pp. 10-11.
12 Rivera Saldaña, “Lucha,” pp. 7-8; Salazar Cerda, pp. 15.
15 Salazar Cerda, p. 15.
16 Rivera Saldaña, pp. 7-8.
18 Rivera Saldaña, Federalización pp. 5-6.
22 Loya Brambila, pp. 112-115.
25 Loya Brambila, p. 113.
28 Rangel Candanosa
29 Rivera Saldaña
The 1971 Pharr Riot
by
Ned Wallace

As of the year 1971, the city of Pharr (incorporated in 1916) had always had an "Anglo" for its mayor. This was true even though Mexican-Americans outnumbered Anglos in a town that by 1970 had a population of 15,829. Anglos (people who were white and of European descent) dominated almost all the positions of political, economic and societal power in Pharr. This was the case in the majority of the cities and towns of the Lower Rio Grande Valley, the far southern tip of Texas. For decades most people just accepted this as the "natural order" of life in the Lower Valley. But changes that were occurring in other parts of the United States during the 1960s finally filtered down to the Valley by the early 1970s. Some Americans were now demanding more equality, better opportunities, and fairer treatment. Some of these people joined the movement for change.

On February 6, 1971, a group of Mexican-Americans, led by Efrain Fernandez, initiated a picket to protest the behavior of the Pharr police. The protest helped to spark a riot that was to leave a young man dead. It also led to the eventual restructuring of Pharr society. In the immediate years following the riot, the social order in Pharr became more inclusive for its Mexican-Americans inhabitants. But at the time it looked as if nothing like this would result from the melee. In fact, it appeared that Fernandez and others would have to pay with prison sentences for their actions and that the status quo in Pharr would continue. This is the story of how one small Texas town made the transition from an old style exclusionary "patron" political system to one that benefited and served all its citizens and made a more conscious effort to live up to Thomas Jefferson’s declaration that “all men are created equal.”

For roughly the first two-thirds of the twentieth century, Mexican-Americans were treated as second-class citizens, not only in the Lower Rio Grande Valley but almost everywhere in the United States. There were many reasons for this state of affairs. The pseudo-scientific rationale was Social Darwinism, a variant of Darwin’s theory of evolution. The concept of Darwin’s “survival of the fittest” was misapplied to human civilization and provided a justification in the United States for the subjugation of various minorities by whites. Unfortunately, this idea was to remain popular for the latter half of the nineteenth century and for much of the twentieth. In the Lower Rio Grande Valley, many Anglos simplistically would only look across the Rio Grande River and measure the disparity of wealth and technological development between the United States and Mexico to find evidence for the superiority of the white race.

In the late nineteenth century, the main economic activity in the Lower Rio Grande Valley was ranching and farming. But agriculture production increased exponentially in 1904 when the first railroad tracks were laid in the Valley and several pump houses were built to convey water from the Rio Grande River to the farms. Agribusiness is mostly a labor-intensive endeavor and a source of cheap labor is needed for crop production. Mexican-Americans, already largely marginalized, provided the labor for the expanding agriculture market in the Lower Valley that was to remain this area’s chief economic activity until the 1990s. Many Mexican-Americans did not understand English or the American justice system and this helped to exclude them from enjoying the same quality of justice that Anglos enjoyed. Mexican-American children were not given the same educational opportunities as white children and this helped to perpetuate the low status of Hispanics. The power structure in the Lower Valley was based on a “patron”
or “bossism” system that allowed a few Anglos through various methods to control and make political decisions for the majority of Mexican-Americans. Coercive methods were employed either to ensure a low Mexican-American voter turnout or a manipulation of their votes\(^9\).

This was how life was for the vast majority of Mexican-Americans living in the Valley for much of the 20\(^{th}\) century. But things began to change with the advent of the Black Civil Rights Movement that began in the 1950s and reached its height by the 1960s. Following the African-American model, other displaced minorities and groups including Hispanics, Native Americans, women, and the elderly began to openly and vehemently declare that they were no longer going to accept their second-class status and began demanding they have the same rights and opportunities as the elite in American society.\(^{10}\)

Before this period there were various Mexican-American organizations that struggled against the “Jim Crow” system, sometimes making incremental gains. These groups included LULAC, PASO and the American GI Forum and were generally more cautious in their approach to obtaining rights and benefits for Hispanics.\(^{11}\) Even MECHA (el Movimiento Estudiantil de Aztlan), the student organization to foster interest in Mexican-American culture, was met with suspicion and restrictions from the administration when it was introduced on the Pan American campus in Edinburg in this period.\(^{12}\)

But the Mexican-American civil rights movement dramatically changed in the 1960s. Chicano/Chicana became a popular concept for many Hispanics, particularly among the young. To be a Chicano meant to be someone who was actively fighting for Latino civil rights and the acceptance of Mexican-American heritage, and many Hispanics involved in civil rights groups called themselves Chicanos.\(^{13}\) One notable organization organized by César Chávez in 1962 was the National Farm Workers Association. The NFWA dedicated itself to improving the lives of migrant workers in California, who were mainly Mexican-Americans. Chávez and the NFWA called for various strikes against the California growers demanding the recognition of migrant unions, better pay and improved working conditions.\(^{14}\)

An important Hispanic civil rights group that was formed in Texas during this period was the Mexican-American Youth Movement (MAYO). MAYO was founded in 1967 by José Ángel Gutiérrez, Willie (William) C. Velásquez, Mario Compeán, Ignacio Pérez, and Juan Patlán.\(^{15}\) This group took a more activist approach in their fight against Mexican-American injustice, police brutality, and lack of educational and economic opportunities. They employed more direct tactics such as political confrontations, school walkouts and demonstrations. MAYO originated in San Antonio and eventually spread to other Texas cities, including Kingsville, Uvalde, and various towns in the Rio Grande Valley. MAYO had approximately thirty chapters established in the 1967-68 period.\(^{16}\)

**Efraín Fernández**

One person who became a member of MAYO was Efraín Fernández, a young man from Kingsville, Texas, near Corpus Christi. Fernández still vividly recalls various experiences he had while at Henrietta King High School in Corpus Christi that underscored the racial divide in the community. One such memory was that during football pep rallies, the Anglos would sit on the bleachers of one side of the gym and the Mexican-Americans would sit on the other. There was no intermixing. The Anglos were clearly the dominant group.\(^{17}\)

Efraín was a student at Texas A&I University in Kingsville (now Texas A&M-Kingsville) and says that the professors opened his eyes and made him aware of various Mexican-American
civil rights issues of his day. Initially, Efrain’s major was biology but he changed it to psychology/ sociology in an effort to understand “what was going on” and to utilize his newly gained knowledge to improve conditions for Hispanics. It was also at A & I that Efrain met Jose Angel Gutierrez of MAYO. This is what really got him “started.” Fernandez clearly remembers Jose Angel’s first comment to him at a beer party when he was still deciding whether or not to join MAYO. He walked up to Efrain, half-drunk and said, “You need balls.” Fernandez still expresses amusement in recalling this interaction with Gutierrez who was his “biggest influence.” Efrain joined MAYO.18

Fernandez describes the tactics that MAYO used in fighting for Mexican-American civil rights as “non-violent.” MAYO carried out voter registration drives, actively supported sympathetic politicians, and created a “high degree of conflict” by organizing pickets, but “it was not a violent movement.” Efrain remembers his first involvement in a major demonstration. It was a protest against Humble Oil’s policy of hiring only Anglos and not Mexican-Americans for the many “meter-reader” positions in the Corpus Christi area. It was a peaceful protest and ultimately a successful one because Humble did start hiring Mexican-Americans soon after. 19

But then Fernandez and his family experienced what could happen when someone challenged the racial power structure of Texas society during this period. His parents owned a Mexican food restaurant, El Jardin, which was very popular, particularly among Anglos. Soon after the Humble demonstration, business at the restaurant began to decline substantially. Efrain soon learned through a friend that there was a “phone committee” that was taking down the license plate numbers of patrons eating at his parent’s restaurant. After procuring the phone numbers from the Texas Department of Public Safety, phone calls were made to the El Jardin patrons who were informed of a boycott against the restaurant because of Efrain’s participation in the Humble picket. It was a traumatic time for the Fernandez family and eventually they had to sell the restaurant. 20

But this did not diminish Efrain’s resolve in fighting for Mexican-American rights. He soon found a job with VISTA in the Rio Grande Valley. VISTA is an acronym for Volunteers in Service to America, a sort of domestic Peace Corps and community-based program committed to finding solutions for problems caused by urban and rural poverty. Fernandez was hired as the supervisor for this “minority mobilization” program. Fernandez now had a wife and family and was making a salary that allowed him to bring his family to the Valley and settle in Pharr where the VISTA office was located. There were MAYO chapters in the Valley and Efrain reestablished his affiliation with this group. 21

The mayor of Pharr at this time was R. S. Bowe. Many who lived in Pharr during the 1960s and early 1970s refer to Bowe as being a political boss, someone who had tight control over the affairs of this small community, particularly over the affairs of the Mexican-Americans who lived here. Bowe was able to exert control through various city agencies including the police department, the water department, the tax department, and other agencies. For example, Pharr residents might find their water bill increase precipitously if they displeased the mayor in any way. 22 Many of the jobs in these agencies were low paying and held by Mexican-Americans who were appreciative of finding employment in a community where steady jobs were scarce. Not surprisingly many of them felt it was best to just go along with Bowe’s “program.” 23

Pharr was also known for other things. One was that it was a speed trap, sometimes known for issuing speeding tickets to drivers for going one mile over the speed limit. The other was that Pharr allowed its bars and cantinas to remain open until 2:00 a.m. The surrounding towns all closed their drinking establishments by midnight. 24 Not surprisingly, many patrons of the bars
and cantinas in the Hidalgo County area would venture to Pharr if they wished to continue their consumption of alcohol after midnight. One problematic by-product of this situation was of late-night drinkers publicly misbehaving or driving while intoxicated. In response, the Pharr police, who were almost all Hispanic, aggressively apprehended those who were publicly intoxicated and/or driving while drunk. But there were growing complaints that the Pharr police were far too aggressive in curbing problems relating to alcohol consumption. Many Mexican-Americans arrested for drunkenness claimed that they were severely beaten while in the Pharr jail. In the past, there was not much that could be done about this type of situation. Historically, Mexican-Americans had very little success in challenging the south Texas social order. But by the early 1970s, the times-were-a-changing. The “sixties” had finally arrived. There were now some individuals willing to commit themselves to confronting the status quo.

When Efrain Fernández heard about the reports of police brutality he decided to personally investigate them and became convinced of the sincerity of the many victims he interviewed. He believed the behavior of the Pharr police was “inexcusable” and that action would have to be taken. Consequently, he organized a daylong demonstration for February 6, 1971, to protest the behavior of the Pharr police.

The Demonstration

The demonstration started in front of the Pharr City Hall building around 9:00-10:00 in the morning. Fernández recalls that there were several people picketing with him, anywhere from eight to twelve, along with various spectators who claimed to have been mistreated by the Pharr police. City Hall closed at noon, and the demonstrators walked the short distance to the Pharr police station and resumed picketing there.

At a later interview, Pharr police Chief Alfredo Ramírez stated that there were approximately thirty-two Mexican-Americans that began a demonstration in front of Pharr City Hall at 10:00 am. Ramírez claims that the reason for the demonstration was not only to protest police brutality but was also to get Ramírez and two other police officers accused of police brutality to resign for alleged civil rights violations. Ramírez says that the picketers carried signs saying, “Chief Out,” and “Chief and all other Police Officers Out,” and “Enough of (Mateo) Sandoval,” (Mateo, a police sergeant, was one of those accused of beating the jail prisoners).

Carlos Sandoval (no relation to Mateo) was a Pharr policeman at this time and was present at both the demonstration and riot. Sandoval remembers the protest moving from the City Hall to the police station and that the picketers did not interfere with any police work, but that they did try to “agitate” the police by their remarks.

Sandoval was probably referring to Daniel Vásquez. Some people felt that Daniel should not participate in the protest. Efrain describes Daniel as being “special-ed, a slow guy.” Efrain believed that it was perfectly acceptable for Vásquez to participate in the demonstration because he had been arrested and beaten in the Pharr jail and his right to protest was just as valid as anybody else’s. Efrain remembered that during the picketing, Daniel would initiate chants, in particular, a Spanish nursery rhyme with the refrain, “the pig is beautiful.”

David Fishlow, editor and publisher of *Ya Mero!*, a weekly newspaper that supported the Mexican American civil rights movement in the Valley (and the only paper published in Spanish in the area at the time) also recalls someone chanting an old Spanish nursery rhyme that sounded like “Old McDonald had a farm” but that the words were different. The chant-song kept repeating the same refrain, “The pig was beautiful.” The word, “pig” was a term of derision for the police
coined by the protest movement of the 1960s.

Initially, Efrain stopped Daniel Vásquez from chanting because he thought it was too provocative. But later that afternoon Daniel began chanting the same rhyme again when Efrain was temporarily absent from the picket line. Efrain believes in retrospect, “there were some things that shouldn’t have been done or said.”

Alonzo López was also active in the “Movement” and was also a student teacher in McAllen. López really did not know Efrain well before the riot, but regarded him as one of the leaders in the Valley in the fight for social justice. He joined the demonstration on the way home from work in the afternoon. López remembers the picket signs saying, “Stop Police Brutality!” and other various slogans. López saw nothing at all wrong with this and believed that the picketers were just expressing their views and opinions as free citizens of the United States. He left the protest later in the afternoon to attend a meeting in Mercedes.

On the same afternoon of this demonstration, a meeting addressing various Mexican-American civil rights issues was taking place at a Methodist retreat center in Weslaco. Fernández often frequented these types of gatherings. Assuming that everything was under control, Efrain left Pharr to attend the meeting. He was gone several hours and returned at around dusk.

Chief Ramirez states in his interview with the FBI that at about 3:00 p.m. (during Efrain’s absence) the number of demonstrators increased to around 300. He also claims that around this time the picketers began throwing rocks at the police station. Ramirez says that he had no choice but to call for help from the Pharr Fire Department. He also alleges that he asked the demonstrators to leave the area at this time but that they refused. Almost all these statements have been refuted by everybody else’s recollection of events, including the Pharr policeman Carlos Sandoval.

But Ramirez was accurate about one thing: the number of people in front of the Pharr police station did increase during the afternoon period. But these people had nothing to do directly with the demonstration.

There were over thirty cantinas that stretched from Highway 83 to Expressway 83 either on or near Cage Street in Pharr. Close to the southeastern corner of this region was the Pharr police station located right off Cage, about a block north of Highway 83. During Efrain’s absence, patrons of these cantinas walked the short distance to the police station and began to congregate across the street from the station. The demonstrators were picketing on the sidewalk directly in front of the station. There were several Pharr policemen standing right in front of the station. The demonstrators were in between the cantina patrons and the police. Presumably, many of the cantina patrons had been consuming alcohol. David Hall, an attorney and one of the few Anglos involved in the Mexican-American civil rights movement, states that, “These individuals were not at all associated with Efrain’s protest.”

Oralia Magallán, one of the picketers present on that day, also claims that the cantina patrons were not part of the demonstration but that they did support the demonstrators by bringing them food, water, and emotional support. Oralia calls the cantina patrons an “ad hoc, adjunct support group.” She remembers that most of the demonstrators were young and that the cantina patrons were generally older in age. Fishlow recalls that as the afternoon wore on, the cantina patrons began jeering at the police.

Carlos Sandoval said that he and the other Pharr policemen believed that the protesters and the cantina patrons were “in cahoots” from the beginning. Sandoval was convinced that all the people marching in front of the station were from La Raza Unida (a newly formed political party committed to Mexican American civil rights) and the Brown Berets (a Mexican-American civil rights group that was militantly leftist). He said that the Pharr police believed the demonstrators
and the cantina patrons had carefully planned and choreographed this protest well before February 6th.  

The Riot

Fernández thinks that he returned to the picket sometime between 6:00-7:00 when it was getting dark. He recalls that the situation had greatly changed; it had become “serious.” As he walked to the police station to rejoin the picket line he heard a “roar.” This sound emanated from the cantina patrons, gathered across the street from the station, who were loudly jeering the police. Fernández thinks that these cantina patrons were “probably every drunk guy who was mad at the Pharr police” and had either experienced beatings in jail or heard stories of others who had. Efrain rejoined the picket line.

Several of the picketers observed many of the cantina patrons going back and forth between the police station and various cantinas as the afternoon progressed. Presumably they were drinking more alcohol. Efrain states that none of these “fringe elements” ever attended any of his meetings or were members of MAYO. They were not disciplined, as were those who were part of the “movement.” They became spontaneous protesters and then rioters, swept up “in the mass-hysteria of the moment.”

Efrain recalled that the picket line was now moving very fast in an elliptical circle in front of the police station. He said that there was a lot of “jeering” between the police and the protesters. At this point, Efrain did not realize that things were getting out of control; he had no inkling of what was about to happen. He just thought it was another demonstration. He maintains that he would have stopped everything if he had known how it was going to turn out. But, he added, “That is the way protests are. You are confronting people, you want to get to a point where you’re protesting, and then you pull back. Apparently we just didn’t pull back fast enough. The riot occurred.”

Officer Carlos Sandoval thinks that the demonstration was getting on Chief Ramirez’s “nerves” by the time it was getting dark, and he was anxious to end it. Ramirez walked over to Efrain Fernández and asked him to stop the protest. Fernández refused. Shortly after this exchange, Chief Ramirez called the Pharr Fire Department. Located nearby, the firemen and their trucks quickly arrived at the scene. David Hall characterizes the Pharr firemen as, “almost totally Anglo. It was like a private Anglo club. They were only too happy to pull up alongside the police station and wash down the crowd.”

The cantina patrons and demonstrators became more restive and tense with the firemen hooking up their hoses and aiming the nozzles at them. It may have been during this time that the cantina patrons began collecting stones, although this is only conjecture. Ironically, Sandoval said that things were just starting to quiet down right before Chief Ramirez called in the fire department.

Without warning, the Pharr Fire Department sprayed the crowd (although not the demonstrators) with high-pressure water in a “crossfire” pattern. Initially, the cantina patrons quickly vanished. But if the police thought they had successfully dispersed the crowd they were quickly disabused of this notion. Fernández described it as if a switch had been turned on. What had been a relatively peaceful demonstration immediately turned into an out-of-control riot.

After the crowd dispersed, there was a pregnant pause. Then Efrain heard what could only be describe as a, “rumbling,” a “terrible roar.” He then realized that rocks were being thrown from the dispersed crowd. “It was a lot of rocks.”  

Oralia Magallán thought that the rocks appeared
to be thrown at the same time, as if it were planned\(^5^1\) and Chief Ramírez would say the same thing.\(^5^2\)

In Efrain's opinion, the water enraged the crowd.\(^5^3\) David Fishlow confirms this and believes that spraying water at them was a major act of stupidity. "It was from this point that things got out of control."\(^5^4^5\) Afterwards, Chief Ramírez claimed that he ordered the Fire Department to "use water in an effort to disperse the crowd" only after the riot had started, but this has been refuted by everyone else, including several Pharr policemen. Officer Carlos Sandoval states that it was the firemen "watering" the crowd that started the riot. That was when "things really hit the fan." Sandoval clearly remembers that it was Chief Ramírez who ordered the Pharr Fire Department to "hose" the cantina patrons. Sandoval declares, "I know this because I was there." He strongly believes that the riot would not have occurred if the firemen had not sprayed the water from their hoses. Sandoval also confirms that the throwing of rocks only occurred after the water was sprayed, not before, as Chief Ramírez claimed in his interview with the F. B. I.\(^5^5^5\)

Police Chief Ramírez reported that Efrain Fernández and a group of approximately ten demonstrators who were directly in front of the Police Station fell to the ground "as if on signal and then a barrage of rocks was thrown." Ramírez said that one of the rocks hit him in the back and caused him severe pain. He also stated that other officers (in addition to buildings, police cars, and fire trucks) were being struck by the rocks.\(^5^6\)

Oralia Magallán remembers that the Pharr police accused Alonzo López of throwing the first rock, but she states that this was not true. She remembers that Alonzo was not even there when the riot started.\(^5^7^5\) López, in a separate interview, makes the same point.\(^5^8^5\) Magallán only saw the cantina patrons throw rocks, nobody else, and certainly not the protesters.\(^5^9^5\)

When Fernández heard the "rumbling" from the rocks being thrown, he instinctively told his picketers to "hit the deck, fall down," and take cover. Efrain attempted to protect the young and the female picketers, but realized that the rocks were striking none of the picketers. He felt that something terrible was about to happen. He imagined that the police might even start firing their guns.\(^6^0^5\)

Fernández, thinking it prudent to leave the area immediately, signaled to the other picketers to run over to the west side of the police station. As the picketers ran in this direction, they approached a fire truck. Firemen with ax handles immediately ran up to them in a threatening manner. Efrain quickly signaled to them that he and his group were only trying to leave the chaotic scene. The firemen let them pass. The protesters then ran behind the fire truck in a westerly direction to Efrain's home, located only a few blocks away. Efrain did hear shots being fired as they were running. He told the other picketers not to worry because the shots were only blanks, although he did not believe this himself. The demonstrators safely reached Fernández's home.\(^6^1^5\)

Continually being pelted by rocks and unable to establish control, Chief Ramírez called for police reinforcements from nearby cities, including McAllen and Edinburg.\(^6^2^5\) Ramírez claims to have heard six shots fired from the crowd, but Pharr policeman Carlos Sandoval said that nobody from the crowd shot a gun; only the police did.\(^6^3^5\) Ramírez said that it was during this time that police officers began making arrests. A total of thirty-one adults and eight juveniles were arrested and charged with various crimes including "inciting to riot."\(^6^4^5\)

David Hall states that he had arrived at the Pharr police station shortly after receiving a phone call from Efrain's wife. He witnessed police reinforcements "pouring in" from all over the Valley. He said that the area around the Pharr police station looked and sounded as if incredible warfare was going on because of the gunshots, tear gas, and pandemonium. "It was like a war
zone up and down Cage Street.” Hall said the gunfire only came from the police shooting their guns in the air. He also states that once word got around about what was happening in Pharr, a lot of Mexican American kids around the Valley involved with the “Movement” came to Pharr to “join the action.”

Originally, Alonzo Lopez left the demonstration at around 6:00 p.m. to attend a workshop about “Mexican-Americans” in Mercedes. It was while he was at this meeting that he heard about the riot. He quickly left and returned to Pharr at around 8:30 p.m. He went directly to the police station to ask the police “why everybody was getting beat up” but no one was present at this time. Lopez saw firemen spraying water at the demonstrators. Alonzo then went looking for the police to talk to them. They eventually found some officers who were carrying rifles with bayonets. Alonzo went up to them and asked, “What are you doing? Why are you beating the people up?”

What’s going on? Why don’t you let the people be?”

Alonzo was directing these questions at Chief Ramirez. Lopez recalls that Ramirez was “in another world” and was “gone” by this time. His face was red, and his hair disheveled. He was “in a rage and full of vengeance.” Lopez believes that Ramirez was so disconcerted that he couldn’t comprehend what he was saying. Then there was a sudden volley of shots fired in the air. Alonzo turned and ran away. As he was running he heard more shots fired and smelled more tear gas. He was at a loss about what to do.

Jack Dean, a Texas Ranger stationed in the Valley, received a call that “all hell had broken loose” in Pharr and he immediately drove down to the Pharr police station. Dean said that the station looked under siege from “a lot of people in the streets throwing rocks.” It was “getting pounded pretty good.” He described the situation as very chaotic because the Pharr police had no control of the situation. Anything that moved was “rocked.” Soon after, police from the surrounding cities began to arrive. Dean witnessed the firemen shooting water at the rioters. The rioters were running up and down the alleys and between the houses. Dean saw them hide, run out, throw a rock and then hide again. Commenting on the riot years later, Dean says that, “he had never seen anything like it.”

The riot started sometime between 6:30 and 7:00 and stretched on for several hours. Chief Ramirez and his second-in-command, Mateo Sandoval, were not having any success in ending the mayhem. In fact, it appeared that the behavior of the Pharr police had only further enraged the rioters because of their bellicose conduct towards them.

Alfredo C. Gonzalez was chief of police in Edinburg, a town located only a few miles north from Pharr. On the evening of February 6, Chief Gonzalez and his wife and daughter were attending a “quinceañera,” a coming-of-age party for Mexican-Americans who had reached the age of fifteen. While at the party, Gonzalez received a call informing him that Mayor R. S. Bowe of Pharr had asked for assistance from Edinburg under “Article 966.” This article stipulates that a given town can request and receive police assistance from neighboring towns in the case of any kind of overwhelming emergency. Gonzales had heard the day before that a demonstration was going to take place in Pharr. He started making calls to other Edinburg police to help him.

When Gonzales and his men arrived in Pharr, they saw other policemen grabbing and pulling people, sometimes by their hair, and throwing them into the holding cell of the Pharr police station. He believed that their aggressive behavior made the job of restoring order much more difficult. “The people were extremely mad and refusing to be arrested.” Gonzalez says that there were “hotheads” on both sides, and that this is what made the situation unmanageable. His assessment of the situation was that Chief Ramirez and Mateo Sandoval had lost control of themselves and of Pharr.
Carlos Sandoval and another Pharr policeman walked up to Mayor R. S. Bowe (who was now present at the station) and suggested to him that Alfredo Gonzales should be appointed temporary chief of the assembled police force. They explained to Bowe that Gonzales had just received up-to-date formal police training on crowd control in Washington D. C. Shortly thereafter, Bowe asked Gonzales to take charge of all the police forces in Pharr and to restore order. Gonzales agreed. Chief Ramírez and Mateo Sandoval left the station soon after and were not seen for days. Gonzales speculates that they may have left because of “hurt feelings” or “anger” over the fact of having their command taken away from them.

Reflecting back on what happened, Gonzales thinks that Bowe had no choice but to hand over command to somebody else at the time—the situation in Pharr was totally out of control. The original picket was specifically directed at the alleged police brutality of Chief Ramírez and Mateo Sandoval, and the hostility of the rioters was still focused on them. The riot had been going on for approximately two to three hours by this point and Ramírez and Sandoval had failed to end it. In fact, it showed no signs of slackening.

Gonzales remembers still hearing sporadic gunfire and seeing ongoing destruction of public property when he took over command. The first order Gonzales issued was for all the policemen to put their guns away. Gonzales did not want anyone to be hurt by a policeman’s bullet. He believed that the provocative behavior of policemen only increased the animosity of the rioters and made the situation more dangerous. “Whatever you put out will come right back at you.” Gonzales’ goal was to stop the rioting and bring Pharr under control. He wanted to restore order, not seek vengeance against the rioters. He ordered the police to no longer make any arrests and to stop acting in an aggressive manner.

Gonzales’ next order was to have the assembled police force break up into two groups and walk up and down Cage Street to close down all the cantinas. The reason for closing them down was that the rioters were using them as “safe-houses.” They would run out of the cantinas, throw rocks at the police and then run back in. One DPS sergeant took one group of officers to the west side of Cage and Gonzales took the other group to the east side and they began the task of closing all the drinking establishments. During this period, the firemen were instructed to “hose” any rioters who came near the police station, thereby securing this area.

Both Gonzales and Carlos Sandoval stated that there were a lot of onlookers at the riot. This contributed to the chaos of that night because the police had difficulty in discerning exactly who were the rioters and who were the bystanders. The police attempted to disperse these observers by warning that a rock might hit either them or their cars. But many individuals chose to remain in the riot area and watch what was going on.

Stanley Ramos, was an owner of a barbershop located at Cage Street and Bell and gives the following account of what happened on the night of February 6th:

Just as I was getting ready to close the shop, a customer came in and I told him that I was unable to cut his hair. I needed to go over there (the riot area) and find out what was going on. This fellow said, ‘well, it won’t take you too long to cut it, why don’t you just cut it’ and I told him that if I start I may not be able to finish it up. So I had to cut his hair and it was a flat-top. We saw some people running from the fire station towards us. His wife and daughters came in from outside the shop. They were upset and afraid because it was getting pretty dangerous. I hadn’t finished his haircut yet when we heard a lot of people running from the north on Cage. I remember seeing a lady coming in to the shop asking if I had
a towel . . . that a man had been shot in front of the barber shop. I immediately gave her a towel. I still couldn’t do anything to help because I was trying to finish up the customer. I found out afterwards that this man that was shot was working somewhere in Baytown. He just came down for the weekend to see his family. He didn’t know anything that was going on. He just came to observe. It was real sad. He had his hands in his pockets.79

Soon after the bystander, Alfonso Flores, was shot, Jack Dean said that a girl about the age of twelve or thirteen years ran up to him and said that a man down the street was injured. Dean proceeded to the front of the Stanley Ramos barbershop and found Flores lying on the ground:

I will never forget . . . he was laying flat on his back with his hands in his pockets. I thought that he had been hit by a rock. Blood was coming out of his head. We called for an ambulance and then got him out of there.80

Later, Gonzalez was able to ascertain who was responsible for the shooting by finding the police officer in charge of the area where the shooting occurred.81 Carlos Sandoval said that right after the riot he heard that an Edinburg deputy, Robert Johnson, shot a bullet in that direction. The bullet in Flores’ head was in so many fragments that there were never able to later establish what kind of gun fired the bullet. Sandoval declares that weapons should not have been drawn during the riot. “This situation did not call for it.”82

Gonzales states that it is often the onlookers who get hurt in this type of situation. He claims that they found the pockmark where the bullet had hit over the upper section of Ramos’ barbershop and then ricocheted and hit Flores in the head. He believes that this incident was just an accident.83

When Gonzales arrived in Pharr at 9:00 everything was in complete chaos. But at around midnight everything had calmed down and “you could hear a pin drop.” It was at this point that he returned to the party where his wife and daughter were waiting for him. He still had his uniform and his riot-gear on.84 Jack Dean said that around 10:00 p.m. the riot was largely over.85

Carlos Sandoval said that the police did suffer some injuries, mostly bruises, abrasions and lacerations to the head and body by rocks. No policeman was seriously hurt or had to be taken to the hospital. Sandoval himself had bruises and bumps all over his body. It was estimated that approximately 100-150 gunshots were fired during the riot.86

Efraín Fernández said that in the days after the riot the atmosphere in Pharr was like “martial law.87 David Fishlow recalls that the town of Pharr was “reeling” over what had happened. He claims that there really was not that much physical destruction of property. “The terrible thing was that Pancho Flores was killed . . . that goddamned cop who killed him was another cracker with a gun. Wasn’t like these people were rocket scientists.”88

Carlos Sandoval claims that for days after the riot, individuals would park two to three blocks away and shoot at the police station and then speed away. He said he found bullet holes in the police building. This was the reason that police with rifles were stationed at the top of downtown buildings in Pharr in the days following the riot. Sandoval says that everybody was very tense because of rumors that another attack or riot was planned. Things were very “jittery” for a few days but shortly thereafter the town of Pharr eventually “cooled down.”89
After the Riot

“Violence Rages for Four Hours” was the headline in McAllen’s The Monitor. “One youth was critically injured and several other prisoners hurt by flying missiles Saturday night outside the Pharr police station when a so-called ‘peaceful demonstration’ erupted into a full scale riot.” The article goes on to state that the demonstration was sponsored by MAYO and Efrain Fernandez to protest alleged police brutality in Pharr and that there were around 300 people involved in the protest and around 100 police officers were involved in quelling the riot.90

The article inaccurately states that the riot broke out when “the youths began hurling bricks and stones at firemen who trained their fire hose on the demonstrators.” Also mentioned was that Alfonso Flores, a twenty-year old bystander, was in critical condition after being hit by a “flying missile.” Flores’ hands were still in his pockets, which underlined the fact that he was not involved in the riot.91

Efrain is quoted in the paper as saying, “Things had just got out of hand. We had planned this demonstration as a peaceful protest of police brutality.” He also states that the crowd “went wild” when they were sprayed with the fire hose and that he was sorry for what happened, “but there is just not any communication in this town. The mayor will not even listen to us.” The last paragraph claimed that “Fernandez and his followers have been “agitating” with the mayor for about two weeks.92

The next day, an article on the front page of The Monitor stated that Alfonso Flores was killed by fragments of a bullet that struck his head. Part of the headline declared, “No lawman seen in area where shooting occurred.” The article goes on to say that the lawmen were not the only ones with guns because there were “dents” in the fire trucks and on the buildings. There was also a photograph of Pharr Fire Chief B. E. Cook pointing to a damaged windshield on a fire truck claiming that the rock throwing began before the water was sprayed onto the crowd. This broken windshield was to play a prominent role in Fernandez’ trial.93 “The chief (Ramirez) told me to wet them down and disperse them,” Cook said.94 Hidalgo County District Attorney Oscar McInnis declared that his department was investigating the Pharr Riot and would be turning over his findings to the grand jury within seven to ten days.95

By sheer coincidence, Cesar Chavez was scheduled to come to the Rio Grande Valley and give a speech in support of the unionization of farm laborers in San Juan (a town adjacent to Pharr) that evening. But instead, he gave a twenty-minute eulogy at a memorial service for Alfonso Flores. He stressed the need for non-violent strikes and more demonstrations. Chavez also stated that the Pharr Riot was an event that did concern the farm worker’s union. “We can’t tolerate that kind of action by the Pharr police.” When Chavez was told that the Pharr police force was totally composed of Mexican-Americans, he said, “Mexicans can be just as brutal as Anglos.”96

Alfonso Flores’ funeral was held on Friday, February 12, at the St. Margaret Mary church in Pharr. As a precaution, Chief Ramirez issued military flak jackets for his officers and requested that police reinforcements from neighboring communities and that bars and supermarkets not sell beer after sundown. There were said to be 800 mourners in attendance. The United Farm Workers provided a cordon of parade marshals to prevent any sort of disturbances or outbursts. Spokesman Antonio Orendain told the mourners that Cesar Chavez had requested that everybody “cool it” at the funeral. The ceremony was tense but peaceful.97

Indictments & Arrests

The riot alone would have clearly focused everybody’s attention on the problems in Pharr.
But because a person died, the situation took on a degree of solemnity and gravity that it otherwise would not have had. All the different factions involved in the violent melee would now be thoroughly scrutinized, including the Pharr police and Mayor Bowe. A grand jury was selected and instructed to investigate the evidence and issue indictments. It filed its report to Judge J. R. Alamia on March tenth, and was critical of both sides involved in the riot. In relation to the Pharr policemen and its elected officials, the report declared that:

Certain conditions exist and have existed over the past several years in Pharr which have had a direct influence on the recent activities . . . the Pharr police should do all it can to correct its reputation. We suggest closer supervision, constant training and upgrading of all officers to help bring about a more peaceful climate in Pharr. . . . it is the recommendation of this jury that the bars be closed to hours conforming with the closing hours of the bars in the surrounding towns. Police leadership in Pharr regardless of past rights or wrongs, now need to consider that they have a divided citizenry. Force and unreasoning attitudes will not dispel this discontent. This grand jury feels that the mayor and city council should immediately take measures to bring about the necessary changes so that all business of the city government can be conducted in an open manner, including evening meetings, as opposed to noon, so that there can be more citizen's participation.98

For the “agitators,” the grand jury said:

Needed changes in any town can be a far greater credit to that town when achieved by honest and legal means. Beware of those agitators who suggest militant demonstrations and physical confrontations. Their motives are questionable and their methods can only lead to an occurrence like that experienced in your city on February 6th. This Grand Jury feels that those leaders and participants of the demonstration and resulting riot of February 6th in Pharr should in some measure share in the responsibility for this death.99

After the sealed indictments were returned by the grand jury on March 10th, three carloads of Hidalgo County Sheriff’s deputies began making arrests of those individuals who were indicted. Two of the first people arrested were Efrain Fernández and Daniel Vásquez. Fernández was charged with malicious damage to property over $50.00. Vásquez was arrested for disorderly conduct.100 In a somewhat surprising turn-of-events and in contrast to what the local newspapers had been reporting, Robert Johnson, a Hidalgo County deputy sheriff, was charged with the negligent homicide of Alfonso Flores, thereby dispelling the notion that any of the rioters had shot Flores.101

Pharr Women Protest

A year after the riot, David Hall said that the arrests and trials of MAYO members effectively “blunted” its activities and sapped its energy. There was a danger that the prosecutions of the demonstrators might divert attention away from what many perceived to be the real cause of the problems in Pharr, namely Mayor Bowe and his administration. Some Pharr citizens were not willing to let this happen and they picked up right where Efrain left off. On April 16th, 1971
Oralia's Magallán's mother, Maria, announced that a group of women would begin picketing the Pharr police station demanding that Chief Ramirez and two other police officers alleged of beating prisoners in the Pharr jail, Mateo Sandoval and Gilbert Zuniga, be removed. The very next day the picketing began in front of the Pharr police station with about thirty-five women demonstrating in the morning and about ten women marching in front of station during the afternoon. The women carried signs that said, “The United Women Want Justice” and “The Police Department Is To Be Within the Law and Not Outside the Law.” These “united women” did not stop there. Three weeks after demonstrating in front of the Pharr police station they began picketing in front of Mayor Bowe’s house. The women continued to march even when Bowe’s sprinkler system was turned on and they got wet.

The unyielding attention on Bowe led others in the community to question his management of their city. Some of the people formed themselves into a group, the Pharr Citizens League, to investigate the accusations against Bowe, find solutions for these problems and to mend the fractious divisions in their community. Members of this organization came from all walks of life and were composed of both Anglos and Mexican-Americans. They were committed to taking whatever actions were necessary to promote positive changes. None of these activities boded well for Bowe.

Alonzo López Trial

Alonzo López was charged with inciting a riot and throwing a rock at Chief Ramirez. López claims that he was indicted because of his verbal confrontation with Chief Ramirez during the riot. Alonzo believes that the Hidalgo County District Attorney at the time, Oscar McInnis, had to find “fall-guys” on whom to pin the blame for the riot. “They had to blame somebody and it sure wasn’t going to be him.” Alonzo said he was surprised when he was indicted. He did not realize how serious the charges against him were. Prior to this, López had no criminal record, not even a traffic citation. But he had a clear conscience and faith in the justice system and believed that he would be vindicated. Even with the history of unequal justice for Mexican-Americans in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, Alonzo thought that the lack of evidence against him would keep him from being found guilty.

On June 10th, 1971, López stood trial for the charge of interfering with police in a civil disturbance. Chief Ramirez was one of the witnesses called by District Attorney Oscar McInnis. He testified that several bullets struck the east side of the Pharr police station and a fire truck during the riot. Ramirez also accused Alonzo López of throwing two rocks at him; one of the rocks was “the size of a baseball.” Ramirez claimed that he dodged both rocks and López ran off, not to be seen again in the demonstration.

Chief Ramirez reiterated his claim that the rioters had thrown the rocks before the firemen sprayed them with water. His estimate of the number of demonstrators was now given as 440, higher than his previous given immediately following the riot. He characterized the crowd as “abusive and insulting,” yelling epithets such as “pigs” and “perros (dogs)” at the police.

The Pharr police chief recounted that he had ordered officer Mateo Sandoval to disperse the demonstrators because the demonstration was “no longer peaceful.” Ramirez claims that Fernández then “gave a signal” to the crowd before falling to the ground. Immediately afterward the police were pelted with rocks and several gunshots were fired (from the rioters). Officer Sandoval testified that the firemen only turned their hoses on the crowd after a fireman received a deep gash in his head from a rock thrown from the crowd. McInnis also introduced “photographic
evidence" of Alonzo Lopez participating in picket lines in front of the Pharr police station carrying a sign that said, "We've had enough. We want more justice and less beatings."  

Lopez's defense attorney, Robert Yzaguirre, attempted to portray Chief Ramirez as a man with a "violent temper" by referring to accusations of wife-beating provided by his former wife. He also brought up a 1947 arrest of Ramirez for being drunk and disorderly. But the judge told the jury to disregard the defense's argument because it was not relevant to the case. Lopez also testified, stating that he did not throw rocks. As far as his overall behavior at the Pharr Riot was concerned, he said, "I certainly know my rights, privileges and limitations and I was certainly within bounds."  

In his final arguments, McInnis warned the jury of the dire consequences that would ensue if they found Lopez not guilty. "There will be rejoicing among his cohorts and others who would change our system with this kind of violence" and "Your decision here today will affect the course of law enforcement in Pharr and maybe this country in the future." In the defense summation, Robert Yzaguirre declared that the case, "boils down to the testimony of one officer and this defendant and those who corroborated him (Lopez). There were no corroborating witnesses for the prosecution." Yzaguirre went on to say that even Sgt. Mateo Sandoval never testified that Lopez threw a rock. After the closing arguments, the jury retired to deliberate. Alonzo was optimistic and expected that he would be found innocent because the case against him had no real merit.  

It took the jury almost three hours to complete their deliberations and find Alonzo Lopez guilty. They gave him a five-year probated sentence. Lopez's family and friends expressed shock, anger and dismay. Alonzo himself was stunned and bewildered. He could not understand how this could happen because he did not do anything illegal or break a law. He felt a bitter sense of betrayal because of his misplaced faith with the American justice system. Soon after he fell into a depression and hardly saw or spoke with anyone for several months. Even after twenty-five years, he still speaks with apparent indignation in reference to the District Attorney:  

He was a big liar. That's just what he was. Did you ever see the movie Judge Roy Bean. That was how McInnis would have things set up. He always knew how they would respond on the jury. Very few Mexican-Americans were ever called. He had index cards of people who were sympathetic to his causes. McInnis would load the jury in his favor. He had been a D. A. for a long time and he knew the system backwards and forwards.  

Alonzo's lawyers were his trusted friends and he does not blame them for the guilty verdict. "The ones who had experience with the juries were Anglos. The lawyers, juries, and judges were mostly Anglo."  

David Hall felt that Lopez was found guilty for a number of reasons. One thing was that his lawyers were not "well-versed" in this type of trial and made the mistake of not treating it as a political case. He watched part of the trial and thought that the District Attorney was "running all over Lopez's lawyers." Hall recalls that the D. A. used inflammatory language to incite fear in the jury:  

Oscar McInnis scared the jury with images of a 'brown hoard' coming to take over the Valley, and the other side did not really address these tactics. Their defense was that Alonzo was a nice guy. The defense was lackluster.
David Fishlow agrees with Hall saying that Alonzo’s attorney really “blew it.” He believed that it was a terrible verdict because the evidence against López was so flimsy. Fishlow said that Yzaguirre defended Alonzo by stating that he was “a good boy,” as if implying he may have done something bad, but now he had “repented . . . almost as if admitting guilt. So they sent Alonzo down the river.”

Efrain Fernández remembers Warren Burnett, one of the most successful trial lawyers in the state of Texas at the time, saying that Alonzo’s lawyers had more at stake than just trying to prove that Alonzo did not throw a rock at a policeman. What they did not contend with was a political system that was tilted in favor of Anglos in the Lower Valley.

López remained bitter for two years after the trial and for a while even hated Anglos. But after the passage of time, “the Lord washes it away. We would do it again. We stood up for social justice.”

Efrain Fernández Trial

After Alonzo’s trial it became clear to Efrain that he was in serious trouble because he was the organizer of the demonstration. Fernández believed that what happened to López was a “strong injustice.” He heard that McInnis was anxious to go to trial with him and that he was fairly confident that Efrain would be found guilty as well. The D. A. offered Fernández to plead to a high-degree misdemeanor but he refused. Efrain wanted to go to and trial and “fight.” It would be eight months before Efrain’s case would be tried, and this was a very tense period for him.

Fernández was notified by the American Civil Liberties Union that there was a chance that Warren Burnett was going to defend him, but right up to the trial this was never certain. Burnett had a reputation for being an unpredictable genius; he might or might not show up. The knowledge that one of the best trial lawyers in Texas might or might not represent him (and that Efrain was likely to go to prison if he did not) added to the anxiety he was already undergoing.

Fernández was willing to accept a prison term if “it came down to it,” but he now shudders at the thought because he currently works in the penitentiary system and is keenly aware of how terrible the conditions are there. Ironically, Efrain remembers that the “movement” was at its most vital during this period with constant meetings, demonstrations by María Magallán and the other women, various ad hoc groups forming in Pharr to investigate the Bowe administration, and several Pharr policemen resigning. But the fact still remained that a guilty conviction and a prison sentence loomed as a very real possibility for him, especially in light of López’ conviction and the long history of unequal justice for Mexican-Americans.

Days before the trial Warren Burnett did show up. Both Efrain and David Hall and were greatly relieved. Otherwise, Hall would be responsible for defending Fernández, and he did not have much trial experience or knowledge of how to wage the type of defense that Efrain needed.

David Fishlow remembers Burnett’s preparation for the trial:

Burnett got in there 2-3 days before the trial. I was there, Efrain was there, Hall was there, I don’t know who else. Burnett said to us, talk, I want you to talk all night and tell me everything you remember, just talk. Talk about the issues, talk about that night, talk about Efrain, talk about whatever. Talk about the rocks, just talk. And we did that and he just took notes.
Fernández's trial began on February 15, 1972. The charge against him was breaking a Pharr fire truck windshield that was valued over $50.00. This was a felony charge. The trial lasted almost two weeks and about fifty of Efrain's supporters were in attendance every day. One reason that this trial lasted longer was that Warren Burnett spent several days selecting a jury. Fernández remembers that the jury was roughly composed of half-Anglos and half-Hispanics. He was impressed with the type of Anglos on the jury, schoolteachers and people of this type, not the reactionary element that generally made him feel weary.

The state's case was largely a replay of the one used against Alonzo López. As in the previous trial, the D. A. called Chief Ramírez, Mateo Sandoval and Texas Ranger Jack Dean to testify. Ramírez and Sandoval both reiterated their claims that Efrain raised his hand and gave a “signal” to initiate the throwing of rocks at the Pharr police. Fire Chief B. E. Cook repeated the allegation that the rocks were thrown before the water was sprayed on the crowd, and verified that the damaged windshield on the fire truck cost over $50.00 to repair. Former Pharr policeman Frank Tagle testified that Fernández threw an object at the fire truck and was “waving his arms and yelling encouragement to the protesters.”

Ramírez stated that he never saw Fernández throw any rocks but he did accuse Efrain of being responsible for the outbreak of the riot. Ramírez was the D.A.’s star witness and the state’s case hinged on his testimony. Oscar McInnis had Chief Ramírez testify for around two hours. But Warren Burnett, speaking with a “booming” voice and wearing a red, white, and blue striped shirt with matching suspenders, spent more than four hours cross-examining Ramírez. It was reported that Ramírez “appeared to be perturbed by Burnett’s lengthy, probing questions.”

Burnett asserted that Ramírez had changed his story of what happened at the riot in Pharr; that his testimony was different from previous testimony he had given. Ramírez claimed that he never saw Fernández throw the rock himself but was told about it by two other police officers, one of them Frank Tagle, Jr. But Burnett pointed out that in a sworn statement dated February 10th, the police chief stated that officer Garza and another police officer (not Tagle) had originally told him of Fernández throwing the rock. Burnett said to Ramírez, “Your memory was better on February 10th, 1971 then it is now, isn’t it?” Ramírez replied, “Garza is dead now.” Burnett then shot back, “After Garza died, you changed it to Tagle, didn’t you?” Ramírez said nothing. In a telling moment, Burnett said to Ramírez, “You’re making it up as you go along, aren’t you Chief?”

Efrain acknowledges that he should not gloat, but that he felt “glad” that Chief Ramírez was embarrassed. Ramírez had perpetrated many injustices against individuals like him who were only seeking a better way of life for those oppressed under the Bowe administration.

Oscar McInnis got his comeuppance too. During the trial, Burnett appeared to be dozing off and seemed not to be paying any particular attention to what was going on in the court. McInnis was holding some files and tried to “slip” something in the record, implying that the evidence was in the files. Burnett immediately jumped out of his seat and “practically stalked” after McInnis, demanding that he hand over the files. Efrain remembers Burnett saying to McInnis, “You are trying to grandstand to the jury. Now give me those records!” Efrain said that McInnis had a really stunned look on his face:

McInnis had apparently brought up something, the kind of testimony that he wasn’t suppose to bring up and the judge sits there and says (in regards to Burnett’s accusation), “That’s right.” Burnett grabs the files and brings it over to our table. I
had never seen anything like that. You’re talking here of an extremely high degree of legal knowledge of the fine points of law that could eat up the competition. McLinnis was just outclassed. He was highly outclassed and that showed it right there.\textsuperscript{131}

Watching Warren Burnett in action was a fascinating experience for Efrain. He recalls that Burnett had a vast awareness of legal knowledge that inspired confidence. He asked the right questions and seemed to have a photographic memory. Burnett would ask a witness certain questions and then come back to the same witness fifteen minutes later and catch him off guard by precisely restating his answer and pinning the witness down to his previous statements or demonstrating the inconsistencies with his testimony. There were many prominent lawyers in the gallery observing the skillful work of Warren Burnett in action. Fernández said that Burnett had “little tricks.” He wore a red, blue and white tie and had a little American flag on his lapel. He always referred to Efrain as “this citizen.” To this day, Efrain recalls the impact that this word had. “It is a very important word, citizen.”\textsuperscript{132}

Former Pharr policeman Francisco Fuentes also testified and corroborated the accusation that the rocks were thrown before the water was sprayed on the crowd. But under Burnett’s cross-examination, Fuentes offered testimony that contrasted greatly from others given by Pharr city officials. Fuentes said that the picketers were in just as much danger as the policemen and firemen of being hurt by the rocks, implying that Fernández and his group were separate from the crowd of cantina patrons across the street. His testimony also underlined the fact that the two groups were not working in concert and that Fernández and his demonstrators were not involved in the rock throwing. Fuentes also said that that Chief Ramirez could have prevented the riot from occurring if he had kept the Pharr police from the front of the police station where the demonstration was taking place. The presence of the police only served to further provoke the cantina patrons and make the situation potentially more perilous.\textsuperscript{133} Throughout his cross-examinations, Burnett continually reiterated the point that the MAYO protesters and the large crowd of cantina patrons were in no way associated with each other.\textsuperscript{134}

Burnett had initially predicted it would take three to four days to complete his defense but rested his case after only calling two witnesses, Texas Ranger Jack Dean and Bishop Patrick Flores of San Antonio. Burnett asked if Jack Dean knew of Efrain Fernández’s whereabouts when the fire truck windshield was broken. Dean replied that he did not. Burnett reminded Dean that in previous testimony he had stated he had seen carloads of people driving by the Pharr police station throwing rocks and bottles, implying that it could have been any of these people that hit the windshield of the fire truck. Even Texas Ranger Dean could not corroborate who had broken the windshield. This added more weight to Efrain Fernández’s side of the scale since it provided more reasonable doubt.\textsuperscript{135}

Burnett presented a character witness, Bishop Patrick Flores, to testify on the behalf of Efrain. Flores said that he had known Fernández for roughly three years and believed that he was a person who used non-violent methods to improve the conditions of the poor. Flores said that Fernández “was a peaceful, law-abiding citizen.”\textsuperscript{136} Efrain was surprised and gratified to see prominent individuals like the Bishop from San Antonio supporting him and believed that it really helped his case.

During his summation, McInnis employed the same kind of rhetoric he used at the López trial, “You represent all the people. By your action here, you will say if we have a repeat of this sort of thing over the county.”\textsuperscript{137} In his closing arguments, Burnett declared that nobody actually
saw Fernández throw a rock, underscoring that the testimonies of Chief Ramírez and Frank Tagle had been discredited. He portrayed Fernández as a “law-abiding citizen” who had never been convicted of anything else before. Burnett asked the jury the following question, “Because there was a riot, does someone have to go to the penitentiary and is he (Fernández) to be the fall guy?”

The judge then instructed the jury to consider many points in deciding Efrain’s guilt or innocence. Among them, was whether the state had proven that Fernández was guilty of willful destruction of property with evil intent. Another admonition he gave them was that the accused could not be convicted just because he was present at the riot.

The Verdict

The verdict was announced on Thursday, February 25th. In case of any kind of disturbance, there were a number of deputies positioned outside the courtroom on the second floor, on the first floor and also in the parking lot. The jury deliberated for one hour and thirty-nine minutes. It found Efrain Fernández “not guilty.”

Efrain’s supporters in the courtroom cheered, and many stood in line to congratulate him. One newspaper account said that after the judge recessed the court there was “soft applause” but that this grew into a standing ovation with “shrieks” coming from many of the college-age girls that were present. “Handshakes, embraces and tear-filled displays of emotion became the order of the moment.” After the verdict was read McInnis “silently” walked away and offered “no comment” when reporters asked him questions. Warren Burnett told the reporters, “I think it was a very fair and just verdict.”

David Fishlow sums up the contribution that Warren Burnett made to Fernández and the city of Pharr:

He got up there and ran a real trial. He just made it clear to the jury that Efrain hadn’t done anything illegal. The cops had put a fire-hose on the people and that was a mistake. Whatever else happened in the course of the riot, destruction of property or whatever, Efrain was not responsible for that. He (Burnett) was a real showman, a wonderful guy. And so Efrain was acquitted. And so there was a fair election. A. C. Jaime was elected. The city council was thrown out, and Bowe went away.

Conclusion

When Efrain was found not guilty, all the impending cases relating to the Pharr Riot were dropped. Almost immediately after Efrain’s trial everything began to fall apart for Bowe. The unremitting pressure from the women demonstrators helped to keep the focus on Bowe and his administration’s misdeeds. The Pharr police force was in total disarray, with many officers resigning. Many of Pharr’s citizens were fed up and disgusted with Bowe’s leadership, including many Anglos. The Pharr Citizen’s League was actively trying to orchestrate Bowe’s resignation. Just two months after Efrain’s trial, with the swirl of the recent events and various forces at work, Bowe resigned as mayor of Pharr. Efrain could not believe it. He felt that a great victory had been won. In fact, many people from across the state of Texas working in the “Movement” considered it a major victory. Fernández recalls that, “We were glad, we were triumphant; the
citizens of Pharr were triumphant.” A. C. Jaime, a certified public accountant, became Pharr’s first Mexican-American mayor. Efrain states that the Jaime and his administration were “good people” and that Pharr was fortunate to have such good leadership at such a crucial time.144

Fernández modestly speculates that the Pharr Riot may have been the beginning of positive changes in Pharr and the Valley.145 Alonzo López said that many beneficial positive changes occurred in the wake of the Pharr Riot:

After the riots and marches there were many Mexican-Americans who got the education to get involved in the “system.” A lot of the protesters who were students went to college and came back as professionals, lawyers and worked to change the system.146

David Hall believes that the Pharr Riot was a pivotal event for Mexican-Americans in the Lower Rio Grande Valley because it was the beginning of a period of more inclusion for them in the South Texas region:

There was a dramatic change all across the Valley after the Pharr Riot and the election of A. C. Jaime. This was definitely a watershed event. Up until then local politics was dominated by Anglos. After the Pharr Riot all the Valley towns began switching to Mexicano control, one after the other. The Pharr Riot really galvanized the Mexicano community.147

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Memoirs of Brownsville Politics
by
Loddell Batsell

My initiation to politics began in 1988 in a restaurant owned by the then Sheriff of Cameron County, Alex Perez. Doctor Joe Zavaletta, a local gynecologist, invited us to sit in his booth, and asked us if we would support Pat Robertson, who was running for the Republican presidential nomination. I believe that Dr. Zavaletta asked us because of Jim’s past experience in politics. He had been elected for five consecutive six-year terms as a commissioner of the Port of Brownsville. Although Jim had political experience, nothing could prepare us for the party politics on the state and national level that followed. Our instruction began in Dr. Zavaletta’s office. We watched a video about various aspects of a precinct convention, which he had acquired from the campaign of Pat Robertson. The main theme was “All politics are local.”

The County Primary of March 1988

Meetings were held prior to the primary to orient newcomers like ourselves to the process of qualifying voters to attend precinct, county and state conventions. The Republican Party in Cameron County was still very small in 1988. Through Pat Robertson’s television show and the Christian Coalition, we began recruiting local Christians as workers (even though the Christian Coalition had to remain neutral to keep its tax-exempt status). I became the chairman of the Brownsville chapter of the Christian Coalition. We opened every meeting with prayer and the pledge of allegiance.

Delegates to the county convention are elected at the precinct convention held immediately after the polls close, usually at the same locations. In order to be eligible to vote in the precinct convention, the voter must have voted in the Republican primary. The precinct chairperson elected at the last primary election usually conducts the meeting. Resolutions that pass are taken to the state platform. Resolutions that are then agreed upon at the state level are sent to the national platform committee, and may or may not become part of the national platform. Delegates to the county convention are nominated and voted on at the precinct convention. The county convention seats all the delegates by precincts. The number of votes relegated to each precinct is determined by the percentage of votes in that precinct in the last governor’s primary race. The chairman of the Cameron County Republican Party appoints the committees. Decisions made by committees are voted on by the entire convention. The county chairman, retired Lt. Colonel Frank Morris, was a fair arbitrator between the experienced delegates and the newcomers.

Frank and Mary Yturria and Frank Morris were very helpful. While I was headquarters chairperson, The Brownsville Herald called. The reporter said, “Mrs. Batsell, I would like an interview with you about the Republican Party and headquarters activities.” I had been a student of Karen Hughes at the state level. Her class was “How to Meet the Press.” She had warned me, ”Do not let the press set the agenda or get the upper hand. You do not have to answer any question they propose.” I told the reporter, ”No thanks, I’m too busy to give you an interview.” He asked, “Why not?” I answered, “Why should I? Your paper usually presents our Republican Party in a bad light.” He said, “What are you trying to do, influence the press?” I answered,” I am free to talk to you or to say no, and I say no, thank you!” I immediately called Adolf Tijerina, a fourth generation young Hispanic Republican. I asked, “Adolf will you come to headquarters and give
an interview to a *Herald* reporter?” He said, “Sure, Mrs. Batsell just let me know.” I arranged the interview. We received a front-page headline saying, “Hispanic Raised in Duval County is a Fourth Generation Republican,” plus a picture.

**The State Convention of June 1988**

The doctor who had recruited us had put my name up for the female member of the State Republican Executive Committee from District 27. He later called, and asked my husband if I would serve. Jim said ‘yes’ for me. The State Republican Executive Committee consists of 31 districts. One man and one woman must be elected at the state convention at the meeting of the caucus of their district. The caucus is composed of all delegates of the district. The State Republican Executive Committee meets quarterly to determine the policy of the state party. The State Convention for the Republican Party in 1988 was held in Houston, Texas. Jim and I attended because I was nominated and elected to represent District 27 on the SREC. My reward was to be made chairperson of the campaign headquarters.

**The Presidential Campaign of October 1988**

George W. Bush presided over a large fund-raising party for his father held in Brownsville at the home of a Bush family friend. I asked Mr. Yturria, who was Bush’s Cameron County campaign chairman, if I should keep a group of volunteers phoning and working at the headquarters. It was between shifts and if George W. Bush were to visit the headquarters I would have to do some planning. Mr. Yturria said, “No, there won’t be time to come by.” Jim and I were at headquarters waiting for the second shift to come. At about 6:30 p.m., a large black limousine pulled up to headquarters, and out popped George W. Bush and Mr. Yturria. There were several important phone calls for Mr. Yturria, and, while he was on the phone, we began talking to Bush. My husband asked him, “Did you know a Presbyterian pastor in Midland named Matthew Lynn? Bush responded, “I guess I did! He baptized me. We were Presbyterian in Midland, but my dad had promised my mother that, when we moved, we would become Episcopalians. So when we moved to Houston we became Episcopalians.”

Then Bush said, “Let me ask you a question. Are the Robertson people giving you any trouble?” He had been misinformed that Robertson’s people had disappeared after the primary, and were harassing the campaign. I answered, “I am one!” He looked astonished, so I said, “Robertson people are a main workforce in our campaign down here. However, Mr. Bush, I need to know one thing because I am constantly asked this question. What is candidate Bush’s belief about God and abortion?” Bush responded, “My dad has a very deep faith, and is pro-life. However, he feels if he talks about his faith he would be using religion the wrong way.” I said “That is very commendable, but many Christians, such as I, have become involved for the first time in politics because of our moral convictions and our faith. We want to know where your dad stands.” Bush said. “I am going to send you some copies of *A Man of Integrity* by Doug Wead.” This was a biography of the elder George Bush’s early years, including the loss of his daughter, telling how he had derived strength from his faith. It relates how, after he was shot down by the Japanese, but was rescued by the sudden appearance of an American submarine, he asked God why he had been spared. George W. Bush did indeed send a case of the books, which I distributed.
The County Judge Election of November 1988

The next turn in our political career came in November 1988. The executive committee of the Cameron County Democratic party had appointed Ray Ramon county judge. The elected Democratic judge, Jack Goolsby, had died while in office. Jack had won the election over two opponents: Ray Ramon, a Democrat, and Dr. Lendy McDonald, a Republican. Dr. McDonald, a local veterinarian, had run three times as a Republican against Kika De La Garza, District 27's Representative to Congress in Washington, D. C. Dr. McDonald's goal was eventually to establish a two party system in the Rio Grande Valley. A controversy over Ray Ramon, the appointed county judge, became an opening to get a Republican in office. Many Democrats were seriously opposed to Ray Ramon, so they backed Tony Garza, a local attorney, who was a Republican. Garza won the election, becoming the first elected Republican in Cameron County. Governor George W. Bush subsequently appointed Garza as Texas Secretary of State in 1995. Garza in 1996 was elected railroad commissioner, and in 2002 was appointed as President Bush's ambassador to Mexico.

The State Convention of 1992

Frank Morris, the Cameron County chairman, came to me at the state convention held in Fort Worth in 1992 and asked if I knew anyone in the Corpus Christi delegation. I answered that I knew some ladies there. He stated that Frank Yturria, my mentor and a long-time Republican and personal friend of the Bushes, had never attended a national convention as a delegate. I approached my friends in the Corpus delegation, and asked for their vote for Frank. They said that they had to talk to him first.

It was embarrassing to me to set up the meeting because Frank had probably never had to interview for any position, especially in front of a group of women from Corpus Christi. However, he agreed to meet with them. I presumed that he passed their scrutiny. Later on, Frank Morris came back to me and said that the new chairperson of Nueces County (which includes Corpus Christi and outlying areas) had told him “Since we are in the majority we are going to send all the national delegates from Nueces County.” This decision would not allow any national delegates from Cameron County. He asked if I would please re-contact my friends in Corpus.

Jim and I returned to the hotel for lunch, after which we got on a shuttle bus to go back to the convention hall. My friend, Ernie Angelo, was on the bus directly behind Jim and me. Angelo was given VIP treatment, so this occurrence, I know, had to be God ordained because Ernie never should have been on the bus. He asked me whether I knew how to get in touch with Frank Yturria. He wanted Frank to nominate him at the caucus of district 27 for the national committeeman.” I replied, “If I see Frank I will of course give him your request. We don’t have much time, Ernie; the caucus meeting is this afternoon. If I don’t find Frank, may I have the privilege of nominating you? He stated, “Yes, of course.” I then said, “Ernie, I have a favor to ask of you.” I related the situation with the Nueces county chairperson and the national delegates. Looking very surprised, he said, “Don’t let it worry you another minute. I will take care of that situation immediately.” I never found Frank, so I nominated Ernie for the national committeeman, and he won. I nominated Frank as a national delegate, and he won, too.
The Gubernatorial Campaign of 1994

Bush won as governor. In an election for governor, the precincts that voted for the candidate who won obtained control of the precinct by appointing judges for the next major election. This meant that we had Republican control in the majority of Cameron County precincts. My husband and I scrambled to recruit election judges to fill so many places in the Brownsville area. The Republican Party kept this control until the gubernatorial election in 2002. Rick Perry may have won the election, but Sanchez won in Cameron County. Now the Democrats are in charge again.

The State and National Conventions of 1996

At the State Convention in 1996, Governor Bush was chairman of the Texas delegation. We elected Debbie Moutsos, Tony Garza, two Corpus women, and one young man as delegates, and me as an alternate. The National Conventions was held in San Diego. At the convention hall, Debbie Moutsos, the delegate from Padre Island, had the idea of collecting autographs of famous people. We framed them and auctioned them off as a fundraiser. When we pursued Larry King to the door of the men’s room, he said, “Ladies, if you wait here, I will give you one when I come out.” He kept his word. We walked away autographs of Jeb Bush, Oren Hatch, Chuck Colson, and Dan Quayle, among others. The one that was hardest to get was Oliver North’s, which raised more than $400. Even though I was an alternate, I was always seated on the floor as a voting delegate.

The Primary Election and State Convention of 2000

In the election of 2000, I was the Republican representative on the resolutions committee at the Courthouse, examining mailed ballots on the day of the election. The criterion was whether the signature inside and outside the envelope matched. In preparation for the state convention in that year, which was held in Dallas, Frank Morris, re-elected as Cameron County chair, set up a meeting of Jim, Norma Tovar, and myself. As we discussed strategy for the election of delegates, Jim casually said, “I have always wanted to be an elector in the electoral college.” I said “What is that, and how do you get the job?” Frank answered, “I think that we can go for the nomination at the caucus meeting.” Frank asked me to talk to the Corpus ladies about Jim’s nomination at the caucus. I prayed about making the contact, but I could not get a confirmation. Jim asked Melvin Newland to nominate him. Melvin made a speech, saying, “Jim is not getting any younger. This may be his last chance at becoming an elector.”

There were two lady nominees for the elector’s position from Corpus Christi. In the first vote there was not a majority. A second vote was taken, and Jim won a majority. After the meeting was over, I had lunch with a friend from Corpus and her husband. As we ate lunch, I asked what had happened to change the Corpus vote. She said that they had held a strategy meeting, and one of the ladies had been very mad at the people who had voted for her opponent. It seemed to make some of the people so angry that they voted for Jim. I told her about Frank’s request to secure Corpus votes; I told her that I had not wanted to do that. She laughed, and said, “Lody, if you had been seen with me, or telephoned me, or in any way have had contact with me, it would have secured a Corpus Christi elector. The Corpus Christi delegation thought you were trying to tell us how to vote. I told them that you had not even said hello. The delegation said that if you had tried to
influence us in any way they would have banded together to defeat Jim."

This was the beginning of a long process of preparing for the Texas Electoral College. Jim received many communications from persons trying to get him to change his vote. The Brownsville Herald did a piece on Jim. Some would call it an act of chance, but we truly believe that God had placed us at the right place at the right time. Jim signed a pledge to vote for George W. Bush, believing that Bush was the right man to lead the nation.

Closing Statement

Since our initiation into political activism in 1988, we have been involved in county, state, and national conventions. If you had told me that day in the restaurant the things that were going to happen in our lives, I would have thought you were crazy. It never ceases to amaze me that so many doors are opened up to those that follow their convictions above all else. We are still involved in politics, and we will remain involved as long as we can. There have been many improvements, and I look forward to seeing many more.
1820, Soldiers Marching in Matamoros
by Salomón Colmenero
Economic Changes in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas: A Bibliographic Review
by
David J. Mycue

When the war between Mexico and the United States ended in 1848, no town existed on the northern side of the Rio Bravo/Grande in the Lower Rio Grande Valley (LRGV). Today that region comprises four Texas counties—Starr, Hidalgo, Cameron, and Willacy—located in the southernmost part of Texas. Ever since Spain colonized the region a century before the Mexican War, ranches had served as centers of community life. Planners of the colonization effort at the outset had decided that the usual Spanish settlements supported by forts or missions appeared unnecessary in the LRGV owing to the scarcity of Native Americans, who were living in small, hunter-gatherer groups.

During the Spanish and Republic of Mexico eras, the ranchers lived part of each year on ranches established north of the Rio Grande, as they allowed their animals (goats, sheep, and cattle, mostly) to graze or slake their thirst in narrowly (about three-quarters of a mile) allocated parts of the river attached to their numbered shares, called porciones, which extended from the river about fifteen miles. The ranchers maintained their chief residences, however, in towns on the southern side, chiefly Reynosa, Camargo, and Mier. After 1821, when Mexico achieved its independence from Spain, Matamoros bloomed as a favorite city for businessmen. Previously, it had existed merely as the small parish of Refugio del Estero. The economic backwardness of the area chiefly arose from Spanish law. It had permitted only two ocean ports in New Spain, as Mexico was then called, Acapulco on the Pacific and Vera Cruz on the Atlantic. Consequently, freed from such constraints after independence, an international business community grew in Matamoros, and it quickly turned into the economic fulcrum of northeastern Mexico.

So economically retarded had the northeast remained during the first half century after Colonel José de Escandon founded Nuevo Santander that in 1794 the Viceroy in Mexico City ordered Lieutenant Colonel Félix María Calleja del Rey to lead an inspection trip to the region. Consequently, among other suggestions, General Calleja advocated the establishment of a dried fish industry at Fronton (Point/Port Isabel) on the Gulf of Mexico by utilizing salt harvested from salt lakes in what would become Willacy and Hidalgo counties. The Mexico City bureaucracy, however, took no effective action, but the salt lakes—a state-owned monopoly under Spain, Mexico, and early Texas—remained a significant source of wealth when food and leather preservation were critical.

Following the Mexican War, businessmen in Matamoros banded together under Charles Stillman (an American who had been working there as an agent for eastern United States firms) to establish Brownsville across from Matamoros. Local authorities then authorized a ferry connection between the two towns as well as between Reynosa, about 100 miles upriver, and what would become the Texas town of Hidalgo. Operating the Hidalgo ferry as a government concession were John Young, originally from Scotland, and John McAllen, from Northern Ireland. Like Stillman, before the Mexican War, they had been working together as international traders in Matamoros.

The Hidalgo-Reynosa ferry concession proved lucrative for Young and McAllen because Reynosa had been archiving borderland property records in the region ever since the King of Spain had issued land grants in the late 1700s. After the Mexican War, Valley folk staying on the north side often had to travel back and forth, not only to research legal property documents, but even to buy groceries or other merchandise. During the first half century of ceded far south Texas, only three U.S. lower Rio Grande Valley towns thrived: Brownsville, Hidalgo, and Rio Grande...
City, all of which served as county seats, respectively, of Cameron, Hidalgo, and Starr.

Attitude adjustment of businessmen plying their trades on both sides of the river proved difficult in the beginning; in fact, many considered themselves neither Americans nor Mexicans. Employing soldier-of-fortune José Carbajal to organize a band of disgruntled Americans and Mexicans, Valley businessmen, irritated with new tariffs and custom duties, hoped to set up a middle country between the United States and Mexico, sometimes referred to as Republic of the Sierra Madre. Skirmishes took place up and down the river in the LRGV. President Millard Fillmore ordered strict enforcement of the Neutrality Acts, and within a short time, the U.S. Army suppressed the movement, known in history as the Merchants War or Plan de Lobo.2

During those same years, in the 1850s, U. S. military forts and camps along the border were concentrating municipal activities at Brownsville (Fort Brown, across from Matamoros); Rancho Davis (Fort Ringgold, across from Camargo), later named Rio Grande City; and the town of Hidalgo (where a detachment of soldiers established a midway camp across from Reynosa). Upriver, Laredo expanded around Fort McIntosh, while residents choosing not to accept U.S. citizenship (as offered all people north of the border in accord with a provision of the treaty that ended the war) moved across the river to found Nuevo Monterrey, later renamed Nuevo Laredo.

All the while, two enterprising former river pilots (during the Mexican War), Mifflin Kenedy and Richard King, started buying up military surplus and establishing river steamship transportation along the Rio Grande, a lucrative enterprise until lands in the northern reaches of the LRGV, full of wild, unbranded livestock, tempted the men to begin cattle ranching activities.

For the rest of the 19th century, the river towns – including Roma, about ten miles north of the Mexican settlement of Mier – existed as prime municipalities along the final stretch of the Rio Grande, before it emptied into the Gulf of Mexico. Even so, aside from the few settlements, the northern side of the river remained sparsely inhabited. On both sides of the border, Spanish continued as the common language, and the peso remained the standard currency. If newspaper headlines and recriminations between governments are to be given credence, the chief economic activity during this period was cattle thievery over the borders, serving, therefore, as a boon for law enforcement operations. Complaints by the King Ranch, in particular, led to continuance of strong U.S. military presence in the LRGV, reorganization of the Texas Rangers (they had been disbanded after the Civil War), and inquiries by legislative committees of both nations.3

Compounding the isolation of the lower Valley from the rest of the United States was the construction, in the early 1880s, of the Texas Mexican (Tex-Mex) Railroad, east to west, between Corpus Christi and Laredo. The Tex-Mex ran across the northern end of an arid land about 150 miles above the Valley. Spaniards, Mexicans, and early Texans called the area (President James Polk’s *causes belli* for the Mexican War) variously Desierto Muerte, Nueces Strip, or Wild Horse Desert. At about the same time that the Tex-Mex was built, the Mexican government ordered the Mexican National Railroad constructed from Mexico City northwest to Nuevo Laredo and northeast to Reynosa and Matamoros.

Consequently, until the early 1900s, the lower Valley—lacking reliable transportation north for goods and services—effectively functioned more as part of Mexico than the United States. This situation improved early in the 20th century when railroad tracks connected Brownsville and the lower Valley with Corpus Christi and the North, the line being called at first the St. Louis, Brownsville, and Mexico Railroad. Until its completion, goods sent from the northern U.S. into the LRGV had to be either carted through the deep sandy loam between Corpus Christi and the Valley or shipped by boat from New Orleans to “lighters” off Point/Port Isabel or Matamoros.

From those north-south tracks, an extension branched west from Harlingen across most of
Hidalgo County as the result of untiring efforts of its sheriff, John Closner, who had, in the late 1800s, set up a sugar plantation along the river near the county seat of Hidalgo. He convinced landowners and railroad financiers that it would be in their best economic interests to underwrite the extension. As a result, numerous towns were organized along it between 1905 and 1920, and the access roads beside the tracks both north and south and east and west became two major arterial highways (77 & 83) of the Valley for many years. Today, those towns have been transformed into a sinuous, nearly shoulder-by-shoulder, chain of municipalities from Brownsville to Roma. Another line, the Southern Pacific (SP), reached the mid-Valley in the late 1920s, giving it a more direct route north to markets in San Antonio and beyond. The access road that SP railroad construction crews made to lay those tracks would soon morph into a state highway (281).

Community life in the south Texas borderlands during the early 20th century experienced a frenzied period of organizing as towns sprouted and huge numbers of Mid-western farmers surged into the region. Those farmers needed towns as commercial centers to take advantage of northern markets being opened by the new transportation connections. Numerous land development companies, employing cadres of wheeling, dealing lawyers and super-salesmen, enticed farmers from such locales as the Dakotas and Nebraska. Exhausted from working in harsh climes, Midwesterners heard affirmations of continuous sunshine, plentiful Rio Grande water, available fertile soil mostly lacking stones or rocks, and a cheap, almost inexhaustible, labor supply from across the border. All such appealing features existed in the inviting environment of the lower Valley. Also there arose a labyrinth of canals and drainage ditches served by river pumps, powered at first by mesquite wood then coal, oil, and nowadays electricity.

New towns were often named for the leaders of this economic change: railroad executives; bankers and financiers of agricultural ventures; and the founders, wives, or children of land development enterprises. The new pioneers also chose town names from local ranches or historical sites, as well as naming new settlements for themselves or their ancestral homelands. Types of crops farmed ran the gamut from sugar, rice, and cotton to truck vegetables.

Each, however, proved relatively paltry or short term in economic benefits until the successful development of the citrus industry. It proved highly profitable from the 1920s to the 1950s. During that period the LRGV experienced what now appears to have been a climatic freak of nature, few hard freezes (below 28 degrees for five hours or more, enough to kill the trees) having taken place. Meanwhile an enterprising, self-made engineer, Sam Robertson from San Benito, promoted the building of a narrow-gauge railroad—popularly called the Spiderweb—that traveled Hidalgo, Willacy and Cameron counties, stimulating agricultural production and thereby a rise in property appraisals.

By the opening of the third decade of the 20th century, most Valley towns were flourishing. New occupations proliferated from the agricultural boom with such spin-off work as crop dusting pesticides from small, private aircraft. Discovery of oil and gas, particularly in Starr and Hidalgo counties, kept the economic momentum going during the Great Depression.

Even so, farming continued as the chief economic force for nearly the rest of the century, that is, until the NAFTA agreements in 1993 between U.S. and Mexico rapidly changed local economies to an economy based on manufacturing, warehousing, and transporting products to maquiladoras on the southern side of the border where final assembly took place by inexpensive labor. The finished product then went north without incurring heavy custom duties. The center of citrus production, in the meantime, shifted 300 miles south, around Linares in the state of Nuevo León.

The Lower Rio Grande Valley, which had launched its existence as a producer—first of
goats, sheep, cattle and then of semi-tropical fruits and vegetables—ended its 250-year history as a service facilitator of commerce between both nations. In the view of some, the days of entrepreneurial glory have passed for the LRGV to a more mundane era, less glamorous, but one with a stronger economy. Where its pitfalls in the future reside and how long current economic conditions will last shall simmer as bemusing topics for theorists, who sometimes sarcastically visualize folks of the entire North American continent flipping hamburgers for each other in franchises on every corner.

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Suggested Readings (*Indicates primary source)

1. Adams, William L. and Anthony K. Knopp, Portrait of A Border City/ Brownsville, Texas (Austin TX: Eakin, 1997). The section “Economic Overview” draws a cogent rationale for Brownsville acquiring a reputation for being “America’s poorest city.” Chapters on the used clothing (ropa usada) business, shrimp fleets in the Port of Brownsville, and welfare agencies add depth to an understanding of the border economy that other studies usually lack.

2. Allhands, James Lewellyn, Gringo Builders (Iowa City IA: p. p., 1931). Memoirs by comptroller of railroad construction company that linked the LRGV with the north in the early 1900s. Allhands’ papers are housed in the archives of Texas A&M, Kingsville, a town created by railroad and King Ranch executives. Nothing on the subject will likely replace soon this first published account, certainly not the recent Rails to the Rio by Glen Harding and Cindy Lee, Raymondville TX, p. p., 2003. Although the latter contains charming photographs of the era, the narrative mostly consists of reprints of contemporary newspaper items. As a fancy, polished scrapbook, Rails to the Rio may satisfy nostalgic cravings of old timers, but researchers requiring a more reliable account would be better served by locating Gringo Builders in some rare book repository, since it has been long out of print, or by bidding on a copy via internet auction services.

*3. ___________________________ , Uriah Lott (San Antonio TX: p. p., 1949). Bar none, the subject of this biography reached fame in business circles for being the most energetic promoter of south Texas. A super salesman, Lott should receive most of the credit for construction of both the Tex-Mex Railway (between Corpus Christi and Laredo) in the 1880s and the St. Louis, Brownsville, and Mexico Railroad (between Corpus Christi and Brownsville) in the early 1900s. This book also remains valuable for its review of events (pp. 86-96) at the King and Kenedy ranches during the generation straddling the 19th century.

4. Alonzo, Armando C., Tejano Legacy: Rancheros and Settlers in South Texas, 1734-1900 (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1998). Primarily a sociological study of those whose descendants became Mexican Americans in Texas. Preferring to call them “Tejanos,” Alonzo traces their roots from Spanish colonization up to the arrival of Anglo Americans en masse. Relying on demographic, agriculture, real estate, and occupational statistics, he produces a thick compendium of Tejanos’ role in the ranching communities of south Texas. With government records as his base, he illuminates the part played by those who, though leaving few first hand accounts, did the actual work bringing civilization to the borderlands.

records of their ancestor John McAllen — merchant, rancher, and politician in the LRGV following
the Mexican War — the authors reveal an intriguing view of the area for the first fifty years after
transfer to U.S. sovereignty. Before the war, John McAllen, an Irishman from Londonderry, had
been clerking in Matamoros for John Young, a Scot from Edinburgh. Afterward, they obtained a
concession to operate a ferry between Reynosa and what became the town of Hidalgo on the other
side of the Rio Grande, where they managed a general store and engaged in agriculture and cattle
raising. McAllen’s meticulous record keeping, and *ober dicta* in extant ledgers and letters, create
an invaluable panorama of retail and ranch life in south Texas. To serve historians until the opening
of the McAllen Ranch Archives, where many of the primary documents reside, researchers will
rely on the 664-page work, which includes copious endnotes, an appendix of cowboys’ colloquial
or technical words, and a bibliography. The last section, though not distinguishing primary sources
from secondary works, is helpfully divided by “Books,” “Manuscripts and Documents,” “Theses
and Dissertations,” “Government Documents and Public Records,” “Newspapers,” “Articles,”
“Interviews and Correspondence,” “Maps,” and “Web Sites”.

York City: W. W. Norton, 1990). A cautionary tale of the Mifflin Kenedy family fortune, which
in only a few generations imploded with an embarrassing scandal for American Catholics and
the Vatican itself. Although worthy of the *National Enquirer*, the story first appeared on the front
pages of the *Wall Street Journal*. The account dramatizes what happened when a mysterious
Trappist monk became an associate of a Catholic capitalist of international repute and a besotted
dowager. Mifflin Kenedy’s WASP soul must surely have been churning in the afterlife during the
events that these journalists exploit.

A socio-economic study of border life in its barrios and colonias, that is, in its urban and rural slums.
Contributing to this state of affairs, phenomena such as migrant labor, maquiladoras, and tariff
agreements are analyzed and compared to similar conditions in third-world nations.

Fresnos town origins seen romantically by Anglo-American pioneers, who had been convinced to
invest in far south Texas by land development companies early in the 20th century. Do not confuse
this book with the song sheet “Rio Grande Valley Home” (published by the American Legion Sam
Jackson Post No. 111, San Benito TX, 1928), as popularized by the “Reddy Kilowatt Quartet”
(composed of “Nappy” Chatelle, Miriam’s husband, L. F. “Cot” Boling, Dick Collins, and William
Buck). The book, however, does reprint the one verse and chorus comprising the entire song.
Although the verse seems to have been quickly forgotten, sales prospects ensconced in company
clubhouses or model showplaces were often heard singing this chorus loud and strong:

For we love our Valley home,
‘Way down upon the Rio Grande,
Land of yours and land of mine
Land of the palm trees and the bright sunshine.
There we live in Paradise,
Where roses bloom on ev’ry hand—
For we love our Valley home,
‘Way down upon the Rio Grande.

Marketing experts nowadays would do well to study the antics of early land salesmen who
lured many pioneer farmers to invest in the Valley. That decision many would regret while returning
north bankrupt after the river ran nearly dry during too many droughts that put a lie to original contracts promising irrigated water in perpetuity. The relatively successful farmers who stayed, however, later imagined a golden glow to those early years. A great dissertation awaits a young, intrepid scholar lured by the pathetic whine of parched pioneers giving up the backbreaking job of chopping through the thick brush before the remaining farmers organized to see a State law passed authorizing irrigation districts to allocate the river waters and issue bonds to build dams, levees, canals, and drainage ditches to survive the risks.


10. Cheeseman, Bruce S., “Richard King: Pioneering Market Capitalism on the Frontier,” pp. 86-91 in Ranching in South Texas: A Symposium, ed. Joe S. Graham (Kingsville: Texas A&M, 1994). Written by, at the time, the King Ranch archivist who later offended the corporation chiefs to be eased out of his position, as dramatically told by Don Graham in Kings of Texas: The 150-Year Saga of an American Ranching Empire, Hoboken NJ, John Wiley, 2003. The event proved an ironical twist, particularly since, aside from scattered records copied from other repositories, virtually no archival resources exist for the King Ranch before 1912, when a fire destroyed the ranch headquarters completely. Before that, at the end of 1863, Union forces had occupied King’s ranch house and his town house in Brownsville, where they had confiscated all his files up to then. It is to be hoped that someday a diligent scholar may discover them somewhere in the bowels of an archive. Meanwhile the problem is moot, since the King Ranch archives are now sealed by order of King Ranch executives.

11. Clayton, Laurence, Historic Ranches of Texas (Austin: UT, 1993). Includes King (pp. 36-42) and Yturria (pp. 85-90) ranches. F. Yturria, Brownsville owner of the only bank south of San Antonio during the 19th century, established himself in the ranching business after King’s death, when his widow was forced to repay debts by signing over some lands to banker Yturria and to Jim Wells, King’s chief attorney and leader of the Democrats in South Texas.

12. Cook, Scott, Mexican Brick Culture in the Building of Texas, 1800s-1980s (College Station: Texas A&M, 1998). A first-class monograph about brick making on both sides of the lower border, one of the earliest skilled industries to develop in the Rio Grande Delta. Cook delved into every aspect of the enterprise and produced a narrative that should be satisfying to historians, archeologists, economists, as well as other social scientists who appreciate thorough scholarship.


20. Green, Stan, *A History of the Tex Mex Railway/The Texas Mexican Railway* (Laredo: Border Studies Center, c. 1990). An essay on perhaps the most significant economic achievement with the widest spreading ramifications for the borderlands during the 19th century. Green’s conclusion (p.10): “While the railroads fueled a capitalist reshaping of northern Mexico, they transformed Laredo from a ranching hamlet to Gateway of South America. Its population tripled in the 1880s, from 3,000 to 10,000.”


23. Irby, James A., *Backdoor at Bagdad: The Civil War in the Rio Grande* (El Paso: Texas Western, 1977). The effects of cotton smuggling during the Civil War. If Nuremberg trials had been held at the war’s close, many of the Valley business elite would have been punished as traitors, à la Krupp, or wiped out.


of Nebraska, 1986). A scholarly cruise along the Rio Grande from Spanish colonization to the 20th century. Well footnoted, mainly from primary sources, the work comes with a selected, unannotated bibliography and index. The focus on river transportation makes it especially valuable as a guide for understanding changing economic conditions.


28. Lea, Tom, *The King Ranch*, 2 vols. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1957). Admired by patriotic Texans as the classic on the subject, it had been initiated as a commissioned endeavor, thus prone to biases that such works commonly demonstrate. Every page of the work displays the King Ranch brand, the running or rolling “W.” Although the work employs the trappings of scholarship, footnotes appear erratically, seldom when authenticity requires substantiation; for instance, to document Texas Ranger Leander McNelly’s half-time speech (I, 285) to his men as they grouped to invade Mexico: “‘Boys,’ he said, ‘I like your looks all right—you are the palest set of men I ever looked at. That is a sign you are going to do good fighting. In the Confederate army I noticed that just before battle all men get pale.’” Likewise undocumented is Richard King’s ode of gratitude (I, 291): “‘There is not another man in the world who could invade a foreign country with that number of men and all get back alive. Captain McNelly is the first man that ever got stolen cattle out of Mexico.’” The work also explains the development of the Santa Gertrudis cattle breed (Shorthorn/Brahman).


31. McCoy, Dorothy Abbott, *Texas Ranchmen* (Austin: Eakin, 1987). Basing her brief biographies on interviews, the author creates pithy, informative profiles of ranch founders, current owners, and managers as well as revealing details about ranch operations. Though encompassing all Texas, the book describes selected ranches in counties south of the Nueces River: Tierra Seca (Webb); King and Yturria (Kleberg, Kenedy, Willacy, and Cameron); Tres Mesquites-Thomas (Kenedy and Willacy); Steen (Duval); Ed Lasater (Brooks and Starr); Mariposa (Brooks); Hooper (Brooks); and La Coma (Hidalgo).
32. Malouf, Dian Leatherberry, *Cattle Kings of Texas* (Hillsboro, TX: Beyond Words Publishing, 1991). A photographic essay, covering Yturria (Punta del Monte), McAllen (San Juanito), East (San Antonio Viejo & Santa Fe), Finley (Callahan), Garcia (Pacuvaya), Armstrong, and Lasater Ranches. This coffee table book offers graphic evidence that the lowly life of the cowpoke had risen, by the end of the 20th century, to rank among south Texas capitalist oligarchy.

33. Montgomery, Julia Cameron, *A Camera Journey Through the Lower Valley of the Rio Grande: The Garden of Golden Grapefruit*, 2nd ed. (Brownsville: Monty's Monthly News, 1930). In the words of the author, it covers “... more than thirty thriving towns and villages—many of them paved from curb to curb with concrete—and linked together as a crystal prosperity chain by long ribbons of palm-bordered highways.” Researchers of the citrus industry should not overlook this slim volume.

34. __________, *A Little Journey through the Lower Valley of the Rio Grande: The Magic Valley of Texas, A Story*, 2nd ed. (Houston: Texas and New Orleans Railroad Co., Southern Pacific Lines, 1929). Featuring an early tour map of the LRGV, a harbinger of an economic sector that would greatly boost future growth of the area. The book also contains seldom seen photo images of LRGV life during the Roaring '20s: (1.) Workers laying gas lines along the Arroyo Colorado; (2.) South Padre Island casino on the Gulf of Mexico side; (3.) YMCA camp at Rio Hondo; (4.) Engelmann Ranch at San Carlos; and (5.) Resaca Laguna de las Leones near Progreso.

*35. Neale, William and William A., *Centuries of Conflict, 1821-1913*, eds. John C. and Virginia Kemp Rayburn (Waco: Texian Press, 1966). The Neales, Brownsville businessmen in the 19th century, kept informative journals, which lend light on diverse activities, such as those of Richard King and Mifflin Kenedy in their early acquiring mode. The partners’ interest in the region between Corpus Christi and Brownsville seemed to bemuse colleagues at first, for (p. 58) “... all that territory between the Nueces River and the Rio Grande consisted of sand hills and vast prairies of salt grass ... inhabited mostly by a few Indian tribes that had for their companions rattlesnakes, gophers, owls, and above all coyotes. In these large prairies thousands of head of wild horses and cattle roamed about without a brand or owner. This land became known as No Man’s Land and became the contentious bone between the state of Texas and Mexico ... ”

*36. Norquest, Carrol, *Rio Grande Wetbacks: Mexican Migrant Workers* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1972). Experiences of a Kansas family who arrived in the LRGV just before the Great Depression to take possession of a few acres from the bankrupt W. E. Stewart Development Company. Stewart, eponymous founder of the town of Weslaco, had been previously convicted and sent to a penitentiary for fraudulent practices in selling Valley land to northerners. Norquest’s account centers on how nearly destitute American farmers survived in interdependence with illegal Mexican migrants, who had begun coming across the border before the U.S. Bracero program began during WWII. El Patrón tells their stories through a series of colloquial vignettes. Despite the non-“PC” title, the descriptions are of hard-working Anglo-Americans and Mexicans who fell in love with each other’s divergent lifestyles to create a synergy of multiculturalism that might serve as a model for all border people.

37. Pope, Dorothy Lee, *Rainbow Era on the Rio Grande* (Brownsville: Springman-King Co., 1971). Describes influx of Americans into southern, mid-Hidalgo County from 1905 to 1930. There arose the towns of Alamo and San Juan in an area Spain called Porción 72, Reynosa jurisdiction, and Mexico called Los Torritos, Santa Ana, and Los Gatos Grants. A sentimental, charming account that one’s grandmother, who lived through the era, might relate to her granddaughter over a kitchen table.


*40. Ramirez, Emilia Schunior, *Ranch Life in Hidalgo County after 1850* (Edinburg TX: New Santander Press, 1971). Singular study in the field of home economics looks at daily activities in LRGV ranches around the turn of the 19th to 20th centuries. From a woman’s perspective, the book demonstrates, for instance, the cultural importance of such events as periodic quilting “bees.” The narrative offers a wealth of data not easily found elsewhere, for instance, the common use and proper pronunciation of local shrubs, trees, or herbs.

41. Richardson, Chad, *Batos, Bolillos, Pochos, & Pelados: Class & Culture on the South Texas Border* (Austin: UT, 1999). A sociological analysis of the borderlands viewed as a conglomerate of subcultures. Presenting his results through prisms of social sciences, education, and health care, the author based his research on interviews with legal and illegal migrants who are struggling to survive and adjust their working lives to complicated necessities of existence on the U.S. side.

42. Salinas, Martín, *Indians of the Rio Grande Delta: Their Role in the History of Southern Texas and Northeastern Mexico* (Austin: UT, 1990). Without this work, much about the existence of the first LRGV peoples would remain confusing. To research the book, Salinas toured available archives north and south of the border to locate reports of early explorers or visitors to the LRGV.

43. Sánchez, Mario Lorenzo, ed., *A Shared Experience: The History, Architecture and Historic Designations of the Lower Rio Grande Heritage Corridor*, 2nd edition (Austin: Los Caminos del Rio Heritage Project and the Texas Historical Commission, 1994). This compendium of information serves as tool in an attempt to generate an economically viable historic corridor for tourists along the Rio Grande, one modeled on the Gettysburg corridor in Pennsylvania. The production serves planners with all sorts of articles about historic and environmental locales written by experts, many of whom are motivated to preserve the river environment and wildlife as well as crumbling historic buildings in towns between Laredo and Brownsville. Chambers of Commerce striving to cash in on the increasing tourist traffic along the border during the past fifty years would do well in acquiring this book. Originally this economic sector arose because of the continuing interest of northerners who chose to live in the Valley during the winter months instead of relocating to the more expensive warm weather locales in Florida or Arizona. Retailers gradually came to depend on the semi-annual trade along with increasing sales to shoppers visiting from both the Mexican interior and frontier. This book serves as an excellent example of how those who look for the bottom line first can manipulate the past to their advantage.

44. Silva-Bewley, S. Zulema, *The Legacy of John H. Shary: Promotion and Land Development in Hidalgo County, South Texas/1912-1930* (Edinburg TX: UT/Pan American, 2001). Extended treatment of a graduate thesis that centers on Mission in the late teens and 1920s, the boom years for the citrus industry in the LRGV. Although the author mostly limits her sources to material housed in the Edinburg university library, photos about the Shary operations enliven her account. It should
serve as a start for a much-needed monograph on the rise and decline of the industry in the Valley. Besides answering the need to expand archival research to produce a satisfactory monograph on the citrus industry in the LRGV, a wider search for available publications on the subject could result in a lively, entertaining account about those involved, such as the title character in *Old Soggy No. 1: The Uninhibited Story of Floyd, “Slats,” Rogers. His memoirs, written with Hart Stillwell (San Antonio, Ayer, 1986) constitute a hilarious recollection by a Valley crop duster.

45. Smith, Brad, “Oil and Gas Development in the Valley, 1930-35,” I, 177-183 in *Selections from the Collected Papers of the Lower Rio Grande Valley Historical Society, 1949-1979*, p. p., Lon C. Hill Memorial Library, Harlingen TX, c. 1979. Traces discovery of oil pools from Starr County in 1930 to the Samfordyce field in Hidalgo County in 1934 and on to the Mercedes discovery in 1935. This pithy review vividly shows how the LRGV escaped the worst of the Great Depression when the average price of oil was .70 cents a barrel and Valley production averaged 4,000 to 4,500 barrels a day. The amount proved so great that in 1934 engineers constructed an oil pipeline from western Hidalgo County to storage facilities at Port/Point Isabel, and in 1935 McAllen businessmen began planning to lay natural gas pipelines. Readers should supplement this statistical description with another of earlier discoveries drilled up near the Nueces River in Duval County, where the Freer oil boom became the scene of Dorothy Abbott McCoy’s lively *Oil, Mud, and Guts*, Brownsville, Springman—King, 1977.

46. Stambaugh, J. Lee and Lillian J., *The Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas* (San Antonio: Naylor, 1954). The book leans heavily on economic and agricultural events, being an outgrowth of studies on the causes and effects of the agriculture depression in the Valley following WWI. The research led to a Master of Arts thesis at the University of Texas, Austin, in August, 1924: “The Marketing of Perishable Farm Products Growing in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas.” Upon retiring as superintendent of the Pharr-San Juan-Alamo school system, J. Lee Stambaugh and his wife collaborated on this expansion of their interests, resulting in the only work for the next half century that synthesized the history of the entire LRGV while attempting to be scholarly. A recent synthesis, *Historic Rio Grande Valley: An Illustrated History* by Marjorie Johnson (San Antonio TX, Historical Publishing Network, 2001), although supported by a lean bibliography, slightly annotated, lacks any footnotes. It stems from Chamber of Commerce activities that would have served the public better with a grounding in the principles of historiography. The narrative relies on unattributed secondary works and, in the style of vanity publications, is followed by popularized accounts of corporations, persons, or other organizations who subsidized the work.

47. Vassberg, David E., *Stockholm on the Rio Grande: A Swedish Farming Colony on the Mesquite Frontier of Southernmost Texas (1912-1985)* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2003). This monograph portrays the struggles of a Swedish-American colony at the edge of Hidalgo and Willacy Counties during the early 20th century. The newcomers from northern U.S. climes purchased land from railroad investors, who had been juggling property ownership since obtaining the lands as rewards for building railroads to and within the Valley. The Swedish-Americans, once they cleared the brush land, engaged in a hardscrabble existence, mostly as cotton farmers. Stockholm no longer exists, save as a cemetery, and its people have dispersed.


LRGV pioneers, particularly those involved in the sugar cane boom of the late 19th century. The author later became one of the first mayors of Mission. The autobiography may prove upsetting for hero worshippers of Anglo-American pioneer leaders, a phenomena similar to (in an academic vein), Evan Anders’ Boss Rule in South Texas: The Progressive Era, UT/Austin, 1982, which, when published, had some Valley old timers, unschooled in the niceties of the U.S. Bill of Rights, demonstrating that such a work was inappropes for the shelves of LRGV public libraries.

50. Zamora, Emilio, The World of the Mexican Worker in Texas (College Station: Texas A&M, 1993). Solid scholarship (including appendices, notes, bibliography, index, and even period photos) of both Mexican American and Mexican national labor in Texas during the first two decades of the 20th century. Zamora’s book will act as the definitive work on the subject for a long time.

51. Zavaleta, Antonio N., “The Twin Cities: A Historical Synthesis of the Socio-Economic Interdependence of the Brownsville-Matamoros Border Community,” in Milo Kearney (ed.), Studies in Brownsville History (Brownsville: Pan American University at Brownsville, 1986), pp. 125-173. Based on scholarly monographs, Zavaleta’s essay used the Brownsville/Matamoros communities as entities that have grown increasingly dependent on each other for their social and economic well being. The result has been a roller coaster ride of prosperity and poverty through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The communities have learned to rely on one another so completely that they can be understood best as societies surviving through a symbiotic relationship.

Endnotes

1 A Spanish military officer, Félix Maria Calleja del Rey, late in the 18th century, sent an informative report to the Viceroy in Mexico City. It revealed much about economic conditions in the Valley, which he had investigated first-hand. The report was translated and published in the Southwestern Historic Review, LXXV (4), April 1972, 461-506. Although a photostatic copy has been housed at UT/Austin archives for a long time, students recently came upon the report in the Archivo General de Indias in Seville, Spain. They published in The Journal of South Texas, XVII (1), Spring 2004, 79-85, an account of their discovery with news that the report is being translated (“Félix Calleja’s Report of 1795 on the People of the Provence of Nuevo Santander and Their Ownership and Use of Land,” by Miguel Bedolla and Elena Stoupignan), leading veteran specialists to wonder how much help professorial advisors and editors are giving their charges nowadays since SHQ is well indexed and located in all academic libraries.

2 Professor Joseph Chance of the mathematics department at UT/Pan American has written an extensive, fascinating, but yet unpublished, description of Carbajal’s activities.

3 México, Comisión de la Pesquisidora de la Frontera del Noroeste, Reports of the Committee of Investigation Sent in 1873 by the Mexican Government to the Frontier of Texas, trans. Anon., New York, Baker & Goodwin, 1875, passim; U.S. House of Representatives (45th Cong., 1st Sess., Exec. Doc. 13) Mexican Border Troubles: Message from the President of the United States [Rutherford B. Hayes]: In Answer to a Resolution of the House of Representatives, Transmitting Reports from theSecretaries of State and of War in Reference to Mexican Border Troubles, Washington, D.C., 1877, passim. The Mexican report, though published in the U.S. in English, was allegedly bought up by agents of King and Kenedy at the time; however, they must have missed at least one copy since in 1976 Arno Press reprinted the report as The Mexican Experience in Texas, comp. Carlos E. Cortés.
The Laguna Madre is one of the most unique bodies of water in the world. It is a hypersaline coastal lagoon stretching from north to south along the Gulf of Mexico from north of Corpus Christi Bay to Port Isabel between Padre Island and the mainland. It fronts south Nueces County, all of Kleberg, Kennedy, Willacy and most of Cameron counties. This hypersaline estuary runs for about 115 miles and 60 percent of the coastline is undeveloped. The main reason for its pristine condition is this lack of development. The Laguna Madre is the only hypersaline coastal lagoon on the North American continent and one of only five, world wide. The Laguna is noted for its vast seagrass meadows, huge bird population, and bountiful fishing grounds.

The Lower Laguna Madre, the area we are interested in, runs from the land cut (a channel dredged through the sand flats called Saltillo Flats 25 miles north of Port Mansfield) to the Brownsville Ship Channel in the south. The Laguna is bounded on the east by South Padre Island, the longest barrier island in the world, and on the west by the King Ranch and the Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge. The Lower Laguna Madre is approximately 300 square miles in size and 3/4 of it is too shallow for deep draft boats. It is also the largest continuous shallow water flat in North America. It is the only subtropical fishery in North America, except for South Florida. Since no major rivers flow into the Lower Laguna Madre, its salt content is 35 to 45 parts per 1000. The average depth is about 2.5 feet, with the deepest parts reaching a depth of about 5 feet. There is only a small tidal movement in the lagoon. Because of this it is saltier than the Gulf. The clear water allows sunlight to penetrate to grow vast areas of seagrass. This seagrass, along with hypersaline marshes, algal flats, and lomas allows the lagoon to become a great fish hatchery. These seagrass meadows serve as nursery areas, giving refuge to many sought after fish. Seagrass also serves as a substratum for the attachment of plants and animals known as epiphytes. These organisms provide an abundant food supply for small fish and invertebrates. These seagrasses die and decompose. They form decaying organic matter called detritus that are the basis of the food chain. This detritus is eaten by small organisms and larger ones feed on these. The food chain is followed all the way to the top.

