7-1982

The Mexicans' and Mexican-Americans' contribution to the development of the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas and its citrus industry

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THE MEXICANS' AND MEXICAN-AMERICANS' CONTRIBUTION TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE LOWER RIO GRANDE VALLEY OF TEXAS AND ITS CITRUS INDUSTRY

By

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THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

Pan American University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

Pan American University

Edinburg, Texas

July 1982

THE MEXICANS' AND MEXICAN-AMERICANS'
CONTRIBUTION TO THE DEVELOPMENT
OF THE LOWER RIO GRANDE VALLEY
OF TEXAS AND ITS CITRUS
INDUSTRY

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DATE: 7/12/82

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AUTHOR'S FOREWORD

The development of the Rio Grande Valley of Texas and its citrus industry is a popular subject in the area. It is a topic local authors write about. Furthermore, it is not unusual for Valley newspapers and magazines to occasionally mention the greatness of the area and its citrus business.

Most of what is written, however, is used to propagandize the area and the citrus industry. Moreover, little, if anything, is mentioned about the Mexican and Mexican-American and his contribution, with the exception of the Laguna Seca ranch, the Vela family, and a few affluent individuals.

Even when one reads of the death of a long-time resident in the obituary column, Anglos are typically mentioned as "pioneers" while Mexicans or Mexican-Americans are referred to as merely "retired farm laborers." This type of informing or reporting does not provide much motivation for Mexican-Americans to engage in local research. The few who wish to look into this subject further find the information available extremely unbalanced.

One of the reasons I chose to write on this subject was that I felt that some of the data that had previously been presented on this topic had to be corrected. The Mexican's and Mexican-American's contribution to the success of this area has to be emphasized.

As of this writing there are still many Mexicans and Mexican-Americans living who contributed greatly to the development of the Valley during the period 1910-1930. I have made an attempt to contact a number of them, especially Tamaulipecos, and to report on their points of view and their efforts.

My interest on the subject was further stimulated by the death of a Valley resident named Genaro Cano, Sr. in late 1980, at the age of ninety-six. His obituary in the Harlingen Valley Morning Star stated only his date and place of birth, and the number of his children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. There was no mention of how he and his children had contributed to the development of the Valley and the citrus industry. A few days later, the local paper carried the news, prominently displayed on the front page, of the death of an Anglo resident of the Valley. His contributions to the development of the area were publicized in great detail, and he was eulogized as a "pioneer."

As a young man, I often heard stories of how and why people had come to the Valley during the period under consideration. I was also shown many citrus orchards where the Canos and many other Mexicans and Mexican-Americans had worked. Thus, as I read the obituary column I wondered why no mention of Genaro's contribution had appeared in the Harlingen paper, because I knew that the information had been provided to the funeral director.

I have no quarrel with those who write about Anglo-American Valley "pioneers." But I would like to point out that the Mexicans and Mexican-Americans who helped develop the Valley through back-breaking

jobs were also "pioneers."

It is my hope that as attitudes change, and as more information becomes available, writing and reporting about the area will give due credit to all who had a hand in the dramatic development of the Valley in the early 1900's. I offer this thesis as a contribution toward that end.

In writing about this subject I have tried to remain as impartial and unbiased as possible, even though Genaro Cano, Sr. was my grandfather.

C.A.M.

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INTRODUCTION

Throughout the nineteenth century and a part of the early twentieth century the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas was truly an underdeveloped part of the nation. It was isolated from the rest of the country and its economic base depended heavily on ranching and subsistance agriculture. This, however, was to change, for the first three decades of the twentieth century were of tremendous importance in its development. It was during this period that previously barren land was transformed into the great crop-producing area that it is today. Modern farming techniques, irrigation, and, above all, the abundance of Mexican labor made it possible to bring this previously barren, semi-arid land into production.

One of the main contributing factors for the rapid growth of the region was the availability of low-cost Mexican workers. Overall the Anglos' working and living conditions in the United States had improved during this period. It is doubtful that they would have been willing to work in the fields in large numbers and at such low wages as the Mexicans to make possible the tremendous development which took place at that time.[1] Therefore, the Mexican worker did the dirty and low-wage work which most Anglos could afford to shun.[2]

Although the Rio Grande Valley's development was largely the product of Mexican labor, it was the Anglo settlers who provided the vision, or dream, and the money and dedication to make it a reality.

Today, when one takes a ride over the roads and highways in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas, one sees many beautiful citrus orchards. Even while driving through Valley towns and villages one sees citrus trees growing in front and back yards of many homes. Today many take it for granted that these trees have always existed in the area, but although citrus has been in the Valley for many years, it was not until sometime between the 1850s and 1870s[3] that the first citrus seeds were planted. Citrus trees, however, existed here as early as 1856, for Lt. Colonel Robert E. Lee, while on court-martial duty in Brownsville, wrote to his wife of the orange trees he had seen and of the oranges he had eaten there.[4]

It is the purpose of this essay to trace the development of the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas, with special attention to how citrus became one of the Valley's major industries, with national recognition. I will emphasize the influence of the precarious conditions in neighboring Tamaulipas, México after the 1910-1917 Mexican Revolution, especially in the town of Burgos, located about 150 miles due south of Reynosa. With the end of the Revolution, many Mexicans hoped that things would improve and that their country would at last have a sense of normalcy and stability. But this was not to be for many Mexicans, especially Tamaulipecos. They soon painfully learned that things were not improving as expected. The second and third decade of the twentieth century proved to be as chaotic as the previous period. These conditions directly affected the small community of Burgos.