Another interesting part of the lagoon system is South Bay, the Southmost bay in Texas. This bay is approximately 3,500 surface acres, bounded on the south by the riparian edge of the Rio Grande River, on the north by the Brownsville Ship Channel and its associated spoil banks, and on the east by Brazos Island. Sea grass and algal flats are an integral part of the organic production and fertility of South Bay. The Bay supports 41 species of finfish and 9 different species of shellfish. The largest eastern oyster population south of Aransas Bay occurs in the South Bay Preserve. South Bay is also a pristine mangrove lined estuary. It is located within a 20 minute run by shallow draft boat from boat ramps and marinas on South Padre Island and Port Isabel. Tide levels are critical in the Bay. Spring tides and high water from tropical depression often set off snook action. With good tidal movement fishing along the edges of the tidal creeks can pay off handsomely.

Early History and Use

The Laguna Madre has a long and varied history of providing food. Two groups of Indians, the Coahuitlcan and the Karankawa, used the shallow waters of the lagoon for many years. Just
how far back this use goes, we do not know. During the winter large schools of several kinds of fish would come into the shallow waters of the bays. They were easy to catch and there were a lot of them. Redfish and drum were the most prevalent. There were also large qualities of shellfish, like oysters and clams. These were eaten only during the winter months. The Karankawas used long powerful bows. Their arrows were often 3 feet or more in length and were better than shorter ones because they would stick up above the surface of the shallow water. The Karankawas liked certain camps sites for the winter and used the same camp year after year. The oyster and clamshells were piled several feet high at these campsites. We have to assume that these sites had easy access to the waters of the bays. The oysters and clams could not be eaten in the summer months. The fish also moved to deeper water during the summer. The Indians then moved inland in smaller groups to hunt and gather. A change in the physical environment took place and caused a drier and hotter climate. The development of this semi-arid environment caused food to become scarcer. Many of the stories we hear from the Spanish are about this period. When the Indians caught a fish, they would place it on a rock in the sun for several days. When the fish was rotten and full of maggots, they would eat it and any other insects that were on the fish. We think that hunger, caused by the climate change, caused this.

The various Indian bands used fish and salt as tribute. Captain Alonso de Leon identified the kinds of fresh water fish as bass, catfish, trout, and bream. In 1653 de Leon found bountiful supplies of these fish. He states that many different Indian Nations lived on these fish. Also there is a story of fish being served to Spaniards that show they were not well cooked. There is mention of fishing tackle found at an Indian camp, but it was noted that it was in poor condition. The Indians used nets and fish traps as well as arrows and spears. So far few direct accounts of nets and traps have been found.

Recent History and Use

Marcel "Buddy" Sommer's father, Oscar, and Uncle Meyer came to the Valley in 1913, and went into the furniture business in Brownsville. They liked to fish and often went to Port Isabel. They would rent a rowboat and row out into the bay. They used cane poles with dead shrimp and cut mullet for bait. The children played along the waters edge and they often had picnics. The Sommers fished at the old pump station on the Rio Grande. Buddy remembers catching gar on cut bait. Buddy and his brothers, David and Sidney, would have their father take them to Boca Chica Beach. They stayed for a week at a time in an army tent. Fresh water was a problem, so their father checked on them during the week and brought fresh water. They used throw lines and cut bait. From what I can find out they caught lots of fish.

Jim Ghilian built the first fishing pier on the Island. Mr. Ghilian was born in Illinois and first came to the Valley in 1946, working as a plasterer. He came back to stay in 1954. There were two ferries to the Island, one operated by George Colley and the other by Ed Sullivan. In the Wednesday, November 14, 1928, issue of the Port Isabel Pilot, the schedule for the ferry service is advertised as leaving Port Isabel at 8 A.M. and 1 P.M., returning at 10 A.M. and 4 P.M. The ferry has just come off the dry dock where it has been completely overhauled and is in excellent shape. A picture of Ed Sullivan's ferry can be found in the Historical Port Isabel Guide on page 28. These ferries charged 50 cents for a round trip. There were vehicles on the Island to take people to the beach and the jetties to fish. The charge was 25 cents for a round trip. There were some old shacks at the ferry landing back then. The first causeway was started in 1952 and was finished in 1954. Mr. Ghilain was able to use the unfinished causeway to transport some of the
material needed to construct his pier. The charge for using the causeway was $1.00. The first boats for rent were 14 foot wooden crafts covered with fiberglass. They were powered by 10-20 horsepower Johnson outboard motors. To supplement his income he had a boat that was used to catch bay shrimp to sell for bait. In the winter he fished with tout lines for trout and redfish.

Many changes have taken place over the years. One of the most important was the declaration of trout and redfish as game fish. The gill nets and the tout lines came out of the bay and trout and redfish could not be sold in restaurants. Mr. Ghilian retired in 1980 and has many found memories of his years on the Laguna Madre. Jim’s Pier is still one of the main piers on the Island. Bay guides, bay fishing boats, deep-sea boats, and just plain fisherman use it every day.

Physical Features

There are a number of physical features of the Lower Laguna Madre that are important both for fishing and their commercial impact. The first of these is the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway (GIWW).

The Laguna Madre section of the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway is a link in the chain of navigable channels, which extend from Florida to near the Mexican border. On 23 July 1942, Congress authorized enlargement of the Gulf section of the Intracoastal Waterway to include the Laguna Madre section. A shallow-draft navigation channel 12 feet deep and 125 feet wide was authorized for the entire length of the waterway. Construction on this project began in 1945 and was completed on 18 June 1949. Upon Completion of the GIWW, the Upper and Lower Laguna Madre, once separated by the land bridge, were constantly connected by what came to be called the Land Cut.

The Land Cut is located 25 miles north of Port Mansfield. The GIWW makes the total flats from the Land Cut to the Brownsville Ship Channel accessible to boats of all kinds. Before this, it was only possible to ford cattle from the mainland to South Padre Island. The GIWW provides the Ports of Harlingen, Brownsville, and Mansfield a protected channel that connects them with all other Texas ports and all the way to the Mississippi River. The economic importance of the GIWW is enormous. Most of the gasoline in the Valley moves down the waterway from the upper Texas Coast.

The dredging of the channel created spoil islands along the edge of the channel. These spoil areas make for great fishing.

In December 1929, voters approved a measure establishing the Brownsville Navigation District and provided $2 million in bonds to build a ship channel from Brazos Santiago Pass, so that deepwater vessels could dock in Brownsville. The work went slowly at first, but after a major hurricane hit the area in 1933 the Public Works Administration (PWA) lent money to the District to complete the seventeen-mile-long channel and build a turning basin and dock facilities. The Port of Brownsville, located five miles northeast of the city, officially opened on May 15, 1936. State Highway 48 runs alongside the ship channel that connects the port to the Gulf and the Intracoastal Waterway. The port was originally 32 feet deep and 200 feet wide, while the turning basin were 36 feet and 1000 feet.
Shrimpers moved into the area and the Brownsville-Port Isabel facilities became one of the leading shippers of shrimp in the country.\textsuperscript{40}

Port Isabel is one of the most historic seaside communities in the state of Texas. Originally named ‘El Fronton De Santa Isabel’ by the Spaniards and later the ‘point’ because of a bluff extending into the Laguna Madre Bay, Port Isabel witnessed many important events that impacted our national history. Included in these events are the U.S. Mexican War and the Civil War.\textsuperscript{41} “With increased tourist traffic, changes and improvements began to take place in the Laguna Madre area. The ‘Fingers’ better known then as Little Venice was developed for summer cottages, motor courts were opening, roads were being built, the bluff around the Lighthouse was leveled and a square was established. Finally a port was planned and the phrase ‘building a city where a city belongs’ became the motto for the community.”\textsuperscript{42} In 1928, it was reported that “Port Isabel has blossomed since its incorporation 75 years ago, with unique shops, restaurants, historic hotels, and museums that make up this historic and colorful community.”\textsuperscript{43} Since the 1980s the town has continued to attract tourists. Recreational opportunities included fishing, boating, and hunting. In 1990 Port Isabel had a population of 4,622. Although the number of businesses had declined, the town continues to support itself with shrimping and fishing, as well as the tourist industry.\textsuperscript{44}

Incorporated in 1973, the town of South Padre is accessible via the new causeway on State Highway 100. Once you are on the Island, a wide range of accommodations from the county campground, to family motels, high-rise luxury condos, rental condos, marinas, and seaside cottages are available. Along the five and a half miles of development, all types of fishing facilities are available, from full service marinas, with boat ramps and charter services for both bay and Gulf, to bait for wade fishing. At the South end is the Cameron County Park with access to the jetties. Water sports of all kinds are also available.\textsuperscript{45}

An article published in the Wednesday, July 4, 1934, issue of the \textit{Port Isabel Pilot} discussed the granite stone used for the development of the jetties on South Padre Island:

To date over 118,000 tons of stone have been used in the construction of the north and south jetties. This means that thus far over 2,200-car load of stone, ranging in weight from, a few pounds to huge cover stones of granite, eight to ten tons each, have been used. An average of from 35 to 40 carloads of stone is now being used daily, and with present weather conditions prevailing this will in all probability be stepped up to about 50 carloads daily. The north jettie, on Padre Island, which is to be approximately a mile in length, is now completed to a distance of 2,600 feet while the south jettie has been completed approximately 2,300 feet.\textsuperscript{46}

The jetties protect the entrance to Brazos Santiago Pass into the Brownsville Ship Channel. They are a popular place for tourists and Winter Texans to fish. You can always find some one on the jetties.

The Arroyo Colorado is a stream in the Valley that originates at Lake Llano Grande in Hidalgo
County. It flows northeast for fifty-two miles through Cameron and southeastern Willacy counties and empties into the Laguna Madre. The channel running from Port Harlingen connects the Arroyo with the GIWW. The turning basin is 400 by 600 feet and was completed and dedicated on February 27, 1952. The Arroyo is a former outlet of the Rio Grande River and is one of the few outlets into the Laguna Madre. In times of flood it still carries excess water from the Rio Grande to the Laguna Madre. This waterway, located about half way between Port Isabel and Port Mansfield, offers fisherman access to the flats in the middle part of the Laguna Madre with a fifteen-minute boat ride. A morning trip down the Arroyo, as described earlier, is always a treat.

Until 1948, the little used highway from Raymondville to the Laguna Madre at Redfish Bay was traveled by occasional fisherman going to deserted beaches. No community marked the road’s end at the water’s edge. The people of Willacy County, employing own financing, set about creating a port. They built wharves, docks, and turning basin. They laid out the town site and called it Port Mansfield. The ship channel completed in 1962, slicing across the shallow Laguna Madre, through Padre Island ventures into the deep waters of the Gulf of Mexico. This channel also crosses the GIWW and makes Port Mansfield accessible to both barge and ship traffic. The Port Mansfield jetties are located 9 miles east of the port. Port Mansfield gives fisherman easy access to water that would be hard to reach otherwise. The area has been described by sportswriters as “one of the 10 best fishing areas of the country.”

Kinds of Fish

There are five important game fish that are sought after from one end of the Laguna to the other. The most prized, both for their fighting ability and eating quality, is the redfish. The interior of the Laguna is covered by various stands of seagrass. Within the seagrasses are small areas called potholes that have no grass. As the tide rises, it floods these potholes and the shoreline cuts and creeks. The rising water makes these sites assessable to many different kinds of smaller fish. As the baitfish move into these nutrient-rich waters, the redfish will follow. One thing to look for in this shallow water is an entire tail waving at you. A good cast in front of a tailing redfish is almost a certain strike. Reds may also be found at intersection of cuts or creeks, anywhere there is a difference in water depth or color. Shell banks and oyster beds are also productive at times.

Number two on the list is the speckled trout. It is the most-sought-after game fish on the entire Gulf coast. Trout are the king of the inshore angler because they are abundant, fight hard, and will take live and artificial baits on any given day. Drift fishing the flats off the GIWW is one of the best ways to find trout and stay with them. Once the fish are found, if the water is shallow enough, wade fishing can be very productive.

Of the “Big 3” game fish of the Laguna Madre the flounder is the most distinctive. The trout is the most beautiful and abundant, and the red is the toughest fighter. The flounder, however, is the one that is sly and crafty, and patient, and the one that is primarily sought after by 26% of the fishermen on the coast. The other game fish are available consistently throughout the year while the flounder is
much more seasonal in its appearance. The other game fish swimming around the marine environment aggressively look for what they can attack. Flounder lay hidden on the bottom waiting for victims to come their way.58

The flounder is the tastiest fish in the bay. They are flat fish and this is the reason they swim with up and down strokes. They can be found off drop-offs like the edge of the GIWW and the Port Mansfield east cut. A bottom-bumping jig with a short tail or shad fished along the bottom is the best method of taking flounder.59 Flounder can also be taken at night with a lantern and a gig. Wading in shallow with a lantern, a flounder looks like a big footprint lying flat on the bottom. You gig them near the head so the meat will not be ruined. The Port Mansfield east cut is one of the best places for this.

South Bay is a must stop for South Padre’s top snook guides. They look for snook along the estuary’s mangrove shorelines and scattered oyster beds. Tide levels are critical in the bay; spring tides and high water from tropical depressions often set off snook action.60 There are not a lot of places in Texas for snook. The snook fishing along the edges of the Brownsville Ship Channel is the best along the Texas coast. The Ship Channel produces more snook in the summer and fall.61 Tarpon are not as plentiful as they used to be. However, they are the unsung story. The South Padre Island-Port Isabel area has the best tarpon fishing along the Texas coast. The jetties are the best place for tarpon, with the Ship Channel a close second. Tarpon fishing is best in late August and is good until a cold front drops water temperature.62 Fishing for the “silver kings” is exceptional fun.

**Methods and Places**

Boating is big business on the waters of South Texas. Boats have evolved from dugout canoes, to sail boats, to small flat bottom boats covered with fiberglass, and small motors, to some of the large high-powered boats we see today. The most important development, however, was the development of the “scooter.” Two Harlingen residents, Forrest Peek and Fran Scheiner, were among the first scooter men. The skinny waters of the Laguna Madre could not be reached by conventional craft. The early scooters were built from scratch. They were built from a single piece of marine plywood with a coat of fiberglass. There was an uplift in the bow to keep the fisherman drier. The early ones were 4 feet wide and 10 feet long without a steering wheel. The motors, 10 or 15 horsepower, were usually locked straight and you leaned the direction you wanted to go. The scooter could be used for drifting in the shallow water or anchored for wade fishing. Local fisherman and retired Hanna High School teacher James Ericson has an article that describes how the scooter was used in the August 1966 issue of “Outdoor Life.”63

Russell Dargel, Sr., built the first commercially available scooters in 1958. The Dargel Boat Company of Donna still builds scooters as well as some of the best shallow draft tunnel boats to be found on the Bay. The writer has had one of their Skout170 models for 10 years. There are a large number of companies that build these large scooter and tunnel boats that we see today. They are large enough to have 150 horsepower or larger motors. You will see all shapes and sizes of scooters and boats in use on the day.64 With the development of these shallow water boats, the once isolated and obscure areas of the flats are now accessible to those who know where to go and when. Some of these areas are only 6 to 8 inches deep. Tidal changes, wind speed and direction make these areas available only at certain times.65

There are a number of fishing piers in Port Isabel and on Padre Island. The largest one is
Pirate’s Landing just north of the causeway on the Port Isabel side. It is Y shaped with a T on the south branch and it is lighted. Part of the old causeway on the Padre Island side is also used as a lighted pier. For this night fishing, you do not screw a light bulb into a socket. Not just any lights will do; they must be the large sodium vapor spotlights. They are focused on the water directly below the stand they are on. The larger trout usually stay on the edge of the main beam. Fish the perimeter first and work your way to the center. A long handle landing net is a must for pier fishing. Fishing at night under these lights can be very productive. Fishing off the jetties is much like pier fishing. The same type of tackle can be used for both. Terminal tackle is used most of the time with heavy line and leader. Larger rods and reels are also used in this type fishing. Lighter tackle can be used, but the pilings on the piers and rocks on the jetties can cut light line very easy. Live shrimp is the most common bait, but dead shrimp and cut bait is sometimes better because it will stay on the hook better in the current.

Wade fishing requires its own special equipment. Rods are usually 6’6” to 7 feet with medium light action. The reel depends on the individual fisherman. The open-face spinning reel is the most popular because it does not backlash often. Bait-casting reels are used by individuals after larger trout and reds. The spinning reels use 8 to 10 pound test line. There are a number of ways to rig these outfits for fishing. I tie a barrel swivel on to the line and attach an 18” twenty pound test leader to the other end of the swivel. With artificial bait, the lure is tied onto the leader. Other equipment includes a wading belt with a rod holder on it. You must carry a landing net and all the lures, lines and other things you might need. You could be a long way from your boat or the bank. Wade fishing from the bank is the cheapest way to fish. All you need is a rod, a reel, and some bait and hopefully a stringer to be filled. When you slip off into the shallow water you must shuffle your feet along the bottom. The sharp stinger of a stingray can be very painful. You must move slowly and do what fishermen call the “stingray shuffle.” Some fishermen use wading boots that cover the ankle area to protect against stingrays. Even with wading boots, you definitely do not want to lift you feet as you move along. Another problem that can arise, but does not happen often, is from sharks. If you have a stringer of fish tied to your belt and a shark comes along and takes them, you had better have it tied where it can come loose. The only place I have ever seen sharks is in the deeper water near the causeway.

The most popular method of fishing on the Laguna Madre is drift fishing. The wind is almost always out of the southeast from 15 to 25 miles per hour. With the shallow draft tunnel boats, you can get into the shallow water, turn your boat cross wind, and drift to the northwest as far as you want to go. There are a number of things that you need in drift fishing. One is a PVC pole with a sealed T on one end and a cap on the other. This push pole has two functions. One to see how deep the water is and the other is to move the boat. Some time when you sight fish, you want to move quietly toward them. The push pole is the best way. Another item that can help slow you down on windy days is a drift sock. A drift sock is a cone shaped heavy canvas sack with a handle on the big end. It is tied to the opposite side of the boat from your direction of drift so that it acts as a drag on the boat. The same type of equipment used in wade fishing can be used in drift fishing. You will cover much more water and can try many different kinds of bait.

There are some important things to look for and do as you move across the water. One is to slow down when you are near the area you want to fish. Birds feeding usually mean that fish are feeding. Come in on the down wind side of feeding birds so you can drift into them. Being quiet is important. Another important item is a good pair of polarized sunglasses. They will help you find color changes in the water. Sometimes there is a very distinct line, and at others it is gradual change. Redfish sometimes root around on the bottom in shallow water, turning the water.
muddy. Baitfish jumping out of the water being chased by reds or trout is also one way of spotting feeding fish. Always look for fish slicks. The oil from regurgitated feeding fish floats to the top and spreads out on the surface. It has a sheen that is easily seen. Once you find some fish, you might want to mark the spot. An old plastic bottle of some kind is great for this. Tie a length of small rope on the handle of the bottle and attach a weight to the other end. Just drop it overboard so that it floats where the fish are. After you drift through the feeding fish, you can make a large circle and come back on the down wind side and drift through the area again. As long as you are catching fish you keep circling. Be sure to pick up your marker when you leave.

Another item that you will find useful is a map. The best that I have found is “Top Spot” published by Pasadena Hot Spot, Inc. These maps cover the whole bay with names of fishing spots and Global Positioning System (GPS) coordinates. “The basis of GPS technology is precise time and position information. Using atomic clocks and location date, each satellite continuously broadcast the time and its position. A GPS receiver receives these signals, listening to three or more satellites at once, to determine the user’s position on earth.” By using the map and GPS you can get every close to holes, sand bars or other physical feature that might attract fish.

It is sometimes helpful to watch other fishermen. If they are circling a spot and catching fish, you might want to enter their pattern. A word of caution here: do not get too close, that is a rule of the water.

It is very difficult not to get impatient when driftfishing. There is always the lurking vision of the next great spot to go fish or the great idea that will surely get you a lot of bites.

Since Texas banned the commercial sale of redfish and trout several years ago, fly fishing on the flats has become world class. The dean of fly fishing is Bud Rowland. Bud has submitted a 15 pound, 6 ounce speckled trout to the International Game and Fish Association as a world record. He caught this trout, on a fly he made himself, in the Lower Laguna Madre. It seems that Bud has good eyesight and can spot large trout in the shallow water. Bud’s advice is “Patience.” He says, “Do not go out there every day expecting to catch huge trout; it will not happen.” Everyone has his own way of doing things. As you read different stories about fishing you will find that there are as many techniques as there are fishermen. “Pay attention to your surroundings and the signs the fish give you, and you will find that there is nothing random about choosing a good drift.

Future of the Laguna Madre

Destruction of the seagrass beds is the greatest threat to the future of the Lower Laguna Madre. Dredging of the GIWW and its attached channels threatens these fragile seagrass beds. Douglas Dunkin recognizes the economic importance of the dredging of the channels, but is concerned that the silt deposited on the spoil banks and the adjacent water will bury much seagrass and send him trying to find new places to fish in the Laguna Madre. Scientists and environmentalists also agree that the dredging could hurt the seagrass on which the fish rely. They worry that the new plan for approval by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) does not go far enough toward protecting the seagrass. An Environmental Impact Study (EIS) concerning the dredging of the main channel (GIWW) and its tributary channels (the Arroyo Colorado and the Port Mansfield Channel) was published in October 1975 by the USACE. This statement evaluated the impact of
the continued maintenance dredging. Alternatives were studied but the decision was to continue
the periodic dredging and deposit of the spoil. In 1989 the question of the adequacy of the EIS
was raised by a task force appointed to study the problem. This task force was composed of
federal and state representatives. A lawsuit by the National Audubon Society and others in 1994
led to another attempt to solve the problem. The next attempt was made later in 1994, but this
report left unresolved issues and the report was completely revised in 1997.76

Walt Kittelberger, president of the Lower Laguna Madre Foundation and a fishing guide out
of Port Mansfield said, “I would rate it (EIS) down for under-performance. They had access to
some of the best Ph.D.s in the world and they came up with something like we’re going to have to
do it about like we have for the last 50 years.”77 Kittelberger’s group sued the Corps in the mid
1990. If the Corps record of decision (ROD) approves continued dredging, Kittelberger’s group
is ready to sue again. A new dredge plan is in effect. Dredging can only take place from November 1
to February 28, when the seagrass is least vulnerable. Dredge material will be diverted away from
seagrass beds in certain areas near the channel.78 Kittelberger hopes his organization, for the next
seven years, can spend the money on education projects.79 The battle goes on.

There are two positive developments that directly impact the Lower Laguna Madre. The first
is a report from the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department (TPWD). “The Coastal Fisheries Division
of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department has released the results of its annual coastwide gill­
net surveys – and the news is good.”80 What this tells us is that the new shrimping regulations
adopted by the Parks and Wildlife Commission in August of 2000 are working. This, along
with limited entry programs for commercial fisheries, crab trap removal (helped by the Valley
Sportsman Club) and continued efforts to assure freshwater inflows, good water quality and
sufficient habitat, shows that we are headed in the right direction.81 There are different ways to
analyze this information and all of them are positive.82

The second development may be the most important thing to happen to the bay systems in
years. To quote an article in Texas Parks and Wildlife:

Few people remember the days when a chain of lagoons occupied almost 10,000
acres at the tip of Texas, providing habitat for thousands of waterfowl, tons of
shrimp and offering anglers a fishing paradise … But in 1933, construction
of the Brownsville Ship Channel blocked the inlet that supplied the lagoons
and, deprived of water, the place called Bahia Grande, Laguna Larga and Little
Laguna Madre withered into desert… During the last 70 years, several futile
attempts were made to restore the Bahia Grande to its former grandeur. Thanks to
a complex restoration effort involving the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Texas
Parks and Wildlife Department, Ducks Unlimited, the Nature Conservancy and
grants totaling $5 million from the government and private foundations, water
is going to be flowing into Bahia Grande and other nearby wetlands on a more
predictable basis. This wetland restoration project has the potential to make a
considerable amount of nursery habitat available for marine aquatic organisms
such as blue crab, shrimp, red drum, black drum, spotted seatrout and flounder as
well as many wildlife species… Bahia Grande is one of the largest attempts in
the world at recovering wetlands. Bahia Grande is 6,800 acres, we’ll add Laguna
Larga (1,700 acres) and Lahuna Madre (1,300 acres) to form a wetland of 9,800
acres… Inflow to Bahia Grande will be provided via two conduits. The first will
reopen the Gulf water passage initially blocked by the Brownsville Ship Channel.
The second will furnish either fresh or brackish water (depending on the season) from San Martin Lake, which collects runoff from Brownsville and from which in former times Bahia Grande also derived water. If all goes well, the first infusions of water from the Gulf of Mexico and San Martin Lake will begin in late spring or early summer 2004. The entire project has been supported by all sectors of society — power companies, shrimpers, housewives. The bird watching is phenomenal, and will pour millions of dollars into the local economy.83

This wetland restoration project is one of the largest ever attempted. Fishing in South Texas has a great future.84

The University of Texas at Brownsville

Endnotes

4 Elizabeth Pierson, p. 1.
14 The Laguna Madre, p. 1.
16 Seagrass, p. 1.
18 Texas Gems, p. 1.
19 Texas Gems, p. 1.
23 *Rob’s True Lies*, p. 3.
24 *Rob’s True Lies*, p. 3.
26 R. E. Moore, p. 7.
29 Juan Batista Chapa, p. 36.
30 Juan Batista Chapa, p. 59-60.
31 Juan Batista Chapa, p. 129.
32 Interview with Mr. Marcel “Buddy” Sommer on March 31, 2004.
33 Interview with Mr. Jim Ghilain on April 13, 2004.
34 *Historic Port Isabel* (Port Isabel: Port Isabel Chamber of Commerce, Museums of Port Isabel and Rio Bravo Gallery, October 2003), p. 28.
41 Historic Port Isabel, p. 12.
42 Historic Port Isabel, p. 12.
43 Historic Port Isabel, p. 13.
46 Historic Port Isabel, p. 29.
51 *Port Mansfield, Texas*, www.lone-star.net/mall/txtrails/ptmansfield, p. 1.
For the history of fishing in the northern Tamaulipas, and well as the southern Texas, Gulf Coast, also see Hart Stilwell, *Hunting and Fishing in Texas* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1946).
A Short History of Land Titles in South Texas
by
Joseph E. Chance

The flags of those sovereign nations that flew over South Texas form a part of our proud historical heritage, namely: the Crown of Spain, the Republic of Mexico, the Republic of Texas, the Confederate States of America, and the United States of America. The patchwork of laws that created private ownership to Texas lands by each of these sovereign entities are a part of our historical legacy, but have created complex and perplexing title problems that remain under litigation even to this day in our state and federal courts. The purpose of this article is to review briefly the history of land ownership laws and to examine how their interactions created some of the legal problems of ownership now facing our courts.

Lands in Texas first came into private hands directly from the Crown of Spain in the form of Royal Decrees. The first of these Royal Grants were the so-called *porciones* that subdivided lands north of the Rio Grande and were about a league, or 4428 acres in extent. These grants were rectangular in form, with nine-thirteenths of a mile of river frontage, ideally suited for livestock grazing. Probably the most famous of these was *porción* 80, a wedding gift to Henry Clay Davis and his bride Hilária de la Garza from her father. The river town of Rancho Davis, now known as Rio Grande City, sprang up on this site.

The second form of land titles were those issued by Spain upon the application by an individual. This form of royal grants varied greatly in size, the largest being one hundred and six and a half leagues in extent (about 280 square miles). There were ten Royal Grants in the lower Rio Grande Valley, the earliest granted in 1777, the last issued in 1808. As a vestige of the states’ Spanish heritage, the Texas General Land Office still recognizes the linear measurements of *vara* (33 1/3 inches) and the league (*legua*: 2.63 miles).

The individual receiving such a grant was required to meet with a representative of the Crown, and hand-in-hand the two would walk the boundaries of the grant in a ceremonial procession. The new owner would stop occasionally to pull grass, herbs, and weeds and scatter to the four winds, shouting to proclaim his ownership and tossing stones as evidence to any spectators present that he was taking possession of the land. The boundaries of the grants were marked with large stones, a special tree, or other prominent landmarks. Often within a few years grant boundaries grew indistinct and ownership often became hopelessly entangled by rival claims. When the original grantee died, unless his will specified otherwise, his children inherited the grant in undivided interest and thereafter the grant became the joint property of all inheritors. These children begat their own children who in turn inherited an undivided interest in the grant, and within a few generations the number of grant owners had grown exponentially. A story often repeated is that many oil companies have declined to drill on such grants, as it is impossible to locate all the grant owners with which to either sign a drilling agreement or to pay royalty.

With the success of the rebellion against Spanish rule came the creation of the Republic of Mexico. The Mexican Constitution of 1824 created a federalist republic. The former Spanish provinces now became sovereign states bound together by a relatively weak central government. Texas, with a southern boundary considered then to be the Nueces River, became a part of the State of Coahuila y Tejas, and the strip of land between the Nueces River and the Rio Grande became a portion of the Mexican State of Tamaulipas. By 1825 unoccupied lands within the Nueces Strip were being granted by the State government of Tamaulipas, but care was taken to honor all
Empresarios such as Stephen F. Austin, invited to colonize Texas and empowered by laws of the Mexican Republic, granted lands north of the Nueces to Anglo colonists: one labor (177 acres) to farming families and one sitio or legua (4428 acres) to stock-raising families. These lands were usually found within a trackless wilderness teeming with unfriendly Indians. To establish ownership the land had to be located by a surveyor and a report filed with the government. These pioneer surveyors located lands by the process of describing its metes and bounds and could charge as much as half of the land as a fee for their professional services.

The new colonists seem to have been almost forgotten by the Republic of Mexico until an inspection visit of the colonies by Don Manuel Mier y Teran in 1828-29. Mier y Teran reported that Mexican culture “disappeared” north of San Antonio, and further found that a flood of Anglos had illegally entered Texas and were now living on lands they did not own. By modern terminology we might describe this class of settlers as “undocumented aliens,” one of the first instances in Texas history. Fearing that Texas might be lost, the Mexican Republic enacted the Decree of 6 April 1830 that forbade any further colonization of Texas by settlers from the United States. 3 By April 1834, Santa Anna had seized the reins of power in Mexico and by the next year had abrogated the Constitution of 1824, declaring Mexico a centralist state with absolute power reserved for himself and his handpicked Congress.

Santa Anna’s actions were resisted vigorously by the northern states of Zacatecas and Coahuila y Tejas. The State Government of Coahuila y Tejas, dominated by federalists, was bankrupt with no funds available in the treasury to raise an army with which to oppose Santa Anna. The disastrous State Legislature of 1835, meeting in Monclova, Mexico, devised a plan to raise the funds necessary to finance a state militia. The legislature acted to sell vacant lands in Texas to the highest bidders, whether or not they were Mexican citizens, a violation of Mexican Federal Law. Swarms of land speculators and their agents descended on Monclova, where the legislature met, to purchase the more than 400 leagues of land (1,771,200 acres) being offered for sale. These state-sponsored sales offered raw Texas lands lacking a legal description whose boundaries were given by only a vague description. To increase the complexity of these land sales, the large blocks of land purchased by speculators were split into smaller plots and resold to eager purchasers in the United States. The country was now literally swarming with landowners possessing title to blocks of Texas lands that had yet to be precisely located.4

The ensuing struggle for the independence of Texas is well known to the reader, but with the victory at San Jacinto on 21 April 1836, the Republic of Texas became a member of the community of nations. The infant republic now faced the problem of which of the many land claims, some of which were genuine and some outright forgeries, to validate. With the Texas Declaration of Independence, 2 March 1836, an interim government of Texas was formed, with one of its principal responsibilities being to raise funds for an army to defend Texas. The penniless government raised money and men by selling its only asset--land. Money was raised by selling land scrip (promises for “unoccupied” land in Texas in exchange for gold). In exchange for three months military service in the Texian Army, a soldier was paid for his services by a grant of 320 acres of similarly “unoccupied” land.

With independence won, the new government of the Republic of Texas approved several laws concerning land ownership. The new Republic pledged to honor all valid land grants previously issued by the Crown of Spain and the Republic of Mexico. The many Anglo illegal aliens who
had swarmed into Texas and were squatting on lands they did not own were empowered with rights for the acquisition of the lands on which they were residing: a person living on a plot of land long enough could not be dispossessed, even by the legal owner of the land. The Republic also passed homestead legislation forbidding the seizure of a homestead for debts. Eager to populate the new republic, a law was passed granting a family moving to Texas between March 1836 and October 1837 with 1,280 acres of free land, and there was no requirement that the grantee had to either live on or improve his free acreage. Big land companies and speculators moved into the state to take advantage of the trade in land titles, buying up all land titles, legal or otherwise. Forged land certificates became such a problem that the Republic enacted legislation whereby:

Every person who shall . . . purchase or sell [any fraudulent or forged certificate for land] . . . or be in any manner directly or indirectly concerned in . . . purchasing [or] selling . . . knowing the same to be fraudulent, shall, on conviction thereof, receive thirty-nine lashes on the bare back . . . and imprisonment from three to twelve months.

The Republic of Texas, acknowledging the many problems associated with land titles, created the General Land Office on 22 December 1836 to “...superintend the public land of the Republic of Texas,” but a cash strapped nation could not afford to supply the funds necessary to adequately manage the enormous variety of problems associated with Texas land titles. The chaotic situation on land titles was to continue until the Republic entered the United States with statehood on 19 February 1846, and was then passed on to the Federal Government to resolve.

The Mexican-American War, that followed the annexation of Texas into the United States saw more land speculators and adventurers flood into the new state, especially in the area between the Nueces River and the Rio Grande, usually making their headquarters in occupied Matamoros, south of the Rio Grande. Anticipating that this region would become a permanent part of the state after the cessation of hostilities, one opportunistic attorney published this misleading broadside in 1847:

The Legislature of the State of Texas . . . [has] extended the jurisdiction and laws of the State over all the country east of the Rio Grande. Mexican authority and laws are forever at an end on that side of the river . . . no alien enemy can hold real estate within its limits...[the] laws of Texas direct certain classes of claims, shall be presented for examination and adjudication within a fixed period, not very distant, or be forever barred and proscribed. Persons claiming under Mexican grants will do well to give prompt attention to them, as preparations are now being made, to locate other claims on the lands covered by such titles . . .

But by the end of the war, such anticipations proved to be false. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, in the last paragraph of Article VII provided that:

In the said territories, [those to be incorporated from the Republic of Mexico into the United States] property of every kind, now belonging to Mexicans not established there, shall be inviolably respected. The present owners, the heirs of these, and all Mexicans who may hereafter acquire said property by contract, shall enjoy with respect to it guarantees equally ample as if the same belonged to
The new State of Texas was eager to clear up titles to its newly acquired lands south of the Nueces River, and on 8 February 1850 empowered two commissioners, William H. Bourland and James B. Miller to investigate land claims in south Texas. The commissioners posted notices in English and Spanish that all land claims were to be presented to them with a complete description of the evidence of title, and sworn affidavits regarding ownership. An abstract of each claim was to be submitted by the commissioners to the state legislature with their recommendation to reject or confirm the title. The Commissioners were armed by the legislature with the power to administer oaths and issue subpoenas for all witnesses in regard to land claims.

News of the legislation creating the land claims commissioners created a shock wave of panic that moved through south Texas, focusing on the newly created village of Brownsville. There was a special impact in the offices of the many unscrupulous land speculators, attorneys, and freebooters that had swarmed to the valley to gobble up grant lands north of the Rio Bravo that belonged to Mexican citizens. Among this class of speculators we find men such as Rice Garland who was the author of the broadside seen above, Charles Stillman, Simon Mussina, Elisha Basse and Robert H. Hord of the law firm of Basse and Hord, Samuel Belden, and Stephen Powers, just to mention a few. These men and other key leaders of the valley met together on the night of 2 February 1850 to hatch a conspiracy which they hoped would neutralize the actions of the newly appointed land commissioners.

In the isolated environment of south Texas, persons with wealth and political power could control the courts and influence legal decisions on the validity of land claims. This local autonomy was now threatened by the distant state government in Austin, which sought to establish control over the newly acquired Nueces Strip. Brownsville speculators would no longer be able to control decisions validating their land claims, often based on inferior titles and in some cases outright forgeries.

The Brownsville land speculators claimed that the Nueces Strip "territory was acquired by the arms of the United States, and is the common property of the Union." They prepared two petitions, to be sent to the United States Congress, asking that the Nueces Strip be declared a territory separate from the State of Texas, governed by an independent territorial government. With a local territorial government, the speculators felt that they could retain control of the courts, and validate their many land claims. An interesting and telling paragraph of these petitions stated their request that:

We desire that all suits and proceedings now pending in our local courts, in the Supreme Court of Texas, and in the District Court of the United States for the District of Texas, emanating in the Territory, may be transferred . . . to the courts provided for the same.

The first petition was presented to the U. S. Senate by William H. Seward on 27 February 1850, containing the signatures of 106 men, only three of which were Anglo. The Hispanic names were misspelled with several "X" marks representing those unable to sign their name. Senator Thomas J. Rusk of Texas denounced the petition, claiming from the floor of the Senate that the land speculators "...have taken charge of the Mexican population and are engaged in directing their action to their own purpose." The second petition was presented by Henry Clay on 11 March of the same year. This petition contained 74 signatures of Anglo names, many of which were in
the employ of the land speculators.

But Brownsville had an opposition party to that of the land speculators and under the leadership of Israel B. Bigelow sent their own petition to Congress. The petition contained seven resolutions, the most important stating:

That we fully recognize and assert the right of the State of Texas to the sovereignty and jurisdiction over the territory between the Nueces river and the Rio Grande, and hold ourselves bound as citizens of the State, to sustain that right against internal opponents or external enemies.\(^\text{12}\)

The speculators' scheme to separate the Nueces Strip from the State of Texas was now not deemed credible in Congress and died on the vine, due in no small part to the laudable efforts of Commissioners Bourland and Miller to validate area land claims.\(^\text{9}\) The Texas land commissioners traveled to the Valley, holding hearings in Brownsville and Rio Grande City, acquiring original documents and affidavits that they would present to the state legislature along with their recommendations. Miller wrote to Gov. Peter H. Bell that, "I have not examined a claim that is not just and equitable and should be confirmed." With a trunk full of irreplaceable documents, Bourland and Miller boarded the steam ship Anson on 28 November 1850 to return to Austin for their report to the legislature. But great misfortune struck: the Anson filled with water and sunk in the breakers close to Matagorda with a complete loss of all documents. Bourland and Miller returned to Brownsville, this time under a cloud of suspicion, and held a second set of hearings, returning to Austin later with only sworn affidavits to document their recommendations. The legislature accepted all of the Bourland-Miller recommendations, establishing the first extensive land records to be established in south Texas.

As an example of the recommendations made by Bourland-Miller we find:

The grant "La Parra" originally given by the State of Tamaulipas to Alvino de la Garza, was confirmed by the state.

The grant "San Pedro de las Motas" originally granted by the State of Tamaulipas to Javier Salinas and others was confirmed to his heir, Arcadio Salinas.

The heirs of Pedro Bonchard were confirmed as owners of the seven-league grant "Palo Alto."\(^\text{13}\)

But not all grants were confirmed. The grant "El Agostadero de San Juan de Carrisitos," originally given by the Crown of Spain in 1792 to José Narcisco Cabazos was not confirmed. The Cabazos family had been driven off the land in 1811 by Indians, and consequently the hacienda originally envisioned to be on that grant had never been completed. Miller-Bourland stated that, according to the laws, Mexico, the country then in power, would have declared the land to have been abandoned, and the Cabazos family would have therefore forfeited the land. Thus, the commission recommended that this grant be considered as public lands.

By these decisions and others, the Bourland--Miller Commission strove to record the validity of Spanish and Mexican land grants in the newly formed Texas State Land Commission. Needless to say, their efforts quieted the Separatists, and Gov. Bell noted this in a letter to the legislature: "... Much dissatisfaction prevailed for a short while after its enactment [the legislation creating the
But not every title was validated without legal intervention. Suppose we look at one of the most famous land ownership cases that snarled the courts in litigation for years. This case involved a convoluted series of business deals and court actions to determine the ownership of the lands on which the City of Brownsville, Texas, is now located. The history of this case is marked by shady business partnerships, land companies created as false fronts to hide true ownership, court decisions in two states and a federal district court, and impeachment proceedings instituted against a federal district judge as a result of his legal decision in this case. This case had it all.

The Brownsville townsite was a portion of the original Spanish grant known as “Agostadero del Espiritu Santo,” given in 1781 to grantee José Salvador de la Garza. Subsequent to that grant, the village of Nuestra Señora del Refugio de los Esteros, now the metropolis of Matamoros, was founded south of the Rio Grande in 1796. But by the laws of Spain, and later the Republic of Mexico, each municipality was required to furnish a portion of land, known as an ejido, or commons, for the use of its citizens. This acreage, a town commons, was required to be set aside for the urban population to keep a garden for fresh vegetables, graze milk cows for the children, or raise few head of beef cattle for food. The Ayuntamiento of Matamoros determined to set aside lands north of the Rio Grande, then owned by Rafael Garcia Cavazos, heir of José Salvador de la Garza. The city fathers entered into negotiations with Cavazos and completed an informal agreement for purchase, but never sealed the contract by paying Cavazos for his ownership of the ejido site. However, after 1826, the Ayuntamiento of Matamoros proceeded as if it owned these lands by granting farming rights to the Cavazos lands north of the Rio Grande to several farming families. These grants did not convey title, and the farmers occupying these lands were technically speaking sharecroppers and squatters. In the meantime, the Mexican-American War, 1846-1848, disrupted civil law in occupied northern Mexico, and the ownership of the Cavazos ejido lands seems to have been forgotten by the Matamoros town fathers.

By 1848, the visionary investor Charles Stillman saw that this tract of land, adjacent to Fort Brown, had great commercial possibilities as a city. Stillman formed the so-called Brownsville Company, with partners Samuel A. Belden, William Alling, and Simon Mussina, owner of the newspaper, American Flag. The company began to acquire ownership of the land, buying questionable titles from the squatters then farming the land. These small portions of land, known as labors, were purchased from the Mexican occupants usually for $500 or less. The partners realized that these titles were not legally sound, so they hedged their investments by purchasing bounty warrants and land scrip that had been issued by the Republic of Texas of sufficient amount to equal the acreage of the ejido sites.

In the summer of 1848, Stillman hired George Lyons to survey the townsite and lay out city lots on the newly acquired lands. The partners then retained the law firm of Elisha Basse and Robert H. Hord as their agents to sell the lots to the public. The rightful owners of this land, now living in Matamoros, viewed these activities with alarm, and to alert prospective buyers published this Public Notice on 14 June 1848:

All persons are hereby notified, that I, Rafael Garcia Cavazos, am owner possessing a valid and indisputable title to a certain tract of land . . . which . . . embraces the entire front from opposite the City of Matamoros on the the said Rio Grande.

Notice is hereby given that all documents emanating from the Honorable Ayuntamiento of the City of Matamoros, purporting to be titles to the labors as
ejidos are of no value, as said Ayuntamiento are not, nor ever have been possessed of any legal right to grant said labors or any part of said tract of land.

All persons purchasing or attempting to hold said land, or any part thereof, except by titles emanating from myself, are hereby notified that they will do so at their own cost, and will subject themselves to damages as trespassers, as I am determined to appeal to the law for the protection of my just rights. 16

The lots at first sold for inflated prices, but an economic downturn in the Valley caused the prices of the lots to drop to a fraction of their former value. Stillman and Belden, feeling that litigation with Cavazos was imminent, moved to restructure the Brownsville Company. They canceled their agreement with Simon Mussina, who had invested only a small amount of capital in the partnership, and created a dummy company, selling the Brownsville Company to Basse and Hord for a fraction of its value: $17,000. The transfer of ownership was designed to shield something questionable, perhaps the defective titles. The new owners of the Brownsville Company, as we shall see, had formed a dummy company set up with the financial backing of Charles Stillman and his partners.

True to their suspicions, W. G. Hale, attorney for Rafael Garcia Cavazos, citizen of the Mexican Republic, sued the Brownsville Company in the Federal District Court of Judge John Charles Watrous in Galveston, Texas. After a long and damaging trial Judge Watrous sustained the cause of Cavazos and enjoined the operations of the Brownsville Company and their land partners. Watrous had ruled in favor of Cavazos, and one of the partners of the Brownsville Company, Simon Mussina, swore vengence. Watrous had enjoined Mussina et al "from again setting up claim or pretending any right of title in themselves in opposition to the title of Cavazos." However, Mussina had, at this time sued his partners in the Louisiana District Court, claiming a portion of the Cavazos title. By this act Mussina was in violation of the Watrous decree. Judge Watrous cited Mussina for contempt, and ordered his marshal "to attach Jacob Mussina--and have him before the court immediately." But Mussina by this time was not in Texas, and was not arrested. Mussina, who blamed Judge Watrous for practically all of his reversals in fortune, now began a struggle to remove Judge Watrous from the bench that would last for more than thirty-seven years. We will later examine the Mussina vendetta against Watrous. 17

Basse and Hord soon countered the legal judgment against their properties by purchasing title to Cavazos' ejidos for $33,000, with funds quite likely supplied by the Stillman partners. But the issue became further clouded in January 1850 by actions of the State Legislature. The legislators acted to incorporate the City of Brownsville for the first time, 18 giving the city "all the rights, title, and interest [to the lands] of the State of Texas...provided this act shall not impair private rights." Basse and Hord brought suit against the newly incorporated city in 1854, claiming that as the new owners of this tract, their "private rights" were being impaired. The city countered by contending that these lands were originally owned by the City of Matamoros, were public lands, and therefore became public lands of the State of Texas by the provisions of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, and title to these lands could therefore be conveyed by the State of Texas to the City of Brownsville. The suit was settled in favor of the City of Brownsville in 1872, but Basse and Hord appealed to the Federal Courts and ultimately, in 1879, the U. S. Supreme Court upheld the Cavazos title, thus granting ownership to Basse and Hord. 19

As the question of ownership moved through the courts, Mifflin Kenedy purchased the Basse and Hord interests in the Brownsville lands, then conveyed his interests "for a valuable
consideration” back to Stillman and Belden. By 1876, it became apparent that the sale of city lots by the City of Brownsville, which had been an ongoing process during the court battle conveyed no title to the new “owners.” In 1876, William Neale, in a speech to Brownsville citizens noted that:

some unscrupulous men got a footing among us; they made vast claims to landed property and instituted suits at law: they . . . claimed all land donated to the city by the State Legislature . . . rival claims discouraged many persons who had intended to settle here . . . it also deterred those who did stay here, from putting up good and substantial buildings, and this accounts for the very inferior class of buildings that grace, or to speak more truly, disgrace some of our public thoroughfares.20

However, the City of Brownsville settled all adverse claims to acreage within the city limits in 1921 by concluding a $325,000 settlement with the heirs of Charles Stillman, thus closing the dispute that had raged more than 75 years as to who owned the lands that the city occupied.21

The Watrous decision in favor of plaintiff Cavazos had created a life-long nemesis for the judge: Simon Mussina. John Charles Watrous was born in Colchester, Connecticut, on 1 August 1801, the second child of a successful attorney. Watrous received an early education at Bacon Academy in the city of his birth, and graduated from Union College, Schenectady, New York, in 1828. After graduation, Watrous moved to Knoxville, Tennessee, to be a law clerk for Col. John Williams, a political leader of Eastern Tennessee. While in Williams employ, Watrous met and became a close friend with Congressman James K. Polk, future president of the United States. After brief law practices in Selma, Alabama, and Natchez, Mississippi, Watrous joined the stream of immigrants moving to the Republic of Texas, arriving there by the spring of 1838.

Watrous set up an office in the fledgling community of Houston, Texas, where he soon developed a specialized practice for clients engaged in land speculation and the sale of land claims. In this type of practice, he soon developed an extensive knowledge of the intricate land laws of Spain, the Republic of Mexico, and the new Republic of Texas. Watrous soon became involved in the politics of Texas, and supported the successful campaign of Mirabeau B. Lamar for the Presidency of the Republic of Texas. For his support, Lamar appointed Watrous as attorney general of Texas. Texas courts at that time were clogged with wholesale fraud in the issuance of head right certificates by the land boards appointed for this duty. Using his extensive knowledge of the many land laws, Watrous prepared a bill designed to detect fraud in land cases, but the proposal was defeated in the Republic of Texas Congress.

Watrous continued a private practice during his tenure in office, and finally finding himself enmeshed in a conflict of interest, resigned his office in September 1839. His private practice continued to prosper as he became the legal advisor for the Texas Land and Emigration Company and the New York and Texas Land Association that held rights to 2,026,200 acres of Texas land, but many of those rights were either inferior or outright fraudulent. For his work with the latter company, his fee was paid with stock in the company, and his association with this company would cast a shadow on Watrous’ integrity in latter years.

Watrous continued a private practice during his tenure in office, and finally finding himself enmeshed in a conflict of interest, resigned his office in September 1839. His private practice continued to prosper as he became the legal advisor for the Texas Land and Emigration Company and the New York and Texas Land Association that held rights to 2,026,200 acres of Texas land, but many of those rights were either inferior or outright fraudulent. For his work with the latter company, his fee was paid with stock in the company, and his association with this company would cast a shadow on Watrous’ integrity in latter years.

With the annexation of Texas to the United States and the enactment of Congress to create the United States Court for the District of Texas, John Watrous began his campaign to be appointed to the bench of that court. The leading contender for the position was James Webb, who had also been Lamar’s attorney general. Webb received an almost unanimous recommendation from the delegates to the 1845 state constitutional convention, as well as the approval of Senator Thomas
Jefferson Rusk, and ultimately that of Senator Sam Houston. But Watrous' earlier friendship with President James K. Polk won the day, and Polk nominated Watrous for the position. The Senate confirmed the nomination and Watrous was commissioned in Washington, D. C., on May 29, 1846. Judge Watrous rather belatedly returned to Galveston, Texas, in late November of 1846, and organized his court there, hearing his first case on December 5, 1846.

The members of the new state government were irritated that their candidate for the judgeship had not been selected. The state legislature complained that Watrous “had remained but a small part of the time within his district . . .”, and six days before adjournment the Texas legislators passed a joint resolution requesting John C. Watrous “to resign his office.” The Texas lawmakers were expressing their unhappiness with Watrous’ early decisions. Texas had long been a haven for debtors escaping their debts in the States, and Watrous had ruled in favor of allowing “foreign” creditors a longer time in which to bring suit against Texans. He also overturned the state courts by approving the validity of certain eleven league grants made by the Legislature of Coahuila and Texas in 1835. Thus Watrous continued to make powerful enemies in the state government by opposing the popular laws favoring debtors and upholding the very unpopular eleven league grants issued by the State of Coahuila y Tejas in 1835.

The judge immediately responded to the legislative resolution by convening a Federal grand jury to which he presented the charges made against him by the legislature. After hearing the evidence, the grand jury moved to vindicate Watrous’ actions, but more troubles were soon to find the judge.

U. S. Representative V. E. Howard submitted an impeachment resolution to Congress on 15 January 1852, but by February 1853, “after examining . . . documentation” the House of Representatives did not recommend articles of impeachment against Watrous. But the matter of impeachment did not end there.

Mussina realized that Watrous was not popular in Texas, and requested support from the State Legislature to develop another impeachment resolution against “the rascality of old Watrous.” Mussina’s agents produced a document of more than nine hundred pages to the House Judiciary Committee. By adjournment on 28 February 1857, a recommendation for impeachment from that committee had been placed before the United States House of Representatives, but was not acted upon.

In January 1858, the Judiciary Committee reconvened, with Judge Watrous present to cross-examine witnesses. The memorials of the last session were revived and a jubilant Simon Mussina wrote, “Watrous is virtually impeached . . .” But Judge Watrous ably defended himself against the charges, which did not justify “high crimes and misdemeanors” merely those of judicial judgement which could have been rectified in a Federal Appeals Courts. The House, on 15 December 1858, after six days of debate on the matter defeated the impeachment motion by a vote of 112 to 87.

Mussina then renewed his efforts against Judge Watrous. Sen. Sam Houston, a long time ally of Mussina, blasted Watroux in the Senate Chambers with a bombastic speech recorded in the Senate Journal: “I insist that we be relieved from this judicial monster that has disgraced the judicial system . . .” In March 1860, yet another impeachment resolution was presented to the House, and by December 20, 1860, a report for impeachment was placed on the calendar. But before further action could be taken in the case, Texas seceded from the Union, and the report was rendered moot.

Judge Watrous returned to the bench on 7 May 1866, but the state, suffering under the strictures of the Reconstruction, was no longer in a mood to remove the judge from office. John

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Watrous, whose health had been damaged by the incessant attacks of Simon Mussina, suffered a paralytic stroke in early 1869, and resigned from office on 19 April 1870. His health continued to decline and Judge Watrous, Texas' first federal judge, died on 19 June 1874, escaping the wrath of Simon Mussina and closing the saga of the Brownsville title dispute.  

I hope that this article will cause you to realize the enormous potential complexity that can develop in determining the ownership of the lands of south Texas, a complexity that results as a legacy of the proud history of our region, state, and nation. My article has only scratched the surface of an interesting development which is still being played out in the courts of our nation. Perhaps some interested reader will be motivated to delve further into the dry legal records on file in the courthouses. These records are a veritable gold mine for some historian who has the patience to penetrate their specialized legal vocabulary and give a historical interpretation. So much of the interesting history of this region is the result of covert business dealings that surfaced only in the courts. Civil court proceedings often remove the veil of secrecy from shadowy business dealings, allowing the historian to better understand this region we affectionately describe as the "Magic Valley."

The University of Texas – Pan American University

Endnotes


7 Hawkins, pg. 25; and Robertson, pg. 72.

8 The American Flag, bi-weekly newspaper, Matamoros, Mexico, 7 June 1847.


10 Robertson, pp. 75-76.


12 Dugan, p. 183.

13 Robertson, p. 79.

14 Robertson, pp. 75-83.


16 The American Flag, 14 June 1848.

17 Hawkins, pp. 31-32, 39.

18 According to Bill Young, Public Information Officer for the City of Brownsville, the first
incorporation passed by the State Legislature in January 1850 was defective, requiring a second incorporation in February 1853.


22 Hawkins, p. 35.

23 Hawkins, p. 52.

La Historia del Oro Blanco en H. Matamoros, Tamaulipas  
por  
Tere J. Salazar

La ciudad de H. Matamoros, Tamaulipas, situada al noreste de la República Mexicana (cuya frontera con los Estados Unidos es la ciudad de Brownsville, Texas), tuvo su mayor auge como productor de algodón durante los años de 1938 a 1966. Durante esos años, el algodón fue conocido en esta región como el “oro blanco”, el cual era llamado así debido a las grandes ganancias obtenidas de su producción, procesamiento y exportación. A pesar de que esta ciudad fue considerada como una de las principales productoras de algodón de México, el cultivo del algodón terminó debido a los altos costos de producción y las numerosas plagas que, a pesar de todos los esfuerzos, fueron imposible de erradicar. Todo esto ocasionó que los agricultores acumularan año tras año grandes deudas, y muchos tuvieron que vender sus tierras. El cultivo del algodón se extinguía de esta región en el año de 1966, dando paso al inicio del cultivo de granos como el sorgo y el maíz que hasta la fecha se producen en la región de H. Matamoros.

Origen del Algodón

El algodón era de la familia de las malváceas, y tuvo su origen en Asia. Su planta era llamada algodonero, la cual producía un fruto con semillas rodeadas de una fibra. La fibra se utilizaba para usos industriales, la semilla se utilizaba para obtener aceites, grasas vegetales y para la fabricación de jabones. La semilla una vez que se había limpiado, descarnado y molida se utilizaba como alimento para el ganado.1 El cultivo del algodonero tenía duración de 6 a 7 meses y requería de temperaturas superiores a los 20 grados centígrados, el cultivo necesitaba bastante humedad para la germinación de la semilla y después de crecer la planta, ésta debía de tener un ambiente seco.2 La siembra se llevaba a cabo durante los meses de enero y marzo (de preferencia entre el 20 de enero y el 31 de marzo).3 La cosecha o recolección se llevaba a cabo durante los meses de julio y agosto.

Primera Época del Cultivo del Algodón

El cultivo del algodón en el Estado de Tamaulipas tiene su origen el el siglo XIX. De todas las poblaciones tamaulipecas situadas al margen el Río Bravo, es la de H. Matamoros la de mayor importancia a partir de 1834, cuando fue declarada Ciudad y Puerto de Altura. Su auge como puerto fue entre los años de 1861 a 1866 que en la historia de Tamaulipas se le conoce con el nombre de “épocas de los algodones”.4 En 1844, el Coronel Constantino de Tárnava (quien fuera Presidente de Matamoros en 1838), instaló la primera máquina despepitadora de algodón (separaba la fibra de la semilla).5 En 1850 tiene inicio la primera época de la historia del cultivo del algodón en los Municipios de Matamoros, Reynosa y Camargo cuya producción era enviada a Europa en lugares de embarque como Camargo en embarcaciones que navegaban por el Río Bravo; otro lugar de embarque lo fue el Puerto de Bagdad.6

Segunda Época del Cultivo del Algodón

La segunda época del cultivo del algodón en Matamoros, tuvo lugar entre los años de 1938 a 1966. Las grandes fortunas producidas por este cultivo en el siglo pasado, influyó para que muchas
personas iniciaran el cultivo del algodón en esta región con el deseo de mejorar económicamente. En esa época regresaron a Matamoros muchos emigrantes de Estados Unidos y se inició en esta región una nueva colonización. Agricultores procedentes de Anáhuac, Nuevo León llegaron a Matamoros después de huir de aquella región debido a las sequías que habían terminado con la producción de este cultivo en aquella zona. Estos agricultores fueron los pioneros en este cultivo y aportaron a esta región su gran experiencia. Nacieron nuevos poblados como Control, Santa Apolonia, Estación Ramirez y Comales. Años después se crearon Municipios importantes como Valle Hermoso, Río Bravo, Miguel Alemán y Díaz Ordaz.7

Esta nueva colonización no fue solamente de agricultores, también llegaron a la región nuevos comerciantes, inversionistas, gente especializada como Ingenieros Agrónomos y Técnicos en agricultura, además de vendedores de insumos agrícolas. La ciudad de Matamoros se convirtió en la región agrícola más importante del Estado de Tamaulipas. Se generaron nuevos empleos debido a creación de la industria de transformación del algodón, como los molinos de aceite, plantas desp epitadoras, compresoras de pacas de algodón.8 Durante la época de cosecha o recolección llegaban a esta región toda clase de personas de los Estados vecinos de Tamaulipas, todos ellos atraídos por la fama de que esta región algodonera rendía sustanciosas ganancias. Entre las personas que recolectaban el algodón había albañiles, burócratas, comerciantes, choferes, carpinteros, jornaleros, mecánicos, obreros, peluqueros, zapateros y hasta profesionistas.9 La población se incrementó en un cuarenta y un por ciento llegando en 1950 a 92,952 habitantes.10

Con el incremento de la población llegaron a la región los servicios de mayor necesidad como: asistencia social, instrucción pública, correo, electricidad, telégrafo y el teléfono aumentó su número de líneas, se desarrolló además un programa de construcción de escuelas. Los expertos en la producción del algodón decían que Matamoros estaba destinada a convertirse en la región productora de algodón más importante del mundo. En 1950, la economía de Matamoros era sólida y todos los negocios prosperaban. El “oro blanco” como era conocido el algodón, era el oro de los agricultores.

Las Dos Regiones Agrícolas

La base de esta agroindustria estuvo en continua expansión de zonas de riego y en el mejoramiento de las mismas. En el año de 1938 se iniciaron los riegos en el Distrito del Bajo Río Bravo.11 Este Distrito fue creado por orden del Gral. Lázaro Cárdenas, Presidente de México, quien nombró al Ing. Eduardo Chávez Director de Obras del Bajo Río Bravo, se le encomendó captar las aguas del Río Bravo, almacenarlas y distribuirlas para irrigación (riego a los cultivos).12 Las obras se iniciaron en 1935 con la construcción de tres vasos almacenadores con el fin de aprovechar reguladamente el agua del Río Bravo. Estos vasos fueron: Culebrón, Villa Cárdenas y Palito Blanco los cuales estaban intercomunicados entre sí.13 El 21 de enero de 1950 se inició la construcción de la presa Falcón.14 Esta presa se encontraba ubicada en terrenos que cruzaba el Río Bravo en el municipio de Guerrero y del Condado de Zapata, Texas y fue inaugurada en agosto de 1953.15 Otra presa importante fue la presa Marte R. Gómez situada en el Municipio de Camargo, sobre el Río San Juan. Comprendía el Distrito de Riego del Bajo Río San Juan que abarcaba los Municipios de Miguel Alemán, Camargo, Díaz Ordáz y Reynosa.16

Favorecidos por la irrigación proveniente de estos dos distritos de riego, existieron en Tamaulipas dos principales regiones agrícolas entre los años de 1938 a 1966. La primera región agrícola comprendía los Municipios bajo la influencia del Distrito de riego No. 25 del Bajo Río Bravo y del Distrito de riego No. 26 del bajo Río San Juan. Los Municipios eran: Matamoros,
Valle Hermoso, Río Bravo, Reynosa, Camargo, Miguel Alemán, Mier, Guerrero, Laredo y San Fernando. La segunda región agrícola surge en el sur del Estado de Tamaulipas, en el año de 1960 y comprendía los Municipios: Altamira, Aldama, González, Mante, Antiguo Morelos, Nuevo Morelos, Ocampo, Gómez Farías, Llera y Xicoténcatl, todos ellos en la región llamada de temporal, (el cultivo estaba a expensas de la lluvia, no existía presa cercana que abasteciera riego).17

La producción del algodón se elevó año tras año, con excepción de los años de 1952 y 1953 en que la producción disminuyó debido a una intensa sequía. El mejor año de producción fue en 1958, cuando se produjeron un total de 540,008 paces (cada paca tenía un peso estimado de 230 kilos) cuyo valor estimado en aquel tiempo fue de 985,000,000 millones de pesos.18 En 1960 en la región existían 114 plantas deshechoadoras, 2 compresoras de algodón, y siete molinos de aceite.19 Se decía que “se barría el dinero con la escoba”20 en la región alodonera de Matamoros por la gran derrama económica que producía el algodón.

Clasificación del Algodón

Después de la recolección del algodón, para poder realizar su venta y exportación del algodón en fibra, era necesario llevar a cabo una clasificación de cada paca de algodón. Entre todos los países productores y consumidores de algodón se estableció y autorizó una especialidad que permitía conocer los diferentes aspectos de la fibra por su color, largo y resistencia. Existían once grados conocidos mundialmente para la clasificación del algodón. El algodón ideal para los productores era el de color blanco cremoso y sin alguna materia extrña como hojaras, cabos, basura, semillas o nudos. Otro aspecto que se tomaba en cuenta para establecer el precio de la fibra era su largo, existían trece diferentes dimensiones sobre la base de pulgadas. Una vez hecha la clasificación de la fibra de algodón, ya conocida su calidad, se procedía a su venta y exportación tomando como base las cotizaciones que para cada grado había fijado la Bolsa del Mercado del Algodón de New York.21

Exportación del Algodón

La calidad del algodón de Matamoros por su brillo, resistencia y blancura respondió satisfactoriamente a las exigentes especificaciones americanas. Por este motivo, el algodón de Matamoros tuvo una gran demanda entre los industriales textiles de Europa Occidental y Japón.22 El 23 de abril de 1948 sale a la ciudad de México, D.F. una comisión de alodoneros de Matamoros para solicitar a la Secretaría de Agricultura y a la Secretaría de Economía Nacional el permiso de exportación del algodón. Esta comisión estuvo formada por productores y propietarios de empresas alodoneras de Matamoros.23 El 29 de abril de 1948, la Secretaría de Agricultura autoriza el permiso de exportación del algodón. Con la condición de que se exportaría solo el cincuenta por ciento de la producción y el otro cincuenta por ciento sería para abastecer a los industriales textiles de la República Mexicana, los pedidos tendrían que hacerse con anticipación y no después del mes de agosto, de no ser así, los alodoneros podrían exportar todas sus existencias.24 El algodón se exportó a los siguientes países: Alemania, Australia, Austria, Bélgica, Canadá, Dinamarca, España, Estados Unidos, Finlandia, Francia, Hong Kong, Holanda, Inglatera, Irlanda, Italia, Noruega, Portugal, Reino Unido, Suecia y Suiza.25
Los Grandes Algodoneros

En la época del “oro blanco” en Matamoros surgieron en esta región grandes empresas algodoneras. La más grande y la más fuerte fue Anderson & Clayton, S.A., empresa estadounidense, contaba con 12 plantas despepitadoras de algodón, y una desborradora de semilla. La segunda más grande fue la empresa algodonera del Golfo, que contaba con 10 plantas despepitadoras. Existieron en Matamoros un total de 123 empresas dedicadas a la agroindustria del algodón.26 Muchos matamorenses reforzaron sus riquezas y otros formaron sus riquezas con el surgimiento de este cultivo. Algunos de los famosos algodoneros fueron: Francisco Covarrubias, Ramiro González, Amador García, Manuel Cavazos Jr., Octaviano L. Longoria, Alberto Terrazas, Ernesto González Farías, Fausto Ramírez, Andrés Pacheco, Raúl García, los hermanos Treviño Emparan, Miguel Huerta y Shelby Longoria.27

Crisis del Algodón

Los mayores enemigos del cultivo del algodón fueron las diferentes plagas, y el mayor problema que enfrentaron los agricultores fue el combate y control de dichas plagas. Las principales plagas fueron el gusano trozador, el pulgón o borcegui, el thrips, el picudo, el gusano rosa, el gusano bellotero, la araña roja y el gusano medidor.28 Hasta 1963, eran conocidas 63 especies de insectos nocivos para este cultivo.29 Todas estas especies vivían alimentándose del algodón, su trabajo era morder la planta desde sus raíces, tallos, hojas y flores hasta terminar por trozar la planta. La plaga más temida y la más conocida fue la del gusano blanco, el cual en una sola noche terminaba por destruir hasta cuatro hectáreas de cultivo (una hectárea comprendía 1000 metros cuadrados).30

Con la aparición de estos fatales enemigos, los agricultores tuvieron que invertir parte de sus ganancias en el combate de millones de insectos que invadieron sus cultivos. Se desarrollaron insecticidas, pesticidas y herbicidas en un intento por combatir a estos insectos destructivos. Los agricultores utilizaron métodos manuales, mecánicos y aéreos para la fumigación de los cultivos, pero a pesar de todos estos esfuerzos, las plagas no fueron erradicadas y los agricultores iniciaron a tener pérdidas. Además, los insecticidas comenzaron a ser un negocio lucrativo debido a la gran demanda que existía. Las casas algodoneras actuaban como distribuidores de insecticidas y muchas obligaban a los agricultores a aceptar un programa crediticio que incluía de seis a diez fumigaciones anuales.31

En esta época de crisis del algodón, Matamoros recibió asistencia técnica de un grupo de inspectores de Sanidad Vegetal del Departamento de Agricultura de los Estados Unidos. Las inspecciones consistían en checar un determinado número de lotes de algodón y recomendaban la dosis adecuada para controlar la plaga presente. Las plagas se incrementaron haciéndose incontrolables, el control biológico de las plagas era desconocido y no se recibió asistencia técnica oficial por parte del Gobierno del estado de Tamaulipas. Los agricultores, ejidatarios, colonos y pequeños propietarios no tuvieron los suficientes recursos para erradicar las plagas, por lo tanto los costos de producción se elevaron. Las cuantiosas pérdidas anuales se fueron acumulando y vino la quiebra, muchos agricultores tuvieron que vender sus tierras para poder pagar las deudas. En 1963, la estimación de las pérdidas por plagas y enfermedades del algodón fue de 300 millones de pesos.32
La Extinción del Algodón

En el año de 1963, se inicia la extinción del cultivo del algodón.33 Otro factor que contribuyó con esta extinción fue la salinidad de las tierras. La salinidad se originó por el afloramiento de sales depositadas en los perfiles internos del suelo causadas por exceso de agua en la tierra que penetra hasta esas capas salinas, disolviéndolas, estas sales ocasionaban la pudrición de las raíces de la planta del algodón.34 Aún con todos estos factores en contra, algunos agricultores se arriesgaron y continuaron cultivando algodón sin ningún éxito. En este año se inicia la emigración de muchas personas que llegaron a la región atraidos por este cultivo. En un esfuerzo por resolver el grave problema de la quiebra, todos los sectores afectados solicitaron al entonces Presidente de México, Lic. Adolfo López Mateos, ayuda económica. El Banco de México concede a los agricultores matamorenses un préstamo por cincuenta millones de pesos pagadero a un plazo de cinco años.35 En 1963, da inicio el cultivo de granos en la región de Matamoros, siendo el sorgo y el maíz los dos principales granos cultivados hasta la fecha los cuales reemplazaron al cultivo del algodón.36

Conclusiones

La época de producción del algodón de la región de Matamoros trajo consigo numerosos beneficios para esta región. Además de las ganancias obtenidas de su producción, procesamiento y exportación, esta agroindustria generó una gran cantidad de empleos. El algodón de la región de Matamoros fue conocido a nivel mundial. Todos los Municipios se convirtieron en centros de desarrollo económico, se construyeron presas, carreteras, nuevas escuelas. A pesar de contar con buenos sistemas de irrigación, este cultivo se extinguió de esta región principalmente por las numerosas plagas que lo afectaron además por el problema de la salinidad de la tierra. Los costos de producción de este cultivo de incrementaron por lo tanto se volvió incosteable. El famoso cultivo del “oro blanco” se extinguió de la región, quedando solo en la historia el recuerdo de las mejores épocas en la agricultura del Estado de Tamaulipas.

Notas

1 Eliseo Zorrilla, Panorama de la Geografía Económica del Estado de Tamaulipas (Monterrey: Editora Delta, 1967), 106.
2 Zorrilla, p. 107.
3 Voz de la Frontera, 7 enero, 1950, p. 2.
4 Zorrilla, p. 24.
6 Zorrilla, p. 106.
8 Hernández, p. 4.
9 Entrevista de Tere Salazar con Emiliano Sáenz, el 20 de Junio, 1998.
12 Hernández, p. 19.
15 Hernández, p. 30.
16 Hernández, p. 29.
17 Zorrilla, p. 107.
18 Hernández, p. 71.
19 Quintero, p. 66.
20 Hernández, p. 37.
22 Hernández, p. 41.
25 Hernández, p. 75.
26 Polo, p. 25.
28 Entrevista de Tere Salazar con Emiliano Sáenz, el 20 de Junio, 1998.
30 Hernández, p. 45.
31 Hernández, p. 47.
32 Hernández, p. 48.
33 Hernández, p. 63.
34 Polo, p. 33.
35 Hernández, p. 64.
36 Polo, p. 37.
1840, Religious Processions in Matamoros
by Jessica Cisneros
The Prehistoric Peoples of the Rio Grande Delta and Their Connections with the Cultures of Mesoamerica

by
Rolando L. Garza

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the prehistoric cultures of the Rio Grande Delta, those of nomadic hunters and gatherers, and their connections with the cultures of Mesoamerica, sedentary agriculturally based societies. This paper will first present an overview of the prehistoric cultures of the Rio Grande Delta Region, and then discuss the archeological evidence supporting connections with the cultures of the Mesoamerican Regions of Mexico, and finally will attempt to present a context for interaction between these peoples. For the purpose of this paper the author will use data gathered from beyond the Rio Grande Delta proper and into the Rio Grande Plain when describing the early prehistoric people due to the dearth of information for these cultures from the delta region.

Prehistoric Overview

As far back as 11,200 years before present (BP), peoples known as Paleo-Indians first occupied what is now known as south Texas and northeastern Mexico. The Paleo-Indian period is generally associated with lanceolate points; the earlier forms being fluted (Clovis and Folsom) and the later forms not being fluted (Plainview, Golondria, Angostura and Scottsbluff). Although Paleo-Indians are typically known as “Big Game Hunters”, there is no conclusive evidence pointing towards a Paleo-Indian exploitation of Late Pleistocene megafauna on a large scale, if any, in this region. It appears to be likely that the Late Pleistocene environment, which is identified as cooler and moister, was shifting towards a more arid and warmer environment earlier in this region than in other portions of the North American continent. Therefore, it is possible that the Late Pleistocene megafauna (eg. Mammoth, Mastodon, Bison Antigues) were extinct or on the very edge of extinction in this area by the time that the first Paleo-Indians arrived. It is more likely that the Paleo-Indians in this region were following modern large herd animals. Despite the meager archeological data for reconstructing the Paleo-Indian lifeways in this area, it is probable that their occupation was characterized by a very low population density, with small roaming groups of non-specialized hunters and gatherers covering extremely large territorial ranges.1

Accordingly, the transition from Paleo-Indian, “Big Game Hunters”, to Archaic, more diversified hunters and gathers, in this region is nebulous at best. However, by approximately 8,000 years BP the use of lanceolate points is replaced by the use of the early corner and basal notched dart points associated with the Early Archaic period. Also very important to this transitional period is the introduction of the atlatl, or spear thrower. This is a wooden tool that acts like an extension of the arm greatly increasing the velocity of the throwing action. In other words, the atlatl enhances the range and penetrating power for the user. As with the Paleo-Indian period, the Early Archaic lifeways and settlement patterns are virtually unknown. It is speculated, nevertheless, that these peoples operated much as the Paleo-Indian peoples, just adapting to their increasingly xeric environment. In south Texas the animal resources these people could exploit ranged from bison, bear, pronghorn, and deer to rabbits, other small rodents, snakes, lizards, turtles, land snails, fish, and freshwater mussels. The plant resources could range from various acorns, nuts, and bean pods to the numerous varieties of cacti.2
Around 4,500 years BP another cultural or technological shift occurred, signaling the onset of the Middle Archaic period of south Texas. This can be easily seen in the regional material culture pattern, as triangular and sub triangular dart points (Tortugas and Abasolo) dominate the projectile point assemblage. Also becoming common in Middle Archaic contexts are ground stone artifacts such as tubular stone pipes, grinding slabs, and manos. It is has been suggested that the Middle Archaic marks a shift to a heavier reliance on plant resources (eg. beans and nuts of mesquite, acacia, oak, and hackberry), as reflected by an increase in formal hearths, earth ovens, and burned rock accumulations. A consequential event in this period is the establishment of the modern sea level. This occurred as the meltwaters from the final glacial episode subsided and the oceans stopped rising.

The establishment of the modern sea level, with the concurrent stabilization of productive estuary bay systems, made possible the development of littoral adaptation strategies in this area. Also extremely significant to this period in South Texas is the inception of cemetery sites. Thus, it appears that the Middle Archaic period in South Texas marks an increase in population densities, accompanied by more diverse regional and local adaptation strategies, and smaller territorial ranges. In the South Texas sub area known as the Rio Grande Delta the earliest firm archaeological evidence dates back to this period.

By roughly 2,400 years BP the transition into the Late Archaic period has occurred in this area. In the material culture this is indicated by an increase of smaller dart points (Matamoros,
Catan), including corner and side notched points in the Rio Grande Plain. This period can be seen as a continuation, or better yet an amplification of the trends that occurred in the Middle Archaic period. The population can be considered to be booming. This appears to be evident when viewing the increased site density with regard to the relatively short time span of the period. The adaptation strategies tend to become more regionalized or specialized. The data for the Late Archaic, from investigations at Choke Canyon, suggest a broad economy that focused on plant resources, but also included exploiting a narrower range of animal species, mainly smaller mammals and rodents. Along the coastal zone the data for this period suggests a focus on marine resources, particularly those of the estuary bays. Here the evidence reveals an exploitation of a wide range of shellfish and fish, along with small mammals. The Rio Grande Delta area of south Texas has a fair representation of Late Archaic sites, however they have not been as extensively, scientifically excavated and documented as those sites at Choke Canyon or the Coastal Bend area.

At about 1,200-800 years BP the Late Prehistoric period begins in south Texas. This is identified mainly with the introduction of the bow and arrow. This period is the most represented and the best known of the prehistoric periods in the Rio Grande Delta area. After 1,100 AD we recognize what is known in archaeological literature as the Brownsville Complex, also known as the Barril Complex on the south side of the Rio Grande. There are three major traits which distinguish the Brownsville Complex from the surrounding cultural patterns. First and foremost is a sophisticated marine shell-working industry, producing thousands of shell ornaments and shell tools. The second trait is the presence of artifacts from the Huasteca Region of Mesoamerica. The third identifying trait of this complex is the use of cemetery sites, some of which contain numerous burials. Most of these burials were interred in the flex position, contained red ochre, as well as other grave goods such as shell ornaments, modified human bone artifacts, Huastecan ceramic vessels, and ornaments made of jadeite and serpentine. In his early survey work of Cameron County, Elton R. Prewitt identified five types of sites on the basis of geographic location: clay dune - laguna; resaca - laguna; clay dune - lake; resaca; and barrier island. The people of the Brownsville Complex appeared to have thrived in the Rio Grande Delta area up until Spanish contact and colonization.

Presence of Mesoamerican Artifacts in the Delta Region

The presence of Mesoamerican artifacts in the Rio Grande Delta has been a topic of much interest since the early part of the twentieth century when the region first began to be archeologically investigated. From 1908 to about 1940, Andrew Elliot Anderson, a civil engineer and avocational archeologist, documented literally hundreds of sites and made extensive systematic surface collections on both sides of the Rio Grande. As early as 1917, Mr. Anderson recorded a conch whorl ornament with an engraved human face, which he noted as clearly not of local manufacture and attributed it to the people from "the South". A. E. Anderson's efforts to scientifically record the prehistoric sites from the delta has resulted in the largest well-documented collection of the Brownsville Complex artifacts, which is still the basis for the definition of the culture. The collection, which has still yet to be completely analyzed, contains some pieces of jadeite and serpentine, several bits of obsidian, and decorated ceramic sherds attributed to the Huastecan culture, including five large vessels that were mostly whole or could be partially reconstructed, as well as thousands of locally manufactured shell ornaments and tools, and other items.
Of the exotic materials recovered from sites on the delta, objects of jadeite and serpentine are by far the rarest. Richard MacNeish reports two jadeite objects recovered from Brownsville Complex sites. One was a large spherical bead about 2.5 centimeters (cm) in diameter, and the other was a small celt-like object about 2.5 cm long. Michael Collins and company report a large tubular bead fashioned from gray-green jadeite in association with a burial at the Floyd Morris Site. The bead was approximately 4.5 cm in length and about 2.2 cm in diameter at the ends, tapering to towards the center. Anderson had also recovered a spherical or globular jadeite bead from the delta, but it is no longer available for study. MacNeish goes on to state that “These undoubtedly came from Mexico, and probably Huasteca …” even though he acknowledges that Gordon Ekholm in his excavations at Tampico and Panuca did not discover any jadeite. However, Ekholm did recover 132 jade beads, some tubular beads like at Floyd Morris. The geologic sources for the jadeite objects recovered from Brownsville Complex site are unknown, but would have to originate beyond the Huasteca, perhaps in Oaxaca or any number of other areas in central and southern Mexico. But as Hester points out, “What is important here is their occurrence; though they are not true jade, they are ‘green stone’ of the type of great importance in Mesoamerican cultures”.

Obsidian, mainly in the form of small flakes or debitage, is another exotic material found in Brownsville Complex sites that can be linked to Mesoamerica. Like the objects of jadeite, obsidian objects in delta sites are relatively scarce. However unlike the jadeite items, the geologic sources for many of the obsidian flakes recovered from the delta have been pinned down with precision, based upon techniques of nuclear chemistry used for the Texas Obsidian Project. To start with, seven green obsidian flakes excavated from a site in Willacy County have been sourced to the Pachuca, or Cerro de las Navajas, one of the most famous obsidian sources in ancient Mexico. A tiny piece of black opaque obsidian found in Cameron County by Anderson has been linked to the Zacualtipan obsidian source in the state of Hidalgo. Two other flakes of obsidian that were collected in Willacy County during the 1970s were unable to have their geologic sources traced until recently, when fortuitous circumstances arose so that the members of the Texas Obsidian Project were able to link them to the Ojos Arcos source in Queretaro state not far from Guanajuato. So unlike the jadeite objects whose place of origin is indeterminate, many of the objects of obsidian have been linked to specific sources in Mesoamerica (Figure 2).

The third exotic artifact type found in Brownsville Complex sites to be discussed, and possibly the most telling, is ceramics from Huasteca. By no means are Huastecan ceramics prevalent in the cultural assemblage, but they have been the key indicator for interaction between these two cultures. A. E. Anderson was the first investigator to make the connection with people of Mesoamerica and was fortunate enough to be able to support it with solid archeological evidence in the form of five mostly whole or partially reconstructible vessels, as well as many other vessel fragments that he collected in the first quarter of the twentieth century. Most of the vessels were found in association with burials, however sherds have been found on sites without any direct connection to a burial. The vessel forms include ollas and bowls, with black-on-white decoration on some and polychrome on others. They have been positively identified as Huastecan in origin, and appear to date to Periods V and VI of Ekholm’s sequence, which is the Early and Late Postclassic from ca. 1000-1520 A.D. These vessels have been recently analyzed by William J. Wagner III, whose compositional studies and comparisons confirm the origin of these vessels as Huastecan.
Wagner's investigations indicated that the majority of the ceramics dated to Elkhom's Period VI of the Late Postclassic era, ca. 1200-1520 A.D., but the collection does have some earlier vessels of Huastecan origin. Of special interest is Anderson's Vessel One, whose illustrations of this vessel have appeared in most of the literature out on this subject since the 1930s. The initial published illustration was based on Anderson's drawing and was published showing a solid black anthropomorphic figure (Figure 3). This led to some confusion in later studies comparing the illustration to ceramics recovered from Huastecan sites, because the actual design was only black in outline with the interior painted red. Therefore, this design does not merely show Huastecan influence, but positively identifies the vessel as a Tancol Polychrome, identical to a sherd recovered by Elkholm. Wagner notes, "The black and red figure most likely alternates across the horizontally banded frame with a second anthropomorphic figure of similar design painted in black only (Figure 4). In brief, Wagner's work has confirmed the identification of the ceramics in question from Brownsville Complex sites as Huastecan in origin.

A Context for Interaction and Trade

The prehistoric archeological record of the Rio Grande Delta clearly indicates the presence of some sort of interaction and/or exchange of goods between the peoples of the Brownsville Complex and those to the south in Mesoamerica. It would appear that the people of the Huasteca Region served as the main conduit for contact between the people of the Rio Grande Delta and
Mesoamerica. This is based mainly upon the Huastecan artifacts recovered from Brownsville Complex sites, and the fact that the northern edge of the Huastecan cultural range is only about 300 miles down the Gulf Coast from the delta (Figure 5). Evidence from archeological investigations in the Huasteca Region, as well as the surrounding area, tenuously suggests that the flow of at least goods moved towards Mesoamerica as well. Despite the information we do have, we still have no real understanding as to the type of relationship that these two cultures shared, nor do we have any idea of how this relationship began. Many models of cultural interaction between these two groups can and have been made, but until more extensive and intensive scientific investigations can be undertaken in both regions and the intermediate area between the two cultural regions, these interpretive models will be based mainly on speculation.

Figure 3. Anderson's original illustration of the anthropomorphic design on vessel one. Illustration courtesy of Texas Archeological Research Laboratory, University of Texas at Austin.
Therefore, logically the initial area to study when creating models of interaction between these two cultures, would be in Mesoamerica where there is relatively ample information on the Postclassic Period based upon scientific excavation and collection. During the Early Postclassic Period, it is evident that the Huastecs had trade relations with the Toltec Empire. In addition, it appears that Huastecs had a strong presence at the Pachuca mines, at least after the Toltecs of Tula, who had been in control of the resource, met with their decline around 1100 A.D. It is also abundantly clear that the Late Postclassic Huastecan culture interacted with Aztec Empire, which was mainly due to the fact that the Aztecs tried to subjugate the Huastecs. Some of the Huastecan towns did actually pay tribute to the Aztecs, while others stayed mainly independent, especially in the north. Regardless of whether it was tribute or trade, Huastecs had a strong presence at the Pachuca mines, at least after the Toltecs of Tula, who had been in control of the resource, met with their decline around 1100 A.D.

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Furthermore, it has been noted that the markets of Huasteca competed with those of the Aztec Tenochtitlan. In brief, this means that the agriculturally based cultures of Mesoamerica had developed sophisticated trade networks and broad avenues of interaction. Even though we still are not clear on the level and role of social interaction between the cultures of Mesoamerica, we do know the flow of goods was abundant, and therefore issues of supply and demand would come into play.

Was it in this facet where the people and the resources of the Brownsville Complex come into play? The people of the Brownsville Complex had a sophisticated and extensive shell manufacturing industry, perhaps unrivaled by contemporary cultures throughout the entire Gulf Coast. The people of the Brownsville Complex produced copious amounts of shell ornaments and shell tools. This type of industry is not necessarily unusual for groups of semi-nomadic hunters and gatherers, except possibly in its intensity. Presumably shell ornaments were exported to the Huastecan region, and characteristic Huastecan pottery vessels were traded in return, ornaments of jadeite and serpentine, and artifacts of obsidian. But were the people of the Brownsville Complex intentionally manufacturing surplus amounts of shell products as a trade commodity for external distribution? And if so when and how did this come to be?

As mentioned earlier, the Aztecs markets were hungry for marine shell and marine shell ornaments. The Huasteca Region does have marine shells and had produced its own shell tools and ornaments. However, it seems logical to think that once the Huastecs realized the source of manufactured marine shell items that the Brownsville Complex would have to offer, whether they were already producing them in the numbers or they just had the potential to, the Huastecs would have immediately known it was to their advantage to tap into this resource and control the distribution of these items into Mesoamerica. Potentially, one scenario could be that they had preliminary contact with the people of the delta, who had already adapted to the littoral and environment and were exploiting marine resources. The Huastecs would have encouraged these people to increase the focus on marine shell manufacturing for the exchange of prestigious exotic items such as decorated ceramics, jadeite, serpentine, obsidian, and possibly other items of desire, possibly even agricultural products. To the semi-nomadic hunters and gatherers of the delta region, the lithic items were definitely of use, especially the high quality obsidian. But the objects like the large ollas appear to be strictly status designators. Especially, if these groups remained highly mobile, large ceramic vessels would be more of a hindrance. This could also possibly point to a change in lifeways because of this interaction.
Figure 4. Illustration of Anderson’s vessel one, Tancol Polychrome Olla. Illustration courtesy of William J. Wagner III.
Conclusions

In summary, there is undeniably positive evidence that indicates some sort of interaction and/or trade between the people of the Rio Grande Delta Region and those of the Huasteca Region. Unfortunately, due to the dearth of intensive scientific investigations in both regions, as well as of the territory between them, we have no idea as to what nature the relationship of these two cultures was. All models or scenarios for interaction between these two cultures are based mostly upon conjecture and only bring up more questions. One thing is for certain, there are numerous variables that led to the interaction of these two cultures, and that the interaction had significant ramifications for both societies, possibly one more than the other. In the latter half of the twentieth century the scientific data base for these two regions grew extensively. Prior to that, these regions did not receive the funds or attention as other regions that contained more a glamorous archeological record. However, there is high need for broad-scoped multidisciplinary regional studies, intensive site excavations, and discourse and dissemination of information between professionals from both nations. This is especially true now, as modern populations continue to grow exponentially in the Rio Grande Delta Region, and the shallow deposits of Brownsville Complex sites continue to be negatively impacted and destroyed by both cultural and natural agents.
Endnotes


3 Hester (1995), 438.


12 Hester (1994) 1.


15 Hester (1994) 2.

Huasteca, Mexico.” Anthropological Papers of the Museum of Natural History (1944) 38(1).

17 Elkholm (1944) 487.
18 Hester (1994) 2.
19 Hester (1994) 2.
23 Hester (1994) 1.
25 Elkholm (1944) 405-409.
30 Hester (1994) 2.
This past spring, my wife and kids and I decided to take a drive to Falcon Lake Reservoir located about 100 miles west of our new home in Harlingen, Texas. As we proceeded west on U.S. Highway 83 through McAllen and Mission, we looked with interest at the rather desolate and unforgiving landscape of mesquite trees, yucca plants, and cacti. How different the Rio Grande Valley seemed from our native Michigan!

Forty miles west of McAllen brought us to the outskirts of Rio Grande City, a town of approximately 12,000 people and seat of Starr County. As we drove passed historic Fort Ringgold through a residential section of town, I noticed a hand-painted wood sign leaning against a chain link fence on the north side of the road. The red letters were beginning to chip away from the white background, but the message was still visible:

SACRED SACRAMENT PEYOTE DEALER MIGUEL RODRIGUEZ PLACE TO STAY

A few yards further was a second sign—this one with the lone word “PEYOTE” spray-painted black on particle board and resting on top of the same chain link fence.

As we continued west on Highway 83 through the town of Roma before turning for the final few miles to Falcon Lake, I kept thinking about the signs I had seen back in Rio Grande City. What exactly was the connection between peyote and the “sacred sacrament”? Since there are few Native Americans living in South Texas, who was buying the peyote? What was the connection with Rio Grande City? Were there other peyote dealers in the lower Rio Grande valley? Was the operation in Rio Grande City legal?

Little did we know that we were driving through the northern-most reaches of “peyote country”—the only area in the United States that grows this relatively rare species of cactus. Known by numerous appellations including Dumpling Cactus, Devil’s Root, White Mule, Cactus Pudding and Dry Whiskey, the peyote cactus is known to botanists as *Lophophora williamsii*. Anthropologist Weston LaBarre has described peyote as a “small, spineless, carrot-shaped cactus” that is mostly subterranean. The top of the cactus looks like a grayish-green pincushion with “spiral radial grooves dividing the puffy prominences which bear linearly spaced tufts of fine gray-white floculence, somewhat like artists’ camel-hair paintbrushes.”

What the small cactus lacks in physical aesthetics, it makes up for in psychotropic and medicinal qualities. Peyote is renowned for its ability to assuage hunger and thirst, ward off fatigue, and to treat fever and other illnesses. Possessing over fifty-five alkaloids (nine of which are psychotropic alkaloids), peyote also contains mescaline—an oily or crystalline alkaloid that is a hallucinogenic, and the primary source of the plant’s historic notoriety. Initial somatic effects of mescaline include increased blood pressure and pulse rate, dilation of the pupils, nausea, dizziness, immediate perspiring, and increased salivation. These unpleasant symptoms are usually followed by feelings of euphoria and elation accompanied by profound psychic experiences including visions or hallucinations, a distortion of sense perceptions, and even “synesthesia” of the senses.
where the stimulation of one sense results in sensations of others. Scientists differ on exactly how mescaline impacts the biochemical systems of the brain and nervous system, but recent research has focused on the possibility that mescaline may in some way inhibit the action of serotonin in the brain. Experts generally agree that peyote is non-habit forming and non-soporific—thus failing to qualify as a narcotic. There have been no recorded cases of deaths due to peyote consumption, although some fatalities have occurred indirectly (i.e., heart attack and suicide).³

Peyote is commonly found growing individually or in dense clumps or colonies that may span five to six feet across and contain hundreds of miniature cacti. It is a hardy plant that can grow in a variety of settings—under the shade of mesquite trees and shrubs, in direct sunlight, in silty muddy flats, in arid sandy soil, even in rocky limestone crevices. The northern geographic limit of the peyote cactus lies along the Texas-Mexico border from the Big Bend region south along the lower Rio Grande valley. Prime peyote real estate can be found in Webb, Zapata, Starr, and Jim Hogg counties—particularly around Mirando City (located approximately thirty-five miles east of Laredo in Webb county), and near Rio Grande City and Roma (located eighty miles south of Mirando City in Starr county).⁴

When peyote is harvested, only the gray-green pincushion cap visible above the ground is sliced off—allowing the cactus to grow a new top. If done correctly, the plant will produce new caps (or buttons) for years. The caps vary in size (from a dime to a silver dollar) and shrink to some degree as they dry. When dehydrated, the “peyote buttons” as they are most often called, appear brownish in color with a leathery look and texture. Peyote eaters most often chew the buttons whole, but sometimes they first cut them into pieces. At times buttons are ground up and boiled in water to produce a tea-like brew or they are added to alcoholic beverages to enhance the drink’s potency. Some people apparently take ritualistic peyote enemas. Because mescalin comprises anywhere from one to six percent of the weight of a dried button, it usually takes six to twelve small buttons to experience full somatic and hallucigenic effects.⁵

By all accounts peyote and other hallucinogenic plants played an important role in Native American societies for centuries, and peyote necklaces have been found in cave burials that date back to prehistoric times. Indian peoples such as the Chichimecs, Aztecs, Coahuiltecas, Pimas, and Carrizos are just a few of the pre-Columbian tribes that used peyote for religious, ceremonial, and medicinal purposes.⁶ The first Spanish mention of peyote occurred in the 1560s when Franciscan friar Bernardino de Sahagún noted in his *General History of the Things of New Spain* that the Chichimecs used the plant “in place of wine.” That peyote use was widespread in the viceroyalty of New Spain is born out by an early seventeenth century pamphlet by Fr. Nicolas de Leon that listed a series of questions for Native American penitents.

Dost thou suck the blood of others, or dost thou wander about at night, calling upon the demon to help thee? Has thou drunk peyotl, or hast thou given it to others to drink, in order to find out secrets, or to discover where stolen or lost articles were?⁷

The Roman Catholic Church labored to curb peyote use throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In 1571 the Inquisition was introduced into New Spain and by 1620 a decree passed that banned peyote use among all Christians—apparently Indians were not the only peyote-eaters in the New World!⁸

While anthropologists and historians agree that peyote use among Indian peoples is centuries old, there is no consensus regarding the diffusion of peyote among Native Americans in the
United States. What tribe (or tribes) introduced peyote, when they introduced it, and what tribes they introduced peyote to remain subjects of scholarly debate and investigation. Tribes such as the Carrizos, Lipan Apaches, Mescalero Apaches, Tonkawas, Karankawas, and Caddoes were all peyote-eaters residing north of the Rio Grande in the early 19th century. Jean Louis Berlandier, a Swiss botanist who traveled throughout Texas from 1828 to 1834, indicated that the Lipans, Karankawas, and several native peoples residing in north-eastern Mexico used peyote and that the Lipans carried strings of peyote like rosaries. Anthropologists Omer Stewart, Weston LaBarre, and Morris Opler all credit the Lipans as the tribe responsible for bringing peyote to the tribes of the United States. They argue that the Lipans learned of peyote from the Carrizos—a Coahuiltecan group who inhabited the peyote-rich region along the Rio Grande and among whom the Spanish were trying to settle the Lipans. Spanish missions established for the Lipans in the latter half of the eighteenth century, moreover, were situated near the peyote-growing areas discussed earlier. The Lipans in turn taught the Mescaleros, Comanches, Kiowa Apaches and others about peyote. Thus by virtue of their association with the Carrizos and by their proximity to the peyote fields, the Lipan Apaches can at the very least be regarded as an important early disseminator of peyote usage north of the Rio Grande.9

Given the diversity of native peoples and cultures, peyote uses, rituals, and theologies differed significantly based on numerous factors. A particular tribe's history, social organization, and worldview shaped the way they adapted peyote use to their particular needs. Anthropologist J.S. Slotkin has suggested that peyote use underwent an evolution during the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries. Initially, individuals used peyote primarily as a medicine and to obtain "visions" for purposes of supernatural revelation. Collectively, it was an element in tribal dancing rites, the peyote evidently being used to induce a trance-like state during the dance. By the late nineteenth century, Slotkin argues, a "peyote cult" had evolved that was a "trait complex consisting of a voluntary religious organization, whose rite is one of prayer and quiet contemplation, centered on peyote both as a symbol of the spirits being worshipped and as a sacrament."10

Hints of the evolution of ritualistic peyote use among the Lipans are evident in a folk tale that speaks of four Lipan men who decided to have a peyote meeting. After erecting a tipi, the men took a large woven basket and filled it with fresh, dry peyote buttons. They entered the tipi, and for the next four days and nights ate the peyote while sitting around a small fire. The Peyote People heard about the meeting and sent a representative disguised as an old man with a cane to find out what the four men were doing. Upon arriving, the Old Man Peyote hit one of the participants over the head with the cane and took his spirit back to the Peyote People. The remaining three men—upon seeing their friend slumped over unconscious and fearing that he was dead—became frightened. The old man assured them that if they remained for four days and four nights their friend would be restored to them. On the morning of the fourth day, as promised, Old Man Peyote returned their friend to them. Before doing so, however, he placed a bullet and some excrement from a red-tailed hawk inside the man to protect him in battle and render him invulnerable to his enemies. The Lipans rejoiced at their reunion and afterwards they smoked and prayed, washed their hands and faces, and ate a meal.11

In addition to the folk tale of the Lipan who visited the Peyote People, anthropologist Morris E. Opler's interview with some elderly Lipans in the 1930s sheds further light on the ritualistic nature of peyote use among some native peoples. According to Opler, the Lipans prayed, sang, and smoked when they went out to harvest peyote. Chewing on a button apparently helped one find peyote groves. Once the buttons had been gathered, participants in an upcoming peyote ceremony had to bathe and cleanse themselves with yucca root (no soap could be used as the
peyote would "smell" it and not work). A day of fasting and prayer preceded the ceremony. The person in charge of arranging the ritual put up a tipi with a fire pit in the center and with the door facing east and carpeted the interior with fresh sage. Although women were the customary tipi erectors among the Lipans, they were not allowed near where the ceremony was to be held because their scent would cause participants to become nauseous. A fire was then built in the tipi and a large peyote button placed on the ground behind the fire. This "chief peyote" served as a silent witness to the proceedings, to ensure that the ceremony was conducted correctly, and that participants had the proper attitudes. Before beginning the ceremony, participants were to tell others not to disturb them—even if they fell asleep. The Lipans may have been concerned that a person who appeared to be asleep or unconscious may be visiting the Peyote People (like the man in the folk tale).12

Once the ceremony started, participants were expected to remain until the four day ritual ended. In addition to chewing peyote buttons (some men reportedly consumed as many as fifty buttons during the ceremony), participants prayed, sang, and danced. A drum, rattle, and (in later times) an eagle bone whistle were passed around for individuals to take turns playing. A first time participant was expected to approach the leader of the ceremony who would chew a button first and then give it to him, or simply blow on it a few times before giving it to the neophyte. Depending on one's state of mind and/or intensity of one's prayers, visions could be either wonderful or horrifying experiences. Opler notes that some men went running out of the tipi toward their vision in a vain attempt to seize it, while others came out screaming in an effort to escape that they were seeing. The morning after the ceremony, participants were to drink water and wash up. Dishes of roasted corn, wild fruit, and meat were then eaten. For the remainder of the day, the men were to rest and exchange stories about their visions. That evening, the tipi was taken down and everyone returned to his home.13

During the early twentieth century, the peyote ceremony evolved yet again and became associated with curing illnesses. Men prayed to the peyote chief to help cure a friend or relative; shamans attempted cures in the tipi during peyote ceremonies (women for the first time were allowed inside the tipi but only to seek cures—not to participate in the ritual). Thus, the peyote ceremony came to mean different things to different Indian peoples. To the elderly it may have been used for its curative attributes; conservatives may have been interested in its vision-producing power which allowed people to feel closer to their Creator; some Native Americans may have seen the peyote ritual as a means of resisting their place as minorities in an Anglo-dominated society; for others, peyote-eating may have been little more than a social and recreational activity.14

While Native Americans had diverse motivations for consuming peyote, demand for the "divine cactus" increased during the latter decades of the nineteenth century, spreading north into the Indian Territory and beyond. Perceptive inhabitants of the Mirando Valley region, meanwhile, leveraged their close proximity to prime peyote-growing areas by harvesting and selling buttons to various Indian peoples who made annual treks south to acquire them. Because they are lightweight, durable, and compressible, peyote buttons made perfect trade items. Perhaps the first peyotero (or one who harvests and sells peyote buttons) was Francisco Canales who, in the early 1870s, began selling peyote in the village of Los Ojuelos (located three miles south of Mirando City, Texas). Peyoteros in Los Ojuelos exchanged sacks of peyote buttons at the General Store for supplies, or loaded them on to carretas for transport to nearby villages Aguilares and Torrecillas, where they were in turn reloaded onto railcars for shipment via Laredo to Indian customers in Oklahoma, Wyoming, Nebraska, Wisconsin, and Iowa. In 1887 one could purchase peyote for $15 a bushel (approximately 3500 buttons). Anna B. Nickels, a peyote dealer in Laredo, wrote in
July 1888 that in addition to Native Americans, Mexican customers also purchased peyote buttons for a nickel a piece. They pounded fresh buttons and soaked them in water, then strained and drank the water, using the pulp left behind as a medicine for sores. In 1913, Native Americans began traveling by train to Laredo bringing empty trunks and burlap sacks to fill with peyote; a decade later they began driving privately owned automobiles.¹⁵

A watershed event in the evolution of the South Texas peyote trade occurred in 1921 when oil was discovered in the Mirando Valley. That same year, Mirando City was founded three miles north of Los Ojuelos and two years later Torrecillas town fathers opted to rename their city “Oilton.” The prospect of hitting it big in the oil bonanza lured many ranchers and other landowners to sell or lease their lands for oil exploration rather than for peyote extraction. Oilfield workers, furthermore, moonlighted as peyoteros, and their lack of expertise in harvesting the cactus damaged plants and undercut the supply. As a result, the peyote trade shifted south in the 1930s to the Lower Rio Grande Valley centering around the cities of Roma and Rio Grande City.¹⁶

As the peyote trade expanded during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, officials in the U.S. government—convinced that peyote use would discourage the assimilation of Native Americans into the majority society—passed legislation aimed at prohibiting peyote in Indian country. The 1897 Indian Prohibition Act made it an offense to furnish any article whatsoever under any name, label, or brand which produced intoxication to any Indian ward of the government. Lawmakers used the 1897 law, as well as similar anti-liquor legislation passed in 1906, to discourage peyote use among Native Americans. In spite of the incorporation in October 1918 of the quasi-Christian Native American Church that uses peyote as an integral part of its liturgy, several western states passed anti-peyote legislation in the 1920s. Not until 1965 did Congress enact legislation protecting the ceremonial use of peyote. A little over a decade later, Congress passed the American Indian Religious Freedom Act which bound the government to protect and preserve the inherent rights Native Americans to “believe, express, and exercise” their traditional religions. Six years later, the act was amended to specify peyote as a “religious sacrament” and “integral to a way of life, and significant in perpetuating Indian tribes and cultures.” The amendment legalized the possession and transportation of peyote by an Indian for “bona fide traditional ceremonial purposes in connection with the practice of a traditional Indian religion.” It also required peyoteros to be registered with and accept regulation from the Drug Enforcement Administration and the state of Texas.¹⁷

There are six licensed peyoteros operating in Texas today. One lives in Mirando City, the others in Roma and Rio Grande City. Thousands of Native Americans still make annual pilgrimages to the Rio Grande Valley in hopes of acquiring their yearly supply of peyote. Salvador Johnson, the peytero in Mirando City, sells between 300,000 and 500,000 buttons a year—roughly one-fifth of the state’s two million button a year harvest. A bucketful of buttons runs around $125 (roughly fifteen cents a button). Diana and Severiano Garcia, peyoteros in Rio Grande City, have been in business for thirty years and Mauro Morales and Miguel Rodriguez (the owner of the sign I saw) have operated peyoterias for decades as well. In hopes of luring Native American customers to do business with him, Rodriguez offers travelers a place to stay. Some Indians prefer to pick the peyote themselves—believing that this makes stronger medicine—and hire the peyoteros as guides. That being the case, the trip down to peyote country may last up to a week or more.