For many years prior to the Revolution many Burgueños had been coming to South Texas in search of seasonal agricultural work and then

returning home. During the 1920s many decided to come to South Texas to live until more pleasant conditions were restored in Burgos. Others, because of the continuing problems, decided to make South Texas their permanent home.[5] A coincidence of timing--the development of the Valley and the instability in México--brought the American agricultural employers and the dislocated Mexicans together.[6]

For the most part, the Valley Anglos, during the period under consideration, tended to categorize most Spanish-speaking people in the Valley as Mexicans. However, for the purpose of this essay it is important that the terms "Mexican," "Mexican-American," and "Anglo" be defined. "Mexican" refers to a person born in México regardless of whether he is living in his native country or in the United States legally or illegally. "Mexican-American," as defined by the United States Commission on Civil Rights, and as used in this essay, refers to a person born and living in the United States who is himself of Mexican origin or whose parents or more remote ancestors came to the United States from México or whose antecedents resided in those parts of the Southwestern United States which were once part of the Mexican nation. Any other Caucasian residing in the Valley is referred to as "Anglo."[7]

A description and explanation of the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas is also essential. The Valley of the Rio Grande is contained in Hidalgo, Cameron and Willacy counties. It is bounded on the south by the Rio Grande, on the east by the Gulf Coast, and on the north by a strip of sandy land not suitable for agriculture. This area forms a triangle of about ninety miles along the river, sixty miles along the

coast and ninety miles on the north. It contains on the aggregate approximately one million acres.[8] Most importantly, the abundant water supply for irrigation and the topography and fertility of the soil accounted in great part for the Valley's agricultural success. The surface is generally smooth except in the bottom lands along the river where it is cut off by the old river bed, or what are commonly known in the area as resacas. The climate in the area has been described as semi-tropical and is such that some crops can grow under irrigation every month in the year. The area on the Mexican side of the river is much like the one of the American side in physical characteristics. The major differences were that the American side was more susceptible to flooding and the Americans had more sophisticated methods of irrigation.[9]

Although the American side of the Valley is now more prosperous than the Mexican side, it was the Mexican side that was first settled. Spanish officials, in an effort to stop the French who were threatening to move into the Spanish area of Texas, decided to colonize the area between the Pánuco and Nueces Rivers. The Spanish hoped that this colonization would also control Indian raids and give support to the mission of San Antonio de Valero, more commonly known as the Alamo, which had been plagued with problems since its founding in 1718. Spanish officials, on September 3, 1746, decided that José de Escandón was the man to carry out this settling task. Thus, Escandón was appointed conquistador and governor of the area, and was to be responsible for investigating the area for future settlement sites for Spanish colonizers.[10]

In order to accomplish his mission, Escandón proposed that entradas (penetrations) be made from seven different points and that they converge at the mouth of the Rio Grande. The seven selected points of departure were: 1) from Tampico north, 2) from present-day Ciudad de Valles north, 3) from Querétaro northeast, 4) from Linares east, 5) from Cerralvo east, 6) from Montclova northeast and 7) from La Bahía, near present-day Corpus Christi, south.[11]

Almost three years after his investigation and subsequent recommendations, on December 1748, with 755 soldiers and about 2,515 colonists, Escandón left Querétaro enroute to the area he proposed to settle. It was Antonio Ladrón de Guevara, a rancher from Nuevo León, in charge of the entrada from Linares, who, after meeting with Escandón, recommended that a townsite be considered near the Río Conchas. During the month of January 1749, Escandón dispatched Captain José Antonio Leal with thirty colonists and eight soldiers to found Burgos on the left bank of the Río Conchas.[12] This site provided an adequate water supply as well as suitable farming land.

By the following month Escandón had founded various other settlements. On March 5, Camargo (108 miles west of Brownsville) was founded and Blas María de la Garza Falcón placed in charge; on March 4, Reynosa (58 miles west of Brownsville) with Captain Carlos Cantú in charge. Cantú later became one of the richest landowners of the northeastern frontier.[13]

For reasons unknown, Escandón chose not to settle the area downriver from Reynosa. Nevertheless, a small settlement was begun at the site of Matamoros[14] in the mid 1760s, and Matamoros was finally organized

as a village in 1821.

After the expedition, Escandón returned to Querétaro. In the spring of 1750 he made an inspection tour of the area including Burgos, which he had never visited. He was pleased with the progress of the settlements. However, he noted that the settlers were having problems with Indian raids.[15]

After his return to Querétaro, Escandón recommended to Agustín de Alumada y Vallalón Marqués de las Amarillas, the newly appointed viceroy, that more settlements be established. The new viceroy, wanting to study the matter further before committing himself, appointed a viceregal commission to inspect the area in 1757. The commission, besides advising that other sites be founded, reported that the old settlements were thriving. Agriculture and cattle and sheep herding continued to be the economic base of the area. It was reported that Reynosa had a population of 289 and Camargo 637. However, the commission noted that Indian problems continued.[16]

From their founding till 1875 most of the settlements had been subjected to Indian problems. Settlers suffered frequent raids from the Apaches, Comanches, Mescaleros, and Kikapoos, especially along the border of the Rio Grande.[17] Some settlers had additional problems as well.

Unfortunately, the original sites chosen for Burgos and Reynosa were prone to flooding. Both settlements were later relocated to their present sites. Burgos was moved to the right bank of the Río Conchas.[18] Today, the old townsite, still exists but there is no bridge between the old and new. Those who wish to visit the old site have to swim to

get to it and thus it is referred to as Brownsville by the Burgueños.[19] Reynosa was moved just up the hill.

To encourage and attract settling, Escandón had offered huge land grants. With time, as more people came into the area, grants were given farther and farther away from the settlements. Much land was given on the north side of the Rio Grande. Although settlers now owned land on either side of the river, they preferred to live on the south side. The north side was mainly used for the grazing of cattle and sheep and for farming. Only a few people stayed on the north side to care for their stock.[20]

By the Texas Revolution of 1836, many other settlers had come to Texas. North of the Nueces River it was estimated that Anglos outnumbered Mexicans in Texas by five to one.[21] However, due to Indian problems, the area between the Nueces and Rio Grande remained sparsely inhabited. The region continued to be used mainly for grazing except for a few patches of farmland. In the meantime, Matamoros had experienced tremendous growth.

As early as 1823, Martín de León, a Tamaulipas rancher and impresario, was using Brazos Santiago, a port near the mouth of the Rio Grande, for the importation of goods for his business. From Brazos Santiago the goods were taken to Matamoros from where they were sent into Northeast México. With the importance of Matamoros growing as a trade center, people started to move into the area. Consequently, by 1836, Matamoros had become larger than any town in Texas.[22]

There was little change south of the Nueces River after Texas Independence, due to the persistant Indian raids and the scarcity of

fresh water away from the river areas for drinking and irrigation. To compound the problem, there was political uncertainty. Even though Texas had gained its independence from México, the area between the Nueces and Rio Grande was considered disputed territory. Both México and Texas had claim to the area.

With the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo in 1848, which ended the Mexican War, the Rio Grande was finally established as the Texas-Mexican border. Soon after the treaty became effective, Anglos began to move into the Valley area. They felt secure, for American troops were garrisoned along the border towns on the Texas side. Although the Anglo population of Brownsville had grown greatly, near the end of the century Mexicans outnumbered Anglos by ten to one.[23]

Many Anglos, like Charles Stillman, Samuel A. Belden, Elisha Basse, Robert H. Hord, the Mussina Brothers, Richard King, Mifflin Kennedy and later others, moved into the area. These men had come to get rich quick, and some of them were not above defrauding the newly created American citizens of Mexican descent who owned lands and property in this section of Texas.[24] It would be Charles Stillman who would become the most powerful of the group.

Soon two political factions were established, one called the "blues," later known as Democrats; and the other the "reds," who later became known as Republicans. Stillman soon became recognized as the leader of the "reds." With his power increasing in Cameron county, he soon had absolute control of both the county and city administrations. Stillman ruled with an iron hand. Those who stood in his way or disapproved of his financial schemes would be prosecuted and convicted,

or simply done away with.[25]

Problems along the border continued, for although the border had been established, people of both countries, with different cultures were continously brought together in the cities in the fertile area downriver from Laredo. Thus, border disputes continued long after the treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo was signed. The treaty did not stop the ever-present cultural conflicts between two different peoples. Everyday life in the Valley was anything but peaceful.[26]

Because of the security offered by the Army troops garrisoned in Fort Brown, the Anglos continued to increase their economic control of the area. They soon controlled most of the commercial life while the Mexicans remained involved in ranching.[27]

As long as the military remained in Brownsville the Anglo merchants and the area continued to prosper. However, because American troops were needed to fight Indians elsewhere, soldiers were pulled out of Fort Brown. On December 1858, Brevet Major General David E. Twigg, Commander of the Texas Department headquartered in San Antonio, ordered that the river posts be closed. This included the Rio Grande City and Brownsville posts.[28] The removal of the troops set the stage for the 1859-1860 Cortina raids.

Juan N. "Cheno" Cortina, who has been called a "bandit," was born in Camargo, México. He was a descendent of a wealthy original land grant family with holdings on both sides of the border. Prior to the Mexican War he and his mother moved to their ranch, El Carmen, near Brownsville. At the end of the war, Cortina, now twenty-four and living in Brownsville, automatically became an American citizen. Although he

was now an American citizen, Cortina resented the Americans.[29]

After the war Anglos started to acquire, legally and illegally, vast land tracts north of the river that had previously belonged to Mexicans. With their huge land holdings, they started to eliminate the comparatively small Mexican operations. Some Mexican land ownership was retained in a few instances, but the trend toward largescale operations was difficult to stem.[30]

Many questions arose in the Valley as to the real ownership of various parcels of land. In Brownsville the dispute was over the legal ownership of a 1500 acre tract. This land had originally belonged to María Josepha Cavazos, but now it was claimed by Patrick Shannon. Eventually the land dispute reached the courts where it was ruled that Shannon was the rightful owner. The Anglos were elated by the decision, while the Mexicans suspected foul play. Cortina not only resented the decision, but was angered by the Anglos' gradual encroachment into the area.[31]

As far as the law is concerned, anyone who attacks or robs with violence is a bandit.[32] However, historians cannot be satisfied with such a simplistic definition. An historian must be aware that whether a man is called a "bandit" or "hero" often depends on whether or not the man is successful in carrying out his plan. Very often a successful bandit turns out to be a real hero and a true patriot. The unsuccessful one is condemned as a criminal and often hanged, even though, in reality such a person has lived a heroic life.[33]

It is unfair to condemn and label Cortina as a bandit, for most of his people, the Mexicans, regarded him as a champion, avenger, fighter for justice, perhaps even a liberator, and in most cases a man to be

admired, helped and supported. Cortina, in his own opinion, originally was trying to correct what he perceived as Anglo injustices.