While a natural rivalry and competition for customers at times leads to hard feelings among the peyoteros, all agree that the biggest problem they face is an ever-growing demand for peyote and a shrinking supply. Severiano Garcia recalls a time when he could go out and collect 1,000
buttons in few hours. Nowadays, that 1,000 button harvest may take a day or longer. Ranch lands that were once cheap to lease for *peyoteros* are now being let to deer hunters or plowed up for grazing range. Peyote poachers, meanwhile, harvest immature cacti, often employing methods that damage or kill the plant. A secondary problem relates to identifying legal customers. Buyers are required to be members of federally recognized tribes, but *peyoteros* receive frequent requests from Native Americans from tribes not yet recognized and/or from Canadian tribes. Legitimate customers are also required to carry permits that authorize them to transport peyote across state lines. In December 1999, border patrol agents at the Falfurrias, Texas checkpoint stopped four Native American men with over 3,000 peyote buttons in their possession. Because they lacked a permit, the peyote was seized, although the men were allowed to leave. Despite the growing hardships, none of the existing *peyoteros* have plans of getting out of the business. As Severiano Garcia explained in a March 2001 interview regarding his career as a *peyotero*, “I like to pick it, I like to see it, and I’ve been with it a long time.”

To many Native Americans, peyote is a way to get closer to their creator, to go beyond the confines of mind and body to see what they call the “clear light.” This desire to “transcend self-conscious selfhood is,” according to famed-novelist Aldous Huxley, “a principal appetite of the soul.” On a bright May morning in 1953 Huxley swallowed four-tenths of a gram of mescaline dissolved in a glass of water and awaited the results. He hoped to experience “a change from his ordinary mode of consciousness.” Although Huxley had mixed feelings about the experiment, he came away with a deeper understanding and appreciation for ritualistic peyote consumption. He concluded that in “sacramentalizing” the use of peyote, Native Americans had done something “psychologically sound and historically respectable.” While some Indians reacted to white supremacy by accepting Anglo culture and Christianity, others responded by embracing their traditional cultures. The peyote sacrament, Huxley posited, allowed them to “make the best of both worlds, indeed of all worlds---the best of Indianism, the best of Christianity, and the best of those Other Worlds of transcendental experience, where the soul knows itself as unconditioned and of like nature with the divine.”

Whether or not future generations of Native peoples will be able to experience the transcendental consciousness that the peyote sacrament offers remains uncertain. As the peyote range declines, the prospect of a religious crisis looms over tens of thousands of Indian peoples who consume peyote each year. In the meantime, however, the annual trips to south Texas will surely continue, and Native Americans traveling along Highway 83 will no doubt be keeping an eye out for the hand-painted signs advertising the “SACRED SACRAMENT” of the Rio Grande Valley.

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Endnotes


3 LaBarre, “Twenty Years of Peyote Studies,” 45; Edward F. Anderson, *Peyote: The Divine*


10 Slotkin, “Peyotism, 1521-1891,” pp. 210-211.


13 Ibid., pp. 278-283.


16 Ibid., pp. 279-281.


Twin Cities on a River: A Reminiscence and Comparison
by
Anthony Knopp

Obviously differences between cities on opposite sides of the Rio Grande can be attributed largely to the historical and cultural impact of the international border that lies along that river...and continues well beyond it. Perhaps, however, a portion of the explanation of those differences may be found in the existence of a river between two communities. Please understand that I propose no profound hypothesis, but rather a notion that has emerged from the fringes of my consciousness as I contemplated the quarter-century I spent in St. Paul, Minnesota, and the quarter-century I have lived in Brownsville, Texas.

As I have considered, described and attempted to explain in several books the distinctions in the historical development of Brownsville and of Matamoros,1 I reawakened my perceptions of the distinctions between St. Paul and Minneapolis, divided by the Mississippi River, as I was aware of them years ago. 2 Growing up in St. Paul, one soon became aware that the focus of life was the community and neighborhoods of St. Paul, and what lay on the other side of the Mississippi, often just a few blocks away, was somehow strange and foreign—"enemy territory". During my youth both Minneapolis and St. Paul had their own baseball teams (the Millers and the Saints) and for a time their own professional hockey and basketball teams. These teams were the focus of intense sports rivalry.

The perception of rivalry was acute, extending to religious and ethnic dimensions. St. Paul was an Irish Catholic labor union town, while Minneapolis was Protestant, especially Lutheran, and focused on dynamic industrial expansion. In St. Paul, identity was defined by the Catholic parish in which one lived. A former St. Paul Jew, now living in Brownsville, exhibited the "code" by informing me that he had grown up in the St. Agnes parish. Minneapolis exhibited anti-Catholic attitudes at least until the 1960's. One of my professors at the College of St. Thomas in St. Paul in 1963 announced that he was one of the first two Catholics ever to have been appointed to any administrative position in the Minneapolis public school system. Possessor of a doctorate, he was a junior high school assistant principal. For the Twin cities of my youth the Mississippi may not have been a border in the international sense, but it often seemed like one.

Fortunately I am able to provide some scholarly support for my reminiscences, as well as an extended historical perspective, thanks to the work of Mary Lethert Wingerd. Her recent study, Claiming the City: Politics, Faith, and the Power of Place in St. Paul, closely examines the relationship between the two cities because, as she writes, "The civic identity of St. Paul came to be self-consciously articulated in opposition to Minneapolis." Wingerd argues that, "geography itself—and identification with place—is a critical if often neglected element of the social process. The contrasts between St. Paul and Minneapolis vividly illuminate the importance of place in the formation of identity and political culture." 3

How did these cities emerge so distinctively as to prompt enduring rivalry and hostility? As an historian, I am drawn to an historical analysis of subjects. St. Paul was founded as a trading center on the Mississippi in the 1840's and 1850's before the appearance of what became Minneapolis. St. Paul evolved as a commercial and transportation center while Minneapolis became a grain-milling industrial city. The cities were not established opposite each other on the river, but rather on opposite sides of a massive bend of the river. Minneapolis grew more rapidly than St. Paul, leading to a dispute over city populations, painfully exhibited in the chicanery involved in the census of 1890.
From Mary Wingerd's perspective, "In the case of St. Paul and Minneapolis, where cultural battles reflected real struggles for economic advantage and power, the stakes in civic rivalry were inordinately high." Minneapolis triumphed in population and economic growth in the twentieth century, while St. Paul followed a conservative course leading to stagnation. St. Paulites often exhibited a frustration vis-a-vis Minneapolis partly born of envy, but in contrast also displayed a self-satisfied cultural complacency.

The twin cities on the Rio Grande, Matamoros and Brownsville, would both seem to have more in common with each other and with St. Paul rather than with Minneapolis. All three cities lacked an industrial base until the 1970's, and all three shared an inferiority complex. In the case of the Rio Grande cities the inferiority complex was due largely to the low reputation of border towns in the national consciousness of their respective nations. Brownsville in particular has suffered from a negative perception. A recent article in the Brownsville Herald observed that, "Over the years, Brownsville has developed a reputation outside the Rio Grande Valley as a lawless, squalid borderland of witchcraft, drugs, poverty and violence."5

As in the case of the Minnesota cities the river serves as an obvious demarcation line between the cities on the Rio Grande. As scholars of the U.S.-Mexico border well know, the border/river separates cities with their own distinct cultures. No one would mistake Cd. Juarez for El Paso or San Diego for Tijuana. In contrast to the Minnesota cities, however, there is no palpable sense of rivalry between Brownsville and Matamoros. What rivalry exists is between cities on their respective sides of the river: Brownville versus Harlingen or McAllen and to a lesser extent Matamoros versus Reynosa.

Again an historical perspective offers insight to the evolution of distinctive cities divided by a river. Matamoros began to be settled about the time of the American Revolution. It was already a town of some substance and stability, a ranching and commercial center, when the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo created the border at the Rio Grande/Rio Bravo in 1848 and prompted the establishment of Brownsville. Several of the founders of Brownsville had resided in Matamoros for years as members of the foreigner-dominated merchant class. These merchants and others conducted their operations thereafter on both sides of the river for decades. Nevertheless, the two cities, preoccupied with their own problems and development, soon manifested cultural distinctions related to their respective national cultures. Brownsville, for example, suffered political rule by a city "boss", who was eventually ousted by a reform political organization, an experience shared by numerous American cities.

Although Brownville and Matamoros shared the challenges and frustrations of life on the border, they cooperated (or were allowed to cooperate) only sporadically or on an ad hoc basis. In addition, the rapid population growth of both cities, but especially of Matamoros, has posed internal challenges of identifying and maintaining civic identity, although the economic elites of both cities appear to have succeeded in maintaining political dominance for the present.

Familial and social relationships continue to exist across the river and tie Brownsville to Matamoros, and economic factors still draw Matamorenses across to Brownsville, but many citizens of both cities never cross the border and have no wish to. Their identity is with their respective cities. Brownsville, a new book of short stories by Oscar Casares, portrays a society in which life plays out as elsewhere, but the inhabitants, in the words of columnist Ruben Navarette, "don't waste two minutes obsessing over their ethnic identity. These people know who they are."6

Is it the river that divides the peoples of the Rio Grande/Rio Bravo . . . or the Border? Minneapolis and St. Paul demonstrate that societies established separately and divided by a river
can develop very distinct civic identities. In the case of Brownsville and Matamoros the existence of the river served to function as an international border. Without the border, no Brownsville. But the river, by limiting access between the cities to ferries and bridges, has further accentuated the role of the border in causing separate identities to evolve in these twin cities.\(^7\)

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### Endnotes

I spent the 2000-2001 academic year in Xiamen, Fujien Province, P. R. China as a Fulbright Lecturer. While there I became intrigued with the signs, many in an English that made me smile. My favorite said, “It's our duty to cherish the grass.” The English was certainly correct, but its emotion-laden content sounded inappropriate to American ears accustomed to the peremptory “Keep off the grass.” When I returned to Brownsville, I realized that the bilingual signs on the way to school, like the Chinese ones I had studied the previous year, reveal much about a constantly changing contemporary culture.

A verbal and literate society, we put up a seemingly infinite number of signs. I counted fifteen posters on the fence of one vacant lot facing Southmost Road. Cheaply handmade or professionally expensive, made of fabric, metal, wood, plastic, or glass; they are pristine, broken, or tearing apart; legible or illegible; colorful or dull. Signs can be seen on, in, over, under, beside, in front of, and behind sticks, windows, buildings, telephone poles, fences, flags, banners, trucks and vans, school and city buses, bumpers, yards, streets, and parking lots. This afternoon at the post office I noticed three rugs that said, “We appreciate your business! United States Postal Service.” On the way home I stopped at an intersection beside a cement truck. The moving mixing chamber said on the side, “www.j-3concrete.com.” During Charro Days, thousands of rented chairs proclaimed “Lions” on their backrests. On a recent trip to the zoo with my husband and grandson, we saw hundreds of young children with the proud slogan blazoned across their chests: “It’s all about ME—Magee Elementary.” Near Billy Mitchell on Boca Chica a sign graces a roof: “Restaurant: El Papas.” Some signs are intended to be permanent, such as the names of businesses, but some are ephemeral, such as those all up and down Elizabeth Street on February 27, 2004 during Charro Days that announced the parade at 6:00 p.m. and said the cars parked there after 5:00 p.m. would be towed away. I even see signs advertising signs: Lamar Outdoor Advertising says, “Caught you looking! Advertise outdoor style.” With so many signs to be made, businesses such as family-owned Southmost Signs promise to help. Home-printed signs on brightly colored paper point the bargain hunter toward garage sales dotting the city every Thursday, Friday, and Saturday. With so many signs the driver cannot possibly read them all, and ironically some of them use such small letters that they are illegible from the street.¹

The variety of signs is astonishing. Some are dignified: “The University of Texas at Brownsville” and “Texas Southmost College” are molded into large elegant concrete and brick monuments at either side of the campus facing International. Some signs are beautiful: Wells Fargo had a brilliantly colored sign at the corner of 77/83 and Boca Chica that featured a stagecoach and horses in silhouette against a colorful sunset and boasted, “Una cuenta de cheques gratis, de verdad. Con más de 150 años de experiencia.” Some are ugly: The Office of National Drug Control Policy has a picture of a trash dumping site on a black and white sign that reads, “Do you see a garden? Then you see the power of community coalitions.” Some are mysterious: “We can be afraid, or we can be ready” invites the reader to check out www.ready.gov (the U.S. Department of Homeland Security website). Some are hyperbolic: One of the buildings of J. E. Canales Elementary School says, “Home of the Mighty Bulldogs.” Some are ironic, like an old blue pickup truck with a sign on its back window reading “An Aggie’s Cadillac.” Some are humorous: One wall in the Academic Computing Lab of the UTB/TSC library sports a picture of

¹
a road sign that says, "Don’t pick up viruses." Some are risqué: Captain Bob’s Restaurant’s ever-changing marquee said one day, "Fried Shrimp—get your tails in here." All Brownsville’s signs want to catch our attention and influence our behavior. The signs are expensive, but obviously thousands of decision makers in Brownsville consider them worth the money. Looking at the signs from another direction, we have a clue how Brownsville’s people spend their money.

The space for billboards is sold to a large extent by Lamar Outdoor Advertising. The sign company does not appear to be concerned about what signs are next to one another, but the juxtaposition makes a comment on Brownsville culture. My favorite combination was one on Boca Chica just east of Four Corners. A large white sign featured a bent engagement ring and said, "A drunk driver took this bride. Friends don’t let friends drive drunk." Next to it a brilliant blue sign pictured a Lite beer with the drink spouting out a couple of holes and said, "Chupacabras, es tiempo Miller." Another notable mixture is Burlington Coat Factory’s sign touting its “Luxury lines” just above the sign for Dollar Tree, which has just opened at the east end of the building. In politics too, opponents put signs next to one another.

Brownsville’s geographical location is everywhere noted in the signs. Because the city sits on the Rio Grande River, the international boundary between the United States and Mexico, signs tell an immigrant where to find help with paperwork: “Inmigracion. Consulta Gratis. Jones & Crane. Abogados.” One can also take care of “Nacionalización de Camionetas.” The proximity appears in “Casa de Cambio Anahuac” and signs in front of many other casas de cambio (money exchange houses) on International in the blocks before the Gateway Bridge. Near the bridge a large warning advises, “Illegal to carry firearms/ammunition into Mexico. Penalty—Prison by Mexican law.” Garcia’s of Matamoros advertises, “Pharmacy, liquors, gift shop, restaurant,” near the approach to the bridge. Resacas wind through the city, as seen in the sign for Waterside Apartments at 4200 Boca Chica. Ducks live on the banks of many of the resacas, so Barnard Street needs a warning sign: “Duck Xing.” With the Gulf of Mexico twenty-two miles away, seafood places suggest Brownsville’s proximity to the ocean. Capt. Al’s Seafood Mkt. on the west side of town sells the “freshest seafood in town, fish, shrimp, oysters, bait . . . fried seafood plates to go.” Trailer parks dot the city, especially on the east side, testifying to the warm winter temperatures: Tropical Delights, Autumn Acres Retirement Community, Gulf (where overnighters are welcome), Paul's RV Park, Gulf Breeze Retirement Community, Rio, Cactus Cart, Trailer Village. At the eastern end of the airport a sign announces, “Air Cargo Terminal, Foreign Trade Zone.” A little farther east a sign points the way to the Sabal Palms tropical bird refuge. Between Barnard and Coria on Boca Chica another sign announces, “The Great Texas Birding Trail,” identifying one of the drawing cards of the city.

Brownsville is part of Cameron County, Texas, and the United States, with signs for all of these levels of government. Approaching Gateway Bridge we find “Bridge info. Turn radio to 1620 AM.” Cameron County announces its presence on the east side of town beside a drainage ditch: “Your tax dollars at work: Another drainage improvement project brought to you by Cameron County Drainage District Number One.” Signs reveal many government-sponsored agencies: “Texas WorkForce Center: Entrene Para un Trabajo Mejor. Su Nuevo Vecino en Southmost.” “Defensive Driving (at 30,000 feet)” entices the young of one of the country’s poorest cities to join the Air Force Reserve, and “Cross into the blue” invites the reader to seek adventure at “airforce.com.”

Hundreds of Brownsville’s signs show the government to be staffed by elected officials. While I was doing my research, one of the biggest races was that in the Democratic Party to choose a nominee for Cameron County Sheriff. The beleaguered sheriff Conrado M. Cantu proclaimed,
“Together we can make a difference.” One would suppose that a property owner would put up signs for the candidate of choice, but obviously the privilege is granted for a fee because next to Cantu’s sign was one for Antonio “Tony” Lopez, insisting on “Integrity, Leadership, Professionalism.” Down the street Abel Perez had a sign next to Cantu’s saying to vote March 9, 2004. Joe A Cisneros wanted to “restore the integrity of the sheriff’s office,” and Omar Lucio, a former sheriff, promised “proven leadership.” Hilda Treviño, the independent candidate, and Mike Barberena, the Republican nominee, had yet to put up their signs because they would not be challenged until November. Alongside these were signs for candidates running for county commissioner, constable, justice of the peace, district attorney, Democratic Party chairman, and tax assessor-collector.

All over town signs evidence the “establishment of religion” clause of the First Amendment, separating church and state, stemming from rejection of the state religions of the European countries from which most of the early immigrants came. On the west side, Our Lady of Good Counsel at 1055 Military Highway announces masses in English and Español Saturday evening and Sunday morning, and during the week in Español at 6:00 a.m. A second sign announces menudo and barbacoa on Sunday. Iglesia Metodista Unida, “El Buen Pastor” appears a few blocks east. Crossing Central Boulevard, we find Trinity Lutheran Church and First United Methodist. First Baptist Church at Boca Chica and Old Alice announces its school and also that “Jesus is Lord.” Nearby St. Mary’s Catholic School counsels, “Be Christ to one another!” Even the vehicles in the street are in on the act as one on the back of a Toyota pickup reads, “Real men love Jesus.” In some parts of town the church signs are in Spanish. On Minnesota is Iglesia Menonita de/ Cordero, and Southmost Road has many signs in Spanish such as Templo Elim, Asambleas de Dios.

In addition to food for the soul, we need food for the body. The food-related signs give an international flavor to our border city. Though the proximity to Mexico is the most obvious point that makes Brownsville signs cosmopolitan, references to other countries slip in to remind the reader traversing Brownsville’s streets that we now live in a small world that infringes on our daily lives and that we really can’t escape from. A diner may eat at Johnny Carino’s Country Italian, Taqueria Siberia, Kohnami (for “Japanese cuisine”), or Plaza Garibaldi. He may also try one of the several Chinese restaurants, testifying to the Chinese claim that theirs is the world’s best cuisine: Lin’s Super Chinese Buffet & Sushi, Peking Restaurant, Strawberry Square’s New China Buffet with “all you can eat,” Lotus Chinese Buffet, and the China Café. The city boasts numerous fast-food chains such as McDonald’s, Pizza Hut, Wendy’s, Church’s Fried Chicken, Dairy Queen, and Kentucky Fried Chicken (McDonald’s and KFC were much in evidence everywhere we visited in China). A & V Lopez Supermarket has a marquee in front of each store advertising such Mexican-American fare as menudo, cilantro, arracheras, fajitas, serrano or jalapeño peppers, pinto beans, and/or milanesa. Throughout the city small snack shacks feature light fare, such as “Snow-cones, natural flavors, snacks, chamoyadas.” And of course many restaurants serve Mexican fare: Taco Palenque at the freeway and Boca Chica spells out in giant letters pirata, enchiladas, barbacoa, chilaquiles, adobada, fajitas, quesadillas, caldo de res, and menudo.

The subject of food brings us to our national fixation on losing weight, hard for a people with a plentiful food supply to do. The local farmer’s market sells “fat burner eggs” and “fat flushers”: lettuce, cabbage, mangos, pineapple esmeralda, tomatoes, cucumbers, and “wmelon.” According to a sign on the old highway department building near the railroad tracks on West Boca Chica, one can “lose weight, anxiety, stress, headaches” with “weight control by acupuncture” using “no needles” or “control de peso con acupunturo, perdido de peso, ansiedad, stres, dolor de cabeza, sin agujas.” One of my favorites is the sign along the south-bound expressway that advertises
Miller Lite, which I am to drink because “This year, I will cut the carbs.” Burger King surprisingly has a sign on its window telling its customers about a new “low carb menu,” and McDonald’s has a couple large billboards advertising “premium salads.”

We need low-fat food because we ride instead of walking. Adame Inc. on International Boulevard near the Gateway Bridge has “Autobuses con salidas a Houston, Atlanta, Las Carolinas, Florida, y muchas ciudades mas.” Bus stop signs all along Boca Chica tell of the Brownsville Urban System, but the people of Brownsville declare their independent spirit through their fascination with cars, vans, pickups, and trucks. Boca Chica seems to have a service station on every corner—Shell, Exxon, Citco, Texaco, Fina, Diamond Shamrock, Phillips, Conoco—in addition to several used car lots and for car services such as Aladdin Car Wash and Grease Monkey (“ten minute lube & oil pros”). At Four Corners I can buy a used car from Tipton, parts from Auto Zone or Burton Auto Supply, wash my car at Fiesta Car Wash (“Rub a dub dub, your car needs a scrub”), buy tires at Paisano’s Tires & Wheels (“Llantas Usadas y Nuevas”), fix my brakes or muffler at Midas, and buy gas at Texaco or El Centro’s Exxon. Of course, to be legal, I must carry insurance, which Manuel Saldivar sells for Allstate and Kay Conly for State Farm. To qualify for a discount on theft insurance, I can visit Safe and Sound Auto Alarms.

Even more expensive than cars is medical care. In addition to pharmacies at such places as Walmart, H.E.B., and Walgreen, signs identify offices of physicians and dentists. The west end of Boca Chica boasts Valley Doctors Clinic with Sundee Reddy, M.D.P.A., and Luis Leyton, M.D., in Internal Medicine. The names on signs at many doctors’ offices suggest that the doctors in the city come from all over the world: Alexander P. Sudarshan, M.D., & Associates Eye Clinic. ABC Pediatrics lists its physicians as Yogesh Trakru, MD, and Seema Suri Trakru, MD. On a large billboard on 77/83, “Pisharodi Surgicals, Inc., Brain & Spine Technology” claims, “Born in Brownsville ... Building for the World.” Signs also indicate the presence of new medical services. In the old highway patrol building on the west side of town, we find Boca Chica Medical Supply and Advance Plus Home Health. The latter illustrates the current practice of sending nurses to the home, as does A-Touch of Home Health Care, Ltd., in Wellington Office Plaza. Near the freeway a sign says, “Brownsville Physical Therapy & Sports Medicine” and promises “Pool Therapy,” a new medical specialty. Signs also announce the Santa Maria Clinic, where large numbers of pregnant women go regularly to be checked by a nurse practitioner rather than a doctor. Surely the use of midwives has decreased in Brownsville in the last generation, but a large Partera sign may be seen just behind the McDonald’s at the corner of International and Ridgely Road across the street from the university. Valley Day and Nite Clinic also illustrates a new trend, a doctor’s office that stays open later than normal business hours.

Many other prominent features of our society unknown a few years back but now standard practice are announced boldly on signs. When I was growing up most businesses, including stores, closed on Sunday. Now most large stores are open on Sunday and often twenty-four hours a day, as announced in big letters in front of the H.E.B. at Boca Chica and the freeway and even Auto Zone on Security Drive. Chicken wings used to be cheap at the grocery store, but they now cost more than chicken breasts, obviously because of the popularity of “buffalo wings.” KFC touts its “boneless wings & honey BBQ wings.” One of the most obvious new features of our society is watching movies, even recent ones, at home in VHS or DVD format by renting the movies at Hollywood or Blockbuster. Popular fads today, especially among the young, are body piercing and tattooing. The latter at least can be obtained at Southside Tattoo on Southmost Road. A current practice is for dealers to buy homes for resale as seen in “Blessed Home Buyers” on west Boca Chica. People expect to get their income tax refunds promptly. A sign on a Lopez
Supermarket reads, “Efectivo, rapido, e-file, preparacion de impuestos, servicio electronico. ¡Es su dinero!” We’ve also bought so many things that we have no place to store them, so we need Dan’s U-Lock Storage Units. Because we have realized that our resources are not unlimited, recycling is announced on trash bins. Making an effort to care for all our people, we have signs for “Handicapped Parking. Permit Required.” Culture is never static.

Electronic devices, the most obvious new features in our society, are evidenced in signs throughout the city. Copiers have been around for around forty years, though when I wrote my doctoral dissertation I needed to make four carbons as I typed the final copy on an old manual Underwood typewriter. Now Copy Graphics offers sales, service, and supplies for “copiers, digital color, printers, facsimiles, paper handling equipment.” Cell phone companies are advertised throughout the city in both English and Spanish: Verizon, Nextel, Cellular One, T-Mobile. On 77/83 north of town Cellular One proclaims on a large billboard, “hola, vamos a platicar.” Loren Studio offers “digital 24 tracks, for all your recording needs.” Now many signs also refer to the Internet as in www.usps.com, www.sbc.com, www.chase.com and www.helpyourcommunity.org.

One changing cultural issue that has gained prominence in our society is the treatment of women. The patriarchy, established as long as history has been written to tell about it, is under intense fire. At the corner of International Boulevard and Southmost Road, Lamar Signs had a billboard asking for a salesperson. Further down on International at the freeway, Martinez Car Plex asked for a salesperson, either a man or a woman. Signs posted by Friendship of Women, Inc., “a family violence and rape crisis center,” beg women to “Break the silence; make the call.” Sometimes we think of the “good old days,” but in truth most of us know we are better off today. Women may even get special treatment, as they do at Grease Monkey where Wednesday is Ladies Day and full service is $5 off for women. A subtler sign of change is the one at First United Methodist that says the pastor’s name is Laura S. Adams.

Part of the change in women’s status is seen in the businesses that have sprung up to care for the very young and the very old, who used to be cared for in the home by women who did not have paying occupations outside. At the corner of Boca Chica and Billy Mitchell, a large sign announces, “Little Big Ones Daycare Center for children 18 months-13 years of age.” A sign in front of the Chase Bank announces Senior Friends, an organization to benefit retirees. Driving about town I often see a five-seat van that says TLC Adult Day Care. Seniors who need attendance during the day while their adult children hold down jobs can now get that help.

Related to the concern for women and the aged is one for children. Signs decrying and seeking to prevent child abuse are now common: a current one shows a boy’s head with insulting epithets splattered over it: “I’m gonna smack you, stupid, shut up, worthless, idiot, I’m sick of you.” The sign insists, “What a child learns about violence, a child learns for life.” Girl Scouts now has a large billboard saying, “Cookies Anyone?” The advertising department of UTB/TSC has designed some of the most attractive billboards in the city. At the corner of Southmost and International, a large billboard with a close-up of a lovely girl of perhaps seven raising her hand in a classroom reads, “What do you want to be . . . ?” The message is clear: To be successful, the child needs to attend the university when she grows up. To help her do just that, Budweiser put up a large billboard at the corner of Boca Chica and International that said merely, “Stars, Thanks, Budweiser.” The sign was meaningless until one discovered that STARS is an acronym for a scholarship fund founded by L & F Distributors and Anheuser-Busch named South Texas Academic Rising Scholars, set up so that students of South Texas could have an equal opportunity in higher education with students from more affluent communities.
Though spending for social programs has increased, Brownsville is still one of the poorest cities in the nation. Evidence of poverty abounds. Signs in front of grocery stores say “WIC Vouchers Accepted” and “Aceptamos WIC Vouchers.” A Lopez Super Market has on the front signs for Lone Star (the card now used by recipients of the Texas Department of Human Services food stamps) and for Western Union money orders. I received some money not long ago from China via Western Union in payment for some books I purchased for a doctoral student I had known in Xiamen, but mostly relatives and friends of people who are in desperate need of money immediately send money by Western Union. A small store east of town offers to send money another way: “¡Envios de dinero! Orlandi Valuta.” Lavanderias, such as the one at White Orchid Apartments “open to the public,” are scattered throughout the city. Dollar stores, 2004 versions of the old five- and ten-cent stores, have sprung up across the nation, but especially in Brownsville. Boca Chica has a Family Dollar at each end and Dollar Tree and a 99¢ Mart in between. If one must have money now, Cash America Pawn and EZ Pawn exchange valuables for cash quickly. Many notary publics, such as Irma M. Torres and Uresti Immigration/Notary Services on Southmost Road, are doing business in the city, helping poor people with their taxes, with paperwork they need to fill out, and with signatures on official papers. I also saw a sign on Southmost Road offering “Seguros por un mes.” Obviously this offer appeals to poor people who buy their car insurance for one month so they can get their car license.

According to the 2000 census, 91.28% of Brownsville residents claim to be Hispanic and most of these as well as many of the non-Hispanics in the city speak Spanish. The census figures show that 86.6% of Brownsville residents say they speak Spanish and 41.8% of these say they “speak English less than very well.” These figures indicate that more Spanish is spoken in Brownsville than English. G. Richard Tucker refers to research showing that “it is rare to find (minority) language maintenance among immigrant children beyond the third generation even when there are well-developed opportunities for home- or heritage-language education.” David Masci notes that, “surveys show that the grandchildren of immigrants speak only English and not the language of their grandparents’ country of origin.”

Brownsville maintains its Spanish, apparently because many third-generation Hispanics migrate to the large cities such as Houston for better jobs, while immigration continues to bring new monolingual Spanish speakers into the area.

Given the above figures one would expect to find more Spanish on signs than English, but that is not the case. Brownsville’s border culture is a rapidly changing hybrid. Some signs have only Spanish, like the one that said, “¿Cuál es su excusa por no abrocharse el cinturón?” Decorated with a tombstone reading, “Se me olvidó,” it encouraged buckling seatbelts: “Salve una Vida.” The same sign could be seen elsewhere in an English version. The Public Utilities Board has a sign on Padre Island Boulevard that says it is “A powerful part of Brownsville,” but on Southmost Road the sign is in Spanish. Garbage dumpsters even have signs on them in English and Spanish: “Danger, stay out of containers. Peligro, no entre en /os bates de basura.” Gloria’s says, “Travel Agency” on one side and “Agencia de Viajes” on the other. Apparently many business owners expect their clientele to be bilingual. Walgreen’s at Four Corners has two red signs extending from the side of a pole, saying on one “Fotos en una hora” and on the other “Drive thru pharmacy.” Mi Casa Furniture has a sign in front that says, “Open to the public 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday. Cerrado domingo, lunes y martes.”

Certainly Spanish graces many signs. It is surprising though that more evidence of Mexican culture, except Mexican food, doesn’t appear. I did find a sign at Esmeralda’s Flower Shop, Bridal Boutique, and Tuxedo Rental on Boca Chica east of Four Corners that says, “XV Años y Comunion” and “Vestidos de Novias.” Cindy’s Flower Shop on International also offers,
"The newest in hall decorations for quinceañeras and weddings." A banner across International reminded of the Charro Days Fiesta, Feb 22-29. On Southmost Road several halls announce the sorts of parties they host. Hacienda Jacquelina Reception Center has “decoraciones de bodas, XV, aniversarios, bautizos, graduaciones, etc., servicio de banquete.” Julyve’s Decorations on Southmost Road has “party bouncers [not strong-arm waiters, but “moonwalk” contraptions for children], todo para su evento especial, quinceañeras, bodas, despedidas, aniversarios, fiestas, arreglas de iglesia, credit card accepted.” These signs show that many Brownsville residents maintain aspects of Mexican culture. Enrique T. Trueba argues that “Mexican immigrants and other Latinos develop new identities (beyond their ethnic identity) to cope with the challenges of living in American society, and that they create these identities as both genuine Latinos (Mexican, Cuban, Puerto Rican, etc.) and genuine Americans . . . . They find their strength in the creation of new communities that replicate their original communities in rural villages, their original kin systems, and the family ties they had in their countries of origin.”

In this bicultural community, an attempt is sometimes made to appeal differently to each culture. Joe King, Jr., Printer/Imprenta, on Minnesota Road has some signs in English, some in Spanish, and some in both, apparently choosing the language to fit aspects of each culture. Tickets, banners, business cards, real estate signs, and magnetic signs for cars and trucks are advertised in English, seemingly the language of business. “Tarjetas de quinceañera” are advertised only in Spanish as it is the Mexican culture that throws extravaganzas for fifteen-year-old girls announcing they are ready to be considered for marriage. “Graduation cards/tarjetas de graduacion” is printed in both languages. The surprising sign is that for “wedding cards,” which is only in English. Some businesses apparently feel they can win customers by appealing to speakers’ pride in their language and so put up signs in Spanish. Perhaps Southwestern Bell Telephone Company had a topical reason for using Spanish in the sign on International reading, “Ahora llama a Mexico y cuelgate del telefono. Llegaron planes desde solo $9.95 al mes.” Presumably those persons eager to find a bargain when making calls to Mexico intend to use Spanish in their calls. Nextel, with Cellular Solutions, has a billboard saying “Para cruzar la frontera” to eastbound traffic and “Connect faster Brownsville” to westbound traffic. The appeal to speakers of Spanish to use their cell phones for making calls to Mexico makes good advertising sense. The English advertisement though promises speed to the hurried English speaker. The majority of people in Brownsville can read both signs.

The signs reveal that the city’s hundreds of English and Spanish teachers, trying to protect the purity of their languages and halt language change, are fighting a noble but losing battle. Instruction in written Standard American English and formal Spanish may slow language change, but certainly cannot stop the natural process. Five hundred years ago, printing slowed language change, but with globalization and rapid changes in society due to technological advances, change is likely to accelerate again. Kwik Wash Laundry, with its “Laundry” upside down, deliberately subverts Standard English to gain attention. Treviño's Restaurant near the railroad tracks on the west side of town advertises “home style cookin’” and a “drive thru window.” Part of the problem is obviously sign painters, as the owner of “Texas Lounge Bar and Gril” (corner of Paredes Line and Los Ebanos) wanted to know why my husband was taking a picture of his sign. He said he had called the sign painter to ask that he come back and paint in another “V” on the sign but that the painter never returned. We had a similar experience when we took a picture of the “Coffe Shop” painted on a wall on International Boulevard. The owner knew the sign was misspelled, but the painter had spelled the name that way, and he left it. On Los Ebanos, Valley Hemorroid Clinic says it has moved to a new location and nearby is Dental Worx. The “x” for “ks” is made of two
crossed toothbrushes, but the sign illustrates society's penchant for creative spelling. Signs in Spanish have errors too. The accent is routinely left off signs that say such things as Resaca Jardin Apartments or “nacionalizacion de pickups.” In the latter example, standard Mexican Spanish would be camionetas instead of the Tex-Mex “pickups.” Actually the sign makers have done exceedingly well considering how many signs they have put up. And language change cannot be halted.

English predominates on the signs in Brownsville to an astounding degree if we consider how many of the people speak Spanish and are of Mexican descent. English must be seen as the prestige or standard language for so much of it to be used. However, the most interesting signs use Tex-Mex, a hybrid mixture of English and Spanish widely spoken in the city. It is not new for English to mix with another language. Justin Fox sums up the case for English as a global language:

> It’s a Germanic language, brought to Britain around the fifth century A.D. During the four centuries of French-speaking rule that followed the Norman Conquest of 1066, the language morphed into something else entirely. French words were added wholesale, and most of the complications of Germanic grammar (genders, cases, etc.) were shed while few of the complications of French were added. The result is a language with a huge vocabulary and a simple grammar that can express most things more efficiently than either of its parents. What’s more, English has remained ungoverned and open to change—foreign words, coinages, and grammatical shifts—in a way that French, ruled by the purist Academie Francaise, has not.5

The Story of English adds, “Today in this new global state, English is probably finding more variety of expression and more local color than at any time since the Elizabethan ‘golden age’... Spoken and written, it offers a medium of almost limitless potential and surprise...”6 English is well suited for mixing with Spanish. Most of the people of Brownsville thrive on their mixture. If names are included, great numbers of the signs have both English and Spanish on them. Many of the Spanish-only signs (such as the Wells Fargo signs in Spanish) are not put up by Spanish-only speakers, but by major corporations wishing to capitalize on Hispanic pride in the Spanish language. The signs represent the changing bilingual, bicultural nature of Brownsville.

One way to understand the presence of English on so many of the signs is to look at who has settled in Brownsville. Spanish is alive and well here because many people are first-generation Americans after having emigrated from Mexico. Usually the immigrants learn only enough English to get by; however, their children go to school in English and become fluent in both languages. The third generation is likely to be much better in English than in Spanish. Spanish remains alive and well in Brownsville because immigration continues apace. The cause of continued immigration must be found in the relative economies of Mexico and the United States. Because more chance for economic advancement exists in the United States, many people are willing to take the risks involved in crossing the border. With an economic reason for coming, they are eager to fit in, to find jobs, to make a place for themselves in American society. Therefore, they attend English classes at night and go to extremes to ensure that their children are truly bilingual. Photis and Yvonne Lysandrou support this idea: “There is a general acknowledgement of the fact that those groups within certain communities who can command English, or standardized forms of English in particular, have access to the most prestigious posts or to the most lucrative jobs,
while those who cannot are consigned to positions of inferior rank or status.”7 Most of the signs in Brownsville have an economic connection. Someone spends money on a sign desiring to make money from the expenditure. Buyers want their signs to be in correct English. Even if Spanish is the language they are most comfortable speaking, they want to be a part of mainstream America’s affluence, and they see acquisition of English as a ticket to American prosperity. Kevin Finneran suggests “that the threat to English dominance is imaginary. Three out of four Hispanics over the age of 65 speak English . . . and among those 18 to 25, 94% speak English.”8

With a constant influx of new people, many from Mexico, and the traffic always on the move, the people and the culture of Brownsville are dynamic, never static. Every day the signs provide an adventure because they change constantly. This afternoon on International a “Ready” sign from Homeland Security had changed to a Burger King advertisement that promised “BK fish fillet 99¢.” Another one just like it has replaced the Wells Fargo sign at the freeway and Boca Chica. Yesterday I noticed a new business on east Boca Chica announcing “Planchando/ironing Express 99¢.” The day before a new Furr’s Cafeteria sign on International appeared saying, “Recibe más en Furr’s Buffet/Fresh.” The banners across the street preparing for Charro Days are now gone. Soon all the political ads will have been taken down also as the election was yesterday. Two of the large billboards east of Four Corners have disappeared completely within the last couple of weeks.

The signs of Brownsville do not catch my attention because of their strangeness the way the signs in Xiamen did; instead I find their mixture of English and Spanish comfortable—but then I grew up in the Rio Grande Valley and that is where I am at home.

I have neither driven every street of Brownsville nor entered every public building to read all of the signs, but I have looked at thousands. I have entertained myself reading them while driving. Basically the signs are designed to provide direction to travelers, to encourage business, or to change public behavior. The Brownsville signs are distinctive to the border city, not only reflecting the culture but helping to shape it. Paul Jay says that “The culture of English is so thoroughly hybridized, so inexorably based on complex exchanges among these various cultural traditions, that it is getting ever more difficult to identify a dominant Western discourse that is not being subordinated to, and shaped by, this accelerating mix of sources and discourses from outside Britain and the United States.”9

The signs of Brownsville lead to the conclusion that though English is the economic language of the community, it is every day being influenced by Spanish and is changing to fit the culture and the twenty-first century. The signs of Brownsville do not catch my attention because of their strangeness the way the signs in Xiamen did; instead I find their mixture of English and Spanish comfortable—but then I grew up in the Rio Grande Valley and that is where I am at home.

The University of Texas at Brownsville

Endnotes

1 Though most signs are printed in all upper-case letters, I have used normal capitalization to make the text easier to read. I have not noted line division as signs usually put very little on each line and shift lines only for convenience. I have also added punctuation from time to time where a line division made the commas unnecessary on the sign but the words don’t make sense in a text without punctuation.

1860, Fort Brown Drill Field
by Jessica Cisneros
La Masonería en Matamoros: Trasfondo y Bosquejo Histórico
por
Minerva García Lerma, Joseph Robert Davis, y J.A. González P’. M.’.

Durante la edad media se denominaban masones los albañiles. Los integrantes de este grupo contaban con una serie de reglamentos internos estrictos mediante los cuales se transmitían los secretos del diseño de la construcción de las grandes obras. Con el tiempo se crearon hermandades en las que se enseñaba y practicaba una doctrina secreta de sus respectivos oficios y artes.

En el siglo de la ilustración se inició la masonería moderna. Dado que uno de sus propósitos era el descubrimiento de la verdad por encima de los dogmas, esto le permitió convertirse en una sociedad secreta donde se discutían toda clase de conocimientos científicos, filosóficos y literarios. Así fue como las logias masónicas constituyeron sociedades secretas que combatieron al absolutismo y actuaron como un medio de difusión de ideas políticas. En la actualidad, ya no son sociedades secretas, pero sí son sociedades con secretos, y éstos, con el único y exclusivo afán de distinguir a los agremiados de sus distintas cofradías, así como a los miembros de las otras sociedades vinculadas.

México Masónico

Las logias masónicas que tanto influyeron en la vida política de México durante la primera etapa de su organización nacional, se habían comenzado a establecer en el país desde antes de la independencia por oficiales del ejército venido de España. Las primeras logias pertenecían al Rito Escocés. En 1819, era ya tan grande el número de adeptos que a instancias de ellos se publicó la Constitución Española en 1820. Al consumarse la Independencia, se afiliaron en las logias del Rito Escocés los generales Bravo, Barragán, y otros muchos políticos, que formaron el partido escocés, el cual llegó a tener gran influencia en el gobierno y en el congreso.

Entre 1804 y 1807, se reunían a ocultas algunos masones procedentes del Rito de York y del Escocés entre los que se encontraba el Lic. Manuel Bernal. Se reunían en el Callejón de las Ratas, y analizaban la situación en que se encontraba nuestro suelo, invadido por España, azotado por la Inquisición o Santo Oficio. La terminación de la Libertad del Rey español creó una situación muy especial porque al no haber rey en España y siendo nuestro suelo una dependencia de ellos, se estudiaba el inmediato futuro político que inspiró la guerra de Independencia. Es obvio entender que en estos estudios tomaron parte los iniciadores de la Guerra de Independencia, como el Cura Hidalgo, Los Rayón, Allende, y el Lic. Bernal, quien murió antes del Grito de Independencia.

La primera logia masónica en México se fundó en 1806. Era del Rito Escocés, y pertenecían a ella el Licenciado Primo de Verdad, el Marqués de Uluapa, personajes notables como Don Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla, Don Ignacio Allende, Don Miguel Domínguez (esposo de Doña Josefa Ortiz de Domínguez), Don Gregorio Martínez, Don Feliciano Vargas, Don José María Espinosa, Don Miguel Betancourt, y Don Manuel Luyando (en cuyo domicilio se reunían, cita en Callejón de las Ratas, Número 4, en la ciudad de México).

El Virrey Iturrigaray trató a los masones con simpatía, y aún aprobaba el movimiento de Independencia que se estaba gestando. Este movimiento se inició públicamente en 1808 por el propio Licenciado Verdad. Debido a la renuncia de Fernando VII al trono de España, ocupado por José Bonaparte, el Virrey fue hecho prisionero junto con algunos miembros de esa logia. La persecución de los masones, considerados herejes, estuvo a cargo de la Santa Inquisición. Por lo tanto, se suspendieron los trabajos de dicha logia en la casa del Callejón de las Ratas. Se reunían
en distintas partes sin lugar fijo; pero donde con más frecuencia, era en el Pensil, casa de campo del Señor Luyardo, ubicada en el pueblo de San Juanico. Es de suponerse que su objeto siempre fue la independencia.

El Rito Escocés se reestableció a partir de 1813 por las tropas españolas que vinieron a sofocar el movimiento de la Independencia. En realidad, sus integrantes eran liberales en el sentido español. Excusando a los mexicanos y los pocos que habían dimitido, se puede asegurar que pertenecían a familias nobles y españolizadas. Entre ellos estaba Nicolás Bravo, quien promovió la integración de logias verdaderamente mexicanas, aunque pertenecientes al Rito Escocés.

El 12 de abril de 1817, el Gral. Francisco Javier Mina, inspirado por el entusiasmo de Fray Servando Teresa de Mier y Noriega, organizó una expedición que (saliendo de Inglaterra, y pasando por Baltimore, Filadelfia y Nueva Orleáns), llegó a la boca de Río Bravo, frente a lo que después se llamó Bagdad, bajaron a cargar agua y víveres, imprimiendo allí la primera proclama libertaria en aguas tamaulipecas. En esta proclama se invitaba a los mexicanos a continuar la lucha iniciada por Hidalgo, Allende, y demás patriotas, y que aún sostenían con fe Don Vicente Guerrero y Don Guadalupe Victoria. Con la reapertura del puerto en la boca del Río Bravo fincaron su hogar en ésta muchos europeos y norteamericanos, engrosando las filas de la masonería con los que vinieron del interior del país, aumentando los elementos de la Logia “Valor” no. 53. El General de Mier y Terán y los miembros de su comisión trabajaron en esta logia.

Estas logias intervinieron en el derrocamiento del Imperio de Iturbide, sostenido por la burguesía española y por el clero. Las logias integradas por españoles perdieron sus puntos de vista conservador en cuestiones políticas, y prácticamente desaparecieron en 1825. En el año de 1825, Don José María Alpuche e Infante, cura de una parroquia del Estado de Tabasco, y senador por el mismo Estado, concibió la idea de formar el Rito de York en México. Fue apoyado por Don Ignacio Esteva, Don Miguel Ramos Arizpe, y el Coronel Don José Mejía, entrando en el proyecto también el Presidente de la República Don Guadalupe Victoria. Se formaron cinco logias simbólicas, y después el Ministro Plenipotenciario de los Estados Unidos recabó las cartas o patentes reguladoras. (Relato del Sr. Alfredo Sosa Morales miembro activo de la Logia “Fénix Número 116.”)

El Rito Nacional Mexicano fue fundado el 25 de marzo de 1826. Nace un poco después de establecida la República. Como ya se dijo, el Rito Nacional Mexicano fue fundado por masones Yorkinos y Escoceses con la finalidad de establecer un Gran Oriente en México que, sin variar los fundamentos esenciales de la Masonería, tuviera preponderantemente una actividad nacionalista, sin depender de ninguna potencia. Por medio de sus recomendaciones, la Gran Logia de Nueva York otorgó cartas patentes a cinco logias: (1) Tolerancia no. 450, el 10 de febrero de 1826, (2) Luz Mexicana no. 454. Estas logias tomaron los números siguientes en la formación de la Gran Logia Nacional Mexicana: Tolerancia” no. 1, de la cual era venerable maestro el cura Don José Ma. Alpuche e Infante; Luz Mexicana no. 5; U.M. Agustín Biseca; Rosa Mexicana no. 2, V.M. General Don Vicente Guerrero; Federalista no. 4, V.M. Coronel Don Félix Arbusto; e Independencia no. 3, V.M. Don Lorenzo, el Ministro de Hacienda Don Ignacio Esteve.

Al establecerse el régimen federal se creó una nueva asociación masónica, la de los yorkinos, bajo la dirección de Sr. Joel R. Poinsett, Ministro del Gobierno de Los Estados Unidos ante el gobierno mexicano. Al llegar a México Sr. Joel R. Poinsett, se da la tarea de dividirnos más. Al darse cuenta que los criollos y mestizos que consumaron nuestra Independencia eran los mexicanos más preparados en todas las órdenes, buscó la forma de colaborar con aquellos masones que habían formado una institución mixta con fines políticos, llamada los Novenarios. Don Guadalupe Victoria, antiguo escocés, formó otra logia política, llamada “El Águila Negra,”
de carácter ultra radical.

Estas logias fueron el germen vital de las logias “yorkinas,” a las que el señor Poinsett prestó toda su ayuda consiguiendo darles cartas patentes de regularidad masónica en los Estados Unidos de América, (regularidad muy dudosa ya que conforme al derecho masónico, México era terreno ocupado por los “escoceses,” y los “yorkinos” estaban invadiendo su jurisdicción). A grandes rasgos, describimos a Poinsett como una persona de porte distinguido, descendiente de protestantes franceses, de regular estatura. Estuvo en México en 1812 como espía. Se presentó ante Iturbide como agente de los Estados Unidos, pero se convenció de que no podría manejarlo, y se retiró de México. Al estar el poder en manos de Don Vicente Guerrero, Poinsett regresó a México como ministro plenipotenciario. En la primera recepción que diera en la embajada norteamericana, según reseña del periódico “El Águila Mexicana,” Poinsett hizo colocar en uno de los extremos del salón el retrato de Moctezuma y en el otro una alegoria de América. Era evidente que el homenaje a Moctezuma llevaba el propósito de borrar el recuerdo del pasado español en México en favor de Moctezuma. Esto estableció una división entre los mexicanos, aunque, según el Plan de Iguala, debieran estar unidos, indios, mestizos, criollos y españoles en torno a nuestra patria.

Con fino sentido de la realidad que se vivía en México, Poinsett prestó apoyo a las logias “yorkinas”. Aquí cabe mencionar que entre los principales Yorkinos destacan los nombres de Lorenzo de Zavala, Miguel Ramos Arizpe, Valentin Gómez Farias, los generales Vicente Filisola, Vicente Guerrero, Mariano Arista, y otros destinados a desempeñar papeles muy significantes en la serie de desgracias que iba a sufrir la nación mexicana frente al país vecino, de cuyos intereses Poinsett fue fiel servidor durante los veinte años posteriores.

Los Comienzos Masonicos en Matamoros

Los primeros brotes de actividad masónica en la Heroica Matamoros, Tamaulipas, datan del año 1828. El 25 de abril de aquel año, se publicó un catálogo de las logias bajo obediencia de la Gran Logia Nacional Mexicana, en el cual (entre las 102 logias registradas) aparece la primera logia formada en dicha ciudad, con el nombre de Valor Número 53. Entre los miembros de esta logia se encontraban tan distinguidos masones como el Coronel Alejandro Yh ary (jefe de la guarnición de la Barra de Santiago), quien recibiera una carta solicitándole carta patente para la instalación de una logia en el pueblo de San Felipe de Austin (centro de las colonias anglo-americanas en la provincia de Texas). Otro máson ilustre que llegó a afiliarse con la Logia Valor Número 53 fue un hombre de ciencia, el General Manuel Mier y Terán, quien llegó a esta ciudad el 7 de marzo de 1829, procedente de Laredo. El General Mier y Terán se hallaba en la región cumpliendo la comisión que le había asignado el Presidente de la República, el General Guadalupe Victoria, comisión que consistía en deslindar y definir los límites territoriales con los Estados Unidos. Si bien dichos límites ya quedaban definidos tras el Tratado Adams-Onis de 1829, al país vecino, anhelante de extender su territorio, ya buscaba modificarlos en su provecho.

Llegaban en compañía del General Mier y Terán varios otros masones del Rito Escocés, entre ellos militares y científicos que permanecieron unos cuantos meses en esta ciudad haciendo estudios cartográficos, botánicos, y zoológicos de la región y por descontado contribuyendo con su presencia y trabajo a los actividades de la mencionada logia. En ese mismo año, también llegó a Matamoros el General Anastasio Bustamante para supervisar la reapertura del puerto, lo que iba a atraer a muchos nuevos residentes, mexicanos y extranjeros, a esta ciudad, acrecentando la membresía de la Logia Valor Número 53. Otros renombrados masones que aquí trabajaron
son el General José María Carvajal (líder federalista y uno de los fundadores de la Logia Río Grande Número 81 en la vecina ciudad de Brownsville, la que recibió su carta patente en 1851), y el General Nicolás Bravo (comandante militar de la Línea del Bravo y líder de la masonería escocesa en México). El General Bravo se estableció en esta ciudad para dirigir las operaciones militares contra los separatistas de Texas.

De las 102 logias en 1828, había 13 ambulantes formadas de diferentes regimientos y batallones del ejército dispersadas por toda la República desde Yucatán y Chiapas en el sur hasta Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo León y Tamaulipas al norte. Tanta era la confusión que los "yorkinos" se hacían llamar el partido de los "Americanos" o del "Progreso," y los "escoceses" eran acusados de "retográdase" o "conservadores." De este río revuelto el señor Poinsett sacó gran partido, ya que ni "yorkinos" ni "escoceses" tenían tiempo de darse cuenta del abandono en que estaba el norte del país.

En aquel mismo año de 1828, el 10 de febrero, llegó a Laredo, Tamaulipas, el General Don Manuel de Mier y Terán, jefe de la masonería escocesa en México, para cumplir la comisión conferida por el General Don Guadalupe Victoria, quien comisionara a Bustamante para que vigilara a Don Manuel de Mier y Terán. Éste llegó acompañado de otros masones escoceses como el Coronel Constantino de Tarnava, el Teniente de Estado Mayor Don José Batres. Bustamante se trasladó de Laredo a Matamoros para inspeccionar la reapertura del puerto en abril de 1828. En enero de 1829 regresa a la capital al informarse de la revolución que había proclamado Don Vicente Guerrero, noticia que le confirmaron al llegar a San Fernando, Tamaulipas, quedando al mando de Tamaulipas otro masón, el General Don Felipe de la Garza.

El 7 de marzo de 1829 arriban a Matamoros el Gral. Terán y su comisión; se le ordena permanecer en Matamoros para seguir estudiando la flora y la fauna y la calidad de las tierras, además de levantar mapas de la ciudad y de la costa. También se sabe que el General José Antonio Mejía, "yorkino," Paredes y Arrillaga vino a reforzar al Coronel Mariano Manzanares, y construyó el fortín de Paredes en el paso de la Anacuita.

Don Macedonio Capistrán, después general, fue alcalde segundo en 1835, y el General José Urrea, también "escocés," inició su ofensiva contra los texanos en esta ciudad. Don Nicolás Bravo, jefe de la masonería escocesa en México, fue comandante militar de la línea El Bravo en esta ciudad. En 1837, dirigió las operaciones contra los rebeldes texanos. Un año antes, un masón "yorkino," Don Vicente Filisola, había ocupado la comandancia militar. Don Victorino T. Canales, "escocés," fue alcalde en 1842 y gobernador interino del Estado en 1845. En la logia Río Grande, no. 81, de Brownsville, Texas, existen documentos que demuestran que el General Don José María de Jesús Carvajal procedía de la Logia Frontera, no. 28, de Corpus Christi, y que fue regularizado en la Logia Río Grande número 81, el 28 de agosto de 1848. También en el archivo de dicha logia existe un documento en el cual el señor José María Ariciaga, procedente de la Logia Harmony, no. 6, de Galveston, Texas, pidió su carta de quite el 11 de noviembre de 1850.

En el Medio del Siglo XIX

recibió su carta patente el 23 de enero de 1851. El General Carvajal y el Coronel José María Canales fueron quienes proclamaron el Plan de la Loba, luchando dentro de las filas del Partido Liberal durante la invasión francesa, siendo agente de compras del gobierno de Don Benito Juárez, así como gobernador y comandante militar en Tamaulipas en 1866, recibió con el General Don Juan José de la Garza la plaza de Matamoros del imperialista Gral. Tomás Mejía.

Desafortunadamente, muchos documentos de sumo valor e importancia se perdieron por causa de las múltiples zozobras políticas e intervenciones extranjeras que afligían a la República Mexicana, y muy especialmente a esta región fronteriza, a mediados del siglo XIX. Estos documentos, si aún existen, podrían, sin duda, dar mucha luz sobre el pasado histórico de ésta y otras tantas logias que aquí iban a desempeñar su trabajo. Sin embargo, desconocemos hasta cuando trabajaron normalmente. No vuelven a aparecer datos fidedignos de actividades masónicas en Matamoros hasta el año 1860. En el Archivo del Supremo Consejo de la Jurisdicción Sur de los Estados Unidos existe un documento constatando que el Supremo Consejo de México extendía carta patente a una logia llamada Tamaulipas, Número 2, en la Ciudad de Matamoros. Esta logia debía su existencia a un grupo de masones escoceses encabezados por el Licenciado Vicente L. Castro, uno de los fundadores del Supremo Consejo de México, legalmente constituido en Veracruz. Esos masones solicitaron y obtuvieron carta patente para organizar dicha logia. Entre los miembros activos de Tamaulipas, Número 2, se encontraban muchos de los personajes más importantes en el Matamoros de aquella época.

El Licenciado Vicente L. Castro, fundador del consejo constituido legalmente en Veracruz el 21 de diciembre de 1860, solicitó y obtuvo carta patente para organizar una logia simbólica en la Heroica Matamoros. Esta solicitud fue hecha al Gral. Comonfort por la frontera el 21 de julio de 1861 en Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas. El 21 de octubre de 1861, se expide la carta patente a la logia simbólica Tamaulipas, no. 2. Coincidió la fecha con la contienda iniciada entre los rojos y criolinos, lucha estéril que terminó a los 96 días gracias a la labor conciliadora realizada por Comonfort. El Lic. Vicente L. de Castro murió en Brownsville el 23 de enero de 1864.

Después de conciliar a los rojos y criolinos (encabezados los primeros por Don Jesús de la Serna y los criolinos por Don Cipriano Guerrero), el General Comonfort fue nombrado gobernador y comandante militar del Estado. Organizó con elementos de ambos lados la primera división del norte, que saliera de Tamaulipas el 8 de agosto de 1862 a defender la patria invadida por franceses, belgas, y austriacos que llegaron a México invitados por los conservadores.

A continuación mencionaremos algunos nombres de personajes de orientación masónica de aquella época. Don Manuel Junco de la Vega, refugiado español y comerciante destacado, fue el padre del ilustre poeta y literato Don Celedonio Junco de la Vega. Dr. Francisco de Asís Molas, español, fue maestro en el Instituto Literario de San Juan y uno de los fundadores del Casino Matamorense. Don Francisco Vizcaya fue un comerciante cuya familia se trasladó posteriormente a Laredo, Texas. Don Oscar Petipain también fue comerciante. Don José Alexander, otro comerciante, encontró un fin trágico rumbo a Corpus Christi en agosto de 1872.

En el último tercio del siglo XIX, por iniciativa de algunos masones que se sentían deseosos de afiliarse mundialmente, solicitaron al Rito Nacional Mexicano, y obtuvieron de este un Exequáutur o sea un documento que autorizaba a trabajar más, únicamente congregados bajo el nombre de Rito Escocés Antiguo. Aceptado a partir de entonces, se establecieron cuerpos Masónicos bajo su jurisdicción.

Lic. Don León Aragon se inició en Brownsville, Texas, el 20 de agosto de 1866, y siete años después se afilió a la Logia Tamaulipas, no. 2. Los hermanos Práxedes y Atenógenes Uribe, fueron agricultores y ganaderos, y uno de ellos fue administrador de la aduana local. Don Teodoro

Bajo el Porfiriato

La Logia Tamaulipas, número 2, siguió sus trabajos normales hasta el 4 de julio de 1876, fecha en que se celebra su última tenida. El cese de sus trabajos se debía a los grandes cambios políticos ocurridos en México después del Plan de Tuxtepec y el inicio del régimen de Don Porfirio Díaz. El abate de actividades masónicas en Matamoros iba a durar cinco años, hasta el día 8 de septiembre del 1881. En esta fecha, trece miembros de aquella logia se reunieron para establecer un templo a la amistad y la virtud, dando a su nueva logia el nombre de Aurora Boreal, número 82, que se conserva hasta hoy en día. Entre este notable grupo de hermanos masones destacan los nombres de Esteban Jambro (jefe del grupo), Eleuterio del Baro, y W.C. Chamberlain (un ministro Protestante). La Logia Aurora Boreal, Número 82, recibió su carta patente de la logia anterior para su debida cancelación.

Al organizarse la Gran Dieta Simbólica en México bajo la dirección del ilustre general Sostenes Rocha, queda instalada la Gran Logia de Tamaulipas con su sede en Nuevo Laredo. Quedó también bajo su jurisdicción Aurora Boreal, con el número asignado de 175. Fue durante esta misma época que se construyó también el templo material, colocándole su piedra angular el 16 de enero de 1895, y terminando su construcción ese mismo año. La ceremonia de inauguración y consagración se llevó acabo el jueves 10 de noviembre de 1895. La construcción y apertura de este edificio templo coincidó con el comienzo de una verdadera época de oro para la masonería matamorense, siendo uno de estos personajes más destacados el Doctor Miguel Barragon Flores. Este hombre distinguido ocupó varios puestos en la primera planta eléctrica en esta ciudad, director del hospital civil en varias ocasiones, y Presidente Municipal en 1894 y otra vez en 1913. Aurora Boreal, número 175, incluye entre sus miembros a muchos hombres ilustres en la educación, letras, negocios, y política de aquel entonces.

Al desaparecerse la Gran Dieta Simbólica en el año 1900, los masones miembros de Aurora
Boreal número 175, lograron que se estableciera en esta región en la Gran Logia Benito Juárez, cuya jurisdicción auspició a tres logias: Aurora Boreal (ahora designada Número 1), Honor y Trabajo Número 2, y Estrella del Norte Número 3.

La Logia Tamaulipas, no. 2, trabajó hasta julio de 1876, debido a la efervescencia política que estalla con el plan de Tuxtepec reformado en Palo Blanco el 21 de marzo de 1876. Esta revolución fue encabezada por el Gral. Profirio Díaz, miembro del Rito Nacional Mexicano, rito al que estaban afiliados hombres de la reforma como Don Benito Juárez, Gómez Farias, y Ocampo.

El Gral. Díaz era popular en el norte, y los masones escoceses tamaulipecos colaboraron con él en la rebelión contra el Lic. Lerdo de Tejada. Entre ellos se encontraron Don Manuel Treviño, en cuya casa en Brownsville se organizaron las juntas revolucionarias. Participantes incluyeron al Gral. Don Andrés Treviño (hermano de Don Manuel), el General Servando Canales, General Don Juan N. Cortina, Don Sabas Cavazos, Coronel Práxedes Cavazos Guerra, Coronel Juan Treviño Canales, Don Domingo López de Lara (que después fuera ministro y tesorero general de la nación), y Don Cipriano Villanueva (quien fue Presidente Municipal en 1899 con el apoyo de los matamorenses y tamaulipecos antes citados).

Don Porfirio atacó Matamoros el 2 de abril de 1876, estando sus tropas al mandó del matamorense General Don Manuel González. Coronel Don José Leonidas Cristo defendió el fuerte Casa Mata. De 1876 a 1880, ocuparon la presidencia municipal los señores General Baltazar Fuentes Farias, Don Domingo López de Lara, el Coronel Juan Treviño Canales, y el General Gregorio Soto, todos ellos miembros de la Logia Tamaulipas, no. 2.

El 20 de noviembre de 1881, se erigió un templo a la amistad y la virtud, dándole a esta logia el nombre de Aurora Boreal, Correspondiéndole el no. 82 dentro del catálogo de logias auspiciadas por el Supremo Consejo de México. Encabezaba este grupo de caballeros Don Esteban Jambru, Sr. Don Eleuterio del Barco, Don Meliton H. Cross, el General Don Ignacio Martínez, Don Juan D. McMillan, el Dr. Ministro Evangélico Chamberlain, los hermanos Alfredo y Edgar Laurent, Don Manuel Álvarez, el notario público Don José Centeno, el Coronel Teodoro Santa Cruz, Don Gerardo Follain, y Don Florentino Zamudio. Entre otros miembros prominentes que cabe mencionar se encontraban los señores Benito Viñas (quien, asociado con los hermanos Medrano y Don Julio Eversman, instaló la primera empacadora de carnes en la entonces Congregación de las Comas, sección 25 de este municipio, embarcando carne salada a Cuba y Estados Unidos. Don Alfredo Passement fue Presidente Municipal en el 1891, y en algún tiempo administrador del correo. Don Antonio Cavazos fue Presidente Municipal en 1895, y Don Jorge Strother fue Presidente Municipal en 1896. Una de las personalidades masónicas más vigorosas de aquella época fue el Doctor Miguel Barragón Flores. Era de carácter dinámico, siendo el fundador de la primera planta eléctrica que tuviera Matamoros. También fue el director del hospital civil en varias ocasiones (primeramente fue hospital militar en 1883, ya que él era mayor médico militar). Ocupa la Presidencia Municipal en 1894 y en 1913 hasta la toma de la plaza por el también masón Gral. Don Lucio Blanco.

En la Primera Mitad del Siglo XX

En Matamoros a fines del siglo pasado, había una Logia Verdad, número 47, que se extingurió a raíz de la revolución de principios del siglo. La Gran Logia Benito Juárez siguió sus labores sin interrupción durante trece años, hasta el mes de marzo de 1913, cuando los trastornos políticos asociados con la Decena Trágica obligaron la suspensión de sus actividades. La logia Aurora Boreal se vio por lo tanto forzada a abatir sus labores en ese mismo mes de marzo de 1913.
Las puertas del templo permanecieron cerradas durante los próximos diez años, hasta que las condiciones políticas y sociales en el país se normalizaron. Ya tranquilo el país, el Rito Nacional Mexicano estuvo dirigido por el ilustre y poderoso hermano Manuel Esteban Ramírez. En este tiempo, se constituyó la Respetable Logia Simbólica Verdad, número 50, Ignacio Ramírez, número 62, en Reynosa, y Cuauhtemoc, número 88, en Brownsville.

El 16 de abril de 1923, tras recibir la debida autorización de la Gran Logia de Tamaulipas, se reunió en Matamoros una convocatoria de reorganización que posteriormente restableció la Logia Aurora Boreal con la designación de número 14, designación que lleva hasta hoy en día. Así es que la Logia Aurora Boreal fue la continuación del trabajo desarrollado por los masones matamorenses desde 1828, cuando formaron la Logia Valor, número 53. La Logia Aurora Boreal abanderada del Rito Escocés en Matamoros tal como sus antecesores, ha sido testigo y participante de más de 160 años de historia en esta región fronteriza, compartiendo la prosperidad o el infortunio según las marcas de la política, la economía, y la guerra.

En 1934 formaron un alto cuerpo con el nombre de Muy Respetable Gran Logia del Estado Valle de Tamaulipas. El 5 de junio de 1936 un grupo de hermanos que pertenecieron a la Verdad, número 50, decidieron formar una logia que se llamara Félix, número 116, entre tanto en Rio Bravo se fundó otra logia con el nombre Obreros del Silencio, número 122, ya habiendo cinco logias, todas del Rito Nacional Mexicano.

**En la Segunda Mitad del Siglo XX**

Los señores Esteban González Ancira, Rafael Pérez, y Florentino Cuellar, conscientes de la necesidad de integrar a la esposa, hijas y hermanas, propusieron la formación de un grupo de damas para que iniciaran pláticas culturales, las cuales principiaron el 12 de junio de 1932. Dichas reuniones tenían como finalidad entablar amistad entre las damas y sus familias, llevando a cabo festivales, cenas tamaladas, tanto aquí como en la vecina ciudad de Brownsville. Con los fondos económicos recabados con dichas actividades se logró construir el auditorio de la logia, el cual fue inaugurado el 12 de octubre de 1935, estando al frente como Venerable el Sr. Don Eliseo Paredes Manzano y como Gran Maestro el Sr. Don Amado G. Gutiérrez. El 20 de febrero de 1947, se eligió la primera directiva para la formación de las bases de la organización, quedando integrada de la siguiente manera: Presidenta: Sra. Aurora Arrese de Castillo Canales; Vicepresidenta: Sra. Luisita F. de de León García; Secretaria: Sra. Juanita Martinez de López; Prosecretaria: Sra. Maria Palacios de Juárez Ochoa; Tesorera: Sra. Otilia G. de González Ancira; Protesorera: Sra. Lydia Treviño de Laurent; Vocales de Beneficiencia y cultura: Sras. Maria Guadalupe Rangel de Paredes Manzano y la Sra. Lilia Calderón de Martínez. Fue el Sr. Don Rubén A. Martínez el que le diera todo su apoyo a la naciente asociación, poniéndose bajo los auspicios de la Logia Aurora Boreal, número 14. También le dio su lema que lleva: “La dignificación de la Patria por la acción de la mujer.” Con este modesto principio, la A.B.C. se ha extendido a otras regiones del país que han seguido su ejemplo. Sostienen jardines de niños, centros culturales, cocina, tejido, etc. Se dan fiestas culturales y conferencias. Se presta auxilio a los hospitales, casas de cuna, y asilos de ancianos; y se lleva consuelo y auxilios a las personas que, por algún motivo, se encuentran privadas de su libertad.

La respetable Logia Simbólica Fénix, número 116, fue fundada el 5 de junio de 1936 por los señores Julio Treviño (primer venerable maestro), José de la Paz García, Lucas Cavazos, Gumersindo Fabela, Luis Solís, Ignacio Guisante, Bartolomé García, Alberto Vela, Alberto Vela, Ernesto Longoria, Sabas Garza, Rafael Solís Ruiz, y Arturo Garza González. Está jurisdicticcionada

Fue el cubano Fernando Suárez Núñez que tuviera la idea de la Asociación de Jóvenes Esperanza de la Fraternidad (AJEF), y la propusiera con resultados efectivos. La primera Logia AJEF del mundo se estableció en la Habana, Cuba, el 9 de febrero de 1936 bajo los auspicios de la Logia Perseverancia. Su noble y loable finalidad es pugnar por educar a los jóvenes hijos de masones en todos los órdenes: físico, intelectual, y (sobre todo) moral, despertando sentimientos de superación, amor, y devoción a la Patria. Fue hasta el 22 de febrero de 1946, siendo Venerable el Sr. Leopoldo Marquez Ocampo, que se fundó la Logia AJEF Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla, número 3, instalada el 7 de septiembre del mismo año. Desde aquella fecha esta institución paramasonica ha recibido en su seno a jóvenes que más tarde se han distinguido en el ámbito profesional, artístico, político siendo hombres útiles a la sociedad.

The University of Texas at Brownsville

Logias Actuales de Matamoros, Tamaulipas

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Agradecimiento: Con todo respeto deseamos expresar profundo agradecimiento al Dr. Clemente Cruz Avendaño y al Dr. Fernando San Miguel Tosky por su invaluable cooperación para la elaboración de este trabajo, y a Florentino Cuellar por su “Resena Histórica de la Venerable, Leal y Respetable Logia Simbólica Aurora Boreal No. 14 de la H. Matamoros, Tamaulipas.”
Con la llegada de los conquistadores también llegaron los primeros caballos a nuestro país, y con el nacimiento de las haciendas, este animal llegó a ser indispensable en las faenas del campo. A medida que los terratenientes fueron criando su ganado en estado de libertad, fue imponiéndose la necesidad de lazarr, jinetear y amansar. Los mexicanos se valieron de la reata, en cuyo manejo se volvieron expertos, por lo cual la silla de montar tuvo que modificarse, para facilitar las nuevas suertes. Las suertes de la charrería nacen en distintos lugares del país, por ejemplo, se cuenta que la suerte de colear nació en los llanos de Apán, Hidalgo, donde un picador perseguía a un toro a campo abierto, lo tomó por el rabo, y tirando de él, lo derribó. De ese hecho surgió la suerte de colear como se hace hoy.

La Charrería es un deporte puramente mexicano que consiste en la realización de suertes con caballos y yeguas dentro de un lienzo charro, así como la habilidad para florear la cuerda. El charro es la imagen representativa del mexicano en el mundo entero. La charrería se practica en todo el país, y Matamoros no es la excepción. Inclusive en Brownsville el charro ya es un símbolo que tiene su momento culminante cada año en las Fiestas del Charro. La charrería es parte de la historia de México. Fue hasta 1921 cuando surgió la Asociación Nacional de Charros, A.C., y con ella la charrería como deporte nacional. En 1933, por decreto presidencial, se declaró el 14 de septiembre como día nacional del charro y además como el único deporte puramente mexicano.

Inicios de la Charrería en Matamoros

Los inicios de la Charrería en Matamoros datan de principios de siglo. No era considerada como un deporte. La manera que se practicaba era mediante las jornadas diarias de los rancheros y hacendados. Esta era una actividad de campo donde los rancheros y campesinos tenían ganado y la necesidad de lazarr caballos, amaestrar yeguas, etc. Esta actividad era realizada por trabajadores del campo, de clase social baja, los cuales utilizaban la ropa ordinaria de esa época para realizar este tipo de actividad como pantalones rallados, camisas de manta, y sombreros anchos.

La primera Asociación de Charros en Matamoros se constituyó el 19 de junio de 1938 en el edificio Cárdenas-Galván que ocupaba en ese entonces la Cámara Nacional de Comercio. Estaba presente un grupo de hombres de negocios de los más prominentes en esta ciudad fronteriza, la que tomaría parte en las Fiestas Patrias, en los Jaripeos, en los Charros Days de la vecina Ciudad de Brownsville, y en todas las fiestas de sabor nacional que se verificaran en la región. El informe oficial que rindió la asociación fue el siguiente:

En la H. Ciudad de Matamoros, Estado de Tamaulipas a los 19 días del mes de junio de 1938, comparecieron las personas que al final calzan la presente, cambiándose impresiones con el objeto de formar una agrupación que se encargue de impulsar el deporte charro, nombrándose al Sr. Don Santiago Solís Gómez como presidente provisional, escrutadores a los C. Lisandro Martínez y Juan N. Guerra, con el objeto de que se encarguen de dirigir los trabajos para designación de la mesa directiva que funcionaría desde esa fecha.

La primera mesa directiva de la Asociación Regional de Charros (1938) estaba consistuida
por el Presidente Don Ernesto Elizondo, el Vice-Presidente Don Noe Garza, el Secretario Don Eliseo Paredes, el Pro-Secretario Don Santiago Solís Gómez, el Tesorero Don Rubén A. Martínez, el Sub-Tesorero Don Ladislao Cárdenas Jr., y los Vocales Don Donasiano Garza, Don Juan N. Guerra, Don Lisandro Martínez, y Don Raúl Garza.

Tomando la dirección de la primera Mesa Directiva fue Don Santiago Solís Gómez, presidente provisional. Enseguida se discutió el nombre que llevaría esta agrupación y se aprobó por unanimidad que sería “Asociación Regional de Charros.” Estaban presentes también los señores miembros de la misma Don Eliseo Luna, Don Roberto González, Don Anastacio Zárate, Don Florentino Cuellar, Don Pablo Martínez, Don Julio Solís Gómez, Don José S. López, Don Miguel Jaime, Don Gregorio Sierra, Don Leonides González, y Don Ramiro T. Hernández.

Las primeras Fiestas Mexicanas y Las del Charro Days en Brownsville se iniciaron con gran entusiasmo. Consistían en desfiles grandiosos en ambas ciudades, con impresionantes carros alegóricos y bailes populares. Un gran promotor de la charrería en Matamoros fue el Sr. Everado M. González Villarreal, el cual participó en este desfile junto con miembros de la Asociación. La charrería en Matamoros se practica desde el inicio de esta primera asociación en 1938. En 1949, se formó la Asociación de Charros de Matamoros, donde con más formalidad se empiezan a practicar las suertes charras.

**El Primer Lienzo Charro**

El primer Lienzo Charro en el cual se practicaba el deporte de la charrería se localizaba enseguida de lo que antes era Garage U.S. Royal, propiedad del Sr. Jesús Rodríguez, quien fuera presidente en ese entonces de la Asociación de Charros de Matamoros. Se practicó 2 años, y de ahí, siendo presidente de los Charros el Sr. Guillermo Guajardo, acondicionó un lienzo por la Carretera Lauro Villar.

Los miembros activos de la Asociación de Charros de Matamoros que practicaban el deporte de la charrería en 1951 eran Don Everardo M. González Villarreal, Don Edelmiro Benavides, Don Humberto García M., Don Isaura Benavides, Don Raúl C. González, Don Ricardo Guajardo, Don Alfonso Guajardo, Don Ramiro Guajardo, Don Amadito Garza, Don Raúl Uribe, Don Ambrosio Villarreal, Don Pedro del Villar, Don Rodrigo Alfaro, y Don Raúl de la Garza. En 1963, se cambia la asociación a un nuevo Lienzo Charro, ubicado en los terrenos de la Feria y Exposición por el Sendero Nacional. En este mismo año, se funcionaron la Asociación de Charros de Matamoros y Villa del Refugio, cambiando al nombre de “Villa de Matamoros”.

El 26 de agosto de 1967, el Sr. Everardo M. González Villarreal, uno de los más grandes impulsores de la charrería en Matamoros y Tamaulipas, fue galardonado por parte de la Federación Nacional de Charros, otorgándole “La Espuela de Oro.” Hasta ese año, era la tercera que se otorgaba a nivel nacional. Isto fue por haber sido factor decisivo para la construcción del Lienzo Charro de la Asociación Villa de Matamoros en 1967, el cual se encuentra ubicado por Carretera Sendero Nacional KM. 1, que hasta la fecha se utiliza para la práctica de la charrería.

En la actualidad, existen en Matamoros cuatro asociaciones charras: 1) **Villa de Matamoros** - Presidente: Everardo M. González, fundada en 1938, 2) **Enrique Hernández Tomeyoso** - Presidente: Juan Benavides, 3) **San Juan de Los Esteros** - Presidente: José Luís Lozano, fundada el 10 de marzo de 1988 y inaugurada el 24 de junio, Día de San Juan, y 4) **La Costeña** : Presidente: Hector Urtiaga, fundada en marzo de 1988.
Lo que Piensan los Charros de este Deporte

El Sr. Juan Benavides (Henrique Hernández Tomeyoso) menciona que la charrería ha tomado mucho auge y es muy practicada por una gran cantidad de gente, gracias en parte a la labor que estas asociaciones han hecho, las cuales se han encargado de promover la disciplina y el amor a este deporte entre sus miembros. Dijo, “La charrería es un deporte muy mexicano, que requiere de mucho tiempo y disciplina. Lo he practicado por 40 años. Mi padre nos heredó el gusto por el deporte, y lo practicamos con mucha pasión.”

Everardo González (Villa de Matamoros) dijo, “La charrería es un deporte muy caro. Considero que se necesita mejorar la calidad e imponer más disciplina a quienes la practican. Es muy desagradable ver a gente practicar sin la vestimenta adecuada. Esto degenera el deporte.” Lic. José Luís Lozano (San Juan de Los Esteros) dijo, “Siempre me ha gustado la charrería porque es un deporte 100% familiar. Creo que nos mantiene unidos, y es un deporte muy sano,” dijo Sr. Gustavo Morales (La Costeña). “Creo que el gusto por los caballos lo traemos de herencia. Mi abuelo fue charro en Veracruz, y mi papá es entrenador de caballos. Mi hermano y yo hemos aprendido mucho,” dijo Andres Aradillas Palmero, charro completo y arredador de Caballos (San Juan de Los Esteros/La Costena).

Escaramusa

La charrería permite la participación de las mujeres a partir de los 1950s. Su participación fue directa cuando nació la escaramusa como deporte, la cual consiste en una serie de doce movimientos al compás de la música del mariachi. Los trajes de las mujeres generalmente son mucho más caros que los de los hombres. Un traje de escaramusa puede costar hasta $7,000 pesos. Existen equipos de escaramusas con edades desde los seis años (para torneos oficiales infantil de 11 a 14 años y adultas de 14 en adelante).

Ex-vestimenta

Actualmente se celebran torneos donde se califica desde la vestimenta hasta el caballo de charro y escaramuzas, poniendo especial cuidado en los detalles, como botas, faldas, pantalones, camisas, sombreros, e incluso la tela utilizada. La vestimenta de un Charro depende de la ocasión. Así hay traje de faena, chumeteado, de media gala, y de gala. Este último es siempre negro, con botonaduras de plata. Es con el único que se puede usar pistola, y con el no se monta a caballo. Pero el traje se compone básicamente de pantalón, camisa, botas, sombrero, chaparreras, espuelas y, por supuesto, la cuarta.

Suertes Charras

Las principales suertes de la charrería son nueve, y se realizan en un rectángulo de sesenta metros unidos a un anillo de cuarenta metros de circunferencia, llamado lienzo. Se les llama: (1.) Cola de caballo, (2.) Piales, (3.) Suerte del Coleadero, (4.) Jineteo de Novillo, (5.) Terna en el ruedo, (6.) Jineteo de yegua, (7.) Manganas a pie, (8.) Manganas a caballo, y (9.) El paso de la muerte.
Bibliografía

Carta constitutiva del Lienzo Charro Villa de Matamoros, 1938.
*Charrería Nacional Mensual*, Tomos 126, 161, 165, 177, y 169, Información General Nacional

Periódico el Mariana, marzo de 1999

Entrevistas a tres presidentes de las cuatro asociaciones de Matamoros, con especial agradecimiento a ellos:

(1.) Lic. José Luis Lozano, Presidente de la Asociación San Juan de los Esteros
(2.) Ing. Everardo González, Presidente de la Asociación Villa de Matamoros
(3.) Sr. Gustavo Morales, Tesorero de la Asociación La Costeña
(4.) C.P. Andrés Aradillas Palmero, Arrendador de Caballos
For more than two centuries, Germans have been one of the most significant ethnic groups in
the United States. They began migrating to America during the seventeenth century and after the
Revolutionary War more Germans settled in the United States than people from any other country.
Between the end of the Napoleonic Wars and 1970, approximately 6.9 million Germans left their
homes and embarked on the long journey across the Atlantic in order to start their new lives in the
United States. They accounted for about fifteen percent of the total immigration to this country.
During the latter half of the nineteenth century, annual German arrivals outnumbered those from
any other country and, between 1880 and 1920, they were the largest single ethnic element among
first-generation immigrants. During the time frame of this study, Germans reached their highest
percentage among the foreign-born population in the United States, about 4 percent from 1860 to
1890 (see Table 1). Beginning in the 1890s, German immigration dropped abruptly and decreased
to a trickle until World War I.\(^1\)

German immigrants also played a major role in the settlement and development of Texas. Already
during the 1820s and 1830s, Germans flocked in larger numbers to Mexican Texas. The
foundation and development of these early German colonies in Central Texas, especially the Texan
Hill Country, have been the subject of a great many historical studies. The primary focus of the
majority of these investigations rested on the colorful history of German settlement before the
Civil War, during a period when a “German Belt” stretching from roughly Galveston in the east
to the Hill Country in the west emerged. Yet, this focus partly distorts the history of the German
presence in Texas because, firstly, far more Germans arrived in the state after the end of the Civil
War, and secondly, they also settled in significant numbers outside the “Belt.” During the two
and a half decades after the war more German immigrants relocated to Texas than had come in all
the years of immigration before the war. Between 1870 and 1890, the German-born population
in Texas more than doubled from 23,985 to 48,843 (see Table 2). Adding second generation
Germans to these numbers, a picture evolves for 1890 in which Texans of German ancestry clearly
outnumber residents of Mexican descent in the state.\(^2\)

One of the regions outside the “German Belt” in which German immigrants settled, before
and after the Civil War, is the Lower Rio Grande Valley. Probably because of their small overall
numbers combined with the relative remoteness of the region their history has generated hardly
any scholarly interest. The story of their settlement on the Lower Rio Grande under unique ethnic
circumstances, in a predominantly Hispanic environment, is the subject of this study. On a first,
superficial, glance it appears that the history of the German population in the region adheres
neither to German settlement patterns in Texas in particular nor in the United States in general.
However, the following detailed demographic analysis of the German Rio Grande population will
reveal a different picture. It will demonstrate that the history of the Germans on the Lower Rio
Grande is the story of two distinctly different communities, separated not in space but time, which
largely conform to regular patterns of frontier development and German immigration history.\(^3\)

This study of German immigrants in the Lower Rio Grande Valley is based primarily on
information extracted from United States decennial census manuscripts and will address, among
other things, the number of Germans in the region, their percentage among the foreign-born
population, their age structure, gender ratios, marital status, and residence patterns. However,
before such an analysis can be presented, two crucial elements must be addressed: the definition of "Germanness" and the nature of the used sources.

A major problem in studying German immigration is how to define "German." Being of German origin is a vague and imprecise concept. German immigrants were an extraordinarily heterogeneous group – they were people from a variety of provinces with linguistic, religious, political, and socio-economic distinctions. Moreover, Germany as a nation state did not come into existence until 1871. Prior to German unification, United States census schedules list numerous kingdoms, principalities, and duchies as the places of birth of the immigrants that are generally considered to be ethnically German. Beginning with the 1880 census most of the time the schedules list simply "Germany" as their place of birth.

For the purposes of this study, to provide for accuracy and consistency of statistical data, the only viable solution to determine "Germanness" is to include only individuals who were born within the confines of what became the German Empire under Bismarck in 1871. This likely excludes some individuals who were ethnically German but were born outside those borders, such as Austria-Hungary, and include some who considered themselves to be of a different ethnicity but were born within Germany, such as the French of Alsace-Lorraine. In addition, this study will not distinguish between Germans of different religious affiliations because the census sources do not provide the necessary information. This means that German Jews will be included in this study as part of the larger German immigrant population of the region. For some this might be a controversial proposition. However, numerous studies show that, at least into the early twentieth century, a majority of German Jews in the United States viewed themselves as part of the larger contingent of the German immigration into the country, and many displayed a "dual identity," identifying themselves equally as Jews and Germans.

As mentioned above, the following demographic analysis of first generation German immigrants on the Lower Rio Grande is largely based on the census records of the United States. Some difficulties and problems permeate an analysis that relies on this type of source. The nature of the census schedules and the way data was gathered pose one kind of problem. The original purpose for conducting decennial censuses was to collect population numbers on which the government would base the number of political representatives and taxation. Consequently, they prepared the reports primarily in order to count the number of residents and were taken in long decennial intervals. The census-taking deputy marshals considered other information that was to be collected, such as sex, age, occupation, value of property, and place of birth, as only secondary and failed to treat the collection of this data with perfect accuracy. In addition, they had to rely on the information provided to them by the individuals who were counted, and this material might not always have been accurate or truthful. Sometimes census takers missed or misspelled names; they omitted names if individuals were not at home at the time they took the census; and occasionally they did not reach and record people who lived in remote areas. Despite these problems and limitations, the census schedules provide a wealth of information that can provide an accurate though not ideal demographic profile of the German immigrant population on the Lower Rio Grande.

No conclusive statistical data can be gathered for German immigrants in Texas, and for this matter the Lower Rio Grande region, before 1850. However, it is evident that several Germans had settled in the area during the 1830s and 1840s. The most prominent of these German individuals was Adolphus Glavecke who moved to the Lower Rio Grande in 1836 at the age of seventeen. He soon emerged as one of the most influential Euro-American landowners in the region and was able to increase his fortunes by marrying into a prominent local Mexican merchant family.
Glaevecke was, at least until 1850, accompanied and assisted in his endeavors by two German family members, Charles and Caspar Glaevecke, probably his older and younger brothers, who clerked for Adolphus’ in-laws. When the Texas Legislature formally established Cameron County in 1848, Adolphus and Caspar were elected County Tax-Assessor and Constable reflecting their prominent stature in the area.6

By 1850, 100 individuals of German birth resided in the Valley on the American side of the Rio Grande River. The first reliable source for the German population on the Lower Rio Grande in Cameron and Hidalgo Counties is the 1860 United States Census. By then, of the 7,220 Cameron and Hidalgo residents, 130 were German-born. They constituted 1.8 percent of the total population, which was substantially lower than the 3.3 percent reflected by the 1860 census for the whole population of Texas (see Table 2). During the following decade, the number of German immigrants slowly increased to 153 by 1870. This was the highest level that they would reach during the nineteenth century. While the population in the Lower Rio Grande Valley slowly increased until the turn of the century, the number of Germans steadily declined, reaching a low of thirty-three in 1900 when they constituted a mere 0.1 percent of the region’s total populus. The first two decades of the twentieth century brought a reversal of this trend. While Cameron’s and Hidalgo’s population grew two and a half times from 22,932 to 74,772 in 1920, the number of Germans increased by more than tenfold. By 1920, the 340 German-horns 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. The analysis of the censuses clearly reveals two trends: from 1870 to 1900, the German population constantly declined, while after the turn of the century their numbers significantly were on the rise again.7

Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Lower Rio Grande Valley had a high percentage of foreign-born residents. By far the largest segment of this sub-population was of Mexican heritage. From 1870 to 1920, more than 90 percent of all foreign-born residents in the region were of Mexican birth. Of course, early on, many of them were actually born where they resided but were labeled foreign-born after the Rio Grande Valley’s “acquisition” during the Mexican-American War. As Table 3 illustrates, Germans represented, from 1890 onward, the largest segment of European immigrants in the area. In 1870 and 1880, Irish individuals constituted the largest European contingent in the Valley. The vast majority of them were, however, members of the United States Army stationed along the Rio Grande. Another remarkable observation that can be extracted from this table is the relatively large presence of French immigrants in the area. The population decline before 1900 and increase after 1900 among the German population as described above parallels exactly the trends that can be described for all Euro-Americans—a steady decline up to the turn of the century and then a significant increase. One constant is that the German-borns in Cameron and Hidalgo counties from 1870 to 1920 always accounted for about one-fourth of all residents of European ancestry.8

An examination of the location of the residences of German immigrants reveals a succinct distinction between the declining pre-1900 and rising post-1900 population (see Table 4). Up to the turn of the century, Germans almost exclusively resided in Cameron County, whereas afterward a growing number of them took up their homesteads farther up the river in Hidalgo County. From 1860 to 1900, the vast majority, upward of 90 percent, resided in Brownsville. Established in 1848, across the border from Matamoros, Brownsville was for the most part of the century the only city on the American side of the Lower Rio Grande River and therefore possessed the greatest attraction to German merchants and artisans. In the twentieth century, Brownsville’s German population increased again after the nineteenth-century decline, but now the majority of new
German arrivals settled in the predominantly rural areas of Hidalgo County, which provided the greater attraction for German farmers. By 1920, almost 70 percent of the 340 Germans resided in Hidalgo County, and more than half of them lived in the hinterlands of the newly growing towns along the developing railroad lines up the river.9

An examination of gender ratios and marital status of Germans in Cameron and Hidalgo counties from 1850 to the 1920’s also substantiates the division of German immigration into pre- and post-1900 periods (see Tables 5 and 6). With the exception of the 1850 census (Male: Female ratio 60:40), throughout the nineteenth century, the German immigrant population was predominately male – from 1860 to 1880 in excess of 78 percent. Only after the turn of the century does the number of female German immigrants significantly increase, until in 1910 and 1920 German women made up more than one-third of this sub-population. Hand in hand with these developments the nature of the marital status of Germans in the region progressed. During the nineteenth century, always more than half of them were single – ranging from 82.3 percent in 1860 to 59.6 percent in 1880.

The “new” German immigrants, male and female alike, in the Valley of the early twentieth century in contrast were much more likely to live as married individuals in family units. By 1920, the ratios of earlier decades had been reversed. Not only did the percentage of married Germans drastically increase during the early twentieth century, but also the choice of marriage partners along ethnic lines significantly changed as will be illustrated later. For the most part of the nineteenth century, the Lower Rio Grande was a region in which predominantly single male Germans tried their luck as merchants and artisans, while the general ratio of gender and marital status in the twentieth century is reflective of a more settled, family based agricultural community. Trends regarding gender ratio and marital status reflect general patterns of regional and national German-American immigration. During the nineteenth century, the number of males clearly exceeded the number of females among Euro-Americans, and in remote frontier regions, this ratio was usually unbalanced in favor of the male population at least until the end of the nineteenth century.10

Thus far the demographic description of the German population on the Lower Rio Grande has sufficiently established that two German communities existed – a pre- and a post-1900 German settlement. Two sets of questions, however, remain: first, who were these German settlers and why did their numbers so significantly decrease toward the turn of the century? Second, why did another group of Germans during the early twentieth century choose to come to the Valley?

The portrayal of the nineteenth-century Germans, thus far, is partly misleading. It gives the impression of an initial population that during the remainder of the century slowly declined through either the death or relocation of its members. A comparison of the German individuals listed in the 1850, 60, 70, 80, and 1900 censuses, however, records a different scenario. Very few Germans resided in the Valley for a longer period of time and a considerable impermanence in this population is observable. The majority of nineteenth-century Germans left the Valley again after a very short period of residence. In the meantime, German newcomers arrived, however, in increasingly smaller numbers. Why so many Germans left the Valley after a short period cannot conclusively be decided, but several factors certainly contributed to this “exodus.”11

From a certain perspective, the original numbers of German immigrants in 1860 and 1870 are “inflated.” Immigration to certain places entails, at least to some degree, a voluntary choice by the migrants. Yet a substantial number of Germans who resided in the Valley did not have much control over their own destiny. From 1860 to 1880, between 67.3 and 48.8 percent of all German immigrants on the Lower Rio Grande were members of the United States Army (see Table 7).
In 1860, they were stationed either at Camp Rio Grande or Fort Brown, and many of them were originally from Baden. During the two following decades, almost all German military members resided at Fort Brown in Brownsville. Their situation and experiences were unique. They did not make an independent choice to come to the region. Their stay in the valley was part of their military assignment and during their time in the region they lived in a different, often isolated, military environment.\textsuperscript{12}

Many of the Germans who came to the Rio Grande as enlisted members of the United States military had enrolled on the East Coast. For many the decision to join the military resulted from their economic situation. German immigrants with little or no assets, like immigrants from other countries, especially the Irish (almost all Irish residents of Hidalgo and Cameron counties during the nineteenth century were soldiers), primarily viewed military service as a stable source of income with the possibility for upward economic mobility. For some service also promised a free journey into the American West, which they otherwise would not have been able to afford. These soldiers hoped they would be able to explore their own opportunities after their enlistment expired. It is obvious that the majority of them left the Rio Grande while still on active duty, however, only one German soldier decided to make the region his home after his service was completed. Henry Hune, a Saxon who was stationed at Fort Brown in 1860, after the completion of his service, settled in Brownsville, married a local Hispanic woman, and practiced the tailor trade in the city at least until 1880.\textsuperscript{13}

Another factor that partly explains the large turnover of the German population on the Rio Grande was the Civil War. The disruption caused by the war contributed to a higher mobility rate and at least some Germans decided to avoid the consequences of the war by moving into Mexico. However, it appears that the single most important factor to distinguish between those who stayed and those who left was economic success.\textsuperscript{14}

The vast majority of civilian German immigrants on the Lower Rio Grande throughout the nineteenth century were either entrepreneurs or skilled craftsmen (see Table 7). Many of these entrepreneurs were German and German Jewish merchants who hoped to profit in the Mexican-American trade and moved, together with German craftsmen, to the growing city of Brownsville, the main juncture of this trade. This movement of German merchants and artisans to the United States, Texas, and the American West during the nineteenth century is rather typical as Germany, throughout the century, had a substantial surplus of both. Yet the initial promise of profit that the Rio Grande, Brownsville and the Mexican-American trade showed turned into disappointment for many Germans and, for that matter, other Euro-American merchants and artisans, and consequently many of them left the region in their quest for economic success.\textsuperscript{15}

Very few German settlers on the Lower Rio Grande were able to fulfill their dream of economic betterment. From 1850 to 1870 between 91.0 and 77.7 percent of all (see Table 8) German residents in the region did not own any property. The majority of property owners fell into the modest category of $100-$2,000. Only a few fortunate individuals were able to accumulate property in excess of $2,000. It was exactly these individuals who made the Valley their permanent residence while a majority of the unsuccessful left again. Among the individuals who were able to make their business succeed and maintain their residence in the area were Daniel Wolf and his wife Caroline. Wolf moved together with his wife to Brownsville before 1850 and established a general merchandising business. By 1850 he accumulated $17,000 in property, and a decade later, his fortune had increased to $27,000. Wolf operated his business in Brownsville into the 1880s.\textsuperscript{16}

Another German-Jewish merchant who operated his dry-goods merchant business for several
decades on both sides of the Rio Grande River in Brownsville and Matamoros was Solomon Asheim. Together with his wife, Pauline, Solomon moved to Brownsville from Mexico in the 1860s and operated his business until his death in the 1880s. His wife remained in Brownsville until after 1910. Also, a dry-goods merchant, Bernhard Kowalski, made his business prosper in Brownsville for a couple of decades. Bernhard and Sophia Kowalski had, by 1870 after their move into the Valley from Louisiana, accumulated $25,000 in business property. A decade after the Kowalskis, Henry and Pauline Bollack moved from Bavaria to the Rio Grande and opened a dry-goods business. What is remarkable about their story is that after Henry’s death his wife Pauline was able to run the business on her own into the 1920s.17

One of the most prominent Brownsville residents of the nineteenth century was German hotelier Henry Miller (Heinrich Müller). Miller, a native of Bremen, moved before 1850 to Brownsville, where he ran a general merchandising business until he opened the “Miller Hotel” in 1858. His hotel business flourished, developing his establishment into the most elegant hotel in Brownsville and increasing his financial worth from $26,000 in 1860 to $75,000 in 1870. From 1870 onward, he operated his hotel together with his new wife Charlotte who immigrated into the United States in 1855, also from Bremen, at the age of twenty-five. Less spectacular, but still successful was the Krause family. Before 1850, George Krause moved together with his wife Augusta, a native of Saxony, to Brownsville, where he taught music for decades. Beyond his teaching, Krause also engaged in the sale of musical instruments, which was apparently profitable and earned him personal and business property worth $11,000 by 1870.18

These success stories of German immigrants on the Rio Grande during the nineteenth century were, however, the exception and not the rule. At best, what could be expected was to make a modest living like Jacob Brendel who worked as a shoemaker in Brownsville from 1880 to the 1920s or John Schaeffer who constantly struggled to provide for his wife Lena as merchant, carpenter, and sailor from 1850 to 1880. The majority of Germans who chose the Lower Rio Grande as their destination of immigration failed and left the region again. They were, however, not alone in this fate. Most other Euro-American immigrants in the nineteenth century went through a similar process in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. What initially promised a bright future after the early settlement of the region in the aftermath of the Mexican-American War soon turned out to be a land of very limited opportunities for German residents and newcomers alike.19

Several factors contributed to this environment of declining opportunities and attractiveness for Euro-American immigrants. In the first place, there was very little free or cheap land available that would have attracted newcomers. Second, the region was hard to reach from the north and beyond the trade with Northern Mexico little business opportunities existed. This trade required, and gave opportunities to, only a limited number of merchants, professionals and skilled craftsmen in supporting occupations. What hampered the economic progress of Brownsville and the whole Lower Rio Grande region the most was the inability to tie the region into an American transportation infrastructure. Numerous attempts to connect the Lower Rio Grande Valley with a railroad line to the American north failed throughout the nineteenth century. While, farther up the river, Laredo, after the arrival of the Texas Mexican Railroad from Corpus Christi in 1881, flourished, the Lower Valley’s economy stagnated.20

Under these circumstances it is not at all surprising that the flow of immigrants, including Germans, into the Lower Rio Grande Valley was reduced to a trickle during the late nineteenth century and the ones who came did not stay for a long period of time. The majority of the few Germans who remained in the area by the turn of the century had one thing in common: most of them had migrated to the Rio Grande from Mexico and not from the United States. Surprisingly,
though, the number of Germans who intermarried with local Hispanic women was very low (see Table 9). In other regions of the American Southwest these intermarriages helped strengthen the ties between the established Mexican societies and the newly emerging Euro-American communities and there Germans frequently united in wedlock with women of influential Hispanic families. Apparently a climate in which these unions could profit both sides did not prevail in the Lower Rio Grande and thus their occurrence was rather small.\textsuperscript{21}

At the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century the German presence in the Lower Rio Grande Valley was reduced to a mere thirty-three individuals. Their demographic profile at that time resembled more the make up of a twenty-first century community of “Winter Texans” than that of an immigrant community on Southwestern borderland. The few Germans who remained in the area had grown old on the Rio Grande. While until 1870, the German population consisted primarily of individuals in the age range from twenty to forty years of age, the average age of the German immigrant in 1900 had increased to sixty-two years (see Table 10). Many of them not only had reached retirement age, but had actually retired from their occupations as merchants and artisans. They were entering the dusk of their lives close to the souls of the spouses whom they had laid to rest on the banks of the Rio Grande. At the turn of the century, the remaining Germans hardly resembled a community that could be a foundation for a notable German presence in the Valley during the twentieth century. Yet such a renewed German presence in the area evolved during the first two decades of the twentieth century. The revival of the German immigration into the Lower Rio Grande Valley was embedded in the economic resurgence of the region that began with the arrival of the railroad in Brownsville in 1904 and these Germans were very much different from their compatriots of the nineteenth century. The vast majority of them were farmers who made their way into the Valley from the American Midwest.\textsuperscript{22}

In 1904, the arrival of the St. Louis, Brownsville, and Mexico Railroad opened a new era for the economy of the Lower Rio Grande Valley. Tying Cameron County and, soon after, Hidalgo County into the national transportation system of the United States laid the foundation for a flourishing agricultural development of the region. As soon as the link was complete, a slow but steady flow of European immigrants, who had previously settled in the Midwest, ensued. Attracted by promotional offers made by a variety of real estate companies, they took up farms along the Rio Grande River spreading west from Brownsville into Hidalgo County. Next to Scandinavians, Austrian, and Swiss an increasing number of Germans participated in this movement (see Table 3). At the same time, renewed efforts were made to bring German immigrants into Texas. Primarily, Midwestern Germans were offered and encouraged to take the opportunity to develop new futures on the fertile soils of southern Texas and new German agricultural colonies sprouted down south of the “German Belt” along the Gulf Coast all the way to the Rio Grande into the 1920s.\textsuperscript{23}

The German immigrant community(ies) that grew on the Lower Rio Grande during the early twentieth century was distinctly different from its nineteenth century counterpart. First, Germans settled in different areas. In contrast to the nineteenth-century Germans, who had chosen almost exclusively Brownsville as their residence, the German farmers of the twentieth century increasingly followed the railroad lines up the river into Hidalgo County. They settled in the newly evolving towns of Mercedes, Donna, McAllen, and Mission and in their hinterlands (see Table 4). By 1920, the occupational landscape of German immigration also reflected a complete reversal of the nineteenth century. Now 65.4 percent of all Germans were engaged in agriculture whereas only a mere 13.2 percent were making a living either as merchants or artisans (see Table 7). Unlike in the nineteenth century, the new settlers moved to the Valley primarily in family units and by 1920, 77.1 percent of all German immigrants were married (see Table 6).
At first glance, the influx of German immigrant farmers during this period appears to contradict general patterns of German American immigration. After 1890, German immigration to the United States was primarily associated with the acquisition of labor (Arbeitsnahme) and no longer with the acquisition of land (Landnahme). However, the vast majority of the twentieth-century German immigrants on the Lower Rio Grande came to the United States when the primary motivation for emigration was still Landnahme. Of the German individuals listed in the 1910 and 1920 censuses, about 70 percent arrived in the United States before 1890 and only about 15 percent after 1900. During the late nineteenth century, they had tried to establish and develop farms elsewhere in the United States prior to their move into southern Texas and thus their movement fully conforms to general patterns of German American migration.24

An analysis of the prior American residences of German immigrants in Cameron and Hidalgo counties reveals an interesting picture. Whereas the German immigrant of the pre-1900 era came primarily from other parts of the American South or from Mexico to the Valley, 154 of the 340 Germans in the region in 1920 relocated from the American Midwest, overwhelmingly from the Northern Great Plains states (see Table 9). It appears plausible that at least some of these individuals were part of larger patterns of chain migration that brought people from specific regions on the Plains to particular areas on the Lower Rio Grande. Probably, at least some of them knew each other already before their arrival in the Valley and maintained contacts and friendships in their new homes. The 1910 and 1920 censuses reveal that German farmers formed some clusters of settlement, especially in Hidalgo County, that could have laid the foundation of small German ethnic enclaves. For example, farmer families Adam and Lena Adrian, Charles and Paula Seeleman (all four from Minnesota), George and Anna Grosshauser (with their German-born children), Nick Huber, Joseph and Otto Keak, all emigrating from Germany in 1908, settled in close proximity near Mercedes sharing some of their farmland.25

Two additional factors point toward the creation of German cocoons and to the maintenance of a German ethnic identity in the Lower Rio Grande Valley during the early twentieth century. By 1920, almost 80 percent of all local German immigrants were married either to first or second-generation German spouses (see Table 11). Given that families are the primary carriers and promoters of ethnic identity, this circumstance provided for an environment in which “Germanness” could gain a longer lasting foothold. In addition, twentieth-century German Valley immigrants did tend to share living space with each other more so than their pre-1900 compatriots. In 1910 and 1920, clearly more than half of them shared accommodations with other Germans, whereas earlier, the vast majority – up to 80 percent – lived without the immediate company of a fellow German (see Table 12).