Because of the economic and political power the Anglos had attained in the area, it was difficult for the Mexicans to challenge them. Many Mexicans, now American citizens, were allowed to vote. They knew, however, that it would be foolish for them to seek any political office of state-wide importance. American citizenship in the fullest sense was for the Anglos. Mexicans had to be content with a second-class type citizenship. One who aspired to leadership had no future in the Valley. Although Cortina was a wealthy Mexican respected by many of his people, to the Anglos he was just another Mexican and, thus, had no future.

Cortina's notoriety as a "bandit" to the Anglos and as a "hero" to his people started on July 13, 1859. On that day "Cheno," while in Brownsville with friends, saw Marshall Bob Shears mistreating one of his former servants. Cortina requested that Shears stop this action, but to no avail. Shears had never seen Cortina before that day, nor was he aware of Cortina's economic position in the area. Cortina, unable to contain his resentment, drew his pistol and fired twice at Shears wounding him in the shoulder with the second shot. Cortina then fled to his ranch, El Carmen, nine miles northwest of Brownsville.[34]

The Anglos were outraged, but there was little they could do since there were no troops stationed in Brownsville and they thought, quite erronously, that Cortina had a large following. Meanwhile, Cortina, between July and September, was able to gather an army of between fifty

and eighty men. Knowing that Brownsville was virtually unprotected, he decided to return to the city.

On September 28, 1859, Cortina and his army entered Brownsville. Their chant was "Mueran los Gringos!" (Death to the Anglos) "Viva México." Cortina and his followers killed three Anglos and two Mexicans.[35] By this time, most Mexicans were ready to support Cortina. They were willing to support anyone who would throw off Anglo domination and punish their enemy. Such a man was Cortina.[36]

Although Cortina had Brownsville at his mercy, he did not rob or steal as he certainly would have done had he been a bandit. He left the city after ensuring that his men had supplies which he felt would be needed later. These supplies, guns and ammunition, were paid for. With his men now properly armed, Cortina returned to Brownsville on two occasions. In October and in November 1859 he militarily defeated the Brownsville citizens, a group of mostly Anglos and a few Mexicans, and a small contingent of Texas Rangers. On both occasions the Mexican National Guard, stationed in Matamoros, appeared to be ready to assist him if necessary. After these victories more men joined his forces thinking that Cortina was the man to provide justice.[37]

By late November and early December things in the Valley appeared to be out of hand. Local Anglos started to pressure the army to reopen the military posts in the area. Finally, in December, General Twigg ordered Major Samuel P. Heintzelman to come to the Valley and stop Cortina and his raiders.

Major Heintzelman and his troops arrived at Fort Brown, on

December 5, 1859. Shortly after, they joined forces with Tobin's Rangers and the Brownsville citizens. The three combined forces were able to drive Cortina from his stronghold at El Carmen. Cortina, with his enemies in hot pursuit, fled to Rio Grande City where he was defeated in battle on December 27, 1859.[39]

After his defeat Cortina fled to Camargo, México from where he continued to terrorize the Anglos. From his new stronghold he started to rustle American cattle. In some cases he was also accused of extorting money for protection purposes. American troops, now with the aid of the Mexican Army, finally chased Cortina away from the border.

This was not to be the last of Cortina. He fled from Camargo to Burgos and now as a full-fledged bandit continued his rustling operations. After terrorizing the Burgueños for some time with threats on their lives he became interested in the political affairs of México and left the Burgos area.[40]

At the outbreak of the Civil War, the Texas border was garrisoned by various companies of the U.S. First Artillery and the Third Infantry. On February 22, 1860, E. B. Nichols, Confederate Commissioner for Texas, arrived in Brownsville. Nichols asked those military men who were not for the Confederacy to leave Texas and turn over to Texas authorities all U.S. government property along the Rio Grande. Many U.S. troops left, but they refused to turn over federal supplies. Some of the supplies, guns and ammunition, were burned at Brazos de Santiago. Those stores which were not burned ultimately fell into Confederate hands. After the federal troops left, the Texas Volunteers

took possession of all the forts along the border, thus leaving the Confederates in control of the entire area.

Problems did not cease for the Confederate Army, now numbering 1200 men in the Fort Brown and Ringgold barracks combined. In one instance Mexicans crossed the Rio Grande and attacked several Confederate wagons loaded with provisions. The Mexicans killed three of the teamsters, stole the entire contents of the wagon train and returned to México.[41]

Mexican cattle rustlers also continued to plague the area. To combat the rustling problem Captain Santos Benavides of the Confederate Army was assigned to the Valley. Benavides, a respected wealthy merchant from Laredo where Mexican-Anglo relations had always been better than in the Valley, had been offered a General's Commission in the Union Army. Because of his sympathy for the Confederacy he refused the offer. Soon after he accepted a commission as a Captain in the Confederate Army. Benavides once took thirty men into México in pursuit of a band of rustlers. The Mexican government ordered Benavides to leave Mexican soil, on the grounds that he was in violation of a treaty between México and the United States. Benavides refused to comply with the order, and continued to chase the rustlers. Although he did not succeed in apprehending the rustlers, Benavides managed to restore order in the area and most Mexican banditry in the Valley stopped.[42]