No evidence can be gathered that would conclusively indicate how these German farmers fared economically. An evaluation of home ownership, provided in the 1910 and 1920 censuses, shows that the vast majority of them owned their own farm (see Table 13). By 1920, 100 of the total of 129 German farmers owned their land either outright or with a mortgage and only eighteen were tenant farmers. Even though it might be too speculative to draw solid conclusions on the basis of this little information, it appears that these farmers were at least able to make a modest living off the land that they plowed. Economic stability, as a prerequisite for residence stability, combined with stable family structures, the presence of German marriage partners, German friends and neighbors, gave the German immigrant population the potential for laying the foundation for longer lasting German ethnic communities on the Lower Rio Grande during the early twentieth century.

The above provided demographic profile of German immigrants reveals that two distinctly
different German communities existed on the Lower Rio Grande during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – two communities that were separated not in space but time, before and after the railroad. The demographics of the German immigrants in the nineteenth century, portray a rather typical Euro-American borderlands population: relatively young, highly mobile, mainly single merchants, artisans, and soldiers who tried to fulfill their dreams of success on a Southwestern frontier. Failing to realize these dreams, due to economic stagnation, many left the region again and only few newcomers arrived, until, by the end of the century, the remaining German contingent consisted primarily of widowed retirees. The arrival of the railroad in the Lower Valley in 1904 signaled the beginning of a new age of German immigration. Attracted by growing agricultural opportunities, German immigrant farmers, who had previously resided in the American Midwest, relocated to the Lower Rio Grande in growing numbers, laying the foundation of a more stable German ethnic presence in the region during the following decades.

As much as the preceding demographic analysis tells us about Germans on the Lower Rio Grande, one cannot overlook that it can reveal only a part, the surface, of the German story in the region. It does not tell us anything about the personal experiences of these individuals. How did they perceive their life in the region, its society and culture? In turn, how did the local society perceive and treat them? What influence did Germans have on the development of the regional society, its culture, economy, politics, and how did their experiences in this new environment change them? These are just a few of the questions that a future, in depth study, based on more archival research, will have to answer in order to uncover the complete story of German immigrant settlement on the Lower Rio Grande during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The University of Texas at Brownsville

Table 1
First Generation German Immigrants in the United States’ Population, 1850-1920

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>U.S. Population</th>
<th>German-born Population</th>
<th>German-born % of foreign-born</th>
<th>German-born % of total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1850</td>
<td>23,192,000</td>
<td>583,774</td>
<td>26.0</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1860</td>
<td>31,443,000</td>
<td>1,276,075</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1870</td>
<td>39,818,000</td>
<td>1,690,533</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880</td>
<td>50,156,000</td>
<td>1,966,742</td>
<td>29.4</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>62,948,000</td>
<td>2,784,894</td>
<td>30.1</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>75,995,000</td>
<td>2,663,418</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>91,972,000</td>
<td>2,311,237</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>105,710,000</td>
<td>1,686,108</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Table 2
First Generation German Immigrants in Texas and Lower Rio Grande Valley (Cameron and Hidalgo Counties), 1850-1920

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1850</td>
<td>212,592</td>
<td>(*)</td>
<td>8,541**</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1860</td>
<td>604,215</td>
<td>19,823</td>
<td>7,220</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1870</td>
<td>818,579</td>
<td>23,985</td>
<td>13,386</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880</td>
<td>1,591,749</td>
<td>35,347</td>
<td>19,306</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>2,235,527</td>
<td>48,843</td>
<td>20,960</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>3,048,710</td>
<td>48,295</td>
<td>22,932</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>3,896,542</td>
<td>44,917</td>
<td>40,886</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>4,663,228</td>
<td>31,062</td>
<td>74,772</td>
<td>340</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(* Data not available
** Includes Cameron, Starr, and Webb Counties

Table 3
German and Foreign-Born Population in the Lower Rio Grande Valley (Cameron and Hidalgo Counties), 1870-1920

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>1870 no.</th>
<th>1870 %</th>
<th>1880 no.</th>
<th>1880 %</th>
<th>1890 no.</th>
<th>1890 %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foreign-born [%of total population]</td>
<td>8,591</td>
<td>[64.2]</td>
<td>10,128</td>
<td>[75.7]</td>
<td>8,517</td>
<td>[40.6]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>7,868</td>
<td>91.8</td>
<td>9,486</td>
<td>93.6</td>
<td>8,185</td>
<td>96.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irish</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austrian / Swiss</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Euro-American (total)</td>
<td>553</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>362</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>299</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of German-born of Euro-American</td>
<td>27.7</td>
<td></td>
<td>31.5</td>
<td></td>
<td>24.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 3 continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>1900 no.</th>
<th>1900 %</th>
<th>1910 no.</th>
<th>1910 %</th>
<th>1920 no.</th>
<th>1920 %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foreign-born [% of total population]</td>
<td>7,439</td>
<td>[32.4]</td>
<td>14,726</td>
<td>[34.9]</td>
<td>26,217</td>
<td>[35.1]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>7,272</td>
<td>97.8</td>
<td>13,819</td>
<td>96.8</td>
<td>24,515</td>
<td>93.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>340</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irish</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austrian / Swiss</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Euro-American (total)</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>380</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>1,419</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>283</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of German-born of Euro-American</td>
<td>23.4</td>
<td></td>
<td>26.8</td>
<td></td>
<td>23.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4
Residences of German Immigrants in the Lower Rio Grande Valley (Cameron and Hidalgo Counties), 1860-1920

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County/Town</th>
<th>1860 no./%</th>
<th>1870 no./%</th>
<th>1880 no./%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cameron County</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brownsville</td>
<td>89.2</td>
<td>98.7</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harlingen</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Port Isabel</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Benito</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camp Rio Grande</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural Areas</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td></td>
<td>14.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hidalgo County</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edinburg</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McAllen</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mission</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mercedes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donna</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural Areas</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hidalgo County</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>47.0</td>
<td>68.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edinburg</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McAllen</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mission</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mercedes</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donna</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural Areas</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td>52.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County/Town</th>
<th>1900 no./%</th>
<th>1910 no./%</th>
<th>1920 no./%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cameron County</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brownsville</td>
<td>96.9</td>
<td>53.0</td>
<td>31.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harlingen</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Port Isabel</td>
<td>81.8</td>
<td>[28.4]</td>
<td>[7.9]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Benito</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camp Rio Grande</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural Areas</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Hidalgo County</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>47.0</td>
<td>68.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edinburg</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McAllen</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mission</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mercedes</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donna</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural Areas</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td>52.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 5
Sex Ratio of First Generation German Immigrants in the Lower Rio Grande Valley (Cameron and Hidalgo Counties), 1850-1920

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>no.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>no.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1850</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>60.0</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1860</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>86.2</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1870</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>82.4</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>78.1</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>57.6</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>62.7</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>66.5</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


### Table 6
Marital Status of First Generation German Immigrants in the Lower Rio Grande Valley (Cameron and Hidalgo Counties), 1850-1920

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>1850 no./%</th>
<th>1860 no./%</th>
<th>1870 no./%</th>
<th>1880 no./%</th>
<th>1900 no./%</th>
<th>1910 no./%</th>
<th>1920 no./%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>62 62.0</td>
<td>107 82.3</td>
<td>100 65.4</td>
<td>68 59.6</td>
<td>10 30.4</td>
<td>26 25.5</td>
<td>50 14.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>married</td>
<td>38 38.0</td>
<td>22 17.0</td>
<td>52 34.0</td>
<td>40 35.1</td>
<td>14 42.3</td>
<td>27 55.9</td>
<td>262 77.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>widowed</td>
<td>1 0.7</td>
<td>5 4.4</td>
<td>8 24.3</td>
<td>18 17.6</td>
<td>27 7.9</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100 100</td>
<td>130 100</td>
<td>153 100</td>
<td>114 100</td>
<td>33 100</td>
<td>102 100</td>
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</tr>
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157
Table 7
Occupational Fields of German Immigrants in the Lower Rio Grande Valley (Cameron and Hidalgo Counties), 1850-1920

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>1850 no./%</th>
<th>1860 no./%</th>
<th>1870 no./%</th>
<th>1880 no./%</th>
<th>1900 no./%</th>
<th>1910 no./%</th>
<th>1920 no./%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unskilled</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-Skilled</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skilled</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>25.9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>27.6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entrepreneur</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>67.3</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>56.1</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>48.8</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>58</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>113</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>123</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>88</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Includes only individuals for whom an occupation is provided in the census reports


Table 8
Value of Property Owned by Germans in the Lower Rio Grande Valley (Cameron and Hidalgo Counties), 1850-1870

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>US$</th>
<th>1850 no./%</th>
<th>1860 no./%</th>
<th>1870 no./%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>91.0</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-100</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>101-500</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>501-1,000</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,001-2,000</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2,001-5,000</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5,001-10,000</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

158
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region/State</th>
<th>1870</th>
<th>1880</th>
<th>1900</th>
<th>1910</th>
<th>1920</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>no./%</td>
<td>no./%</td>
<td>no./%</td>
<td>no./%</td>
<td>no./%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>79.3</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>90.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[North Dakota]</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>23</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[South Dakota]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Iowa]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Minnesota]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Wisconsin]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Kansas]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Nebraska]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Illinois]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[other]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>29.4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Louisiana]</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*This table is based on place of birth of the children of first-generation Germans residing in the Lower Rio Grande Valley.*

### Table 10
Age of First Generation German Immigrants in the Lower Rio Grande Valley (Cameron and Hidalgo Counties), 1850-1920

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>1850 no./%</th>
<th>1860 no./%</th>
<th>1870 no./%</th>
<th>1880 no./%</th>
<th>1900 no./%</th>
<th>1910 no./%</th>
<th>1920 no./%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>under 5</td>
<td>2 2.0</td>
<td>2 0.6</td>
<td>2 0.9</td>
<td>3 3.0</td>
<td>6 3.1</td>
<td>14 4.1</td>
<td>16 4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-9</td>
<td>2 2.0</td>
<td>2 1.5</td>
<td>1 0.6</td>
<td>1 0.9</td>
<td>3 3.0</td>
<td>16 4.7</td>
<td>16 4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-14</td>
<td>10 10.0</td>
<td>6 4.6</td>
<td>4 2.6</td>
<td>2 0.9</td>
<td>6 3.1</td>
<td>14 4.1</td>
<td>16 4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-19</td>
<td>20 20.0</td>
<td>23 17.8</td>
<td>32 20.9</td>
<td>22 19.3</td>
<td>1 3.0</td>
<td>6 3.1</td>
<td>14 4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-24</td>
<td>26 26.0</td>
<td>41 31.5</td>
<td>34 22.3</td>
<td>24 21.0</td>
<td>1 3.0</td>
<td>14 10.8</td>
<td>24 7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-29</td>
<td>15 15.0</td>
<td>16 12.4</td>
<td>19 12.4</td>
<td>20 17.6</td>
<td>1 3.0</td>
<td>11 12.7</td>
<td>26 7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-34</td>
<td>20 20.0</td>
<td>23 17.8</td>
<td>31 20.4</td>
<td>24 21.0</td>
<td>1 3.0</td>
<td>14 10.8</td>
<td>24 7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-39</td>
<td>26 26.0</td>
<td>41 31.5</td>
<td>34 22.3</td>
<td>22 19.3</td>
<td>1 3.0</td>
<td>11 12.7</td>
<td>26 7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-44</td>
<td>45 45.0</td>
<td>52 39.7</td>
<td>53 39.7</td>
<td>42 34.4</td>
<td>14 10.8</td>
<td>24 7.1</td>
<td>16 4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-49</td>
<td>15 15.0</td>
<td>16 12.4</td>
<td>19 12.4</td>
<td>20 17.6</td>
<td>1 3.0</td>
<td>11 12.7</td>
<td>26 7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-54</td>
<td>19 19.0</td>
<td>24 18.6</td>
<td>25 18.6</td>
<td>24 21.0</td>
<td>1 3.0</td>
<td>14 10.8</td>
<td>24 7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-59</td>
<td>20 20.0</td>
<td>23 17.8</td>
<td>31 20.4</td>
<td>24 21.0</td>
<td>1 3.0</td>
<td>14 10.8</td>
<td>24 7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-64</td>
<td>26 26.0</td>
<td>41 31.5</td>
<td>34 22.3</td>
<td>22 19.3</td>
<td>1 3.0</td>
<td>11 12.7</td>
<td>26 7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65-69</td>
<td>20 20.0</td>
<td>23 17.8</td>
<td>31 20.4</td>
<td>24 21.0</td>
<td>1 3.0</td>
<td>14 10.8</td>
<td>24 7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70+</td>
<td>10 10.0</td>
<td>11 8.8</td>
<td>12 9.1</td>
<td>13 11.3</td>
<td>14 10.8</td>
<td>24 7.1</td>
<td>16 4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unknown</td>
<td>1 1.0</td>
<td>1 0.7</td>
<td>1 0.9</td>
<td>2 6.1</td>
<td>1 1.0</td>
<td>6 1.8</td>
<td>1 1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100 100</td>
<td>130 130</td>
<td>153 153</td>
<td>114 114</td>
<td>33 33</td>
<td>102 102</td>
<td>340 340</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Age</td>
<td>28 28.0</td>
<td>30.6 30.6</td>
<td>32.0 32.0</td>
<td>35.5 35.5</td>
<td>62.0 62.0</td>
<td>44.0 44.0</td>
<td>57.0 57.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range</td>
<td>2-56 2-56</td>
<td>11-66 11-66</td>
<td>5-70 5-70</td>
<td>4-76 4-76</td>
<td>26-80 26-80</td>
<td>4-89 4-89</td>
<td>17-85 17-85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


### Table 11
Spouse Ethnicity of German-born Immigrants in the Lower Rio Grande Valley (Cameron and Hidalgo Counties), 1850-1920*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>1850 no./%</th>
<th>1860 no./%</th>
<th>1870 no./%</th>
<th>1880 no./%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>German-born</td>
<td>30 79.0</td>
<td>10 45.6</td>
<td>22 42.3</td>
<td>17 38.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd Generation German</td>
<td>1 2.6</td>
<td>1 4.5</td>
<td>1 1.9</td>
<td>5 11.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other German speaking</td>
<td>1 4.5</td>
<td>1 4.5</td>
<td>1 27.0</td>
<td>1 2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American</td>
<td>3 7.9</td>
<td>3 13.6</td>
<td>14 7.7</td>
<td>4 9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>1900</td>
<td>1910</td>
<td>1920</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>no. / %</td>
<td>no. / %</td>
<td>no. / %</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German-born</td>
<td>9 47.4</td>
<td>37 62.7</td>
<td>166 60.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd Generation German</td>
<td>2 10.5</td>
<td>8 13.6</td>
<td>53 19.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other German speaking</td>
<td>1 1.7</td>
<td>3 1.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American</td>
<td>2 10.5</td>
<td>8 13.6</td>
<td>43 15.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>4 21.1</td>
<td>4 6.7</td>
<td>2 0.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irish</td>
<td>2 10.5</td>
<td>1 1.7</td>
<td>3 1.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>1 1.7</td>
<td>3 1.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scandinavian</td>
<td>3 1.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Western European</td>
<td>2 0.7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern European</td>
<td>1 0.4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>19 100</td>
<td>59 100</td>
<td>276 100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* includes only married, widowed, and divorced individuals for whom their spouses’ ethnicity can be extracted from the census reports


Table 12
Living Association of German Immigrants in the Lower Rio Grande Valley (Cameron and Hidalgo Counties), 1860-1920

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Living Association</th>
<th>1860</th>
<th>1870</th>
<th>1880</th>
<th>1900</th>
<th>1910</th>
<th>1920</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>not living with</td>
<td>106 81.5</td>
<td>122 79.7</td>
<td>87 76.3</td>
<td>26 78.8</td>
<td>39 38.2</td>
<td>160 47.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>another German</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>living with</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Another German 24 18.5 31 20.3 27 23.7 7 21.2 63 61.8 180 53.0
[family] 13 10.0 28 18.3 24 21.1 6 18.2 51 50.0 172 50.6
[business] 9 6.9 2 1.3 3 2.6 1 3.0 4 4.0 2 1.8
[unknown] 2 1.6 1 0.7 8 7.8 6 0.6
missing
Total 130 100 153 100 114 100 33 100 102 100 340 100


Table 13
Home Ownership Among German Immigrants in the Lower Rio Grande Valley (Cameron and Hidalgo Counties), 1900-1920*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ownership Status</th>
<th>1900</th>
<th>1910</th>
<th>1920</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>no. / %</td>
<td>no. / %</td>
<td>no. / %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>owns house (no mortgage)</td>
<td>9 39.1</td>
<td>9 36.7</td>
<td>19 9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>owns house (mortgage)</td>
<td>2 8.7</td>
<td>1 1.9</td>
<td>11 5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rents house</td>
<td>11 47.8</td>
<td>16 29.6</td>
<td>40 20.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>owns farm (no mortgage)</td>
<td>10 18.5</td>
<td>44 22.5</td>
<td>56 28.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>owns farm (mortgage)</td>
<td>1 4.4</td>
<td>8 14.8</td>
<td>56 28.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rents farm</td>
<td>4 7.4</td>
<td>18 9.1</td>
<td>6 3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>boarding</td>
<td>6 11.1</td>
<td>3 1.5</td>
<td>6 3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>army quarters</td>
<td>6 3.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>23 100</td>
<td>54 100</td>
<td>198 100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Included in this table are only German “heads of households” and single “boarding” individuals


Endnotes


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German immigration after 1890 relies upon several arguments concerning the existing push and pull factors that influence migration. With the official announcement of the United States Bureau of the Census that the frontier had closed in 1890, the character of German immigration and the mind set of the potential immigrant changed. Migration to the United States was no longer associated with Landnahme (acquisition of land) but Arbeitsnahme (acquisition of wage-labor). Given the choice between taking up wage employment in American or the expanding German industrial centers, potential German emigrants frequently opted for the more familiar environment at home. See Klaus Bade, “German Emigration to the United States and Continental Immigration to Germany in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries,” Central European History 13 (1980): 348-377, 362; and Peter Marschalk, Deutsche Übersee wanderung im 19. Jahrhundert: Ein Beitrag zur soziologischen Theorie der Bevölkerung (Stuttgart: Ernst Klett Verlag, 1973), 44.


5 For a detailed discussion of the above described problems and limitations as well as for
the history of the United States census, see Margo J. Anderson, *The American Census: A Social History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988). In addition to the imperfections of the census, there are obviously the shortcomings of the person who analyzes the census schedules – the author of this study. Some parts of the handwritten schedules were hard or impossible to decipher and consequently misspellings of some names and the omission of some individuals of German origin occurred in the process of extracting data from the schedules.


7 Unless otherwise noted all statistical calculations were performed by the author with a “SPSS for Windows” program based on the detailed analysis of the following census population schedules. Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Seventh Census of the United States, 1850: Texas* [microfilm], hereafter *1850 Census*; Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Eighth Census of the United States, 1860: Texas* [microfilm], hereafter *1860 Census*; Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Ninth Census of the United States, 1870: Texas* [microfilm], hereafter *1870 Census*; Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Tenth Census of the United States, 1880: Texas* [microfilm], hereafter *1880 Census*; Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Eleventh Census of the United States, 1900: Texas* [microfilm], hereafter *1900 Census*; Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Twelfth Census of the United States, 1910: Texas* [microfilm], hereafter *1910 Census*; Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920: Texas* [microfilm], hereafter *1920 Census*. This study is of course limited to an analysis of the German population on the American side of the Rio Grande. Certainly, German immigrants also lived on the Mexican side, especially in Matamoros, but due to the nature of the census sources on which this investigation is based their presence in the region cannot be assessed.

8 For the French community in Brownsville, see Kearney, “Franco-Americans.”

9 Kearney, “German-Americans,” 104. Thompson, “Cameron County;” 55.


11 1860 Census; 1870 Census; 1880 Census; and 1900 Census.

12 1860 Census; 1870 Census; and 1880 Census.


15 For the attraction that Texas and Mexico posed for German merchants, see Struve, *Germans and Texans*, 39-53. Walter Struve, “German Merchants, German Artisans, and Texas during the 1830s and 1840s,” *Yearbook of German-American Studies* 23 (1988): 91-103, 94.

16 1850 Census; 1860 Census; 1870 Census; and 1880 Census.

17 1870 Census; 1880 Census; 1900 Census; 1910 Census; and 1920 Census.

Kearney, “German-Americans,” 105. 1850 Census; 1860 Census; 1870 Census; 167-169. 1880 Census; and 1900 Census.

19 1850 Census; 1860 Census; 1870 Census; 1880 Census; 1900 Census; 1910 Census; and 1920 Census.


24 Bade, “German Emigration,” 362; and Marschalk, Deutsche Überseewanderung, 44. 1910 Census; and 1920 Census.

25 1910 Census; and 1920 Census.
A History of the Muslim Community in the Rio Grande Valley
by
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The introduction of a Muslim community into the Rio Grande Valley is a recent development of the end of the twentieth century. It is of special interest due to the focus on Muslims as a result of world events at the dawn of the third millennium. It is also important in the light of the allegation that American opinions of Islam are distorted by misinformation, confusion, and ignorance. While the number of Muslims is small, their importance is augmented not only by American military and diplomatic involvement in the Muslim world, but also by the facts that one-fifth of the world’s population is Muslim, and that the Muslim population of the United States experienced rapid growth at the end of the twentieth century. Islam is believed to have become the country’s fastest growing religion. There are now more American Muslims than Episcopalians, and the Catholic Church and various Protestant denominations have made moves to improve relations with Islam. The status of the Muslim community in the country has rapidly risen to the point where the White House now celebrates Ramadan, and Muslim chaplains are provided for American military personnel. However, American Islam, like American Christianity, covers a broad spectrum of viewpoints, from strict adherence to the articles of Muslim faith through a lack of participation in Islamic services to retention of only a Muslim cultural (but not religious) identity. This entire range is represented among the Muslims of the Rio Grande Valley.

Immigration Pattern

The Rio Grande Valley lagged far behind the rest of the United States in the formation of a significant Muslim presence. The first wave of Muslim immigration to the United States began in 1875. There were Muslims among the black African slaves imported in the colonial period, but most lost their Islamic identity. Down to the end of World War II, most Muslim immigrants were Arabs from the Fertile Crescent (running from Palestine through Lebanon and Syria to Iraq). This pattern reflected the instability in that region with the decline and collapse of the Ottoman Empire, and the short-lived experiment with British and French mandates that followed. The repeal in 1965 (by a bill sponsored by President Lyndon Johnson) of the limitations on immigration according to the national origin of foreigners in the United States in 1920 caused a shift in immigration from Europeans to people from other areas, including from the broader Muslim world. As a result, the American Muslim community experienced a dramatic growth in the last three decades of the twentieth century. In 1980, about 1.5% of the American population (or 3.3 million Americans) was Muslim. More than a third of these lived in New York, Illinois, or (especially) California. By 1987, the number of Muslims living in the United States had grown to about 4.7 million. Muslims have been in the Rio Grande Valley for at least fifty years, but there were too few of them to form an identifiable community before the 1980s. The Muslim community in the Valley is now experiencing rapid growth, with at least a doubling of its numbers over the past decade.

While many Muslims came to the United States in the last part of the twentieth century in part to escape turmoil at home, it has been the search for economic betterment that has brought most Muslims to the Rio Grande Valley. Like recent Muslim immigrants in other parts of the country, most of the Muslim immigrants to the Rio Grande Valley are university graduates and professionals. One group is academic, composed of university professors and schoolteachers.
Another group consists of medical doctors. Other local Muslims are businessmen, including clothing store and jewelry storeowners.\textsuperscript{14} American public schools are hiring outside the area, including abroad, to ease a shortage of teachers resulting from retirement of baby-boomer teachers, poor working conditions, and low pay.\textsuperscript{15} There are no Muslim manual laborers due to the abundant and cheap Mexican immigrant work force available in the Valley.

**Countries of Origin**

The Muslim community in the United States is more varied than in any other country, except at Mecca in Saudi Arabia during the annual \textit{hajj} pilgrimage.\textsuperscript{16} Regarding country of origin, the local Muslim community differs from the national picture mainly in the absence of a strong Black American Muslim group. One estimate of American Muslims according to region of origin (as percentages of the whole American Muslim community) lists the three top groupings as those from South-Central Asia (33%), African-Americans (30%), and Arabs (25%).\textsuperscript{17} This disparity between the local and national picture is due to the lack in the Rio Grande Valley of a numerically significant Black African community. Members of the Brownsville Islamic Society come from Bangladesh, Pakistan, India, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Morocco, and Tunisia.\textsuperscript{18}

The earliest Middle Easterners to come in significant numbers to the United States were non-Muslims. Prominent among these early settlers were Christian Lebanese, Syrians, and Armenians.\textsuperscript{19} Perhaps the most famous of the Maronite Christian Arabic-speaking Lebanese families to come to the Valley have been the Sahadis, known for the popular Sahadi’s Restaurant on Tenth Street in McAllen. Joseph (“Joe”) Sahadi and his wife Margaret Karam were Lebanese Americans who first moved to McAllen from Kingsville at the start of World War II to be close to Margaret’s mother in case Joe was drafted into the military. (Margaret’s father, Slaman Karam, a Maronite Christian from Karkhalum, Lebanon, had wanted to move to the United States. However, since he could not wait to make the quotas for Ellis Island, he had landed in Veracruz, and had become a wealthy dry goods store and gold mine owner in Chihuahua. In 1921, General Pancho Villa had kidnapped her father, who was ransomed by her mother in exchange for the family’s wealth. Reunited, her parents had fled with their children to the safety of McAllen.) Joe and Margaret opened Sahadi’s Restaurant in 1971. Joe died in 1996, and their son John now operates the Sahadi’s restaurant and import grocery. Their nephew later opened Aziz Showery’s Insurance and Financial Services across the street. Margaret taught her children Arabic and to dance the \textit{dobke}. Margaret also maintained her Christian faith, although not in a Maronite congregation, as the nearest Maronite Catholic church is in San Antonio.\textsuperscript{20}

Lebanese Arab Christians have also promoted belly dancing in the Rio Grande Valley. The practice dates back to pre-Islamic days; the famous dance performed by Shalome/Salome for Herod Antipas was possibly a precursor. By the time of the Ottoman Empire, belly dancing had come to be associated with hareem concubines’ entertainment for court males.\textsuperscript{21} Belly dancing is popular in the Rio Grande Valley as a form of recreation, being exotic, attractive, a good workout for the whole body, and done to an appealing Middle Eastern musical accompaniment. Nashla Showery, a niece of McAllen’s above-mentioned Margaret Karam Sahadi, became a professional belly dancer and teacher.\textsuperscript{22} Lupita Maron Fulghum teaches belly dancing at Brownsville’s World Gym and Diamond Ladies’ Exercise Club. Lupita’s father is a Catholic from Lebanon, and her full Arabic maiden name is Maron Schekaibau. Encouraged by her family, she studied belly dancing in Tampico, Tamaulipas; Mexico City; Houston; and San Antonio. She had Lebanese Catholic teachers in both Tampico and Houston.\textsuperscript{23} However, the sensual appeal of belly dancing stands
in contrast to the strict dress and behavior codes for Islamic women. For this reason, the practice receives no approval or participation from the local Muslim community.\textsuperscript{24}

Muslim immigrants, generally coming into the United States later, were disinclined to make contact or co-operate with non-Muslim Middle Easterners due to poor relations between them in the homeland and to the rapid assimilation of Christian Middle Easterners into the mainstream American population.\textsuperscript{25} For example, Bari Siddique, organizer of the Brownsville Muslim community, is not acquainted with any local Maronites.\textsuperscript{26} There are few Iranians in the Rio Grande Valley, seemingly because the period of greatest Iranian immigration to the United States occurred before the economic growth spurt of the Valley. It may also be due in part (at least in the opinion of one Iranian) to Iranian (like Turkish) preference for a cooler climate, in contrast to the Muslims from the Indian subcontinent and the Arabs, who hail from warmer climes.\textsuperscript{27} At the start of 1974, there seem to have been two Muslim families in the Rio Grande Valley: those of Dr. Khalid Soleja, a plastic surgeon in Brownsville, who is still here, and Dr. Jaled Rashid, a chemist who left a few years later. The Solejahs and Rashids were the only Muslims until the Islamic population began to increase in the late 1970s. According to one estimate, there are now about two hundred Muslim families in McAllen, seven in Weslaco, five or six in Harlingen, and thirty-five in Brownsville.\textsuperscript{28}

\textbf{Comparison to Non-Muslim Immigrants from Asia}

One reason for the new presence of a Muslim community in the Rio Grande Valley may be a far-reaching and long-standing historical development. The historian Kevin Riley has suggested that the dominance of global politics and economics by Europeans in modern times was facilitated by the devastating impact of the Mongol conquests (and the Black Plague the Mongols unleashed) on all of the rest of the civilized world at that time. The leading societies in world history down to that point outside of Europe, from China through India to the Middle East, were set back so dramatically that they are only now beginning to return to their pre-Mongol leadership roles.\textsuperscript{29} The surge forward of these countries at the end of the twentieth century is having a major impact on the United States.\textsuperscript{30}

If Reilly's theory is correct, it would help to explain why the appearance of vigorous Hindu and Chinese communities has paralleled that of the Muslims in the Rio Grande Valley. The Valley's Chinese community was first organized into the Chinese Association in the Rio Grande Valley by Dr. Kuo Wei Lee, a Chinese-born Political Science Professor at the University of Texas-Pan American. It meets three times a year, either at the Weslaco Agricultural Research Center of A & M University, at the Edinburg High School library, or at the University of Texas at Brownsville. The meetings are held to celebrate the Chinese New Year (in February), the coming of spring (in April), and the \textit{Zhong Qui Jie} harvest festival (in August).\textsuperscript{31}

As to the Hindu community, when B.S. Wadhwani (the Pakistani-born President of La Quinta Inn in Brownsville) came to the Valley in 1969, he found few fellow Hindus, but there are now an estimated hundred Hindu families in the Valley. Mr. Wadhwani started a meditation group in his home soon after his arrival. This group now meets in a mini-mall in Brownsville owned by Mr. Wadhwani.\textsuperscript{32} William Henricks, known as Guru ("teacher") Prasad Swami ("one who has renounced sex and property"), has opened his home in Harlingen as an unofficial Hare Krishna Temple, and oversees the movement in parts of the United States and much of Latin America.\textsuperscript{33} In 2003, the \textit{Nataraja Kunj} (Shiva Center) was opened in Harlingen, to teach \textit{Ayurveda} (Vedic yoga, meditation, deep tissue massage, acupressure, ear candling, hypnosis, numerology, use of
crystals, self-realization, understanding of one’s karma, palmistry, and astrology). Like the local Muslim community, the Valley Chinese and Hindus are mainly professionals (notably in education and health services) and businessmen (especially restaurant and shop owners). The Chinese and Hindus comment on the same congeniality of Valley culture noted by the Muslims.

Mosques

The recent spurt of mosque building in the Rio Grande Valley mirrors the new flurry of such activity across the country, where between 1995 and 2001 the number of mosques (masjid/مسجد) increased by twenty-five per cent, making for about 1,200 mosques in total. The masjids are supported by contributions, and any local Muslim is automatically a member, even if he never donates. The leadership in the Muslim communities throughout the United States rests mainly in the hands of lay volunteers, and the Rio Grande Valley is no exception. Dr. Mohammed Akram Rana helped to develop Muslim worship in the mid-Valley. From Lahore in southeastern Pakistan, he arrived in the Valley in 1974. He is the Director of Mathematics for the Weslaco Independent School District, where he has worked for twenty-eight years since graduating from Vanderbilt University in Nashville. For twenty-two years, he also taught math classes at the University of Texas-Pan American and South Texas Community College as a part-time professor. A group of Muslim worshippers began to meet on Saturdays, first at the Rana’s home, and then on rotation at other homes. Dr. Hassan, a chemistry professor, came early on, as well as Dr. Chendra, a Pakistani physician, and two Bengali students from Pan American University. Dr. Rana taught religious classes to the children. Dr. Mohammed Farooqui, the Indian-born Chair of the Biology Department at the University of Texas-Pan American in Edinburg, who first came to the Valley in 1984, was instrumental in organizing Muslim worship in the upper Valley. Bari Siddique, from Bangladesh, a computer science professor at the University of Texas at Brownsville who came to the Valley in 1985, was one of the main organizers of Muslim worship in the lower Valley.

In 1985, Dr. Rana and Mr. Siddique joined for worship with the Farooquis and other families. They held weekly meetings in their homes, rotating to a different house each week. Lacking an imam, the men shared in leading prayers, and Dr. Farooqui taught classes for the children. The small group of families would get together off and on for the main weekly meeting in Islam, Friday prayers (juma’/جمعه). The group grew to include about ten families meeting in members’ houses in Edinburg, McAllen, Weslaco, Harlingen, and Brownsville on a rotation basis. As the group continued to grow, they began to meet weekly for prayer at businesses in Alamo and Harlingen from 1986 to 1992 (in a school and at the office of a mobile home park). In 1992, they rented a room in Edinburg Lutheran Church on Sugar Road, and met there for a year. That was when they established, on paper, the Rio Grande Valley Islamic Center. In 1993, they bought the property in Weslaco where the Rio Grande Valley Islamic Center building now stands, and started regular services with five daily prayers, Friday prayers, and the two annual festivals (eids/أعياد). Eid al-Adha (أعياد عيد الأضحى) (which fell on 1 February in 2004) is the festival of pilgrimage, when Muslims worldwide travel to Mecca. Eid al-Fitr (أعياد عيد الفطر) (which fell on 15 November in 2004) marks the end of Ramadan, the month of prayer and fasting.

The mosque in Weslaco is the smallest in size and in number of worshipers in the Valley. It is a small brick building at 502 East Pike Boulevard, next to Sam Houston Elementary School. It was once used as a laundromat and beauty salon, but most of the windows have been bricked over. There are separate entrances and meeting rooms for men and women, and a row of faucets in the back for wudu/وضوء, the ceremonial washing of face, hands, arms, and feet before prayer. Hafez
Atta Ullah Hashmi is the imam/أئمة of the Weslaco masjid, and his title of hafez indicates that he has learned to recite the entire Qur'an/القرآن from memory. He is originally from Pakistan, and has been living in the Rio Grande Valley for a year. An imam is the leader of a masjid, and may or may not be a scholar of Islam. An a/am/علم is a scholar who has studied at a religious school (called a madrasa/مدرسة or jamiah/جامعة) to learn the true meanings of the Qur'an and the al-hadeeth/الحديث (sayings of the Prophet Muhammad) and to interpret them correctly. Hafez Hashmi is both an a/am and an imam. He is supported by the voluntary contributions of local Muslims. Every day, a halaqa/حلاقة meeting is held after maghrib/مغرب (afternoon prayers), with readings from the Qur'an in Arabic and explanations in Urdu, the common language of most of those in attendance. Anyone needing interpretation in English is accommodated. The men sit in a circle on the floor, while women may listen from the next room, though they are not, as are men, required to attend. Saturday meetings are followed with a meal and isha/عشاء prayers (although other masjids may choose to hold this meeting on another day of the week). A halaqa/حلاقة meeting (a class in which hadiths and their meanings are memorized) is held after isha prayers from Friday through Tuesday.

In 1997, the Upper Valley Muslims established, on paper, the Islamic Society of South Texas (ISST), meeting in a room rented for $400 a month from a fitness center on Dove and McColl in McAllen. Prayers were held there from 1997 to 1999. In June of 1999, the group purchased its current property at 2800 North Ware Road on the west side of McAllen, where it established the Umar al-Farooq Masjid. There the group held the five prescribed daily prayers, Friday halaqa (“circle of people”) meetings for adults, children’s classes, and eid prayers. Mohammed Shawwaf, an imam from Egypt, came for a few months during the Ramadan season to lead prayers and to teach from 1999 to 2002. In 2003, Sheikh Amjad Abunar was hired to be a full-time imam. (His title of sheikh/شيخ indicates an expert on religion, although it is sometimes used for other purposes, such as showing respect to elderly men). Sheikh Amjad studied Islam at a government university in his native Jordan, from which he immigrated with his family (he has four daughters and three sons) to the United States in 1998. The owner of a meat market and grocery in Jordan, he was preparing at the time of writing to open a similar establishment on Tenth Street in McAllen, just south of Pecan, so that Valley Muslims need not continue to buy halal/حلال meats from Corpus Christi or slaughter animals themselves. Although there is no obligatory dress code for Muslims, Sheikh Amjad was wearing a round cap (kufi) and a robe (galabiyya/جابية or thobe/طيب) for prayer service. He did not identify with any of the theological or jurisprudential traditions within Sunni Islam (Malakiyyah, Shafi’iyyah, Hanafiyyah, Hanbaliyyah, Kharijiyyah, Mu’tazilah, Wahhabiyyah, Ahmadiyyah, Ash’ariyyah, and Matradiyyah). He was teaching Arabic classes for adults on Monday nights, but found little interest in the opportunity.

The Umar al-Farooq Masjid, while the largest congregation in the Rio Grande Valley, is housed in a former one-story, three-bedroom single-family house, with separate entrances for men and women, and a special room for its now some thirty-five women to assemble separately from the seventy or so men, without any mingling of the sexes, and where they listen to the service over a public address system. The kitchen and garage were joined to the living and dining rooms to form the men’s prayer hall. Lines of masking tape were placed over the carpeted floor of the men’s prayer room to indicate the direction of the Ka’aba in Mecca the worshipers should face. A large, framed copy of the Qur’an and a shelf full of books in English and Arabic were displayed. No collection plate was passed, though three donation boxes sat by the back door. Men left their shoes on the floor or in shelves by the front door. They dressed casually, with some wearing white or gray robes and tight caps. Some washed their hands, feet, and face outside at
Friday afternoon prayers were held between 1:30 and 2:30 PM. The men sat on the floor, except for the speaker and five of the older men, who used folding chairs. After one of the members chanted the call to prayer, the imam would stand and deliver a sermon (such as a commentary on a hadith, a saying of the Prophet Muhammad, as mentioned above) or a sunna (a deed of the Prophet Muhammad). Five minutes of group prayer (salah) would follow, led by the imam in the front corner. The men would bow and kneel on the floor in unison with their heads down. Each prayer began with the Surah al-Fatihah, a formal prayer praising Allah and seeking his aid. The service would end with the reading of announcements. Visitors are greeted warmly by all, with handshakes and wishes of Assalamu alaykum (“Peace be unto you”).

Most American mosques employ English as the language of communication; the variety of language backgrounds and of Arabic dialects makes this necessary. While Arabic is the language of the Qur’an and of prayer, English is used for all other purposes, including the sermons. This pattern holds true for the local Islamic worship as well.

The five main obligations incumbent on Islamic believers (the so-called five pillars of Islam) are observed, namely: (1) the public confession that there is no God but Allah and that Muhammad is his prophet (the shahadah), (2) prayer (salat), (3) fasting during the month of Ramadan, (4) charity or the poor tax (zakat), to amount to at least 2.5% of annual income, and (5) the pilgrimage (hajj) to Mecca at least once in a lifetime. Six Rio Grande Valley Muslims went on the hajj in 2003, but none in 2004.

The Islamic Society of South Texas had three main goals in 2004: to erect a new masjid building, to open an Islamic children’s school, and to establish an Islamic cemetery. The small existing mosque building was inadequate to hold the three hundred people who came from Brownsville, Rio Grande City, and everywhere in between to attend the bi-annual eid celebrations. On these occasions, the Islamic Society of South Texas rented meeting halls like the Cimarron Club, Lark Community Center, and Holiday Inn on Expressway 83. Ground was broken behind the present mosque for the masjid building during Eid al-Fitr of 2003. It is scheduled for completion by Ramadan of 2004. (The word masjid means the “place of sajadah,” one of the prayer postures, kneeling with the head touching the ground, as opposed to kayam or “standing” and ruku or “bowing.”) Currently the women of the masjid are teaching weekend classes for children in Qur'an and Arabic, and a Muslim preschool has opened in Weslaco. The ISST hopes, after starting its full-time Islamic elementary school, to found a secondary school, both close enough to the masjid that the students can perform all their daily prayers together. Until the Islamic cemetery can be established, land has been purchased in Val Verde Memorial Gardens Cemetery in Donna with room for fifty burial plots. A funeral home on Conway and Pecan Streets in Mission helps with the funerals. In Muslim funerals, the body is wrapped in two pieces of cloth, prayed over at the masjid, and buried without a coffin.

Meanwhile, the Lower Valley Muslims had stopped traveling up-Valley to meetings, and rented an apartment in Brownsville. Bari Siddique initiated the start of Brownsville juma prayer services at 1:30 PM on Fridays. At first, prayer services were held in Mr. Siddique’s home. In the mid-1990s, the worshipers began to meet in a rented apartment at Sun Colony apartments. Bari Siddique helped to start the Islamic Society of Brownsville, which he served as President until 2003. The society now has an emir (emir) instead of a president. The offices of president, vice-president, secretary, and treasurer were needed initially for the society to be registered with the State of Texas and with the Federal Government. These governmental agencies have now given permission for Muslim societies to assume a more traditional Islamic structure. The emir
acts as *imam* (prayer leader) and *muezzin* (making the call to prayer), and he decides which (untitled) members will help him to run the organization. Ahmad Khalil, a Brownsville pharmacist, is serving as the first *emir*.

In 2004, the Brownsville community, having grown to about fifty families, constructed the Masjid al-Rahman (مسجد الرحمن, “Mosque of the Merciful” God) on Gilson Road. This was the first building in the Rio Grande Valley to be constructed from the first as a mosque. Its design was planned to include a *minbar* (pulpit), a *mihrab* (wall niche) to indicate the qibla (direction of prayer, facing Mecca), an ablution fountain, and a minaret. Following Islamic tradition, it reserved separate sanctuaries for men and women. Each sanctuary had its own entrance, neither of which faces the parking lot. When Pakistan’s ex-Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto spoke at the mosque on 15 October 2004, she, too, observed the established separation of the sexes, speaking only in the women’s sanctuary.

**Muslim Organizations**

The Islamic organizations in the Rio Grande Valley, discussed above, have a primarily religious and local purpose. However, there are larger national organizations that could become active locally in the future. Various national organizations have been founded to give voice to the Muslim population of the United States. American Islamic blacks led the way in the early twentieth century. In 1913, the Moorish Science Temple was founded in Newark, New Jersey. In the 1930s, appeared the Nation of Islam, with its own militia called the Fruit of Islam. The World Community of Al-Islam in the West appeared as an outgrowth of the Nation of Islam in 1975. Muslim immigrants from overseas took the initiative in founding other Islamic organizations in the second half of the twentieth century. The International Muslim Society was founded in 1952 in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. In 1963, various Muslim student organizations, at a meeting held at Urbana, Illinois, merged to form the Muslim Student Association, which established a network of local chapters at campuses around the country. This led to the founding of the Muslim Community Association, as an off-campus counterpart to the Muslim Student Association. The Indo-Pakistanis and Afro-Americans have joined in the Tablighi Jamaat, which hosts the largest (annual) social gatherings of Muslims in North America, while the fundamentalist Gulf Arabs have grouped into the Salafiya. However, little has been done to organize American Muslims politically. Both the Tablighi Jamaat and the Salafiya in the United States shy away from political involvement, in contrast to the condemnation by Iraqi Salafi leaders of American collaborators in Iraq as “apostates” and “unbelievers.” Exceptions to the rule include Muslim enthusiasm for the Reverend Jesse Jackson for his pro-Palestinian stance, and the lobbying by the Muslim League of Voters, U.S.A. and by the Pakistani Federation of America for more U.S. aid to Pakistan. Since 1985, several Muslim political action committees have been established. Muslim Leagues of Voters have also caught on through most of the country. The Council on American-Islamic Relations works to raise public awareness nationwide about acts of violence and discrimination against Muslims.

**Missionary Outreach**
Islam has always been a missionary religion, in obedience to Sura 16:125 of the Qur'an, which calls on Muslims to call people to Islam, using wisdom, fairness, and reason. However, Islam's mode of witnessing has changed through the centuries, from conquest through emigration and Sufi mystics to missionary merchants. The Egyptian Ikhwan sect and the Pakistani Jamaat-i-Islami sect immigrants have been the most instrumental in launching a Muslim missionary emphasis in the United States. One group of Muslim missionaries receives training in a seven-year program at a training college in Pakistan sponsored by the Ahmadiyya movement. The Black Muslims are also active in outreach, and their leader Warith al-Din Muhammad was recognized in 1978 by Saudi Arabia, Abu Dhabi, and Qatar as the trustee for the recommendation and distribution of funds to all organizations spreading the Islamic faith in the United States. A frequent approach to witnessing is to emphasize the common beliefs in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and to claim that Islam represents the original pure form of Christianity and Judaism, before they were corrupted.68 The result has been that 30 percent of the participants in the 1,209 mosques in the country in April 2001 were converts.69 While conversion of non-Muslims to Islam has been proceeding at a rapid rate in other parts of the country, this seems not to have been the case to date in the Rio Grande Valley. This disparity may be due to the fact that most American converts have hitherto come from the black community (who seem thereby to find dignity in the face of racial discrimination), and there are few blacks presently living along the eastern end of the Mexican border.70

Unity of the Muslim Community

The American Ummah (Islamic community) as a whole has been torn by various internal disagreements. The most serious disagreements have been between Sunnis and Shi’ites, between Salafis and Ikhwanis, and among factions of the Ikhwan.71 Sunnis are non-soteriological orthodox believers (not looking to a savior), while Shi’ites believe that Husein ibn Ali (a grandson of the prophet Muhammad and the third imam) died willingly at Karbala in 680 as a vicarious sacrifice for his followers.72 Sunnis have also disapproved of the Shi’ite emphasis on imagery and reverence for their senior clergy.73 Since Iranians are Shi’ites, since Iraq’s Shi’ite majority has been politically subordinated to a Sunni minority, and since most Arabs in general are Sunni, relations between Sunnis and Shi’ites deteriorated during the Iran-Iraq War of the 1980s. At that time, American Sunnis and Shi’ites stopped worshipping together in the same mosques. Sunnis lambasted the Shi’ites with such propaganda publications as The Devil’s Deception of the Sheeah, while the Shi’ites counterattacked with claims that the Sunni mosques were in financial alliance with Saudi Arabia and the Gulf Emirates.74

The Salafi-Ikhwan quarrel is largely a feud between immigrants from Arab-speaking countries. The Salafis are fundamentalist Arabs who follow a teaching first emphasized in the Gulf States. The Ikhwan (al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun) refers to the Muslim Brotherhood, which began in Egypt and which places an emphasis on Sufi mysticism, which is strongly decried by fundamentalists from the Saudi Arabian Peninsula.75 Both teachings have spread into each other’s home regions, so that confrontations have occurred between them all the way from the Persian Gulf to the Sudan and Tunisia. Even Malayans have been divided between the two sects.76

The various points of discord within the Islamic community seem not to have affected the unity of the Rio Grande Valley Muslims. As far as the Sunni-Shii discord is concerned, most Muslims of the Rio Grande Valley, like most Muslims in the country as a whole, are Sunnis.77 Where the presence of a significant minority of Shi’ites nationally has divided American Muslims elsewhere, the paucity of Shi’ites in the Valley has helped the local Muslim community to pull
together. The few local Shi’ites have joined with the Sunni, and worship together without any problem in both the Lower and Upper Valley. If there are Sufi members of the Brownsville congregation, they have not made a point of it.\textsuperscript{78} Nor has the Salafi-Ikhwan quarrel spread to the Valley, where Sufism is not represented locally.\textsuperscript{79}

### Cultural Adjustments

Acculturation to life in America can be especially stressful for Muslims, given the fact that Islam is a total way of life, and not just a Friday service religion. Various adjustments to the American cultural setting have typified the history of Muslims in the United States. For example, just as some American Jews have adopted the Christmas tree under the name of a “Hanukkah bush,” so American Muslims have met their children’s affinity for Christmas by emphasizing instead a celebration of the Prophet Muhammad’s birthday (the \textit{Milad al-Nabi} ميالد النبي or “Birthday of the Prophet”).\textsuperscript{80}

The need for cultural adaptation has come to the fore especially in education. Accommodation of the full gamut of Muslim student needs would require a degree of change that American schools are not yet willing to grant. Female students are placed in the spotlight because of the contrast between their code of behavior and that prescribed by American feminism.\textsuperscript{81} Muslim schoolgirls would have to be allowed to follow their own dress code, and ideally would be protected from exposure to the sometimes salacious dress and decadent behavior of their non-Muslim peers. The leniency of the dress code in most American public schools has helped to avoid the uproar occurring in France due to the banning of headscarves.\textsuperscript{82} Muslim students would be helped to fulfill salat, the prescribed five daily prayers, by providing release time, ablution facilities, a prayer leader, and a hall for prayer rugs.\textsuperscript{83} However, Valley Muslims seem to be grateful for the concessions made to them by the local public schools. Special dietary requests for school lunches like restrictions on lard and pork have met with co-operation, including ordering special vegetarian pizza for Muslim children for a class pizza party. Muslim children have also been excused from activities with a Christian theme.\textsuperscript{84}

Adjustments in worship and ritual have also been required. The American working schedule and the scattered location of the worshipers obliged the group of Muslims who first launched Islamic worship in the Valley in the late 1980s to hold communal prayer services on Saturday afternoons and evenings rather than for the customary juma’\textsuperscript{a} prayers at noon on Fridays.\textsuperscript{85} The planned Brownsville mosque will have no external call to prayer outside the building, as few Americans are accustomed to the sound of the \textit{muezzin’s} call that forms so typical a part of the sounds of a Middle Eastern city. Instead, the imam will make the call inside the building. The requirement to pray five times a day is not always possible at the prescribed times. Some local Muslims carry prayer rugs to their places of work for daytime prayers on the job. The lack of general observation of Islamic holidays also presents a problem.\textsuperscript{86} Legal restrictions also oblige Muslims (who traditionally do not use coffins) to bury their dead in coffins.\textsuperscript{87}

As \textit{halal} meat (from animals ritually slaughtered by cleaned knives to the recitation of special prayers while the blood is drained) is not sold in the Rio Grande Valley, Muslims who want to be obedient to the dietary laws obtain it from two slaughter houses (in McAllen and Mission) which will allow Muslim customers to prepare it themselves on request.\textsuperscript{88} When the Farooquis had lived in Illinois, before they could find \textit{halal} meat (called \textit{zabihah} ذيغ in Arabic), they ate \textit{kosher} meat from a Jewish store, which is considered the next best thing. During 1985 and 1986, Dr. Farooqui arranged for his group to obtain \textit{halal} meat from animals slaughtered according to
Islamic standards. Ever since, Dr. Farooqui has been going to the De la Garza Slaughter House in Edinburg. There he kills the animals, and the owner stamps each piece of meat with the word “halal”, so that local Muslims can come and buy it. HEB grocery store in Houston now offers a halal section in its meat market, and there is hope for HEB providing a similar service soon in the Valley. Muslims must also take care when dining out because pork, lard, or wine may have been used in the cooking.

The pressure to acculturate into the majority American society is less in the Rio Grande Valley than elsewhere in the United States. This is true even though the area is still largely rural, and there are far fewer Muslims to form a strongly viable subculture than is the case in large urban centers. McAllen holds the largest body of Muslims in the Valley, followed by Brownsville, and then by Weslaco. Some Valley Muslims have lost touch with the Muslim community, either due to assimilation into mainstream Valley society, or due to having become secularized to one extent or another. In the smaller-town world of the Rio Grande Valley, people tend to know each other better, so that the mood for Muslims is more relaxed and congenial. All the same, Valley culture is not so concerned with people outside the circle of family and old friends, so Muslims can be themselves in their own circles without attracting the same degree of attention that they might elsewhere.

The opinion has been expressed that Muslims find the Rio Grande Valley’s Hispanic society more congenial than other parts of the United States, due to its easy-going mood, courtesy, family closeness, conservative behavior, higher morality, and shared roots through the Moorish impact on Spain in the Middle Ages. Hispanic names with an Arabic origin offer another point of familiarity. Examples of last names include Zamora (from the zamr musical instrument) and Albornoz (“wearer of a burnoose,” an Arab hooded cloak). Guadalupe (from wadi al-lub or “river of black pebbles”) and Almira (“always truthful”) are two examples of first name relics from Arabic. Both Islamic and Hispanic cultures include similar traditions, such as boiling a substance (like yerba buena here and dry beans in Iran) to chase away bad spirits, and rubbing eggs over a sick person to absorb the fever. Similarities also include the variety of skin colors, machismo, and patriarchalism. Menudo is emphasized in both cultures, with the same oft-repeated myth that it has the power to sober up an intoxicated person. This affinity not only has aided the growth of the local Islamic community, but also has exerted a pull to assimilation on local Muslims. Hossein Kianinejad provides a case in point. Born in Shiraz, Iran, he left his home country in 1978 to study in the United States. After taking a six-month intensive course in the English language, Mr. Kianinejad earned a B.S. degree in electrical engineering from Southern Louisiana University in Baton Rouge in 1985. He subsequently met his future wife, a Mexican-American, in Galveston, and moved with her to her hometown of Brownsville, so that she could be near her family. Working as a manager of a Circle-K and then founding his own construction company, he raised a trilingual English-Spanish-Persian-speaking family. He felt very much at home in the local society, learned Spanish himself, and became a non-practicing Muslim with a Catholic wife and children. He has only one Muslim acquaintance locally, and he seldom sees even him.

Nevertheless, some cultural clashes do occur from the lack of knowledge about Islam and Muslims on the part of many Rio Grande Valley residents. Local Muslims complain that misconceptions abound, and suspicions create some barriers. The greatest barrier could arise out of anxiety over Muslim priorities of loyalty. Concern has been expressed over whether loyalty to country might be placed after loyalty to the Islamic community and cause. The mood changed for local Muslims after the suicide bombing of New York City’s World Trade Center twin towers on 11 September 2001. After 9-11, the FBI contacted Mr. Siddique. In response to
their concerns, he invited FBI agents to attend prayer services at the Brownsville mosque, which they have since done at least three times. The FBI asked Mr. Siddique if the Brownsville Muslims had been subjected to any hostility; and he was happy to be able to reply that they had not. The regional FBI Chief gave Mr. Siddique his phone number, presented a talk to the congregation, offered his card to anybody who wanted one, and promised to post guards to protect the mosque if any threat to it should arise. Once greeted with universal respect and trust, Dr. Farooqui was saddened to find himself met with suspicion after 9-11. While speaking to a church group, he was asked whether a Muslim could be a good American and a good American soldier. He answered both in the affirmative, pointing out that he himself was a good American, and that his two cousins were serving in the U.S. military. However, there seem to have been no incidences of anti-Muslim intolerance in the Rio Grande Valley, although there have been many in other parts of the state and country. The Council on American Islamic Relations, which tracks such incidents, has reported none for this area.

Various potential problems that could have affected local rapport seem to have been surmounted. Nervousness that Islamic militants might cross the Rio Grande border into the United States could have been stirred when, on 19 July 2004, Farida Goolam Mohamed Ahmed (an illegal immigrant on a government watch list with a tampered South African passport) was detained at the McAllen airport and investigated for possible ties to al Qaeda. The suspect pleaded guilty to using an altered passport and to having entered the country illegally. It was also not helpful that, in September of 2004, the Imam of Ohio’s largest mosque (who had spoken of terrorism as being the only path to Islamic liberation) was sentenced to a prison term for hiding his ties to terrorist groups. A further complicating factor was the allegation made on 27 July 2004 by a federal grand jury in Dallas that the American Muslim Holy Land Foundation charity had provided over $12.4 million to organizations and individuals linked to the Palestinian terrorist organization Hamas. This issue might have been further exacerbated by concern over the flow of monies from Muslim countries to American Islamic mosques and organizations. For example, the Muslim World League (which helped to fund Islamic summer schools, youth camps, journals, newspapers, and television and radio programming, as well as to provide imams, grants and fellowships to Muslim professors and teachers, and Islamic prison ministries) was founded in 1962 by the Saudi Arabian government. Concern in the general population about these developments has created an atmosphere of anxiety for the local Muslim community even though it has not been involved. While Bari Siddique believes that Brownsville’s Muslim community may include members of the Wahhabi persuasion (the fundamentalist Saudi Arabian sect that has donated funds to many American mosques), he states that none of the three local mosques receive funds from outside the area, and that, indeed, they have no outside connections whatsoever.

Efforts at improved understanding between the Muslim and non-Muslim community have been made. Before 11 September 2001, Dr. Farooqui had spoken perhaps five times over the years to groups interested in learning about his religion. After the World Trade Center collapse, calls started coming in from people who wanted his views on what had happened and on what Islam says about such an attack. In the following two years, he made over fifty presentations at the University of Texas-Pan American, South Texas Community College, public schools, hospitals, churches, and other civic organizations, and has participated in forums. Recently a group of fifty winter Texans came to the McAllen masjid to see his PowerPoint presentation. On the first anniversary of the 9-11 attack, an open house was held at the masjid featuring information booths on Islamic women, the meaning of jihad, the Palestinian issue, terrorism, and other related topics.

Dr. Farooqui felt appreciation for the positive coverage provided by the Valley media—
radio, television, and newspaper. Nedra Kinerk, a lady active in community causes, asked if any members of the Muslim community would like to be accompanied to the grocery store, and Davis Rankin interviewed him many times on the radio. Dr. Thomas Pearson, a professor of history and philosophy at the University of Texas-Pan American, taught a “special topics” class on Islam, and brought all of his students to visit the masjid during Ramadan.111 A course in the history of the Islamic world was added to the curriculum of the University of Texas at Brownsville, and was first taught by Dr. Milo Kearney in the fall of 2003.112 The Phi Alpha Theta History Honor Society, sponsored by Dr. Kearney, presented a series of lectures in Islamic history and culture given in the fall of 2003 by Colonel Edward Moore (a UT-B Political Science Instructor and an ex-military attaché and CNN war correspondent in Turkey), Dr. Khaled Elkhal (a UT-B Business Professor from Tunisia), and Dr. Farhat Iftekharuddin (UT-B Dean of Liberal Arts and a Professor of English from Bangladesh).

Conclusion

The Muslim community in the Rio Grande Valley has barely laid its first foundations. What is its future? A contrast between traditional American and Islamic culture and history has been noted in the literature, as well as a pull between national and religious loyalties. The answer to this question also depends on international developments. Will international tensions cause a restriction in the number of Muslim immigrants, or pressure to assimilate into the non-Muslim population? On the other hand, it has been noted that in past times of stress, the number of American Muslims who take part in Islamic institutions has grown.113 Whatever its future, the Muslim community has joined the East Asian and Hindu communities in bringing new diversity to the traditional bicultural society of the Rio Grande Valley.

The University of Texas at Brownsville

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7 http://usinfo.state.gov/products/pubs/muslimlife/immigrat.htm (Muslim Life in America - Office of Intern...mation Programs, U.S. Department of State.)
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1880, Incarnate Word Convent, Brownsville
by Jessica Cisneros
The original Fort Brown of 1846 (originally named Fort Texas and Fort Taylor) was located where the Fort Brown Memorial Golf Course is now. It was renamed after Major Jacob Brown, who died defending it from the Mexican Army across the river. In 1848, after the Mexican War ended and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was signed, the town of Brownsville was founded by Charles Stillman. When Texas became part of the Confederate States of America in 1861, Union troops were ordered to leave, and the fort was occupied by Confederate troops. When Union troops returned to stop the Confederacy from importing cotton, Confederate General Bee ordered that munitions and cotton be torched, with the fort destroyed in the process. Union troops pitched officer’s tents and enlisted men had to construct makeshift quarters with whatever was available. Confederates eventually retook what was left of Fort Brown. Although the Civil War came to a close, in May 1865 Colonel Ford John S. “Rip” Ford attacked Union Troops at Palmito Ranch in what is known as the last battle of the Civil War. A military presence was kept as a show of strength and the fort was relocated to the military reservation by 1867.1 Nearly a century later, this area would become home of the University of Texas and Texas Southmost College.

An Architectural Primer

Buildings embody a physical record of history by their design. A mixture of architectural features and materials denote the era in which a building like Gorgas Hall was built. Architect and historian Manuel Hinojosa revealed that: “It was only after the Civil War with the building of Fort Brown that Spanish elements began to be incorporated in Brownsville’s architecture,” and the availability of brick influenced design.2 These elements have their origin from traditional Romanesque influences and early 16th century Moorish dominance of Spain. One cultural feature of the Islamic world in building practices can be seen in the Visigothic arch. Spain carried this and other elements to the New World, including to Mexico. A mixture of Spanish Colonial and Mexican Creole styles were incorporated into northern Mexico and South Texas building practices. Some of these traditions include: 1) the parapet: a brick wall extended above the roof line, 2) corbelling: bricks extended outward from a wall or column to produce shadows, 3) dentils: bricks of small blocks forming a band of ornamentation, 4) pilasters: a non-supporting pier projected from a wall and rising toward the roof line ending with a stepped “entablature,” and 5) the overhanging cornice: the assemblage of projecting bricks near the top of the wall. Other notable practices can be seen in thick masonry walls and a continuation of noted features to each side (symmetry).3 Figure 1 names several features of the historic campus buildings that are carried over to newer buildings.

Relocating the Fort

Captain William Alonzo Wainwright, Quartermaster of the Post 1868-1870, could not have foreseen that a few of the 40-70 buildings he intended to populate a permanent Army post at Fort Brown would last into the 21st century as buildings of UTB/TSC. His assignment was to rebuild the fort after a hurricane struck on October 2-3, 1867 and interrupted rebuilding efforts
in progress.⁴ A 1950 *Brownsville Herald* article used Wainwright’s words to tell his story of how only a small single story brick building occupied by his sister remained when he arrived in 1868 nearly a quarter of a mile from the original post. An elliptical oxbow lake, known as the Fort Brown Resaca or “Horseshoe Lake,” was littered with debris from the former huts and wood frame construction materials. This new site had been selected in 1849 by Quartermaster W.W. Chapman when he noted the absence of flooding by the Rio Grande River nearby.⁵ Wainwright might also have considered in his planning that in 1854 an Army inspector general criticized wood buildings as being inferior to brick, which he reported was available in Brownsville for $2 per thousand.⁶ He immediately began with four two-story buildings for infantry soldiers which ran beside what is presently International Boulevard and seven one and a half story wood frame houses facing the parade grounds from Taylor Street as Infantry officer’s quarters known as “Officer’s Row”. Wood had to be purchased from the north (just how far “north” will be revealed later). Construction would take 1,800 mules along with 1,300 civilian employees including civil engineers, architects, blacksmiths, masons, carpenters, painters and twenty-four clerks. Brick buildings included a hospital, headquarters, in addition to cavalry and artillery barracks with three houses for officers. It took over 1,000,000 bricks to build the Post Hospital now called Gorgas Hall. Stables for horses and mules, shops, warehouses, and a large bakery were also included. Wainwright’s eight foot high and thirteen inch-wide brick barrier known as the “Quartermaster’s Fence” ran along the edge of the fort behind infantry barracks on what is presently International Boulevard. Among soldiers buried in the National Cemetery, where he used old cannon to place a monument on the island, was buried his little horse “Joe”.

Hundreds of 35- to-40-foot-long pine trees from Florida were bought to the fort to pile the riverbank and hold the water back. The cost was $1.2 million to complete. Wainwright gloved with pride following the inspection by Quartermaster General Meigs, who reported to the Secretary of War that Fort Brown “had more to show for the expenditure than any other post on the frontier”.⁷ The late Bruce Aiken, a well-known local historian who traveled to Austin to look over the Wainwright Papers,⁸ stated that a $150,000 appropriation was granted to rebuild the fort and when the money ran out, military personnel were used to finish the work.⁹ By this time the price of brick was $8 per thousand. Bargains were found in a load of 60,000 used wood shingles for $10 and the cost of 70 cents per bushel of corn and oats to feed horses and mules.¹⁰ The $150,000 might have been an initial grant of Wainwright’s $1.2 million. Although these buildings and those that followed the Wainwright era would be visited by additional hurricanes, several remain as historical landmarks to this day.

**Building No. 83 - Post Hospital**

The most impressive building of Wainwright’s legacy is the hospital. It was altered from standard Army plans to accommodate personnel unaccustomed to the south Texas climate. Its arches and breezeway between two hospital wards allowed air to circulate through passageways. It was regarded as “the most beautiful hospital in the entire army.”¹¹ Architect Samuel W. Brooks, known for his work in Brownsville and the Rio Grande Valley, has been credited as building the Superintendent’s Lodge which once stood on the island at the National Cemetery and the Post Hospital, along with a few other unspecified structures at Fort Brown in W.H. Chatfield’s *The Twin Cities of the Border*. In 1853, Brooks earned his livelihood in New Orleans as an architect, builder and lumber supplier. He continued his trade and business in Matamoros from 1863 until 1878 when he relocated to Brownsville.¹² The question remains as to who should receive credit
for its innovative design. Architect Wainwright coordinated the buildings erected on the fort, working from standardized Army building plans. However, plans may be modified, and this was the case with the post hospital plans. It is not improbable that Brooks, having spent enough years in Mexico to study architectural forms of the region, could have implemented modifications to include Spanish Colonial/Mexican Creole architectural attributes into Wainwright’s standard hospital plans. By Brownsville’s standard at the time, these introductive architectural customs were innovative.

Although the hospital was occupied by 1 May 1869, it was not completed until 1871. Chatfield also stated thorough repairs were made to the hospital in 1890. The architectural firm of Bell, Klein and Hoffman, in their Preservation Master Plan for the Old Fort Brown Buildings (1981), observed that three additions appeared to have been made to the hospital. These additions included the two-story tower adjoined to the east wing by a one-story infill and the two story blocks at the rear. However, a 1869 map shows a “T” form representing the hospital which might indicate that only the far rear block was not present (Fig.2). Another description of the
building in 1892 named three wards with a thirty-five-bed capacity and a large wood stove to provide heat in the winter. When it seemed that the United States would enter World War I, the post hospital was used as a quartermaster office complex and temporary wooden hospital buildings were built a half-mile northeast of the post.
Fort Brown Records and Post Engineer's Records of Buildings in Fort Brown are fairly detailed record books of expenditures made to repair or upgrade post buildings, which include photographs and floor plans. Every building has a numbered designation. The Post Hospital is Building No. 83 and its walls have a thickness of twelve inches. Sections will, hereupon, be referenced by letters A through G to denote each section of Gorgas Hall (Fig.3). Section A, the west wing nearest May Street and C, the opposite wing to the east, were the main wards of the building. Separate floor plans indicate capacities vary from 100 beds in 1936 to 50 beds beginning in 1938. A 1962 article in *The Brownsville Herald* states that Fort Brown assistant surgeon William J. Wilson reported in 1870 that the hospital had accommodations for twenty-four beds. This could mean a single wing was completed during the stages of the hospital's construction unless beds were temporarily scarce. A 10' x 12' room boxed in each corner of the wards was used for linen or closet space, offices and toilets. The first floor of the front central two-story block on the north side of section B included four separate 14' x 14' rooms used for two offices, a medical library and a dispensary to administer medicines to patients in 1936. By 1938 three offices and the dispensary occupied the floor. Two rooms near the front entrance were used by orderlies, with a surgery office and dispensary to the rear by 1941. The second floor of section B was divided into separate wards for officer's and prisoners with a single 13' x 13' holding cell.

Photographs by Robert Runyon during the early 1900s show that Section D, now an office for Administration and Partnership Affairs, was an open arched passageway during the early 1900's. Quartermaster's records from 1921 to 1941 list this section as being divided into an x-ray and operating room with the first floor of the connected Section E divided into a sterilization room, x-ray dark room (with a boiler room inserted in between by 1938) and operating room in front. The second floor included a pathology lab in 1936 but was used exclusively as the dentist's office with two operating rooms, various small rooms and a waiting room thereafter. The first floor of Section F behind the main central block was a 12' x 31' dining area with an obstetrical ward on the second floor. At the rear (Section G) were the kitchen and storerooms on the first floor with a 22' x 31' day room and toilet on the second floor. As noted, sections D, E and G probably existed by 1871.

In 1976 Ruby A. Wooldridge, best remembered for teaching at Texas Southmost College and for her book, *Brownsville: A Pictorial History* with Robert B. Vezzetti in 1982, stated in an unpublished history of Texas Southmost College that Brownsville Junior College (later TSC) made major renovations in September 1948 and the post hospital building was converted to house:

The science laboratories, art department, college library, permanent offices of the Dean and registry, science lecture rooms, office of the superintendent of the grounds, journalism department and the faculty lounge. The room on the second floor of the former hospital, which had been used by the army for confining violent patients, was used jointly by the Junior College and the Brownsville Historical Society for the storage of rare books and documents.

Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps of city blocks and streets include outlines of buildings and their functions. A 1949 Sanborn map indicates sections A and G were used as classrooms, B as offices, C as a library, and E as study rooms. TSC Bulletin No. 36 1971-72 mentions the “Gorgas Science Center” as having been remodeled to include three biology laboratories [in sections C and E] with plans for a Science, Mathematics and Engineering building in the works. By 1972, Gorgas was mainly an administrative building with the completion of Eidman Hall as a science
By 1981 Gorgas housed the Offices of the President and Vice-President, Registrar, Veteran's Affairs, Business and the Counseling Center.²⁸

Figure 3
Building 83 (Gorgas Hall) Post Hospital floor plan re-drawn from Fort Brown Post Records

The feasibility of keeping Gorgas (and other historical buildings) in pristine condition has been tested by time and trial. Although remodeling the interiors suited academic needs, undoing the mistakes of well-intended caretakers and the elements of nature began a program of continual restoration efforts to upkeep the buildings. Some of these conditions can be traced to the painting of brick buildings (beige with white trim) done by army personnel in 1935 and alterations in the early 1940's when the "first floor and porch deck had been replaced with concrete flooring."²⁹ C.J. Garland, who served as Texas Southmost College president from 1953-1968,³⁰ announced a program in the early 1960's to restore the buildings to their original brick face by means of sandblasting several layers of paint to expose the natural brick beneath. The college board, upon inspecting the results of one side of the building, authorized a plastic coat to be sprayed on the buildings to maintain the natural color instead of repainting.³¹ Bell and associates made extensive analysis of the brick that was overly exposed and therefore vulnerable to subsequent impairment from moisture, temperature, atmosphere and biological growth. Recommendations for brick conservation to repair the damaged walls concluded their study.³²

Among buildings surveyed by Bell, Klein and Hoffman's detailed study completed in 1981 were the A.A. Champion Hall (Medical Lab), Old Morgue, Art Building (Commissary/Guardhouse), and Gorgas Hall (Hospital). They exposed nearly every conceivable ailment from roof to floor that could be understandably expected in these old buildings.³³ By 1991, the transformation of old
buildings was completed thanks to a 1986 $13.5 million bond issue approved by voters to boost the college's growth and rescue historical buildings from further debilitation. TSC was presented with a plaque by the Brownsville Historical Association for its efforts to preserve historic fort buildings making the Post Hospital a National Historic Landmark in Texas. Consequently, the college received the highest honor by the San Antonio chapter of the American Institute of Architects in 1993 for a vast developmental project coordinated by the architectural firm of Marmon Mok which included the construction of the North and South buildings whose architectural features are reminiscent of older buildings, namely Gorgas Hall, and:

The restoration of five historic Fort Brown structures, an 8,000 square-foot addition to the gymnasium, a 36,000-square-foot addition to the Arnulfo L. Oliveira Memorial Library, the renovation of two modern buildings [Tandy and the Camille Lightner Center], attractive landscaping, and new lighting and circulation systems [the Central Plant Building near the water tower off Ridgley Road].

It should be noted this vast project also replaced the unattractive system of poles and wires with underground conduit and communication lines to draw attention to landscaping and architecture. The newly designed facades of the Oliveira Library and Cleve H. Tandy Hall unified these structures with original Fort Brown buildings. It is fortunate today that we can look at modern structures are repeat the architectural traits of the fort buildings. Things could have looked much different. It was once expected that the modern architecture of Tandy Hall would "set the functional style to be followed in the construction of future buildings on campus."

The history of Gorgas Hall can be seen in the Robert Runyon collection available online and from photographs held in the UTB/TSC library archive files on local history to tell a de-evolutional story of Gorgas Hall as it was altered and then re-evolved to its earliest known original state. For example, comparison of old photographs reveal that the simple vertical baluster metal railing on the second floor has been restored to its original lattice gallery railing and chimneys once again rise above roof parapets. One report stated the hospital had lost its chimneys and ridge ventilators during the hurricane of 1880. Since the concrete poured in the 1940's has been removed and original wood decks restored, the resounding echo of footsteps can be heard within the arcades by visitors of Gorgas Hall. It is a marvel to this day and justifiably the signature for other buildings that follow it into the 21st century.

Nearly every building on campus is enhanced by arches of one form or another. Architectural features that stem from Gorgas Hall give UTB/TSC an unprecedented uniqueness among other colleges. In 1993 the Architecture and Design Review of Houston magazine included a booklet, “On the Border: An Architectural Tour” featuring Brownsville buildings in which the design of the Gorgas building was noted for its "brick arches, brick pilasters and brick corbelling at the roof line -- [as being] redolent of the Creole architectural tradition of Northeastern Mexico."

This section on the Post Hospital will conclude by retelling a story from the Brownsville Herald about Dr. William Crawford Gorgas, beginning with his thirty year battle at the age of twenty-seven against Yellow Fever, Yellow Jack, or vomito negro, as it was known in Mexico. He arrived at Fort Brown in 1882 amidst the epidemic that overtook its victims with body aches, fever and nausea that induced black vomit. Freshly dug graves stood open and ready to swallow another victim and their belongings. The dreaded disease was known to have "wiped out entire armies and thousands of civilians in tropical climates in the western hemisphere." One case
involved the invading American Army of Vera Cruz, Mexico, in 1846, and another occurred when the Spanish Army was rendered impotent by Yellow Fever in its attempts to suppress Cuban insurrectionists in the 1890's. A "study" suggested that Spanish Conquistadors bought it over with African Negroes. In Brownsville, some presumed the carriers to have been railroad workers from Tampico or seamen from New Orleans. Lieutenant Gorgas was instructed by his colleagues to carry whiskey, brandy, mustard seed and cigars to help ward off the disease, as no cure was known. Also unknown was that the mosquito was to blame for carrying the virus. It was thought the disease was transmitted through personal contact, filth from streets or marshes, or the putrid odor in the atmosphere that rose from this filth. Gorgas began dissecting bodies in the "dead house," as the Old Morgue was then called, to study the cause of Yellow Fever. He had been ordered to stay away from patients and was briefly arrested for disobeying those orders.

Because it was not known how the fever spread, a Yellow Fever doctor was also relegated to being undertaker, gravedigger and clergyman. One night, following his experience at Fort Brown,
Dr. Gorgas described to colleagues at Fort Barranca, Florida, the horrible details of what it was like to dig a grave, wrap a corpse in a white shroud, add quick lime to an empty coffin before placing the corpse within it, the internment “and the reading of the burial service by the light of a lantern.”

One cannot imagine what went through his mind when one day as he looked into an open grave of the National Cemetery on the island and was asked by another doctor to read a burial service for Miss Marie Cook Doughty, whose drawn out fifteen day illness made it seem as her time would come very soon. He agreed to do so, but continued to treat her.

To Miss Doughty, he was the “Gorgeous Doctor” and when he would come to visit her in the cool dark of night, she could hardly see his face but was lulled by the “musical tones of his voice and his soft southern accent.”

His treatment of her and subsequent illness beside her resulted in a lifelong partnership in which she accompanied him in his pursuit to stamp out Yellow Jack for good. Both became immune following their recovery and when it was theorized that the stegomyia mosquito was the enemy, he began warfare to get rid the mosquito. Some of his quarantine methods included the elimination of stagnant water, the insects’ breeding grounds, and fumigation techniques. Oil was also poured into marshes. His campaign against the epidemic took him to Panama where the construction of the canal had been interrupted by the disease.

By 1914 he was appointed Surgeon General of the Army. While in London in 1920 to meet King George V, he had a cerebral hemorrhage. The king visited him in the hospital and expressed at length his sincere appreciation for the work he did for humanity. Gorgas died on July 4, 1920 and is credited with proving the mosquito carried the disease and finding ways to eliminate it thus eliminating yellow fever. A memorial plaque was placed on the Fort Brown hospital building presented in a ceremony by the Brownsville Historical Association (BHA) and Brownsville Junior College to commemorate Gorgas in February 1949. Later that same year the BHA in conjunction with other organizations to get Gorgas elected to the Hall of Fame was realized. Gorgas Drive and the TSC’s Gorgas Science Foundation also bear the name of the doctor.

Building No. 84 - Medical Lab

The Medical Lab was named for Albert Alfonso Champion. Known as “A.A.”, he served on the College Board of Trustees from 1968-74 and was a respected historian of the BHA. He organized a personal library of historical documents and was a descendant of the Champion family, who made regional history since 1848. He served on the Brownsville City Commission and “was a cattle rancher and a farmer and a businessman” who will be remembered for assisting government officials in finding the exact location of the Palo Alto Battle Site.

Champion Hall, now housing offices for the Vice President of External Affairs and the Dean of Graduate Studies, is listed as Building No. 84 in post records. Its size is 22’ x 64’ with 12-inch thick walls. Its designation is listed as Medical Supply & Detention Barracks in 1936 records and Medical Offices, Lab & Isolation Wards in 1942 records. The 1936 first floor plans show three separate rooms on the first floor were used for medical stores (12’ x 20’ and 20’ x 20’) and one supply room (20’ x 20’). The second floor had two (20’ x 20’) squad rooms, one (12’ x 12’) Non-Commissioned Officers (N.C.O.) room with two bathrooms. Room dimensions remain the same on 1942 floor plans with the exception of a wall dividing one of the large rooms into a lab and exam room in the center. One medical supply office is drawn on the south end with another office at the opposite end. The second floor is divided into three wards. Texas Historical Commission files state that these separate wards were for enlisted men and commissioned officers. The office building is now partitioned into smaller areas. One-story porches, which had been removed.
sometime after the 1920’s, had been replaced as part of the Marmon Mok project. Several conflicting errors of historical record exist regarding the age of the Medical Lab. Quartermaster Post records list it as being completed in 1867. However, it is not mentioned in Wainwright’s detailed account of buildings he erected that was quoted in a 1950 Brownsville Herald article. Historian Bruce Aiken mentions every noteworthy Wainwright building except the hospital annex (and morgue) in his “Historical Sketch of Fort Brown”. If they were indeed Wainwright buildings, they would have been completed by 1870, before he was transferred. Bell, Klein and Hoffman pointed out that the building does not appear on an 1869 map of the post. A definite source was not found to pinpoint the exact date the Medical Lab was built. 1870 may be the closest answer.

The buildings’ initial use by the college was as a physics lab to support the Gorgas buildings’ science program. TSC catalogs beginning in the mid 1960’s state it was remodeled to accommodate two modern physics laboratories until 1972 when C.S. Eidman Hall was built to house the Science and Mathematics departments. By 1974 it housed the Financial Aid office and other special programs. Renovation was in progress in 1977 when the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) examined the building. Maps in the 1979 TSC Catalog label it as Champion Hall. It vanishes from the maps from 1984 until in 1987 it reappears as Champion Hall again. The Bell, Klein and Hoffman study confirms that Financial Aid still occupied the building in 1981. Runyon photos show two interior chimneys on the rooftop and no evidence of exterior stairs. Later photographs show stair locations have been changed from the northeast side behind Gorgas Hall to the end facing the Fort Brown Resaca. Presently, one chimney remains along with interior stairs, located at the entrance for the office of Vice President of External Affairs, Dr. Tony Zavaleta.

Building No. 86 – The Morgue

Building No. 85 is a section of the present day Old Morgue where W.C. Gorgas performed autopsies during the Yellow Fever epidemic of 1882 in attempting to discover its cause. The Post Engineer’s Record lists two separate buildings. Building 85, the larger section (16’ x 16’) was a Linen Storehouse and the taller of the two was Building 86, the (12’ x 12’) Morgue. Walls are 15 inches thick. The buildings, once separated by 40 feet, were connected in 1940 to add storage rooms in between with a garage addition (11’ x 20’) to house an ambulance on the northwest side. The linen storage section is on the opposite side closest to Champion Hall. As a single building, it was designated as Building No. 85 & 86 Office, Storeroom and Garage. Its decorative brick dentils make recognition of the original structures effortless and brick infill marks location of former garage doors. A dividing wall was added to the original linen storehouse to create separate offices. A Boundary Survey map, first drawn in 1928 and last updated in 1938, shows that building 86 was still being used as a morgue. Another General Plan drawn by the Post Engineer c.1943 shows that Building 85 was still used as a “Medical Supply.”

Brownsville Junior College used it as an art gallery beginning in 1948 under the auspices of the Brownsville Art League to exhibit art works of college students, public school pupils and members of the Art League. In existence since 1934, the Art League relocated in 1950 to the historic Neale home (c.1850), itself relocated from 709 Washington Street [actually 14th St. between Washington and Adams], to 230 Neale Drive where it still exists. Its four fireplaces were restored brick by brick and many of its original windows kept intact. It was moved under the supervision of the first woman to graduate from the Rice Institute with a B.S. in Architecture and
also the first woman to practice architecture in the lower Rio Grande Valley. Her name was Ruth Young McGonigle and she was a contributing founder and life-long member of the Brownsville Art League. Young also worked with the BHA in the last decades of her life. It was interesting to learn at the time this article was written that the Neale home is once again to be removed to another location beside the new Museum of Fine Art on Ringgold Street between 6th and 7th Streets expected to open in July 2005.

With the Art League gone, the TSC publications office occupied the morgue for some time thereafter. TSC catalog maps show it housed Business Services throughout the 1970’s. The Bell, Klein and Hoffman study designates the linen storage section as housing Campus Police with Business Services in the morgue during the early 1980’s. They also cite the Surgeon’s Daily Log, 1868-69 as including a complaint that a “dead house” was needed which leads to the belief it was constructed after 1869. It was also used as a mailroom. TSC District Office personnel have occupied the Old Morgue since 1997.

**Building No. 88 – Guardhouse/Commissary**

The Post Engineer’s Record for Guardhouse Building No. 88 was not available. The Fort Brown Post Records state it had a capacity to hold fourteen prisoners and was built in 1904. Its walls are 15 inches thick. A photograph shows two interior chimneys rising from each end of the building, fabric awnings attached to first floor windows and a “Quartermaster Office” sign on its south end. Floor plans are poorly drawn. It may have been simultaneously used as a Commissary/Guardhouse when these plans were first drawn. A *commissary* is used to store food and supplies for an army base. The basement plan indicates a large (33’ x 63’) storeroom taking up the south end with a small solitary holding cell (approximately 8’ x 4’) in the eastern corner of this room and a tool room (19’ x 33’) on the north side. The main floor included two guard offices and one guardroom accessible from the entrance with a gun rack room toward the back. The north end had a large (33’ x 48’) cell room. The attic is labeled as an “unfinished attic storeroom” and is without partitioning walls. Though not shown on floor plans, the building had a loading platform that was used to facilitate delivery or dispensing of provisions. Nancy Selight, a Fine Arts Associate Professor since 1986, remembers that the platform extended to the back of the basement. The opening has been sealed with plywood. Grilled partitions of strap metal still line brick columns where the holding cells were in the basement. Some of these have been removed but an outline on the floor indicates where they were torn out.

John P. White, in writing for the HABS, surmised that once the original guardhouse fell in disuse, the commissary, already equipped with iron bars to keep thieves out, would have been more suitable. He also recounted the Battle of Matamoros and Fort Brown’s hospitality to political prisoners:

> On June 3, 1913, the Carrancistas (insurgents following Venustiano Carranza, who allied himself with Obregón and Villa) under General Lucio Blanco defeated the Mexican federal troops at Matamoros, and 130 Mexican soldiers fled across the river to Brownsville and Fort Brown. Colonel Blocksom, the commanding officer at Fort Brown, fearing an international incident if there were trouble between any of his U.S. soldiers in the regular guardhouse and the incoming Mexican soldiers, used the Commissary as a guardhouse for several weeks to hold the Mexicans.
A 1949 Sanborn map reveals that the building was in commercial use by a business for “wholesale products and warehouse” and the attic was used for “basket storage.” In the fall of 1960, it was remodeled to hold chemistry labs. A TSC catalog for that year proudly announced it had two large laboratories, offices for instructors, weighing rooms, chemical storage with an area for soil, water and corrosion analysis. By 1962 it was part of The Gorgas Science Center, consisting of biology, physics and chemistry departments, which had been “converted into a triple laboratory ... and equipped the latest scientific apparatus.” TSC catalog maps show that the Art Building has been used by that department since 1972 (after Eidman was built), when it briefly shared the structure with a Radio/TV department. Skylights were added at this time, and the attic was used as an art gallery. The main floor has faculty offices and classrooms. The basement is mainly used for ceramics. The skylights and loading platform are now gone.

In 1977, HABS researched the historical Field-Pacheco building at 1049 E. Monroe Street built by Henry M. Field. A minor segment of criteria for their report is to identify contractors or suppliers of buildings they study. Research found that a list of correspondences indicate that H.M. Field might have sold building supplies to the Fort when Building 88 was being built. Research of the Henry M. Field Papers in the Center for American History at the University of Texas at Austin point to this possibility.

In Ballots, Bullets and Barking Dogs, Bruce Aiken told a befitting story to end this history on the Guardhouse. He recalled a soldier from the 1930’s by the name of “Shorty” who was small in stature but always in big trouble. A few shots of cheap whiskey in Brownsville could always put him in the brig for vandalism or disrespecting his superiors as soon as he would saunter back to the post. He was usually seen performing hard labor wearing blue denim with a large painted “P” to adorn his jacket. Soldiers enlisted for three years back then. Any time spent in an army jail was not counted as time served. Shorty managed seven years without reenlisting and was the last man of the 12th Cavalry to board the train (escorted of two “burly” military guards) to Fort Bliss in 1941. As Aiken told the story, Shorty could still be trying to complete his three-year enlistment. In all seriousness, there really was a “Shorty” at Fort Brown. His name was Leo Saenz, better known as “Leo.” He was a sergeant who stood 5’6”-167lbs and liked calling others “Shorty.” He enlisted in June 1927 and for years saw enlisted men become ranking officers while he remained the “Dean of Orderlies.” He was also known to arbitrate “Picket Line Parties” in which he was once arrested.

Building No. 89 – Art Annex

Scarce documentation was found for the Art Annex (Building No. 89) now used for an office and storage space. Post Engineer’s Records designate it as a Telephone Exchange and a Bachelor N.C.O. Quarters. Floor plans have a telephone switchboard, sleeping quarters and signal corps detachment room crossed out leaving a lavatory and N.C.O. quarters on the first level and a signal corps workshop and lighting switchboard on the second floor loft. Fort Brown Post Records designate the two upper rooms as storage room and switchboard room. Walls are 15 inches wide. Both plans do not give a date when it was built. It was probably built in 1904, the same time as building 88. Its double doors were once a single door with five-step stoop at the entrance. HABS photographs taken in 1977 show a metal exterior flue pipe once rose from the exterior sill when it housed a kiln and it was once connected to Building 88 by a flat-roofed wood frame shed. The east entrance was also brick sealed. A door was once located near the southeast corner with another directly across to Building No. 88 when the two buildings were joined by the wooden
structure. This structure was torn down and entrances sealed to attain the historical authenticity of the two buildings. Openings at the foot of the building have also been brick filled.

In *Ballots, Bullets and Barking Dogs*, Aiken recalled that the building was used by the Sergeant of the Guard. Whiskey bottles, over one hundred of them, were found beneath wooden floors during renovation for use by the college. Good old-fashioned drunkenness back then was known as the delirium tremens. Not everyone on the post was immune from this disease.

### Building No. 113 – Cavalry Barracks

The elongated “T”-plan Cavalry building was used to house Cavalry units until WWI, when it became the Quartermaster warehouse and commissary. A devastating hurricane on September 4-5, 1933, struck Brownsville and caused extensive damage to the post. Winds were estimated at 125 miles an hour, after 106 wind gusts blew the anemometer away. As this was the Depression Era, the War Department felt deactivating the post was a better alternative to rebuilding but was convinced not to by Brownsvillites.

The newer officer homes facing the lagoon suffered total destruction. The radio towers fell, warehouses buildings were de-roofed, only a few structures were spared. It is interesting that the oldest officer homes suffered the least damage.

One of the buildings on the fort that received damage was the Cavalry Building No. 113. A larger (100 feet longer) but identical Artillery barracks (No. 133), built by Wainwright near the area where the Brownsville Compress towers now stand, was heavily damaged and was deemed “not habitable” on the Post Engineer’s Record. It was probably too far removed from the active base and too little needed to warrant repairs. Much of the Cavalry Quarters veranda must have been damaged and removed as it does not appear on either post records. Runyon photographs show how the porch looked in the early 1900’s. They are also a record of the building’s appearance before the north wing extension was added. Old bricks juxtaposed by new bricks make this addition noticeable.

Repairs were made in June of 1934. By the 1930’s, the T-plan structure’s central block was used as the Main Post Quartermaster’s Office sales commissary office with the Commissary and Clothing and Equipage Storeroom in the north wing and subsistence storeroom in the south. Partitioned walls show up on more detailed 1936 floor plans with little change to space usage.

Revised records from 1942 label it as the Post Commissary with both wings used as storerooms and an exterior wood framed “issue shed” attached to the north wing. A roofed open passageway separated the main block from the central block. It is not known when the central block was attached to the main by brick.

Maps show there were two brick N.C.O. duplexes and a garage where the Smith Amphitheater and parking lot are now, and a “wash rack” on the corner of Gorgas Drive and Ringgold Road. There was a laundry and “motor transport” building for the 12th cavalry across the street where the New Student Union now sits. Adjacent to the west wing and across the street where the Bookstore now sits, stood a shoe repair shop and medical dispensary for the 124th cavalry. A wide-open corral in front of Cavalry extended up to the entrance of the Rusteberg building. Four warehouses once stood where the Life and Health Sciences building is now located. Two barracks buildings were constructed behind Building 113 around 1940 and were removed in the late 1990s’. A small plate with number “113” can still be seen above the entrance.
The Cavalry building was not used immediately by the college. A Sanborn map from 1949 indicates that the west wing was used by Sears & Roebuck for warehouse storage and the east wing to house auto supplies storage, with a cold storage room at the far end. The central block is labeled as general storage. Other former Army buildings belonging to the city behind Cavalry appear to have also been used as commercial rental spaces bordered by Brownsville Compress warehouses. These compress warehouses were formerly hay barns.

The building appears to have been used by the college throughout the 1980's for electronics technology classrooms. Campus Police headquarters, which was once in the Old Morgue building and later in Building 23 (“Officer’s Quarters”) during the mid to late 80's later moved into Cavalry with Student Health Services with room for computer classrooms. Renovation and reconstruction of roofed porches were planned by Design Five Architects and contracted to the Jearel Adams Construction Co. At the time of this writing it was still in use by Campus Police and Student Health Services had relocated to the Cortez complex. The west wing, used by Business Administration, will have a new function once the Education and Business Complex currently under construction is complete. The east wing is used by Computer Sciences and Computer Information Systems. Campus Police plans to expand its use of the central block by relocating its dispatcher office.

Building No. 23 – Married Officer’s Quarters

Why Building 23 is called by that number was not discovered. Now occupied by the Development Office, it was also once used by housekeeping services and campus police. It will very likely have a new use by the time this article is published. It sits opposite Champion Hall facing Gorgas Drive and May Street. Research showed that Building 23 once stood on Porter Drive (facing the Fort Brown resaca) in the 1920s and 30’s. By the early 1940’s there was a “Building 23a” next to it. Neither Quartermaster Post records floor plans or photographs resemble the structure. To further add complexity to the conundrum, a photograph of Building 53 from Fort Brown Post Records (which shows up on maps as being across Champion Hall), has what appears to be the roofline of Champion Hall behind it – making it appear as the accurate building. However, sketches of side elevations and an outline of Building 23 were drawn and compared to photos of Buildings 23, 23a and 53 without a match. When the outline sketch was compared to the General Plan map of fort buildings, lo and behold it was discovered that Building 51 must be it! Postmaster inventory records confirmed this. Actually, careful examination of maps should have made it obvious that building 53 would have been on the corner parking lot next to building 51.

Fort Brown Post Records Plan No. 51 is without a photograph or floor plan. Instead, it refers to Buildings 47 & 48, which are identical to it. Photographs of the front view of 47 and the rear view of 48 are identical to elevation sketches and the outline sketch of the actual building matches an outline of floor plans. Renovation was not performed on it until the late 1990's. A large window unit was removed and replaced with a central air system, and the building was prepared for offices by Physical Plant personnel. Clearly, they knew how to restore the building to its original appearance. It was neighbored by three similar buildings used as dormitories for Scorpion baseball players until the poor condition of these buildings made it necessary to house athletes in the Fort Brown Hotel [now the “Village at Fort Brown” student housing] in 1993. These houses, and others like them -- which were used by the college at one time or other as faculty residences, a University of Texas-Pan American University at Brownsville library support offices
Building 51 was originally built in 1919, at a time appropriations for building resulted in many permanent officer’s quarters being built between the Fort Brown Resaca and the Rio Grande. The house and others like it were destroyed by the 1933 hurricane. Reconstruction of the buildings on the same spot they had stood was completed on June 30, 1934 and “made hurricane proof”. Originally built as a (married) Officer’s Quarters with family, it is a small wood frame/stucco structure that had three bedrooms and baths. The entire front and half of one side had a screened porch. The side porch area was designated as a “sleeping porch.” It is the last of several officer residences of this sort that were removed through the years.

Maps show there were eighteen single-story buildings facing Gorgas Drive and Taylor Street that stretched from May Street to Porter Drive. Some of these single story homes were added in 1919 with additional ones built along Porter Drive between Horseshoe Lake and the Rio Grande. Wainwright’s seven field officer’s quarters that faced the former Parade Grounds from Taylor Avenue “were altered from multiple to single family dwellings.” Twenty-five buildings and a twelve-car garage filled this block. Barry Horn, Director of Development, had an office in Building 51. As a child, his family visited friends who rented one of the homes. He recalled there being backyard areas between the houses for children to play and a traditional barbeque was held at the large post chapel which will be discussed later. Elizabeth Street would later cut through this residential block and be bridged to the island.

A Junior College Uses Old Buildings

When Brownsville Junior College came to Fort Brown in 1948, Jefferson did not turn into May St. May St. was a short road from Gorgas Dr. to Taylor Ave. Instead, Jefferson turned into Heintzelman Road, which started at Jefferson onto the post and later, the college. Maps show the path of this road once ran between the library and Tandy Hall, past the Gorgas Tower in a straight line along the paseo going beyond the Cavalry building and Ringgold Rd.

Three two-story barracks buildings stretching from the present May entrance to the front of the not yet built Fort Brown Memorial Center were used as classrooms. The middle building was used as vocational training for veterans to learn furniture repair. Three other barracks buildings in the same line across May St. adjacent to International Blvd. to the present day Tandy Hall were also used as classrooms and college preparatory classrooms including basic English classes for non-English speaking persons. These classes were sponsored by the Junior College and not part of the regular college curriculum. Other two story barracks buildings were used as dormitories for students and out-of-town teachers.

The Post Exchange (PX) building (Bldg. 80), which was also used as a post office, and Post Restaurant (Bldg. 81) once stood where the library and parking lot nearest the Gorgas Hall are now. The PX building had the first floor removed and raised. Front rooms were used for the Board of Education and School Tax Office. The rear wing had its walls covered in acoustic tile for the Music department. Sara Cortina-Walker of the Brownsville Historical Association, who used to work in the basement of the PX building, recalled several instances when rain would flood the basement and equipment had to be carried out in a hurry. After snakes had slithered their way in, the basement was nicknamed the “Snake-pit”. Another time, Sara was completely taken by surprise when a large frog jumped into a pitcher of water used for drinking. On the topic of drinking, veterans of the old fort came into the basement one day for a visit to see how much
the building had changed. They stood in disbelief at how the college had “ruined” their favorite distilling room! Yolanda Gonzalez-Gomez, also of the BHA and long-time TSC Hunter Room Senior Library Assistant, recalled how a load of Life magazines and other publications she had spent countless of hours collecting for the library had been thrown in as filling for the basement when the parking lot was being completed along with the new library. It would be interesting to know what this unusual but attractive building might look like today if it hadn’t been torn down. It had four “double” columns in front and a single column on both sides that stood on square pedestals to support the opened gabled entrance. Building trim was painted white. A large arch projected from the wall above the front door with a large fanned window light. There was also a clerestory (circular opening) at the top of the gable.

The Post Restaurant, which was also used to house a tailor shop and a barbershop, became the cafeteria, bookstore and student union. The late Judge Filemon Vela remembered this as being one of the few buildings that had air conditioning, and he used to like to spend his free time there while he waited for the school bus to take him back home to Harlingen. The Post Theater (Bldg.5), (which was torn down as nearby Tandy Hall was being built), had been converted to an auditorium by enlarging the stage and adding 414 new opera chairs. It was also used for speech classes.

Building Nos. 2 and 62 – Post Chapel

Building No. 2, the Regiment House or Office of Institutional Advancement, has been called by many names. Although small in stature, it has a diverse history. Not only has its use and title changed many times since it was built, it has also misled some local historians into reporting it as being located at one place or another. Once affectionately known as “The Little Chapel at Fort Brown,” it originally stood with its back to the Rio Grande and faced the parade grounds near the present Gateway International Bridge and Customs facilities. There, where the original 1860’s guardhouse once stood, was the Officer’s Club and tennis court. Southeast from it was the Headquarters Building on Kerr Street (no longer existing). According to Bell, Klein and Hoffman, Building 2 had “been moved from its original location to a point near the international bridge.” Another account described the chapel as once being located near the Jefferson entrance and used as a school for African-American soldiers. See endnote for additional information. These minor errors that crept into historical record made Building No. 2 an interesting study. There were actually two chapels; each one moved one time and both still in use today.