In spite of the problems both sides of the border experienced prior to and during the Civil War, the area continued to prosper. Bagdad, the landing port on the south side of the Rio Grande, grew to

a population of nearly 15,000; Matamoros, because of its importance in commerce, grew from a population of 13,740 in 1858, to nearly 40,000, while her foreign imports more than doubled, totaling 2,076,374.20 pesos during the war. Other towns showed similar growth. Reynosa and Camargo, whose populations before the war were 3,724 and 6,125, respectively, almost doubled their population, while their combined total imports were 118,863.85 pesos. Brownsville also grew, from a few thousand inhabitants prior to the war to over 25,000 during the war. These increases in population and foreign imports greatly benefited the Mexican government. Reynosa, Camargo and Matamoros together paid 295,437.90 pesos in import taxes, Matamoros leading the way with 290,000.00 pesos.[43]

The Civil War era was a period of instability in the Valley. The area changed hands—Confederate and Union--many times. This period, however, had been good for Cortina. He had joined the Mexican army to fight French intervention in México. Because of his loyal service, by the fall of 1863, he had been promoted to lt. colonel in the cavalry and had been sent to Matamoros.

While in Matamoros, Cortina first pledged his allegiance to Governor Manuel Ruiz, for they were of the same political faction. However, Ruiz soon started to raise troops to make himself independent of Cortina and, thus, a power struggle ensued. On January 12, 1864, the American Consul, Leonard Pierce, Jr., of Matamoros, sent a message to General Francis J. Herron, who now commanded the U.S. forces at Brownsville. In his message Pierce stated that a battle was taking

place in Matamoros between the forces of Ruiz and Cortina. Pierce feared that Cortina might take $1,000,000 in specie and other valuables that were under his charge if Cortina was victorious. Pierce requested that Herron send a "sufficient force to protect myself and property and to transport the money within the limits of the United States at the earliest possible moment."[44]

Herron responded by sending forty men, who successfully protected the consulate. Ruiz, however, was not so lucky. Cortina, with 600 men and six pieces of artillery, was able to defeat him. The victorious Cortina now proclaimed himself Governor and military commandant of Tamaulipas.[45]

Since Cortina had been a loyal supporter of the government of Benito Juárez and now in command of Bagdad, the only port of importance remaining in the hands of the Juaristas, Juárez promoted him to the rank of general. In full command of the area, Cortina sent Juárez considerable sums of money from the tariff customs from Matamoros and Bagdad.[46]

After serving his country in Matamoros, Cortina went to México City and Querétaro, returning to the border in 1870. With the Civil War now over and the Reconstruction government in power in Austin, some of Cortina's friends in the Valley petitioned the governor to allow him to return to Texas with a full pardon.[47]

Many investigations and commissions were established to determine Cortina's innocence or guilt. After a detailed examination of all the charges against Cortina it was proven that he had not been

involved in as much cattle stealing as he had been accused of. It was established that he had been the victim of smear campaigns conducted by Valley Anglos with ulterior motives.

Whether Cortina was guilty or not is immaterial. The most important thing is that Cortina, while attempting to better the lives of the Mexicans in Texas stirred up more hatred between the Mexicans and the Anglos. Cortina's raids were used well by the Anglos. They now had an excuse or a reason to request Federal troops back to Fort Brown, troops they needed to continue their political and economic ascendancy.[48]

With the end of the Civil War the area's economy suffered. Trade decreased considerably. To add to the problems, a hurricane in late 1867 destroyed the port of Bagdad and Brazos de Santiago and caused considerable damage to Matamoros and Brownsville. For a while things appeared to be getting better, but in 1882, a railroad line between Corpus Christi and Laredo was completed and this hurt the Valley, for it virtually isolated it from the rest of the United States.[49] Thus, the development of the Valley was retarded because now merchants and settlers saw little reason to come to the area.

ENDNOTES

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[19]Interview, Pilar, 12 and 13 July 1980.

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[45]Goldfinch, Juan N. Cortina, p. 51.

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The Citrus Industry

The Valley, now in a state of isolation, returned to an economy based on a meager agriculture and ranching. Ranching continued to be the main source of income, but farms continued to operate and various crops were tried.

Sugar cane, for a short time, appeared to be the crop the Valley had been waiting for. In 1870, George Brulay bought a thousand acre farm near Brownsville on which he planted cotton and sugar cane. Seven years later he built a sugar mill, and by 1890 he was refining 1,500 barrels of sugar averaging 350 pounds each.[1]

Even though Brulay was the first to introduce sugar cane to the Valley in a large scale, it was John Closner who became known as the "sugar king" of the area. The federal government, in 1891, established a sugar bounty which provided the payment of two cents per pound of sugar produced in the United States. This bounty encouraged new plantings of sugar cane in the area.[2] In 1895 Closner brought the Louisiana variety of sugar cane from Mexico and successfully planted a ten acre plot near present day Hidalgo. Because of his success, he later increased his sugar cane acreage to 400 acres and his field became known as the "San Juan Plantation." Closner continued to prosper so that by 1898 he built his own sugar mill. Closner's plantation produced from 35 to 40 tons of sugar cane per acre yielding as high as 240 pounds of sugar each compared to Louisiana's 180. This was a

tremendous boom for the Valley, especially when farmers realized that sugar cane could grow better in the Valley than in Louisiana.[3]

For a while the sugar craze took hold of the Valley, but it was not to last long. The Valley's romance with sugar cane ended in 1910, when the bottom fell out of the sugar market. To make matters worse, the federal government stopped providing the sugar bounty.[4] Soon Valley farmers started planting other crops.

First, Bermuda onions were thought to be the solution to the farmers' economic problem. By 1911 Mr. I. G. Cook had several hundred acres of onions planted in the McAllen area from where he shipped them by the trainloads. This crop soon proved to be unprofitable in Cameron and Hidalgo counties. The planting of onions was then moved to Willacy county where there was more suitable soil.[5]

Next farmers started to plant other crops such as cabbage and broom corn. Broom corn proved to be the most profitable and again farmers started to think of this crop as "God-sent." By 1918 the first broom corn from the Valley was shipped from the William Reis farm in McAllen. For his crop Reis received about $2,400.[6] Before long there was a surplus of broom corn and this crop, too, became unprofitable.

Many farmers were now becoming disillusioned with the Valley. Some even sold their land and left the area. Most of those who stayed behind realized that citrus was the answer. Besides farmers, many businessmen saw the citrus potential of the area. Consequently, many of the previously planted crops were replaced by citrus, the crop which was to project Texas and the Valley into one of the nation's

leading producers of citrus fruits.

Citrus

Many farmers were still skeptical of citrus, and preferred to plant cotton, for it was still their number one crop. But many newspaper articles of the day predicted that by 1924 or 1925 citrus would be the number one crop and that within five years citrus would probably be more valuable than all the other crops growing in the Valley combined. "Plant now," it was said. "Get in the prosperity wagon."[7] Such propaganda convinced many cotton farmers to shift from cotton to citrus.

But the citrus industry in the area was not something that just happened. For many, it was a dream, a planned industry, hard work and dedication. As early as 1869, Edward Dougherty of Brownsville, in describing the quality of the land in the area, wrote that Valley land, which could be bought for one dollar an acre, was "unsurpassed in fertility," and well suited for pasture and for growing various crops, including citrus. Almost fifty years later Mr. T. C. Richardson of Willacy county, while writing for Monty's Monthly Magazine in December 1922, said that in the United States most of the citrus consumed was either from California or Florida, but that he felt that the citrus produced in the Valley was capable of competing with any citrus being grown elsewhere.[8] But how did this happen? Where did it start? How did it get here?

There is a lot of speculation as to where citrus fruits originated. Just where they did originate is really unknown. Many claim that citrus

originated in Malaysia from where it started to move gradually westward. It is believed that from Malaysia citrus was brought to Europe by the Crusaders or by traders and later brought to the New World by Columbus when he made his second voyage to Haiti. From there it is believed that a soldier brought it to Florida in 1518, from where it was to spread.[9]

How It Came To The Valley

It is not known just when citrus trees first came to the Valley, but the earliest record of citrus being planted is the planting of seedling orange trees on the Laguna Seca Ranch north of Edinburg.[10] This ranch was founded and developed by Don Macedonio Vela and his wife, Mercedes. It is believed that on a visit to the ranch, sometime between 1865 and 1878, Father Keralum, a missionary of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, gave some oranges to the Vela children. The seeds were planted by one of the children, Carlota, and seven produced trees.[11]

Sizeable plantings of citrus trees were made in the Valley during a period beginning about 1890, but the industry was almost totally destroyed by the freeze of 1899. After this, planting of citrus trees continued on a small scale.[12]

Citrus Planting

Even though citrus had been in the Valley for several decades, it was not until 1906 that there was an effort towards large-scale Valley citrus production. Citrus planting had flourished earlier on a commercial scale in the upper coastal regions of Texas--Jefferson, Galveston and Brazoria counties. However, most of the groves in these

areas were destroyed by low temperatures which occur every few years. Thus, citrus planters started to look further south.[13] Mr. W. H. Friend, writing in The Mission Times on January 3, 1953, stated that not until 1902, when some citrus trees were planted in Beeville, Texas, did some people in the Valley take notice. Because of this interest, in 1906 citrus trees were planted on the Raymond Ranch near Raymondville. At about the same time, small plantings were made throughout the Valley.[14]

In 1906 Mr. A.P. Wright, while managing the 160-acre Chenoweth plantation at Santa Maria, initiated horticultural experiments. This led him to work with citrus. He soon learned that stronger woodstock than what he had been using would be necessary for better citrus.[15] At about the same time, John J. Conway and James W. Holt, who were developing land close to what is now Mission, decided to involve themselves in the citrus industry. Conway visited the Laguna Seca Ranch as well as the Chenoweth plantation. Eventually he persuaded Wright to move to Mission and continue his work. Others, such as Virgil N. Lott were also attracted by the potential of the citrus industry.[16]

Prior to settling in the Valley, Lott had traveled extensively through California, South Africa, Cuba, and a few other places where he had seen citrus trees growing. In his article in the February 1925 issue of The Lower Rio Grande Valley Magazine he stated that when he first came to Mission, Texas in 1909, he had seen a great potential for citrus growing in this area. The following year, 1910, in his newly established newspaper, The Monte Cristo Hustler, he repeatedly affirmed

his belief that the Valley would one day be the greatest citrus producer in the world.[17]

During this time, farmers in the Valley were so involved with other crops that they ignored and ridiculed Lott. They continued to plant citrus on a small scale, but by 1920 they realized that Lott was correct. It was during the twenties that the production of citrus fruit increased rapidly and became one of the chief factors for the Valley's development. The Valley offered fertile soil, semi-tropical climate, river water for irrigation, level land, and cheap labor. All these qualities gave the area unlimited possibilities for the production of a superior fruit at a reasonable cost.[18]