The first chapel was built for use as a school and library. Plans were originally designed for it to be made of wood in 1879. However, a hurricane in 1880 might have convinced the Army that a brick building would last longer. Maps showed that building No. 2 was built between 1882 and 1884. It was used as a school until 1907. Between then and 1922, it is not certain what it was used for. From 1922 to 1941 it was used as a Post Chapel, N.C.O. “Bachelor’s” Quarters, Officers’ Guests Quarters, Post Office and N.C.O. Quarters, and the Chaplain’s office prior to October 1941 as will be explained later. Earliest Post Engineer’s records show that a single 20’ x 30’ ft. bedroom and 16’ x 18’ living room made up the floor space with an open porch. At this time it lists a capacity for 50 persons. “The larger room was the chapel’s auditorium, while the smaller room was its vestry.” Later records show the building was divided with a hall to make three bedrooms and small kitchen to house a single family by 1938. It was also painted at one time. By then, the 6’ x 15’ ft. porch was screened.
In 1951, the Little Chapel at Fort Brown was remembered at the time for being a “popular place for weddings of soldiers and local girls” when it was transferred by the city of Brownsville as a museum to the BHA. The BHA restored the building and opened in 1952. The BHA was organized in 1946 and granted a charter by the state of Texas in 1947. They were granted use of the Chapel as a museum for 50 years. However, by 1958, the Stillman house at 1305 E. Washington Street was purchased by Chauncey Stillman, a great-grandson of Charles Stillman, and donated to the BHA as their permanent home. When businessmen in downtown Brownsville heard about this, they drew up a petition to oppose the BHA relocating there under the charge that “a museum would stifle the growth of the immediate area.” The BHA restored the home and moved in by 1960. Now with the expanded Brownsville Heritage Complex, the BHA continues to organize a wide range of activities to promote local history and preserve historical records.

From 1960 to 1991, Building No. 2 was used as an office for the General Services Administration (GSA) and a tool and maintenance building. Little maintenance had been done on the building and after thirty years of neglect, the building had seen better days. When expansion of the U.S. Customs facility would require that it be removed, in 1992 the “Little Chapel” was suddenly in need of a few small miracles.

Mark Lund, Director of City Planning, (Heritage Officer for Brownsville at the time) had first hand experience from the initial dismantling, storage and restoration of Building No. 2. He stated that the city had a contract with the GSA to remove (demolish) the building. When the Texas State Historical Commission became involved, the “Planning staff and Heritage Council persuaded the City Commission to intervene such that the building’s demolition (disassembly) was done carefully to allow it at a future date to be possibly reassembled.”

Because the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) protects important cultural and historic aspects of our national heritage from being destroyed before an assessment of the area can be made, the Southeast Archeological Center and National Parks Service coordinated efforts funded by the GSA. After a few test pits were dug, charred bits of wood were found. Archeologists suspected this could mean that fighting in an 1846 Mexican-American War battle could have been carried over to the side of the river near the bridge. Wood structures such as jacaless (simple wood huts roofed by thatch) might have ignited as the Mexican Army and Fort occupants exchanged fire. The GSA had heard enough history and was anxious to remove Building No. 2 because it delayed construction by standing in the way of a road that had to be widened for trucks to make a sharp turn from the bridge for inspection. Once the Historical Commission was satisfied assessment requirements were met, the process to demolish was approved. When the city was contracted by the GSA to demolish Building No. 2, Mr. Lund involved the Heritage Council and Planning Director Joe Galvan who spoke with Butch Barbosa of the City Commission to find what could be done to save the little building.

Bricks were not numbered as previously believed. Instead, temporary workers were hired and instructed to carefully remove the bricks and place them on pallets to be stored for future use. The City Manager, Kirby Lellijedahl, sent Parks Department trucks to transport brick and wooden pieces, which were labeled and protected by tarps.

There was no funding to immediately relocate the building. One ideal plan was to situate the building near the entrance at the Fort Brown Memorial Golf Course as a visitor’s center. Until Building No. 2’s fate would be known, components would be temporarily stored in Brownsville Compress warehouses free of rent for several months by compress owners. After a quite a few months, the city was asked to begin paying rent. Since the building was eligible to receive funds from the Community Development Block Grant – Community Development Funds (CBDG),
approximately $1,200 was used to keep the parts in storage until it would be decided where it
would be rebuilt. Around this time Los Caminos Del Rio was producing a film to highlight
significant architectural buildings along both sides of the Rio Grande Valley to be aired by
the Public Broadcasting System (PBS). The Dallas-based philanthropic Meadows Foundation
supported this production and representatives were visiting Brownsville. After learning about
Building No. 2, they advised the City to write a formal grant proposal.141

TSC got involved in planning a new site with the Texas Historical Commission and the City
Planning Department for the building on the historical campus once funding by the Meadows
Foundation was assured.142 TSC officials must have considered Building 2 as an inherent part of
the historical assemblage of Fort buildings and that it would be turned over to them even though
it had fallen under ownership of the GSA and later, transferred to the City.143 The project was
entitled “Building Number Two” by the City and an Inter-Local Agreement was signed between
the City and TSC under which the City would pay all costs once a $50,000 grant was secured by
the Meadows Foundation. Construction was to be supervised by Heritage Officer Mark Lund and
progress of the work would be reported to Michael Putegnat, TSC Executive Director. Once the
job was completed, the City would “turn over title and control to TSC. Costs involved for TSC
would be time and landscaping.”144

Bricks were delivered near the parking lot on the site it would be rebuilt. This pile caused
rainwater to flood the parking lot and Michael Putegnat, was pressured to correct this situation.
For a short while, stagnant water became known as “Putegnat’s Pond.” Bricks had to be reset aside
to allow for proper drainage.145

During reconstruction, the contractor became dissatisfied with the amount of his imbursement
when the small building proved to be a bigger challenge than he anticipated. He had stored some
of the wooden pieces from the Brownsville Compress in his garage and held up construction.
Mark Lund was faced with two problems: One was to hire a new contractor to complete the
half-finished project with the amount of funds that were left over (most contractors wouldn’t
want to bid on a half-finished job) and the second was to get the wooden pieces back. Lund had
the police called in as a precautionary measure to insure parts would be delivered. The Parks
Department was used again to deliver wooden parts to the second contractor, Carroll Adams who
saw the project to the end. (His nephew Jearel Adams worked on the Cavalry building). Some
wooden pieces had become damaged from being taken apart, stepped on, or exposed to moisture.
Carroll Adams, having worked on historic building restoration jobs before and seeing Mark had
been scraping pieces of interior wood trim so that they may be used again, took it upon himself to
purchase wood pieces with his money to see the job be done right.146

Another obstacle to rebuilding was met below the ground on which Building No.2 now
stands. Because of its heavy 12” brick walls, a continuous concrete brick foundation had to be
placed below the ground for the building to stand on. Utility pipes obstructed digging and created
problems for re-builders:

Boxed openings were made in the reinforced concrete foundation. Steel pieces
were placed on the top of the openings after the concrete cured. This was done to
handle the loads of substantial masonry walls. The City sidewalk crew (under the
direction of Santana Vallejo) built this concrete foundation. They did very well
in dealing with the challenges presented by the existing utilities. The foundation
design was done by the City Engineer, P.J. Garcia, P.E. The private contractor was
hired to do the subsequent work… after the foundation was completed.147
Mark Lund also had the odious task of placing insulation from the crawl space beneath the floor of Building No. 2. Work was completed by 1993 and it now sits near the Art Annex Building No. 89. Disappointingly, there isn’t a historical subject marker on the Little Chapel for visitors to inform them where the building was once located, what it was used for, and to memorialize the people who all worked together to save it.

A second Post Chapel (Building No. 62) once stood in the area between Tandy Hall and the Lightner Student Center next to the Post Theater. This chapel was the actual “Regimental” chapel. It had a larger capacity to hold services for a larger number of men. The large wood-frame structure with a steeple was built in 1941 and had a 350-person capacity. It measured 81'-3” long and 37’ wide. The Quartermaster record lists it as a “temporary” building and classifies it as a “Regimental Chapel” on the floor plan. It was dedicated on Sunday, 26th October 1941. It had a movable altar for Jewish, Catholic or Protestant services. Before that, services were held in the service club near Building No. 2. Chaplain Stephan K. Callahan moved his office from Building No. 2 into the new chapel the following Monday.

In 1947, the two chapels and other buildings at Fort Brown were declared surplus property by the War Assets Administration (WAA). An appeal was made to the WAA to secure Building No. 2 (The Little Chapel) as a museum for the BHA who had just had their first annual meeting at the Brownsville Chamber of Commerce after being chartered by the State of Texas. Immaculate Conception Church bought Building No. 62 for the St. Joseph Church on the corner of Sixth and W. St. Francis. Luke Waters of Harlingen took the job of moving the building from the Fort to its new site. For a job that would have normally lasted a few days or couple of weeks at the most, it ended up taking nearly five months. It was a burden he carried to the end.

Waters began the task in October of 1947. To move it presented a problem because streets were only 30 feet. Weighing 150,000 pounds, it was moved by heavy trucks. Telephone cables were either lowered or raised to make way for the chapel. Electric lines were also cut. This upset some people who were temporarily left without electricity. The weather caused the greatest problems. Whenever it rained, the job would be halted, as the earth was too soft to move over without getting the load stuck in the mud, which it did at various points. The front end was pulled out of one of Water’s trucks. Two winch trucks were damaged and cable lines broke several times. Mr. Waters also broke his arm in a fall on January 2nd. Asked if he remembered the exact route that was followed in moving; his reply was “I certainly do. I’ll never forget it.”

After leaving Fort Brown, it proceeded on Jefferson to East Ninth, turned north to Madison, west on Madison to Seventh, north on Seventh to Van Buren, west on Van Buren across the Southern Pacific railroad tracks to Ninth, south on Ninth to Jackson, west on Jackson between the Resaca and City Cemetery, across Palm Blvd. to West First, south across vacant lots to Jefferson, west on Jefferson to W. Seventh, south to Elizabeth, east to half-way between W. Fourth and Fifth, west again to Seventh, south on Seventh to St. Francis, and finally to its destination at W. Sixth and St. Francis.

For the “wandering church” to reach its destination, brush had to be cleared on some vacant lots to move it. It finally reached its destination on February 17, 1948. Father Chateau officiated at services and Father Casey was appointed first pastor in 1953. It remained a parish until 1962 after a new church was built across the street. Research material showed that historian A.A. Champion and his wife Isabel were also members of this church. The church has been covered in brick with an addition on its west side and the steeple has been removed. It now serves as a youth center for the church.
All that remains of seven houses on Officer's Row is the Commandant's Quarters (Building No. 44) and another house relocated on Van Buren Street (Building No. 40). These seven officer's homes had received the least damage from the 1933 hurricane. By October 1952 several houses were scheduled to be torn down and tenants were notified to vacate by February 1953. There were forty-four homes rented to veterans and their families. These homes were located near the parade grounds and to the south along Porter Drive. An unknown number of homes were sold and removed instead of being torn down. The six large field officer's quarters sold for about $2000 and smaller N.C.O. quarters for $1500. Building No. 40 has found its way back in this history of old Fort Brown buildings.

The house on 810 Van Buren Street, used as an office building for Valley Wide Security, has been undergoing renovation for the past two years. Jaime S. Ochoa, owner of the business, hired Porfirio Gamez, a local carpenter, to help remodel the house. Mr. Ochoa assisted in much of the repairs as well. The house was originally sold to Ochoa's uncle Regulo Flores, a Korean War veteran, on 26 June 1953 for $1882.00 by the Brownsville Compress and Warehouse Co. A record of the deed designates the house as "Building No. 40". The house was moved in four sections. One (15' x 15') section, once designated as a library, was put in the back yard so it could fit on the lot. It was later torn down by Ochoa's father and grandfather because they could not afford to pay the extra taxes for that structure. When hurricane Beulah threatened Brownsville in 1967, family members high-tailed it to San Marcos but his uncle, confident the building would stand up to the chubasco, remained there. The house remained undamaged. Ochoa's father and uncle watched as some nearby houses were destroyed.

By the time it came into Mr. Ochoa's possession in 2002, it was so debilitated and infested by pests that family members and building inspectors advised him to tear it down. By salvaging old materials, he has managed to make dramatic restorative improvements to the house without sacrificing its original character. He demonstrates remarkable skill considering he drew most of his plans to restore the home from memory. Work was contracted to restore plumbing, electrical and roofing. When roofing was redone, five to six layers of roofing material were removed. The first of these layers were made of wood and asbestos. Top layers were different colors. Some double sash windows were replaced but he saved the originals. Most interior doors and knobs are original. Original wood floors were sanded and stained. Minor modifications were made, such as: the original front door was removed and stored to install a much secure one but the original transom light still remains over the new front door and several small casement windows from the second floor that swung inward by a horizontal lever were permanently closed but still retain original appearance and window bars on the exterior. An original bathtub still sits on the second floor.

With much consideration to keep the house original within and without, Mr. Ochoa has poured a lot of love and dedication into the large structure at no small expense. He recalls the house originally had window shutters but determined it was too expensive to replace them. He revealed a clue as to why Wainwright's Officer's Quarters withstood hurricanes. Hard and heavy wood used to build these houses came from as far north as New York. During the restoration, Mr. Ochoa uncovered this when he spotted lumber from the house had a New York manufacturer's stamp. His hammering hand still aches from two years of driving nails through this wood. A well-intentioned assistant had advised him to remove the old wood and substitute it with a softer pine.
but Ochoa was relentless. Because the height of staircase railing is a shallow twenty-eight inches, he was told it must be replaced for safety reasons but was later permitted to keep it original.164

He is currently renovating the kitchen. Unfortunately, antiquated glass cabinets were beyond repair. The porch had been badly damaged and removed when the house was moved in 1953 and Mr. Ochoa, with no reference to as to how it once appeared, constructed a new one.165 With photographs from the Runyon collection and Fort Brown Post Records, Ochoa can opt to plan adapting ornate woodwork to further restore the porch to its post-1919 appearance, that is, before it was screened. It continues to be a huge undertaking for what is the largest house of “Officer’s Row.”

Mr. Ochoa told a sad little story about his childhood. One time he and his brothers had ventured into the attic space and found bayonet knives. An adult caught them playing with the knives and swept the place of these historical relics and quickly placed them in the garbage!166

Building No. 44, the Commandant's Quarters, is the last building to survive on “Officer’s Row.” It has a significant place in the history of the fort and UTB/TSC. It has been home to post commanders and college presidents. This is where the annual President’s Party was held during the college’s golden years. It has also been used for the Continuing Education Office, and housekeeping services.167

The first commander to live in the building was Alexander McDee McCook and another was Abner Doubleday, who later developed the game of baseball.168 Guest dignitaries included aviator Charles Lindberg, general “John ‘Black Jack’ Pershing and John L. Clem, who gained fame as a boy during the Civil War when he was known as the ‘Drummer Boy of Shiloh.’”169 The first TSC president to live in the home was C.J. Garland,170 and the last was Arnulfo L. Oliveira.

In the 1940's the building had an elongated living room with a library and bedroom on the first floor. An open hallway from the entrance led to the stairs and to the rear wing of the house with a large pantry, laundry room, kitchen, bath and large dining room. A maid's room was also part of the building. The maid's room, dining room and double-story screened porch have been removed. The second floor had two baths and four bedrooms.171

Vacant since the early 1990's, the goal to restore it has been an ongoing effort. Speculation and doubt as to the age of the building has arisen in the past and alterations to the building since it was first built can be difficult to map.172 However, evidence to prove it is not an original Wainwright building has not surfaced.

Both Post Engineer's and Post Inventory records have 24 December 1922 as completion dates which leads to the assumption that either the building was entirely rebuilt or major alterations were added which drastically altered the building’s appearance, such as adding screened porches or additional wings.173 In 1919, “the seven 1868 officers quarters were altered from multiple to single family dwellings.”174 Forms appended to Fort Brown Post Records list expenditures from 1923 to 1942. This makes it impossible to know what work was done to Building No. 44 prior to 1922. When compared to records for the six other Field Officer's Quarters, average cost expenditures for “general repairs” range from $420 in 1921 to $2427 in 1922. Oddly enough, these six records all have an “unknown” date of completion.

Other houses, such as Building 51, were rebuilt in 1934 as a result of the 1933 hurricane. There had not been one of that magnitude since 1867, but we already know Wainwright buildings received the least damage. Projects in need of rebuilding required an “authority for construction” under a public works program in an undefined “N.I.R. Act.” None of the seven officers quarters required this contract in 1934. It does appear by the major cost of “general repairs” for the seven houses in 1934 (averaging $1137), that screened porches might have been added at this
time. Entries were listed as general repairs unless specific appliances such as gas heaters or accessories such as light fixtures were installed. This comparison of records does not aim to prove a chronology of identifying changes to the building. Instead, it shows that the next step to determine the actual age of the Commandant’s Quarters would require physical inspection. An architectural investigation to determine the building’s age can vary from a making a visual analysis of architectural characteristics and inspection of hardware such as the type of nails used, to a stricter laboratory analysis of paint, mortar or plaster. Records of architectural analysis were not available.

In a 2001 interview with historian Carl Chilton, Larry Löf, Director of the Gorgas Science Society, stated the Commandant’s Quarters was originally built as a one-and-a-half story building in the 1860’s with a second floor added during the early 1900’s. Since then, additions were built and alterations such as a two story screened porch was placed on three sides. Although it was described as a “gutted shell”, Löf can determine a plan of action to restore the building:

An old building tells you what to do. You look under moldings, etc. It tells you what was originally there. It’s an interesting mystery. The answers are there, you just have to look. You can tell where windows and doors were located. There are ways to determine what the original structure was by observing the building itself. We should be able to do a good restoration. We have old photographs.... Since they had obliterated the story and a half building, you can’t go back that far, so what you have to work with is the last incarnation of that building, around the turn of the century.

A 1995 Collegian college newspaper article had this to say about the building:

In the past, the college has been prodded by local and state preservationists to restore, or at least preserve, the house. Texas Historical Commission officers talked college administrators out of demolishing the home in the early 1980’s. Mark Lund, who was Brownsville’s Heritage Officer at the time, saw the building was neglected and deteriorating. The Architectural firm of David Hoffman and Co. was hired in 1995 to determine the feasibility and cost of renovating it. Tony Lehmann, Supervisor of Physical Plants and Buildings at the time, noted little had been done to preserve and protect the house. Marmon Mok architects reported this in Volume I of the 1995 Master Plan:

Since being vacated, this structure is rapidly deteriorating with a pending collapse of the upper enclosed porch. There is evidence of foundation damage which has affected the integrity of walls in some areas. Peeling paint, wood, decay, loose roof shingles and broken windows are a few apparent problems. Interiors throughout have been damaged by neglect.

Wings added to the house and three-sided screened porch may have actually protected the house from the elements for some time before having to be removed. In 1998, workers of the Physical Plant department “replaced the roof, removed dangerous lead paint... and [repaired] siding, windows, doors and flooring.” Dr. Wayne Moore, Special Assistant to President Dr. Juliet Garcia, was Vice President for Administrative Affairs at the time. He stated the house has been “stabilized”. Abraham Hernandez, Superintendent (Control Center) with Physical Plant, assured me that the house is “rock solid.” Periodic inspections of the building and regular
maintenance to protect it from damage will keep it mothballed until it can be restored. As of this writing, Larry Lof and his crew have completed restoration of the historic Andres Cueto building and the Commandant’s Residence awaits further funding to commence restoration. Until then, it is not known to what extent the building will be rehabilitated.

3 Buildings: The Alonso Building, Young House and Andres Cueto Building “La Nueva Libertad”

Historical buildings off the main campus have been rescued by Texas Southmost College and the Gorgas Science Society under the direction of Larry Lof. The first of three buildings to be rehabilitated was the Manuel Alonso Building in 1996. Located at 510 East St. Charles and 6th Street, the two story brick building was built between 1877-1890 as a dry goods and grocery store. A blending of New Orleans and Spanish-Mexican Creole styles, marked by an elaborate wrap-around porch, ornate cast-iron railings and brick details near the roofline, is another example of an architectural mixture. Lof noted the historical significance of preserving the building as being “absolutely critical, not only in Brownsville’s history but in the history of architecture in South Texas and the United States.” It was built as a part two-story and part one-story “T” shaped residential and commercial building. Tall double shuttered French doors open from the second floor and decorative cast-iron railing runs around the balcony. The parapet is decorated with a denticulated brick cornice. Historian Theresa Champion once noted that the year “1890” and the name of Alonso’s store, “Los Dos Canones” was once painted on the cornice. The patio within the “L” shaped building is hidden by a protective high wall. In addition to being the home of the Gorgas Science Foundation, it will have a multipurpose function as a historic interpretation center, home for the South Texas Resource Center, a community special events center and headquarters for the foundation’s educational outreach.”

Next door to the Alonso house at 500 St. Charles and 5th Street is the Colonial Revival Young House built in 1912 by architect M.E. Tracy. It was also restored in 1996 to house the Cross Border Institute for Regional Development (CBIRD), UTB/TSC’s first research institute. It was the first time students from TSC’s construction technology associate program became involved in restoration work for the college. Pieces of lumber and hardware were carefully salvaged and restored instead of substituting them with new construction. This house was built by J.J. Young, a wealthy rancher and landowner whose father, John Young, shared a store in Matamoros with Charles Stillman. The yellow brick building is covered with rose-colored stucco. Attic dormer windows crown the hipped roof. The front porch has large columns and the entrance is adorned with leaded glass windows. Wood floors have been refinished and original double-sash windows remain. The first floor has a reception room, kitchen and conference rooms. The second floor has offices. The third floor (attic) is also an office and meeting room. The building also has a basement and is surrounded by a large wall.

Restorative skills in construction were carried over to the Andres Cueto building located at 1301 E. Madison and 13th Street. Larry Lof was assisted by ten students. One of these students “found a jar of coins, rings and gold jewelry while installing a new water line. There are plans to display these findings within the Cueto building.” Don Andrés Cueto first worked as a store clerk then later opened a general store on 13th and Madison and named it “Libertad.” He later built “La Nueva Libertad” across the street in 1893 as a wholesale and retail grocery, pawnshop, and bakery. Like the Alonso Building, it melds New Orleans with Spanish-Mexican Creole architecture. It has ornate railings on the second floor balcony and a parapeted brick cornice.
In 1986, Houston architect Anthony E. Frederick had restored the iron balcony.\(^{192}\)

Before restoration work began, UTB/TSC helped Claudia Garcia, an 81 year-old tenant since 1964, make the transition to a new home. She had been living in the back of the building with her 31-year-old grandson and family. The grandmother was accustomed to walking on Sundays to sing in the choir at the Immaculate Conception Cathedral, and she did not want to relocate a greater distance away.\(^{193}\) John Ronnau, UTB/TSC Vice President for Administrative and Partnership Affairs stated: “The house she will be living in, she found. But we are helping them move and get the utilities paid, and we helped her with part of the rent” for six months while her grandson looked for a construction job to help her financially.\(^{194}\)

Because old wooden doors and windows would be reused, the job would take close to two years to complete but also cost much less to do. The bottom floor will have the same original space as before instead of partitioning it off for office spaces. Løf found hand-fired wrought iron hooks to reuse to keep doors closed. “Restoring a building like this can be an exacting art” Løf said. “If you are very careful as you first start to work on an old building, the building itself will give you clues to how it was put together – even after a century of changes.”\(^{195}\)

The building had been open to the public to allow visitors to witness the restoration process. Raul Hernandez, a student who also worked on the Young House, allowed me to wander around the building in April 2004. He found me as I discovered the bake house and dome-shaped brick ovens at the far rear and opened the iron door so I could take a peek inside. A well can still be seen in the backyard and a decorative iron fence and gate replaced the originals, which were unsalvageable. The profile of the building was the general store with living space on the second floor.

The South Padre Island Center

In 1986, the federal government deemed the Old Coast Guard Station at (2 Wallace L. Reed Rd.) South Padre Island (SPI) as surplus property and it became available to TSC at no charge. All they had to do was pay for renovation. Within six months it was ready to be used for the study of marine science. Built in 1923, it has a “New England” design with a lookout tower and it “served as an active Coast Guard Station until the 1970’s.”\(^{196}\) At one time it was the only building that stood on the island and is the only historic building on SPI.\(^{197}\) Designated as a historical building by the Texas Historical Commission, a wide variety of programs have been designed to serve the SPI community:

These include culinary arts training for people working on the island’s many restaurants. Personal enrichment classes include yoga, birding, fishing and Elderhostels. Boat certification is available for those who need this type of instruction.\(^{198}\)

By 2001 the Information Technology Training and Testing Center was established for SPI students wanting certification in computer programs.\(^{199}\)

Conclusion

The numerous buildings that once dotted the Fort Brown Reservation have steadily diminished since becoming the home of Brownsville Junior College (soon after, Texas Southmost College)
in 1948. Many groundbreaking ceremonies followed to replace the old with the new. Careful planning and visionary approaches to expanding its boundaries through the gradual acquisition of surrounding lands has also transformed a small 47-acre community college into a 358 acre university with a prominent past that will carry it into the future. In TSC’s early stages, some buildings were used and then discarded to make way for modernization, while others were sold and removed to other locations. When Dr. Juliet Garcia was chosen as president of Texas Southmost College in 1986, she wasted no time in serving her community by securing a bond issue (the first of its kind in TSC history) that would build new buildings and renovate old ones. Historic Fort Brown buildings were restored to their original appearance between 1987 and 1996. The University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College has shaped its unique identity by carrying the architectural features of its past into the shaping of the present and future. Thanks to the preservation efforts of successive college boards, the surviving buildings are now more than historical relics of a bygone era.

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The University of Texas at Brownsville

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66 Wooldridge, Ruby, p. 23.
69 Interview with Tencha Sloss and Carol DeMoss, 16 June 2004.
70 TSC Bulletins Numbers 26 – 41.
71 Bell, Klein and Hoffman, p. 24 and 65.
72 Interview with Wayne Moore at the Young House on 10 June 2004.
73 Ruiz, Rosa, telephone interview at (10:03 a.m.) lasting 1:38 seconds on Tuesday, 1 June 2004
74 Fort Brown Post Records
75 Interview with Nancy Sclight 25th June 2004. Nancy was a great help in confirming my suppositions about the various changes on Buildings 88 and 89.
White, John P. Fort Brown Commissary and Guard House (Building 88): HABS No. 3278: Historic American Buildings Survey. Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service: Department of the Interior; Washington, D.C., 1977. See Milo Kearney and Anthony Knopp’s *Boom and Bust: The Historical Cycles of Matamoros and Brownsville*, Austin, Tex: Eakin Press, 1991, for more about Lucio Blanco’s invasion of Matamoros. Also, Robert Runyon photographs available online show Mexicans being escorted across Fort grounds to the guard house. http://runyon.lib.utexas.edu/: Reproduction number: 01002 and 01003. There was a wooden guard house in use during the infamous “Brownsville Affray,” where twelve black soldiers were briefly held after being accused as being the main participants in the controversial incident which took place in 1906. It stood beside the Post Exchange building. Building 88 was not a guardhouse at this time.


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Boundary Survey Map and General Plan Map.

Bell, Klein and Hoffman, p. 38.

Aiken, Bruce. *Ballots, Bullets…*, p. 276. The “Jefferson entrance” (now May St.) referred to was Heintzelman Road. According to an unpublished history (unknown author), large numbers of African-American soldiers were sent to Fort Brown following the Civil War. These newly freed men were mostly illiterate. A post school was established for them in 1874. Their school teacher was Chaplain J.W. Schultz of the 24th US Infantry. This history alludes to a new school house being constructed in 1879 which also served as a chapel. In *Ballots, Bullets…*, Aiken names Willie Stigger as a black Navy veteran of the Civil War as being the principal of the school assisted by two or three teachers. This school was located near the Jefferson Street gate and could accommodate 60 soldiers. However, here lies confusion between the small Building 2 (c.1882) and much larger Building 62 built in 1941 near the Jefferson gate entrance. The unpublished history of the “Fort Brown School House” is now held in the UTB/TSC library Hunter Room archives.

Kane, Sharon and Keeton, Richard, p.13.


Kane, Sharon and Keeton, Richard, p.13.

Fort Brown Post Records and Post Engineer’s Records.

“Investigations of Building 2, 41CF129…,” p. 15.

Bell, Klein and Hoffman, p. 38.

“Local Historical Association Re-elects Officer for 1951.” *The Brownsville Herald* 18 March 1951 and “Brownsville Historical Museum on Parade.” *The Brownsville Herald* 15 August 213

132 Letter of history of BHA "Little Old Chapel" in Hunter Room archives copied from records at Brownsville Heritage Resource Center.


In completing the relocation process, sources noted components were stored in the TSC Physical Plant storage facilities and each brick was dismantled one-by-one and numbered, then replaced in its identical position, but this is not accurate.

137 Mark Lund, e-mail 22 June 2004.

138 *Ibid.* UTB/TSC realizes the importance of historic preservation and that further expansion necessitates archeological studies be conducted prior to erecting new buildings and that at any time, archeological evidence uncovered once digging begins can halt progress and delay construction.

139 Mark Lund, e-mail 22 June 2004.

140 Ibid.


142 Ibid.

143 "Investigations of Building 2, 41CF129...," and hand written note "Given back to TSC by City/GSA for IA [Institutional Advancement] office" written by unknown author, p. 15. In the Hunter Room archives.


145 Interview with Mark Lund and e-mail.

146 Interview with Mark Lund and e-mail.

147 Mark Lund, e-mail.

148 Ibid. Because Building No. 2 has been moved from its original location, it will not qualify to become a Recorded Texas Historic Landmark until 2043 – fifty years after being moved from its original site.

149 Fort Brown Post Records.


153 "Wandering Church..."

154 Ibid.

155 "St. Joseph’s Catholic Church” annual publication 1978.

156 "Wandering Church..."

157 *Ibid.* A 1962 “Blessing of St. Joseph’s Church” publication calls the distance from the Fort Brown to W.St. Francis/6th Street a “three mile stretch.”

158 "Wandering Church...".
“St. Joseph’s Catholic....”


Interview with Jaime Ochoa, 11 June 2004.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

TSC Bulletins.


Chilton, Carl, *The Community’s University...* p.135.

Fort Brown Post Records.

Holland, Heidi, p. 8.

Fort Brown Post Records and Post Engineer’s Records.

Aiken, Bruce, “An Historical Summary,” p.18.

Fort Brown Post Records #’s 32-44.


Chilton, Carl, Jr., Interview with Larry Lof, 16 January 2001. Transcript is a part of a collection of notes compiled by Carl Chilton for his History of UTB/TSC which he donated to the Hunter Room archives.

Holland, Heidi, p. 8.

Marmon Mok, *Master Plan Volume 1*, University of Texas and Texas Southmost College; Brownsville, Tex, 1995, p. 46.


Ibid.

Betty Bay, p. 157-158.

Orange and White, May 1996.

Fox, Stephen, “On the Border.”


Betty Bay, p. 158-159.

Interview with Dr. Wayne Moore.


Betty Bay, p. 145-146.

Fox, Stephen, “On the Border.”

196 Script for PAC..., p.2.
197 Interview with Dr. Wayne Moore.
200 The University of Texas System Campus Master Plan Executive Summaries, UT Austin Printing Services, 2000, p. 66-67.
201 *Ibid.*, p.72
202 Illustrations of the buildings described are available on line at HTTP:/Blue.UTB.edu/GhostsofFortBrown/Page_ 07_BldgsHOME.htm.
Brownsville and The Herald in the 1940's
by
Cipriano A. Cárdenas

In 1940, the regional community of some 200,000 people known as the Rio Grande Valley of Texas comprised dozens of small towns stretching 110 miles along U.S. route 83 from Brownsville west to Rio Grande City. Virtually all of these towns—with the notable exception of Brownsville and Rio Grande City—were founded in the early 1900's, in the wake of a land boom that had converted the Valley into one of the nation's richest and most productive farming regions. To the north of the Valley lay a large, virtually uninhabited, expanse of ranch land that included the famous King ranch. Immediately south of the Valley, the Mexican border cities of Matamoros and Reynosa were still relatively small towns of about 15,000 people. Irrigation canals were already being built, however, that would transform the Matamoros-Reynosa area into an agricultural emporium by 1940, ushering a period of unprecedented growth that would make Matamoros the area's largest city by the end of the decade.

The buffer of large grazing lands to the north, together with the sparsely populated region south of Matamoros, with its poorly developed highway system, served to instill a sense of isolation and detachment from the large metropolitan centers of Mexico and the United States. This isolation, however, helped to shape a regional identity among local residents, a feeling of belonging to "The Valley." And Brownsville, with its 25,000 people and 100-year history, had come to view itself as the "capital" of this new and fertile agricultural region. Brownsville, with a strategic location on the border, was the Valley's oldest and largest city. In the 1930's, she had become a seaport and, by 1940, had the most important airport south of San Antonio. The seat of Cameron County, Brownsville was the Valley's retail and financial center. The Brownsville Herald regularly published articles that reported the city leading the Valley in every barometer of economic activity: bank deposits, postal receipts, and electrical, gas, and telephone connections. By the late 1940's, however, Brownsville's historical status as the Valley's principal city would be called into question when Harlingen, then the Valley's second largest and fastest growing city, began to challenge Brownsville as the area's banking and distribution center.

In 1940, The Herald reprinted articles dealing with life in the Valley that had appeared in the fifteen Scripps-Howard newspapers nationwide, from New York to San Francisco. The articles, written by Scripps-Howard roving editor Ernie Pyle, highlighted Brownsville's notoriety, within and outside the Valley. A trained observer, whose work carried him into every corner of the country, Pyle noted the region's isolation and the peculiar differences that set Brownsville apart from the other Valley towns. Writing from Brownsville, he said in part:

To outsiders who have never even heard of McAllen or Weslaco or Harlingen, Brownsville is the Valley. But actually it is not even of the same personality as the rest of the Valley...I had pictured Brownsville as a barren, sun baked town of adobe buildings. But it isn't. The homes are of wood or brick. There is grass in the yards and flowers on the borders and palm trees along the streets. There is an eight-story hotel, and some of the most modern tourists camps in the country. Already they are packed with northerners staying all winter.... We outsiders hear of Brownsville nowadays mainly because of its international airport. It is the jumping off place for Pan American Airways planes to Central America. And true, aviation is one of Brownsville's biggest businesses. Pan American's main shops
Brownsville is more than 300 miles from San Antonio, the closest big city. And just to give you an idea of the size of Texas—if you were in the northwest corner of the state you would be as close to Canada as to Brownsville.... Second to its airport status, Brownsville is proudest of its ocean port. And it well might be, for Brownsville isn't on the Gulf of Mexico at all. It's 20 miles from the Gulf. Brownsville is a port simply because they dug a big ocean-going ditch clear in from the Gulf. This canal and harbor project cost around $7,000,000 and was finished in 1936. The harbor and ‘turning basin’ lie out on the prairie, seven miles north of Brownsville. Average about a ship a day. Already, three ships that have sailed from here this fall have been sunk in European waters. Think of the adventures some of these pink Texas grapefruit have been through. You have a faraway feeling down here, as though you weren't quite in the United States. In fact, the Valley is so isolated and its problems are so unique that for years there has been a certain faction wanting to secede from Texas and become a forty-ninth state... But the Valley is certainly a Valley of parts, and it is on the upgrade. And though it's almost unknown on the outside now, I venture to say that within thirty years the phrase ‘The Valley’ will be as common to American ears as ‘Coral Gables.’

*The Brownsville Herald: A South Texas Institution*

It seemed fitting that the Valley’s metropolis should also possess the region’s leading newspaper. Established in 1892, 18 years before Harlingen’s founding, *The Herald* was the last of a long line of English language newspapers published in Brownsville during the second half of the 19th century. *The Herald* was founded as a daily afternoon newspaper on July 4, 1892, by Jesse O. Wheeler, who published the paper until his death in 1908. His widow, Frances Wheeler continued publishing the paper until her retirement in 1924. Mrs. Wheeler was the first woman to affiliate with the Associated Press. During her tenure as publisher, she was the first in South Texas to install a press using continuous rolls of newsprint. In 1924, Mrs. Wheeler sold *The Herald* to J.M. Stein, a former Houston Chronicle newsman who had been *The Herald’s* managing editor since the early 1920’s. Writing in the paper’s diamond jubilee edition in 1967, editor Ethel Carstens noted that *The Herald* had experienced impressive growth during the 1920’s, after it had been acquired by J.M. Stein:

Stein, in tune with expanding Brownsville, erected a new building at the corner of East Thirteenth and Adams Streets for The Herald. With circulation up to 6,000 daily, he bought the first high-speed press in South Texas with a capacity of 20,000 16-page papers an hour.

In 1929, Stein sold the paper to the Fontress-Marsh group, but bought it back in 1934. That same year *The Herald* began publishing a daily Spanish-language edition, *El Heraldo de Brownsville*, to serve the Valley’s Hispanic community. In 1937 Hubert R. Hudson and associates announced the acquisition of *The Brownsville Herald*, the *Valley Morning Star*, and the *McAllen...*
Hudson appointed Carl Magee, a former Arizona newspaper publisher, as editor-in-chief for the three papers. In 1940 Hudson sold The Herald to Leo E. Owens who published the paper until 1951 when ownership was passed on to the Freedom Newspapers of California. By the time The Herald celebrated its 50th Anniversary in 1942, it was widely regarded as a leading South Texas institution. Circulated on both sides of the Rio Grande, the afternoon daily served not only Brownsville, but the entire Rio Grande Valley. In February 1940, The Herald added of a new Saturday afternoon paper to its Monday through Friday afternoon and Sunday morning publication schedule:

Beginning Feb. 3rd a Saturday edition will be published and delivered to every subscriber from Brownsville west to Rio Grande City, east to Port Isabel and north to Raymondville. It will carry all the weekday features regularly carried by the Valley’s oldest newspaper. It will publish the full day worldwide news report of the Associated Press. It will be the only Saturday afternoon paper published in the Rio Grande Valley.

In the 1940’s, The Herald published two daily editions. The first edition, called the “Valley” edition, was published around 1:30 p.m. for circulation in the middle and upper Valley. This edition was designed to retain readership in those areas at a time when the Valley Morning Star was expanding its coverage and circulation in those sections of the Valley. The second edition, called the “Final” edition, was published about 3:00 p.m., and was meant for circulation in Brownsville. El Heraldo, the paper’s Spanish section, consisted of a Spanish-language Front Page and Back Page wrapped around the English-language “Final” edition. El Heraldo was circulated in Matamoros and in Brownsville’s predominantly Mexican-American neighborhoods.

Regional Appeal

The Herald’s technical superiority in the Valley, its long-standing tradition as the region’s leading newspaper, and the general popularity of afternoon newspapers in those days, is illustrated by the following commentaries from the editor’s “In our Valley” column:

Moulton (Ty) Cobb is the justly proud radio news purveyor for Radio Station KRGV, Weslaco. Every afternoon, Mr. Cobb awaits the arrival of the first edition of The Brownsville Herald. Reads it carefully, selects whatever news there may be of interest to his listeners and passes it along to them—together with a few kind words in behalf of his own sponsors. Our good friend Mr. Cobb—who is a good sport and can take it—occasionally finds a few errors. We find them ourselves, occasionally, even on the part of radio news commentators. Anyhow, he found a couple of them in The Herald Tuesday afternoon. And called them to the attention of his listeners. One was glaring, indeed, and was discovered in the offices of The Herald, even before Mr. Cobb found it.

The Herald is a subscriber to Acme telefoto news service. Despite the fact that it is located thousands of miles from the scene of pictured news events, it is able to supply these pictures to its readers more quickly than any newspaper in South
Texas. That happens to be possible, of course, because of the excellent airmail service into Brownsville. The edition which Mr. Cobb reads has a noon deadline; that is, all copy for it must be in the composing room by 12 o'clock. That is necessary in order to reach the farthest circulation limits of The Herald in the Valley—Rio Grande City, 108 miles away—before sundown. The result is that great speed is necessary on the part of reporters, copy readers, printers, pressroom, and automobiles.8

The Herald was being congratulated Thursday afternoon over the speed and enterprise exhibited in producing a three-column photograph of Vice-President Elect Henry A. Wallace and Mrs. Wallace, who spent a brief hour in Brownsville Thursday morning. They were en route from Mexico City to San Antonio where they will be guests Friday and Saturday of Mayor Maury Maverick. The Herald is indebted to Glenn Dennis, public relations man here for Pan American Airways, for the excellent photograph of the couple. The Wallaces arrived at 11:30, by the morning plane, and left an hour later, at 12:20. Mr. Dennis cooperated with the reporter assigned to the arrival by taking a quick ‘shot’ of the couple as they left the plane. The film was rushed the four miles to The Herald office. It was quickly developed. Then the plate was made by The Herald engraver. The Herald’s first edition of the day, on the press at 1:43, carried the picture of Mr. And Mrs. Wallace. Insofar as The Herald was concerned, however, it was all routine. It isn’t often, however, that so many people notice the particular speed with which this particular operation was carried out.9

Features of The Herald

On most weekdays, The Herald published an eight-to-ten-page newspaper, with the Thursday edition being slightly larger—fourteen pages—due to the large display ads placed by local grocers announcing their weekend sales. The Sunday morning edition was larger, about 24 pages, and consisted of two 12-page sections. The Sunday edition was published jointly with the Valley Morning Star and McAllen’s Valley Evening Monitor from 1940 until 1943. When The Herald resumed publishing its own Sunday paper, it ceased publication of the Saturday afternoon edition.

In many respects, Herald 1940’s editions were similar to today’s newspaper. The Front Page consisted of the most important international, national, state, and local news. Typical of 1940-era newspapers, however, The Herald’s Front pages were cluttered with as many as twenty stories. The inside news pages contained, primarily, stories and photos from the Associated Press. One to two pages were devoted to Sports, and another two pages focused on Society or Women’s news. Sections of interest to the Valley’s agribusiness included market reports, cotton reports, and citrus and vegetable news. The paper also contained other sections, such as Valley radio programs, the crossword puzzle, “Harrison in Hollywood,” court records, comics, and editorial cartoons. The paper’s Editorial Page carried other regular features found in daily newspapers then, such as nationally syndicated Washington columns by Paul Mellon, Walter Winchell, and Bruce Catton. However, it was the local aspects of The Herald—news of Brownsville and the Valley, and the editorials and columns written by its own editorial staff—that were especially appealing to its readers.
Editorials

Perhaps *The Herald*'s most interesting features were the editorials and columns written by members of its own editorial staff. Every issue of *The Herald* contained an editorial, unsigned, but usually written by the editor, that represented the newspaper's position as an institution. Through its editorials, *The Herald* articulated its views on current events and attempted to persuade the public to adopt the same views. Many editorials encouraged actions that the paper believed would benefit the community, such as urging citizens to approve municipal or school bond proposals, or discussing, for example, the merits of a Master City Plan.

In its daily editorials, *The Herald* took stands on issues that mattered to the regional community it served and, in so doing, fulfilled its institutional responsibility to be a leading citizen of the Valley. *Herald* editorials of the 1940's evince the leadership, the sound judgment and, indeed, the caring civic attitude that gave the paper the high regard and credibility that it enjoyed in the Valley's mainstream community. The following editorial, published January 1, 1945, is typical of *Herald* editorials of the period, and is an example of its proactive position on issues of importance to the Valley:

As citizens of the Valley, what else, then should hold our attention in some measure during the 12 months ahead? There is the matter of the United States-Mexico water treaty, due to come up for senatorial committee approval late this month. Its ultimate passage by congress is vitally essential to the Valley. Without an adequate and assured supply of water, the Valley's growth will be stunted. It could be utterly stopped. There is the matter of an adequate drainage program throughout the Valley, with each community looking after its own sewage disposal problems. There is the matter of adequate promotion, through advertising and other means, of our citrus fruit crop and other production. Florida and California have done well by themselves by this means. We should give heed to the development of our international relations, doing our share in the expansion of the 'Good Neighbor' policy. We are on the frontier of another nation. It is our duty, to our own communities and to the nation.

And, locally, what is it that demands our attention. This is our home, our fireside. How shall we better it, in our own interest as well as in the interest of our neighbors? Fundamental things need fundamental attention. Our municipally-owned utilities are the backbone of our city. They must be nourished and improved and enlarged so that they may continue to give the services demanded of them. Our airport is one of the sinews of our economic structure here in Brownsville. Its future needs must be studied in a thorough manner and it must be kept abreast—even ahead—of the needs of modern air transportation. Our air lines are personelleed by highly competent men. They should be invited to make suggestions for the improvement of our airport. The Port of Brownsville connects our city and our section with the ports of the world in peacetime. It is highly important that we pay attention to its requirements. It, too, must be kept abreast of the times. Of utmost importance to Brownsville and to Matamoros is the completion of the Matamoros-Victoria highway connecting with Mexico's famed Pan-American Highway. We must continue to cooperate and work with the citizens of Matamoros who are equally
alive to this highway's importance. There are other matters of importance in the daily lives of our citizens. Our chief asset is our children—they will inherit what WE build. If there are some hundreds of children unable to obtain an education because of lack of school rooms, then this lack should be remedied. There must be developed a playground system that will attract over 7,000 children in their leisure hours. There are those who contend that the existing city charter is restrictive of growth in many of its aspects. Then let us get at suggestions looking forward to a better set of rules under which to live and grow. A city auditorium is a need. We should prepare to build it. We should extend our sewerage system in order to improve the sanitary conditions of our city. Where there are no adequately paved streets or sidewalks, we should think about getting them. Incidentally, it is not fair to force our children to walk to school in streets. Death by accident can result....

Still another example of civic leadership provided by The Herald comes from the editorial of Tuesday, February 3, 1943. It is interesting to note that many of the topics discussed in the article are somewhat prophetic, and are just as relevant today as they were in 1943:

Some extremely interesting discussions are taking place at various points in the Valley now in connection with projected post-war planning.... In this particular section of the Valley, a major portion of our development should be concerned with the tourist trade and with transportation. The two will be connected in many instances. For example, the project to build a causeway to Padre Island from Port Isabel and then develop the island as a seaside drive to Corpus Christi merits attention. It is a huge undertaking in its entirety, although that part of the development at the southern end of the island should not be delayed pending approval and financing of the whole project.

In and around Brownsville extensive park beautification should be carried out, particularly in conjunction with our resacas. This city has never yet realized the value that lies in these resacas. A glimpse at San Antonio and what she has done with the San Antonio river should give us an indication. These resacas should be beautified, certain forms of plant life placed in them so the water can clear up, stocked with fish, and made into one of the city's greatest assets. In fact, the whole tourist activity should someday center around the resacas, probably in the vicinity of Ringgold Park. Naturally, the Valley as a whole is going to be concerned most with drainage, with irrigation, with flood control—also with getting the Intracoastal Canal down to Harlingen, Port Isabel, and Brownsville. It is going to seek better marketing methods, probably through grower organizations, seek closer highway links with our neighbors to the south through the Matamoros-Victoria highway and the Reynosa-Victoria highway. It will go after airfields dealing in freight, after new waterborne commerce for its ports, and other business. But let's remember the tourist—he'll be coming in tremendous numbers after the war.
The Herald also tried to influence public opinion through commentaries reflecting the opinion of the journalists who signed these columns. At other times, columns sought to entertain their readers through humorous observations or anecdotes. Unlike editorials, which were unsigned because they expressed the paper’s position as an institution, columns were more personal in nature and often revealed a great deal of the writer’s personality. Popular Herald columns of the period included “In our Valley,” “Good Afternoon,” “Don Pedro,” and El Heraldo’s “Observando y Comentando.”

“In our Valley”

Perhaps the most popular daily column of the 1940’s Herald was “In our Valley.” The column was a favorite with readers throughout the Valley because well-known citizens’ names were often mentioned in it. This was a “folksy” piece in which the editor related various and sundry topics and anecdotes, some serious, but more often, of a humorous nature. “In our Valley” appeared on the Herald’s Front Page until 1942, when it was moved to the Editorial Page, where it would remain until the end of the decade. Throughout this period, the paper’s editors would write commentary in this column, beginning with J.M. Stein, followed by Hart Stillwell and, subsequently by Jack Rutledge, Ray Sicard, Clarence LaRoche, and E.C. Osborn, as each, in turn, assumed responsibility for the column.

The following excerpts from “In our Valley” reveal much about the attitudes, mores and journalistic ethics of previous generations, and give us a glimpse into daily life in the Valley in the 1940’s:

“In our Valley,” February 23, 1940, by J.M. Stein

“Gone with the Wind” is coming to Brownsville. “Gone with the Wind” is going to be shown in McAllen. We are authorized to announce that the date for the showing in each of these cities is the week beginning February 29. If you are a movie patron and have had any idea that the showing is going to be “cut” in some way, just forget it. It is just as easy to show the whole thing. If you are willing to remain with it the three hours and forty-five minutes required to show it. “Gone with the Wind” is not like the three-ring circus of the old days, when circus patrons in the smaller towns used to complain that the show was “cut” and that part of it was sent somewhere else. They just don’t do those things nowadays, for the public would know about it, and wouldn’t appreciate it even a little bit.

“In our Valley,” July 2, 1942, by Hart Stillwell

Yesterday was the thirtieth anniversary of his arrival in Brownsville, J.M. Stein, for years editor of this newspaper, tells us. He had been working in the Dallas News and was advised there if he wanted to learn all angles to the newspaper business to get a job with a small paper. He answered a classified ad and got The Herald job from 35 applicants.
Not long ago we mentioned in this column the fact that the Chicago Tribune, a bitter anti-administration newspaper, gave a big black streamer to the report that longshoremen had refused to unload cargoes on Sunday for Marines in the Solomons. We expressed the belief the report was probably untrue. Well, now comes a report from Admiral William F. Halsey, Jr., who certainly ought to know what he is talking about, to the effect that the report is untrue. At no time has anything of this kind happened, he said.

It's a shame that some newspapermen are so venal and ratty as to make such lying reports. It's equally shameful that some newspapers such as the Tribune are cheap enough to give prominence and play it as absolute fact with complete disregard to the chances that it isn't true—which it wasn't.

Luther had what few people really possess—a fine sense of humor. He never took life's little problems, or its glories, or rewards, too seriously. Which is, after all, one of the signs of a really intelligent human being.

The Valley Morning Star, which was three days late in letting Valley readers know anything about new developments of the cryptostegia plant, today comes out with a Page One story and picture boasting that The Star on July 22, 1941, carried a feature about Peter Heinz and his discovery. That's true. The present managing editor of The Brownsville Herald was managing editor of The Star at that time.

This is to inform menudo followers that the “Dr. Samuel Johnson Menudo Cultural Club” has been formally organized. The organizational breakfast was at Senor Ben Freudenstein's home, with Judge J.T. Canales serving as “Gran Meneador.” Those attending in addition to Ben and Judge Canales were—Bob Goodrich, H.A. and O.B. Garcia, Capt. T.B. Arlitt, and the writer. Menudo and tortillas, topped off with hot coffee, makes a first-rate breakfast.

New Year's morning we saw a sight that once was very familiar in Brownsville. The professional serenaders. Remember how they used to go around every night serenading homes? On Saturday night they would serenade business houses. Their serenade was a voluntary affair and the owner of the home or business was required, ethically, to pay the group a small sum. There used to be several groups of these serenaders—a group usually composed of a violin, guitar, and trumpet. For several years now, they have been disappearing until there is now left but one group. We have noticed them straggling out on several evenings.
“In our Valley,” January 2, 1946, by Clarence LaRoche

Muchas gracias to our amigo Matias Chavarria over in Matamoros for the savory tamales de venado he sent us for Christmas. Since Matias entrusted E.B. Duarte with the delivery, it was really a revelation to us they got through...instead of being waylaid at the Houston Bar for use as a botana, like a certain turkey we know of!

“In our Valley,” January 10, 1947, by E.C. Osborn

Despite the fact that some folks do not agree with us, we still insist that the International airport at Brownsville will remain one of the largest in the United States and will get its share of business. It is true that Houston will be a big gateway south but don’t think for one minute they are not faced with quite a few flying problems. And if you are interested just check for yourself. If you do, you are likely to join us in being quite optimistic over the future of the International airport here. We have long contended that just so long as any airport or area provides passenger and cargo, airlines will make regular trips in and out of that airport. Perhaps the citizens of the Valley do not use an airline to go and come on business and pleasure trips BUT the potential business is here. And the population. The Rio Grande Valley will grow. And as it grows, so will business and industry. From this growth will come added need for faster transportation. We cannot believe that the three major airlines that now operate from the International airport will pull up and leave this business... Such a condition may change but until that time comes and just so long as there is a demand for airplane seats in and out of Brownsville, major airlines will remain with us. For one we are going to remain optimistic. And we never did care much for a pessimist.

Although the “In our Valley” column and Herald editorials were written by six different editors during the 1940’s, one can detect certain persistent and continuous qualities throughout. One unchanging feature is a genuine affection for Brownsville, with its rich bilingual and bicultural values peculiar to the border region. The newspaper’s publisher and editors embraced the Spanish language and became a part of the Valley’s unique border culture, with its menudo breakfasts, its tamales de venado and its serenaders. One senses that Herald editors of the 1940’s were fair-minded men with a “gusto” for life who did not view their stint in Brownsville with disfavor, as a “foreign assignment” to a God-forsaken land. It is evident that Herald editors of the 1940’s were close to their community and had developed a bond of trust with their readers. Still another quality evinced in Herald commentaries of the 1940’s is a resolute optimism that the area’s economy would improve and bring more and better jobs that would raise the standard of living for the residents of Brownsville and the Valley. This is clearly shown in Herald editorials of the period that constantly promoted economic development that would benefit the general populace.
Another Herald column that would gain popularity with readers was “Don Pedro.” This column first appeared in the paper’s February 2, 1943 edition and would eventually become a Herald icon. Throughout the 1940’s Don Pedro limited his commentary to the weather, and would not discuss other topics until the “In our Valley” column disappeared in the early 1950’s. The column depicted a “venerable” old Mexican man, Don Pedro, as a sage, supposedly venerated for his wisdom and ability to predict the weather. Like Don Quijote, the column’s humor was based on good-natured ridicule heaped on Don Pedro, who had various human failings, a habit of talking to himself, as well as lexical problems that diminished his dignity:

“Don Pedro and the Weather,” February 2, 1943

Don Pedro, whose flowing gray beard indicates he’s old enough to know better, dusted off a desk marked, “Herald’s Unofficial Weather Bureau” and sat down to his new job today. “I’ve seen enough weather in my time,” he boasted, “to be able to detect it a mile away.” “Well, how about the groundhog?” he asked. “My job is Weather Forecaster, not livestock editor,” he said loftily. “But this is groundhog day?” “It is also Tuesday, Feb. 2 and it will rain tonight,” he answered. “Intermediary rains.” “Intermittent rains,” we corrected. “Off and on, yes,” he admitted. “But not a very much alteration of temperature.” We’ve already started worrying about whether we made a mistake in hiring Don Pedro, who will occupy this spot daily and predict Valley weather.

By 1947, a sketch of Don Pedro became a part of the column. The caricature was not complimentary to Don Pedro: the back view of a Mexican peasant, wearing an old sombrero, and dirty, patched up clothing:

“Don Pedro Says,” January 1, 1947

Don Pedro did not show up at the office this morning. His seventh son came in his stead, all alone, and he didn’t even bring a note from the Don. He looked lonely, worried and bedraggled. “Don Pedro won’t be here today,” he told us. “Why?” we asked. “I don’t know,” said the boy. “He didn’t tell me to tell you why. In fact, he didn’t even tell me to tell you he wouldn’t be here. He hasn’t said anything all morning.” “When he awakens,” we said, “You might remind him that he is sending the New Year off to a bad start.” “I’m not sure he is asleep,” said the son. “He hasn’t even come home yet.” “You’ll have to take my word on the weather, I guess,” he smiled. “I think it will be warmer, but that’s not based on scientific knowledge.”

“Don Pedro” would be the only column of commentary that would survive Freedom acquisition of The Brownsville Herald in 1951. In the 1950’s, Don Pedro would evolve into a decidedly negative character: he would appear as a lazy or drunken Mexican, taking a siesta against a palm tree. During his waking hours, Don Pedro would spend his time at the Tequila Bottling Works
in Bluetown, when he was not busy chasing the Widow Ruiz. This negative and stereotypical portrayal began to incite the criticism by an increasing number of Herald subscribers. A work in progress, Don Pedro would change with the times and, gradually, shed his lazy, tequila-drinking, fiesta-going and womanizing ways. On his 50th anniversary in 1993, Don Pedro would receive a complete facelift and take on a younger, more modern “look,” along with a more politically correct discourse, in order to remain relevant to contemporary readers. Don Pedro’s make-over was so substantial that the column debuted in the paper’s Spanish edition in 1993, then under the direction of Herald editor Marcelino González.

El Heraldo’s “Observando y Comentando”

Subscribers to the paper’s Spanish edition of the 1940’s looked forward to reading “Observando y Comentando,” written by Herald editor J. Oscar del Castillo. The column was extremely popular with El Heraldo’s subscribers, most of whom resided in the city’s Mexican-American neighborhoods of East Brownsville, such as La Cuatro-Veintiuno, located in the original town site, adjacent to Fort Brown. This was “Mexican Town,” with its “jacales” and shacks, as well as some of the more substantial homes of Brownsville’s Mexican-American merchants. In his column, del Castillo discussed local politics, often lashing out at discriminatory practices by City Hall that earmarked more money for improvements in the newer, middle class neighborhoods in town, such as Los Ebanos, while ignoring the older, predominantly Mexican neighborhoods located in the original town site. Editor del Castillo was for the print media what José Cantu became for the city’s Spanish-speaking radio audience in the late 1940’s and early 1950’s: defender of the disenfranchised, predominantly Mexican-American residents of Brownsville against a fairly well-knit Anglo community that controlled the town’s politics and economy.10

Del Castillo’s Heraldo chronicled Mexican-American life in Brownsville, informing the community of social events, such as, weddings and anniversaries, as well as illnesses and funerals. In addition to recording the community’s political and social history, El Heraldo ran stories on Mexico, as well as general news events, such as, sports and crime. It also commemorated holidays, such as Mexican Independence Day and the Cinco de Mayo. El Heraldo served local merchants who catered to Matamoros customers by selling space for advertising. The paper also enjoyed the trust of subscribers in Mexico at a time when Matamoros’ newspapers were not much more than political rags that published propaganda and ideology, rather than “the truth.”

The success of El Heraldo can be attributed to its widespread support by Mexican-American readers who recognized that the paper embodied the values and culture of the community it served. The following commentary, from the January 9, 1948, column, is typical of del Castillo’s concerns for the welfare of the residents of East Brownsville’s Mexican-American neighborhoods. In this particular article, he argues that the residents of the original town site, who have resided in Brownsville longer—and have paid taxes for a longer time—than the newcomers who had recently bought homes in the newer subdivisions of North and West Brownsville, are deserving of more fire alarm and fire hydrant installations to protect their homes and property from possible fire damage:

Hemos observado que existen instalaciones de alarma contra incendios en la esquina de las calles Van Buren y 18. No erogaría mucho más gasto el ampliar los circuitos mencionados para que fueran instaladas cuando menos tres estaciones
más .. Otro punto que merece el estudio del Cabildo es la ampliación de los ramales de hidrantes por la misma barriada a que hacemos referencia... También hemos observado que se encuentran algunos hidrantes que no funcionan debidamente y que en algunas de las nuevas colonias residenciales ya han sido instalado hidrantes. ¿Qué, los residentes de la barriada este de la población, que tienen mucho más tiempo de residir en Brownsville, no tienen más tiempo de pagar contribuciones, y el "derecho de antigüedad" para que se les brinde más protección instalando mayores facilidades para prevenir y combatir incendios?

Also popular with "Observando y Comentando" readers were humorous notes on language issues, particularly those that dealt with the influence of English on Spanish vocabulary that had led to the creation of a unique "border" variety of Spanish:

Nosotros, los que vivimos en la frontera, nos sentimos fuertemente atraídos a usar palabras del inglés en nuestro idioma, con unos cuantos cambios. Pongamos por ejemplo unas cuantas: "wachar"—que deberíamos sustituir por sus equivalentes: observar, mirar atentamente, etc. “Diche”—que deberíamos sustituir por canal, zanja vallado. La palabra bruto, especialmente usado por los muchachos cuando ven una muchacha de hermoso parecer, tienen exclamaciones como esta, “una muchacha brutalmente bruta”, cuando se oiría diferente si pudiéramos decir: “vi pasar por el vallado a una encantadora joven, en lugar de, “estaba yo wachando cuando cliqué una chava brutalmente bruta que pasaba sobre el diche”.

Editorial Policy and Journalistic Ethics

*Herald* editors of the 1940’s sustained close and continuous communication with their readers through editorials and columns. The principal policies, as set forth by Editors Stein, Stillwell, Rutledge, and LaRoche were that a newspaper should be the “conscience” of the community; it should be honest, truthful and authoritative; and, it should be profitable, but not at the expense of journalism.

Writing in his “Good Afternoon!” column of January 2, 1944, Managing Editor Jack Rutledge discusses the issue that journalists must take business into consideration in making commentary:

We realize that advocating the improvement and enlargement of the (city) market will irritate, at first thought, many of our leading grocers who are, incidentally, our best advertisers. But the improvement of the market could be done with their cooperation. They could participate in the project, and the profits. It wouldn’t be competition, but expansion . . .

In an editorial of January 6, 1943, Editor Hart Stillwell explains to readers what kind of duties and responsibilities are borne by the newspaper:

It is the business of this newspaper to do what it can to help get protection in the ways of levees for the El Jardin farmers. It is the business of this newspaper to
help prod the commissioners’ court into action when it feels that public welfare demands that action. It is the business of this newspaper to help reconcile differences between the property owners, the commissioners’ court, and the I.B.C. where it can do that. All this The Herald has attempted to do. It appears now that the major differences are on the way to being solved and that the levees are to be built. We don’t claim any credit for this—we’re not interested in credit. We simply make the point that if a newspaper is to sit idly by and fail to do its duty in such a matter on the theory that its editor is not an expert flood control engineer, then it certainly deserves blame—not credit.

Conclusion

During the first half of the 20th century, Brownsville was the Rio Grande Valley’s most prominent city, and The Brownsville Herald was the region’s leading daily newspaper. The Herald’s circulation area included Rio Grande City—108 miles to the west—and Raymondville, seat of Willacy county, 50 miles to the north of Brownsville. In addition, the paper’s Spanish edition also circulated in Matamoros, Mexico. As a South Texas institution, The Herald played an important role as an agent for economic change and progress throughout the area. The Herald’s reign as the Valley’s premier paper peaked in the 1940’s and it began to decline gradually as a regional newspaper during the second half of the century, beginning in late 1951 when the Freedom Newspapers, headquartered in California, purchased the area’s three dailies newspapers. The new publisher for Freedom’s three Valley papers made his home in Harlingen and established the Valley Morning Star as the headquarters and flagship paper in the Valley. As the region’s only morning newspaper, The Star subsequently became the region’s only daily newspaper with Valley-wide circulation. The Star’s ascent as the Valley’s regional newspaper in the 1950’s coincided with television’s advent as a source for news and information, a development that adversely affected afternoon newspapers in particular. By the end of the century, The Herald’s home subscribers would be limited to the immediate Brownsville area. The Star’s status as the Valley’s only morning paper, however, would change in the early 1990s, when both The Monitor of McAllen and The Herald converted to morning publication.

The University of Texas at Brownsville

Endnotes

1 The Brownsville Herald, July 4, 1967, p. 4A.
4 The Brownsville Herald, July 4, 1967, p. 4A.
5 McAllen Daily Monitor, May 27, 1937.
The Brownsville Herald, February 1, 1940, p. 6. (From 1940 to 1943, The Herald’s Sunday edition was published jointly with the Valley’s two other dailies and was called the Star-Monitor-Herald.)

Ibid.

The Brownsville Herald, February 18, 1940, p. 6.

Ibid.

José Cantú was a popular radio announcer and commentator for KBOR radio in Brownsville in the early 1950’s. See “José Rangel Cantú : The Conscience of South Texas,” by Carlos Larralde, in Studies In Matamoros and Cameron County History, edited by Milo Kearney, Anthony Knopp, and Antonio Zavaleta (Brownsville: The University of Texas at Brownsville,1997), pp. 163-178.
One of Brownsville's charms is its ability to attract and tolerate an eccentric element. The unusual and the offbeat manage to survive, here and there. Chris Christopherson paid homage to this characteristic in his song “Delta Dawn,” telling of an ageing Brownsville spinster wearing a faded corsage and carrying a suitcase around town, while waiting in vain for the love of her life. This characteristic of Brownsville may result from several factors: its identity as a port city (which attracts elements from other cultures); a certain continuity of leading families (providing a stronger link to tradition); the town's greater age (giving it a tie to a less commercial period); the proximity to Matamoros (lending a strong Mexican influence); and the innate beauty of the town's semi-tropical resaca setting (attracting residents for aesthetic reasons).

The history behind the Casa Petrina is a case in point. This white “Mexican Vernacular” house stands at 1452 East Madison, a block from the campus of the University of Texas at Brownsville. A painted sign announces that this building houses the Museo Carlotta Petrina, and a treat awaits the curious visitor. The house itself is an architectural delight of French doors opening from white-washed rooms surrounding a central patio with a colonnaded porch, garden tables and chairs, a fountain splashing water, and trees heavy with lemons, limes, and tangerines. Huge oil canvas murals painted in pastel shades hang on the walls. Furthermore, behind the architectural and artistic aspects lies the interesting story of the unusual and gifted people who gave the house its present form: Anthony (“Tony”) Petrina and his mother Carlotta Kennedy Petrina.

Carlotta hailed from Kingston, New York. Her father, Gilbert Kennedy, no relation to the Boston Kennedys, traced his Presbyterian back to Scotland rather than to Catholic Ireland. However, Gilbert had become a good friend of Joseph Kennedy. Gilbert was a lawyer, and one of his legal cases took him to London, where he first made Joseph’s acquaintance. Joseph was then the American Ambassador, and the American government had an interest in the case. Joseph liked to kid Gilbert by telling him, “You’re a good fellow, but your family came from the wrong side of the Irish Sea.”

Gilbert’s large personal library stimulated Charlotte (her original name) to absorb the classics, and then to translate them into paintings. Her mother, the painter Helen McCormack, spurred Charlotte on with such comments as, “This effort is alright, but you can do better.” In 1918, at age seventeen, she enrolled in New York City’s Art Students’ League. There she met an Italian-born fellow student Giovanni (“John”) Petrina, from Treviso near Venice. After becoming his wife, Charlotte Italianized her name to Carlotta. The newly-weds settled at Cagnes, between Nice and Cannes on the French Côte d'Azur. In 1928, they returned to New York City, where Giovanni became head of the Graphic Arts Department at Pratt Institute. While on a family vacation driving to California in 1935, another vehicle crowded them off a mountain highway in Wyoming, causing their car to tumble down a slope. Giovanni’s wife and son Anthony survived; he did not.

Carlotta stepped into her late husband's position at Pratt Institute, and began illustrating books for the Limited Edition Book Club. Already in 1934, she had received a Guggenheim Fellowship, and had traveled to Capri. There she had drawn inspiration to illustrate Norman Douglas’ novel South Wind, which is set in Capri (although the island is called Nepenthe or “Sleep” in the book). Carlotta now went on to illustrate such works as Vergil’s Aeneid, Ovid’s Metamorphosis, Shakespeare's plays, and John Milton’s Paradise Lost. She also did window designs for Saks Fifth Avenue and Lord and Taylor, and did work for Elizabeth Arden. She had
shows at such locations as the Crespi Gallery and Lord and Taylor (both in New York City) and La Finiestra Gallery in Rome. For some two decades she lived in Italy, spending her time mainly in Capri and Venice.  

Meanwhile, Carlotta’s son Tony was making his own contribution to American culture. Born in 1924 in Nice, speaking French as his first language, Tony attended Connecticut’s South Kent Preparatory School, and subsequently earned a bachelor’s degree in English from Columbia University. He later studied Spanish in Granada and Madrid, and received a masters of Arts in Spanish from Vermont’s Middlebury College. In 1950, Tony published a story entitled “The Map of Rome” in New Stories, telling about a man who had accumulated so many debts that he had made a map showing where his creditors lived and worked, in an attempt to avoid them. He wrote plays as well, including one about a New York thug who tries to reform in an attempt to win the heart of a college co-ed. He also bought colonial homes and restored them, both in New York and Italy. Tony’s three great passions (for the theater, for art and architecture, and for teaching) found reflection in his three marriages. His first wife was a fellow thespian, who acted with him in a New York adaptation of Homer's The Odyssey. His second wife (and mother of his daughter Elena) was a Roman painter, a Borghese descendent, and daughter of the Marquese di Rocca Giovane. His third marriage was to Sonia Camporese, a well-known Italian journalist and teacher. Tony met her when he was studying Arabic in Tangiers, where Sonia was teaching at the Italian School.  

In 1988, Tony and Carlotta relocated to Brownsville. World traveler Tony gave several reasons for this surprising move. He explained that the American fad for abstract art, encouraged by the powerful patronage of David Rockefeller, had closed the doors to his mother’s more traditional brand of painting elsewhere. Brownsville was one of the few areas of the country not totally in thrall to artistic modernism. This situation Tony ascribed in part to the Mexican flavor of the town and in part to Brownsville’s being behind the trends of the rest of the country. Brownsville’s warm climate also influenced their choice.  

In Brownsville, Tony turned his expertise at house restoration to transforming an old merchandise warehouse on East Madison into the flamboyant Casa Petrina. The structure had been built about 1900 for M. H. Cross, a merchant who lived on Calle 7a in Matamoros. The building had later housed a bakery, and still later the notorious Hotel Casablanca, close to a brothel in status. Tony upgraded it into the Casa y Museo Petrina. A cultural center and an art gallery combined, its patio rang with the music of local groups, and its walls were hung with large murals painted by Carlotta. The pastel-colored oil paintings with their graceful, mainly female figures found their ideal setting in the pleasant whitewashed surroundings. The paintings evoked Venice and other Italian locales.  

Carlotta continued to paint and receive accolades after her resettlement in Brownsville. She was invited by the city of Sorrento, Italy, to participate in a celebration of the Late Renaissance writer Torquato Tasso by sending some of her paintings of Tasso’s epic poem, Gerusalemme Liberata (Jerusalem Liberated). Four of her paintings illustrating this book were displayed in the Casa Petrina. One of this set, for example, depicted the crusader hero Orlando with the Muslim Amazon warrior Clorinda. In the poem, Clorinda is wounded by Orlando, then rescued, converted to Christianity, and betrothed by him before dying, all in the space of about five minutes. Femina Films produced a video of Carlotta Petrina’s life at this time. In 1992, in connection with the celebration of the 500th anniversary of Christopher Columbus’ discovery of America, Carlotta received a reception, accolade, and certificate for her artistic contributions. Even four years after her death in 1997 at the age of 96, Pope Giovanni Paulo II rendered homage to her work as a part of the Roman Jubilee of 2000.
Tony also remained productive after moving to Brownsville. One of the plays he wrote, entitled “Sunset in Brownsville,” deals with the corrupt power of one of Brownsville’s leading families. In it, a reporter for the Brownsville Herald, who has already stirred the enmity of the local Catholic hierarchy, uncovers evidence explaining a local murder. A member of the family in question, of whom the victim had been the secret boyfriend, was responsible for the crime. The reporter’s story is suppressed, and he ends up discredited and alone, having lost his son in a custody battle.16

For some five years through the 1990’s, musical evenings lit up the beautiful house-gallery on East Madison Street. Adrian Foncerrada with his wife Laura and Raúl González regaled visitors with their pleasing Latin sounds on musical evenings there. Adrian played a variety of instruments, including the saxophone, violin, flute, guitar, quena (a South American member of the flute family), and the charango (a little guitar used for flamenco music); Laura played such instruments as the guitar, maracas, and the bombo legüero (a large Argentine drum); and Raúl played the guitar. All three sang. Their songs were sung in Spanish, Portuguese, French, and English.17 Other musical presentations at the Casa Petrina included the jazz concerts of Tomás Ramírez, the jazz quartet of Eddy de la Garza, and a female folksinger from Austin.18 In Laura Foncerrada’s words, “Era como un escape de la vida cotidiana.”19

One of the groups attracted to the Casa Petrina was the Alliance Française’s “La Vallée du Rio Grande” Chapter. This organization was founded in Brownsville in 1995 as a replacement for the earlier Fleur de Lys French Club (which dated back to 1988). For several years, the Alliance scheduled some of its meetings in the Casa Petrina. It especially became a tradition to hold the January Fête des Rois get-together there. During one of these occasions, a wino wandered in from a flophouse across the street, and joined in the singing of French carols. Even though the pianist was surely among the most animated to be found anywhere in the world, he continually barked at her, “More pep, woman! More pep!”20

The cultural evenings have ended. Tony Petrina once dreamed of securing the future of the Casa Petrina by selling it to the University of Texas at Brownsville, whose campus was located a short block away on the other side of International Boulevard. He hoped that the building might be converted into a faculty club, with his mother’s murals still gracing its walls.21 Instead, the Casa Petrina and its dueño, now in his eighties, are moldering away together. It seems they might be doomed to pass into history as just another of the discarded tidbits of Brownsville cultural memorabilia.

The University of Texas at Brownsville

Endnotes

1 Interview by Milo Kearney with Anthony Petrina on 27 June 2004.
3 Interview by Milo Kearney with Anthony Petrina on 27 June 2004.
Interview by Milo Kearney with Anthony Petrina on 27 June 2004.


Personal observations by Milo Kearney.


Interview by Milo Kearney with Anthony Petrina on 27 June 2004.


Interview by Milo Kearney with Anthony Petrina on 27 June 2004.

Interview by Milo Kearney with Laura Foncerrada, on 5 July 2004.

Interview by Milo Kearney with Laura Foncerrada, on 5 July 2004.

Interview by Milo Kearney with Laura Foncerrada, on 5 July 2004.

A memory of Milo Kearney, as sponsor of the UT-B student wing of the “La Vallée du Rio Grande” Chapter of the Alliance Française.

Interview by Milo Kearney with Anthony Petrina on 27 June 2004.
1900, Elizabeth Street, Brownsville
by Jessica Cisneros
Las inquietudes literarias en Matamoros tuvieron una consolidación definitiva en los años setenta. Entonces un grupo de personas amantes de la poesía empezaron a reunirse en las instalaciones del Instituto Regional de Bellas Artes para darle cauce a su producción literaria. La inquietud que naciera del poeta e historiador Sr. Lisandro Martínez Espinosa fructificó el 27 de octubre de 1977 con la creación del Círculo Literario Dr. Manuel F. Rodríguez Brayda. Antes de que existiera el Círculo, había un grupo de mujeres que de manera un tanto informal se reunían para el mismo fin que tenía el nombre de “Juana de Asbaje”. El señor Lisandro Martínez encomendó a su hija, la señora Sonia Hada Martínez de Villar, la tarea de invitar a las integrantes del grupo “Juana de Asbaje” reunir a quienes en ese momento se destacaban en Matamoros por su trabajos literarios. Así, con los poetas dispersos y en el anonimato, contagiados con el ánimo del señor Lisandro Martínez y su hija Sonia, después de algunas reuniones nace un Círculo Literario al que por acuerdo general se le dió el nombre de “Dr. Manuel F. Rodríguez Brayda” en honor del que fuera poeta, médico y maestro de nuestra comunidad.

Entre los fundadores está la maestra Martha Rita Prince de García, a quien se nombró presidenta cuando se constituyó la primera mesa directiva. Ella, en colaboración con Don Lisandro Martínez, organizó, coordinó y estimuló a sus primeros integrantes. Estuvieron sesionando temporalmente en el Instituto Regional de Bellas Artes, en los hogares de algunos integrantes del Círculo como la señora Celia Charles de Pérez, la maestra Martha Rita Prince, la señora Gloria Zellerbach, en las oficinas del I.M.P.E.X. por una cortesía de Don Lisandro Martínez y del señor Marte A. Martínez, y por último en la casa de la señora Sonia Martínez Viuda de Villar, hasta que con la ayuda del entonces Presidente Municipal Jorge Cárdenas González, adoptaron como su recinto oficial la Casa de la Cultura, ubicada en la calle quinta y avenida Constitución, en la que a partir del día 12 de octubre de 1982 se instalaron definitivamente.

A reciente creación del Círculo Literario, se enteran que se estaba convocando a todos los poetas de Tamaulipas al tercer Encuentro de la Poesía Tamaulipeca en la ciudad y puerto de Tampico, Tamaulipas. Dicho encuentro se llevaría a cabo los días 24 X 25 de septiembre de 1976 al cual acudieron y recibieron un diploma como reconocimiento. Entonces don Lisandro Martínez pidió la sede para Matamoros en el año siguiente, en que se llevaría a cabo el Cuarto Encuentro de la Poesía Tamaulipeca. Se convocó a todos los poetas de Tamaulipas para los días 6, 7, y 8 de mayo de 1977, en el teatro del Casino Matamorense y cuya apertura de trabajos fue declarada por el Licenciado Jesús Lavin Flores, Rector de la Universidad Autónoma de Tamaulipas. A gusto de los integrantes del Círculo Literario, se desarrolló un brillante programa durante el cual se impusieron medallas a los destacados poetas: profesor Héctor Francisco Peña Rodríguez, de Reynosa, Tamaulipas; al profesor Don Francisco de P. Arreola de Ciudad Victoria y al Licenciado Carlos González Salas de la ciudad de Tampico. El Círculo Literario Dr. Manuel F. Rodríguez Brayda volvió a ser sede del Encuentro de la Poesía Tamaulipeca los días siete y ocho de noviembre de 1981 cuando se llevó a efecto el noveno Encuentro de la Poesía Tamaulipeca, en el cual se otorgaron preseas de reconocimiento por su labor en beneficio de la comunidad a los señores Don J. Natividad Alemán, Director del Periódico “El Bravo”; al señor Don Lisandro Martínez, Coordinador General del Círculo Literario, y al señor Jaime Garza Salinas, Director del Instituto Regional de Bellas Artes de la ciudad de H. Matamoros, Tam.
Estatutos y Mision

El Circulo Poetico y Literario “Dr. Manuel F. Rodriguez Brayda” es una asociación civil cultural que pretende promover los valores culturales de la comunidad, específicamente los literarios y poéticos. Es rama de la Casa de la Cultura, pero funciona autónomamente. Como Asociación mexicana que es, estará siempre sujeta a las leyes del país y del estado. Estará abierta a los amantes de la cultura cualquiera que sea su credo, raza o condición social a que pertenezca. Está encabezada por una Mesa Directiva que consta de: Presidenta Vitalicia la Sra. Raquel H. Longoria Vda. De Rodriguez Brayda, de un Presidente y un Vicepresidente elegidos para cada periodo, dos Coordinadores, un Secretario y un Prosecretario, un Tesorero y un Protesorero y un Jefe de Relaciones Públicas. El escudo del Circulo es una lira que deberá ir impresa en las credenciales y en toda la papelería oficial; el lema será el fragmento del poema “El Ideal” del Dr. Manuel F. Rodriguez Brayda: “LA VIDA SIN IDEAL, SIN AMOR, ES UN ROSAL SIN FLOR.”

El Circulo Literario Dr. Manuel F. Rodriguez Brayda ha publicado hasta la fecha obras que pueden dividirse en “Matamoros Poético” que es la recopilación del trabajo de dos años de los integrantes del Circulo, y otras obras como recitales, calaveras para celebrar el día de muertos, calendarios, y muchas otras. Las reuniones habituales se efectuarán dos veces al mes alternando los Jueves a las 20:00 horas. Al inicio y al final de cada reunión se leerá un poema del Dr. Manuel F. Rodriguez Brayda. Se asignará media hora para taller o didáctica poético-literario. Se firmará el diario de asistencia. Se dará lectura a los trabajos de cada uno de los socios, uno por cada vuelta del Circulo. Se tratarán asuntos generales. Se atenderá a las organizaciones o instituciones que soliciten la colaboración para sus eventos. Se asistirá a los Encuentros de la Poesía Estatal e Interestatal en cuanto sea posible. Se organizará periódicamente el Encuentro de Poesía en nuestra ciudad. Está instituido el concurso a Nivel Estatal de Poesía con la premiación de medallas “DR. MANUEL F. RODRIGUEZ BRAYDA” Se hará cuanto sea posible por el engrandecimiento de “Nuestra Asociación Civil sin Fines Lucrativos” así como por su proyección y respetabilidad.

Desde su fundación en octubre de 1977, el Circulo Literario Dr. Manuel F. Rodriguez Brayda de Matamoros A.C., ha sido una fuerte columna para la creación poética en Matamoros. A lo largo de sus veinte años esta asociación se ha constituido y reforzado como el lugar donde la creación literaria encuentra la manera de proyectarse en diferentes ámbitos. El Circulo Literario ha irradiado su producción fuera de Matamoros; la ciudad de Brownsville, Texas, y muchas de las ciudades de Tamaulipas han sido visitadas por la organización. Esto marca entonces impacto en la sociedad que el Circulo Literario tiene. Matamoros por ser la ciudad natal del Circulo Literario Dr. Manuel F. Rodríguez Brayda es donde se aprecia el trabajo constante del grupo de poetas. Con la creación del ‘Concurso de Declamación “Manuel F. Rodríguez Brayda” que año tras año se lleva a cabo entre estudiantes de escuelas a nivel medio y medio superior el Circulo facilita y provee un espacio que los maestros, de escuelas secundarias y preparatorias, aprovechan para encausar el arte de la declamación en los jóvenes matamorenses.

Requisito para participar en este concurso es que la poesía debe ser de la autoría del Dr. Manuel F. Rodríguez Brayda. Otra actividad importante y esperada por los integrantes poetas del Circulo Literario es el Recital de Primavera, iniciado en 1992, reúne a los poetas del Circulo ante el público matamorense cada marzo o abril con temas alusivos a esta estación del año donde además se publica un libro con las poesías seleccionadas. El Circulo Literario es invitado como jurado a los concursos locales de declamación, poesía y oratoria, con lo que se reconoce que es
visto en la comunidad educativa y sociedad en general como una organización seria y conocedora.

A nivel estatal, el Circulo ha instituido el “Premio Estatal de Poesía “Celia Esperanza” en honor a una de sus integrantes, Celia Esperanza Charles de Pérez. El poeta ganador de este concurso obtiene la publicación del libro ganador. Otro ejemplo a nivel estatal es el concurso “Poesía Patriótica” que se lleva a cabo en septiembre de cada año y el premio al ganador es un trofeo y diploma de participación.

Es importante mencionar que algunos de los integrantes del Círculo Literario Dr. Manuel F. Rodríguez Brayda son originarios de la ciudad de Brownsville, Texas. Esto demuestra que el Círculo Literario tiene influencia también en la ciudad de país vecino.

Presidentes del Círculo Literario

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<th>Nombre</th>
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Este trabajo es un análisis del impacto que ha tenido el Círculo Literario en la sociedad Tamaulipeca. De acuerdo a la información expuesta puede concluirse que la influencia que el Círculo Literario Dr. Manuel F. Rodríguez Brayda de Matamoros A.C., ha sido trascendental en la vida cultural en las últimas dos décadas al ser una organización impulsora de nuevas ideas y proyectos cuyos esfuerzos han irradiado el ámbito cultural de otros estados y países.

Bibliografía

Entrevista con Lilia Treviño de Sánchez, integrante y expresidenta del Círculo Literario Dr. Manuel F. Rodríguez Brayda, 27 de Junio de 1998.

Entrevista con Sonia Martínez de Villar, integrante y expresidenta del Círculo Literario Dr. Manuel F. Rodríguez Brayda, 27 de Junio de 1998.

Among the different questions this essay will attempt to address, in no particular order, are the following: What is the recent literary history of the Rio Grande Valley? What are some of the Valley’s significant literary works? What are the connections from one writer to the next? Are there defining elements of Valley literature that make it unique? And, what is the nature of what has already been done, and most definitely, what has been left undone?

As to the first question, what is the literary tradition in the Valley, other writers have already made some considerable headway. This article’s focus, then, will not be so much a historical cataloguing of Valley literature, but more a view of the area’s contemporary authors, and more specifically, the Texas Mexican Valley writers and their work. There is no doubt in this author’s mind that the region’s literary history is vast and worth a closer examination, but my interests lie, for various reasons, in the more recent past and in authors whose role has been, for the most part, overlooked. There have been several studies conducted on the validity of the teaching of culturally-relevant literature, and since the Valley is made up largely of Mexican Americans and Mexicans it is only logical that the writing of these authors who reflect the community’s ethnic make up be looked at more carefully.

One such author who has been largely ignored by Valley educators and readers is Gloria Anzaldúa, who is originally from Hargill, just north of Edinburg. Her best-known work is titled Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza. More than a collection of essays and poetry, the book is an in-depth analysis of the “psychological borderlands, the sexual borderlands and the spiritual borderlands [that] are not particular to the Southwest”; nevertheless, Anzaldúa states, “I am a border woman” who “grew up between two cultures, the Mexican (with a heavy Indian influence) and the Anglo (as a member of a colonized people in our own territory).” Even though she doesn’t lay claim to these borderlands mentioned above, she’s writing from this regional/emotional/spiritual perspective. Aside from “straddling that Tejas-Mexican border...all my life,” that is, the physical/cultural border, she also takes a very hard look at “other” kinds of borders, including but not limited to gender roles and expectations in the Mexican American culture, sexual identity, and her “new language,” “this infant language, this bastard language, Chicano Spanish, [that] is not approved by any society” but that, despite the lack of acceptance by the establishment, will continue to “cross-pollinate” and give new life to our Chicano culture. This book is Anzaldúa’s call to arms, as it were, for Chicanas/os who should “no longer feel that we need to beg entrance, that we need always to make the first overture—to translate to Anglos, Mexicans and Latinos, apology blurtng out of our mouths with every step.”

The first chapter, “The Homeland, Aztlan,” is an anthropological/ sociological/political look at the genesis of this region. Anzaldúa states that “the first inhabitants [of the Americas] migrated across the Bering Straits and walked south across the continent” and either continued their trek southward “or permanently occupied, the Southwest, Aztlan.” Evidence of this occupancy dates back to 35,000 B.C. Even so, with no factual support to the contrary, Anzaldúa argues, the Americano, or Anglo, considers the Mejicano Americano an outsider, an in-wanderer; no matter that we’ve occupied and lived off of the land for countless generations, we are “los atravesados,” “transgressors, aliens—whether [we] possess documents or not.”

In another chapter, “How to Tame a Wild Tongue,” Anzaldúa recalls how early on she was “caught speaking Spanish at recess—that was good for three licks on the knuckles with a sharp
ruler," and later an Anglo teacher advising her that "If you want to be American, speak 'American.' If you don't like it, go back to Mexico where you belong." It would have been the easiest thing for Anzaldua to make of this chapter a space for documenting one case after another of those in power, namely the gringo, attempting to shut up the pobre Mejicano; what Anzaldua does instead is she takes the opportunity to show how Chicano Spanish is a valid and living language, separate from both pure or Castilian Spanish and American English. It is a language, she argues, that Chicanos "can connect their identity to, one capable of communicating the realities and values true to themselves—a language with terms that are neither español ni ingles, but both ... a patois, a forked tongue, a variation of two languages." It "is a language of rebellion" against both its parent tongues, and "a secret language" spoken amongst friends, amongst raza.

In this chapter, Anzaldua also examines how this third language has come into existence and how it continues to evolve, including examples for readers to study for themselves. For instance, she offers a few "anglicisms, words borrowed from English: bola from ball, carpeta from carpet, máquina de lavar (instead of lavadora) from washing machine." Students interested in the study of regional/cultural linguistics would do well to begin their research here.

Unfortunately, the Valley lost Anzaldua long ago when she left to further her studies elsewhere. And more recently, we have lost her again; she passed away May 15, 2004.

Carmen Tafolla lived and taught in the Valley for a short time and now has moved with her family to San Antonio. While in the Valley, she did more than encourage young poets to keep up the good work; she did what she could to aide them in their endeavor to become published. Even though a schedule of events had been printed, she secured reading spots at the San Antonio Inter-American Book Fair and Literary Festival for three Valley poets back in the early nineties.

In her Sonnets to Human Beings, Tafolla illustrates that the "slide toward the appreciation of the common as the best source to commonality is logical and inevitable." Her philosophy is not simply to document the Chicano's life but to find a means of bringing together cultures that, as yet, have remained cut off from one another. Her intention is not to erase one language at the expense of another; far from that. Her desire, as shown in several of her works, is for those of different cultures and tongues to co-exist, peacefully; but more than that even. She wants one people to learn from another and vice versa.

In America, there is room enough for all of us, she argues. No matter the color, creed, or language, key is the appreciation of and love for every aspect that makes up this nation, language included. In her poem "In Love With People," she concludes, "It occurs to me that we [poets and Americans alike] / are all in love with people." To arrive at this point, though, is a difficult journey because the path dictates that a Chicano identity and discourse be considered valid. If this discourse "opposes standard English and opposes the canonical literary telos....[and if its] style conflicts with the authoritative discourse," then so be it. How boring our America would be if there were space for only one discourse!

In the poem titled "In Memory of Richi," Tafolla describes a scene that is much too common in a society in which an attitude of division prevails: a representative of the conquering class, in this case in the person of a teacher, consciously or not, attempts to impose his language on the "other," in this case, a child of six on his first day of school. When the two first meet, they introduce themselves. The teacher asks the boy's name who proudly offers it. "Richi," the boy says, rolling "it like a round of wealth / and, deep in Spanish tones .... " The teacher then attempts to imitate it, anglicizing it in the process, "Ritchie." "No," answers the boy and proudly repeats, "Ri-chi—just like this." What occurs next is crucial because it appears that the boy has stood his ground, but a mere six hours later, at day's end, "really not a speck of time" gone by, the teacher,
having learned the correct pronunciation, calls out to the boy down the hall, “Hey, Richi!” But it’s too late; the boy’s identity has been assaulted throughout the day, and

He corrects [the teacher],
the light and wealth all gone
from his new eyes,
“No.
Ritchie.”18

In this example, the reader is witness to a renaming which proves catastrophic to the “second-class” culture, one whose very language, it is implied, needs correcting by a member of the ruling class. What the boy does, in essence, is to take on the name given him which will make it easier for him to be accepted by those in this “enlightened” class, leaving behind nothing but a shadow of his name, a memory of his culture.

In another of her poems, “Right in One Language,” Tafolla points out the bipolar experience of the Chicano poet, “the old Pachuco playing his TexMex onto the page,” who is told by the critics, the “Publication Crew,” to “Write / in one language,” that is, in English; otherwise, the Chicano’s poetry will not be published. Doing so is impossible, though, because those of the establishment “want Shaker hallways / and I grow Mexican gardens and backyards.” Tafolla, like the old Pachuco, writes the only way she knows how. Gloria Rodriguez, another character in this poem, says, “¡Estos gringos con su Match-Match, / y a mí me gusta Mix-Mix!” Writing anything else or in any other form translates into writing falsely, into giving in and so giving up one’s culture. Tafolla writes,

There are 2 many cariños to be created
to stay within the lines,
2 many times
when I want to tell you:
There is room here for two tongues inside this kiss.19

It is not hatred the poet feels for those who would have her write inside the lines; rather, she expresses love for them. To clarify, though: the image, “two / tongues / inside this / kiss,” does not refer to a mixing of the Chicano and white races (nor does it exclude it), but it does call for the possibility that within one kiss, America, there can co-exist, equally, multiple languages and many peoples. One not greater than the other, one no more nor less American than the other; simply different.

For a more obvious illustration of *mestizaje*, let us study a short portion of “Mi Tía Sofia.” In this poem, Tafolla captures the voice of one of the people she is so in love with, one of the common folk from the barrio. Tía Sofia says, “Cuatro yardas de floral print cottons por solo eighty-nine cents— / fijate nomás, Sara, you’ll never get it at that price anywhere else.”20 There is no rearranging of the syntax, no forcing of one language’s grammar over the other to make the poem flow more smoothly. Words and phrases, English and Spanish, co-exist equally on the page. Neither of them is the primary language. Readers may confuse this as an example of a bilingual poem, or code-switching, but it is not. It is a prime example of the language spoken in the “alternative space, the third country between the United States and Mexico,” the Chicano space in America mentioned by Arteaga.21 In another poem “Los Corts (5 voices),” different
narrators speak of their lots in life.

In the second part, spoken by the chamaquito, the little boy, readers will note how the speech of the Chicano takes a word in English, for example, and molds it into something new. He doesn’t simply translate it into the Spanish, although it is pronounced in Spanish. Words like “daime,” “beisbol carts,” and “nicle” have evolved, taken on a new identity. Daime derives from the English dime, beisbol from baseball, and nicle from nickel. Dime in Spanish is diez centavos, ten cents. The new word is so obviously a phonetic creation, but the point is that where there had been only the English and the Spanish words now exists a hybridization, another language spoken by another American.

Tafolla’s book is filled with treasures much like the ones above. But rest assured, there are many more treasures besides these. Her poetry is indeed an experience.

Raquel Valle Senties was born and raised in the border town of Laredo. Her book, titled Soy Como Soy Y Qué (I am how I am, so what are you gonna do about it!), points to the divided self found in much border literature. In her poem “Laredo,” she writes of her border town, “¡Te odio! ¡Te amo!” Senties loves Laredo’s “Tex-Mex culture / where hablar español / is an asset, not a liability.” But especially, she loves “your people, mi gente.”

Of her language she writes in another poem, “Growing Up En Laredo,”

    y crecí talking like this.
    El get-together ya empezó.
    Los guys ya están llegando.
    Prestáme tu lipstick,
    El Fire and Ice que está bien rojo.

Here is a poet using the language that reflects the identity of a people living on a border between two nations, neither of which accepts them, and thus, they have to give birth to another culture and language. She infuses her poems with words that reflect the clash between the two languages that results in a third. In this same poem she uses the word “flirtear,” a word that originates from the English “to flirt” but that is pronounced in the Spanish due to its Spanish suffix, as in the word estacionar, to park one’s car.

Another aspect of special interest concerning her writing is her ability to look at herself and her culture truthfully. She is willing to find the answers by asking the tough questions. In “Border Distortions,” the poet admits to her own prejudices against whites, the gringos, by detailing how prejudiced white tourists behave when they visit Mexico. She says of them, they are “a plague of locusts,” “the Ugly American[s],” who “find the natives so amusing.” In the speaker’s description of them, she exposes her hatred for this other race, one that continues to oppress because it has American dollars to spend freely. It is this sort of self-reflection that will ultimately lead to a better understanding of the other, and thus, of self.

Area schools would do well to include in their literature and history programs selections from Valle Senties’ Soy Como Soy Y Qué.

David Rice, who divides his time between the Valley and Austin, has published two books, Give the Pig a Chance & Other Stories and Crazy Loco: Stories. The first is a fine collection of short fiction, stories that cover the gamut; his pieces deal with conquering low self-esteem, dealing with a community member’s passing, living with superstitions, local lore, and much more. In the most touching and the strongest of the stories, “Tina La Tinaca,” we meet our protagonist, Tina, who “loved hot dogs with plenty of chile con carne and cheese.” Tina also loves most dearly
her son, Hector, a “gift [God] had sent her. Héctor came to her through her brother, Rubén….a borracho….[whose] wife of three years had left him and Héctor, and he left Héctor with Tina.” 30 They attend an Astros ballgame, and tragically, the young boy dies as a result of being hit by a car. The rest of the story concerns itself with a mother’s coping with the loss of the dearest person in her life. The story’s ending reminds me of the ending to What’s Eating Gilbert Grape? 31 which, in turn, reminds me of the send off of Beowulf after dying fighting a fire-breathing dragon—a funeral pyre fit for a god.

In another story, “El Cucuí,” two brothers, David and Roger must contend with Cata, the family’s “last maid and the one who lived with us for more than six years.” 32 To make them obey, this tiny woman scares the two boys with a description of el cucuí: they are “only as tall as you are, but they can be very strong. They have long claws on their hands and feet, and when they walk on floors or streets, their claws click and scratch. They can climb trees and the sides of houses very easily. They have small, sharp pointed teeth, and saliva is always falling out of their mouths, just like with dogs or cows. They have long, pointed ears so they can hear you whisper…. bad, mean things,” and so on, effectively making the boys behave.33 Having brushed their teeth, in bed now, the two brothers pray that if El Cucuí were to pay their house a visit tonight that it “would eat Cata and not us.”34 In most collections, readers often find something that links the stories, a running theme maybe, recurring characters, a symbol that ties the whole together. In the case of this first book, there doesn’t seem to be that connection. That is not to say this is a flawed work. Far from that; Give the Pig A Chance captures for the first time in a long time a new vision of the Rio Grande Valley, a vision of a larger and yet still scattered Valley. In a place where generation after generation of Mexican Americans are born and raised here, and with each passing generation, there is a slow forgetting of our original language and culture. This collection’s lack of connection simply mimics this movement away from a different time and place.

Rice’s is also a fresh voice. He, more than any other Valley writer, living or dead, does more to promote our young people’s success. Counterproductive as it is for a working writer, Rice generously gives of his time to local schools. He has seen the need for our students to experience literature as close to first-hand as possible, and that means meeting the author of the works that students are reading. How in the world he can write a solid second collection while traveling up and down between here and Austin to conduct workshops, to do readings, to get after students to pursue higher educations (as a matter of fact, at various functions we’ve worked together; Rice insists that our students apply to the Ivy League schools) and to conferences across the nation is beyond me. But he has, and to critical acclaim. His Crazy Loco was a finalist for the PEN West USA competition. It was also chosen by ALA as one of 2002’s Best Books for Young Adults. This book picks up where the first leaves off: first love, finding oneself by losing another, a crazy dog, a young man humbleing himself to serve, and a young woman who will fly to a great future despite attempts on her parents’, the community’s, and culture’s parts to try to cage her. This last story, “She Flies,” has gotten much attention. The story is about a girl, Milagros, who desperately wants to leave South Texas to attend university elsewhere. Her old, old aunt does what she can, including talking to the girl’s parents, who are very much like a great many parents are here in the Valley when it comes to letting a daughter leave the fold, traditional to the point of sacrificing their daughter’s future happiness. The story is very positive, but more message-driven than based on a well-rounded character. This same character, though, comes alive in the play She Flies, based on the story. Written by Mike Garcia and performed by actors of Nushank Productions, the play has gotten quite a bit of stage time.

I’ve told the author once or twice that I prefer the stage version to the story version, and lucky
for me, I count myself as a good friend of Rice’s, and so this may be why he hasn’t yet knocked
my block off for saying so. In the same way as Rice feels about our young people succeeding
(the message of both story and play), Garcia and the rest of the Nushank players will perform
in cafeterias, formal stages, a museum where space is limited, anywhere really where our youth
is. Rice, if anyone, is the most forceful and authentic of Valley voices. Sure, his writing doesn’t
capture the one voice of the area because there is no one voice of the Valley. But, he speaks
honestly, sometimes harshly, in his stories and in person, both to our weaknesses and to our
strengths. He doesn’t pull punches, but because he feels an urgency to get the message out, he
feels that there is so little time for him to do everything that has to be done to insure bright futures
for our students.

Anne Estevis, author of Down Garrapata Road, is a former student of Jan Epton Seale, a
local poet who for many years led a writers’ workshop in McAllen. Although described as a novel
on the back cover, Estevis’s work would be better classified as a collection of short stories that are
loosely connected by setting and recurring characters. The stories take place on different family
farms that lie all up and down Garrapata Road, really Garland Potter Road. The tales attempt to
document what life was like for Mexican Americans during the 40s and 50s in South Texas.

In one story, “The Dancing Queens of Garrapata Road,” readers become aware of how little
a great many Valleyites have ever traveled outside of their communities. The narrator, Chatita,
sees nothing wrong with this sort of isolation, though: “At fourteen, my world was here on my
father’s twenty-acre farm, and up and down the dusty dirt road...."35 One consequence of this
isolationism is not being aware of the magnitude of world affairs, or a conscious unwillingness
give them thought for their very magnitude. At a dance for a boy about to leave for the war,
Chatita is more concerned that the Paloma girls are wearing “the most beautiful dancing frocks
I had ever seen,”36 than what could happen to the boys of Garrapata Road once they have left
for war. Her brother Chuy gives money to Mr. Paloma, who will soon travel to San Antonio, to
purchase a similar frock for Chatita. Not long after she gets it, the family is invited to another
party, where she “pranced like a queen,”37 giving no thought to this second party’s occasion.

In “The Virgin and Doña Fidelfa,” readers are treated to a good laugh. Doña Fidelfa, who
sells roses and paints her house in various bright colors once a year, has “fallen and injured
her hip.”38 Zulema, the seventeen-year-old neighbor and narrator, is sent over to help while the
old woman gets better. Around this same time, Abelardo, Doña Fidelfa’s no-good and good for
nothing nephew arrives. No sooner does he arrive than he begins to order Zulema around, and
worse, “He never said please, he never said thank you. He sat at the table and gulped down his
food and belched, then gulped some more. When he was finished, he asked Doña Fidelfa for
money.”39 He misspends it on booze and then wants more. One morning, while in the outhouse,
the old woman sees the image of the Virgin shining onto the outhouse door through the cracks
of the wooden slats. The nephew is quick to capitalize on this miraculous incident, charging an
entrance fee to get a look at the Virgin. In the end, he tries to rob the old woman blind. But she is
cunning. He takes his new clothes, the door, and a coffee can she leaves out in the open. The rest
she has hidden away. Having “known Abelardo all his life, ... I’ve never trusted him. There is no
way I would ever let him steal my money!” she tells Zulema.40

This collection has one major flaw, one I am surprised Estevis’s editor let pass, and that is,
that the stories are all told in one voice, presumably the author’s. Each story would have been that
much better had the author allowed the individual narrators to speak in their own voices. Instead,
we have good stories recounted by the implied author, almost as though the narrators are telling
her their stories and giving her permission to impose on them her voice.
Oscar Casares, who recently took a teaching post at UT-Austin and is an Iowa Writers Workshop graduate, is the Valley author who has garnered more national media attention than any of the rest of us for his *Brownsville: Stories*. His writing is crisp and clean, hardly a rough edge to it. The stories are straightforward. And even though the book takes for its title the town’s name, the setting is ambiguous. Of all the books mentioned thus far, *Brownsville* is the one whose setting could easily be changed to anywhere in the Midwest, the Northeast, or out West, and the stories would still work. Sure, the stories themselves take place in Brownsville; there’s mention of the *Herald*, the Levis plant, Parra Furniture, Amigoland Mall, the McDonald’s over by the college, and Matamoros, and other such references. The stories are literally set there, but what is missing is the sense of the place, its people (as opposed to its inhabitants, those who could live in these stories or any other writer’s who is not from here).