The Valley's ideal conditions made it inevitable that the citrus industry would flourish. In 1918 there were only a few acres of citrus in the Valley and the value of citrus shipped that year was only $50,000. But by 1920 Hidalgo county alone had around 124,000 trees, which produced a crop worth over $125,000. During the year 1920 some 12,000 new trees were planted in the Valley, and the number of trees and revenue increased every year. During the 1930 planting season, 1,811,000 trees were planted while the value of the grapefruit crop alone totaled $1,305,150.[19]

Cameron county farmers, seeing their neighbor's success, also jumped on the "prosperity wagon." They were encouraged to convert to citrus by the claim that Cameron county would grow more and faster producing trees than Hidalgo county. Although the quality of fruit was said to be the same throughout the Valley, farmers were told that the rate of growth was different, because there is a two to four degree

difference in temperature between the upper and lower Valley. The lower Valley is cooler in the summer and warmer in the winter, allowing the lower Valley trees to produce within four years of planting as opposed to five years in the upper Valley. Cameron county farmers were also told that there was better drainage and richer soil in the lower Valley.[20] With this propaganda thousands of acres in Cameron county were shifted to citrus.

While some farmers were shifting to citrus, landowners in La Feria and Santa Rosa started a massive clearing of virgin land for citrus planting. In these areas, during the 1921 planting season, 108,500 trees were planted. By 1924, even though most trees were still not producing, the orchards were worth $1,627,500. That same year, farmers planned to plant 100,000 more trees. It was predicted that by 1930 this area would have more trees and be worth more than any other area in Cameron county. Orchard owners were estimating that by that year there would be 500,000 trees bearing fruit and that at an estimated value of $10 per tree orchards in this area would be worth $5,000,000.[21]

During the early 1920s when citrus planting had intensified, planting was limited by the supply of trees available. Trees for the early orchards were chiefly imported from Florida and California, but were not available in sufficient numbers to meet the local demand. Valley nurserymen soon realized this and increased their planting so as to meet the demand.[22]

Sam J. Baker had come to the Valley as a citrus inspector for the Bureau of Plant Industry, U.S. Department of Agriculture. Upon

arrival Baker was told that it was imperative that Florida or California stock trees be planted here. Furthermore, he was told, nursery trees could not be grown here for it was impossible to get the buds to "stick." Baker, unconvinced, decided to buy a small piece of land where he began the propagation of citrus nursery stock. He was so successful that soon he could not supply the demand. Baker's argument was that his trees were better than those grown anywhere and were better adapted to Valley conditions than any imported trees could possibly be because they were grown under the same soil and climatic conditions as the proposed grove. He proceeded to advise prospective citrus growers on how to grow and produce better trees.[23]

By 1925 many Valley nurserymen were growing most of their own trees, but they were still importing some. That year, Dr. J. B. Webb of Donna and Mr. A. J. Hemminger of Mission received 160 Thompson Pink trees from Florida and shared them with other nurserymen in the Valley. In 1929, Mr. Hemminger discovered that one of his Thompson Pink trees had a sport limb (branch) bearing fruit with a deep red pulp and a red color on the outside of the rind. At about the same time, Dr. Webb found an entire tree in his grove bearing similar fruit.[24]

Hemminger named his fruit the "Ruby Red" and Dr. Webb named his the "Red Blush." Both used buds from these limbs to graft seedlings and in two years they had trees for sale. Not only were they able to sell all the buds and trees they could grow, but they, along with other owners, found that red fruit brought higher prices than white fruit. After the 1929 discovery even more extensive grafting began.[25]

Nurserymen, in their search for the best stock and planting conditions for the area, had found that the foundation of a citrus grove was the root stock on which it was budded. Experience in the Valley had shown that sour orange stock was the best for Valley conditions. In planning a seed-bed care had to be taken to plant only pure sour seed. The seed had to be soaked in water for several days before planting, changing the water twice daily to prevent souring. Good seed usually takes two to four weeks to germinate and the bed has to be kept constantly moist from the time the seeds are planted until they come up. The seedlings were kept growing by frequent irrigation and cultivation. Care had to be exercised in irrigation and only enough water used for the proper growth of the seedlings, as excessive moisture causes rotting.[26]

Work and care in the nursery was meticulous. Nursery rows were planted four feet apart and the plants were placed sixteen inches apart in the row. This allowed room for balling[27] trees when taking them to set out in the orchard. For the best results, nurserymen found that stock should be allowed to grow to at least one half inch in diameter before budding.[28]

Once the nursery work had been carefully studied, nurserymen found that the best time for transplanting the seedling to the main orchard was in early spring, thus avoiding the danger of frost. Trees were planted no closer than twenty-five feet from each other to allow roots to grow well. The holes in which the trees were planted was usually about eighteen inches in diameter and eighteen inches deep. If balled trees were used the tree was placed in position and the top

of the ball was left about two inches above the general level of the surrounding soil. The soft top soil was used to fill in around the ball and pack firmly.[29]

Because of many citrus growers' foresight and extensive grafting and planting that began, the Valley citrus industry grew rapidly from only a few small citrus orchards in the Valley prior to World War I, whose production accounted for 12,000 boxes of citrus per year, to the season of 1929-1930, when production increased to 20,000 boxes.[30] This growth was due to a lot of work and early planning by many early farmers who foresaw the area's great potential when teamed with irrigation.

Irrigation

Water, another indispensable factor for the citrus' success, was plentiful because of the proximity of the Rio Grande. It was obvious that irrigation would have to precede large scale citrus planting. The original irrigation systems had been intended for the growing of crops other than citrus. However, if it had not been for these systems the citrus industry might have been retarded or might not have reached the level of success that it did.