A student of Dagoberto Gilb, it is surprising then that Casares would not have taken from Gilb how important it is for an author to people his stories with characters different from anyone else and to set his work in locales that are distinct from anywhere else, and still be universal. The mere mention of specific places and events is often not enough to get setting right. It is not enough to describe in great detail a particular place in an attempt to get the reader to see what the writer sees. That’s easy to do. It’s horizontal writing. Linear and two-dimensional.

An author must write vertically to get his people and place right. He has to dig deep into character, into place. He must show what is not visible on the surface. Casares does accomplish this in the story “Domingo,” whose main character, Domingo, a seventy-three year old handyman who, even at this time in his life, still mourns the tragic loss of his daughter, Sara. He also longs for his life back in Mexico. Toward the end of the story, the old man climbs the now-famous tree on which, some years ago, appeared an image of the Virgin Mary, to speak “to God directly.” He originally climbs the tree to ask “why he and his wife had lost their child” only to realize that “there was no answer: it had been the will of God,” and so Domingo asks for God’s forgiveness, at which point he looks across the Rio Bravo and into Matamoros, “and even farther, past the loneliness of his little room next to the tire shop, past the reality that he would work the rest of his life and still die poor, and finally, past the years of sorrow he had spent remembering his little girl, past all this, until he clearly saw his wife and then his daughter, Sara, who was now a grown woman.” At this point in this one story, Casares gets it right. Dead-on right.

But this overall omission of sense of place critics didn’t seem to take notice of, or chose to ignore. What many critics mention time and again was the author’s use of code switching. They all seemed to agree that this switching from one language (English) to another (Spanish) added a certain Hispanic flavor to the writing. And perhaps this is another reason why the sense of place is missing for me, because code switching is nothing more than a device available to a writer who wishes to add another dimension to his work. At best, it impresses non-native speakers; at worst, those in the know know enough to see it for what it is: an attempt at adding another layer that would have best been left alone. What an author should shoot for is authenticity. The use of mestizaje, the language Anzaldúa writes about in her book, cannot appear to be authentic; rather, it must be so. Writers cannot simply translate words and or phrases for the sake of flavor. If it is understood a character or narrator is speaking Spanish, then why For example, in “Domingo,” the narrator states that Domingo “had been waiting over half an hour for la señora Ross” (italics mine). The addition of the article ‘la’ is problematic. Most Valleyites would omit this article and leave it at ‘for Señora Ross.” It is slight, you might argue, and it is a mistake I have likely made in my own writing, but we must strive for more than appearances. At other times, Casares gets it right: “¿N’hombre, pa’qué? He’s a good dog” is a fine example of mestizaje and not code-
switching. These two sentences I am certain to hear my neighbors speaking at a pachanga (that’s code-switching for Mexican barbeque and fiesta).

Ultimately, Casares’s *Brownsville* is not like “puppies, clumsy sometimes, shamelessly endearing,” as one reviewer put it, nor is it a series of vignettes as another reviewer described it. Instead, it is a work of good fiction, stories that may or may not speak to the sense of place, but fine stories nevertheless.

Xavier Garza, author of *Creepy Creatures and Other Cucuys*, is the most recent of Valley natives to publish a book. He’s originally from Rio Grande City and now lives with his wife in San Antonio. His is a collection of myths and folktales that have been communicated orally from one generation to the next, stories we have all heard, stories we have all been told in order to keep us in line, those of us who have grown up here in the Valley. For example, Garza includes two different versions of La Llorona; in one, “Another Version of La Llorona Story,” she is cruel and evil, killing her children to marry a wealthy old man from Mexico who didn’t want children (she had two) because “he was too old to be chasing after brats and, quite frankly, was annoyed by their noisy presence.” Cristina accepts the old man’s proposal for marriage and now must rid herself of the children: “Without so much as shedding a tear of guilt, [she] tossed her children into the raging waters” of the Rio Grande. In “La Llorona,” Cristina is not so unsympathetic. The protagonist is deceived by the handsome Héctor, the father of her two boys, and who, despite many promises, “had no intention of divorcing his wife or marrying Cristina.” His plan is more sinister, to steal away with the two boys, leaving a grieving mother behind. In an attempt to escape Héctor, she heads toward the river with the boys. Héctor gives chase. In the rivers, trying to cross, Cristina “suddenly lost her footing and fell into the raging water whose current carried her and her boys away, drowning all three!” In this version, instead of being punished directly by God to wander the earth until she finds her children to present them in heaven, Cristina’s soul chooses to search and search, crying out for her lost boys.

This is a much better book than Juan Sauvageau’s *Stories That Must Not Die* in that Sauvageau’s collection reads a little thread-bare, the barebones story, whereas Garza adds some meat to the *cuentos*, embroiders more colorful stories. Other *cucuys* he includes are the *duendes*, *la lechuza*, *la mano pachona*, *chupacabras*, and the devil at the dance. Garza is first and foremost a storyteller, and so much of his work here reads as though he were present telling us the stories himself, which works in a collection like this one. And unfortunately (in my opinion), though Garza is from Rio Grande City, a city alive with ghosts, with *cuentos* aplenty, this is not a Rio Grande City account. I was so hoping that it would have been. As it is, it is a book written by a young man from Rio, and it is a very good read.

In the final analysis, I find there is not one distinct South Texas voice, and most definitely not a South Texas Mexican voice. Each author varies in content and manner, and each shows the beauty that is the Valley. What is the next step in Valley Mexican American literature? More of it. Authors like Paredes and Hinojosa Smith began publishing with what houses were available to them, Arte Público and Bilingual Press; others have followed their paths (Canales, Estevis, Garza, among others); and a few, thanks to those who came before and proved our writing is not second tier or backward, have worked their way into the bigger, more prestigious New York houses. The foot is in the door; now it’s time to make good use of it. One trend I have noticed that prevails with many, if not all, of these authors: they do not forget where they come from and have been willing to help younger, would-be writers who are willing to work hard at the craft in any number of ways. That, if nothing else, is the responsibility of those who have already “made it”—that is, to mentor and work with the next set of soon-to-be published writers.
Selected Bibliography


---. *Give the Pig a Chance and Other Stories*. Tempe AZ: Bilingual Press/Editorial Bilingüe, 1996.


Endnotes

1 Read, for example, Charles F. Dameron, Jr.'s. “The Fictional World of the Valley,” in *Studies in Brownsville and Matamoros History*, edited by Milo Kearney, Anthony Knopp, and Antonio Zavaleta (Brownsville: The University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College, 1995), pp. 229-237, in which the author focuses on the cultural and language dualism present in the Valley and in the literature of South Texas, the earliest of which is a short story titled “The Ranger” by famed Western writer Zane Grey (1929) and the latest of which is América Paredes’s collection of short fiction, *The Hammon and the Beans and Other Stories* (1994). Dameron also mentions other authors of note: some of them are Hart Stillwell, Cleo Dawson, Rolando Hinojosa-Smith, and G.F. McHale-Scully. And so, with a few exceptions, I will not revisit these authors nor their contribution to South Texas writing.

2 A short article worth reading is titled “Home Run Books,” in which the authors discuss how using work by Latinos/as in classes composed mainly of Latino/a children increases interest in
reading that then leads to improved literacy. (Freeman, Y., Freeman, A., and Freeman, D. NABE News. January/February 2003, pp. 5-8, 11-12, 28); see also Joan Parker Webster's *Teaching Through Culture: Strategies for Reading and Responding to Young Adult Literature.* Houston: Arte Público Press, 2002.

3 Gloria Anzaldúa, “Preface to the First Edition,” in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* 4

Anzaldúa, 19.

5 Anzaldúa, 20.

6 Anzaldúa, 26.

7 Anzaldúa, 26. This date Anzaldúa takes from John R. Chávez’s *The Lost Land: The Chicano Images of the Southwest.* (Albuquerque, NM: U of New Mexico P, 1984), 9.

8 Anzaldúa, 25.

9 Anzaldúa, 75.


11 Anzaldúa, 77.

12 Anzaldúa, 77.

13 Anzaldúa, 78.

14 I was one of the three poets she helped. The other two are Xavier Garza and Luis Valderas.

15 Padialla, Ernesto in the “Preface” to *Sonnets,* xiii.

16 Tafolla, 46.

17 Arteaga, *Chicano Poetics,** 74.

18 Tafolla, 11.

19 Tafolla, 23.

20 Tafolla, 50.

21 Arteaga, *Chicano Poetics,* 34.

22 Tafolla, 57.

23 Valle Senties, 15.

24 Valle Senties, 17.

25 Valle Senties, 17.

26 Valle Senties, 33.

27 Valle Senties, 34.

28 Valle Senties, 19.

29 Rice, 74.

30 Rice, 75.


32 Rice, 45.

33 Rice, 48.

34 Rice, 49.

35 Estevis, 10.

36 Estevis, 14.

37 Estevis, 17.

38 Estevis, 64.

39 Estevis, 65.
Dagoberto Gilb is himself a writer born and raised in another Texas border town, El Paso, and a master of character and place. He presently is a professor of creative writing at Texas State University in San Marcos and who occasionally mentors Mexican American would-be writers, among them Corpus Christi author Diana Lopez (Sofía's Saints). Gilb has written The Magic of Blood (for which he won the PEN/Hemingway award), The Last Known Residence of Mickey Acuña, Woodcuts of Women, and Gritos! In addition, he has also been awarded a Guggenheim fellowship.

One trend I have noticed about Valley artists (painters, musicians, writers, etc.), we as a community aren’t doing enough to keep these folks in the area. This is why I’m a big promoter of supporting the local arts in whatever way available to us, be it attending readings/openings, purchasing work from the local artists, or giving of your time and even money to different arts organizations who can then fund the arts. Go to a museum, take your children to a museum. Take them to an art opening or reading. Have them meet the painters/writers/musicians.
El Corrido Epitalamico de Brownsville
por
Jorge Green Huie

Entre los periódicos viejos que se conservan cuidadosamente protegidos por plástico en la colección histórica de nuestra biblioteca universitaria, encontré un ejemplo de corrido epitalámico en El Monitor Republicano de Brownsville para la fecha de jueves, 25 de noviembre de 1909.

El epitalamio, el poema compuesto en celebración de una boda, representa una tradición literaria que hemos heredado de los romanos antiguos. Cayo Valerio Catulo, poeta latino del primer siglo a. d. J. C., se considera el iniciador de este subgénero poético con sus delicados versos líricos en ocasión de las nupcias de Tetis y Peleo. Temáticamente, el epitalamio suele ser una epístola, o carta, dedicada a unos novios. Por esto, manifiesta con raras excepciones una estructura bipartita: la voz del autor en primera persona se dirige a la pareja feliz en segunda persona:

Sé, pues, en la existencia venturosa,
que sea la honradez siempre tu egida,
y harás, Elena, con tu amor de esposa
féliz al compañero de tu vida.

Por “corrido” entendemos la poesía popular de México, que a menudo se canta al son de la guitarra y otros instrumentos. Vicente T. Mendoza en su libro Romance y corrido enumera treinta y dos variedades métricas.\(^1\) El mexicano poetiza las hazañas de sus héroes y las peripecias de su historia preferentemente en cuartetos octosílabicos con asonancia en los versos pares, sin rima en los impares y con cambio de rima en cada estrofa nueva. Tal subgénero de poesía popular se ha comentado en relación con la tradición peninsular de índole épico-lírica en un artículo de tomo anterior de esta serie de publicaciones sobre nuestra región.\(^2\) Para el subgénero epistolar, no obstante, muchos bardos hispanos desde el siglo XVI han escogido el endecasílabo, el verso de once sílabas, sobre todo en ocasiones solemnes. Recordemos las epístolas de Garcilaso de la Vega (español, 1501-1536), quien adaptó este verso al castellano del italiano. Por su parte, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (mexicana, 1645-1695) para epístolas informales utilizaba generalmente versos octosílabos; pero al recibir una alabanza de su poesía del rey de España, Felipe II de Habsburgo, la Décima Musa de Nueva España contestó en endecasílabos:

Altísimo Señor, Monarca Hispano,
que a Dios, entre accidentes escondido,
cuando queréis mostraros más rendido,
es cuando os ostentaís más Soberano…\(^3\)

Por consiguiente, no nos debe sorprender que el corrido epitalámico de Brownsville consiste en versos endecasílabos. A continuación se reproduce el texto completo del corrido:

EPITALAMIO

En los esponsales de mi hermana Elena Morales
con el Sr. Simón Benavides

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Has visto, al fin, tu dicha realizada,
la dicha por tu alma apetecida,
al prender el cariño su alborada
sobre el sereno cielo de tu vida.

Llevas como una luz resplandeciente,
al luz de tu virtud, bella y serena,
que es un beso de Dios sobre tu frente
y el talismán de tu honradez, Elena.

Digna y honrada, pues, tu mano cedes
al ser que amas y quieres en la vida,
y con tu amor dignificarlo puedes
y gozar de una dicha indefinida.

Sí, hermana mía; la virtud su palma
forma en tu ser un nido de afeciones
que te conquistan con amor del alma
todos nuestros honrados corazones.

¡Que el cielo te bendiga; que Dios quiera,
besando tu corona de azahares,
tener siempre en perpetua primavera
el cielo de tus sueños tutelares.

Los que abandonas en tu hogar honrado,
nido siempre de afectos en fragancia,
donde dejas el símbolo sangrado
de las horas más bellas de la infancia.

Nos tortura la angustia y la alegría,
feliz te vemos y llorar queremos,
porque siempre la dicha, hermana mía,
no manda que de ti nos separemos.

Sé, pues, en la existencia venturosa,
que sea la honradez siempre tu egida,
y harás, Elena, con tu amor de esposa
feliz al compañero de tu vida.

Y tú, Simón, que de su amor mereces
el galardón por tu conducta honrada,
que acrisola tus limpias honradeces
de tu sana existencia en la jornada;
Que hoy su nombre has unido con tu nombre
para cruzar la senda florecida
donde tu recto sentimiento de hombre
la llevará enlazada con tu vida.

Ámala siempre con amor profundo,
que sea en ti su dicha un solo anhelo,
porque es la compañera en este mundo
que solo puede arrebatarte el cielo.

¡Sé tú y ella feliz! Quiera el destino,
cual justo premio a vuestras almas buenas,
regar de vuestra dicha en el camino,
una aromada lluvia de azucenas.

UN HERMANO⁴

Los catorce cuartetos del corrido se dividen en dos secciones claramente delineadas: las diez primeras estrofas se dedican a la novia; las cuatro restantes se dirigen al esposo. Las ideas expresadas, en el fondo, son obvias y sencillas: a los recién casados se les desea la felicidad y la bendición de Dios, y se alaba el alto carácter moral de ambos.

El anhelo de la felicidad se pondera a través de la reiteración de un sustantivo clave: la palabra “dicha” se repite ocho veces en las catorce estrofas. El sinónimo “feliz” figura dos veces. En estos versos se encuentran también los adjetivos relacionados “dichoso” y “venturosa”. Además, dos imágenes de flores simbolizan la misma idea: en el antepenúltimo cuarteto se nota la frase “senda florecida” y en los versos finales de la última estrofa encontramos la metáfora memorable de un camino regado de “una aromada lluvia de azucenas”. Brevemente surgen en el noveno cuarteto sentimientos contrarios causados por la separación inevitable de la novia de su familia:

Nos tortura la angustia y la alegría,
feliz te vemos y llorar queremos
porque siempre la dicha, hermana mía,
nos manda que de ti nos separemos.

Aquí las emociones positivas se reflejan en las voces “alegría”, “feliz” y “dicha”, en contraposición a los vocablos antónimos “tortura”, “angustia” y “llorar”.

Desde el primero hasta el último verso del corrido reina un constante espíritu de optimismo, que se crea en parte con referencia a la “alborada”, la “primavera”, la “luz” y las flores blancas encontradas tradicionalmente en una boda, “azahares” y “azucenas”.

El segundo tema de la virtud o honradez se complica por las referencias no sólo a los novios sino también a la familia de Elena. En nueve de los catorce cuartetos se expresa esta idea. Se introduce en la estrofa inicial con una metáfora para la virtud de Elena, “sereno cielo de tu vida”. En el segundo cuarteto se insiste en este concepto reiterándolo con lenguaje figurado:
Llevas como una luz resplandeciente
la luz de tu virtud, bella y serena,
que es un beso de Dios sobre tu frente
y el talismán de tu honradez, Elena.

Otra vez sobresale la reiteración: la palabra “luz” (que implica pureza en este contexto) aparece en la línea inicial y se repite en el segundo verso; el adjetivo clave del primer cuarteto, “sereno”, figura aquí también en su forma femenina. La “luz” asimismo se relaciona directamente con la voz “virtud”: “luz de tu virtud”. Además, el vocablo se califica de “resplandeciente” en el primer verso, y después su virtud se caracteriza como “bella y serena”, se describe como “un beso de Dios” y finalmente se presenta como “talismán”.

Tres otros cuartetos - tercero, cuarto y décimo - ofrecen referencias a la virtud de la novia: la palabra clave en cada caso es de sentido diáfano, “honrada”, “virtud” y “honradez”. En la tercera estrofa se refiere a la honradez de la familia. El mismo atributo del novio se alaba en las estrofas once y doce: “tu conducta honrada” y “tu recto sentimiento de hombre”. Finalmente se expresa lo mismo sobre la pareja con la frase “vuestras almas buenas”.

El carácter popular de estos versos estriba precisamente en el idealismo inocentón de su mensaje central, según el cual los novios por buenos merecen la felicidad. Nos imaginamos los brindis alegres en la recepción de Elena Morales y Simón Benavides hace casi un siglo.

The University of Texas at Brownsville

Endnotes

1920, Harlingen Citrus Grove
by Salomón Colmenero
Israel B. Bigelow: From Connecticut to the Rio Grande
by
Bill Young

Israel B. Bigelow may not have had nine lives but he managed to cram a lot of living into the one life he did have: First Chief Justice or County Judge of Cameron County, first Mayor of Brownsville, beef dealer, lawyer, saloon keeper, brawler, loyal Confederate then turncoat Union man, friend of the poor, Christian. Bigelow answered to all of these and carved out a unique niche in the history of his city and his county.

In 1846, Texas had been a State in the Union for only about a year; its status as a Republic ending with Statehood. Even before the end of the War with Mexico and the new territory that would be added to the Lone Star State, waves of settlers from the North joined pioneer Spanish families that had farmed, fished and ranched along the Rio Grande since 1749 on land grants deeded to them by the King of Spain. Israel Bennoni Bigelow, a native of Colchester, New London, Connecticut, arrived on the border in the decade of the 1840s. He was less than 40 years old, and even though he had “read” law in his native state, he chose what he believed was a far more lucrative way to make money: contracting with the U.S. Army to provide beef for thousands of hungry soldiers fighting in Mexico.

This business led Bigelow to the Ciudad Victoria, Tamaulipas, area. While returning from a trip to the “front” he and his party were ambushed by Mexican soldiers. Bigelow took a serious wound to the leg. He spent several months recuperating at an Army hospital in Tampico, Tamaulipas, Mexico. This wound would bother him for the rest of his life and would eventually claim his life at age 58. It is during this early period that the first public mention is made of Bigelow. Even though he was in the beef business, he still found time to peddle the other meat as evidenced by an advertisement in the Matamoros Reveille in mid-1846: “For sale—A few BBls [barrels] Mess Pork in Fine Order, low for each. I.B. Bigelow.”

Bigelow had married Mary H. Avery in a ceremony held in Connecticut on November 2, 1837. The couple’s only child died in infancy although the time and place of the child’s death is uncertain. Israel and Mary adopted a baby girl from Virginia who was born in 1846. That adopted daughter, Henrietta Bigelow, lived with the couple in Brownsville and stayed on after their deaths. Bigelow and his little family became full time residents of the embryonic Brownsville once the War with Mexico ended. He, Mary and Henrietta were reported to be living in a “nice little box of a house; lumber is dear in this place.” When Cameron County was organized in 1848, according to The Brownsville Semi-Weekly Sentinel, he was elected the county’s first Chief Justice by a “large majority.” On September 11, 1848, Bigelow presided over his first meeting of the Cameron County Commissioners Court.

It was during this time that Bigelow befriended Helen Chapman, who described the County’s first Chief Justice as “a large man of large frame, well dressed with a head rather too small for his proportions, not intellectual but shrewd and calculating in expression.” He was, Chapman wrote her mother, “certainly a cute Yankee” and counted Bigelow as a personal “friend.” In another letter to her mother, Chapman wrote that Bigelow also ran a “grog shop” in Matamoros and made “handfuls of money” from that enterprise. Chapman also reported on Bigelow’s efforts in building a courthouse, a school, and a Protestant Church, nudging the Chief Justice on the latter. “But when are we going to get a handsome Protestant Church, Judge?” she asked Bigelow. “You know a city can’t pretend to much respectability until it has schools and churches.” Bigelow contributed $50 toward “a real good church and a good minister, not one of your ignorant set of
men, but a real smart educated man." The latter was prompted at the same time that Chapman recorded both Bigelow's efforts at getting the Cameron County Seat moved from its earlier upriver location to Brownsville and also how Bigelow worked on a courthouse for the new county seat.

No doubt Brownsville needed schools and churches as badly as it needed a new courthouse, especially during the summer of 1850 when there was murder and mayhem galore. Mrs. Chapman reported one gambler killing another over a monte game; two accused murderers were lynched by a jury of their peers without benefit of a trial. Mosquitoes, barking dogs and "a plethora of prostitutes" all contributed to the frontier dinginess of the place. Roads were worse than the criminal element, barely more than trails. They were rough, without maintenance and didn't lend themselves to pleasure trips. A trip from Brownsville to Brazos Santiago took nine hours; slow going to say the least.

Even though Bigelow "glorified in the title of Chief Justice", he nevertheless decided to give up his cherished judgeship to seek the office of Mayor of Brownsville. He ran for that office in an election held April 8, 1850, and claimed victory. Vote totals, however, are not available. Nine days later, on April 17, 1850, Cameron County Commissioners accepted Bigelow's resignation as Chief Justice and ordered an election to fill the vacancy. Before it was all over, however, Bigelow probably regretted his mayoral aspirations and subsequent resignation as Cameron County's top official. Almost immediately, the Brownsville City Council challenged Bigelow's contention that he had been elected mayor. On election day, an "election protest was lodged by Judge R. Garland, counsel of record for various citizens." City Council members didn't vote on that protest, but rather appointed a committee to investigate the election. That committee came up with a 10-point bill against Bigelow claiming, among other things, that the mayor had "issued his own writ of election for mayor while Chief Justice of Cameron County and a candidate for mayor, thus therefore, legally disqualified to do so" and "that many persons not citizens of the United States, nor of the State of Texas, but of Mexico, were permitted to vote.”

On April 19th, the City Council filed notice that it was contesting Bigelow's election. In an odd turn of events however, Council on May 6 set the mayor's salary at $1,800 per year and that of Town Marshall J.T.W. Mitchell at $1,000. Meanwhile things continued to simmer in the Brownsville City Council with Bigelow never attending a meeting and maintaining a running verbal battle with members of the council. The situation became even more bizarre on July 16, when the Council reduced the Town Marshall Mitchell's salary from $1,000 to 12 ½ cents per year. Mitchell was also ordered to get out of town within 48 hours.

Four days later Bigelow was ordered to make a "detailed report in writing" of all city claims he had received and to "also pay such amount over to the treasury". Bigelow refused to comply. The Council then reduced Bigelow's salary to $1,000 per year and then to $500 per year. Bigelow responded by vetoing these salary reductions only to see his vetoes overridden by the Council. The embattled Mayor continued to boycott Council meetings and, on Sept. 7, 1850, was ordered to turn over "ledgers, paper and property [belonging to the City] within 48 hours ..." Bigelow responded that the Mayor "is of the opinion that the president of the Council had better come after the books if he should see fit." The situation climaxed on September 2nd, when the Council stated, "Israel Bigelow is not the legally elected mayor" and declared the office vacant. A new election was called for September 17. Bigelow got one vote in that new election and one can only guess at who cast that lone vote in his favor.

Never a man to be trifled with, Bigelow seems to have gotten testy after his ouster as Mayor of Brownsville. In the summer of 1850 the ex-Mayor is reported by the New Orleans Daily True
Delta to have had two “rough and tumble fights—once with a Justice and once with a member of the learned profession. In the last case he is said to have got the worst of it, as he was not seen in the streets for four days afterwards, and a certain druggist reports having sold a quantity of sugar of lead (topical medication) . . .” Out of office but not out of the public eye, Israel Bigelow continued to practice law and to keep his political connections intact. On December 12, 1854, County Commissioners appointed him as “Road District Overseer for Cameron County Precinct No. 4.” He still had pull with the county, for on August 20, 1857, he was paid $108.84 for “rent of office.” With the county not having a courthouse, per se, in 1857, meeting space was rented from property owners in Brownsville. It isn’t stretching the imagination too much to suspect that Bigelow was renting office space to Cameron County.

What can only be described as Bigelow’s greatest comeback took place on November 19, 1861. Again he found himself serving as Chief Justice of Cameron County, taking over from Stephen Powers, who was then Mayor of Brownsville and who had served as Chief Magistrate since August 16, 1858. By November 1861, Texas had left the Union and was part of the Confederate States of America. Bigelow thus became part of a Rebel commissioners’ court in a Rebel county in a Rebel state. Commissioners Court minutes often spoke of adhering to Confederate laws and kept an account of Confederate and Union money in the county treasury. For almost two years, Brownsville enjoyed the distinction of being the “back door” to the Confederacy and the prosperity that went with it. Cotton from west of the Mississippi was brought by wagon to Brownsville, where it crossed to Matamoros and then to Bagdad for shipment to ports in Europe and the Eastern U.S. Brownsville was firmly in the hands of the Confederate Army and as Chief Justice Israel Bigelow didn’t miss the chance to make a few Confederate dollars. He signed the court minutes—even the ones that contained payments to himself—in a big, bold hand.

From early 1862 through most of 1863, Bigelow submitted various bills to the county, including $43 for “appearance in court”, $18 for “court”, $43 for “services”, and $72 for “services. With no explanation, Bigelow, on February 1, 1863, began signing his name “Israel Bonaparte Bigelow.” His middle name, of course, was Bennoni. With the approach of Fall in 1863, there was also the specter of another approach: that of Union General Nathaniel Banks, who with a large force, had landed at Brazos Santiago and was moving inland toward Brownsville. The invaders met with little resistance. A New York Herald item dated 5 p.m., Nov. 4 proclaimed “Startling News—the Rebels are evacuating Brownsville.” The capture of Brownsville had been anticipated by Bigelow and his fellow Rebel commissioners, who voted to buy a “chest” to preserve county archives. The October 17, 1863, Commissioners Court meeting was the last to be presided over by Bigelow. He was replaced by Edwin Moses, ending his political life, but by no means ending his days in Brownsville.

Union occupiers were benign masters, getting along well with the locals and even publishing a newspaper, The Loyal National Union Journal, which lasted for 10 issues in late 1863 and early 1864. Publication ceased when Union forces were driven out of Brownsville, a condition that would endure until after the Battle of Palmito Ranch in May of 1865. One issue of the Union Journal made specific mention of “Judge Bigelow . . . whose house is used as a hospital (which it was). He was a rampant rebel but had now taken the oath and is a bully Union Man.” It didn’t take a weatherman to tell Bigelow which way the wind was blowing. With the ouster of Banks in the Spring of 1864, the flow of cotton resumed and things in Brownsville partially returned to pre-invasion conditions. Even the most optimistic among the Rebels, however, could probably see that it was now only a matter of time before the end of the Confederacy. Israel Bigelow kept a low profile by returning to his law practice and suffering no repercussions over his conversion to
Unionism, at least no repercussions that have survived.

Once the Civil War ended, the Union occupiers came to Brownsville to stay. The army brought with it members of the Eastern press: the New York papers, Harper's, Leslie's Illustrated and the Philadelphia Inquirer. Thanks to these papers' correspondence, one can get a good picture of the postwar Brownsville that Israel Bigelow called home. Even though the Civil War had ended, there was a continuing battle in Mexico between the Imperialists and the Liberals who were dedicated to driving the French and their Austrian allies out of Mexico. While the Mexican war didn't spill over into Brownsville, many people involved in the fight did cross the Rio Grande. Israel Bigelow surely knew about the conditions in Mexico as well as he knew about the conditions in Brownsville. If the Northern press is to be believed, Brownsville was a sad sight at the end of hostilities. Bigelow, however, stuck it out.

Reports from Brownsville in both the New York Herald and The New York Tribune paint a bleak picture of the Brownsville that Israel Bigelow knew in 1865. “Brownsville is in a dilapidated condition,” reported the Herald, “empty houses and abundant ruin”. The Tribune echoed, reporting that “Brownsville is a dreadful place . . . any traffic on the streets causes clouds of dust . . .”20 The town may have been in ruins, but Bigelow continued to be held in high esteem by his fellow Brownsville residents. The Matamoros Daily Ranchero, in an 1866 advertisement for a girl’s school, included Bigelow’s name in a select group of notables: “The Rio Grande Female Institute makes reference to Rev. Chamberlain, Franklin Cummings, Israel B. Bigelow, Richard King, Edward Downey, Rev. D. Shaver and George Dye.”21

It didn’t take long after the war for life to improve in Brownsville. Bigelow and others in the city could slake their thirst with ice from the Matamoros Ice Works, buy food from George McKay’s Choice Family Grocery on Elizabeth Street between 11th and 12th Streets, and enjoy a meal at Victor’s Restaurant, also on Elizabeth Street.22 Victor’s had received mention in The New York Tribune: “A good restaurant has been started by Mr. Cachot. It goes under the name of ‘Victor’s Restaurant’. The place is much frequented by the officers . . . and all others who can pay $1 for meals.”23 You have to wonder if the newly converted Unionist Israel Bigelow hung out with the soldiers at Victor’s.

That Israel “Bonaparte” Bigelow was feisty toward the end of his life is evidenced by an 1867 advertisement he placed in the Rio Grande Courier: “Bigelow, Israel B., Attorney & Counselor. Office on Levee Street in the most muddy part of the city.” The Courier was a tri-lingual paper published in English, French and Spanish.24 Up to the time of that ad it had been 19 years since Bigelow’s election as the first Chief Justice of Cameron County and 17 years since his contested election as Brownsville’s first Mayor. On Nov. 2, 1867, he and Mary Bigelow would celebrate 30 year of marriage.

Whether Israel Bigelow ever enjoyed the status of elder statesman we’ll probably never know. He died at 2:30 a.m., March 29, 1869 at the age of 58. He was praised and remembered in a two-column obituary in The Brownsville Semi-Weekly Sentinel, a paper published by Bigelow’s former Confederate colleague and ally Col. John S. “Rip” Ford. From what we do know, Bigelow made a lasting impression on those who knew him, and, if his obituary is to be believed, the people of Brownsville genuinely loved him.25 It read:

In his intercourse with his friends and neighbors he was kind and genial; in the discharge of his professional duties, zealous; and in his business relations upright and honorable. As a man he was possessed of a heart filled with charity to his kind, and it rarely occurred that he missed the opportunity of doing a good or kind
act when in his power. To the poor and humble in our midst he was a friend and
counselor ever ready to extend relief or serve with his professional aid, those too
poor to command the services of a hired advocate. His death was hastened by the
wound received by him over 21 years ago; as in the natural order of events, his
robust constitution was such as to promise to him a long and useful life. He has
gone from among us, but his works remain. Peace to his memory.26

Bigelow was buried the afternoon of March 29, 1869, and his burial was “attended by a
very large number of persons.” A funeral procession 10 files deep consisted of officials, judges,
citizens on foot, carriages, citizens on foot. Courts were adjourned for a day in honor of Israel
Bigelow. Some 12 hours after Bigelow died, a meeting of the Cameron County Bar was held in
the District Courtroom occasioned by the decease of their fellow member of the bar, the Hon.
Israel B. Bigelow. During this meeting, a resolution of remembrance and respect for Bigelow
was prepared. Bigelow was buried in the City Cemetery—now the Old City cemetery—and his
grave may be seen today. Bigelow’s wife, Mary, would outlive him by more than fourteen years,
dying of malaria on Aug. 12, 1883. She was 71 years old.27 The saga of Israel B. Bigelow doesn’t
quite end there, however. His adopted daughter, Henrietta, remained in Brownsville until 1889.
On December 31 of that year, she married R.B. Foster, who was Cameron County District Clerk.
The couple reportedly moved to Florida, and whether or not Bigelow has any descendants from
them is not known.28

Public Information Officer for the City of Brownsville

Endnotes

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   Center by the Texas Historical Association, 1992), p. 160.
5 Cameron County Commissioners Court Minutes, Books A & E, Roll #198, no p. n.
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7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
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15 Cameron County Commissioners Court Minutes, Books A & E, Roll #198, no p. n.
16 Cameron County Commissioners Court Minutes, Books A & E, Roll #198, no p. n.
17 Cameron County Commissioners Court Minutes, Books A & E, Roll #198, no p. n.
19 The Loyal National Union Journal, Brownsville, Texas, March 26, 1864, Vol. 1, No. 4, p. 9.
   XXX, No. 7,589, pp. 1 and 2.
26 Ibid.
27 Record of Interments in the City Cemetery of Brownsville, Texas, Vol. II, 1881-1890. Sam and Chula Griffin, p. 5.
28 Cameron County Marriage Index, Vol. B, p. 181.
Friederich Wilhelm Hofmokel: “Mr. Port Director”
by
Sondra Shands

South Padre Island, Texas, was an island sparsely settled in 1965. Motels, restaurants and residents were few. The Hofmokels and close friends enjoyed occasional weekends together, relaxing at the Dunes Resort Motel one of the few motels on the island. The water was rough with high surging waves, the undertow strong and dangerous, but that wouldn’t stop Fritz Hofmokel from swimming. He was a strong swimmer who loved the ocean, and spent as much time as possible at the beach.

According to the Brownsville Herald, he was “a familiar sight as he lay on his back in the water, wearing a hat and smoking a cigar.”1 “Padre Island is the best medicine,” he said, “it cures everything.”2 According to his family and subsequent news reports, Hofmokel was not concerned about the coldness or the roughness of the surf. He was a very capable swimmer. The first indication that something had gone terribly wrong was when his wife and friends realized that they could see Fritz’ white cap bobbing in the current, but they could not see him. He was found between 50 and 75 yards out in the water.3 All efforts to revive Hofmokel failed. The ocean he so dearly loved took Fritz Hofmokel’s life late Saturday afternoon, April 24, 1965. Public offices in Brownsville closed, tributes poured in from all over Texas and around the nation. The list of pallbearers and honorary pallbearers read, according to newspapers, like a “Who’s Who” of Valley and State dignitaries.4 At age 66, Fritz Hofmokel, director of the Port of Brownsville was dead. The community mourned.

Friederich Wilhelm Hofmokel was born on January 3, 1899, in the Ansbach region of Bavaria in Germany.5 He enlisted in the German Imperial Navy and fought for his country aboard a submarine during World War I. Near the end of the war the submarine ship on which he was serving went down in the Mediterranean Sea. Hofmokel and other survivors were taken by a rescue vessel to Turkey. An ally of Germany, Turkey recognized the courage of the German sailors. Hofmokel and the other sailors from the submarine were given a medal for service to their country and for having survived the sinking of their vessel.6

The war over, Fritz was left to his own devices to make his was back to Bavaria. On his return to Germany, Hofmokel found that the German countryside had been greatly damaged by World War I. Taking advantage of the destruction of the land, the government and the people’s defeated spirit, Communism had infiltrated the country. Eighteen years of age and idealistic, Hofmokel quickly became a member of an underground campaign that was determined to root out and destroy the Communist movement in Germany. To support himself, Hofmokel spent the next several years working at various jobs before deciding to attend a merchant marine school in Germany to learn the shipping business.7

According to his daughter, Gerda Hofmokel Settle, her father’s family was prosperous and respected, owning land and an inn in the small Bavarian town. Fritz could have gone into the family business, but like many young Europeans of the day, Hofmokel wanted to come to America. In 1922, at age 22, he came to the United States on a visitor’s visa and enrolled in Columbia University to study shipping. After a short time postwar inflation in Germany made his letters of credit valueless and he was forced to find a job.8 Without a work permit he could not remain in the United States. It had taken but a short time in this country for Fritz Hofmokel to make a decision. The German national wanted to become an American. In order to accomplish this, he must first return to Germany and complete the necessary paperwork that would allow him to return legally.
He went back to Germany in 1928.

On his trip back, Fritz met a young German girl, Elizabeth Schoenfelder (Else). He was smitten! By the time he returned to the United States they were engaged. It was necessary for Else to remain in Germany until her immigration papers were in order. Hofmokel returned to the United States. Six months later, Else was cleared to join her fiancée. In February 1929 the couple was married in New York before returning to New Orleans where Hofmokel was employed by the North German Lloyd Steamship Company.

Six years later, in 1936, when the Port of Brownsville opened, the Hofmokels were living in Baton Rouge, La., where Fritz was director of the port. Juan Fernandez, one of the navigation district trustees, heard of Hofmokel and invited him to come to Brownsville to interview for the position of director of the newly opened port. The Hofmokels made the trip to Brownsville, liked the small, friendly community and its sister city, Matamoros, but initially declined the position of port director. Several days after returning to Baton Rouge, Hofmokel changed his mind and sent a cable to Juan Fernandez stating that if the position were still available, he was available for the job. “On June 1, 1936, the 37 year-old Fritz Hofmokel, became director of a port which was little more than a muddy ditch winding its way through Jackass Prairie.”

“He didn’t find much to work with: a thread of water cutting straight through the raw prairie for 17 miles; a 1,000 by 1,300 foot turning basin offering only 1,200 feet of dock, including 800 feet (without) dock ... but there were 642 acres of Navigation District land as a nucleus from which to grow.” Hofmokel would be the port’s first and only director from 1936 until his death in 1965.

Hofmokel took on the challenge of his new directorship and in 1939, three years after he became the director of the port it was announced “that in the past thirty-six months of operation the port had saved the people of the Lower Rio Grande Valley in freight charges more than the total amount of money invested in the port.” “There had been an increase in the last year of over 100 percent in both tonnage and value of cargo.” That same year, 1939, Brazos Santiago Pass was dredged to a depth of thirty-four feet and the ship channel to thirty feet and two passing basins in the ship channel were dug. Also, that year, another storage warehouse was built at the Port Compress and continual shipping was begun to the West Coast. “Twenty-one steamship lines and one barge line were operating through the port.”

Fritz Hofmokel’s accomplishments were impressive. He was a very capable businessman who stated often that there was no substitution for truth.

“Late in August 1939, a German vessel, the MV Wilheim and a French vessel, the SS Louisiana were in port at the same time. Several port officials visited aboard the Wilheim and heard the captain declare that there would be no war. Both vessels sailed from Brownsville on August 26, 1939.” September 1, 1939 Hitler invaded Poland. “The Wilheim arrived safely at its destination in Germany, but the Louisiana was torpedoed in the Atlantic.”

How would war affect the Port of Brownsville? The United States was determined to remain a neutral country. As such, all American ports were determined to continue importing and exporting goods. Even so, the ports in this country, including the Port of Brownsville, fell upon very difficult times. By 1941 the war in Europe had choked off half of all shipping, and only canned goods and petroleum products were being moved. Pearl Harbor was attacked by the Japanese on December 7, 1941. The next day port commissioners asked Hofmokel to meet with the military officers who had been assigned to Fort Brown in order to decide how best to safeguard the port.

German submarines had been seen in the waters beyond South Padre Island, in the Gulf of Mexico. There was great concern that the port and/or port facilities might be attacked. This was not, unfortunately, an unfounded fear. A tanker, the SS Garnet Hulings, was in fact, torpedoed
in the Gulf after it sailed from the Port of Brownsville. The torpedo went completely through the tanker without crippling the vessel, which allowed it to return to port for repairs. Business vessels, it was decided, might continue to call, but other vessels, referred to as pleasure vessels, were no longer welcomed to sail up the channel. In 1942, still more cargo was halted. Only the continued storage of war materials and lend-lease merchandise kept the port afloat by providing much needed funds for the operation of the port. The very commodities which kept the Port of Brownsville from sinking financially would be the fuse which ignited serious accusations and panic among a few of Brownsville’s citizens.

Fritz Hofmokel was not only a native of Germany; he had also served in Germany’s Imperial Navy during World War I. The fact that Hofmokel had been in America for more than twenty years and had been, for many years, a citizen of the United States did not prevent some of the townspeople from suspecting his loyalty to his adopted country. Ugly rumors, nasty letters, and calls to the FBI accused Hofmokel of being a Nazi spy who was providing German ship captains with critical maps and military information.20 So determined were the people who were profiling Hofmokel that ultimately United States Army officials were forced to listen. After an intense investigation Fritz Hofmokel was asked to resign his position as director of the port and leave Brownsville. Hofmokel resigned on November 20, 1942. An open letter written by Hofmokel to the people of Brownsville was published that same day in the local newspaper, the Brownsville Herald. In part the letter stated:

A situation has developed in which I seem to have become the primary issue in connection with the operation of the Port of Brownsville solely because of the fact that in my early life - some 25 years ago - I served in the armed forces of the country of my birth. It is my belief that such matters, affecting all the people as they do, should be decided entirely on the basis of sound business and not emotions. Since this unfortunate situation has developed, however, I feel that the best interest of this port can be served by my resigning, which I have done today . . . Of late I have had several conferences with army officials in charge of this Defense Area. And I repeat, there still is not one single charge against me substantiated to this day. I have been, am, and forever will be, a good true American citizen . . . the suggestion has been made by the Army, and other government agencies, that I continue my connection with the Port of Brownsville, operating it from some other point . . . My wife and child will remain here in what has been our home. We have decided on this with a feeling of confidence that there is no person who calls himself an American who would cause these innocent people further suffering because of any animosity that has been built up against me. I sincerely hope . . . that I may some day in the not too distant future be permitted to return to Brownsville, my home.21

The response to Hofmokel’s letter to the people of Brownsville was best expressed by an editorial in the Brownsville Herald. It stated in part:

Banned from his home, deprived of the privilege of slaving day and night for the port he loved, so that it could contribute its part to the winning of this war, falsely accused by the unthinking, the greedy, the malicious, this man is an innocent
victim of the very evils against which we are fighting today. Those who have had
the courage to come to his aid, and their number is legion, have time and again
gone before the men in whose hands his fate rested, both military and civil, and
have asked this question, “If there is anything against this man, if there is the
faintest evidence of disloyalty, if there is any valid reason to suspect him, tell
us. We are entitled to know this. We as patriotic Americans would never seek
to defend any man who was a danger to the nation for which we are fighting, the
same as you are fighting. Tell us the facts if there are any. The answer has always
been the same. They make no charges against F. W. Hofmokel.22
he worked, "Fritz Hofmokel loved his family, his country, his work, and his citrus trees - probably in that order."31

"The story of Fritz Hofmokel is the story of the Port of Brownsville, and, in a sense, the story of Brownsville itself. Fritz Hofmokel was ... was shrewd, honest, capable and dedicated. He carried on an unremitting love affair with the country he adopted. He brought to his beloved United States an almost fanatical devotion, an irrepressible determination to make himself worthy of this nation - not as it exists today but as it was born in the hearts of Washington, Jefferson, Adams and the other founders who valued freedom and integrity."32 Hofmokel believed that native-born Americans didn’t appreciate their country because they’d never lived in any other.33 "Only a foreigner, he said, "could appreciate America."34

The Port of Brownsville is big, according to the Brownsville Herald, because Hofmokel planned big and thought big. Only those close to him understood what kind of energy Hofmokel put into the building of the industrial community that is the Port of Brownsville. In a tribute given Hofmokel in 1956, on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary celebration of the opening of the Port, the Brownsville Herald stated that Fritz Hofmokel was the sort of man to tell your grandchildren about. He was, the paper declared, "A hell of a guy!"35

Texas State Technical College, Harlingen

Endnotes

7. ibid.
8. ibid.
14. ibid.
17. Carl S. Chilton, Port of Brownsville: Sixty Years of Service, p. 65.
18. ibid.
20. Carl S. Chilton, Port of Brownsville: Sixty Years of Service, p. 70.
22. ibid.
29. Brownsville Herald (clipping from Hofmokel files, 1956?)
30. ibid.
32. ibid.
33. ibid.
34. Brownsville Herald (clipping from Hofmokel files, 1956). Special thanks must be given to Fritz Hofmokel's daughter, Gerda Hofmokel Settle, his granddaughter, Lisa Settle, and his widow, Elizabeth (Else) Hofmokel for sharing their memories.
Menton Murray, Sr., and Betty Murray of Harlingen:
A Legacy of Public Service
by
John Hawthorne

It is a frequently heard lament that public service is declining and no one cares about civic and community issues any longer. This is heard even more so in the Rio Grande Valley where poverty and a lack of education make social problems far more severe than in the United States as a whole. Civic-minded families are considered crucial to Valley life for the many contributions they make to the lives of residents. Valley politics, community groups, charitable organizations, and religious faiths all need volunteers who are generous with time, talents, and money. Menton Murray, Sr., and Betty Murray exemplify the best of public service by their many contributions to the quality of life in the Rio Grande Valley. Although neither was born in the Valley, both lived here from early ages, Menton Murray, Sr. coming to Mercedes in 1919 at age twelve, and Betty coming to San Benito with her family in the same year at age two.

My first acquaintance with the Murray family of Harlingen was the 1999 donation of the papers of the late Menton Murray, Sr. to the University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College. I preserved, organized, and made accessible to the public the papers amassed by Menton Murray, Sr. in his long career of public service dealing with political, civic, religious, professional, and personal activities. As part of this work, I wrote a finding guide that details the information available in the Menton Murray Papers. The following is a short biography of Menton Murray, Sr. taken from that finding guide.

Menton Joseph Murray, Sr. a lawyer and member of the Texas State Legislature for 26 years, son of James Joseph and Katherine Menton Murray, was born in Dayton, Ohio, October 25, 1907. He came to Houston with his family in 1918 and to Mercedes, Texas, in December 1919. He graduated second in his class from Mercedes High School in 1925. During his senior year he won first place in News Writing in the State Interscholastic League meeting in Austin, the first year the subject was included in the Interscholastic League. Murray attended Rice Institute 1925-28, where he was managing editor of the “Rice Thresher” 1927-28. He earned his LLB from the University of Texas in 1931 and served as issue editor of “The Daily Texan” 1930-31. In 1931 he was admitted to the Texas Bar and thereafter practiced law in Harlingen and became one of its most prominent citizens. He was a member of the firm McCullough, Murray, McCullough from 1957 until his death.

Menton Murray was Harlingen Municipal Court Judge and Justice of the Peace 1938-42. He was elected to the Texas House of Representatives in 1949 and therein served 13 terms with distinction, retiring 1975. He became Dean of the House in 1963. By 1959, during the 56th Legislature, he was serving on the State Affairs panel, in addition to chairing the House Conservation and Reclamation Committee, where he sponsored several important bills. He became known as “Mr. Water” for his constant and tireless work and concern for the future of statewide water resources, and for his role in the passage on April 14, 1967 of the Water Adjudication Act. The Texas Water Plan was a flexible one intended to provide effectively and economically the supplies necessary to meet the needs of all Texans by matching water development to demand through the Texas Water Systems.

After the closing in 1958 of the U.S. Air Force base in Harlingen, which left the city in serious economic straits, Mr. Murray launched vigorous legislative action to bring in new industry, educational institutions and regional medical facilities. During his tenure in the Texas House, he also:
in 1959, sponsored the bill for retired teachers to act as substitutes without loss of retirement benefits;

chaired the Special Investigating Committee which heard testimony concerning the breakdown of law enforcement in Jefferson County (Beaumont and Port Arthur) in 1961;

sponsored the Padre Island National Seashore bill, signed by Governor John Connally on April 5, 1963, which conveyed 91,243 acres (80.5 miles) of state-owned land in Kleberg, Kenedy and Willacy Counties to the federal government for the creation of a national seashore.

was instrumental in bringing to Harlingen in 1967 a branch of James Connelly Technical Institute of Waco. This institution became, through subsequent legislation, the Rio Grande Valley campus of Texas State Technical Institute, which was dedicated on August 24, 1970, and later come to be known as the Harlingen campus of TSTI.

as Chairman of the Higher Education Commission in 1971 and following, sponsored the Tuition Equalization Grant Program, a bill to allow college students to work in order to continue their studies in the colleges of their choice.

In 1974 chaired the Special Investigating Committee which heard testimony concerning the 1971 Sharpstown Scandal Committee.

During World War II, Menton J. Murray served as a U.S. Navy Lieutenant with Naval Air Communications in the Philippines (Leyte and Samar). Murray was a dedicated public servant and served in many educational, professional and philanthropic organizations including, in Harlingen, that of Chairman, Community Chest Drive, 1949-50; U.S.O. Drive, 1943-44; member Executive Council of University of Texas Ex-Students Assn., 1947-49 and 1953; American Legion after WWII until his death; Lions Club (president 1941 and Deputy District Governor 1943). He also was a member of the Cameron County Bar Association (president 1952-53); State Bar of Texas Committeeman 1973-74. An advocate of mental health, he was appointed by Governor Dolph Briscoe to the Texas Mental Health and Mental Retardation Board 1975-79 and was a member of Tropical Texas Board of MHMR 1979-89; Board of Rio Grande State Center, MHMR; and the Valley Rehabilitation Center Board (1985-89).

Mr. Murray was a member of the Rio Grande Valley Museum Board, which he chaired until his death, and he was a member of the Cameron County Historical Commission from 1982 until his death. A Roman Catholic, Murray was a parishioner of St. Anthony’s Church in Harlingen where he was active on the boards of School Endowment and St. Vincent de Paul Society. He was a Master of 4th Degree in the Knights of Columbus for ten years and Knights of Columbus State Advocate, 1940. A stalwart, lifelong Democrat, Mr. Murray was Cameron County Chairman, Democratic Executive Committee 1946-48.

Among the honors he received was an honorary doctorate from St. Edwards University, Austin, in 1976. He is listed in Who’s Who in the South and Southwest, various editions, and listed in Men of Achievement 1978, Vol. 5, Cambridge, England. Menton Murray was named
"Boss of the Year" by the Harlingen Jaycees on June 19, 1969. Menton Murray married Betty Marie Nosier, December 27, 1938. She played a significant role in his successful career as a state representative and public servant. Children are Menton, Jr., and Betty Marie Smith. At the time of his death he had resided for 48 years at 1022 E. Pierce Street in Harlingen. Menton Murray died September 8, 1989, in Harlingen.

Subsequent work on Murray’s papers and conversations with people who knew him have convinced me that there was far more to his legacy than some of the tangible things listed in the finding guide biography. There is abundant evidence of Murray’s willingness to give generously to charitable groups both large and small. Even more importantly Murray had a habit of influencing others to give and to volunteer their time and talents with his example. Comments like “he was actually all honest” or “you don’t see a politician like him very often” are common in informal discussions as well as formal interviews. A remarkable number of Valley leaders have found inspiration in his work.

Another fact, which should not be surprising to those who follow politics, was the great influence of his wife Betty on his career. In the early days of his 26 years in Austin, Murray shared living quarters with other Valley legislators, including future U.S. Congressman Kika de la Garza of Mission. Betty served as keeper of the home front, allowing Murray, Jr., to have a more normal life in Harlingen. However in his later career Betty would stay with him in an Austin apartment. She had many opportunities to see Texas history up-close. “When Menton first served, it was customary for representatives’ wives to sit on the floor of the house with their husbands,” she recounts. She was there for Menton Sr’s special service in the 1974 Texas Constitutional Convention. She was a very influential behind-the-scenes person in the legislature. She served as President of the Legislative Wives Club from 1972-74. She and the ladies made a special trip to the Lyndon Johnson ranch in 1972. She had long enjoyed a warm relationship with Lyndon Johnson.

Mrs. Murray’s efforts to promote and preserve Texas history have been monumental. She is a past vice-chairman of the Texas Historical Commission, former member of the Cameron County Historical Commission and the Lower Rio Grande Valley Historical Society. She was a founder of the Rio Grande Valley Historical Collection based at UT-Pan American in Edinburg. She taught Texas History in San Benito, Texas, for nine years. She and Menton, Sr. worked hard to preserve Harlingen history, raising funds to restore the Paso Real Stagecoach House and to house it at the Rio Grande Valley Museum in Harlingen. Her efforts on behalf of healthcare in Harlingen and in Texas as a whole are similarly notable. She and Menton, Sr. have long supported Valley Baptist Medical Center through fund-raising efforts, volunteer work, as well as financial contributions. She continues to help the Valley Baptist Medical Center Auxiliary to this day at age 87.

A great example of the couple’s legacy is their son, Menton Murray, Jr., who began his own career of public service at an early age. He served as the mascot for the Texas House of Representatives in 1952. His early education prepared him well for his future career. He attended St. Anthony’s Catholic School in Harlingen, whose primary branch his father was instrumental in founding. He then received his diploma from Harlingen High School in 1960. He furthered the family tradition by attending the University of Texas at Austin, receiving his undergraduate degree in 1964. Menton, Jr., then stayed in Austin completing his legal degree at UT in two more years. His legal and public service career has been a great success, much like that of his father. He began his legal career in Austin when his father was still living there and serving in the legislature. Right after his graduation from law school, Murray began his career as Assistant Attorney General of Texas. He dealt with many issues crucial to a changing state of Texas.
In 1968 Murray, Jr., returned to Harlingen for good, continuing his public service career as Assistant City-Attorney for the city of Harlingen. He continued in this position until 1970 when he took a new position as Assistant District Attorney for Cameron County. Murray continued serving Cameron County until 1973. In 1972, Murray, Jr. made a great effort to claim the Texas House seat vacated by his father. He fought a long, hard primary contest against family friend and fellow attorney Melchor Chavez. Chavez, however, won the primary contest and the general election serving for two terms in Austin. Murray, Jr., then settled into private practice in Harlingen until 1980 when he again embarked on a new stage of his public service by serving as a judge from 1980-84 for Cameron County Court at law No. 2. He then took his judicial career to the next level, serving from 1985-86 as the 357th Judicial Court Judge for the State of Texas. After losing his reelection bid, he worked as an attorney in Brownsville for the 1987-88 period. Murray, Jr., then embarked on a campaign to become judge of the 103rd District Court for Texas, located in Brownsville. Murray won his campaign for this position, and he has served from 1988 to 2004, at which time this article was written. He has received consistently high marks from the Texas and Cameron County Bar Associations for his work as a judge. He is due to retire from the bench in 2006 and open a new chapter in his career.

There are many descendants of the Murray family. Menton Murray Jr. and his wife Lori Murray, a teacher at Marine Military Academy in Harlingen, have a son, Trey Murray. Trey and his wife Janey live in Edinburg, Texas, and have two children, Hannah and Menton (Quaide) Murray IV. The Murray's daughter Betty M. Smith lives in Tennessee. She has three daughters. Stephanie Schafer and her husband Steven have one daughter, Abigail Catherine Schafer. Sybil Cohn and her husband David have a daughter as well, Madison Kenan Cohn. Sarah Smith is the youngest daughter and is currently a college student.

The influence of the Murray family continues to this day on friends, co-workers, and fellow public servants. The Murray family, in a furtherance of its history of public-spiritedness, has chosen to make much of its history available to the public. The papers of Menton, Sr. and Betty Murray have been donated to the University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College and now are housed in the John Hunter Room of the Arnulfo L. Oliveira Memorial Library. We encourage readers to come and learn more about this remarkable Valley family.

Manager of Special Collections and University Archivist
The University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College

Bibliography


Conversations and oral history interviews with Mrs. Betty Murray of Harlingen, Texas, by the author, John Hawthorne.

Conversations with and the written resume of Judge Menton Murray, Jr., of Harlingen, Texas.
Mayor and Commissioner Henry Gonzalez  
by  
James W. Mills

Henry Gonzalez was born on November 29, 1935, in San Benito, Texas. His parents were Emilio Gonzalez and Maria Cortez. Although Henry did not get to know either of his grandfathers, he does remember his maternal grandmother, Catarina Cortez, and his paternal grandmother, Clara Gonzalez. At the age of three, Henry and his family moved to Los Fresnos, Texas, where he went to school through the fourth grade. His family then moved to the “great metropolis city” of Brownsville, Texas. Here, Henry began working his first job at the age of ten delivering newspapers. He delivered *The Corpus Christi Caller* along West Madison, West Jefferson, Levee Street, Elizabeth Street, and the St. Charles and St. Frances areas. He bought a bicycle with the money he earned so that he could continue delivering the newspapers.

Young Henry Gonzalez attended the fifth grade at First Ward School, which is today known as Skinner Elementary. He attended Central Junior High until the eighth grade and then in the ninth grade he studied at the Saint Anthony Catholic Seminary in San Antonio, Texas. After one year in San Antonio, Henry returned to Brownsville, where he enrolled in Saint Joseph Academy. He spent the next three years at “St. Joe” and paid his own tuition, which began at $3.00 per month but went up to $5.00 per month during his senior year. This increase in tuition created a hardship, but he worked summers for a cotton company to continue his education. Henry Gonzalez graduated from Saint Joseph Academy in 1954. (This year marks the 50th anniversary and the Marist Brothers of St. Joe have invited the class of 54’ to South Padre Island to celebrate graduation with the class of 2004). Henry Gonzalez is also a graduate of Texas A & M University where he paid his own tuition and received a Bachelors degree in Marketing in 1958. He also received his Teacher Certification from Pan American University in 1963.

On August 30, 1957, Henry Gonzalez married the love of his life, Mary Lou Barrientes. Her father, Justo Barrientes, Sr., started the Oyster Bar restaurant on Levee St. in downtown Brownsville, Texas, in 1950. Henry taught school by day and starting in 1961, he began working for his father-in-law in the evenings as a cook, washing dishes, filleting fish and shucking oysters, a little bit of everything. In this way, Henry learned the ins and outs of a successful seafood business. Henry Gonzalez and his brother-in-law, Justo Barrientes, Jr., went into partnership and opened the second Oyster Bar on Boca Chica Boulevard that opened for business on September 1, 1970. The Oyster Bar restaurants would continue to expand into Harlingen, McAllen, and Weslaco.

Henry Gonzalez has worked for the school district and in the seafood business, in addition to serving in politics. In his long career with the school district, Henry taught in the classroom for three years, and was the director of transportation, textbooks, and supplies for ten years. He began serving in politics in 1973 as a member of the Brownsville school board when his good friend Hector Gonzalez, a federal probation officer, had to resign after about six months of service. The school board asked Henry if he would like to serve. He accepted because of his love for the Brownsville community, and would stay on for the next eight and a half years until 1981. He also dedicated some of his time to supporting others in politics, such as Democrat Renee Oliveira, who became a Texas State Representative for district 37. Renee Oliveira is also Henry’s nephew.

In 1990, Henry Gonzalez was approached by some influential Brownsville citizens including Oscar Garcia from the Jackson Feed store, Caroline Baird from Lackners jewelry, and Sam Pate and Harry Holzman, successful businessmen from the downtown area. They had expressed their
concerns about how the office of mayor and the city commission was being run at the time. They proposed that Henry run for the Brownsville city commission because of his reputation for being honest, straightforward, sincere, and always looking out for the betterment of the community. With a little arm-twisting, he got back into politics after a ten-year absence.¹

In 1991, Henry Gonzalez successfully ran for a seat on the city commission. He had served as city commissioner for three years when Brownsville Mayor Pat Ahumada resigned in January of 1994 to run, unsuccessfully, for Cameron County Judge.² Henry then took office as mayor, finishing out the remainder of Ahumada’s term. In the next election for Brownsville Mayor, Henry Gonzalez was popularly elected to a full four-year term by defeating Ernie Hernandez in 1995. Local businessman John Wood ran and won the vacant seat for the city commission that was left when Henry Gonzalez became mayor and Pat Lehman won a commission seat also. Pete Benavides and Jackie Locket, who defeated former City Commissioner William Garza, were also elected. Brownsville City Commissioners serve four year staggered terms. In the following elections Pete Benavides resigned to run for County Commissioner, Jackie Locket chose not to run for re-election, and Pat Lehman was defeated. Harry E. McNair Jr., Ernie Hernandez, and Carlton J. “Bud” Richards won, and along with John Wood, were the main commissioners during Henry Gonzalez’s term as mayor.³

Brownsville Mayor Henry Gonzalez and the city leaders accomplished much during their stay in office. Matamoros, Mexico, directly across the Rio Grande river from Brownsville, Texas, was made the “sister city.” This event is commemorated by a plaque on Gateway International Bridge and the planting of a fifty-foot Washingtonia filifera palm tree on Calle Obregón in Matamoros. The planting of this friendship tree was in itself no easy task, as it had to be transported through U.S. Customs. The United States Department of Agriculture also initially frowned upon this endeavor, in part because of the novelty of transporting a fifty-foot tree across the border, and also because of dirt on the tree roots. However a call from Washington, D.C., smoothed any complications.⁴

Making Matamoros the sister city of Brownsville was a reflection of the cordial relations between two city’s political leaders. When Henry Gonzalez was the mayor of Brownsville, Thomas Yarrington was the mayor of Matamoros, before moving on to the governorship of Tamaulipas. Ramon Sampayo became the next mayor of Matamoros and was followed by Omar Zamorano and then Mario Zolezzi, a former police chief under Yarrington. It was the close friendship and political relationship between Yarrington and Gonzalez that provided for the establishment of the Brownsville/Matamoros “sister cities” status. Nowhere was the political alliance between the two city leaders more evident then with the historic building of Los Tomates Bridge, also known as Veteran’s Bridge.

This project had been in the making for many years. One of the main purposes of this international bridge was to direct heavy truck traffic away from the Brownsville downtown area.⁵ Cameron County, with the help of such people as Judge Gilberto Hinojosa, took the lead in getting the proper permits, and in negotiating with as many as forty-five different federal entities on both sides of the river, all of which had to eventually agree amongst themselves on various sign-offs and criteria to get this international undertaking to become a reality. Mexico’s Federal Secretariat of Urban Development was one such federal entity, along with the Secretaria de Comunicaciones y Transportes, Land and Water Conservation, U.S. Fish and Wildlife, Bureau of Land and Rural Reclamation, and the International Boundary Water Commission. Cameron County also hired Houston-based private contractor, John Hudson as a bridge consultant to devise, among other things, a plan as to where the Los Tomates Bridge would be built. The city of Brownsville came
into this project as a willing partner under Mayor Henry Gonzales. The city at this time began to assist Cameron County in funding consultant fees, as well as traveling to Washington, D.C., and Mexico City to help in negotiations. Henry was a driving force in these negotiations, which led to the eventual completion of the bridge.7

In the end, although many professional people and politicians were involved, the completion of Los Tomates Bridge would not have been finalized without cross border alliances and Mexico’s ultimate go ahead. On the front line was Matamoros Mayor Thomas Yarrington of the then ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). Yarrington was willing to work hard. He hustled and talked to the right people. He worked very well with Henry. Also involved was the following mayor of Matamoros and his wife, Sr. and Sra. Ramon Sampayo, who, along with Henry and Mary Lou Gonzalez, “first lady” of Brownsville, Mr. and Mrs. Carlos Rubenstein, the Brownsville city manager, and City Commissioner John Wood and his wife Dr. Virginia Wood, would all enjoy “ladies night” out together to attend festivities on both sides of the river. Brownsville at this time also provided Matamoros with used police vehicles, and fire equipment that could no longer be used here legally, as well as mosquito equipment during floods. The very good relations between the two cities helped make the completion of the Los Tomates Bridge project much easier, as well as to establish sister cities. Without this friendship, the bridge could very well not be here today.8

Another major project during Mayor Henry Gonzalez’s term in office was the building of an overpass over International Boulevard and the old Lincoln Park, to connect the Highway 77 expressway with the new Los Tomates Bridge. Brownsville citizens and political leaders were overjoyed with the fact that agreements had already been made for the widening of the expressway, future Interstate 69. Unfortunately, it soon became known that the state had made no provisions for expanding the interstate past International Boulevard! Mayor Gonzalez, members of the Brownsville City Commission, city staff, and Larry A. Brown, the Director of Planning and Community Development, traveled to Washington, D.C., on numerous occasions to seek a special permit for the building of the overpass. With the help of United States Congressman Solomon Ortiz and Bud Schuster, Chairman of the Transportation Committee,9 four million dollars was eventually obtained from the Federal Highway Commission and the state of Texas. Guy Huddleston, president of the Brownsville beautification committee, was instrumental in creating an architecturally pleasing look to the overpass instead of its being left as just bare concrete. Mayor Henry Gonzalez was a driving force in working with various federal and state agencies in obtaining the funds necessary for the completion of this project.10

Other important city projects during the mayoral term of Henry Gonzalez involved the planning and construction of the East Loop, part of which will be known as University Boulevard, and the selling of the R.E. Smith properties to the college. Mayor Gonzalez served on the Metropolitan Planning Board that helped lay out a new traffic route or “loop”, which was originally designed to take heavy truck traffic off of Gateway International Bridge, prior to the construction of Los Tomates Bridge. The East Loop, to be built in three phases, begins at International Boulevard and East Elizabeth Street and will eventually extend all the way to the port of Brownsville.11 Actual construction of the East Loop project began with Henry’s successor and Brownsville’s first female mayor, Blanca Vela.

The R.E. Smith property was sold by the city of Brownsville to Texas Southmost College in the late 1990’s for $2.25 million. This included the Jacob Brown auditorium complex and some eighty acres behind the college’s student center. This real estate transaction conducted under Mayor Gonzalez has allowed the college to expand and grow.12
In the late 1980's, the Texas state legislature allowed for cities to impose a half-cent sales tax, upon approval by popular vote, for economic development. Harlingen was the first city in the Rio Grande Valley to incorporate this "4A" Tax. Brownsville voters also chose to pay this half-cent sales tax for the building and maintenance of city parks, as the city previously did not have enough funds to adequately maintain and build new city park recreation areas. In the late 1990's, the Texas State Legislature passed a bill to allow communities that had already adopted the "4A" program, to enact a "4B" plan, again, by the consensus and approval of Brownsville voters. The "4B" program allowed for the half cent sales tax to be split into quarters, one fourth cent for economic development and one fourth cent for quality of life issues. "4B" monies allowed for the additional funding of projects such as the building of a sports center, coliseum, events center, etc. Although Brownsville politicians and city voters were split, sometimes bitterly, over the passage of "4A" and "4B" programs, Henry Gonzalez fully supported both, calling for the betterment of the community. 13

Another issue during the political career of Henry Gonzalez was the Dean Porter Park renovation project. Originally a gift to the city of Brownsville through the Earl Sams Foundation, Dean Porter Park, also known as Ringgold Park, had through the years begun to fall into disrepair. Brownsville city leaders, including Henry Gonzalez, began planning for the restoration and funding of this historic icon. A board of directors was created including such prominent members as Frank Parker Sr., retiree of the Port of Brownsville stevedoring business. Children of the wealthy philanthropist who had originally funded the park contributed money, as did insurance giant Roy F. Mitte. Mitte, who grew up in Brownsville, committed $3 million to the renovation project, in part due to the encouragement of his childhood friend and former Brownsville City Commissioner, Alice Wilson.14 Upon completion, the new park's civic pavilion will be named in his honor.15 Also important was Melanie Conners, who with her committee worked closely with architects and contractors during the renovation and restoration of Dean Porter Park.

Yet another one of the important accomplishments while Henry Gonzalez was the mayor of Brownsville was the acquisition of the old federal courthouse downtown on Tenth and Elizabeth Streets. City Manager Andy Vega, City Commissioner John Wood, and Mayor Gonzalez made several trips to Washington, D.C., conducting negotiations with the Governmental Services Administration that handles surplus federal properties. The federal government was in the process of selling the old courthouse to a private "non profit" company from New York, which had planned to use the building as a homeless shelter. This transaction would have displaced the federal post office, which now pays Brownsville an annual lease fee and handles a large volume of mail from Mexico.16

Also at this time, the federal government planned to build a new courthouse in Cameron County and determined that it would be built in either Harlingen or Brownsville. Filemon B. Vela, who had been appointed as a federal district judge by United States president Jimmy Carter, was influential in helping Brownsville win out. Police Chief Victor Rodriguez had purchased land from the Union Pacific railroad near the new Brownsville police station by using forfeiture bonds. Mayor Henry Gonzalez and city leaders were able to work a deal in which the federal government received this land to build a new courthouse in exchange for the old courthouse downtown. In essence, the city of Brownsville got an $11 million building for about $450,000 in real estate. Brownsville city hall and city offices were then relocated to the old courthouse.17

While Henry Gonzalez was the mayor of Brownsville, he also worked with city leaders to oversee street work, street resurfacing, drainage improvements,18 better police coverage, and more accountability in police operations. He placed great emphasis on working with local, county, state,
and federal legislatures to bring additional funds and programs to the community. During his tenure in office, Mayor Gonzalez supported the Brownsville Art League, as well as local history groups including the Stillman House Museum on Washington Street. He was also instrumental in establishing Heritage Zoning Ordinances to help protect Brownsville’s architectural historic sites, employing class D permits.

Mayor Henry Gonzalez worked on the railroad relocation project, which was started in the mid-1970’s, and has progressed in various stages. This is one of the many long-term projects that subsequent mayors inherited. He carried the torch on this project, working with various agencies, and made progress towards its eventual completion.

Mayor Gonzalez supported and attended the Governors Conference held on the University of Texas at Brownsville campus, which involved a meeting of governors from the border states of Mexico and the United States. This was the first such meeting of its kind. He also initiated the “Make A Difference Day” program in which residents could trade trash for cash. Every four months or so, the city would have a “trash bash” where people would bring in old refrigerators, mattresses, stoves, tires, furniture, etc. Literally tons and tons came in. Usually a trash bash was scheduled just before school started (which helped give people some money for their kid’s clothes and supplies) and also during the Christmas season. The “Make A Difference Day” was beneficial for people and good for the community. It saved the Brownsville taxpayers money and helped to beautify the city and surrounding areas. Unfortunately, this program faded after Gonzalez left office. Mayor Henry Gonzalez also initiated a five-year capital improvement plan, which helped to secure better bond ratings and lower interest rates on bonds that were being issued. He was also financially conservative and built up the city’s fund balance, which in a few years was $10 million. A faction of the city commission, however, felt that Mayor Gonzalez’s conservative approach was at times detrimental to Brownsville’s economic growth.

During his time in politics, Henry Gonzalez was able to meet such people as Texas governor and future United States president George Walker Bush and former U. S. President William Jefferson “Bill” Clinton, who came to Brownsville while Henry was mayor. Gonzalez noted that governor Ann Richards would come down to our area, and was good to Brownsville. Gonzalez met Mexican president Ernesto Zedillo at Los Pinos, the “Mexican White House” in Mexico City. He also worked with Brownsville native and U. S. Ambassador to Mexico, Antonio Garza, Jr., who, Henry said, “has been very helpful to this community.” He also notes that Benigno “Ben” G. Reyna, another Brownsville native and Director of the United States Marshals Service, has been helpful.

For all of their hard work, Brownsville mayors and city commissioners receive $10.00 per meeting, but cannot receive more than $50.00 per month. These city leaders would usually have official council meetings every Tuesday night, but, taking into consideration all other sorts of meetings (in addition to giving presentations and attending various functions), their pay is virtually next to nothing. They contribute approximately thirty hours of work per week to their elected positions in addition to their regular jobs and careers.

The role of the mayor is to be the figurehead who runs meetings and represents the city and all its functions wherever they go. The mayor, along with the city commissioners, establish the goals and guidelines which are to be achieved through everyday operations by the city manager, assistant city manager, and various city staff positions. If these officials go astray, it is the mayors’ job to set them straight. Gonzalez notes that, in his long political career, he was fortunate to have worked with very good city managers in Andy Vega, Carlos Rubinstein, and Lanny Lambert, as “they went beyond the call of duty.” He also notes that he did not accomplish anything on his
own. Henry further believes that politicians have to make a stand and do what they feel is right for the community. They will meet with opposition, as it is hard or impossible to please everyone, but the people who voted Henry Gonzalez into office knew and supported the political agenda and political philosophies that he stood for. “It’s important to respect people’s political ideologies whether you agree with them or not. Making yourself available and known to the community is what makes a good city leader.” He also notes that being a political leader can be a thankless task with a lot of responsibility.

According to Ivan Welker, former Assistant City Manager, Henry Gonzalez could be a tough and focused individual. He was a no-nonsense-type-of-guy, who did not tolerate much incompetence. “You had to be on your toes or he would be in your face,” said Welker. Much of what was accomplished for the city of Brownsville under Henry’s leadership was due to his perseverance and not taking “no” for an answer. If he did not get the proper response or support from Washington, for example, he would go up there personally and knock on doors. He met with U.S. Senators Phil Gramm and Kay Bailey Hutchinson to personally express Brownsville’s needs. “He would not take no for an answer,” Welker concluded.

University of Texas at Brownsville professor Anthony Knopp observed that, “Gonzalez made it clear where he stood on an issue. He stood up for what he believed in, even if an issue became confrontational.” John Wood noted that, “he could be stubborn as hell.” When he got something in his head it was difficult to change his mind even if the rest of the city leaders did not support him on a certain item. Ivan Welker commented that: “it was rough and tumble at times, sometimes excruciating, but in the end it’s a land of compromise.”

Former City Commissioner Harry McNair, Jr. added, “Henry Gonzalez did not work with all members of the commission fairly and equally.” When asked what makes a bad city leader or politician, Gonzalez expressed concern in regards to people who run for office simply for the ego or merely to obtain a title, and otherwise do not genuinely care about the community. “Caring for the people and doing for the people is what’s important,” he said.

Goals that Henry Gonzalez would like to see accomplished in the future for Brownsville include the building of a Sports Center to attract tournaments and possibly trade shows, and also the construction of a larger civic center to accommodate 5,000 people, in order to attract large conventions. He remembers that a few years ago the Pan American Golf Association came to our area (a project that Mayor Gonzalez was involved in) and all of the functions had to be held in Matamoros at their event center because the event center in Brownsville was too small. (About 2,000 people, including about 1,000 golfers were involved in that event). Maintenance of our city streets will be a continuing concern, and he would like to see Brownsville incorporate more activities for our youngsters. “A place where kids can go rollerblading, for example, a place where kids can gather, a place specifically designed for kids, we need more activities for our young people.” Henry sees Brownsville as having a “fantastic” and positive future. However, he notes that traffic will continue to be a problem, even after the completion of construction on the expressway. “Our main arteries are Palm Blvd., Boca Chica, 802, International and 511. We will need a big loop around the city to move traffic. We have a problem being right against the river, so there are only a few ways to go, east, west, and north. We can’t go south.”

After having served as a Brownsville City Commissioner from 1991 to 1994 and as the Mayor of Brownsville from 1994 to 1999, in 1999, Henry Gonzalez ran for a second term as mayor, but was defeated by Blanca Vela. In 2001, he was elected to a second term on the city commission, and in 2003 he ran again for mayor but was defeated in a run-off election by Eddie Trevino. Henry Gonzalez decided to retire from politics after his 2003 bid for re-election.
Henry and Mary Lou Gonzalez have five children; Henry Jr., Ana Cecilia, Gloria Leticia, Magda Lucilla, and Justo Emilio. Four of them graduated from Texas A & M and one from TCU. Henry and Mary Lou also have six grandchildren.

The University of Texas at Brownsville

Endnotes

1 Interview by James W. Mills with Henry Gonzalez on 31 March 2004.
3 Ibid.
7 Interview by James W. Mills with Ivan Dean Welker on 27 April 2004.
9 Ibid.
10 Interview by James W. Mills with Ivan Dean Welker on 27 April 2004.
11 Ibid.
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
21 Interview by James W. Mills with Harry McNair on 27 May 2004.
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24 Interview by James W. Mills with Ivan Dean Welker on 27 April 2004.
27 Interview by James W. Mills with Harry McNair Jr. on 27 May 2004.
29 Ibid.
30 The Brownsville Herald, 1 June 2003, 1.
31 The Brownsville Herald, 8 June 2003, 1.
1940, Brownsville from the New Bridge
by Jessica Cisneros
Porfirio Díaz in the Lower Rio Grande Valley during the Rebellion of Tuxtepec
by
John D. Kearney

At the beginning of 1876, the frontier city of Brownsville, Texas, became the operations base for one of the most influential figures in Mexican history—General Porfirio Díaz. Renowned for his military career in both the Three Years War (1858-1861) and the French Intervention (1862-1867), Díaz arrived in Brownsville as the head of a political rebellion soon to be launched in Mexico against the administration of President Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada. Planning for the uprising utilized strategies for recruiting support in both Mexico and the United States. Díaz's presence in Brownsville at the start of the Rebellion of Tuxtepec foreshadowed the extensive program of economic development through foreign investment later initiated during his long tenure as President.

Díaz was no stranger to political rebellion by 1876. Following the French Intervention, General Díaz lost an electoral contest against long-time President Benito Juárez and afterwards retired to the hacienda of La Noria just outside of Ciudad Oaxaca. Here he and his brother, Governor Félix Díaz, prepared for the presidential elections of 1871. Three prominent Mexican Liberals--Benito Juárez, Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada, and also Porfirio Díaz--presented themselves as candidates, and La Noria became a center of intense correspondence and clandestine activity. In February 1871, the Díaz brothers concluded a political alliance with the Governor of Nuevo León, Gerónimo Treviño, who agreed to support the Díaz campaign. Communication with Treviño was facilitated by Díaz's long-time military companion, General Manuel González of Tamaulipas, then commander of the presidential guard in Mexico City. The election returned Juárez to the presidency in October 1871, but by then Díaz and his cohorts had already launched the ill-fated Rebellion of La Noria.1

The Rebellion of La Noria proved to be a disaster and Díaz's presence in Brownsville in 1876 reflected the lessons learned by painful error in that earlier failure. As a result of a vigorous government military response, by January 1872, the Díaz brothers were fugitives. Félix was captured and executed. Porfirio, who throughout his long career demonstrated exceptional skill as an escape artist, managed to make his way to the Gulf of Mexico. From Veracruz, the fugitive rebel leader sailed for New York City on 1 February, accompanied by General Pedro A. Galván. Díaz's voyage to New York offered more than a route of escape. New York represented, then as now, a major center for large corporate entities, many of which had interest and experience in Mexican affairs. The name of Porfirio Díaz would have been familiar among such circles. Among those who had dealt with him during the War of Intervention, Díaz enjoyed a reputation for honesty and political integrity. U.S. General Herman Sturm, who arranged arms purchases for Mexico, praised Díaz to his fellow businessmen as "our kind of man," who shared the North American's vision of industrial development. Certainly such a recommendation would have proved welcoming to the powerful United States railroad interests who looked to Mexico as a natural extension for their rapidly developing national rail systems.2

Since the 1870s, such major capitalists as J. Edgar Thompson of the Pennsylvania Railroad; General William J. Palmer, founder of the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad; and Colonel Thomas A. Scott, president of the Pennsylvania Railroad had led an effort to connect with Mexico through Scott's Texas and Pacific Railroad. A second railroad syndicate calling themselves the International Railroad also competed for railroad concessions in Mexico. Headquartered in New York, this group included Anson Phelps of the Phelps Dodge Corporation; Francis Skiddy of the
National Bank of the Republic; Robert Symon of the Atcheson, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad; and a man with important connections in Brownsville and South Texas—Moses Taylor of National City Bank. However, while these and other North American capitalists might have appreciated Díaz’s enthusiasm for railroad development his rebellion at that point presented scant prospects for success. If Díaz indeed sought aid from northern industrial interests in 1872, it was a case of too little, too late and by March he was back in Mexico.3

President Juárez died during the rebellion in July 1872, and executive leadership passed to Lerdo de Tejada, who called for new elections and offered amnesty to the rebels. Forced to surrender in October 1872, Díaz went into political retirement with his wife Delfina on a finca called La Candelaria near the border between the states of Veracruz and Oaxaca. Here he made his home and cultivated sugar cane while awaiting the next presidential election in 1876. As he and his partisans counted the days, events in the Lower Rio Grande Valley assumed added importance for growing tensions between President Lerdo de Tejada and North American business interests. Conflict along the Texas frontier in the 1870s made the city of Brownsville a vital outpost on the jagged edge of industrial development with tremendous significance for the futures of the two neighboring republics and of Porfirio Díaz.

A confluence of various regional and international pressures gathered like a thunderstorm along the Lower Rio Grande where a state of unrest amounting to an undeclared guerrilla war existed along the border. Many Texans focused their anger and frustration on their long-time nemesis, Juan Nepomuceno Cortina of Matamoros, Tamaulipas. The U.S. Consul in Matamoros, Thomas F. Wilson, raised protests over Cortina’s role in the cross-border raiding and urged that the Lerdo government take appropriate measures. Although Cortina was arrested on Lerdo’s orders in July 1875, and confined in Mexico City, raids and confrontations continued in the Brownsville area. In November 1875, shortly before Díaz’s arrival in Brownsville, Consul Wilson reported to Secretary of State Hamilton Fish on an incident between U.S. forces, Texas Rangers, and Mexican forces at the town of Las Cuervas, Tamaulipas, that threatened all out war. Such hostilities along the Lower Rio Grande kept relations between Mexico and the United States in a dangerous state.4

In addition to these political antagonisms, the unstable environment along the Texas-Mexican border served as a block to economic expansion and railroad development by United States financial interests. Railroad development formed an important issue for many Mexican Liberals concerned with their country’s future in the dangerous era of global Imperialism. Speaking in 1867, Liberal intellectual Gabino Barreda expressed the hopes of many that, “Now peace and order . . . will bring about everything that remains undone . . . In the future let our motto be Liberty, Order, and Progress; Liberty as a means; Order as a base, and Progress as an end.” Liberal intellectual and political figure Vicente Riva Palacio declared, “Mexico, which in its ideas has been elevated to the height of the nations which are in the vanguard of Europe and America, lacks only the railroad to acquire that well-being.” For such Liberal leaders order and development, especially in railroads and communications, held the key to breaking Mexico’s cycle of debt, domestic conflict, and national survival. Many of these individuals looked to Porfirio Díaz for leadership and felt frustration with the cautious development policies of President Lerdo de Tejada.5

Railroads capitalists in the United States likewise experienced a growing disenchantment with Lerdo de Tejada. In December 1874, the Lerdo government awarded a concession to the International Railroad group for construction of a line known as the Mexican National Railroad. The Mexican National was to run from Nuevo Laredo to Mexico City and would connect the two nations with the Texas International, which began pushing construction towards the border. By
February 1875, the New York consortium controlling the Texas International issued $3,500,000 worth of bonds for construction capital. Within the rival United States railroad syndicate, Colonel Thomas A. Scott, president of the Pennsylvania Railroad, led an effort to construct a competing railroad line to Mexico City that would connect with his Texas and Pacific Railroad at El Paso. Although Lerdo de Tejada approved both these and other projects, in late 1875 he announced the cancellation of all United States concessions in Mexico except for the one awarded to the Mexican National Railroad. The effect was to unite all parties of U.S. capitalists against him as threatening to the interests of all involved. Competitors in business, U.S. financiers and developers proved quite capable of closing ranks in the face of foreign opposition.

Among the powerful U.S. financial leaders with interests in developing the Mexican market were several with deep connections to Brownsville and the Lower Rio Grande Valley. The financial dynasty represented by the Stillman family illustrates the complex relationship between Northern capital and Mexican development. During the U.S.-Mexican War of 1846-48, Charles Stillman secured a contract to supply the forces of U.S. General Zachary Taylor and afterward tied his fortune to that of the Rio Grande Valley. Together with his associates Richard King, Mifflin Kenedy, and Samuel Belden, Stillman acquired vast tracts of land north of the river from which he created the Brownsville Town Company, the lots of which would become the City of Brownsville in 1850. These and other business ventures on both sides of the border made Charles Stillman the richest man in Texas by the 1850s.

Conflict likewise provided opportunity for Stillman and his partners. During the U.S. Civil War, 1861-65, Stillman, King, and Kenedy utilized their resources to provide an outlet to the global market for Confederate cotton through Stillman's warehouse facilities in Matamoros. The Civil War made Stillman even wealthier. He used part of this profit to join his friend and associate Moses Taylor as a major stockholder in Taylor's National City Bank, a powerhouse in investment banking and a participant in the International Railroad syndicate of New York. In 1866, Charles Stillman moved from Brownsville to New York leaving behind a powerful network of business partners and associates throughout Texas and northern Mexico. Among these were Richard King and Mifflin Kenedy; the Samuel Belden family; Don Francisco Yturria of Matamoros; George Brackenridge, to whom Stillman had advanced $200,000 to found the San Antonio National Bank; and T. W. House, founder of the Houston Cotton Exchange. Charles Stillman's brick home, the first built in Brownsville, still stands at the corner of Washington and Thirteenth Streets.

Moses Taylor and the National City Bank were already players in the International Railroad project while King, Brackenridge, and House were investors in the Texas branch of the system, the Texas International. Continued unrest along the border, together with contentious diplomatic negotiations over U.S. damage claims against the Mexican government and Lerdo de Tejada's cancellation of railroad contracts to U.S. capitalists added to a general sense of anxiety as construction of railroad lines began to approach the Mexican border. The future economic development of both the United States and Mexico approached a crisis point just as President Lerdo de Tejada stood for reelection. The combination of these elements created an intersection of interests that did not go unnoticed by the astute diplomatic mind of Porfirio Diaz.

Diaz had remained neither idle nor isolated during the years at his hacienda of La Candelaria. In addition to sugar cultivation and home-improvement projects, Diaz visited with his military and political allies and with them developed plans for a new attempt to win the presidency by force of arms. By late 1875, the planning phase of what became the Rebellion of Tuxtepec approached completion. Diaz left La Candelaria in December and made his way towards the Gulf of Mexico accompanied by his confidants, Manuel González and Francisco Z. Mena. Together they sailed for
the United States. Arriving in New York City, Diaz met with members of the National City Bank including James Stillman, son of Charles Stillman and protégé of Moses Taylor. James Stillman would become the head of the National City Bank in 1892. Afterwards, Díaz traveled southward to New Orleans, Louisiana. From New Orleans, he made his way to Brownsville, Texas, in the company of Charles Sterling, a famous lawyer associated with both Stillman and the National City Bank. By January 1876, Díaz and Manuel González had established a revolutionary base in Brownsville, while Francisco Z. Mena worked to garner support for the Díaz faction in San Francisco, California. Lacking a power base in any Mexican state capital, Díaz and his fellow-conspirators—the tuxtepecanos—began forging an operational base north of the Rio Grande.8

In Brownsville, Díaz stayed in the home of Manuel Treviño located at the intersection of Washington and Thirteenth Streets, the same corner at which the Charles Stillman house stood. Díaz and González met with regional supporters such as General Baltazar Fuentes Farias, the Mayor of Matamoros; local merchant and banker Francisco Yturria; and the political exile and current Brownsville resident Miguel de la Peña, among others, to coordinate strategy and raise support for the coming rebellion. From Matamoros, Consul Wilson reported Díaz’s residence in Brownsville to his superiors at the State Department, noting the rebel general’s strong following in the region and the alarm his presence created among local Mexican government officials. Several hundred additional Mexican troops were dispatched to reinforce the Matamoros garrison and Wilson sourly compared Mexico’s promptness in responding to a domestic political crisis to its professed inability to supply sufficient forces to prevent cross-border cattle raids. Considering Díaz’s movement to be primarily supported by partisans of Juan Cortina, Wilson authorized the commander of the U.S. gunboat Rio Bravo to sell some two hundred pounds of gunpowder to the government commander of Matamoros, General Bernabé de la Barra, so he could put the Mexican city in a defensible state.9

While Díaz and González organized in the north, the rebellion within Mexico unfolded rapidly. The insurrection began in the District of Tuxtepec, where the regional military chief issued the preliminary draft of the Plan de Tuxtepec on 10 January 1876. Fidencio Hernández, jefe político of Ixtlán, Oaxaca, declared for the Plan and took possession of the state capital within a few days. President Lerdo dispatched Federal troops under General Ignacio Alatorre into Oaxaca and on 17 February, Alatorre’s Second Division collided with rebel forces under Hernández in the Battle of Jazmin. The battle proved both bloody and inconclusive. Then, in response to other tuxtepecano uprisings, President Lerdo withdrew Alatorre and the Second Division from Oaxaca, leaving one fire smoldering to fight another conflagration. General Luis Mier y Terán pronounced his revolt in Veracruz, while General José María Couttolenc captured the city of Tehuacán, Puebla, seizing a large Federal munitions cache and placing their forces between Alatorre and Mexico City. Rebel forces under Mier y Terán and Couttolenc fought the Second Division under Alatorre on 28 May at the Battle of San Juan Epatlan, Puebla. As at Jazmín, the battle proved painful for both sides and after eight hours of combat the opponents withdrew from the field with heavy casualties. Soon another rebel concentration formed and although Alatorre could hammer each in turn the tuxtepecanos merely dispersed with their components intact and ready to combine again.10

To the north of Mexico City the rebellion proceeded with a similar undulating rhythm. In Jalisco, Donato Guerra and Pedro A. Galván, declared for the Plan. In the northeast, porfirista Generals Francisco Naranjo and Gerónimo Treviño pronounced for the rebellion and raised a force of around seven hundred men in Nuevo León. Meanwhile, throughout the early months of 1876, Díaz labored to build up support for the rebellion from Brownsville. A lack of arms and money proved to be the primary concern. Díaz wrote a supporter in Mexico City that “the battle
is disadvantageous ... because, having neither weapons nor money, we cannot incorporate into
our ranks the great unarmed masses who offer themselves, only accepting those who bring their
own weapons, horses, ammunition, and food." Once the Plan de Tuxtepec had been announced,
however, Diaz commenced recruitment in Mexico while expanding his efforts to enlist financial aid.
On 28 February, Miguel de la Peña, named by Díaz as "Colonel in Command of the Expeditionary
Section of the Rio Grande," crossed into Mexico at Reynosa with a force of twenty men. He
gathered recruits from the area of Las Cuervas and Camargo but by 03 March had only managed
to enlist some eighty men. Manuel González crossed the Rio Grande with some one hundred men
at La Pascuala above Matamoros on 11 March, and thereafter assumed military leadership of the
rebel effort in the Lower Rio Grande theater. Calling all available forces to join him, González
began another of the threatening tuxtepecano force concentrations outside Matamoros.11

Trusting in the military skills of González, Díaz used his equally formidable diplomatic
talents to secure a broad base of financial support on both sides of the border. He sent an agent
from Brownsville to Mexico City seeking loans from such wealthy and influential supporters as
José Yves Limantour, while local merchants in the Brownsville-Matamoros region were likewise
solicited for contributions. The vision of those backing the Rebellion of Tuxtepec, however,
extended beyond Mexico’s political frontiers into the global marketplace, where, through
development and order, Mexico would assume its destined position as a secure, prosperous
member of the international community of nations. To achieve this goal an economic and political
accord with the United States was absolutely essential, especially concerning the construction of a
Mexican railroad system that the tuxtepecanos regarded as the key to Mexico’s future. As a worthy
spokesman for his political constituency, Díaz utilized his considerable international reputation
to engage support from powerful U.S. interests with coinciding views concerning development in
Mexico.12

In February, Díaz left Brownsville and traveled northward to the railroad town of Kingsbury,
Texas, for a meeting with financial and political figures from Texas and New York. Thomas
Wentworth Peirce, president of the Galveston, Harrisburg, and San Antonio Railroad, on which
Kingsbury was located, attended the meetings along with his brother, Andrew, president of the
Texas International. Peirce intended to extend his G, H.& S.A. Railroad into Mexico at Eagle Pass
while the Texas International likewise planned to connect with Mexico at Laredo. Also present
were steel manufacturer James A. Griswold and New York financier Thomas T. Buckley, as well
as Richard King and the famed Texas Ranger John S. “Rip” Ford, then a correspondent for the
Galveston News. The commonality of interests between the participants included future railroad
development in Mexico and pacification of the border region through which future railroad links
between the two countries must pass. Specifically, the U.S. interests wanted the elimination of
Juan Cortina, which might have proved awkward since Díaz had been receiving support from
Juan’s half-brother Sabas Cortina in Brownsville. According to Ford, Díaz pledged to remove
Cortina from the frontier following his rebellion’s successful conclusion. The overall positive
atmosphere at the Kingsbury meeting proved significant in securing support for the Tuxtepec
movement.13

In spite of protests from the Lerdo government, United States officials took no effective
actions against Díaz’s recruiting in Brownsville. The New York Bondholders Committee, whose
members held legal grievances against Mexico stemming from arms sales during the War of
Intervention, forwarded a contribution of $320,000 to Díaz through Alberto Castillo, who served
as a business agent for Moses Taylor in Havana, Cuba. The total contribution from U.S. supporters
is estimated at $500,000. In March, Díaz contracted for 500 rifles, 250,000 loaded cartridges and
2,000,000 unloaded cartridges from the Remington Arms Company of the influential U.S. banker and industrialist Marcellus Hartley, who was also an aggrieved Mexican bondholder. Other arms shipments arrived from the Whitney Arms Company and the New York arms firm of Wexel and DeGress, "Armeria Americana," from which Díaz a quantity of gunpowder. Although other commanders in the northeast, including Francisco Naranjo and Gerónimo Treviño, continued to complain of shortages, Díaz built up his own supplies and forces. On 20 March 1876, Díaz entered Mexico and met with González, then commanding a force of several hundred men, at the rancho of Palo Blanco, Tamaulipas. The next day Díaz issued an updated declaration known as the Plan de Tuxtepec Reformado en Palo Blanco to serve as the rebellion’s manifesto of grievances and aims.14

Now besieged by rebel forces, General Bernabé de la Barra at Matamoros placed the city under martial law on 30 March. Sensing the weakness of his position, and undoubtedly concerned over the loyalty of his own forces, de la Barra called the foreign merchants of Matamoros to the Customs House and demanded 1,500 pesos from each of the six U.S. businessmen present. Among these was a member of the Belden family—James M. Belden—and when the merchants refused to pay they were placed under detention. U.S. Consul Thomas Wilson went in person to lodge an official complaint and called for the U.S. gunboat Rio Bravo to come over to the Mexican side of the river in support of his mission. De la Barra released the merchants and shifted blame for the incident onto his adjutant, General Jesús Toledo. When the anticipated assault against Matamoros came on 02 April, Toledo defected with his entire command. Reports noted that Díaz met very little resistance in taking the city.15

Once in possession of Matamoros, Díaz announced his assumption of the “all the powers of a President of the Republic” and began making government appointments. Many of these appointments, for practical reasons, concerned the local administration of Matamoros but other officials received Federal positions including customs collectors, a district judge, and a treasury official. In a dispatch to the State Department, Consul Wilson noted that “foreigners were not disturbed in person or property” following the occupation but added comments demonstrating a marked distrust towards the Díaz movement. To his superiors Wilson portrayed Díaz as a stooge for the Cortina faction. “General Díaz owes his success in this frontier to the Cortina party,” Wilson reported, “he is under their complete control as he could not hold his position a day without their support.” Animosity towards Díaz from members of the U.S. State Department would continue after the rebellion, bringing the two republics close to a point of war. The seemingly contradictory existence of active support from U.S. business interests alongside diplomatic hostility from the U.S. government demonstrates some of the complex factors confronting Díaz during the Tuxtepec Rebellion. In such a dangerous game, Díaz had to choose his moves with utmost skill.16

With Matamoros secured, Díaz prepared to march southward to unite his forces with those of Francisco Naranjo and Gerónimo Treviño to threaten the Federal forces under General Carlos Fuero at the city of Monterrey, Nuevo León. On 25 April, Díaz marched out of Matamoros at the head of some 1,500 men, leaving some 500 more troops under Manuel González to garrison the town. In early April, Lerdo de Tejada dispatched three Federal columns northward under General Mariano Escobedo. Federal forces in the north enjoyed considerable success and in late April and early May, defeating both Donato Guerra and Pedro A. Galván. General Escobedo, meanwhile, occupied Monterrey and on 03 May led a force of nearly 3,000 men northward towards the Rio Grande, leaving another 1,500 men in the city under General Fuero.17

Díaz fell back towards Matamoros, indicating that he intended to defend it. Instead, Díaz then turned back westward and penetrated the state of Nuevo León, hoping to distract Escobedo.
by threatening Monterrey. Diaz had good reason for holding Matamoros as long as possible. Every shipment of weapons and money that arrived could be used to strengthen the command of Manuel González, and these future events proved to be Diaz’s ace-in-the-hole. González remained in Matamoros until the eve of Escobedo’s arrival, then abandoned the city without a fight to move his forces slowly southward. Escobedo occupied Matamoros on 19 May. The following day, near the hacienda of Icamole, just northwest of Monterrey, Federal forces under General Fuero delivered a sharp defeat to the rebel column under Francisco Naranjo. After the Battle of Icamole, the rebel concentration dispersed. Once again employing his talents of escape, Diaz prepared to leave the northeastern theater for southern Mexico. From the city of Monclova, Coahuila, Diaz made his way into Texas and traveled eastward, eventually securing passage on a ship named the City of Havana, which carried him to Veracruz. Afterwards, Diaz made his way to his home state of Oaxaca, where he took command of rebel forces and begin building for the final confrontation.18

In the end, it was the rebel force first organized in the Lower Rio Grande Valley that decided the outcome of the rebellion. Lerdo de Tejada ordered General Alatorre to move his Second Division into Oaxaca. As Alatorre advanced against Diaz, however, General Manuel González and his frontier army gathered strength in its southward journey from Matamoros. Dispatching 1,000 men under General Jesús Alonso to engage González, Alatorre hastened to bring Diaz to battle. The clash came at the hacienda of Tecoac, Oaxaca, on 16 November 1876, and developed into a battle of epic character. The decisive element proved to be the arrival of reinforcements, whose presence was announced by the sight of dust and the noise of cannon. As at the Battle of Waterloo, with which the Battle of Tecoac has been compared, in the initial moments neither side could tell whose troops were approaching the field--those of González or Alonso. As fortune favored Wellington in 1815, so Diaz gained victory with the arrival of González, whose forces shattered Alatorre’s Second Division and put it to flight. It was the only victory Diaz needed. Economically and militarily exhausted by the conflict, Lerdo de Tejada left Mexico City for exile in November 1876. For all intents and purposes, the outcome of the Rebellion of Tuxtepec had been decided.19

The Rebellion of Tuxtepec marked a turning point in the history of Mexico. The policies implemented afterwards by Diaz and his supporters allowed Mexico to normalize its foreign relations, consolidate its debts, and strengthen its position as a sovereign state. Such monumental accomplishments, however, were not without their social and political costs. Increasingly viewed, both at home and abroad, as indispensable for Mexico’s continued stability, Diaz continued to occupy the presidency through the first decade of the twentieth century. The exception was a presidential term held by his ally and comrade, Manuel González, from 1880-1884. This breech with the principles of effective democracy contributed to the disenchantment expressed in the catastrophic Mexican Revolution of 1910-20.

As Diaz consolidated his hold on the presidency, railroad development by United States industrialists proceeded at a breath-taking pace. Diaz fulfilled his promise by holding Juan Cortina in Mexico City until the frontier leader’s death in 1894, signaling a commitment to eliminate military insurgencies and pacify the U.S.-Mexican frontier. By 1902, United States investments in Mexico amounted to $511,465,166, with railroad development accounting for 70% of the total. After assuming direction of the National City Bank in 1892, James Stillman made the institution into the largest bank in the world. Its board of directors comprised what has been called “the greatest concentration of Mexican wealthholders ever assembled.” Among the directors were such powerhouses as Cleveland Dodge, Cyrus McCormick, J. P. Morgan, Jr., Joseph P. Grace, and

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Jacob Schiff. Stillman himself, along with directors E. H. Harriman, William Rockefeller, and Schiff, invested heavily in Mexican railroads. The success of the Rebellion of Tuxtepec opened the way for new opportunities on both sides of the international border with historic consequences far beyond their tumultuous initiation in the Lower Rio Grande Valley.20

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Endnotes


6 Hart, Empire and Revolution, 52-55.

7 Ibid., 22-23, 51; Kearney and Knopp, Boom and Bust, 70, 149; Lilia García, “Francisco Yturria,” in Milo Kearney, Anthony Knopp, Antonio Zavaleta, eds., Studies in Brownsville and Matamoros History (The University of Texas at Brownsville/Texas Southernmost College, 1995), 123-25.

8 Porfirio Díaz, “The Personal Recollections of Porfirio Díaz, President of Mexico,” The Cosmopolitan, Vol. 49 (1910), 795; John Mason Hart, Revolutionary Mexico: The Coming and


Ibid., 213; General Carlos Pacheco, *Presentada al Congreso de la Union por el secretario de estado y del despacho de fomento, colonizacion, industria y comercio de la Republica Mexicana; corresponde a los años trascurridos de enero de 1883 á junio de 1885* (México: Oficina Tip. de la Secretaria de Fomento, 1887).


*Dispatches*, doc. 231, 233.


Nació el señor Eleuterio Reyna García en Dr. Coss, N.L., el 20 de febrero de 1881. En 1905, ya vecino de Matamoros, Tamaulipas, era una persona muy satisfecha porque había participado en la construcción del ramal del ferrocarril de Monterrey a esa ciudad y había sido distinguido para inaugurar la línea con la primera locomotora que llegaba a Matamoros. Había aportado su experiencia y conocimiento práctico así como el necesario manejo del idioma inglés, adquirido entre 1898 y 1903, en los ferrocarriles de los Estados Unidos. Pero en 1910, la figura de Francisco I. Madero, convocando al movimiento anti-reeleccionista, motivó su participación en lo que vendría después a ser conocida como la Revolución Mexicana.

El 25 de febrero de 1913, a cinco días de la Decena Trágica que culminó con el asesinato del presidente Francisco I. Madero por Victoriano Huerta, Reyna García solicitó armas al señor Alfredo Pérez en Monterrey, N.L., para iniciar la campaña, las que le negaron. Él se vió en la necesidad de poner dinero de su propio peculio, $1,500 pesos fuertes, que tenía depositados en el Banco Mercantil y que era el ahorro de su vida. Con esto compró armas y parque, y con veinte hombres se lanzó a la lucha revolucionaria, consiguiendo controlar el tráfico ferroviario entre Monterrey y Matamoros, así como entre Monterrey y Laredo, y preparando de esta manera el ingreso de las tropas revolucionarias del Gral. Lucio Blanco, con quién se incorporó en Junio 7 de 1913. Participa activamente en la toma de Matamoros, y establece amistad con Francisco J. Mújica, ideólogo revolucionario y con el General Lucio Blanco, jefe de la Revolución designado por Venustiano Carranza.

El primer reparto agrario fue decidido por el Gral. Lucio Blanco en la Hacienda de los Borregos, propiedad de Félix Díaz, sobrino de Porfirio Díaz y que estaba ubicada en el Municipio de Matamoros. Este reparto fue preparado en forma conjunta con Francisco J. Mújica y apoyada localmente por el entonces jefe militar local, Eleuterio Reyna, quién firmó junto con estos dos héroes nacionales el documento que formalizó el inicio de la Reforma Agraria. De junio de 1913 a abril 25 de 1914, con trenes exploradores, reconstruyó las líneas férreas y se prepara el ataque y toma de Monterrey, N.L., que permitiría posteriormente el avance de las fuerzas revolucionarias hacia la Ciudad de México. De abril 26 a agosto de 1914, reconstruyó otras líneas férreas y telegráficas, y avanzó hacia la Ciudad de México bajo las órdenes del Gral. Pablo González. Posteriormente se trasladó a Veracruz y participó en la expulsión de las tropas norteamericanas que habían desembarcado y mantenido ocupado ese puerto durante el régimen de Victoriano Huerta. Se dirigía con un cuerpo militar, usando el ferrocarril para consolidar la revolución en el Estado de Oaxaca, donde naturalmente tenía gran influencia el porfirismo ya que Díaz era de esas tierras.

En octubre de 1914, se desempeñó muy relevantemente en la evacuación de la Ciudad de México, movilizando ferrocarriles hacia Veracruz bajo las órdenes del C. Primer Jefe Don Venustiano Carranza. Posteriormente comandó victoriosamente, junto con otros jefes revolucionarios, a las tropas en la toma de El Ebano, en lo que se convertiría en el sitio más largo en la historia militar de México. Se desempeñó en muchas otras campañas posteriores para la consolidación del movimiento constitucionalista frente a las campañas militares de la Convención de Aguascalientes, encabezada militarmente por Francisco Villa, quién se enfrentaba de esta manera a Carranza. Durante 1915, propuso y le aprobó el Presidente Carranza el inicio de una red de agua entubada en la ciudad de Matamoros. Esta obra se realizó durante la revolución entre limitantes materiales y escasez de recursos, mostrando en estas acciones, el inicio de las propuestas constructivas de la Revolución.
Fue hombre leal a los principios de la Revolución Mexicana, que luchaba por las causas populares y por una estructura política más flexible y humana que difería del Porfirismo en sus últimos años. Falleció en Matamoros, Tam., el 2 de abril de 1967.

La Sociedad Tamaulipecana de Geografía, Historia y Estadística.

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Nació en el municipio con menor población de Tamaulipas: San Nicolás, el 24 de agosto de 1893. Fueron sus padres Don Francisco Castellanos de la Fuente y Filomena Tuexi, hija de un inmigrante italiano. A pesar de la época y el tamaño del lugar ya tenían escuela donde asistió para aprender las primeras letras del profesor Félix Tomelloso, que tenía el mérito de ser originario del mismo lugar.1

Buscando mejores horizontes, se trasladó a Victoria, donde ingresó al Instituto Literario bajo la dirección del erudito maestro y poeta Juan B. Tijerina, y se inclinó por la carrera de leyes. En 1915, se trasladó a Matamoros para practicar su profesión sin titularse aún. Pronto destacó, y a principios de ese año forma parte de la Brigada Tamaulipas organizada para defender a la ciudad del ataque de los generales villistas Absaúl Navarro y José Rodríguez. La defensa estaba a cargo del energético general sinaloense Emiliano P. Nafarrate. En 1919, fue nombrado Juez de Letras. Ese mismo año, se casa con la Srita. María del Refugio Narváez de la Fuente, originaria de Flechadores del municipio de Cruillas.2

El triunfo del Plan de Agua Prieta significó para Tamaulipas el ascenso de Emilio Portes Gil como la figura política más importante del Estado. Consolidó su poder destituyendo a las autoridades que consideraba no le eran lo suficientemente leales, y fundó el Partido Socialista Fronterizo para encauzar a sus partidarios. Francisco Castellanos fue uno de sus colaboradores más cercanos y eficientes.

A pesar de sus responsabilidades, se dio tiempo para titularse en Toluca en 1923, versando su tesis sobre el artículo 27 constitucional, que cinco años antes habían redactado los constituyentes de 1917 y presentaba ideas polémicas. Ese año, Portes Gil le escribe, manifestándole el mucho afecto que le tiene, le comunica que ha recibido muchas peticiones para que Castellanos sea Diputado Federal, pero que considera que le es más útil como Diputado Local, y le da a entender que pudiera ser gobernador en el futuro. Por este motivo, se traslada a Victoria, donde pronto es nombrado Segundo Vicepresidente del recién creado Partido Socialista Fronterizo.

El 1 de noviembre de 1924, toma posesión como Gobernador del Estado Gregorio Garza Salinas que lo nombra Secretario General de Gobierno. A finales del año, es electo Diputado Local Propietario a la XXIX legislatura por el IX Distrito electoral que abarcaba a su natal San Nicolás y además a San Carlos, Méndez, y Burgos.3 Se considera a Emilio Portes Gil como el político que vio la importancia de aplicar las leyes de la Revolución en los artículos 27º y 123º constitucionales. Para ello se creó en 1928 la importante Comisión Local Agraria de la que Francisco Castellanos fue su titular, por muy poco tiempo, pues el 15 de enero de ese año Portes Gil como “Jefe Nato” del Partido Socialista Fronterizo organizó un plebiscito para escoger el candidato a gobernador, en el que compitieron Francisco Castellanos y Pedro González, y da a conocer los resultados el 15 de febrero en el que obtuvieron 32,410 votos para el primero y solo 7,047 para el segundo. Las elecciones fueron hasta el 14 de octubre donde por supuesto triunfó el antecesor del PRI.

Francisco Castellanos era de apariencia muy delgada, y contrastaba con la de Portes Gil. Inspirado en ello, y pensando en la agricultura que era una de las fuentes principales de riqueza, alguien elaboró el siguiente verso:

Sí para el mes de abril
No se lo come el tordo
Me voy a poner tan gordo
Como Emilio Portes Gil.
Pero si de tales granos
No se me da ni un saco
Me voy a poner tan flaco
Como Pancho Castellanos

A Castellanos le tocó como gobernador una época muy difícil, tanto por haberse iniciado la gran depresión en los EU como el asesinato de Obregón que llevó a México a Portes Gil donde fue nombrado Presidente Interino de la República, dejando como Gobernador interino al Prof. Juan Rincón solo durante ocho meses para entregarle el puesto a Castellanos. Otro problema fue la consolidación de Plutarco Elías Calles como el político más importante del país, pues su influencia era tanta que su poder de decisión era mayor que el del presidente en turno, razón por la que se le llamaba Jefe Máximo de la Revolución, y ese período de nuestra historia se conoce como El Maximato.

Entre los problemas que enfrentó como gobernador fue el resultado de una junta de gabinete del Ing. Pascual Ortiz Rubio, Presidente de la República, celebrada el 20 de marzo de 1930, a la que asistió Plutarco Elías Calles. Calles, sin pertenecer al gabinete, opinó que se decretara el fin de la Reforma Agraria. Esta disposición acató Portes Gil en el distrito y territorios federal. Portes Gil envió una circular a los estados, sugiriendo se hiciera lo mismo, y la mayoría de los estados la acataron. Sin embargo, el de Tamaulipas se negó, argumentando que la ley que la autorizaba no había sido derogada. Hasta se entrevistó con el propio Jefe Máximo, que a pesar de su frialdad inicial, terminó aceptando los argumentos del gobernador.

Castellanos destacó por su honestidad fuera de lo común. En su gobierno se le arregló un viejo problema a la familia Legorreta, y esta quedó tan agradecida que le obsequió 3,000.00 de aquellos pesos que, por supuesto, se negó a aceptar. Como insistiera, Castellanos le dijo: "Mira, si tienes ese dinero y no lo necesitas, entonces construye una escuela". Y ésta se construyó, y debe ser alguna de las que llevan su nombre. ¿Cómo es que adquirió esos valores? Aunque la respuesta a preguntas como ésta no es fácil, muchos piensan que se adquieren en la familia. Es muy posible que éste sea el caso de Castellanos, como lo prueba el siguiente poema que le hizo su padre cuando fue nombrado dirigente del Partido Socialista Fronterizo.

Del desierto a mi primogénito

El día quince de enero
A las doce meridiano
El partido socialista
Comprometió a Castellanos.
Muy alerta hijo mio
Si llegas a gobernante
Que las leyes sean tu norma.
Te sugiero de mi parte
Cuidate bién te lo pido.
Sé avisado y desconfiado.
Sé prudente y justiciero.
Desprecia al adulador.
Mira que el hombre sincero
Puede gobernar mejor.
Sé comprensivo con todos.

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No presumas potestad  
Mira que el mejor tesoro  
Es la honradez y lealtad.  
Tú de niño fuiste mío.  
Hoy de adulto del Estado  
Procura hacer el bien.  
A todo el necesitado.

Francisco Castellanos de la Fuente

Cuando Emilio Portes Gil entregó la Presidencia de la República, fue nombrado Presidente del recién fundado Partido Nacional Revolucionario y después embajador en Francia. Pero no descuidaba el control de su Estado.

Portes Gil pretende regresar al gobierno de Tamaulipas, sustituyendo a Castellanos como gobernador, como ya lo había sido, fue considerado como reelección, a lo que se opuso Calles. Contó con el apoyo del Gobernador Castellanos. Si consideramos el control que Portes Gil tenía del Estado, no era nada fácil cortarle el camino. Sin embargo, Castellanos logró el apoyo de los presidentes que se opusieron a la pretendida reelección. Nuevo Laredo y Matamoros no se alinearon a la petición del gobernador, pero ante las presiones pronto cambiaron de opinión. En Matamoros logró que una mayoría de seis regidores desconocieran al Presidente Roberto F. García, pero luego se arrepintieron y lo reinstalaron. Sin embargo, las presiones continuaron. El alcalde finalmente se da por vencido, y presenta su renuncia.

Lo que permitió nombrar candidato al diputado a la XXXII legislatura local por el segundo distrito, que abarcaba a Cd. Madero, Altamira, Magiscatzin, Villa Juárez (Mante) y Xicoténcatl: Dr. Rafael Villarreal, que lo sustituyera como Gobernador. Portes Gil protesta valiéndose de sus amigos en el Partido Socialista Fronterizo y la Liga de Comunidades Agrarias. Castellanos reacciona con energía, reprimiendo las protestas, y aunque en las siguientes elecciones recuperó su influencia, comprendió que el principio de no reelección había echado raíces en el pueblo mexicano, y no volvió a intentar reelegirse. Castellanos se fortaleció al demostrar independencia y habilidad, que lo llevaron en 1934 a ser electo Senador de la República cuando Lázaro Cárdenas fue presidente.

En 1940 fue nombrado Procurador General de Justicia del Distrito Federal durante la presidencia del Gral. Manuel Ávila Camacho. Le tocó enfrentarse a los sonados casos de Gregorio Cárdenas, asesino de varias mujeres, que enterraba en el patio de su casa y se hizo famoso porque había estudiado leyes mientras estaba preso, se casó y logró su libertad con gran cobertura de los medios de comunicación. Otro caso igualmente famoso fue el del asesino Sobera de la Flor. Otro sonado caso fue el de Villar y Lledías. Tres hermanos ancianos y solteros habían acumulado una regular fortuna y no usaban los bancos, por lo que tenían en su casa su patrimonio. En una ocasión contrataron a un plomero, y se dió cuenta lo desprotegidos que estaban por lo que lo mató. El procurador personalmente se hizo cargo de recuperar lo robado, y vigiló que nadie tomara absolutamente nada. Entre sus colaboradores era famosa su frase que les repetía constantemente: “No vayan a equivocarse o cometer errores, porque no sólo los destituyo, sino que los consigno”.

Después del matrimonio llegaron los hijos, que fueron Raúl, Óscar, Humberto, Enrique, Pedro, Elvia, Irma y Gloria. En 1947, regresa a Matamoros a practicar su profesión de abogado, pero pronto sus conocimientos y experiencia se requieren en el servicio público, donde en 1953 es nombrado Presidente del Comité de Auxilio a Deportados, después Presidente de la Junta Federal de Mejoras Materiales, y ese mismo año Administrador de la Aduana.
Comentamos que Castellanos practicaba una honestidad fuera de lo común, y es en la Aduana donde después de 40 años se escuchan anécdotas que prueban su actitud. Cuando un amigo, y tenía muchos, le solicitaba permiso para pasar algo sin pagar impuestos, él lo autorizaba, luego se presentaba con el Vista y le decía: “Va a pasar mi amigo con este material, haga usted la boleta y me la envía, permita que pase”. Y él la pagaba de sus propios recursos. Se dice que en 1958 dijeron sus amigos: “Este Pancho no tiene remedio, vamos a ponerlo en un lugar para que haga dinero” y lo nombraron agente de la Lotería Nacional, donde no sólo tenía un buen ingreso, sino que recibía una comisión especial por cada premio que obtenía los billetes que él distribuía. Así fue como compró la casa en la colonia San Francisco que fue el único patrimonio que hizo en su vida, pues nunca compró carro ni aprendió a manejar, ya que cuando tuvo puestos importantes tenía carro y chofer. La mejor prueba de su honestidad es que sus descendientes, hijos, nietos, y bisnietos son de clase media y vida modesta, como el ejemplo que él les puso. Especialmente si los comparamos con las familias de sus numerosos sucesores, indican que resolvieron sus problemas económicos por varias generaciones.

Todo el mundo sabe como los gobernantes patrimonialistas se iniciaron durante la presidencia de Miguel Alemán y Castellanos ya no colaboró con ellos. Recibió varias invitaciones hasta del presidente Díaz Ordaz, que siempre declinó. Sin embargo, fue un hombre admirado por muchos que lo buscaban continuamente. No vacilaba en recomendar a quienes consideraba era su deber. Precisamente sus muchos admiradores le hicieron un homenaje en México, los que destacaron su cualidad más importante y famosa, su honestidad llevada al extremo. Aunque ésta es la cualidad que más lo ha destacado y ha pasado a formar parte de la leyenda tamaulipecana, no debemos olvidar su valor, apego a la ley que lo llevaron a enfrentarse tanto a Calles como a Portes Gil cuando lo consideró necesario. Murió en Matamoros el 16 de junio de 1983. En esta época donde nuestros políticos se han vuelto cínicos en la adquisición de recursos, la figura de Francisco Castellanos se agiganta como paradigma del estadista que reclaman los mexicanos.

Archivista de la Heroica Matamoros, Tamaulipas

Notas

1 Remembranza. Escrito de un alumno de preparatoria basado en entrevista. Documento de Eva Castelanos.
4 Carta del Lic. Ciro R. de la Garza a Francisco Castellanos del 4 de octubre de 1972, Archivo de Eva Castelanos
6 Lucino Cervantes Durán, Legislaturas de Tamaulipas, p. 59.
1960, Charro Days in Brownsville
by Salomón Colmenero
Stephen Powers: Master Mason, Master Citizen
by
Douglas Collins

The story of Brother Stephen Powers cannot be told without painting a background upon which to explain how a lawyer born in Maine and educated in New York came to live in Brownsville, Texas, and became one of Brownsville’s most influential, powerful, and respected founding fathers.

After the Republic of Texas was annexed by the United States under President James K. Polk in 1845, the land between the Nueces River and the Rio Grande River was still a matter of contention between the United States and Mexico. This vast expanse between the two rivers measured over 150 miles at some points, but the size of the area was not the only factor leading to war between the two countries.¹

The Whig Party was considered more nationalistic and anti-slavery than the Southern-based Jacksonian Democrats. The Whigs looked upon the borders of the United States at that time as the land for Yankee Northerners to settle and turn into free states, thus keeping the slave states confined to the Deep South and in a minority position. This would virtually assure that the Northerners would control the federal government. The Jacksonian Democrats, on the other hand, had their own ideas about expansion in the same lands. Theirs was to conquer the sparsely settled territories of far northern Mexico and settle them with Southerners who were moving west. A catalyst was needed to accomplish this by convincing the North that a war with Mexico was necessary, and in order to do that, Mexico had to appear to be the instigator.²

In March 1846, General Zachary Taylor brought an army south from Corpus Christi to Punta de Isabel, later known as Point Isabel, then Port Isabel, and established Fort Polk, named after President Polk. Leaving a garrison at Fort Polk, Taylor took the rest of his army and built another fort on the north side of the Rio Grande across from Matamoros. This fort was originally called Fort Texas, but on 2 May 1846, while being laid siege by the forces of Mexican General Mariano Arista, Major Jacob Brown was struck by a bullet in the leg while walking a parapet. His wound developed gangrene and he died on 9 May. On 17 May 1846, Fort Texas was renamed Fort Brown, and several years later the budding town was named Brownsville in his honor.³

On 8 and 9 May 1846, the American forces defeated the Mexicans at the Battles of Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma. General Taylor moved his main army westward to establish and secure the border of the United States and Mexico. In July 1846, he established a military commission to govern Matamoros. Into this commission came a young first lieutenant named Stephen Powers.⁴

Brother Stephen Powers was born in Damariscotta, Maine, on 1 June 1814, the youngest of several children. After the death of his mother while he was still a child, the family moved to Holley, New York. Thanks to early home schooling by his father, Michael Powers, young Stephen began teaching school at age 15. He moved to Buffalo, New York, to teach and to study law, and on his twenty-first birthday he was admitted to the New York Bar. He continued the practice of law until 12 October 1838, when President Martin Van Buren appointed him U.S. Consul to Basel, Switzerland. Although his consulate was in Basel, he served as chargé d’affaires to several small German states near the Swiss border. While there, he accompanied the United States Minister to France, Lewis Cass, to the coronation of Queen Victoria in England. Brother Powers and Mr. Cass became mutual friends and the friendship would cause Stephen Powers to return to New York from Texas in 1848 to campaign for Cass who sought the Democratic nomination for President that year. He resigned his position as consul and returned to Buffalo, New York in 1842 to practice law. He remained in practice until 1847 when he took the step that would introduce him to south Texas and change his life forever.⁵
There is no documentation explaining why Brother Powers entered military service other than a sense of patriotism and duty to country. He was commissioned as a first lieutenant in the Tenth Infantry Regiment on 24 May 1847, effective 9 April 1847. The commission was signed by President James K. Polk and Secretary of War W. L. Marcy and recorded in the Adjutant General's office on 28 May 1847. He was assigned to sit on the military commission governing Matamoros, and he remained at that position until 16 August 1848 when he was honorably discharged from service after the conclusion of the United States-Mexican War. Upon terminating military service, Stephen Powers returned to New York to canvass and campaign for Lewis Cass. After the elections, Powers left for Texas and the life of a pioneer, never to return to New York.

Brother Stephen Powers' Masonic career closely paralleled his public career. He was active in Masonry, and it was apparent that he approached Masonry the way he approached his public life: with involvement. He was raised in 1841 in Freundschaft und Beständigkeit ("Freedom and Fidelity") Lodge No. 4 in Basel, Switzerland. Upon his return to the United States in 1844, he signed the petition for a charter for Hiram Lodge No. 105, F. & A.M, in Buffalo, New York. Stephen Powers quickly became involved in community and Masonic affairs in Brownsville. Besides being appointed United States Postmaster on 9 April 1849, he continued his law practice and operated the post office out of his law office. He joined with William Neale and Israel Bigelow in obtaining Brownsville’s city charter from the State of Texas in January 1850, and later, Bigelow was unanimously elected as the first mayor of Brownsville.

Masonic events were occurring at the same time. On 23 June 1849, Rio Grande Lodge No. 56, U.D.D., held a called meeting in which Brother Edward Dougherty was healed of all irregularities brought about by his having been made a Mason in Nauvoo Lodge No. 1, U.D., at Nauvoo, Illinois. The Grand Lodge of Illinois had chartered Nauvoo Lodge No. 1 on 15 March 1842, and this was the Lodge in which the Mormon prophet Joseph Smith had been made a Master Mason. On 11 August 1842, the Charter was suspended because of illegal actions taken by the Lodge in that short time. This eventually led to the dissolution of all “Mormon” Lodges in Illinois. All Masons who had been members of this Lodge were required to be “healed” in any regular Lodge in which they sought membership. This usually meant that they had to have the degrees conferred upon them again to ensure that they had properly received the ritual work. Stephen Powers signed the register as a visitor from Hiram Lodge No. 105, Buffalo, New York. On 28 August 1849, he affiliated with Rio Grande Lodge and served as Senior Deacon for the remainder of the Masonic year.

Stephen Powers also became involved in the Brownsville Separatists Affair. Many of the landowners were afraid that the State of Texas would negate the land titles that had been issued during the four years that transformed Brownsville from a fort on the north side of the Rio Grande to a town of about 3,000. On 2 February 1850, a crowd of ranchers, merchants, steamboatmen, lawyers, and “crossmark patriots” (illiterates, mostly of Mexican descent, who signed documents or voted by making a mark such as an “x”) gathered at a schoolhouse owned by R. N. Stansbury to petition the Congress of the United States to declare all the territory between the Rio Grande and the Nueces separate from Texas, to be called the Rio Grande Territory. According to the petition, this territory would be a protectorate of the United States with representation in Congress and a federal judiciary to adjudicate civil disputes and prosecute criminal offenses. Senator Henry Clay of Kentucky presented the petition in the United States Senate on 11 March 1850 and prefaced it by stating, “I know very little on the subject. Indeed, when I received the letter accompanying the petition from a person with whom I am not at all acquainted, I had no information whatsoever that there was any dissatisfaction prevailing in that part of the country”. The petition got nowhere, and by June 1850, the movement was pretty well forgotten.
1850 continued to be a signal year for Stephen Powers. Although there were other attorneys in
the young town, he emerged as the most skilled and knowledgeable and was especially well versed in
land grant law. His legal acumen came to the attention of local businessmen and paved the way for his
eventual place in south Texas history. 12 1850 was also the year that Brother Powers assumed the reins of
Rio Grande Lodge No. 56, U. D.

Rio Grande Lodge, like the budding town of Brownsville, had its growing pains. On 26 February
1849, Most Worshipful George M. Patrick, Grand Master of Texas, issued a dispensation to Rio Grande
Lodge and gave it the number 56. The Lodge would have received its charter at the next Annual
Communication in January 1850, but Brother Reuben Clements, who had been elected as delegate to
represent Rio Grande Lodge at the 1850 communication, rode to Austin on horseback and arrived after
Grand Lodge had completed its session. By this time the Grand Lodge had taken other action, issuing
two resolutions directly affecting Rio Grande Lodge. First, in anticipation of not having a delegate present
at Grand Lodge from Rio Grande Lodge, a continuance of the dispensation was granted. Second, the
name of Burleson Lodge, U.D., was changed to Warren Lodge and given the number 56. 13 At the Annual
Grand Communication held in Henderson, Texas, on 23 January 1851, the Grand Lodge of Texas issued
a charter designating Rio Grande Lodge as No. 81. This made Rio Grande Lodge the oldest lodge south
of Victoria and Stephen Powers the first Worshipful Master under charter. 14

At the next Annual Grand Communication, held in Austin Lodge No. 12 in January 1852, it was
discovered that Rio Grande Lodge was not in a regular Masonic district. The Sixth Masonic District
went only to the Nueces River leaving the lodge without a District Deputy Grand Master. This led to the
creation of the Ninth Masonic District and the appointment of Brother Hiram Chamberlain as District
Deputy Grand Master. He had succeeded Stephen Powers and was the sitting Worshipful Master of Rio
Grande Lodge. 15 Brother Stephen Powers, who had made the trip to Austin on horseback, represented
Rio Grande Lodge No. 81 at this session. As the delegate, he submitted a written request that the Grand
Lodge reconsider the issuance of No. 56 to Warren Lodge and reissue it to Rio Grande Lodge. The
request was denied and never brought up again. At this same Grand Communication, Brother Powers
was appointed by Grand Master Ochiltree to serve on a committee, “to inspect and report to the Grand
Lodge the work of the Grand Lecturer”. In addition, he also served on the Committee on the Constitution
to which were referred various resolutions proposing amendments to the Constitution. 16

On 3 August 1852, Stephen Powers was elected Chief Justice of Cameron County and served in that
position until 18 May 1853. 17 During his tenure as Chief Justice, he became acquainted with a steamboat
captain with whom he would forge a Texas legend that is to this day world-renowned: the steamboat
captain, Richard King; the legend of the King Ranch. Richard King was another of the “Easterners”
who came to south Texas as a member of General Taylor’s army. On 13 June 1847, at the age of twenty­
three, he was commissioned as a second pilot on the sternwheeler Colonel Cross to ferry army supplies
from large ships docked at Brazos Santiago to the Rio Grande river, then up the river to Camargo. These
supplies were then sent to General Taylor who by now was laying siege to Monterrey, Mexico. After the
war’s northern operations in Mexico, Captain King ran a flophouse and grogshop at Brazos Santiago,
leading a rather unsavory life. He bided his time until February 1848 when the Treaty of Guadalupe
Hidalgo was signed. He then purchased the Colonel Cross from the government for $750 and began
operating a cargo service on the Rio Grande from Brazos Santiago to Brownsville. Even though he
was seriously considering pulling up stakes and going to California, an event would occur that would
intertwine him irrevocably with Stephen Powers and Hiram Chamberlain and lead to the establishment
of the King Ranch. 18

The writer has heard the story for years. On a hot, muggy day in February 1850, Captain King
piloted his riverboat into Brownsville where he found his usual docking spot occupied by another former
army boat named Whiteville. Captain King blew his whistle to get the attention of the Whiteville crew. Not getting a response, he flew into a rage and began hurling invectives in the direction of the offending boat. When told that the pilot of the Whiteville was a preacher, King became even more infuriated and began opining loudly about preachers and churches. At the peak of the tirade, the cabin door opened and Captain King was thunderstruck. The most beautiful young woman he had ever seen was standing in the doorway. Henrietta Maria Morse Chamberlain, the seventeen-year-old daughter of Reverend Hiram Chamberlain, had just muted the twenty-five-year-old riverboat captain in mid-sentence. All thoughts of California evaporated from his mind, and all he could think of now was meeting Miss Chamberlain. He was formally introduced to her by his good friend Mifflin Kenedy and began attending church services and socials for the first time in his life. After a courtship of more than four years, Reverend Chamberlain officiated at the wedding of his daughter to the riverboat captain on 10 December 1854.

Richard King had purchased a large area of the Wild Horse Desert approximately forty-five miles west of Corpus Christi on the banks of the Santa Gertrudis Creek. His ambition was to continue purchasing this land that was unfit for farming but perfect for ranching, but he quickly became frustrated with the people with whom he was dealing and the bureaucratic wrangling with land grants and titles along with questions of value that arose with every purchase. King felt that he was being blackmailed by Johnny-come-latelies who were trying to imitate him and cash in on his success. So, he took the step that would alleviate his worries for the rest of his life. He hired Stephen Powers as his attorney to handle all the legal matters of the ranch.

It is not known if Stephen Powers was recommended to Captain King by his father-in-law, Hiram Chamberlain, or if he had decided on his own to offer his services. After all, Hiram Chamberlain had assumed the office of Worshipful Master of Rio Grande Lodge from Brother Powers in 1851 and both men were active in Lodge. Nevertheless, Captain King recognized that Stephen Powers was influential and well connected. Numbered among his friends in Washington, D.C., were Presidents Martin Van Buren, James K. Polk, Franklin Pierce, Zachary Taylor and Millard Fillmore. General Sam Houston and T. J. Rusk were close acquaintances in Austin. Stephen Powers introduced Captain King into the upper society of Brownsville, ensuring that the Captain and Henrietta would be well received in the proper circles and setting the standard by which Texas ranchers began retaining attorneys to handle their legal and business affairs.

Stephen Powers' Masonic résumé continued to grow. On 18 January 1855, Grand Master E.B. Nichols appointed him District Deputy Grand Master for the Twelfth Masonic District. On 16 July 1858, he was elected for the second time to serve as Chief Justice of Cameron County. While serving this term he was also elected Mayor of Brownsville on 23 May 1859 by a vote of 79-28 over his opponent, J. Moorehead. At the first city council meeting after he took office, an ordinance was passed requiring all businesses except drug and apothecaries, public halls, restaurants and livery stables to be closed on Sundays from 9:00 a.m. until sunset under penalty of a $1045 fine.

While serving as mayor, an event occurred that would once again illustrate the transcendence of Masonic ties in international disputes. Although the boundary of the United States and Mexico had long been established, there were still those on the Mexican side who felt usurped by the advent of the Anglo settlers. One who took particular exception to the Americans was Juan Nepomuceno Cortina. Cortina was the son of Doña Estefana Goseascochea de Cortina who was heiress to one-sixth of the 59-square-league Potrero del Espiritú Santo grant. Part of this vast grant included the town site of Brownsville, and the Cortina family had initiated litigation in Texas courts to reclaim the land. Juan, who had refused formal education, preferred instead to study knives, firearms, fast horses and ropes. He was described as "fearless, self-possessed, and cunning."

On 13 July 1859, Juan Cortina was sitting with friends in Gabriel Catchel’s café when City Marshal Robert Shears arrived to arrest a drunk Mexican. The inebriated miscreant was a former employee of
Cortina. Shears appeared to be using excessive force and Cortina asked him to ease up on the prisoner. Shears cursed Cortina who drew his gun and shot Shears in the shoulder. Cortina pulled the drunk up on his horse and rode off with him. This act immediately made Cortina a local hero among the peasants.

The fact that no one from the gringo community rode out to get Cortina further bolstered his celebrity status. Cortina disappeared for over two months, and the incident became a somewhat distant memory. Then at 3:00 a.m. on the morning of 28 September 1859, the quiet was broken by shouts of, "Viva Cheno Cortina; Mueran los gringos; Viva Mexico!" Juan Cortina had crossed the river with about one hundred men and captured Brownsville. He established his headquarters in old Fort Brown and sent his men out to find the Anglos on his list of enemies. In the initial raid, five citizens were killed including the city jailer. All the Mexican prisoners were freed. As dawn broke, Brownsville was securely in the grasp of Juan Cortina.

What happened next has been described as an act of Providence, but it could well be an exemplification of the Mystic Tie of our Fraternity. Observing the activity from the Mexican side of the river was a former Texan and revolutionary, General Jose Maria Jesus Carvajal. General Carvajal along with Antonio Canales had led the 1839-1841 Republic of the Rio Grande scheme in which this area of Texas would belong to neither Mexico nor Texas. Carvajal switched allegiances between Texas and Mexico several times before finally deciding to cast his lot with Mexico. More importantly, Carvajal was a charter member of Rio Grande Lodge No. 81 and good friend of Mayor Stephen Powers. General Carvajal saw Cortina on the opposite bank and ordered Miguel Tijerina, his commander of cavalry, who was Cortina's cousin, to cross over, order Cortina to cease and desist, and bring him back to Matamoros. It is not known what Tijerina said to Cortina, but he led Cortina and his men back to Mexico temporarily ending the siege. Two days later, Cortina issued a proclamation that the siege would continue until the Anglos were driven north of the Nueces River.

Mayor Stephen Powers, who had been politically friendly with Cortina, began organizing a defense for the town with calls for help going to General Twiggs in San Antonio, Governor Runnels in Austin, and President Buchanan in Washington. D.C. Reminiscent of Colonel Travis' famed appeal from the Alamo, this letter was sent to the citizens of New Orleans and published in the New York Times on 14 November 1859...

To the People of New-Orleans:

At a meeting of the citizens of Brownsville, Texas, on the 2d of November, 1859, for the purpose of considering our present condition and the means necessary for the further defence of our town—"it being suggested by Capt. R.N. Smith that assistance could be obtained from New-Orleans; and that the steamship Arizona would be offered for the transportation of men immediately—and no certain information being had as to the time the Texas Rangers may arrive, and our town being considered in great danger of destruction by the large force of the enemy now known to be in its vicinity, the roads being blockaded, the mails on all the routes leading to and from the interior of the State being daily seized, it was resolved that the chairman of the meeting be authorized to invite assistance from New-Orleans; that one hundred well armed men would be sufficient, in cooperation with our present forces, for the present protection of the town until troops from the interior of Texas shall arrive. It was also considered that inasmuch as large expenses have already been made by our citizens and the city itself being utterly impoverished, it would be impossible for the expenses, either of armament or subsistence of these men to be...
defrayed here. We therefore solicit this aid, if thus to be obtained.

STEPHEN POWERS,
Mayor of Brownsville,
and Chairman of the Committee of Safety.30

The citizens of Brownsville formed into defense groups and took turns standing guard at night. General Carvajal sent a detachment of Mexican soldiers to occupy the old Fort Brown flying the Mexican flag as a warning to Cortina that Brownsville was under the temporary protection of the Mexican army. Some citizens even dared to go after Cortina on two occasions both of which resulted in a hasty retreat. A company of Texas Rangers under the command of Captain W.G. Tobin also proved ineffective.31 The first real help came from the United States Army when 117 Regulars under the command of Major Samuel P. Heintzelman entered Brownsville on 5 December. Joining forces with Tobin's Rangers, they found Cortina at La Ebonal on 14 December and attacked. Eight of Cortina's men were killed along with one Ranger, and two Regulars were wounded. Cortina escaped and spent the next ten days murdering, plundering and burning along the southern end of the Wild Horse Desert. On Christmas day, Cortina swept into Rio Grande City intent upon wreaking the same havoc as in Brownsville.32

Meanwhile, in Austin, word was received in the Governor's office of the insurrection taking place on the border. Governor Hardin R. Runnels ordered Ranger Captain John Salmon "RIP" Ford to take a company of Texas Rangers south and put an end to the Cortina problem. The Governor then promoted Ford to major on the spot and placed him in charge of all forces having anything to do with Cortina. Major Ford and his men arrived in Brownsville on 14 December, unaware of the skirmish taking place up the river at La Ebonal. Upon hearing of it, he headed for La Ebonal but arrived too late to join in the battle. Over the next two weeks he combined his Ranger Company with the forces of Tobin and Heintzelman along with a troop of the United States Second Cavalry under Captain George Stoneman and headed for Rio Grande City. On 27 December, Major Ford led an advance group of ninety men into Rio Grande City and engaged Cortina. Cortina was almost captured by Ford but escaped to the Mexican side of the river. Although Cortina continued to make threats, this battle essentially ended the raids and peace returned to the Rio Grande border towns of Brownsville and Rio Grande City.33

Stephen Powers continued as Chief Justice of Cameron County well after the Civil War broke out. His term ended on 18 November 1861. His exact tenure as Mayor of Brownsville is unknown due to the lack of City records during the Civil War years. In later years, Brother Powers, a lifelong Democrat, served the citizens of south Texas as the State Representative in the Thirteenth Legislature in 1872 and as State Senator in the Seventeenth Legislature in 1880. This was the position he held at his death in Brownsville on 5 February 1882.34

In a letter from E. A. Perrinot of Rockport, Texas, to James B. Wells, Power's protegé and law partner, upon hearing of his death, Perrinot wrote, "I trust you will not let the opportunity pass by unimproved to give the general public some insight into the character of the man who did so much for the Rio Grande country."35 May we all live respected and die regretted. So mote it be.36

Past Master of East Dallas Masonic Lodge No. 1200
Past Master of Keystone Masonic Lodge No. 1143

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Endnotes


2 Ibid.


8 Grand Lodge Register, Grand Lodge of New York, F. & A.M., 1832-1853, No. 2721.


12 Kearney and Knopp, *Boom and Bust*, p. 78.


15 Ibid.


17 Index to County Commissioners Court, County Clerk's Office, Cameron County, Texas, vol. 1., p. 55.


21 Ibid.


23 Indxz to County Commissioners Court, p. 55.

24 *City of Brownsville Original Minute books*, City Secretary’s Office, Brownsville, Texas, vol. 1, pp. 388-90.


28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.


31 Lea, The King Ranch, p. 163.


33 Op. cit., p. 165

34 Davenport, *Stephen Powers*, p. 307
35 Brownsville Historical Association, *Documentary Records of the Life of Stephen Powers*, Brownsville, Texas,

36 This is the global Masonic response to “Amen” after a prayer. It means, “So may it be,” and has been handed down from generation to generation.
Morris Edelstein ventured from Kalvria, Lithuania to Ellis Island in 1906. He was sixteen years old, one of ten siblings - seven boys & three girls. I shall refer to Morris Edelstein as Papa. Years before, Papa had been expelled from his Cheder (elementary school). His father Haskell Edelstein hired a tutor to educate the seven boys at home. The girls did not need an education. However, the oldest sister, Rose, was the only person who could keep Papa in line, so she was allowed to attend the classes. It turned out that she became the most learned of the group. In addition to having a Spanish proverb or a Yiddish word to express his thoughts pointedly, he found pleasure in relating lore from his past. In the old country, Lithuania, before the advent of electricity, one day when the sun was setting, Haskel Edelstein, father of Morris Edelstein, said to him, "Boy, you had better go home before it gets dark." My father, Morris Edelstein, replied, "But Papa, I am your son, Moshe."

While traveling by train to Eagle Pass, Papa looked quite peaked. A fellow passenger asked him in German what was his problem. He replied that he had not eaten any food for several days, as he knew no English to order food. The passenger led him to the dining car and ordered a meal for him. Afterwards Papa learned to order food for himself. Necessity is the mother of invention. He finally arrived in Eagle Pass, TX where he was met by one of his brothers, Abraham. The two peddled their wares, house to house, in Eagle Pass and surrounding ranches and in Piedras Negras, Mexico. They sold blankets, quilts, bedspreads, and pictures which were retrieved from customers and sent to New York, where they were enlarged, colored with crayons, glassed, and framed to make 24" X 30" pictures which were proudly displayed on parlor walls. Papa carried his wares in two large suitcases. Papa learned English & Spanish simultaneously, and each equally fluently.

It was the day of the peddler, the drummer. Some of them went house-to-house on foot, some astride horses; and others with horse or burro-drawn carts. Morris likewise started out peddling his variety of wares. He surely never dreamed that the route, which he served as an itinerant merchant, would someday grow into a thriving chain of stores. Papa always wanted to play the violin. He took lessons in Piedras Negras. However his musical career was short lived. His brother could no longer bear the sounds of his practicing.

Papa lived in Eagle Pass for six years. In this time, he had saved $4,000. In 1912, the first railroad was built into Brownsville. One day, Papa was talking to a railroad conductor who told him about the new frontier in Brownsville and that he should visit there. That was exactly what he did. In 1912, he took the train to Brownsville, liked it, and rented a room on the corner of 13th & East Elizabeth Street. Directly across the street was a two-story building with a high ceiling, owned by the King Ranch. Papa rented part of the building. Later on, he added furniture, and rented more space. He purchased a horse and wagon. The horse broke into the oats bin, and ate until he foundered and died. It almost broke Papa's heart. He eventually rented the entire building, and later purchased it from the King Ranch in 1920. He hired an architect, Alex Woolrich, who remodeled the building into four stories and installed two passenger elevators. In ten years, he had opened seven furniture stores.

In those days, there were few radios and no TVs to advertise, so Papa used many gimmicks to bring traffic into his stores. He had a mild mania of wanting to promote household items at about cost, and he sold on the basis of usually twenty five cents down and twenty five cents per week during the Depression. He bought several dozen Japanese eighteen-piece tea sets, which he
sold at a little over cost for $1.95, a move that proved very popular. He eventually began buying in gross lots (twelve dozen sets). Once, after ordering several gross, the importer called Papa from New York, as he was very impressed by the quantity of these sets being sold “at the end of nowhere.” He was thanking Papa for the order and said, “Mr. Edelstein, with the number of sets you have been selling, we would like to offer you the Brooklyn Bridge to sell.” Of course this was in jest, but the importer never was able to understand how so many sets were being sold by the Company.

Papa manufactured and painted children’s rockers made of solid wood slats, with upholstered seats for $1.95, twenty five cents down, and twenty five cents per week. They were not sold for cash. This brought many customers into the store. He also borrowed a huge python snake to display in his front windows. All went well until the snake vanished. It was later found at the bottom of the elevator shaft, sleeping soundly. Meanwhile, the employees were nervous until the snake was recaptured. Papa purchased a railroad car of war surplus cans of tuna fish, which he sold for pennies each. This brought in many customers. One of his secrets was to sell ten percent of his goods at or below cost to attract people. The Simmons Mattress Company sent attractive female models to sleep in our front display windows on Simmons Bedding. You can imagine the number of people who would gawk through the windows just to watch them sleeping on the beds.

In 1915, Papa went to Galveston to court his soon-to-be wife when a killer hurricane struck Galveston Island. There were no sea walls. The water was waist deep over the island. There were bodies of people who had drowned, and other bodies were washed up from cemeteries. Papa took the first train to Brownsville. Mexican bandits derailed the train near Olmito. They robbed and killed or wounded all gringos on the train. Soldiers returning from leave to Fort Brown were all shot. Doctor S.E. McCain and another passenger, Harry Wallace, ran into the restroom. Bandits fired through the door, killing the Doctor and wounding the other passenger. When the bandits got to where Papa was seated, he spoke to them in fluent (border) Spanish, “Por favor, deje mi veliz.” The bandits mistook him for a Mexican, passing by him. They grabbed a fellow passenger and threw him against the wall, getting ready to kill him. Papa shouted, “No lo maten; es Alemán.” “Don’t kill him; he’s German,” which he was not. In those days the Germans provided the bandits with guns and ammunition to use to drive the Anglo settlers from Texas. The bandits let the fellow go. After profusely thanking Papa for having saved his life, the passenger swore that he would never return to Texas. However, for as long as he lived he sent Papa a Christmas card every year.

Shortly after the train robbery, the Texas Rangers arrived. The Rangers found an elderly Mexican couple in the rail car whom they believed might have helped the bandits. They were deciding what to do with them when Papa spoke up telling the Rangers these people were merely passengers on the train and had nothing to do with the bandits. The Rangers let them go. The Rangers later found two Mexican cowboys who lived in the vicinity of the Tandy Ranch nearby. Thinking the cowboys had helped the bandits, they hanged them both. It was later discovered that there were no tracks from where the cowboys lived to the area of the train robbery. The Texas Rangers were the primary law enforcers in Texas. They killed thousands of bandits and outlaws, but they were human beings and made mistakes. Had it not been for the Texas Rangers, Texas would not have been settled until decades later.

In 1915, General Blanco commanded the Mexican soldiers who were trying to dislodge Pancho Villa’s troops from Matamoros. During this time, Papa furnished a temporary hospital for the wounded at what became known as the Jessie Dennet Building, which was located between
12th and 13th Streets on East Washington. Between 1915 and 1918, Pancho Villa’s bandits delivered a large trunk filled with gold to Papa, requesting that he buy guns and ammunition for the bandits. He thanked them for their trust in him, but told them he could not help them.

Papa had a friend named Snake King, who traveled with him by horse and wagon to the Mexican ranches outside of Matamoros. While Mr. King would buy snakes to milk for venom to be converted into anti-venom serum, Papa would sell his goods from the wagon. There were many wars in those days of bandits against other bandits, federal soldiers against bandits, and federal soldiers fighting against independence fighters. Whenever there were such battles, both sides had groups of men guarding the roads. As a traveler approached the group, one would yell, “¿Quién vive?” (“Who lives?”). If you gave the wrong leader’s name, you were shot, no questions asked. To answer them, Snake King quickly responded, “¡Que vivan las viboras!” (“Long live the snakes!”). The group laughed, telling them to proceed. Snake King’s quick thinking saved their lives, as neither of them knew the name of their bandit leader. There was no trial by jury in those days. I would assume that thousands of people were killed in this manner all over Mexico. This practice probably went on all over Latin America.

Persons who were promoting a land sale in Point Isabel around the 1920s located Dad (Papa) and offered him a business deal. They promised that if he would purchase a piece of land in Point Isabel, they would refer all future land purchasers who asked to buy furniture from him. There is no doubt that he picked up some new customers from the deal. The property my Dad purchased was next to the new causeway. These promoters also dug a hole, about fifteen feet deep, to hold the foundation of a new hotel supposedly being built. Every time sales prospects appeared, the promoters would rush men into the hole, to make it appear that they were working on a foundation. They also worked night shifts under lights. As soon as the prospective customers departed, they stopped all construction work. This hole was there until about twenty or thirty years ago, when it was finally filled with dirt.

Papa often conversed with Father Moore, a local priest for many years and a good friend. During one meeting, Father Moore asked Papa if he had ever prayed to the Almighty to give him something. Papa replied, “No,” which surprised Father Moore. Then he continued, “I only ask Him to put me where there is something to be had, so I’ll get my share.” This basically was Dad’s philosophy of life, to work hard to get your share, and yet let others earn their share too. He was of tough European stock, accustomed to hard work, and convinced that the only way to accumulate anything was to work for it. He followed this principle until his failing health forced him into retirement. Once, he learned of a customer who complained that the oven in her Florence Oil Range did not work. Papa went over and made a batch of biscuits and coffee for the entire family, which astonished them but ended the complaint. Another time, he was upset at the poor collection response of one of the outside collectors. He said he would show them how to collect, and asked them to give him the worst account they had. The account he took was of a female customer whose husband had supposedly abandoned her and their small children. This was the time before welfare, child support, or food stamps. Papa took the card one afternoon and brought it back the next day with money that took care of the balance due. The collection personnel were absolutely dumbfounded. What they learned later was that Papa had gone out and bought groceries for the woman and her children and had paid the account balance himself. He never again criticized us about our collection efforts.

Many Mexicans do not consider a man “macho” unless he has one or more women on the side. One time, Dad went to collect a debt from a man who had signed for his wife and had also signed for five other women. Dad asked the man, “¿Porque tienes cinco viejas por fuera,
y yo ninguna? ¿Eres más rico y prospero que yo? ¡Este es muy mal repartido!". In English, "Why is it that you have five women on the outside and I have none? Are you richer and more prosperous than I am? This is very unfairly distributed." The fellow laughed so hard that he fell to the ground. I can't remember whether Dad was successful in the collection that day. Papa enjoyed "kibitzing" with male customers who came into the store and office to make payments. He would often ask them the size of their families (i.e. how many children) and then add, "Y por fuera cuantos tiene?" ("And how many do you have elsewhere?") And they would reply, "Don Moisés, si yo tuviera su dinero, quién sabe cuantos tuviera por fuera, pero yo soy pobre y apenas alcanzo así como estoy. Sí, quisiera, pero no se puede." ("Mr. Moses, if I had your money, who knows how many I would have on the side, but I am poor, and I can barely manage as I am. Yes, I would like to, but its not possible.") I am sure some were not telling the truth, as many did have second families "on the side."

Papa was known for his generosity for charitable causes, Jewish and non-Jewish. He kept his charitable deeds to himself, making it difficult for anyone else to know about them. Papa gave the city of Brownsville some land for a park. It was not until my father passed on that Paul Springman, a faithful employee for many years, told my sister Marion Joyce Cohn that shortly after my Dad hired him, Papa had him swear never to reveal his donations and help to others in need. This Jewish tradition of anonymous charity is referred in Yiddish as true Mitzvah. When Paul Springman passed away, he took with him all knowledge of my father's many deeds to other people, churches, and charities.

Shortly after the birth of the eighth child, two of which had died, a group of citizens called on Papa with an ultimatum, "No more children or they would tar and feather him and run him out of town." The threat apparently worked. Papa had a best friend named Ben Freudenstein. One day he delivered a piano for storage at Papa's warehouse. Several months later when he returned to retrieve his piano, Papa informed him that he had donated the piano to one of the local churches. Ben Freudenstein asked Papa how he could have given away his piano without his consent. Papa told him that it was his piano until he so graciously gave it to the church. Papa said he was really proud of Ben. Later, Ben claimed Papa charged him $3.00 to have the piano tuned.

Papa suffered many tragedies in his lifetime. He witnessed hurricanes that blew roofs off the stores. He suffered a major fire in our central warehouse and manufacturing plant, which especially hurt him because he had insufficient insurance. However, due to his strong European stock, he always managed to bounce back. He lost thirteen stores in the Great Depression. The creditors settled for forty cents on the dollar. This settlement legally released Papa from any further obligations. However, as soon as he was able, he paid his creditors the remaining sixty cents to the dollar. Papa even offered to pay them interest, which they refused. Papa brought over more than twenty families from Europe before the Second World War, saving them from Hitler's ovens. It was a major responsibility, because Dad had to guarantee that they would never become wards of the State. Not one of them ever caused my father any problems. They all became successful people and good U.S. citizens.

Papa was a learned man, and he had volumes of books in Hebrew, English, and Spanish (he spoke eight languages - Lithuanian, Russian, German, Polish, Hebrew, Yiddish, English, and Spanish). He loved to read. In his adult years he purchased volumes of Judaica in Hebrew and Yiddish. His books were his treasures, and he would delve into them for hours on end whenever time permitted. He always regretted never having learned French, because he adored listening to the lilt of its spoken language.
As the good book directs, Papa worked six full days a week. However, when he drove home Saturday night at between 9:00 & 10:00 o'clock p.m., we kids were waiting for him to load camping equipment and food into the car and then drive to Boca Chica Beach to spend Saturday night and Sunday there. On some Sundays we went crabbing; always bringing home one or two tow sacks full of big blue crabs. We never imagined that Papa was entitled to any rest. Papa hired a Hispanic who had recently returned from Chicago and who supposedly had a wide range of experience in furniture upholstery. One day, Papa was walking around the shop area and noticed his “experienced” upholsterer sewing a welt cord incorrectly. When Papa told the man so, the response was, “If you think you know more, then you sew it.” Papa took up the challenge and the sewing came out correctly. The employee was flabbergasted, as he did not know that Papa knew what he wanted and how to do it. Needless to say, there were no further challenges to Papa from this particular employee. Later, Papa confided in me that in the old country he had worked for a while as an apprentice for a tailor, and could handle a sewing machine as well as many of the local workers. While visiting in Mexico, Papa spotted a man plowing with a mule who was not plowing in straight rows. He told the man, who replied, “If you think you can do better, now is your chance.” Papa took the mule and plow and began plowing in straight rows. The fellow was astonished, little knowing that Papa had been a farmer in Europe and had plowed with a mule many times.

During the depression everyone had to watch his or her nickels and pennies. My mother and some of us kids used to drive to the Matamoros open market, where she would buy live chickens, tied by their feet, which were then fattened and later killed for the dinner table. She also bought her fresh fruits and vegetables there. One evening Mother was preparing steaks for the family. She served one to Dad and later asked him about the steak. He replied, “It is as tender as a woman’s heart.” My mother said, “Darn that butcher; he promised me that these steaks would be tender.” Three of mother’s favorite sayings were: “Rome wasn’t built in a day,” “Poco a poco ando lejos” (“Little by little I go far”), and “That which we cannot cure we must endure.”

A middle-aged, weather-beaten, plump farm lady came to the Morris Edelstein residence weekly with a large straw basket of fresh eggs. She would inquire how many dozens of eggs were needed. The lady would carefully count and place them gently in a large and beautiful ceramic bowl, hand painted with yellow fruit and vegetables. I remember this as if it were yesterday. To save money, my parents bought a milk cow for their six hungry children. The cow was kept wherever there was green grass to eat. A lady by the name of Martha, dressed in a white starched uniform, milked the cow daily. Since one of the boys was allergic to cow milk, a goat was purchased for her to milk from the time the lad was born.

The Edelstein children grew up at 1608 West Levee Street. At the graduation of the youngest, Mrs. J.A. Russell, elementary school principal, penned a note to Mother, “It is very rare for a family of six children to pass through my school, each one in turn, with never a word of complaint or misunderstanding to come from a teacher, a fact of which you should be exceedingly proud,” dated May 10, 1942. I remember one day, while Papa and I were walking down the street, we met an old family friend, Herb Seago, who had been Cameron County Clerk for about twenty years. Mr. Seago inquired about the health of one of Papa’s sons, who lived away from home. My Dad looked at him most sadly while shaking his head and said, “I am afraid we need to send him to the Mayo Clinic.” Mr. Seago replied that he was so sorry to hear that and asked what the trouble was. My Dad continued, “He is having some female problems!” Another time, Papa and I were walking down the street when we met another man. As is the native custom, both men embraced,
slapped each other on the back, and gave each other the usual greeting: “How are you? And how are your wife and kids?” I figured they must be old buddies. After the other fellow departed, I asked Dad, “Who was that?” He replied, “I don’t know.”

There is one story told about a yardman who was asked whether he could come to work the following Monday at the Edelstein’s residence. He was told, “No vayas a ser como las gallinas, que el tunes no ponen.” In English, “Don’t be like the chickens, who don’t lay eggs on Monday.” The yardman had a good laugh, and assured me that he would be ready to work the following Monday. However, sure enough, when someone went to pick him up on Monday, he was not at home. Again on Tuesday morning, he was “lost.” On Tuesday afternoon, he went to the local Edelstein’s store to tell the manager, “Digale a su patrón que el martes no ponen tampoco.” In English, “Tell your boss that on Tuesday the chickens don’t lay eggs either.”

One day, driving to work, Dr. “Bea” Hawkins, a gynecologist who lived in the old Isadore Dorfman home at 7th and West St. Charles, was waiting for a bus at 7th & W. Elizabeth Street. She was going to her office at the old First National Bank Building at 12th & E. Elizabeth Street. Dr. Hawkins had a bad cold and complained about being unable to rid herself of it. Papa who had offered her a ride, as he customarily did, reached into the glove compartment of his car and offered her some of his famous capsules to rid Dr. Hawkins of her cold. Dr. Hawkins became a bit indignant; telling Papa that it was “unlawful for him to dispense medication without a license.” Papa replied, “It’s ah-right, Mrs. Hawkins, I never charge for my services and I do help a lot of people get well.” That ended that conversation. Following Papa’s retirement and move to his ranch, he and Mother would return to visit Brownsville from time to time until they sold the family home that Papa had had custom built at 1608 W. Levee Street in 1958 to Cesar and Minerva Pacheco.

Sometime in the early 1950’s, my father received word out on his ranch that a former employee, who had worked for him for some thirty years or more, had become an alcoholic and was in bad shape. His name was Joe Cook. My father made a special trip into town to visit him. Joe was so weak that he could not get out of bed. My father picked Joe up in his arms and put him in the car. He drove Joe to the ranch. Within a month or two, no one would have recognized him from his former self. No liquor was allowed on the premises. Every Saturday my Dad would give him money for a movie and dinner. We never thought anything of it when Joe continually chewed Clorets gum. With two restrooms in the house we all thought it strange that he told my father that he “felt more at home” while using the outhouse, which had gone unused since the advent of indoor plumbing.

After several years, Joe returned to Brownsville to see his daughter. He hit the bottle again, and when my father heard about it, he made another trip to Brownsville to see Joe. As my father was entering the house, the family doctor was leaving. He asked the doctor how Joe was doing. The doctor replied that he was dying and that there was nothing anyone could do for him. My father went inside to visit Joe. Joe told him, “Please Mr. Edelstein, take me back to the ranch.” My father replied, “Joe, it is too late. This time; you are going to die.” Before my father left he told Joe that he was going to leave a bottle of whisky in his casket. And I’ll bet that he did! Shortly thereafter, I went to visit my father at the ranch. We decided, once and for all, to burn down the old outhouse. We spread some kerosene all over it and set it on fire. We had to watch while it burned. It was not long before we began to hear “pop, pop, pop”, as the empty whisky bottles exploded. That was what Joe Cook was doing with the money my father gave him for movies and dinner. While on the same visit, my father asked me to get a piece of lumber from underneath the house (my father could no longer stoop down). As I retrieved the lumber, I
spotted another hoard of empty whisky bottles. Had my father known that Joe was drinking whisky again, I don’t know what he would have done to him; my father had a bad temper.

Some forty five years ago, Papa attended one of our all personnel meetings. One of our employees asked Papa to what he attributed his success, thinking he would learn the secret to instant riches. Without any hesitation Papa said it was a four-letter word: WORK. When he died on May 2, 1967, he left a name admired and remembered by the community to this day and cherished by his family.
In the 1920s the development of the Rio Grande Valley was underway, and land development companies brought “land parties” to area. The visitors were given carefully guided tours pointing out the excellent opportunities and bright future of this tropical paradise. Most of the visitors were from the Midwest, and among them were Charles and Jennie Chilton of Williamsville, Missouri. They were hosted by the Stuart Land Company, developer of an area near Harlingen known as Stuart Place. The all-expense tour, by train from St. Louis, was closely supervised, with little contact with outsiders. The visitors stayed at the Stuart Club House and were taken by private cars to see the citrus groves.

Charles had been approached by a relative who had a job-recruiting prospect for the trip. When he decided to accept the invitation, Charles had no intention of buying land in Texas. His entire life had been spent in the Missouri Ozarks, where he was a successful merchant and farmer. Moving to Texas was not in his plans. But after a few days in the Rio Grande Valley, he was completely taken by the country. He decided it would be a great place for himself and Jennie, and for the rest of his family. So he bought acreage in Stuart Place for himself and for each of his four children.

They moved to the Valley in 1924. With Charles and Jennie came three daughters, Pauline, Mildred and Maideen, and a son, Carl, with his wife Gladys and one year old child, Carl Jr. Carl, Pauline and Mildred were college graduates and soon found employment as teachers. Maideen, the youngest, entered Harlingen High School. Charles planted citrus trees and started raising vegetables. But it wasn’t long before he discovered farming in the Valley was much different from Missouri. He and Jennie became homesick for the Missouri Ozarks. The southern tip of Texas was too much of a change, so in 1927 he sold his land and moved back home.

However, Carl, Pauline and Mildred stayed in the Valley. Carl and Mildred were teaching in Harlingen and Pauline was teaching in Mission. All three were involved in their jobs, church activities, going to movies, eating out, swimming, visiting friends, traveling to Matamoros and to different Valley cities. It was clear they were happy in the Rio Grande Valley. Mildred began dating George Potts and married him in 1927. Pauline married Herbert Chiswell in 1928. Both weddings were held back home in Missouri, after which the couples took up residence in the Valley. Carl, whose first wife had died in 1925, met a young woman named Eula Kell and they married in 1929. After their marriage they both taught in the Harlingen schools. Carl and his family never forgot the 1933 hurricane, which they rode out in their home on East Tyler in Harlingen. Present with Carl and Eula were Carl Jr., age 10 years, Nancy, age 7 months and Carl’s mother, Jennie.

During the night, part of the roof caved in and the family had to make an emergency exit to the next-door neighbor at the height of the storm. Before the night was over the entire roof either caved in or blew away, ruining everything in the house. Family members recall widespread destruction in Harlingen, and the opening of school was delayed several weeks.

The depression years of the 1930s saw hard times for the family. Salaries for Harlingen teachers were reduced. In 1934 Carl became superintendent of schools at Port Isabel, where he stayed for nine years. It is thought his beginning salary was $150 per month. In the 1930s Port Isabel was a small fishing village. Most streets were unpaved. When local residents visited Brownsville or Harlingen they said they were “going to town.” But as time went by the deep water port opened, which attracted an oil refinery and brought some good paying jobs. Carl
contributed to the life of the community in many ways; helping to organize the Port Isabel Rotary Club, organizing and directing a high school band, serving as school business manager as well as superintendent. Carl Jr. played basketball and baseball with the Port Isabel Tarpons. The effects of the depression continued to be felt in the late 1930s. In 1937 the entire Port Isabel faculty wrote the school board, thanking them for seeing that the teachers were paid in full each month of the school year. Some Valley school districts had been unable to pay the full salary to their teachers. Carl became school superintendent in Port Lavaca in 1943, serving there for seventeen years. He retired in 1960 and moved to Brownsville, where he became known and respected in the community. He became involved in the Methodist Church, the Rotary Club and the Community Concert organization. He passed away in 1969.

Carl Jr. (the writer of this article) served as a military pilot in World War II, graduated from The University of Texas in 1947, and in 1948 moved to Brownsville to teach at Brownsville Junior College. His first semester at the college coincided with the move of the junior college to its new campus at Fort Brown. While teaching at the college, Carl Jr. passed the CPA examination, and some local business men began asking him to provide tax and accounting service. About this time he met another CPA, Bill Long. They decided to go into partnership and started the firm of Long Chilton, CPAs. Ruth Lewis moved to Brownsville from Ohio in 1950 to work for Dr. Harry Miller. After Ruth had been in town several months, she and Carl Jr. were introduced by mutual friends. Their friendship and romance blossomed, and in 1951 they were married. Ruth and Carl Jr. built a home on Media Luna Lake in 1964 when that area, now a fast growing part of Brownsville, was out in the country. They spent busy years raising children and engaged in community activities, and are now enjoying their retirement years.

Carl Jr. spent 37 years with Long Chilton before retiring in 1988. During these years he was active in the Texas Society of CPAs, serving as state president in 1979, when that organization had 14,000 members. The firm of Long Chilton is now a Valley wide organization with offices in Brownsville, Harlingen and McAllen, and Carl Jr. has been pleased to observe their progress. His community activities have included leadership roles at the Methodist Church, the Rotary Club, the United Way, the Public Utilities Board, the Gladys Porter Zoo and the Brownsville Tennis Association.

Carl Jr. has always enjoyed writing, and during his professional years wrote two books on accounting practice published by Prentice Hall. In his retirement years he has focused on history subjects. His first effort was tracing the family tree back eight generations, and writing a family history. Then came several books on the history of Brownsville organizations: the First United Methodist Church, the Port of Brownsville, the Public Utilities Board, the Brownsville airport, Texas Southmost College and The University of Texas at Brownsville and, finally, a history of Fort Brown.

Eighty years after Charles and Jennie came to Texas with a land party, the family continues its Rio Grande Valley presence. Carl and Ruth continue to enjoy their home on Media Luna Lake. Nancy Chilton Henderson and her husband, Jeff, own a condominium on South Padre Island and spend time in the area each year. The Chilton family has been through some difficult times in the Valley during these 80 years: hurricanes, freezes, wars, poor economic conditions. But the good (a growing population, an improving business environment, the mild year round climate, good people, an enjoyable lifestyle) has far outweighed the bad. This has made the Valley a good place to live.
La mayor riqueza de un pueblo, está en su gente. Nuestra heroica Matamoros, ciudad fronteriza del noreste de México, cuenta entre sus más grandes tesoros con hombres valiosos como el Profesor Espiridión Puente Rángel (Pilo Puente para sus amigos). Era hombre sencillo pero con un gran sentido de servicio y amor a sus semejantes. Vio la luz primera el 14 de diciembre de 1923, en la Cd. de Torreón, Coahuila, México. Fueron sus padres, el Sr. Pablo Puente Ávalos y la Sra. Hilaria Rángel Muñoz. Fue el mayor de ocho hermanos, y el único al que le gustó la música. Realizó sus estudios de primaria en las escuelas: México y Carlos A. Carrillo en su ciudad natal.

Su inquietud por la música empezó a temprana edad pues desde tercer grado de primaria inició sus estudios en esa rama del arte. Se integró a la banda de música escolar del municipio; desde pequeño empezó a tocar en acompañamientos de ópera y conjuntos de baile. En 1937, llega a la ciudad de Torreón la compañía de ópera de la cantante Militza Korgus. La orquesta de la mencionada compañía estaba dirigida por el maestro Julio Cochard. En virtud de que les faltaba un flautista, Espiridión debido a su prestigio como músico, fue invitado a formar parte de dicha orquesta. Confiesa que tenía miedo aceptar, pero su padre que era un hombre duro, como los de aquella época, le dijo: “usted va, y si puede, aquí está su casa, pero si no puede, no regrese.” En ese tiempo, la ópera y la zarzuela eran lo máximo en el espectáculo. Ese mismo año llega a Torreón la compañía de la Sra. Evangelina Magaña, con quien llevó gran amistad.

En 1941, contrae matrimonio con la Sra. Irene Vallejo Yánez, con quien procrea cuatro hijos: Juan Pablo, Irma, Jesús José y Hugo. En 1946 llega a Torreón la compañía de Placido Domingo, acompañado de su esposa la cantante Pepita Embil, padres del famoso cantante de ópera Plácido Domingo Jr, a quiénes también acompañó en varias ocasiones. En 1946, se encontraba trabajando en la Cd. de Monterrey como parte de la orquesta de Pepe Sandoval, quien acompañaba a los cantantes Libertad Lamarque y Fernando Fernández. En 1948 viene por primera vez a Matamoros, trabaja en el Hotel San Antonio, el que posteriormente pasó a ser el seminario menor de Matamoros. Actualmente este edificio forma parte de las instalaciones de la Universidad del Noreste de México. Ese mismo año emigra a Cd. Juárez, donde trabaja por un tiempo.

En 1955 lo invitan a dirigir la orquesta del Café Matamoros, lugar donde conoce a uno de sus más grandes amigos, el violinista y concertista Elías Brinski, padre de la famosa y conocida artista Olga Brinski. En 1958, al cerrarse el Café Matamoros y ya acreditado como grupo de calidad forma su orquesta llamada Pilo Puente. A partir de este año y durante más de dos décadas, ocupa esta orquesta el primer lugar en la preferencia del público de Matamoros y del Valle de Texas, amenizando los bailes de más prestigio en la región como los que organizaban la Asociación Algodonera, el Casino Matamorense, el Club de los 300, 20-30, Rotarios, Leones y el Club Venecia, así como las bodas familiares más acaudaladas o prestigiosas de la región. Alternó con orquestas como: Pablo Beltrán Ruiz, Mariano Mercerón, Carlos Campos, Orquesta Tampico, Armando Tomae, Venus Rey. Acompañó a los artistas más populares en esos años, como: Ángelica María, Tongolele, María Victoria, Kristian Martell, Mis Universo, Enrique Guzmán, Manolo Muñoz, César Costa, entre otros.

En 1970 la directora de la Escuela Secundaria Federal No.1 “Lic. y Gral. Juan José de la Garza” Profra. Martha Rita Prince le invita a formar la primera Banda Estudiantil integrándola...

El maestro Espiridión, es un ejemplo de superación para sus compañeros maestros ya que a sus ochenta años, cursó un diplomado en la Universidad Pedagógica Nacional y otros cursos sobre teatro, música y artes plásticas, y actualmente sigue activo como docente en secundarias.

Fuentes


Archivo de la Supervisión General de Secundarias Zona No. 3 de H. Matamoros, Tam.
I was born in Brownsville, Texas in August 1964. The earliest that I can recall was living in the Villa Verde housing project. I remember our neighbors sold candy apples; there was a tree in front of our house; and a two-wheel push lawn mower. I vaguely remember my father (the man who I thought was my father). I remember my mother as a woman who spent most of her time in the kitchen cooking for her children. Seven children were living at home including me, and one had joined the Army. My mother would be in the kitchen cooking and making tortillas. We hardly ever had bread. Homemade tortillas were less expensive. Each tortilla my mother would make would be placed in a basket on the table with a kitchen towel wrapped around them to keep them warm. She was trying to accumulate about thirty or forty tortillas so that we could have them with the meal. However, all the kids would go in the kitchen and snatch a hot buttered tortilla or two. With every meal my mother must have ended up making fifty or sixty tortillas! I remember my mother being a very beautiful woman with long black hair. When she was cooking she would listen to the radio. The radio station she would listen to was a Mexican station from across the border.

I hardly remember my father, he was a shrimper and he'd be gone for three weeks or more shrimping out in the Gulf of Mexico. When I did see him it would be when he would come home drunk at night, and always end up beating up on my mother. The last time I saw my father was when he came home one night knocking on door drunk as always. My older brother was home from the Army that night. He took up a baseball bat and stood behind the door. When my father knocked the door in my brother hit him with the bat. The police came and dragged my father away. It was the last time I ever saw him. The next morning outside, in the front yard, all the kids were finding money. It was all the money that had fallen out of my father pockets when the police where scuffling with him to taking him away.

Two of my older brothers, my younger sister, and I were enrolled at Victoria Heights Elementary School. We'd walk to school together. I was eight years old and my mind was far from school. I wanted to explore the world. When we'd reach school my brothers would go one way, my sister the other way, and I'd go my own way. At the back of the schoolyard there was a fence with a hole cut through it. I'd go through that hole, cross the train tracks, and I'd be on my way, exploring the city. I recall this great big Catholic Church, “Guadalupe” church. I was always drawn to that church. Not because it was a Catholic Church. But because I knew God could be found there. Even at such a young age I searched for God’s help. Once I felt a deep, deep calling to go to that church, but I was too frightened to go alone.

Skipping school had become a daily thing for me. I remember coming home through the back door where the kitchen was located one evening, after skipping school. As always, my mother was in front of the stove cooking. As I walked through the door I hollered, “Mom, I’m home”. She asked me if I’d been to school. I said, yes. She asked me about three times if I had been to school, and all three times I told her, yes. I remember her turning around and hitting me with the rolling pin once on the head. I still have that bump on the side of my head. She told me that I was lying to her; that the school nurse had been they’re looking for me; and that I had not been to school in weeks. My brothers started walking me all the way to the classroom. At break time, however, I’d be on my way through the hole in the fence. The police picked me up one day and took me to juvenile detention and I was there a few hours until my
mother came for me.

Every month my mother would take us all to a large warehouse located behind the school we attended. The train would come by full of USDA food and unload it at the warehouse. The poor people would pick up their food there. The pineapple and dried apples were my favorite. My mother started to date other men. Some of them would sleep over at night. I knew that they were not my father. I had an idea that my mother was sleeping with different men. I hated it! I thought that she was doing that to make ends meet. I started to take their money also. At night I would sneak into the bedroom and take money out of their pants pocket. Of course, I'd spend it on myself. I became aware that money had power. With money I could buy anything. My mother met a man whom she eventually remained with for a long time. His name was John. He was not my father, yet he was sort of the only father figure we had around. He moved us out of the government housing and into a two-story home by a resaca (lake). He too worked in the shrimping industry, and was gone for weeks at a time. One night my mother awoke me from my sleep at 2:00 a.m. and took me to a parked car outside. By the light coming from in side of the car I could make out the figure of a large man. My mother told me that he was my real father. I was nine years old, and boy was I frightened! Like, what the hell is going on! Is she trying to sell me or get rid of me? The next morning I thought that meeting that man in the car was a dream. Unfortunately my mother reminded me that my dream was real. Now I knew that I had a different father of my own than that of my brothers and sisters. I'd stay awake at night looking out the window for his car. I became very angry inside that he never came to see me. I would have been better not knowing that I had a real father. I wanted a father.

Headed for Trouble

I started to skip school more frequently. I'd walk around downtown Brownsville all day and would cross over to Matamoros, Mexico and walk around town there also. The cycle of skipping school; being picked up by the police and taken to juvenile; and picked up by my mother went on repeatedly. Eventually the Courts took me from my mother and sent me to a boy's home in Harlingen, Texas (about 30 miles north of Brownsville). I blamed my mother for allowing them to take me away. I remained there for three or four years. Although I was treated very well there, I yearned to be home with my family. I'd run away from the boy's home and hitchhike back home to Brownsville, Texas. I was nine years old when I hitch hiked my first ride to Brownsville. The power of the thumb was a new thing to me. When I would get home my two older brothers would fight with me. My mother was hardly ever at home; she'd be drinking at a local bar with John. I'd tell my brothers that they had no right to hit me, that they weren't my mother or father or even real brothers to me. I was too small to defend myself against the two. But I swore that one day I'd get even. Sadly, but true, I'd call the Boy's Home and ask them to come pick me up. Although I was treated well there, I was still adventurous, and would continue to run away.

Perhaps because they thought I needed some strictness and discipline in my life, I was enrolled into a boy's military academy, The Marine Military Academy in Harlingen, Texas. Once, on a two-hour pass to the Mall, I was seduced by two sisters who took me two their home. I had known them from school. They got me drunk and had sex with me. I had been introduced to a new high. Soon I ran away from there also. After a few years in the Boy's Home, one-day my mother and aunt came to take me back home. I did and I didn't want to go home, but I had no choice. Once at home the fights with my brothers started again. Two against
one. I said to myself that one day I was going to kill them. The fights had gotten so bad that now they would come at me with a knife or machete. By this time I had a few girl friends. I could not bring any of them home for fear that I would end up fighting with my brothers.

My eldest brother who was married took me to live with him. I was in high school now. I didn’t have money to buy school clothes. I took a job in a supermarket; however, I couldn’t handle a job and school. My mother told me to call my father, my real father who was a prominent Brownsville businessman. The only time I had seen this stranger was that night when my mother woke me from my sleep and took me to his car. I was now fifteen years old, and it had been six years since then. I called the man and identified myself. He knew who I was and asked me how much money did I need. He told me to come by his office. I went to his office and met the man who was supposed to be my father. I remember him sitting in a large leather chair. I sat across from him. We gazed at each other for a while. He asked me my intent with the money. I told him it was for clothes and to enroll into a martial arts school. He handed me the money, and I left. The money didn’t last long. I called him again, however, this time I asked him for a job. Although he gave me a job, I didn’t feel right working for him. In my mind I thought I should be sitting with him in the car watching the other men work! He should be supporting me I thought. Why the hell should I have to work for him! I quit without explanation.

I stopped attending school and started associating with troublemakers. The wrong I had done until now was skipping school and running away. Now, however, things had changed. I was arrested with a couple of other guys who were sniffing spray paint. I had tried it but wasn’t deep into it. What saved me from becoming a “spray head” was the Police Officer who arrested me. He took me aside and had a long talk with me about spray paint and what it does to a person’s brain. While in juvenile, I was assigned a “big brother,” in The Big Brother Program. I became involved in boxing and in the martial arts. However, I was still associating with a bad group of people. Although I never touched spray paint again, I was now smoking marijuana, drinking, and vandalizing. Once, just to get out of school early, I cut off the light of half of Brownsville by switching off a power transformer. The people who I had as friends were sons of a drug dealer. They had money and power. They had what I wanted. My best friend’s father was at that time considered a drug kingpin in the Rio Grand Valley. The father of my friend had bodyguards. My friend and I decided that I would be his bodyguard. He and I were up to our heads in money, we had fast cars; girls, the finest cloth and jewelry money could buy. All compliments of his father. In my early teens I found myself in a bar in Matamoros, Mexico across the border from Brownsville with a pocket full of money; a 45 auto strapped under my arm; a woman table-dancing in front of me; all while drinking salty dogs. This was the life, so I thought.

Back in Brownsville, I continued to fall into the long arms of the law. I had built a reputation amongst the town hoodlums as an excellent fighter. In jail and on the streets my friends came to me to settle disputes. Because of my reputation as a good fighter, I was no longer in fights but now I was shot at. I took to carrying a gun at all times. Eventually the Courts had enough of me and I was sentenced to TYC (Giddings State School). I spent one year there. As for my family, they had slowly went their way and I my way. They would hear from me every now and then, however, only when I found myself in jail.

All through my times in juvenile and adult jail I heard about Jesus Christ. In fact, that’s about all there is to read in jail the Bible, and religious literature. During these times in jail I would profoundly contemplate on my life and ask myself why? Why did I keep living this way? I felt
stuck with this sort of life. Life had always been as I have described above. To this day I do not enjoy being in jail. Was there another sort of life? I would always hope for a better life. I wanted to stop this madness, get married, and settle down. I must say, I tried and tried to go straight. I just couldn’t get it right. In my heart I always believed in God. However, I believed that I was too small for Him to be concerned about me. If He were concerned about me, where was He? I’ve prayed for His help. I never got it. I usually prayed when I was in jail. I rarely prayed while out in the “free world”. My prayers were mostly asking God to make my heart hard, cold, and callous; unreceptive to heartache.

On My Way to Prison

After State School I went to live with my brother again. I had no sense of direction whatsoever. I felt like a fish out of water. My brother asked me to get a job and save my money. He told me that he’d get me in the railroad when I turned eighteen if I kept out of trouble. A job to me was something foreign. I felt that having a job was forced labor because I didn’t want to work. There were other ways to make money without having to work, as most people know work. Consequently, I started associating with my old friends. I went back to carrying a gun. During one of these days I was riding around with my friend in a car; both of us were drunk. He was driving. We stopped in a gas station for gas. He asked for my gun. I gave it to him. As I was pumping the gas, he was robbing the store. I jumped to the driver’s side of the car, and we sped off into the night. I didn’t know that his intentions were to rob the store. Nevertheless, heck, I didn’t mind. Due to the gas station attendant who saw the license plates on the car, he was arrested the following day. He implicated me and as a result, I too was arrested. I kept my mouth shut and was sentenced to prison for five years. I kept to myself and served my sentence.

After being released from prison I went to Florida to escape this madness. Again I was fished out of water. I didn’t know about life in the “free world” other than the way I knew it. I called old friends in Brownsville, Texas and became involved in drug trafficking. I was eventually arrested in Orlando, Florida in a large police drug sting. I was sentence to Florida State Prison to thirteen month. After my release, I met up with a couple of Cuban friends that I had met while in prison. Drug trafficking again in stolen cars from Miami, Florida to Houston, Texas. In Houston I was arrested in a stolen car just having delivered the shipment of cocaine.

The Mexican Mafia

Around 1996 or 1997, I was incarcerated at the Beto I Unit in TDCJ-ID, serving a two-year sentence for auto theft. I was now about twenty-two years old. In the “Big” prison, racial lines were clearly divided. It was Black against White and Mexicans, and vice versa. My first week on the prison block I was attacked by a black prisoner, purely out of racial spite. I won the fight according to him; it was far from being over between us. His fellow Black friends encouraged him to fight me again. We fought three times that evening. We were caught by staff and taken before the shift Lt. the very same Lt. would give us a pep talk and send us both back to the block. Roused by his friends and frustrated, I suppose, the same guy came at me again, however, this time he was armed with what resembled a homemade prison knife (shank). He attempted to stab me as I was unlocking my cell door. Without thought, I managed to take the shank out of his hand and I stabbed him once in the mid-section. Consequently, I was placed in administrative segregation.
It was during this time in administrative segregation that I was exposed to members of the most violent prison gangs. La EME (Mexican Mafia) and T.S. (Texas Syndicate). Because of my ability to fight, and especially for having stabbed another inmate, both groups considered me an excellent candidate for recruitment. Incidentally, the cells to either side of me were members of the Mexican Mafia. To my right was a general in the Mexican Mafia from South Texas. In Texas prison inmates tend to associate with other inmates from their “home-town”, (homeboys). I too was from South Texas. I was given no choice in the matter of living and recreating with them. Therefore, everyday I would listen to their propaganda and indoctrination. Up to this moment in my life, I felt like an empty vessel, that my life had no meaning. I had hardly given serious thought to my future. Although I had a sense of right and wrong, I had neither morals nor decent values. I had no serious faithful religious beliefs. Therefore, wanting to have some sort of meaning, in my life, that is, a sense of belonging, and something to place my heart into. I fell for their sales pitch, hook, line, and sinker. After I had joined the Mexican Mafia, I had resolved to be the best gangster of them all. Over and over I proved myself to them by assaulting other inmates in the name of the Mexican Mafia.

I became deeply educated in the ideology of the Mexican Mafia. I wrote their rules (constitution) in my heart. Everyday the old man to my right (the general) would tell me about La EME, what it actually meant and represented. He would tell me about the “white-man” taking our land, the land of our ancestors. About how we Mexicans came from a place called “Aztlan” a legendary place. And now our Aztec religion, language, and culture were taken away. Also about the “Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo,” how “we” Mexican-Americans are the only minority - other than the Native Americans - to be conquered by annex and our right covered under the mentioned treaty. However, that the treaty has been violated time after time. Unaware, I was slowly but surely being programmed. Confined to a cell practically all of the twenty-two hours a day, it was no wonder. I was beginning to feel like a reincarnated elite Aztec soldier. In such a state of confinement one must find something to entertain his mind to keep from going insane. I spent days and nights learning all I could about Mexican and Native American History.

I was told about how Texas was initially our land and how the white man robbed it from us; and how my name, language, religion, and culture were taken away. I was given the Aztec name “Axayacoatel.” I was taught the religion of my alleged Aztec ancestors. Huitzilopochtli, in Aztec religion, is the God of war and the Sun. According to tradition, he guided the Aztecs during their long migration from Aztlan, their mythical homeland, to the valley of Mexico. His name, from the Aztec: Huitzilin, meaning “hummingbird,” expresses the Aztec belief that dead warriors were reborn as hummingbirds. His mother, the earth Goddess Coatlicue, conceived him after keeping in her bosom a ball of hummingbird feathers - that is, the soul of a fallen warrior (Mexican Mafia members) that dropped from the sky. As the sun God, Huitzilopochtli was born anew each morning from Coatlicue’s womb. He was also thought to require human hearts and blood for nourishment. Sacrificial victims included prisoners of war (hits). And warriors who had perished in battle. After their death and sacrifice, such warriors became part of the sun’s brilliance until, after four years, they were incarnated permanently in the bodies of hummingbirds and would go back to Aztlan (El Jardin de las Garzas). All of this is symbolized in the tattoo of the Mexican Mafia. The sun, the knives, the eagle with the serpent in his beak, and its real name, “Mexikanemi.” The “k” in Mexikanemi was intentionally placed there to signify, one of a kind - that is, apart from any other “Mexican” Mafia. The “emi”
in Mexikanemi is where the EME derived from -that is, “LA EME”. Also, the “m” in both Mexican Mafia is pronounced in Spanish, “eme.” The number 13 also signifies Mexican Mafia: the thirteenth letter of the alphabet is “M” and 13 written sideways is “M.”

In time, I could tell you about our (Aztec) gods, our beliefs, and our history. I was now a zealous member of the Mexican Mafia. A significant part of La EME is carnalismo (brotherhood). The Mexican Mafia emphasized carnalismo and loyalty. I soon found in the Mexican Mafia a sense of belonging that is, home, religion, family, and reason for living and dying. I was willing to sacrifice my life at the bark of an order. With every opportunity that arose, I was ready to prove it. To prove that I was down with La EME, I became the bodyguard and enforcer of the old man (the General). The General later said to me, “When you were born God broke the mold.” I had proven to be fearless and loyal. Little did I realize that I had become a soldier in one of Satan’s armies.

The State had mistakenly forgotten that they had sentenced me to a consecutive seven-year sentence due to the prison stabbing. After serving my initial sentence of two years I was released on Mandatory Supervision. I had become a worse man in prison. Meanwhile, while the Texas Syndicate and the Mexican Mafia were at war, internal strife amongst the Mexican Mafia between the “home boys” from San Antonio and members from South Texas was brewing. Inadvertently the ideology of “home boys” found its way into the Mexican Mafia in place of carnalismo. This was mostly predominating with members from San Antonio. There was also conflict regarding the general from the South in that unlike the other leaders, he held to the belief that any member on drugs should be executed and that disrespect between members would not be tolerated.

Having now been released back into society. I sought out other Mexican Mafia members as I was instructed. I had a mission. My mission was to create a “hit” squad to enforce the Mexican Mafia Constitution in South Texas. In a small border town in South Texas I met up with other Mexican Mafia members who were expecting me. Being that I was now in charge of all business affairs of the Mexican Mafia general from South Texas, I asked for a tally of the treasury funds. It was over four hundred thousand dollars. Also included were many pounds of marijuana and heroin. Much was still on the other side of the border.

I was provided with a car, gun and money. The Mexican Mafia was not lacking drugs (marijuana and heroin) in the lower Rio Grande Valley. What we were lacking were buyers. With my old childhood connections, I’d travel to Corpus Christi and Houston in search of buyers. The deal was to first see the money, that is, to see that the buyer was serious. Secondly, a trip was planed where the buyer, a friend or two of the buyer, and myself would go down to the Rio Grande Valley. Upon reaching the certain city, I would call a certain phone number. I’d be told which hotel to check into. Upon checking into the hotel, I’d call another phone number at a given time, and I’d be told where and at what time to take the guest out to eat and party. The following day it would be the same. However, it would be on the Mexico side of the border, any DEA agent would be hesitant to go across at night, and much less alone. All along my guests and I were being watched and followed to see if we were being followed. If it were determined that we were not being followed, I would be instructed over the phone to bring the guests to the place. Once at the place the guests would be allowed to sample the product. Afterward, the amount and price where agreed to. If the price was determined by geographics, that is, if the product were sold on the South side of Falfurrias, Texas (U. S. Check Point) the price would be lower, however, if the buyer wanted the product North of Falfurrias, Texas, the price would be higher. Once this little matter had been agreed upon, the buyer would be told that he’d be notified.
within one week of the pick up location. Within one week the buyer was contacted. I would pick up the guest, no more than four in a car and no more than two cars. Again, going through the same routine of cat and mouse before reaching the place. They were allowed to carry their guns, however, were instructed not to flash them or else the situation would turn into a gun battle. In a place around Kennedy, Texas the deal went down. In one of these deals the opportunity arouse where buyer wanted to exchange two Uzi’s for heroine.

On my way to Dallas, Texas to pick up the two Uzi sub machine guns, I stopped in San Antonio, Texas to visit my sister. I contacted Mexican Mafia members in San Antonio, who then invited me to a gathering. There, organized crimes were being discussed. I could not help but noticing how everybody at the meeting was a heroin junkie. After one of these meetings, a few of us began to walk towards our cars, when a police officer happened to be parked in the same parking lot; and stopped me for questioning. The Officer claimed that I did not fit in with the normal crowd who lived in the projects. He asked me who were all the men that were behind me a moment ago, and if we were coming from a party. The Officer claimed that the area was drug infested and either I must be lost or there to purchase drugs. He handcuffed me, claiming that it was for his safety and mine. After searching the area behind me where the others were at before the officer showed up; the officer came back with a wallet. In the wallet was what seemed like small packets of cocaine. There was no ID in the wallet and I was taken in for questioning. At the police station it was discovered - by my tattoo - that I was a member of the Mexican Mafia. There the officer claimed that he presumed that the wallet he found was mine. As a result I was booked for possession of cocaine.

I woke up in the County jail to find a tall man standing in front of my cell. I found out later that he was the vice-president of the Mexican Mafia and that I was placed in a cellblock reserved for Mexican Mafia members. I knew that he and the Vice President and the General from the South were at odds. The General had mentioned to me previously that the Vice-President had done him wrong on a few deals. When I mentioned the name of the General from the South to the Vice President, he became loud and disrespectful towards the General. When I mentioned to him that he was wrong for slandering the General in front of all the others in the cellblock and that I knew of the situation between him and the General. He told me that if he wanted, I would not come out of my cell alive. I told him that I was not saying anything that I would not say on his own behalf if the situation were turned around. Although that was the end of that, the others had taken a disliking to me for speaking to the Vice President in like fashion.

As a result of their ideology of homeboys come first, I being from the Valley, they, jumping on the bandwagon with the Vice-President in his split towards the General from the South; and for the way I had spoken to the Vice-President, I was frowned upon by the others. So be it then. I would represent the General and the Valley no matter what. The Vice-President was about to leave on bond. Before he left, he pointed at me and addressed the twenty or so EME members and said. “All the brothers should be like him.” What did he mean? Did he mean my sense of fearlessness? My sense of loyalty in defense to my General in spite of being outnumbered. At that moment in time, having met the Vice-President of the ‘Mexican Mafia was impressive to me. I considered it an honor for him to have suggested to the others that I was the epitome of a Mexican Mafia gangster. It meant that I was doing something right.

I noticed that some of the jail guards addressed the Mexican Mafia without respect. I thought I would show those San Antonio boys how a real gangster should handle a situation of disrespect. After a jail guard had talked Bad towards me I hit him across the mouth with my foot. Assault was added to my possession charge. At nights when all was quiet I would
contemplate up on my life. I was focused on being the best of the best. However, like a small flame in the night, there was that internal voice convicting me that I was wrong. All thoughts that hindered me from being the best of the best I’d case aside. Therefore, I’d shut my heart and mind to everything and focused on my allegiance.

Through coded letters I’d write to my General. During our time in prison together we had established a code system for writing to each other. I kept him informed of my situation and he kept me informed of the situation between South Texas and San Antonio. In one of his coded letter he instructed me to find a Mexican Mafia member called “Bandit” who was supposedly in the hospital. I was to tell him that the General would give him sanctuary in the Valley if he wished. Apparently, he was from San Antonio and the San Antonio crew was going to hit him. Being from the Valley myself, and knowing the situation, I found Bandit. I gave him the message, and I told him not to say anything. I don’t know why. But he told the San Antonio crew that I had spoken to him. I was confronted and of course I denied everything. Soon later Bandit was discovered choked to death while weak from coming off heroin.

Doing Hard Time

Soon we were all transferred to the new County Jail. Before we were transferred, however, we (about 20 Mexican Mafia members) were placed in a holding tank. Incidentally, the guards accidentally perhaps, intentionally placed a Texas Syndicate in the same holding tank. As a result, he was severely assaulted. In breaking the fight the jail guards themselves began to assault everyone in the tank. As a Lt. of the jail guards was about to kick a MM in the head while on the floor, I said to the Lt., “If you hit him, I’ll hit you.” His response was, “What the hell are you waiting for?” I struck him once on the jaw, breaking it. As a result, the officers focused their assault on me. I was hand and leg cuffed; removed from the group; and beaten. The FBI soon became involved after a relative saw my condition during a visit and claimed that my Civil Rights had been violated. I was transferred to the newly built county jail.

The prison gang war between the Texas Syndicate and Mexican Mafia had over flowed into the streets. Wherever rivals met bloodshed usually followed. The war was not all about power. Power trickles down. By the time power would reach the bottom man, it was nothing. Why would someone sacrifice his or her life for nothing? Perhaps way back in the old school it was about power. Up close, however, carnalismo was the backbone of this war. The motivator was dying for your fellow brother! In the old school inmates would ride (associate) with their homeboys. In the prison gang it was now everybody together as a family unit. If you stood back from afar and looked at the whole picture you would see - like an abstract painting - that in actual reality, it was dog eat dog.

I began to take a deeper examination of this when I received a letter from death row. The letter was from a Mexican Mafia member. He was on death row for allegedly killing a female officer at the Else I Unit. In the letter he told me, “Little brother, where is the carnalismo now?” I sacrificed my life for the family, and now who is helping me?” Allegedly he had been ordered to kill the officer because she refused to keep being a drug mule for the Mexican Mafia. As I was kept informed of the war by my General’s hand or by the hand of someone else he had ordered to inform me, whether by mail or word of the mouth. I realized that more deaths were caused not by the rival gang. But by the gang itself, that is, brothers were killing brothers; family was killing family. It could not be clearer to me when an attempt was made on my life due to the conflict between members from the Valley and San Antonio. Its dog eats dog in every crime
organization.

I have seen many incidents where a Carnal (brother) places a bad jacket on another brother, and later the one with the alleged bad jacket ends up dead. In this incident the situation was: The Vice-President (from San Antonio) did his General from the Valley region wrong on three separate occasions by borrowing money and dope from his General and not paying him back. The General was rightfully angry with the Vice-President, and he therefore decreed the problem to be personal. (In the Mexican Mafia Constitution a disagreement by two members can be decreed personal, if approved by the leaders, the parties may settle their differences in a personal manner by the parties). Moreover, prior to, during, and after, members from San Antonio were showing favoritism towards each other rather than showing equal carnalismo towards every carnal.

A certain General from San Antonio decided that he would throw in his lot with the Vice-President solely because they were “Home-Boys” from San Antonio. Therefore, this certain General from San Antonio was already bias against the General from the Valley when the later came to him about the problem of favoritism between San Antonio and the Valley. The General from San Antonio was unreceptive to the General from the Valley complaints of favoritism within the familia (family). Soon the General from the valley began to receive my reports from the San Antonio County Jail. As I would inform him of my unwelcome reception and ill treatment he would question the General from San Antonio about this matter.

The conflict within the Mexican Mafia was beginning to extend to the streets. Unfortunately I was yet to be informed that the situation had turned into blood. In fact, it was about to and I was to be the pivotal point. It was during this time, I believe, that the General from San Antonio wrote to the San Antonio County Jail with instructions to have me shut. I was attacked by six of my so-called brothers. I was stabbed once, where, fortunately, one of my ribs deflected the shank (home made knife). When they all realized that the job was not going to be as easy as they thought. Each went his own way. I did not think once about how close I came to being killed because I had been to that edge so often. I didn’t consider that perhaps God was watching over me. In fact, God was far from my mind. As, I think about it now, however, he has never been far away. After the unsuccessful hit, I wrote to my General informing him of the situation and requesting his permission to strike back. I also wrote to the General from San Antonio asking him why he had me hit. The General from San Antonio wrote back and informed me that he was not responsible and that he would get to the bottom of it. I knew that he was responsible, for who else could give such an order? My General soon replied and informed me that the strike on me was the straw that broke the camels back.” After my letter, my General, in so many words, told the General from San Antonio that enough was enough and if war was what he wanted, war was what he was going to get.

Thereafter the situation turned into blood between the groups own members without the President first having been informed. Realizing his mistake, the General from San Antonio quickly sent a message to San Antonio to a certain location where the President would call from Lompoc Federal Prison; and informed the President that the General from the Valley had decided that he was going to break off from the group and start his own group. This was an out right lie. The President therefore ordered that the rebellion be quelled. The Mexican Mafia was still at war with the Texas Syndicate, and now they were at war with each other. Meanwhile, the Attorney General for the State of Texas who had entered into the equation
earlier was still attempting to negotiate peace between the Texas Syndicate and Mexican Mafia. Soon the Texas Syndicate and the Mexican Mafia had reached a quasi state of peace: The Vice-President had died. The General from San Antonio was released from prison and went to San Antonio where He went on an “ordering killing spree.” Over fifty and close to one hundred people were murdered that year in San Antonio alone. The General called it “Cleaning the house”. He soon found himself again in prison, federal prison. Because of his idiocy and incompetence this General was hit. Although he received multiple stab wounds, he survived. He later testified against the Mexican Mafia organization in federal court. He testified against the President of the Mexican Mafia at the San Antonio Federal Court House. Oh, the irony.

About this time five members happened to escape from the Bexar County Detention Center (BCADC). Three escapees were caught within minutes. A fourth was caught approximately a month later. As the escapees were caught they were placed in solitary confinement for fifteen days. When the fifth escapee was finally caught, he, unlike the others before him, was placed in the Mexican Mafia cellblock. Later that evening, however, jail guards came to the cellblock looking for the fifth escapee with instructions from the jail director to place the prisoner in solitary confinement. The fifth escapee refused to cooperate.

In LA EME We Fight to the Death

Within the Mexican Mafia, it is “blood in and blood out.” That is to enter you must demonstrate where your heart is at attacking and/or killing someone. The leaders would determine who that “someone” will be and the severity of the attack. Usually there are stages of membership into the family. A person is first esquina (comer man). That is, a person that is not a member but is down with or on the side (corner) of the family is considered esquina. Following the esquina are the prospects. An actual “made” member must represent a prospect. That is, the prospect must have a padrino, (Godfather). It is the padrino who brings the prospect before the family for prospect status. The padrino is the intermediary between the family and the recruit. The padrino is responsible for the conduct of that person throughout his life. When a recruit prospect becomes a prospect family members begin to scrutinize the prospect and investigate his life. That is, they begin to look closely into the prospects past in search of skeletons. After a while if the prospect is still considered a good candidate for recruitment, he will be given the opportunity to prove himself. The leaders will instruct the recruit to attack certain enemy targets of the family. If he refuses, he himself now becomes an enemy target for the next recruit or nearest member.

Once a recruit has adequately proven himself, all the members present cast a vote. The vote must be unanimous in order for the recruit to become family. The word (vote) of family members comes first. If the recruit is voted in he thereby becomes “property” of the Mexican Mafia. Disassociation is considered treason. The penalty for treason is death. Not every recruit has the opportunity to show his heart for the Mexican Mafia. Often a person being considered for membership will be admitted with a dead serious understanding that he must do a “hit” when he is called for. Once one is a member, allegiance and the prompt performance of any order is demanded.

When the fifth escapee refused to be placed in solitary confinement, it created a serious situation between the jail guards and the Mexican Mafia prisoners. No question about it, the jail staff and Mexican Mafia members knew that there was going to be a melee. To touch one
Mexican Mafia member is to touch them all; to fight one is to fight them all. Not surprisingly, thirty or more jail guards, some in full riot gear, advanced on the cellblock. Before the guards entered the cellblock, I knew that I had only seconds to make a choice: I could align myself with my (so-called) brothers, and/or commit treason by laying myself on the floor and submit to the jail guards. There were two things at the top of my mind to consider: I was already at war with my (so-called) brothers from San Antonio. And, whether I surrendered or not, the jail guards were not going to take any chances; I was going to be ruffed up. Frankly, my choice could have gone either way. However, I was all gung-ho. There is a saying in the Mexican Mafia, “EME hasta la tumba,” (Mexican Mafia all the way to the grave). Also, “Hasta el ultimo cartucho,” (Until the last bullet). These are inspirational battle cries, like the Marines war cry, Aurrraa! Despite being at war with my own brothers, I was going to go down with them. I hollered, “EME hasta la tumba!” When the doors flew open, I stood my ground and fought. Despite throwing my lot in with my so-called brothers during the melee with the Jail guards, the situation between us was no different afterwards. The end results, Attempt to commit capital murder of a police officer, two assaults on police officers, and criminal mischief were added to my initial holding charge. My so-called brothers and I were still at war. And in fact, they all supported each other in court regarding this incident. None of them went to court on my behalf. Also, I received the largest prison sentence than all the others involved in this incident. My bond had risen to over half a million dollars.

I was eventually segregated and placed in confinement house with the most notorious and violent prisoners, that is, those in for capital offences. I was allowed one hour out of my cell each day. My focus was the Mexican Mafia. I loved it, I would have died for it; and it had become a way of life for me despite its internal conflicts. I walked with my head held high, and kicked butt in the name of it at every opportunity that aroused. With my one-hour I practiced and sharpened my martial arts skills while Officers would stand by and watch. On one occasion while another prisoner was on his one-hour recreation period, my cell door came open. The jail guard thought that he had already placed the other inmate in his cell before opening my cell door. As soon as I saw that the other person was a San Antonio Mexican Mafia member, I went up to him and took care of my business. That is, I opened up a can of whip ass on him. I thought I was bad. I had grown obsessed with being the best of the best. It became my outlet, the focus of all my time and thoughts. My mind had grown foggy, I felt as if I were in a dream. I had a bad case of tunnel vision. I had psyched myself with the belief that I was a reincarnation of an Aztec warrior of the elite “eagle” military group of the Aztec army. (In the Aztec times there was the jaguar group and the eagle group, members of both groups had been chosen to be soldiers at birth.)

Realizing a Wasted Life

Prior to being transferred to the new county jail from the old jail, I was being tutored by a teacher from the education department. As previously mentioned, I was being housed in a special cellblock reserved for Mexican Mafia members and other violent prisoners - that is, if the Mexican Mafia allowed them to live with us. This teacher would be allowed to go into the cellblock where she was left for an hour. During that one hour she would be sitting at a table with me educating me in the academics. All the other members were going about in their daily business. In other words, she was left locked in a cellblock surrounded by some of the most violent people; sitting across the table from a stone cold-hearted person, attempting to give him an education. Monday through Friday she would bring school to me.
Each time I could not help but to admire her boldness and fearlessness. Especially when she never failed to slip her “God” into her meetings with me. Over and over I’d tell her that my God was the SUN! And over and over she would tell me “That’s okay, but there is also Jesus Christ!” She was a stubborn old lady, and I was a stubborn rascal. Now that I was in the new county jail confined in segregation, there she was again. She sought me out and didn’t give up her fight with me. I was illiterate and my level in mathematics was pre-school. I was stubborn on my God while she was just as stubborn in hers. What could she have seen in me? Did she see through my countenance, my facade of toughness? Did she see the emptiness in my eyes? Why was she not afraid to sit next to Satan’s spawn? She soon became a person welcomed in my heart. I looked forward to seeing her. She was my light in an otherwise gloomy tunnel. I couldn’t wait for the weekend to come to an end. I began to enjoy her stories about Christ and Saint Paul. When she thought that I was ready, she took me before a San Antonio College GED administrator. I was administered a test, and surprisingly to me I past it. In fact, I had the highest score over all the other students. She continued to build education and preach to me about Christ. As I think about the whole situation it seems so mysterious to me how the situation was just so - that is, if I were not in conflict with my so-called brothers they would not have allowed me to see her with all her talk about Christ and changing my life. I would have rather been in the company of my so-called brother rather that studying. Did God have the situation just so where I would be more receptive? Word got around about me and soon a Catholic Priest and Nun were stopping by to see me. They encouraged me to abandon my old ways and start anew. Keeping within the limits of my situation, they did and said everything to me to get me to take a close look at my life. Volunteer ministry also came to see me. One such person in particular loved me from the very first day. Eventually this lady became my mentor, Mother, friend, and my own personal angel on earth. Soon, there were jail guards praying for me.

Finding Christ

There was this one jail guard, who took every moment to speak to me about Christ. He didn’t come seeking me, but rather it was the way that he conducted himself as a Christian that brought me to him. I’d always see him pull out his Bible and read quietly. He did his job as a jail guard; however, he didn’t let his position over other people go to his head. He treated everyone with respect. Every word he spoke was clearly thought over - that is, he guarded his mouth. I began to admire him for his obvious self-discipline. I began to ask him about Christ. The day before I was bound for prison my angel (The guard) and a few jail guards had a small party for me. The jail director had approved of it. The night before I was to be transferred, (He) the guard came to my cell and wanted to pray with me. I was a little angry because I was on my way to prison. I knew that I couldn’t live like a Christian in prison. I would have to go back to my façade of a tough guy. In Prison it was all about kicking butt. There is no room for weakness. After all, was God going to come down and fight my fights? Nevertheless, I prayed with him, and I clearly remember that I stopped him in the middle of his prayer and I asked if I could say something to God. I asked God that I had read about what He had done for St. Paul. I asked if He (God, Christ and the Holy Spirit) was really “all that”, shouldn’t be so difficult to knock me off my little pony; and if He would knock me off my pony as he did Paul and I too would serve him. Nothing dramatic happened to me afterwards. However, I felt a sense to God being with me. I don’t know, I can’t explain it. Nevertheless, I felt that He was with me.
I left for prison knowing that I would be away for many years. I was twenty-three years old, I had already spent a year in jail, and now I was setting my eyes on being in prison until I was thirty-five.

Upon my arrival at the Diagnostic Unit I was met by prison officials where upon ten pounds were added to my weight. That is, ten pounds of handcuffs and leg shackles. I was taken directly to confinement. Soon after I was transferred to the Ferguson Unit and placed in administrative segregation, and segregated from the inmate general population. Apparently prison administration didn’t know about the conflict between the San Antonio Mexican Mafia and the Valley Mexican Mafia. For soon after I was placed in a recreation group with four members of the San Antonio Mafia. Did prison administration know? I could have refused to recreate with this group of wise guys. However, considering my attitude, I was ready to rock and roll. Amongst me in the cellblock were all San Antonio Mexican Mafia. I noticed the way they address me, respectful and nice. When they asked me if I wanted to go out with them to the recreation yard to play handball, I knew something was up. Without a moment of hesitation, I replied, sure. The recreation area was a cage enclosure approximately twenty square feet. While still in my cell, I drank a couple of cups of coffee and did a little warm ups. As I walked out of that cell to the recreation yard, I was full of adrenaline. The four others were already in the cage, the handcuffs were taken off of me and I was placed in the cage with the four others. As soon as the guard placed the lock on the door, I was rushed and attacked. As always too common, the guards began to holler, “break it up!” “Break it up!” In no way fashion or form were they gong to get into the middle of a fight this big. The better for me because I was resolved to prove that one from the Valley was worth more than four from San Antonio. The fight went on for what seemed forever. I was not about to stop! Fortunately, again, I came out with a small scratch. I really thought that I was bad. And believe me; I wanted to be the badest of them all!

From that day I was transferred from prison unit to prison unit confined to administrative segregation. I was slowly but surely working myself to the lowest level in prison. That is, super-segregation (Literally a prison within a prison, within a prison). I was still as violent as ever. I fought against both officers and inmates. I was resolved to pursue my ideologies all the way to death row! At any moment before I was let out of my cell guards would hand and ankle cuff me, and a metal dog leash was placed on the handcuffs that were behind my back. But there was something lingering in my mind, that is, I was waiting for God to knock me of my pony. I thought about God; about how he was suppose to use His powers to change me into a good guy so that I could serve Him.

Unknown to me, God had started to change my life long before I asked Him to. My mind was in the dark. I was blind and could not see beyond what is visible. Throughout my life I have had this struggle between making the choice of doing right from wrong. A part of me wants to do right, while another part wants to do wrong. I’d ask myself, “Am I crazy? Why do I keep doing what is wrong when actually my most sincere desire is to do right? To my surprise, I would later find Saint Paul describing himself being in the same predicament!

In one of my many unit transfers I met up with my General again. We were again both housed on the same cellblock. We met in the recreation yard where we could speak privately. With a fence between us, we placed out fingers through the fence and shook hands. He commended me for my bravery and loyalty. He debriefed me in all that I had been through and he informed me of our situation there. I was prouder than ever. I said, “soy su seguro servidor hasta la tumba, mi General y hermano.” (“I am your faithful servant all the way to
the grave, my General and brother”). I shall never forget what took place thereafter. I think
that, I was deeply convicted by God. Outwardly I was having a conversation with the General,
however, inwardly; I was having a conversation with that voice conscience. Nevertheless, while
staring into the eyes of the General the voice said to me, you would lay down your life for him,
and obey every order he gives you. Why? What has he done for you? Consider that before you
were yet born, I (Christ) laid down my life for you. If you are so tough and bold, why do you
cower in your service towards me, doing what you know is wrong? I have been with you since
the beginning and I know all about you. Have you not felt my presence even as a little boy? I
have allowed you to make choices in your life. I have allowed you to stumble and fall; yet I
always picked you up. If you choose me today, I will give you peace, and I will make the way
clear for you. I had a knot in my throat and an upset stomach. I told the General that I was
feeling sick. I called for the guard and terminated my one-hour of recreation.

Back in my cell I picked up my Bible and read. I could neither read nor think straight. I
went to sleep. I woke up thinking about my life. Having nothing to do in a cell, especially since
I was on hard plastic and metal restriction, I felt bored. I picked up a small pencil and decided
that, I would jot down all that I had gained in my 23 years of life. I couldn’t think of much,
therefore, I thought it would be much easier to jot down all that I had lost. Not surprisingly,
the list of what I had lost was by far greater than what I had gained. It hit me like a rock! I
was a loser, a big fat zero going nowhere. I began to cry. I looked up and I said something
like this: “God, I give up. I’ll serve you. I may have to die, give up my friends, and things
that I like, but I’ll serve you. I will never be able to do it alone. Help. Thereafter I wrote a
letter to Huntsville Administration and explained to them my situation and how I wished
to surrender. Of course they thought it was a big joke. However, the voice in my heart told
me that it would be okay. Soon I was transferred to another unit. I was placed in protective
custody. Even then I was smoking pot, reading Penthouse magazines and cussing up a
storm. I was at the Eastham Unit, one of the toughest prison units in the Texas prison
system. Tough veteran prison guards, however I was giving then the blues. I was doing
everything I could think of to make life miserable for them. Even though I was in protective
custody, I was jumping over prison fences to assault other inmates who would disrespect
me for whatever reason. Huntsville administration would write to me and instruct me to
cool down. I didn’t want to hear any of it. Yet the voice in my heart was still there just as
it has been throughout all of my life. My mentor was still with me, that is, we maintained
communication. I would write to her and tell her every detail and struggle in my life. Her
response was always, Christ, Christ, and Christ. I began to pray more often, asking God to
help me to serve Him. Slowly but surely, my situation began to change. My whole attitude
began to change. Eventually I was released into the inmate general population.

After eight or so years confined to a cell for the greater part of twenty-two hours per
day. Living in the inmate general population hit me like a ton of lead. I was engulfed
with all sorts of temptations. I had access to everything that is considered illegal in prison.
However, my past followed me. My old gangster friend was also here. The war between
the Valley and San Antonio Mexican Mafia was long over. They were all brothers again.
As previously mentioned the General from the San Antonio Mexican Mafia was released
from prison, it was discovered what real problem he really was and how it was he who
created the conflict within the Mexican Mafia. His own later stabbed him. After his
recovery, he testified against the Mexican Mafia. Nevertheless, I wanted no part of the
old gang or no other gang. Threats were made against my life, however as God said “I will
make the way clear for you." The gang unit intelligence officer went beyond his duty to see to it that I was kept from harms way. Dry words on paper can't adequately express the extreme that this "white" Gang Intelligence Officer went out of his way to assist me and kept me down the right road. Again who am I? What have I done to deserve this goodness from people, especially from guards?

I have yet to actually see God. I have not actually audibly heard God. Nevertheless, the unique experiences in my life lead me to believe that Jesus Christ is real. I do not know what others may say or do, but for me, faith in Christ's works. I by no means consider myself the epitome of a "Christian". Neither have I come close to serving God as I have the Mexican Mafia. Why? I find it very difficult still today to choose what is right from wrong. However, I believe that humans act on learned behavior. The main reason that I am a different man today is because I learned to act differently. Where I did not have good values, I now have. The Bible has been my source of morals and good values. I don't think that I know everything. I do know however, that life has many roads and on each road there are many crossings; at each crossing must come a choice; and it is at this decisive moment of choice that a person has the opportunity to make something good of himself. However, if a person has no morals or good values, he is mentally impaired, and therefore will be apt to more often than not to make the wrong choice. Sound morals and good values are the distinct characteristics of a truly good man. Whatever the world may say or do, my part is to remind myself I shall keep myself good just as a gold piece, or an emerald, or a purple robe insists perpetually. Whatever the world may say or do, my part is to remain an emerald and keep my color true.

I wonder why is it that now that my heart is truly set on what is right, the people that once feared me and hated me because I was a bad man now hate me for being a good? I think that those who criticized me have their own reasons to guide them, and their own impulse to prompt them; however, I must not let my eyes stray towards them but keep a straight course and follow my new nature. Humanity touches me now, inasmuch I am bound to do well to my fellow-creatures and bear with them. On the other hand to the extent that individual men hamper my proper activities, humanity becomes a thing as indifferent to me as the sun, the wind, or the creatures of the wild. True, others may hinder the carrying out of certain actions; but they cannot obstruct my actions, or the disposition of my mind, since these will always safeguard themselves under reservations and adapt themselves to circumstances. The mind can circumvent all obstacles to action, and turn them to the furtherance of its main purpose, so that any impediment to its work becomes instead an auxiliary, and the barriers in its path become aids to progress. I must, therefore, press on in haste. Not simply because every hour brings me near to death! But if anyone can show me and prove to me, that I am wrong in thought or deed, I will gladly change. I seek the truth, which never yet hurt anybody. It is only persistence in self-delusion and ignorance that does harm.

I have not written down my life to tell all. In fact, throughout my life, I've always asked myself, why? That is, why do you place yourself through such misery? Therefore, I thought that I would reflect on my life, write a little down, and attempt to explain why. Mere self-examination. I became worse while in prison because I learned even more mischief and I practiced it; and now I have turned my life around towards doing what is right and just because I re-programmed myself to do so. Obtaining an education has helped me tremendously to understand myself has opened my eyes to the bigger picture, removed tunnel vision, and it allows me to think, analyze each situation, and make wiser decisions.
However, education alone falls short for I know man, far more educated people than me who are criminals. An education may open your eyes to what life has to offer new ideas, and what have you. However, when it comes to making the actual decision, without a foundation of morals or values to stand on, your decision is closer to a coin toss. Morals and values allow you to consider what you would not otherwise when making a decision that is, the feelings and human rights of those your decision may effect. I must insist that there is a God and that he has a Son, Jesus Christ. For where I could not, He did. I could not go about hooping and hollering about Jesus Christ. Nevertheless for me is to live for Christ and to die is but gain. I am no longer trying to “fit in,” but rather, I have found my home in Christ.

Christmas 2004 has passed and its now 2005; I have now spent my eighteenth Christmas in prison. Around this time I think of my family the most. I cannot adequately express in words how much I regret having shipwrecked my life due to wrong choices. I regret all the people I hurt: family, friends, and the police. It’s been so long, I vaguely remember much of the details of my crimes, and yet I am still paying for them. I wish I could relive my life and start new, but that is impossible. I can however, send this message to those recklessly following in my footsteps. Stop and take a good look at the lifestyle you’re living and consider if it is worth imprisonment. It’s not worth it.

For the most part, life is about choices. God gave us the option to choose right from wrong. A moment of pleasure and excitement is not worth even one day of imprisonment. Eighteen years ago I was deemed a menace to society and in fact, I was even deemed a menace to the prison general population and confined with the worst of the worst. Taking time to analyze my choices could have prevented all this pain, suffering, and waste of my life. To believe in God and Jesus Christ is a matter of choice. I made the choice, and He has been true to me. Applying the morals and values written in the Bible has bettered me as a person in my situation. God has blessed me in practically every area of my life. Contrary to popular belief, it is not a cake walk living as a Christian from within prison. I could choose to follow the normal flow of prison life, however, long ago I chose to go against the current. I choose to do right despite what my peers may say or do to me. Attempts have been made on my life because I refuse to be a follower of wrong. God, true to His Word, has and continues to protect me even though I am practically surrounded by my enemies. If God is for me, who or what can be against me? Today I am in a minimum-security prison where I am living in the inmate general population. I am assigned to a highly trusted job. I work as a waiter in the Officers Dining Room where I serve food to both Officers and civilian personnel. Like the Bible story of Joseph who God made his captors show favor upon him, God has caused Officials to show favor upon me. I know that I will be leaving prison one day, but I hope to return as a free man to show that God does set prisoners free. I persevere in Christ. I leave you with the words of my brother and mentor: “You are in charge of your life and no one else.”

Endnote

1 Editorial Comment by Dr. Antonio Zavaleta: The Editors of the Studies in Brownsville and Matamoros History series have decided to include this most unusual submission. Joe Garcia grew up in Brownsville and has spent most of his adult life institutionalized. His compelling testimony tells the story of a young boy skipping school, living on the streets, falling into the wrong hands, going to juvenile detention and then spending most of his forty years in prison doing hard time. Joe Alfred Garcia wrote his testimony from prison, where he is today. He has
found Christ, has renounced the dreaded Mexican Mafia, and hopes one day to be released into society to live a productive life working with the misguided youth of Texas. This is his story, told in his own words, with spelling, grammar, and punctuation left uncorrected.
1980, McAllen's La Plaza Mall
by Jessica Cisneros
From the early 1950’s, my personal experience in Brownsville, Texas included bits and pieces of unarticulated information about the Colored troops (U.S.C.T.) stationed at Fort Brown in the 1800’s. My thirty plus years on the campus of Texas Southmost College and The University of Texas at Brownsville (Fort Brown), connections to our family ranch on Palmito Hill (Last Battle of the Civil War) and to my Great-Great Grandfather, Juan Nepomuceno Cortina, (so-called Border Bandit), have urged me to constantly question Brownsville history as we’ve learned it. I’ve learned that it’s always a mistake to accept “Brownsville History” at face value; there’s always something left out, some fact not told, something important not remembered. This article deals with the forgotten thousands of Negro Soldiers who marched off to Texas in defense of the Nation and freedom from their homes in Indiana, Illinois, Connecticut, Massachusetts, and many other places and who were never heard from again. Many lost their lives in battle but so many more succumbed to disease. Today, more than 1,500 of them have been simply disposed of in a mass grave marked “Unknown” in Alexandria, Louisiana. This is their story.

The life and death experience and treatment of Negro troops while they served on the Lower Rio Grande in Texas (Fort Brown and The National Cemetery; Camp Brazos Santiago; Camp Belknap; Fort Ringgold; White’s Ranch) has always concerned me. While this article cannot in any way reveal all of the forgotten record, it can, however, answer many questions while posing many more for future investigators and to engage in more complete reviews of historical data. There is much more to be learned about the plight of Black troops at Fort Brown and within the context of Brownsville’s history.

United States Colored Troops (U.S.C.T.)

African Americans fought and died in both the American Revolutionary War and the War of 1812, but they were not formally soldiers. A 1795 law prohibited Negroes from serving in the U.S. armed forces. This law for the most part had been ignored in our nation’s early history. However, as the nation prepared for the War of the Rebellion in the early 1860’s, this prohibitive law was reconsidered. The Second Confiscation Act (1862) gave President Lincoln power to enlist or conscript into the Civil War military as many Negroes as needed to defend the nation. The Militia Act of 1862 repealed the 1795 law that prevented Negroes from serving as soldiers. From their very first experiences as “full” members of the U.S. military, Negro soldiers were treated differentially and unequally in every way; food, clothing, pay, equipment, housing, health care, etc. Because Negroes represented a major human capital, the Southern states were forced to follow suit, enlisting African American soldiers in the Army of the Confederacy. The plight of Negro Confederate soldiers was even worse than what they received in the United States Federal Army.

One of the earliest formed Colored troops was the 8th Regiment of Indiana in 1861. The 8th Indiana was organized in Indianapolis in August of 1861, in order to defend Missouri from the Confederate threat. Philip Thomas Tucker in his book Cathy Williams: From Slave to Female Buffalo Soldier provides a brutal insight to the treatment and conditions African American
The 8th Indiana Regiment was among the first Federal Regiments to "utilize" the services of recently freed slaves. Early in the War of the Rebellion, African Americans were considered "contrabands" and as such could be seized and pressed into service by Federal Regiments. Tucker states, "In theory, the Union's contraband policy was based on the legal premise of international law that ex-slaves could be utilized and confiscated by Federal forces because they were formerly employed as property by Confederate forces in supporting the rebellion." As a result, beginning with the 8th Indiana and followed by many others, regiments conscripted former slaves as cooks, laundresses, and for laborers. The Federal Government believed that former slaves were "dominated by passivity and easy manipulation." Since many had been born into slavery it is theorized that psychological subjugation was commonplace and therefore made the former slave an easy capture for Federal use. The rights of citizenship that freed slaves would "enjoy" in years to come did not exist in the early months and years after emancipation. Additionally, freed slaves often had no place to go and little or no means of support. While service to Federal troops was extremely difficult, African Americans were offered protection and daily meals in exchange for their service.

As the war progressed and as Federal troops moved through the South, thousands of freed slaves "joined" the movement of Federal troops. Both Union troops and their African American followers suffered unthinkable hardships during the Civil War. Intense heat, inadequate provisions, and the poor quality of drinking water resulted in disease and an enormous loss of life. The review of the Indiana Regiments (chosen because of the large number of African Americans) indicates that both White and Black Regiments suffered far more loss of life due to illness during the War of the Rebellion than to action in battle. One of the first all Black regiments was organized in Kansas in 1862 and at the end of 1863; South Carolina was the first southern state to organize a regiment of former slaves. The State of Massachusetts is credited with organizing the 54th United States Colored Troops (U.S.C.T.), the first northern state to organize an all Black regiment. Late in 1863, the State of Indiana was authorized by the War Department to organize a regiment of Negro soldiers that became the 28th Indiana Regiment U.S.C.T. So many African American freedmen heeded the call to enlist that it caused the Confederate government to announce that armed and uniformed Negroes captured in battle would be considered escaped slaves and dealt with accordingly (shot or hanged). To prevent such retribution, President Lincoln responded immediately, indicating that for every Negro soldier executed, a Confederate soldier would receive the same fate. Escaped slave and abolitionist, Frederick Douglass was a fervent supporter of the formation of the United States Colored Troops, he believed that, "Once let a black man get upon his person the brass letters, U.S., let him get an eagle on his button, and a musket on his shoulder and bullets in his pockets, and there is no power on earth which can deny that he has earned the right to citizenship in the United States." U.S. Colored Troops served in the American Civil War with dignity and courage prompting President Lincoln to state on December 8, 1863, "So far as tested, it is difficult to say that they (speaking of those who were once slaves) are not as good soldiers as any." And in October of 1864, General Butler in his review of the operations of the Army of the James speaking of the U.S.C.T. said, "Better men were never better led; better officers never led better men." By the spring of 1865 and the close of the war, the U.S.C.T. consisted of one hundred and twenty regiments of infantry, twelve regiments of heavy artillery, ten companies of light artillery and seven regiments of cavalry for a total of 123,156 men, while the entire U.S. troops in these same services at the end of the war numbered only 178,975 men. Of these the total number of U.S.C.T. who were killed or died of wounds from battle numbered only 2,894 while 29,521...
had died of disease.10 While Negro soldiers comprised approximately ten percent of the entire Union army, thirty percent of the U.S.C.T. lost their lives during the American Civil War, a highly disproportionate number.11 U.S. Colored Troops during the Civil War were commanded by White officers, many of whom were “enlightened” and believed in the cause of equality for African Americans. However, many were not, and extreme discrimination and prejudice toward African Americans existed in the U.S.C.T. both during and after the Civil War.

U.S. Military on the Rio Grande

The Lower Rio Grande has a long and illustrious military history. On April 3, 1835, the American Naval sloop-of-war “Invincible” arrived at the Brazos Santiago Pass near modern day Port Isabel, Texas. Intending to examine an “incident” involving the U.S. Consul at Matamoros, the American Naval officer W.H Livine was dispatched to the Mexican sloop-of-war “General Bravo” also anchored at Brazos Santiago. Livine was taken hostage resulting in the “Invincible” opening fire on the “General Bravo.” Under artillery fire from shore, the “Invincible” set sail for deeper water and Livine was court martialed by the Mexicans and executed. The American warship, in foreign waters, was outgunned and forced to retreat. As a point of Texas historical reference, the Battle for the Alamo was in March of 1836, in the year following this incident. Again in 1837, American naval vessels encountered Mexicans in battle near the Brazos Santiago.12

The focus of this article is on the history and experience of U.S. troops stationed or camped on the coast near Brownsville, Texas. For many years, uneasy conditions between the U.S. and Mexico continued over disputed boundaries with the Rio Grande River, known as the Rio Bravo by Mexicans, as the focal point along with the Nueces River to the north at Corpus Christi. Hostilities continued for the next ten years, 1835 to 1845, when Texas was annexed to the United States. These actions prompted the United States “Invasion” of Mexico consisting of the movement of the American army from Fort Jessup, Louisiana to the Rio Grande River. General Zachary Taylor first sailed his army to Corpus Christi and then marched down the Gulf coast to Brazos Santiago arriving “On the Rio Grande” in 1846. The Mexican American War saw its first three battles fought in or near what is today Brownsville, Texas. This action marked the beginning of a continuous African American military experience on the lower U.S. Mexico border that encompassed Brownsville from 1846 to 1906, approximately sixty years. While African Americans did not serve in the military during the 1840’s and 1850’s, they did accompany and attend their White officers on military campaigns thus experiencing all of the military hardships, and more, encountered on the Rio Grande during those years.

At the end of the Mexican American War in 1848, and with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the international boundary with Mexico was established at the Rio Grande. The tenuous nature of the Treaty combined with the need to maintain peace along the border with Mexico required the establishment of a string of permanent military posts and forts along the entirety of the 2000 mile border. Additionally, the 1850s, along the lower Texas-Mexico border, was a time of considerable restlessness and instability requiring an ever vigilant military presence. Histories of conquered peoples never accurately document patriotic insurgencies that follow conquest, so that during the time after the Mexican American War and the American Civil War, nationalistic patriots such as Juan Nepomuceno Cortina were described by historians as bandits and thieves instead of as heroes. People who play at being historians, poorly informed about reality, continue to misunderstand and misinterpret true history, describing nationalistic fervor as banditry, thus promulgating a racist interpretation of local history.
Little is known about the African American presence on the Lower Rio Grande during the years 1848 to the early 1860's. We do know that African Americans were present in differing capacities both on the Mexican side of the border as well as the American. Shipping and mercantilism that thrived along the lower border attracted an eclectic mix of individuals from all over the world. In addition to those servants and slaves who accompanied their White masters to military service at Fort Brown prior to Emancipation, there were many escaped slaves, freedmen and other African descent citizens of the area although their lives remain in the historical shadows. A complete review of Federal and U.S. Troops stationed on the Lower Rio Grande in Texas can be found in, Thomas T. Smith’s *The Old Army in Texas, A Research Guide to the U.S. Army in Nineteenth-Century Texas.*

The War of Rebellion (Civil War)

By the outbreak of hostility between the North and the South, Fort Brown at Brownsville, Texas, was home for several companies of the U.S. Army’s First Artillery. The sea route for the delivery of supplies, both military and domestic, from Galveston, New Orleans and points beyond to Matamoros/Brownsville was still the fastest and most reliable. Therefore, the U.S. military had established a disembarkation encampment at Brazos Santiago on the coast. From this point the U.S. Quartermasters and Engineers received and dispatched troops and supplies to patrol the border between Mexico and south Texas. Early in the conflict and before Texas had seen much war, on February 22, 1861, Commissioner for Texas, E. B. Nichols arrived at Brazos Santiago and proceeded to Fort Brown with the expressed intention of demanding that the Union troops stationed there who were not sympathetic to the Confederate States abandon the Fort. Taking heed, by March of 1861, Federal troops at Fort Brown and Brazos Santiago departed Texas allowing for “Texans” to occupy the Gulf coast and the garrisons along the lower border. In his book, Pierce reports that by November 1, 1862, Fort Brown was occupied by four Companies of Confederate Infantry totaling 404 men.

Finally, in November 1863, Federal forces launched a counter offensive on the lower Texas border, as Federal Major General Nathaniel Banks arrived at Brazos Santiago. General Bank’s armed force consisted of approximately 6,998 men of the Second Division, 13th Army Corps, and the 13th and 15th Regiments of the Maine Volunteers; First Texas Cavalry, and the 1st Engineers and 16th Negro Infantry. Part of his command, the 94th Illinois Volunteers, entered Brownsville on November 5, 1863, followed the next day by 1st Missouri Light Artillery and the 13th Maine Volunteers. The Confederate force at Fort Brown of approximately 1,200 men under the command of General Bee faced certain annihilation by a much superior Federal force of 7,000. In response, General Bee marched his men northward (today Kingsville) but not before burning Fort Brown, all of its provisions, and several city blocks in downtown Brownsville.

It is important to note that almost immediately after the formation of the U.S. Colored Troops; Negro troops arrived on the Rio Grande, at Brazos Santiago and at Fort Brown. By the spring of 1864, all of the military posts along the Lower Rio Grande had been taken from the Confederates and secured by Negro troops. While troops deemed no longer necessary to defend the area were withdrawn in the summer of 1864, the 81st Negro Engineers remained at Brazos Santiago under the command of Colonel Day. In response, Confederate forces regrouped and in June of 1864, once again occupied Fort Brown. The Federal troops retreated to Brazos Santiago joining the Negro Engineers already there. From the summer of 1864 through May of 1865, there were numerous encounters in the area involving Federal, Confederate, Mexican and French forces in

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support of the Emperor Maximilian in Mexico. The "first" Battle of Palmito Hill (overlooked by most historians) took place in September 1864. The guerilla skirmishes between all parties continued through the fall of 1864 and the spring of 1865.

At the time of the official end of the War of the Rebellion, on April 9, 1865, Union forces on the Lower Rio Grande numbered about 1,915, including 675 members of the 66th U.S.C.T., 300 members of the 34th Colored Indiana Infantry and 490 members of the 46th US Colored Infantry. Seventy five percent of the Federal troops in South Texas, approximately 1,415, were Coloreds. Later in the spring of 1865, and after the war had officially ended, the second Battle of Palmito Hill took place. On May 1, 1865, (two weeks before the Battle of Palmito Hill) approximately 2000 Federal troops remaining in the area (Civil War had ended) including 675 men of the 66th U.S. Colored Infantry, and approximately 200 men of the 34th Indiana Colored Infantry marched on Fort Brown and were engaged by a superior Confederate force at Palmito Hill on May 12-13, 1865. More than one hundred Federal Colored troops died at Palmito Hill in May of 1865.

Almost immediately after the battle, the remaining U.S.C. Troops mustered out of the service at Brazos Santiago (see Pierce for description of the Negro Raid on Bagdad). During the remainder of 1865 and through 1867 with the fall of the Mexican Emperor Maximilian, hostilities raged along the lower Rio Grande with numerous actions involving both former Negro soldiers, freedmen and others. While it is known that dozens of Regiments and Companies of Colored Troops served in the area, their documentation is difficult. The following is an important but almost certainly an incomplete list of Colored Units that served in the Brownsville, Texas area with comments if available:

- 62nd Regiment Infantry U.S.C.T., Brazos Santiago 1864 to 1866 fought at the Battle of Palmito Hill.
- 65th Regiment Infantry USCT, Brazos Santiago 1864, as many as one third died from the horrific conditions and undiagnosed diseases, poor sanitary conditions, lack of proper food and the means to prepare it. They were thinly clad and had no shoes. Colored soldiers bivouacked near swampy or poorly drained areas of the camps. Even after black soldiers had proven themselves in battle, officers physically abused them, while others routinely assigned them to fatigue duty, performing the most undesirable duties.18

Fought at Palmito Hill:

- 68th Regiment Infantry U.S.C.T., 1866
- 76th Regiment Infantry U.S.C.T., 1865
- 87th Regiment Infantry U.S.C.T., Brazos Santiago 1864
- 95th Regiment Infantry U.S.C.T., Brazos Santiago 1864
- 38th Regiment Infantry U.S.C.T., Brownsville 1865-1867, 192 died
- 28th Regiment Indiana Infantry- U.S. Colored Troops Brazos Santiago 1865
Total enlisted men killed in battle 45; died of disease 21219 “We left our wives and little ones to follow the stars and stripes…” Chaplain Garland White, 28th Colored Regiment, September 19, 1865. After the war was over the Army sent to 28th to Brazos Santiago to keep the peace, they served there from June 1865 until November 1865 when they mustered out. They lost 212 men to disease.

• 29th Regiment Connecticut Infantry- U.S. Colored Troops, arrived at Brazos Santiago July 3, 1865, marched to Fort Brown and mustered out in October 1865. 152 died of disease.

• 22nd Regiment U.S.C.T., (only all black corps in US history) 22nd sent to Texas border to protect against French invasion. Many believe 22nd sent to border to avoid a flood in the job market so soon after the surrender and to avoid renewing a flame in the beaten South.20 The 22nd Regiment left Texas in October 1865.

• 127th U.S.C.T., arrived Brazos Santiago in summer 1865 mustered out in October 1865.


• 109th Kentucky U.S.C.T. Brazos Santiago March 1866

• 9th Regiment U.S.C.T., Brownsville, 1865-Oct. 1866. 266 died from disease

• 19th Regiment U.S.C.T., Brownsville June 1865, until Jan 1867.


• 114 Kentucky U.S.C.T. Brownsville 1865-1867

• 115 Kentucky U.S.C.T. Rio Grande 1866

• 116 Kentucky U.S.C.T. Brazos Santiago 1865-1867 organized at Camp Nelson. Camp Nelson trained over 10,000 black soldiers. It was the largest recruitment and training camp for black troops in Kentucky and the third largest in the US. At first these Black soldiers were limited to military labor details, building fortifications, working on roads and bridges, and providing all sorts of manual labor, including cooking.

• 117 Kentucky U.S.C.T. Brazos Santiago 1867

• 118 Kentucky U.S.C.T. Brownsville 1866

• 122 Kentucky U.S.C.T. Brownsville 1866

• 36th U.S.C.T. Private John Ives died Brazos Santiago November 5, 1865, Died of Diarrhea Post Hospital Brazos Santiago Texas.

The following represent a very small example of the men of the 36th who died at the Brazos Santiago Post Hospital in 1865 and their reported cause of death:

• Thomas Covanant 6/10/66 Dropsy

• Marshall Pritchett 6/27/66 Disease

• Peter James 7/17/66 Heart Disease

• Solomon Atwood 8/31/66 Cholera

• Sandy Sykes 9/1/66 Cholera

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Cornelius Harris 9/1/66 Cholera
Clinton Shorter 9/1/66 Cholera
March Williams 9/8/66 Cholera
36th U.S.C.T. Toney Wilson (Drummer) age 15, Died 8/25/65 Brazos Santiago of Pneumonia

The following is a brief narrative of Joseph Higgerson of Company A of the 62nd U.S.C.T. who fought at Palmito and who made it home: From the Missouri Slave Narratives: “How did uncle Joe get home?”

When they set the “niggahs” free, the boss men come out and read de papers to’em sayin’ dey was free. When I was discharged from de army I told em I have no home, where shall I go? I decided to go back to Boonville buy all my family was scattered. But I was lucky; someone had started to build a shack, and had not finished it. I got permission to finish here and there and made it into a home. I never been without a home since. My wife and I lived together.

Narrative from the 28th U.S.C.T who served at Brazos Santiago:

We did our job. And part of our job was also to protect the settlers in Texas. But the Texans, who had been on the losing side of the war, felt that they were being penalized by having African American soldiers there. The Texans were supposed to have set their slaves free, but they wouldn’t do it. So we had to help in setting the slaves free in Texas. And that made the Texans a little mad. Texas was the most horrendous place for us that we’d ever been in our military lives, Texas was. It was so hot. Men died from malaria, from scurvy. And just like our medical facilities had been during the war, the facilities for these sick men were inadequate.

At Brazos Santiago there are many unanswered questions. Many of the death records are signed by T.W. Willoughby. However, searches of military records do not show this person had anything to do with hospital, or disposition/documentation of death. He was not a Surgeon and was not an enlisted man. “There is a tremendous amount of information from here that seems to be deliberately missing, even among the military records.”

All soldiers White and Black who served on the Rio Grande during the Civil War faced similar conditions, however all agree that the conditions for the Colored troops were worst of all, “epidemics of deadly disease that steadily took men from the ranks, the harsh frontier climate, and arduous service in an untamed land.” Direct observation from African American soldiers in the years after the Civil War recount how African American soldiers were segregated. U.S.C.T. were often ordered to camp apart from White troops, on low and swampy land. Latrines and water sources were located in close proximity further causing disease in the ranks of the U.S.C.T. Additionally, African American soldiers were often afforded inferior rations, clothing and equipment. Their diets often consisted of stale moldy bread and hardtack.

While many requirements were harsh, even cruel, the following is the record of an actual order by the White Officers that had a positive effect:

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Brazos Santiago, Texas, October 29th 1864  
General Orders No. 35

Hereafter when any soldier of this command is found to be, or to have been, playing cards, he will be placed, standing, in some prominent position in the camp with book in hand, and required then and there to learn a considerable lesson in reading and spelling: and if unwilling to learn, he will be compelled by hunger to do so. When men are found gambling in any way, the money at stake will be seized and turned into the Regt. Hospital fund. No freed slave who cannot read well has a right to waste the time and opportunity here given him to fit himself for the position of a free citizen. This order will be read twice to this command, and copied in each order book. By order of Lieut. Col. David Branson, Regiment Commander.

The following shows that Colonel Barrett took great pride in “promoting” literacy in his Black troops:

In his Farewell to Arms Ceremony, to the 62nd USC Infantry on January 4, 1866, at Fort Ringgold, Rio Grande City, Texas, Col. Theodore H. Barrett, stated, with the utmost of pride that, “of four hundred and thirty one men, ninety-nine have learned to read and write understandingly: two hundred and eighty-four can read; three hundred and thirty seven can spell in words of two syllables and are learning to read, not more than ten men have failed to learn the alphabet.”

Colored Death: 1864-1866

Examination of the death and burial records for Black troops once buried at the National Cemetery at Fort Brown, Texas, clearly indicate that the years 1864-1866 were dedicated to death and dying on the part of the Colored troops. United States Colored troops arrived on the lower Rio Grande at Fort Brown and Brazos Santiago in 1864. In the years from 1858 to 1863, very few deaths are recorded for Fort Brown. Admittedly, during a large portion of this time Fort Brown was in turmoil due to its alternating possession by Federal and Confederate troops. Records indicate that in 1864, 33 soldiers were buried of whom only 3 were U.S. Colored troops, the majority of deaths that year were attributed to the white Federal soldiers from the 91st, 94th and 99th, Illinois Regiments. Also represented were soldiers from Iowa, Indiana, Maine and Wisconsin. The first Colored troops arrived at Brazos Santiago in 1864 but marched inland and did not serve at Fort Brown until 1865. Hence, there is record of only four Colored troops being buried at Fort Brown in 1864. This is not to say that members of the 34 Indiana U.S.C.T. did not die and were not buried at other places in South Texas like Brazos Santiago or White’s Ranch. Regimental records indicate that over all during the Civil War 12,491 Indianans died.

The year 1865 saw the heaviest causalities evidenced by the burials at the Fort Brown National Cemetery. Cemetery records indicate that a total of 414 soldiers died that year, 351 Colored troops and 63 White troops. Eighty seven percent of the deaths in 1865 were Negroses. Of those who died, more than 70% died of disease. That means in a single year, 245 Negro troops died of disease. If examined by month, the death rate shows a clearly disturbing pattern of deplorable conditions. In the months January 1865 to June 1865, only 11 troops died. In July
1865, 39 troops died, more than one a day for that month alone. In August 1865, 118 soldiers died, an average of 4 a day. In September 1865, 97 soldiers died an average of 3 per day. In October 1865, 75 soldiers an average of more than 2 per day. In November 1865, 47 soldiers died or more than one per day. August and September were clearly months of misery and dying for Colored Troops on the Rio Grande. During the heaviest weeks, it was not unusual for between 5 and 10 soldiers to die per day. Beyond the horror of the suffering and death, it is unimaginable to think of the emotional condition of the men who were required to dispose of the remains of their comrades. Large numbers of men from Regiments and Companies were wiped out. In examining the death and burial records by Regiments and Companies, something that has never been undertaken before, it is obvious that several were hit particularly hard in the summer and fall of 1865. The 118th Regiment U.S.C.T. lost 43 men; followed by the 43rd Regiment with 36; the 38th Regiment with 34; the 19th Regiment with 33 deaths and so on. Ten Regiments lost 10 or more men that summer.28

In 1866, the number of deaths was greatly reduced to 142 for the year. A large number of the U.S.C.T. was mustered out of the Army at Fort Brown and at Brazos Santiago in 1865, making their way home. Those troops that were retained were deployed along the border for the purpose of maintaining peace and protecting Americans. The conditions of contagious disease that were present with such a large concentrations of men in unsanitary conditions were greatly reduced in each year after 1865. In 1866 there were 134 recorded deaths; 1867, 18; and in 1868 there were eleven. During the late 1870's and into the early 1880's with recurring epidemics of Yellow Fever the annual death rate rose and fell but never again would it approach the levels of those deaths experienced by the original Colored troops in 1864 to 1865.

It had long been held by the U.S. Army that Fort Brown and the Lower Rio Grande was one of the unhealthiest military stations in the United States. In his 1893 description of the Post, Chatfield states that Fort Brown was the third sickliest post in the U.S. The Surgeon General made this assumption based upon post hospital visits although many were multiple visits. Chatfield, a White officer, would it seems, attempt to excuse the reality of illness in Brownsville by apologizing, “These reports are somewhat misleading to the general public, as they are made up from the Post Surgeon’s reports of the number of cases treated, without stating how many times the same names were entered on the hospital records, and it will readily be seen that a small number of men going on the sick report would soon aggregate a large number of “cases;” this would indicate a general prevalence of disease, unless the actual circumstances were explained.”29 No matter that the majorities were Colored troops or that their rate of death vis-à-vis White soldiers would support the higher rate and incidence of disease for Colored troops. Chatfield totally misled the readers in his reports in the late 19th century in his statement that, “the death rate has always been small, even in those periods when epidemics prevailed in its immediate vicinity.”30 In fact, an examination of the records of death for Colored troops on the Lower Rio Grande, from 1864 to 1906 does not support his statement. Nor does the reality of the more than 3,000 Federal troops buried at Fort Brown (both Black and White). In fact, many thousands of Colored troops came to South Texas and never returned home. See also, Frank Pierce’s comment on the Negro Raid on Bagdad.31

Contrary to the apologies of Chatfield, Joseph C. Sides, Chaplain, U.S. Army, writes in his Fort Brown Historical: History of Fort Brown, Texas Border Post on the Rio Grande, 1942, speaks of the “Health and Sanitation” conditions at Fort Brown.32 Characterizing the years 1868 to 1900 Sides quotes from the Surgeon General’s Report, 1870, “…the principal diseases being diarrhea, intermittent and remittent fever...I believe that most of the cases of diarrhea are produced by
some excess in either eating or drinking, and that also by the water.” The Surgeon General reported that during the month of November 1888, 58 percent of the command at Fort Brown was taken on sick report for the intermittent fever alone. “This does not fully represent the ill health of the command.” In 1889, nearly all the men and their families on the post were taken ill with malaria. Yellow fever also constantly menaced Fort Brown. Command recommended that the troops (Colored) be changed yearly. In his 1890 report to Congress, the Surgeon General reported that Fort Brown was the unhealthiest Fort in the U.S. with 3,710 admissions. Of course no reference or connection was made to the relationship between how Colored troops were clothed, fed and housed at Fort Brown and the incidence of disease. The handwriting on the wall was included in the report with the observation that, “were the (sick and death rates at Fort Brown) expunged from the list of our military stations the prevalence of malarial disease in our Army would be greatly reduced.”

Buffalo Soldiers: 1866-1880’s

At the end of the War of the Rebellion, the nation turned its eyes to a few very clearly defined military objectives. First and foremost, the nation needed to maintain peace and guarantee that the defeated Confederate forces would not regroup and again threaten the nation. Secondly, the nation needed to protect Americans and to maintain the peace along the Mexican border. Large groups of former Confederates, Mexican Nationalists, and the French occupation were all a constant irritant along the border in the years after the Civil War. And finally, the nation needed to subdue the Native populations of the Western U.S. in order to ensure continued expansion and settlement of the area.

After the Civil War, the Union had a very small veteran army. The majority of Federal forces was recruited from state militias and was not regular Army. The survivors of the war had enlisted only for the period of the war. The large number (estimates from 180,000 to 220,000) of African American U.S.C.T. who participated in the War of the Rebellion did not have homes to return to (approximately 38,000 died in the war) and therefore, African Americans were “allowed” to join the regular Army. The thousands who did were sent to the U.S. Mexican border and to the West. African American Civil War veterans enlisted considering the $13 a month salary to be a far greater destiny than slavery. A brief discussion of the Buffalo Soldiers is relevant to the conditions and treatment of African American soldiers along the Rio Grande and in Brownsville, Texas after the Civil War.

Tucker tells us that the story of the Buffalo soldier (the black infantryman after the Civil War) has overlooked the impressive contributions and sacrifices of these men. Finally, in 1866, the U.S. Congress allowed former slaves who had served in the Union Army (U.S.C.T.) to enlist in the Regular Army. Before his death, President Lincoln stated that African American troops, “demonstrated in blood their right to the ballot and citizenship.” In 1866, Washington considered the use of Black troops along the Rio Grande and in the West a “social experiment.” African American veterans of the Civil War were selected in the formation of Two Cavalry and four Infantry Regiments. Created were the 9th and 10th Cavalry and the 24th and 25th Infantry Regiments (38th, 39th, 40th, and 41st. Negro Infantry Regiments are also mentioned). The 9th Cavalry was ordered to Texas in June of 1867. Along with the 9th Cavalry, the 24th and 25th Infantry were considered “Texas’ Buffalo Soldiers.” Their motto was “We can, we will.” Texas Buffalo Soldiers protected the stage lines and the mail, fought against Mexican bandits and French soldiers, as well as raiding Indians. “Many Texans felt that they were being subjected to a
particularly harsh form of post-war reconstruction by Washington, and saw the assignment of Black troopers as a deliberate attempt by the Union to further humiliate them. With such an attitude, the relationship between the troopers and locals was often at or near the boiling point.\textsuperscript{41}

During the years after the Civil War Buffalo soldiers served with great distinction along the Rio Grande and in the West. They also suffered unthinkable hardship that some would say White soldiers never experienced. Many White Army Surgeons held the stereotype that African Americans were more prone to disease such as an epidemic than a White soldier. Records show that during the Cholera epidemics that swept the nations in 1866 and 1867 that African Americans died at a greater rate that White soldiers. Today, however, it has come to light that the inhumane conditions suffered by the African American soldiers were not the experience of the White soldiers.

Colonel Edward Hatch was the commander of the 9\textsuperscript{th} at Regiment Headquarters in Greenville, Louisiana organized, “all twelve companies of the regiment by February, 1867, even though only eleven officers had reported for duty at that time. In March, Hatch received orders transferring the regiment to Texas. Two companies, L and M, were to be stationed at Brownsville on the Rio Grande…”\textsuperscript{42} Additionally, at Fort Brown and to the West, African American soldiers were assigned tasks that White soldiers were not. Manual labor including road building and construction of quarters for White soldiers was routine. Meanwhile, African American soldiers were required to live in deplorable conditions. One of the most famous Buffalo soldiers, Sergeant Henry Parker, had served with the 101\textsuperscript{st} U.S.C.T., and saw action at White’s Ranch/Palmito Hill near Brownsville, Texas. In 1867, he was assigned to the 10\textsuperscript{th} US Cavalry of Buffalo Soldiers.\textsuperscript{43} In 1866, Buffalo soldiers of the 38\textsuperscript{th} Infantry were decimated by cholera in the West, and similar epidemics decimated the African American soldiers stationed at Fort Brown. Tucker states that, “For every 1,000 Western soldiers, for example, surgeons on the frontier treated 1,800 medical cases on an annual basis. Some 1,550 cases were disease and illness related while only 250 cases consisted of battle wounds and other injuries.”\textsuperscript{44}

The conditions and treatment of African American Buffalo Soldiers in the years after the Civil War led to a situation of discrimination and mistreatment of these heroes and especially their mistreatment in the growing communities in which they were stationed. Over the course of the years, 1868 to the turn of the century, the Buffalo soldiers proved themselves some of the best-trained and most heroic units in the U.S. Army. In spite of their outstanding record, the 9\textsuperscript{th} Cavalry was involved in racial disturbances at Fort Ringgold in Rio Grande City Texas in 1899, and the 25\textsuperscript{th} Regiment was accused of attacking civilians in the so-called Brownsville Raid in 1906, the 24\textsuperscript{th} Regiment was involved in the Houston Riot of 1917. While elements of the 9\textsuperscript{th} were sent to Cuba and took part in the charge up San Juan Hill, July 1, 1898, battle tested African American soldiers were not sent to France during World War I, although they represented a large force of experienced noncommissioned officers for other black units.\textsuperscript{45} According to Edward Scott in his 1996 book, “The Unwept: Black American Soldiers and the Spanish American War,” the 9\textsuperscript{th} and 10\textsuperscript{th} Calvary and the 24\textsuperscript{th} and 25 Infantry Colored Troops were more responsible than any other group for the victory on San Juan Hill. Five Hundred Black men of the 25\textsuperscript{th} Infantry were locked in hand-to-hand combat for four hours. It is a matter of great irony that as a result of the Battle of San Juan Hill and the heroism displayed by Colored troops, that the “post-battle spotlight shone brightly on the Buffalo Soldiers and that many Negro homes had prints of the famous charge of the Colored troops up San Juan Hill.”\textsuperscript{47}
Buffalo Soldier Postscript

African American Buffalo soldiers who served along the Rio Grande in the 1870’s received no “official” recognition for their service and were not eligible for pensions. In 1927 Congress established a law that made Black soldiers eligible for pensions. “When David Morgan, a veteran of the 24th Infantry (served at Fort Brown) died in 1917, wholly without means, the Brownsville, Texas post of the Grand Army of the Republic, GAR, and Army officers at Fort Brown bore the expenses.” How ironic that eight short years after the Buffalo Soldiers of the 25th Regiment became national heroes in Cuba that they would be transferred to Fort Brown in Brownsville, Texas and in less than one month be forced to leave by a racist community and drummed out of the Army in disgrace, in many cases these were men who were veterans of Cuba.

William Crawford Gorgas and Yellow Fever: 1882

When Lieutenant William Crawford Gorgas arrived at Fort Brown a Yellow Fever epidemic was in full course. The Surgeon General advised the Post Commander at Fort Brown that, “I’m sending you the most progressive young surgeon under my command.” Gorgas was almost immediately stricken with yellow fever. Even though his direct orders commanded him to stay away from the sick, Gorgas constantly disobeyed. Gorgas’ career contribution would be the “mosquito” theory of the transfer of disease. While it is documented that there was an epidemic of Yellow fever at Fort Brown 1882-1883, death and burial records do not indicate that an inordinate number of Colored soldiers died during his short tenure in Brownsville. This fact, debunks a commonly held myth that Gorgas, “experimented” on Black soldiers resulting in their death from Yellow Fever. Gorgas learned greatly about the need for sanitation while at Fort Brown assisting him in combating communicable diseases in the military. In fact, Gorgas “played no part in determining the cause of Yellow Fever.” The man most credited for his work on Yellow Fever and its “cure” was the Cuban physician Dr. Carlos J. Finlay. Gorgas would work on the Panama Canal project and ultimately became Surgeon General of the United States. Today the name Gorgas is associated with scientific activities at The University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College located on the former Fort Brown reservation. For more on Gorgas and the Panama Canal see David McCullough’s book The Path Between the Seas: The Creation of the Panama Canal 1870-1914.

The Ultimate Insult: The Brownsville Raid 1906

Available historical documents combined with a century of secondary historical analysis clearly indicates that African American soldiers were admitted to the U.S. Army during the Civil War and then again after the Civil War as a stop gap measure. In Texas the conditions they faced and their treatment was particularly harsh resulting in approximately thirty percent of their force being lost to disease. In Texas communities, open racism and discrimination promoted a constant tension between the African American soldiers, whose mission was to protect and defend the community, and the hatred of the community for their protectors.

The racial tension palpable in Texas surfaced in the early 20th century in several notable cases. Of particular significant to understanding the plight of African American soldiers on the Rio Grande, is an incident known as “The 1906 Brownsville Affair.” U.S.C.T.s followed by regular Army Colored Troops had served in and around Brownsville, Texas from 1864 to
1906. By all accounts their experience on the Rio Grande was horrendous, fraught with racism, horrible living conditions, disease and ultimately untimely death. After the turn of the 20th century, Brownsville was booming. African Americans experienced a host of new difficulties. Competition for jobs at the bottom of the economic ladder with the Mexican population was one of the major considerations for keeping Blacks out of town. In Brownsville, an ample supply of cheap labor had always been delivered by Mexicans through a separation of race and class. The presence of Blacks mustering out of the Army posed a serious complication to a delicate balance. Additionally, Brownsville people in the early 20th century identified with the defeated South and harbored racist attitudes toward African Americans. In her book, *The Brownsville Affair*, Ann Lane claims that “race riots began to replace lynchings as methods of repression and expressions of hatred.”

For more than two months in the summer of 1906, Brownsville townsfolk anticipated and feared the arrival of the greatly decorated First Battalion, 25th Regiment Infantry (Colored). White troops at Fort Brown were to be replaced by Negro troops. Arriving on July 28, 1906, Companies B, C and D, consisting of one hundred and seventy Black soldiers and five White officers paraded past very somber towns folk to Fort Brown. These particular Negro soldiers were amongst the best trained and most experienced and disciplined in the U.S. Army. In spite of their honorable service to our nation, the 25th Regiment Infantry (Colored) had experienced racial trouble with Texans in Kansas and had been routed away from Austin against protests of their officers on their way to Brownsville.

Addressing racial problems in the Army of the day, Secretary of War, Taft wrote, “that a certain amount of race prejudice between white and black seems to have become almost universal throughout the country, and no matter where colored troops are sent there are always some who make objections to their coming. It is a fact, however, as shown by our records, that colored troops are quite well disciplined and behaved as the average of other troops, and it does not seem logical to anticipate any greater trouble from them than from the rest.” What Taft did not understand was that in Brownsville, the “trouble” would not come from the Colored troops but from the townspeople.

Within two weeks of their arrival, a racial incident involving a “White Woman” was concocted arousing extreme hostility in the civilian population. The Brownsville Herald reported, “Infamous Outrage: Negro Soldier Invaded Private Premises Last Night and Attempted to Seize a White Lady.” The following day, August 13, 1906, shooting broke out in downtown Brownsville and the Negro troops were immediately accused. Less than two weeks later on August 25, 1906, and less than one month from their arrival in Brownsville the 25th was withdrawn. In October of 1906, all the Colored Companies withdraw from Brownsville were “drummed” out of the Army. It would take most of the 20th century before these men would be completely exonerated by Congress. Some notable Brownsville historians never recognized their innocence, and claimed to this author until their death, that the Colored troops were culpable even if it had been proven beyond the shadow of a doubt that the incident in Brownsville, Texas was an internal set-up. The Brownsville incident that became a national scandal was promulgated by local racism, a final blow to African American troops in service to the Nation on the Rio Grande.

A National Cemetery Abandoned: A National Disgrace

Fort Brown, Texas, was the principal U.S. military post for the region south of San Antonio and Laredo to the Gulf of Mexico. Other U.S. military installations in the region included Fort
Ringgold at Rio Grande City and Brazos Santiago on the coast near Port Isabel. The history of the U.S. military at Fort Brown covered a century from 1846 to 1946. After World War II, Fort Brown was decommissioned. The base closure was a political decision and shortsighted given U.S.-Mexico border history in the second half of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. One would suspect that over the course of the second half of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, 1848-1900, military men would die, in battle, by accident and from disease. But when the history of Fort Brown is examined two issues are apparent, 1) a higher than average number of Negro troops were stationed at Fort Brown compared to White troops and, 2) A higher percentage of Negro troops died of disease, relative to their White counterparts who were also stationed at Fort Brown.\textsuperscript{57}

For the period beginning with the creation of the Black units in the Civil War and running through 1906 with the departure of Black troops from Brownsville, the available records on disease and death are compelling. This paper focused on the period of the Civil War and the immediate post-Civil War period including the French Intervention and the Cortina era, approximately, 1862-1867. Also examined was the period that William C. Gorgas served at Fort Brown, 1882-1883. My interest in the Civil War period is due to the exceptionally high number of deaths that occurred during that time. Interest in the Gorgas phase and his work on Yellow Fever concerned allegations concerning his “experimentation” with Negro soldiers, a story told to me by credible Brownsville historians over the past 30 years. This research required me to examine the question, “did William Gorgas experiment on Negro soldiers “subjecting” them to Yellow Fever, causing their death?” Had this experimentation been covered up by the U.S. military?

It is important to note that for most of its history, 1848 until 1911, Fort Brown had a National Cemetery located on the Fort property (Fort Brown National Cemetery was located on the peninsula in the Fort Brown Resaca). Interment records for the cemetery were extant at the time that the cemetery was “closed” in 1909 and moved in 1911.\textsuperscript{58} The human remains buried at the Fort Brown National Cemetery were re-interred at Alexandria, Louisiana in 1909-1911.\textsuperscript{59} This was a mere five years after the infamous Brownsville Raid in which the 25\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Colored troops were “set up” by Brownsville citizens ultimately causing some of the most decorated soldiers in the U.S. Army to be drummed out of the Army in disgrace.

Students of Brownsville history owe a debt of gratitude to Chula and Sam Griffin as well as to Bruce Aiken for their work on 19\textsuperscript{th} century burial records for the “Old City Cemetery” as well as for Fort Brown. The Griffins examined the records of the U.S. Quartermaster General, in 1987, produced a monumental work of transcription and alphabetization of the burial of some 3,000 soldiers buried at Fort Brown. These soldiers had died at approximately 24 different locations in the Southeastern Texas region between 1846 and 1909 and were buried at the National Cemetery at Fort Brown. In the forward to their work the Griffin’s comment on the inhumanity of the deaths and burials of Colored soldiers, They stated, “This book has been prepared in the interest of genealogy in the hope that it will be helpful to some genealogist searching for a relative or a person that was buried in a Military Cemetery in Texas prior to 1906.

The National Cemetery at Fort Brown was believed to have been the last location for at least 183 Officers and 3,600 enlisted men the majority of whom were Negro.\textsuperscript{60} The March 22, 1936, issue of the \textit{Brownsville Herald} commenting on the closure of disinterment of the National Cemetery at Fort Brown stated that, “Most of the men who were killed in these battles were volunteers, and the records of events during the war (Civil War) were kept badly so that it was practically impossible to identify the dead.”\textsuperscript{61} The \textit{Herald} failed to state the obvious; that the majority of the so-called unknown soldiers buried at Fort Brown were African Americans. Furthermore, the article stated that the decision to move the dead followed the closure of the Fort
after the “Negro Raid” on Brownsville (1906). The townspeople were aware that the majority of the dead in the National Cemetery at Fort Brown were Colored troops and presumably did not want them buried in Brownsville.

Over the course of the years, 1864 to 1906, the majority of the troops stationed at Fort Brown were U.S.C.T. Brownsville history documents cholera epidemics in 1866 and yellow fever epidemics in 1867, 1892 and 1893, during the period that Colored troops were stationed on the Lower Rio Grande. In his 1893 tome, *The Twin Cities*, Lieut. W. Chatfield described the cemetery and its surroundings as follows, “An elliptical sheet of water, called the “Lagoon” (we call it Fort Brown Resaca) lies in the center of the reservation (Fort Brown reservation)... Surrounded by this lagoon and the river, is an island of twenty-five acres, which, previous to 1846, was covered with timber... A National Cemetery is located on this island, containing nearly three thousand graves. Many of the graves were formerly submerged at every high stage of water, and it was all times impracticable to do anything beyond a comparatively shallow resting place for those who were to be buried there; but a levee has been constructed, which prevents such overflows.” Chatfield described that both Confederate and Federal Civil War dead were buried in the Fort Brown National Cemetery as well as those who had been buried at the “original” post cemetery. Chatfield reminds us (in 1893) of the many epidemics in Brownsville and Fort Brown and especially the African American troops stationed there both during and after the Civil War. “During an epidemic of smallpox, soon after the last war (Civil War) while a large garrison was kept here (Fort Brown) six hundred (600) colored soldiers fell victims to the scourge, and their bodies were interred in this cemetery. There have been three yellow fever epidemics since that time (1865-1893), but owing to the troops being promptly removed to isolated camps, the mortality among them was very slight.”

Today, the “Dead of Fort Brown,” Texas are located at the Alexandria National Cemetery at Pineville, Louisiana. The soldiers removed from Fort Brown in 1911 are identified by three markers: 1)“Remains of 1,537 Unknown Federal Soldiers removed from the United States National Cemetery Brownsville, Texas; 2) Remains of 16 unknown Federal Soldiers Removed from Fort Ringgold, Texas 1911 and 3) Jacob Brown, Major 7th U.S. Infantry May 9, 1846. Nearly one hundred years after their removal from Fort Brown and reburial in Louisiana, certain inconsistencies in the documentation of the military dead from Fort Brown remain. Military burial records (1846-1906) and re-interment records (1909-1911) indicate that more than 3,000 persons were buried at the Fort Brown National Cemetery. It is difficult to determine how many of those are African American but those identifiable as such may be counted at more than 1,500. As cited above, the National Cemetery in Alexandria documents a single grave with the remains of 1,537 “unknown” Federal Soldiers. Examination of the “general” burial records of more than 7,000 soldiers at Alexandria does not readily identify the 1,500 or so “unaccounted” for soldiers from Brownsville. It could be that they are buried in the general cemetery but they might not be as well, it’s hard to say. In locating the results of a study of Vermont Civil War dead originally buried in Texas, the report indicates that the entire cemetery at Fort Brown, 3,007 bodies was moved to Alexandria. Additionally, it states that all Civil War soldiers from Vermont (6 soldiers) who were originally buried at Brazos Santiago and Brownsville, Texas have been moved to Alexandria, Louisiana National Cemetery further supporting the possibility of their being buried in the general population.
Final Comments and Recommendations

There is no reference or hint to the fact that the majority of the troops buried first at Fort Brown and now at Alexandria, Louisiana are Colored.\(^6\) Black troops served and died on the Lower Rio Grande during some of the most critical times in our national and regional history yet we fail to recognize them in their final resting place or for their accomplishments. The fact that there is a mass grave that contains the remains of 1,537 “unknown” soldiers from Fort Brown, Texas, may have been acceptable for the early 1900s, when it was established, but it is not for today. We know their names, their Regiments and Companies, where they served and died as well as their race. In no way are they unknown. This information has simply not been adequately communicated from National Cemetery to National Cemetery for reasons cited above. These soldiers did not have a voice. At a minimum, the following should be done.

At Alexandria, Louisiana:

- The marker that identifies the mass grave 1,537 “unknown” soldiers from Fort Brown should indicate that the majority are African American.
- An effort should be made if there is to be a record of their names for the benefit of their descendants. Numerous families are still searching for their ancestors.
- A brief history of the history of African American troops and their life and death on the Border should be available for researchers and descendants.

At Brownsville, Texas:

- An historical marker should be prominently erected at Fort Brown, on the campus of The University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College, commemorating the contributions of African American soldiers on the Lower Rio Grande and at Fort Brown. Importantly, it should recount the hardships and sacrifice of human life endured by former slaves in the initial years after emancipation and for their service to the nation in the Civil War and Post War period.

The University of Texas at Brownsville

Endnotes

1 For the purpose of this paper, the labels African American, Black, Colored and Negro are used interchangeably and where appropriate for the historical context. For example, if in particular passage the references used were referring to Colored troops then I used that term, but attempted to alternate terms. I ask for the readers understanding in advance in that it is with great reverence that I tell this story and that it can not be adequately achieved without the use of all of the racial labels of the day. Although out of respect there is one particular pejorative term that I refuse to use, a variant does occur only once in an oral history from a Colored soldier who returned home from the Civil War.

2 In searching the internet for material for this article I came across numerous persons seeking information on what happened to their Civil War ancestor. Many were African American, and some had been stationed on the Rio Grande and at Fort Brown.

"Ibid.," p. 36.

The Colonel Eli Lilly Civil War Museum, [www.indianathecivilwar.com](http://www.indianathecivilwar.com).

Ibid., Lincoln December 8, 1863.

[http://vermontcivilwar.org](http://vermontcivilwar.org) p.11.


Pierce, p.40.


This research found reference to the following Colored Regiments stationed at or near Fort Brown from 1864 to 1906: 2nd, 7th, 8th, 9th, 10th, 16th, 19th, 22nd, 23rd, 24th, 25th, 28th, 29th, 31st, 34th, 36th, 38th, 39th, 40th, 41st, 42nd, 45th, 46th, 62nd, 65th, 67th, 68th, 76th, 77th, 80th, 81st, 85th, 87th, 91st, 94th, 95th, 99th, 109th, 101st, 114th, 115th, 116th, 117th, 118th, 127th.

Pierce, p.52.

[http://www.buffalosoldier.net](http://www.buffalosoldier.net).


[http://www.mmcwr.org/slavenarrativehiggerson.htm](http://www.mmcwr.org/slavenarrativehiggerson.htm)


Tucker, p.102.

Tucker, p. 172.

[http://www.buffalosoldier.net](http://www.buffalosoldier.net) Soldiers from the 62nd and 65th USCT founded the Lincoln Institute in Jefferson City, Mo. Now Lincoln University. Each year, Lincoln University holds its Founder's Day Celebration, which commemorates the soldiers of the 62nd and 65th USCT who were stationed at Brazos Santiago and forced to learn to read.


Griffin, Griffin and Aiken, unpublished manuscript, Hunter Room, Oliveira Library, UTB/TSC.


Chatfield, p.30.

Pierce, p.57.


Sides, p121.

Sides, p.123.

Sides p.124.

Sides p.126.
37 Tucker, p. xiii.
38 Tucker, p. 69.
40 http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/park/admin/buffalo/
43 http://www.buffalosoldier.net/
44 Tucker, p. 179.
51 Ibid. p. 410.
55 Ibid., p. 22.
56 Ibid., p. 29.
57 For the purpose of this paper I have access to the secondary death records from Fort Brown during the period in question. I have not made an actual comparison to other military installations in the U.S. for the same period.
58 We are fortunate for the dedicated historical work of Chula T. and Sam S. Griffin as well as that of Bruce Aiken. Their work on both the Fort Brown National Cemetery and the Old Brownsville Cemetery (1987) allowed this analysis to be performed.
59 Griffin, forward.
60 The Brownsville Herald, March 22, 1936.
61 Ibid., p. 1936.
63 Chatfield, p. 28.
64 National Cemetery at Alexandria Louisiana, 209 E. Shamrock St., Pineville, Louisiana; http://www.cemva.gov/nchp/alexandrialah.htm
65 http://vermontcivilwar.org/barry/roh-index.shtml
66 Resting Places of United States Colored Troops http://www/coax.net/people/lwf/cem_usct.htm

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In the 19th Century, yellow fever was feared throughout the southern United States. Once contracted, the often-fatal disease simply had to run its course, since there was no known cure. It was all the more terrible because the cause was unknown. Although the mosquito had been proposed as a carrier as early as the 18th Century, the idea was not widely accepted even though it ultimately proved correct. Some authorities thought it was carried by the wind, and referred to the “yellow fever breeze”. In Brownsville, where the disease was a regular occurrence, people believed it was contracted from oranges and bananas, and mustard and whiskey were considered remedies. No one associated it with the many stagnant resacas in the area, or with the mosquitoes that bred there.¹

The local military post, Fort Brown, was not a choice assignment, but could be pleasant. Relations with Mexico were generally good and Indians had long since ceased to be a threat in the fort’s jurisdiction.² The routine consisted mainly of garrison duty and patrolling the Rio Grande. On warm summer evenings officers’ families would sit on their verandas and visit. One such night, in August, 1882, the family of Capt. William T. Lyster was sitting outside when the new assistant medical officer, Lieutenant William Crawford Gorgas was brought up and introduced. Dr. Gorgas was the son of Gen. Josiah Gorgas, who had been the Confederacy’s chief of ordinance. He was born in Toulminville, Alabama, on October 3, 1854, and trained at Bellevue Hospital Medical College. He entered the Army Medical Corps in 1880, and was assigned to Fort Duncan and Fort Clara, in West Texas. On August 11, 1882, he reported to Fort Brown. His pleasant manners and southern accent made a good impression on Miss Marie Doughty, Lyster’s sister-in-law, who was on a visit to the post.³

Gorgas had come at a bad time. Already, fever had broken out in Brownsville, and had spread to the soldiers in the post. At first, the doctors thought it was dengue fever, another tropical illness. However, as Miss Doughty later recalled, “The severity of the cases and the large number of deaths had made the civilians and the army authorities uneasy.”⁴ Reports reached army departmental headquarters in San Antonio, where a senior medical officer, Col. Joseph Smith, was sent to investigate personally, and see what precautions were needed. “He did not long remain in doubt as to the nature of the epidemic,” Miss Doughty wrote. “Yellow fever was rampant.”⁵

The army reacted immediately. Headquarters company, the band, and other companies in which the disease had not yet appeared were sent to quarantine camps outside the city. The post was declared off limits to citizens of Brownsville and the adjacent Mexican city of Matamoros. A local physician, Dr. Xelou, was contracted to assist the medical officers. A convalescent camp was established on the coast at Point Isabel, in hopes that the fresh air would help the victims who were recovering. The quarantine had only limited impact, since the civilian population was badly hit. The medical staff combined resources, and began moving patients from the city to the post hospital.⁶ Inside the fort, afflicted areas were quarantined as well. Although he had dealt with yellow fever as a medical student in Memphis, Gorgas had never suffered from the disease and so was susceptible.⁷ He was ordered away from infected companies and told not to visit the yellow fever ward of the hospital. Meanwhile, the disease appeared in Captain Lyster’s household, and on August 24, it was placed under quarantine.

One morning, long before daylight, Lieutenant Enoch Crowder, officer of the day and
Gorgas’ roommate, was making his rounds accompanied by Captain A.G. Hemessee. When they reached the hospital, Gorgas’ steward met them and tried to steer them away. They brushed past him, through the yellow fever ward and out the back door. A light was coming from the dead room or morgue, a little brick building behind the hospital. Looking in, they saw Gorgas and Dr. Xelou conducting an autopsy on a fever victim. About that time, Gorgas looked up and saw them. Addressing Hennessee, he said, “Good morning, Captain. Will you come in?” It was, according to Crowder, “the last thing either of us thought of doing.” Hennessee ordered Gorgas out and demanded an explanation. Arrest orders were prepared, although they were never executed. Meanwhile, Gorgas was quarantined to the infected portion of the garrison, next to the Lyster family.8

Shortly afterwards, Miss Doughty said, “I was taken in the early morning hours, with a severe chill, which my brother and sister rightly feared might be the first symptoms of’ yellow fever, “At 4 a.m., Gorgas was summoned, and tended her for several days. The disease ran through all its stages, including the black vomit which almost invariably preceeds death. One morning, Gorgas and Xelou accompanied the body of an officer’s eighteen-year old son to the post cemetery. There were two open graves. “This is Miss Doughty’s grave, “Xelou said, indicating the second one. “Will you read the burial service for her this afternoon?” Gorgas agreed. But when they returned to the hospital, they found the fever had broken and she was recovering.9 Two days later, on October 4, Gorgas himself was listed as “sick in quarters . . . Disease, ‘Yellow Fever’.” His case was not severe, and by the eighth day, he was feeling better. He had also gained immunity from a recurrence of the disease. Still, he remained on the sick list until November 17, when he returned to duty.10

The epidemic ran its course in Brownsville, as it had before. Once again, the old city cemetery had rows of’ headstones with the word “Yellow Fever” carved on them, and the post returns for Fort Brown show a large number of solders taking disability discharge. In December, both Gorgas and Lyster were reassigned to Fort Clark, with a battalion of’ the 19th Infantry. Gorgas remained there until July, 1883, when he returned to Fort Brown. On June 28, 1884, he was transferred to the Department of Dakota.11

Throughout his career, Gorgas continued research. He never determined that yellow fever was caused by mosquitoes, and was slow to accept Dr. Walter Reed’s proof of it. Even so, Gorgas established strict sanitation standards, which helped control not only yellow fever, but many other tropical diseases. In 1898, he was appointed chief sanitary officer of the army, and worked against epidemics in the U.S., in Cuba and during construction of the Panama Canal. He became surgeon general in 1914. During a visit to Great Britain in 1920, he was knighted by King George V. He was still there when he died on July 3. He was given a funeral in St. Paul’s Cathedral with honors for a British major general. His body was returned to the U.S for burial in Arlington National Cemetery.12

The story of Gorges’ battle with yellow fever on a frontier post would end here, except for one footnote. On September 1, 1885, he and Miss Doughty were married. “It would be untrue to say that Yellow Jack was the best man at our wedding,” she wrote, “but it would be perfectly true to say that in a sense, he was an usher.13

South Texas Community College, McAllen
Endnotes


Latinos and latinas significantly contributed to the United States effort during the World War II. Over two-thirds of these Latinos were Mexican Americans. Women worked primarily on the farms or in war-related factories. Men, over 300,000 of them, served in the military in all of the theatres and in all of the Armed Forces. "Their valor helped them garner proportionately more military honors than any other ethnic group. Of fourteen Texans awarded the Medal of Honor, five were Mexican-Americans."1 Of these five, one is from the Rio Grande Valley and he is one of the most courageous soldiers in American history.

His nickname is Pepe, and he was born during the Mexican Revolution. He never knew his father and his mother died when he was only eight years old. He only briefly attended school, but he learned how to read and write on his own. He stood all of 5 ft. 5 inches tall and weighed 130 pounds, yet he was stronger and braver than many men much larger than himself. His life has taken him from the cotton fields of Mission to the battlefields of Europe and back to Texas. His loyalty, his faith and his courage in battle have rarely been equaled. He is one of the most decorated soldiers in American history yet regrettably, little has been written about him in scholarly journals or in textbooks. His name is José Mendoza López. His story is one of courage and honor and he is nothing less than a valiant man, "un hombre valiente."

José M. López was born on July 10, 1910. Although his official birthplace is listed as Mission, Texas, there is evidence to suggest that he was actually born in Veracruz, Veracruz, Mexico. His father, Cayetano López, died before José ever got to know him as his father, and his mother, Candida Mendoza de López, died before his tenth birthday. As an orphan he ran errands and shined shoes to make enough money to eat. His mother had instilled in him a strong faith, and he instilled in himself a strong work ethic. A few years later he moved to the border in search of his uncle, Constancio Mendoza, his mother’s brother. López lived in the Mission area for a few years picking vegetables and cotton. He recalls these difficult times, “When I was looking for my uncle, Constancio Mendoza, I crossed the border and I began to pick crops in the fields. I slept on the cotton seeds. It was very hot. I did this for some time.”2 He soon located his uncle in Brownsville and moved in with him. It was there that López met his future bride, Emilia Piñeda, whose family owned a vegetable stand in the downtown market area. Emilia was still attending school and did not want to get married. López remembers that he “watched her go and come from school. She did not pay much attention to me because she was a girl and wanted to be with her friends.”3 She soon married another man.

In the late 1920’s, López boarded a freight train to California. In Los Angeles he worked at a fish cannery. The hours were long and the work was demanding, but Pepe was accustomed to hard physical labor. In San Francisco he worked as a cook on merchant ships. He worked for a ship line that took him from San Francisco to Los Angeles to Hawaii to Pago Pago to Samoa to New Zealand to Australia and back to the West Coast. On one particular trip he traveled to Tahiti. He missed the departure time for the ship and had to wait several weeks to return on a much smaller boat that had engine problems. His life had gone from the rural farms of South Texas to the urban landscape along the West Coast. López then received his seaman’s papers in New York. On a return trip to Brownsville in 1942, he married his sweetheart, Emilia, who was now a widow with one child. They had a simple but memorable wedding in a nearby church and a reception in her home. Family members from Matamoros and Brownsville attended. The newlyweds then moved
into a small apartment for a time. José worked helping her family at the vegetable stand. To make more money he returned to California to work again on the merchant ships.4

During the early 1930s, the Great Depression significantly affected the United States. Cutbacks in industrial production, plummeting stock prices, and rising unemployment were only three of its effects. For José M. López, this decade also brought change. He pursued a successful boxing career as a lightweight fighter. In seven years, as a “peso ligero” he fought fifty-five fights and lost only two, both by decision. López remembers, “In Atlanta, Georgia I got a manager. I was fighting as a lightweight. Later, I went to Tennessee and won fights there. One time I went to fight a champion in Melbourne, Australia. He was Jackie Burgess, the champion of England. He defeated me. He did not knock me down. He was awarded the fight because he was the champion. There I hung up my gloves. I did not fight again.”5

World War II began after Germany attacked Poland on September 1, 1939. The United States entered the war after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. This event would change the history of the United States and the life of José M. López forever. When the United States declared war on Japan, López had just left Hawaii. He returned to San Francisco and on his arrival he was detained because he was believed to be Japanese. After proving his citizenship he was released. Then he was sent to the East Coast. Soon after he went to San Antonio to enlist. He wanted to be a parachutist, but he was married and had a child. Only single men were allowed to be in the Airborne Division. He was told that he would be in the infantry. López enlisted for the army on April 8, 1942. He joined Company K, 2nd Infantry Division, of the U.S. Army as a machine gunner. Before he left, he made a promesa (“promise”) to la Virgen de Guadalupe asking her to ensure his safety. It was a promise that he would eventually repay, personally.6

He received basic training at Fort Sam Houston, Texas, Camp Roberts, California, and special training in Louisiana and Wisconsin. He was then shipped to Europe where he was trained “for a top-secret mission that would pave the way for the Allied invasion of Nazi-controlled Europe, the June 6, 1944, assault on Omaha Beach.”7 The 23rd Infantry Regiment landed there one day later. The fighting was fierce. López remembers:

We fought very hard and we lost many friends. Before the battles priests would come to pray for us. Many of my fellow soldiers were killed. I would see new faces every day. In many towns we fought from house to house as we advanced to Paris. One time when we boarded a train near Paris it stopped briefly and my friend and I went to bring bread and wine. When we returned, the train was gone. We finally were picked up by an ammunition truck and eventually met up with our company.8

Throughout France, López fought with continuous valor. In Brest, the Second Division fought against the Third Parachute German Division. The city finally fell after thirty-nine days. López received a Purple Heart medal because of the wounds he received during the battle. Close to St. Vith, near the Siegfried Line, López received the Bronze Star Medal for his conspicuous courage against the enemy. It was his valiant actions in Belgium, however, that resulted in his award of the Medal of Honor.9

We arrived in Belgium. We would stay and if at all possible hold our position. I was given an area to protect. I was a machine gunner. I used the gun without the tripod and a lot of ammunition. There along the path, the Germans were
going to enter. They arrived and hit an American tank. I ran to the tank and climbed it to see if anyone was alive. No one was. I got down and went back to my position. After a while, more soldiers arrived. Company K was over there and I was here. I began. I saw the well-dressed Germans. I began to fire. My ammunition ran out. The snow was more than knee deep. I got my gun, put it over my shoulder and went to Krinkelt, Belgium, where there were other soldiers who organized another front. There, they gave me credit for what I did. We fought until another division came in. We composed ourselves, continued fighting and went to Czechoslovakia. There because of the points we had earned in battle they would send us back to the United States. We arrived in Germany and everyone that was with me disembarked. They began to shout that I should put my gear back into the truck. I went with all the trucks to Czechoslovakia. At 3:00 a.m. I fell asleep in the hallway.10

The action that prompted his citation of the Medal of Honor reads like a fictitious deed of a superhero. Yet it was real and stands as one of the most selfless and heroic actions in military history. The following is the official citation:

Place and date: Near Krinkelt, Belgium, 17 December 1944. Entered service at: Brownsville, Texas: Mission, Texas G.O. No.: 47, 18 June 1945. Citation: On his own Initiative, he carried his heavy machine gun from Company K's right flank to its left, in order to protect that flank which was in danger of being overrun by advancing enemy infantry supported by tanks. Occupying a shallow hole offering no protection above his waist, he cut down a group of 10 Germans. Ignoring enemy fire from an advancing tank, he held his position and cut down 25 more enemy infantry attempting to turn his flank. Glancing to his right, he saw a large number of infantry swarming in from the front. Although dazed and shaken from enemy artillery fire which had crashed into the ground only a few yards away, he realized that his position soon would be outflanked. Again, alone, he carried his machinegun to a position to the right rear of the sector; enemy tanks and infantry were forcing a withdrawal. Blown over backward by the concussion of enemy fire, he immediately reset his gun and continued to fire. Singlehanded he held off the German horde until he was satisfied his company had affected its retirement. Again he loaded his gun on his back and in a hail of small-arms fire he ran to a point where a few of his comrades were attempting to set up another defense against the onrushing enemy. He fired from this position until his ammunition was exhausted. Still carrying his gun, he fell back with his small group to Krinkelt. Sgt. López's gallantry and intrepidity, on seemingly suicidal missions in which he killed at least 100 of the enemy, were almost solely responsible for allowing Company K to avoid being enveloped, to withdraw successfully and to give other forces coming up in support time to build a line which repelled the enemy drive.11

Fighting the Germans became so difficult that some soldiers no longer wanted to fight. One suggested that they should surrender. López promptly punched him, knocked him out, and
the Americans continued fighting. Lieutenant Paul E. Burkhardt was an eyewitness to the engagement. He said that the action lasted about six and one half hours, from 11:30 A.M until 6:00 P.M. During this time, Sergeant López was targeted by every German weapon, including a tank. He was oblivious to the fire even after his position had been struck. When an 88 mm shell from the Tiger tank blew him away from his machine gun, he reset it and continued firing. Eventually reinforcements returned to his position and drove out the enemy.

The fighting continued back into Czechoslovakia. Because of the points earned, some soldiers, including López, would be sent back to the United States. They boarded equipment trucks bound for Germany. When they reached Germany, everyone disembarked. López was soon told to put his equipment back into the truck. He went back to Czechoslovakia and was informed the next morning that he had won the Medal of Honor. His company commander offered to take him back to Germany and in a Jeep drove him to Nuremberg. At the 3rd Corp headquarters, a ceremony was held in López's honor. Major General James Van Fleet, the commander there, decorated him. López was given the choice of a commission or rank and he selected the latter. José was now officially Sergeant José M. López.

After the ceremony López was to return to the States with General George S. Patton, but López was unable to leave at that time. He then boarded a ship and arrived in New York some days later. There he was welcomed enthusiastically as an American hero and was greeted by New York Mayor Fiorello La Guardia. López finally headed home to his family and to a city that was ready to welcome home its hero. On June 27, 1945, the city of Brownsville held a military parade and a war bond rally in his honor. Thousands of citizens from throughout the Valley came to cheer for the man that had received the nation's highest military recognition for valor. Judge J.T. Canales was the toastmaster at the noon luncheon held at the El Jardin Hotel, where López had been a waiter nearly two decades before. War bonds worth $1,375 were presented to López in recognition of his military contributions. An elaborate military parade was held at 4:00 o'clock with military bands, color guards, Mexican officers, American officers and World War II veterans.

Colonel Arthur H. Wilson, himself a Medal of Honor recipient nearly forty years before, made the presentation. Wilson said, "Permit me to salute you, sir. I am happy to have been given the honor of presenting this gift to you and shake the hand of a fighting man." López replied in his characteristically humble, but proud voice, "Thank you, and I am proud to know a man like you." A few days later, Sergeant López and his family flew to Mexico City to visit the Shrine of Guadalupe, la Basilica de la Virgen de Guadalupe. He had promised to visit the Shrine if he survived the war. On July 2, 1945 López attended mass in his military uniform. "When I was fighting in Belgium, I prayed to the Virgen de Guadalupe (Patron Saint of Latin America) to give me strength. I made a vow that if I emerged alive I would visit the Shrine of Guadalupe. When I visited her she was beautiful, so beautiful." On the same trip the government of Mexico awarded him the Order of the Aztec Eagle, la Orden de la Aguila Azteca. Former Mexican Consul of Brownsville, licenciada Bernice Rendon Talavares, commented about its significance:

The Mexican Order of the Aztec Eagle is a distinction presented by the Mexican government to foreigners with the objective of recognizing their prominent service to Mexico or to humanity.

After the war López briefly returned to civilian life in Brownville. He was offered a job in the sanitation department. About the same time the Veteran's office in San Antonio offered him
a post as a contact representative/advisor with the Veteran’s Administration. He worked there for a few years, and San Antonio now became his home. In June 1948, López reenlisted into the army. Two years later his company was activated to fight in Korea, where he fought on the front line. When his supervisor discovered that he had a Medal of Honor recipient on the front-line infantry he sent him elsewhere. The following day all of his fellow soldiers were killed in battle. López would do two more tours of Korea in 1960 and again in 1968. During the Vietnam War, López again requested to serve in battle. By this time he was sixty years of age. His request was denied. When López was seventy years of age, General John Westmoreland officially granted him a military extension of three years. López retired from the army at age seventy-three. Soldiers today respect and admire José M. López and are keenly aware of his legacy to them. Yet, there is a strong bond between his generation and their generation. Major General Alfredo Valenzuela recently visited Sergeant López in the home of Maggie Whitweir López, his daughter. His remarks about José embody the respect that soldiers old and young hold for him.

We continue to see the Hispanic soldiers excel and they have done it for 227 years. They have done it the old-fashioned way, died on the battlefield in different wars during different campaigns. We have a lot to be proud of, very much so. Sergeant López is a role model and an example that we look up to. He’s a very modest man. He kept it to himself and what he knew he didn’t talk about. Interesting thing about a soldier, we worship peace probably more than anyone else. We go to war because we have to and because, like Sergeant López said, he was called to duty. We’re the ones that are honored and privileged to be around a soldier who gave up his life, gave up his family and gave up his time to join the Armed Forces and only to walk away with what only forty Hispanics have done in the history of the Army, and that is to win the Congressional Medal of Honor.22

As important as it has been to be a loyal soldier, José M. López has been a loyal husband and a caring father as well. His children all attest to this. Candida, Virginia, Beatrice, Maggie and his stepson, John, all agree that their father loves them and has set the highest standard for them. In him they see strength; they see humility; they see pride; they see a role model. Until 2002, he and Emilia, his wife of sixty years, lived alone in a modest home in San Antonio. José routinely walked five miles a day and drove to the grocery store. However, because of failing health they moved into the home of their daughter and son-in-law, Maggie and Guy Whitweir. In early February 2004, Emilia passed away.

José M. López continues to be one of the most respected men in the country. He has been invited to every presidential inauguration since Harry Truman took office and has met the majority of U.S. presidents who have served during the last half-century. Photographs with Presidents Kennedy, Johnson, and Bush are in his family photo album. Several documentaries have been made about his life and his contributions to World War II. Recently, a bronze statue of him was erected at the new Veteran’s International Bridge in Brownsville. At the new Veteran’s Memorial Park in McAllen, images of López and other World War II soldiers are preserved on granite monuments. In July 2002, the U.S. Latino and Latina World War II Oral History Project held its national conference at the University of Texas at Austin. His daughter, Maggie, brought José to the meeting. The professors at the conference who had been interviewing veterans from throughout the country were virtually mesmerized by his words of encouragement. He has that effect everywhere he speaks. On May 29, 2004, José and Maggie attended the dedication of the
World War II memorial in Washington D.C. at the request of the Congressional Medal of Honor Society.

Today at 93, Sergeant José M. López continues to represent himself as a civilian the way he represented himself sixty years ago as a soldier on the battlefield – with dignity and honor. A hero is defined as a man who is admired for his achievements and his noble qualities. López remains what he has always been - a virtuous man, an honorable man, a great man, and a valiant man, “un hombre valiente.”

The University of Texas at Brownsville

Endnotes

5 Interview of José M. López by Manuel F. Medrano on 6 October 2001.
8 Interview of José M. López by Manuel F. Medrano on 6 October 2001.
12 Interview of José M. López by Manuel F. Medrano, 8 November 2001.
16 “Huge War Bond Rally Scheduled Wednesday” The Brownsville Herald, 26 June 1943, p. 1.
18 Interview of José M. López by Manuel Medrano on 6 October 2001
21 Interview of Guy Whitweir (José M. López’s son-in-law) by Manuel F. Medrano on 3 December 2003.
The Clay Dunes of Eastern Cameron County
by
Norman L. Richard

The drive from Brownsville to Boca Chica Beach passes through a district of numerous dune hillocks set within tidal flatlands. Two highways diverge from Brownsville to pass through the dune region. Highway 48 reaches to Port Isabel, and Highway 4 ends at Boca Chica Beach. Boca Chica is the name given for a small outlet (now obstructed by the construction of Highway 4) of the Laguna Madre, which once cut through the extreme southern end of Padre Island. The clay dune hillocks are called lomas, a type of dune first described in Australia in the late 1930's. The dunes are low, the largest usually not exceeding nine meters (approximately 30 feet) in height. Some are very elongated, and others range from essentially round at the base to crescent and many other shapes. Some lomas are located in Mexico across the Rio Grande River, while others are found north of the Brownsville area. While clay dunes are also found in Russia, Australia, and Africa, they are not common. These dunes create a kind of archipelago, with islets of land within a (sometimes flooded) tidal sea. Scattered shrubs grow isolated from each other on different lomas.

Texas tortoises (Gopherus berlandieri) are found on upland lomas. The creatures are unlikely to cross the inundated tidal flats from one dune to another, so that variations occur in their shell pattern, shelter construction and use, activity range, and food preferences.

The origin of the local clay dunes is attributed to silt deposited by the Rio Grande River at its mouth, the Boca del Rio. The particles are contributed to the river by erosional material from the Sierra Madre Mountains and dust from the Chihuahua Desert. Fine silt reaches the Gulf of Mexico after heavier particles are left behind as the velocity of the river decreases. During periods of extended drought along the coast, the silt particles become airborne or aggregate into small "pills," especially during the summer months when southeasterly winds prevail. Any small object in the way of the blowing "pills" which resists their movements may become the nucleus for clay dune formation. Dune building material has accumulated in a linear fashion, along a southeast to northwest axis. The dunes build in height at their distal end. Once built, erosional forces set in, especially from high tides and storm tides, causing the lomas to erode at their edges, creating the look of "badlands." Growth and erosion are periodic and seasonal. The three requirements for clay dune formation are: (1) an arid climate with a negative ratio of precipitation and evapotranspiration (more water loss than rain annually); (2) strong or moderate unidirectional wind patterns (southeasterly during dry seasons); and (3) highly hygroscopic saline clay on bare tidal flats (the clay can gain or lose water readily allowing particles to gain or lose volume and cohesiveness).

In August 1983, 4,600 acres were set aside within the Brownsville Navigation District, through the efforts of the Frontera Audubon Society, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), the Army Corps of Engineers, and the Brownsville Navigation District. The agreement set a time period of forty years and management by USFWS. Loma Portero Cercado, the largest, was not included at the time, being slated for demolition and replacement by a petrochemical tank farm. Additional lomas are now part of the Lower Rio Grande National Wildlife Refuge (The Wildlife Corridor).

Lomas have not been used for agricultural or pastoral purposes, except for the possible grazing of cattle. Many have supported vegetation, notably of the Tamaulipan brush species. One loma bears mostly Texas ebony trees stunted by wind and salt spray. Many have been heavily impacted by human use. Trash dumping (along their perimeters) and target practice have left
many ringed with construction materials, glass shards, and aluminum cans. At a distance, the refuse disappears, leaving an attractive landscape.

Many tales set in the lomas tell of natives and bandits. Relict populations of Karankawas used lomas as vantage points, as did later bandits. Cattle rustling was common. Alfredo Munoz II related a story from his father (Alfredo Munoz I): Two of his father's uncles had traveled to Port Isabel from Matamoros on horseback via Old Port Isabel Road. The roadway was built on higher ground to allow passage through the wetlands, and it passed by Loma Alta, the highest lookout in the region. On the return trip, about 3:00 pm, they spotted Indian ponies on Loma Alta. Soon the Indians began to chase them. It was customary, at the time, to carry one bullet in a pistol for safety reasons, and this was fired at the pursuers when they came into range. The travelers were, by then, at full gallop, and could not reload. When an Indian caught up with one of the party, one of the uncles remembered that he had a knife, and he stabbed the Indian. The resulting confusion among the Indians allowed the two to escape across the river, leaving the Indians "whooping and hollering" on the north bank. One of the uncles was proud that his horse had carried him to Port Isabel, and yet still had enough energy to save his life on the return trip on the same day. As a reward, the man had special horseshoes made for him the next day. In another story, Dr. Frank Benton remembered that his granddad Walter Keller told him about a Mexican thief or rustler, who was caught and hanged by McNelly's Rangers, near either Loma de los Tequios or Loma Plata. The scoundrel was buried in the sitting position, with a whiskey jug between his legs.

Each loma is named in Spanish on survey maps dating from about 1894. The names are often intriguing and enigmatic. While variations and differences exist in these names, they seem to have remained remarkably consistent through the years. An attempt to explain the story behind the name of each of the lomas follows.

Loma Names

Number 1: Rincón de las Viejas - It seems that this name refers to a gathering place of old women. The word rincón can variously mean "inside corner, corner, nook, retreat or just a patch of ground." Most commonly the word refers to a "corner" (according to Benito López).

Number 2: Loma del Ballo - The word ballo probably refers to a bay-colored horse. It is likely to be a misspelling of bayo (acc. to Professor Cipriano Cardenas). Maria Elena McCrory believed that bayo refers to a pinto pony.

Number 3: Loma de la Jauja - This is, perhaps, the most intriguing and perplexing name given to any of the lomas. Christopher Pérez interviewed an aunt from the mid-Lower Rio Grande Valley who described jauja to be a "favored, beautiful and ideal place". She said it was an enchanted land where everything is in its most favorable state. William McWhorter's Spanish dictionary defines it as "a place of extreme danger". C. Cardenas referred to its meaning as "contentment". Elda Rodríguez noted this definition in the Diccionario de la Real Academia Española: "Nombre que denota todo lo que quiere presentarse como tipo de prosperidad y abundancia". Carolyn McLaughlin likened Jauja to an Eden or Shangrila, a place where wishes come true. David Franco, from Peru, recognized it as a name of a town in the Andean Mountains 100 miles east of Lima with a historic tradition of being exceptionally clean. An early French settler and merchant named Celestine Jagou came to Brownsville after the Civil War and may have contributed his name to this loma. An 1894 survey map called his portion of the Espiritu Santo Spanish land grant "La Jauga". Dr. Milo Kearney noted that Jauja is a Spanish term for a "Fool's Paradise," a concept called le pays de cocagne ("Land of Cocaine") in French and
Schlaraffenland ("Lazy Fellow's Land") in German.

Number 4: Loma del Muerto - This name means Dead Man's Hill.

Number 5: Loma del Potrero Cerca to - Benito López referred to this name as meaning a fenced corral for horses (an enclosure). J.J. Garza said it meant "mares’ pasture," and commented that that the mares were not ridden in past days. Servando Hinojosa wrote in the Mesquite Review that on his grandmother’s ranch he witnessed a cattle drive in which the cattle were moved from one potrero to another, and defined potrero as a horse or a grazing field for horses. The 1921 Rio Grande Gulf Corporation gave this loma the name of Potrero Seicado. Seicado does not seem to be a Spanish word but is possibly derived from the spoken word cercado. A smaller disjuncted portion immediately southwest of Potrero Seicado was referred to as Tío Lolo. Both of these portions are called Potrero Cerca to on more recent USGS maps. Dr. Genaro Lopez recognizes Lolo to be a nickname for proper names such as Rolando. Frank Benton visited Loma Potrero Cerca to in 1959 when he was 4 years old and remembered that the portion closest to the Ship Channel bore the remnants of Happy Jack’s fishing camp.

Number 6: Loma del Divisidero - Both Benito López and William McWhorter believe that divisidero means lookout. The 1921 Rio Grande Gulf Corporation map named this loma as Campo de la Vigia. The word vigia also means “lookout” (or “watchtower/watchman”).

Number 7: Loma a los Ligos (United States Geological Survey, 1929) – the words de lejos mean “from far away.” The “G” and “J” may have been transposed. More recent maps refer to this loma as Loma del Tío Alejos. Alex (Alejandro) Hernandez’s nickname is either Alejo or Alejos. In 1921, the Rio Grande Gulf Corporation named this Loma Ébano.

Number 8: Loma de las Vacas - This loma was named for cows.

Number 9: Loma de la Lena Seca - M.E. McCrory translates lena seca as “firewood” (“dry wood”), and William McWhorter found it to mean “kindling wood.” The 1921 Rio Grande Gulf Corporation map names the two portions of this loma Monten de Lena Seca. Richard Moore, in a Valley Freedom Newspapers article, noted that indigenous people placed mesquite pods in a hole and pounded them with a “big chunk of wood (lento)

Number 10: Loma de los Gachupines - Theresa M. Hunter (Houston Chronicle December 21, 1924) defines gachupine as a native of Spain who came to North America. The term is often considered derogatory. In 1921, the Rio Grande Gulf Corporation used the name Loma de los Gachupines.

Number 11: Loma Ochoa - Either the family name Ochoa or the number eight may apply to this loma.

Number 12: Loma del Gato - Gato may refer to one of several wildcats found in this immediate area. Jaguarundi, ocelot, bobcat, jaguar and puma have been noted for extreme south Texas. In 1946, the last jaguar was killed near Olmito, Texas.

Number 13: Loma Silvan - The word silvan refers to a “wooded place.” The word is probably an adaptation of selva. McCrory uses silvan to mean “whistler”.

Number 14: Loma de la Banderita - Banderita refers to a “little flag”. However, Rio Grande Gulf Corporation Subdivision Shares 1-4 and 6 of the San Martin Spanish Land Grant were designated Benderetea on a 1920-1921 map. This seems to be their interpretation of the spoken word.

Number 15: Loma del Burro - The flatlands adjacent to the area where the lomas are found has been called Jackass Flats for the wild donkeys found there until the 1930’s. The burros were hunted to provide meat for carnivores in Snake King’s zoo, located in the Palm Village on Palm Boulevard (called Snakeville and later relocated to near Four Corners (Boca Chica and Fourteenth
Street intersection) after the 1993 hurricane. It is believed that many burros moved south across the Rio Grande into Mexico before they disappeared from the Texas side of the river.

**Number 16: Loma de los Tequios** - There is wide disagreement about what this may mean. J.J. Garza felt certain that tequios means “small stakes”. C. Cardenas called it “Injury Hill”. Dr. Eli E. Pena identified the word as slang for “low class people.” No dictionary definition has been found.

**Number 17: Loma Tía Tules** - While tules refers to “cattails, reeds or sedges” (especially scirpus californicus), Tía Tules points to an aunt’s name. The 1921 Rio Grande Gulf Corporation calls it Puente Tra...ar (some of the letters not being legible). “Puente” means “Bridge.” Possibilities for “Tra...ar” include trabajar (“to work”), trafagar or traficar (“to traffic, trade, bustle or toil”), trajinar (“pass or move back and forth”).

**Number 18: Loma del Macho** - It may be that this refers to the “jack mule” (J.J. Garza).

**Number 19: Loma de la Estrella** - It is not clear why “Star” is the name given to this loma.

**Number 20: Loma de los Ebanitos** - It seems clear that this name refers to the presence of small Texas ebony trees (Pithecellobium ebano), which can grow up to 40 feet in height elsewhere, but near the Gulf of Mexico has its growth stunted by winds and salt spray. On Loma de los Ebanitos, the stunted trees form a continuous low canopy where they have not been disturbed. The ebony grove is distinct from the vegetation covering the other lamas.

**Number 21: Verdolaga Lakes** - This wetland found in the area of the lomas is of interest because of its name verdolaga which refers to the presence of Purslane (Portulaca oleracea). This edible wild plant appears in such traditional Mexican recipes as tomatillo sauce or purslane with chipotle chilis. It has a citrus-like flavor. A cultivated form was derived from the European “weed”. It is prized for its high content of vitamin C and omega-3 fatty acid (five times higher than in spinach) in both the stems and leaves (seeds of change. com).

**Number 22: Loma Plata** - Perhaps this loma appeared silver under certain light conditions, or even had silver-colored soil. Or does plata refer to silver coins?

**Number 23: Loma Pelona** - Pelona means “bald,” perhaps indicating the absence of brush. In Spain, the word refers to being “hairy” (acc. W. McWhorter). To Circe Zarinana Bogart, “pelona” refers to a threat made to misbehaving children. Pelona is a dead spirit who steals naughty children from the haciendas.

**Number 24: Mesa de Gavilan** - A gavilan is a “hawk or falcon” and indeed, this land form, located behind the sand dunes on Boca Chica Beach near Highway 4, is part of the staging area for the arctic peregrine falcon. Particularly female gavilans rest in this area, staying for as long as 28 days during the spring migration northward. They feed on other birds, gaining the body fat necessary for nesting and rearing young after the rigorous, energy-demanding migration. The “washboard” nature of this mesa may indicate geologically how lamas originate.

**Number 25: Loma de Rincon Chiquita** - Rincon chiquita may refer to a “little nook or retreat.” The word is spelled chiquito.

**Number 26: Loma del Mesquite** - While ebony groves are not usually present on any other of the lomas, mesquite trees (Prosopis glandulosa) are common on this one.

**Number 27: Loma de la Draga** - Draga suggests a “dragline” to some Spanish-speakers, or, more likely, a “dredge.” Dredges are often used to scoop earth from the bottom of a river, channel or lake. Both J.J. Garza and C. Cardenas believe the name refers to a dragline used to clear brush. Drago is the local name for Jatropha spathulata. Its red sap is used to rub on gums to help prevent loss of teeth.

**Number 28: Loma del Montuosa** - Montuosa refers to a bumpy, rugged or rough hill, rather
than to a mountainous terrain (C. Cardenas and W. McWhorter). A Port of Brownsville surveyor’s map refers to this as Loma la Montosa.

Number 29: Loma de la Madriguera - This name is found on both a 1929 USGS map and a Cameron County Soils map. A. Munoz believed it referred to “one who rises early”. B. Lopez thought it meant a “thicket so dense that one cannot see through it.” C. Cardenas quickly identified it as meaning “bullshit”. Dictionaries define the words madriguen or madriguera as being an “animal den, burrow or lair.” Several individuals recognized the names as meaning a place where bandits hang out. “Lair” seems to fit.

Number 30: Loma del Cenizal - It is the Spanish custom to refer to a plant association by the name of the dominant plant type ending with al. Another example would be zacatal (grassland). Cenizo refers to the Texas purple sage or silver leaf (Leucophyllum frutesens). The common name of this plant with silver-colored leaves is derived from ceniza (“ashes from woodfires”).

Number 31: Loma de la Montuosa Chica - Located near Loma del Montuosa (Number 28), this loma is somewhat smaller and more slender. Both lie in a line with each other.

Number 32: Palmito Hill - This loma lies within a great bend of the river only slightly west and south of an area named White’s Ranch Landing. White Ranch was located eastward at the point where Highway 4 parallels the Rio Grande River. Riverboats were loaded from wagons with supplies offloaded from ships at Point Isabel during and after the Civil War. Many of the supplies were destined for Forth Worth, Texas, later called Fort Brown. Other supplies reached Rio Grande City area and Fort Ringgold. Riverboats were operated by Captains King and Kennedy under contract with the United States Military. Warehouses were located at White’s Ranch Landing. Palmitos may refer to yucca plants (Yucca treculeana) which are often called Spanish bayonets in English or palma pitas in Spanish. A thick stand still lies close to Highway 4 near White’s Ranch Landing. Many fragments of ginger beer and wine bottles can be found. Artifacts from the Battle of Palmito Hill can also be found in this area.

Number 33: Tulosa Ranch - The loma located on this historic ranch, which has raised cattle for many generations, may appear as Toluso Ranch on some maps. Perhaps tulosa is a reference to tules (sedges).

Number 34: Puerta Tracas - Named Puerta de Trancas on Cameron County Soils maps, the University of Chicago Spanish Dictionary defines trances as “bolt, pole, prop or stick”. Local use may be locks, or refer to a crudely made gate in a fence noted for its rustic support posts. Elda Rodriguez Hernandez identifies trances as meaning a “corral gate with big wooden posts.” C. Z. Bogart believes the word clearly refers to the “crossbar used to secure a door(s) or gate.”

Number 35: Redhead Ridge - This very elongated loma is located immediately northwest of San Martin Lake west of Highway 48. A similar loma, located on Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge along the bayside (Laguna Madre) bears the same name. Redhead Ridge (LANWR) was a location from which hunters slaughtered thousands of Redhead Ducks for their oil. The oil was used as fuel for oil lamps in past days.

Number 36: Loma de los Lobos - Lobos means “wolves.”

Number 37: Loma de las Yeguas - Yeguas are “mares.” Loma de las Yeguas and Loma del Potrero Cercato are located across the ship channel from each other.

Number 38: Loma Sin Nombre - The “loma without a name” of recent USGS maps is called Las Vegnao on the 1921 Rio Grande Gulf Corporation map. Vegnao is not a recognizable Spanish word.

Number 39: Loma del Islote - While isleta refers to an islet (a very small island), islote means small island.
Number 40: Loma de la Pita - Locally, pita refers to *palma pita* (yuca) with its dangerously sharp-pointed leaves like many of the agaves.

Number 41: Bahia Grande – This refers to a prominent former large bay, surrounded by *lomas* (many unnamed), which is currently cut off from the Gulf of Mexico. This area is not a portion of the Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge, and plans are being made to return it to an extensive wetlands by opening its former inlet.

Number 42: Semiluna - *Semiluna* is a small, crescent-shaped *loma* located north of the west end of *Loma de la Estrella*.

Number 43: Loma Alta - Noted for its height, this dune rises 9 meters at its highest point. Its profile, seen from Highway 48, is typical of a *loma* form and is impressive in a land of low relief.

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**Dictionaries**


**References**


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