The first irrigation project was proposed as early as 1847. It was a group of Louisiana sugar planters who first thought of irrigating land near Brownsville. To bring water from the Rio Grande to their plantation they planned to construct a series of windmills that were to be driven by the Gulf breeze to pump water from the river into a series of man-made lakes spaced about five miles apart. These lakes were to supply the water for gravity irrigation. This plan was tried for a

while, but was later abandoned because of the cost.[31]

To George Brulay are accorded the honors for having constructed the first successful irrigation project in 1870. Within a few years other Valley farmers followed suit: John Closner in 1895 started a system in his San Juan Plantation. The Hidalgo Canal Company (later called McAllen Canal Company) was organized in 1902 as the third Valley system. The Brownsville Land and Irrigation Company and the Santa Maria Project started an irrigation system in 1905. Another major project was begun in Mercedes in 1906. That same year various other irrigation projects were begun. By the early 1920, at which time the citrus industry began to flourish, there were over 200,000 acres of land in the Valley under irrigation.[32]

Most of the original irrigation companies were privately owned, for many saw what water could do for the Valley. As early as March 1904 newspaper editorials were carrying information concerning the importance of water in the area. In an editorial dated March 4, 1904 in the Brownsville Daily Herald it was stated that "The county contains 3308 square miles, the greatest part of which is tillable and can be made irrigable." It further stated that the land that was far from the river could be watered from artesian wells. Water from artesian wells, it was claimed, was so plentiful that they could provide as much as 12,000 gallons per hour. Those early proponents of irrigation shouted "Grand is the land! Great is the water that will transform this fertile Valley into a land of plenty!"[33]

With this in mind land speculators developed an ambitious plan to raise capital by private means or public subscription. Land

developers saw the potential of their lands if only they could bring water from the Rio Grande to them. Thus, the Llano Grande Land Irrigation Company, headquatered in San Antonio, was chartered in late 1904. This company had a capital of $250,000 that was used to irrigate lands in Cameron and Hidalgo counties.[34]

At about the same time the La Blanca Agricultural Company of Hidalgo, which had been in operation for about a year, started an irrigation system for 1500 acres out of their 24,000 acre farm. As this project became successful they increased the amount of acreage under irrigation. The company later kept 1,000 acres, but divided the rest into 50 acre tracts and put them on the market.[35]

Other Valley developers started taking note of the importance of irrigation. By 1905 the American Land and Irrigation Company was chartered. It soon began to buy land in the Llano Grande and La Feria grants from the heirs of Juan José Hinojosa and Rosa María Hinojosa de Balli and others. The company's plan was to bring 250,000 acres under irrigation. The success in agriculture in the Mercedes area is owed to this company.[36]

During this period all companies were privately owned, and most began to experience financial problems. By 1920 only four of over 20 original companies survived. Those who were able to keep their heads above water had done so thanks to aid from the federal government. During December of 1918, Mr. W. T. Burnett, then secretary of the Board of City Development of the City of Brownsville, went to Washington D.C. to secure federal funds for improvements of the Brownsville harbor and for a gravity irrigation system. After returning to Brownsville,

Burnett received a wire from Major A. Alber Brown, his contact in Washington D. C., stating that unless a certain amount of money was made available by December 25, 1918, there would be nothing done during that session of Congress in connection with the gravity irrigation matter.[37]

Burnett immediately contacted the U.S. Reclamation Department. Following much discussion, the Reclamation Department offered $15,000 as its share of the $30,000 needed for the preliminary survey, providing that the people of the Valley would subscribe to the remaining $15,000. The people of Brownsville gave their guarantee and, consequently, the Secretary of the Interior approved the Reclamation Department head's offer.[38] Thus, federal involvement in the Valley irrigation systems began. Eventually, all the other private irrigation companies were organized into water districts publicly owned and operated on a non-profit basis.[39]

Water, one of the most important commodities needed for the prosperity of the area and the citrus industry, was now readily available to the farmers through the irrigation systems that had been built in various parts of the Valley. However, it soon became apparent that if the Valley was to compete with other citrus areas, better transportation facilities were needed.

ENDNOTES

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[23]Sam J. Baker, "Valley Citrus School," Monty's Monthly, August 1922, pp. 16-17.

[24]Stambaugh, Texas, pp. 236-52.

[25]Ibid. In grafting; a bud of one tree is inserted into the stem of another where it continues to grow and thus becomes a permanent part of the tree.

[26]J.M. Delcurto et.al., The Citrus Industry, pp. 28-31

[27]Balling: the process of wrapping in burlap the root and dirt of the newly-dug tree for transplanting.

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The Development of Transportation And Its Influence

Prerailroad

For many years the biggest handicap in the area was the lack of good transportation. The roads that existed were merely rough traces menaced by dense chaparral. This had caused the Valley to remain isolated from the rest of Texas and from the markets of the country. To remedy this situation a better transportation system was needed.

As early as 1856 the Texas Legislature granted a charter for a railroad to be built from Corpus Christi to near Rio Grande City. This would have been a blessing for the Valley. Area farmers could have hauled their goods by wagon to Rio Grande City to be shipped by rail to Corpus Christi and then to other markets. But although the project was approved, it never materialized. There was opposition by wagon traders, and the area people voted against the necessary bonds required to start the project. After this several other unsuccessful attempts were made to bring a railroad to the Valley. Promoters were discouraged. They saw the hundred-mile stretch of sand dunes between Kingsville and Raymondville, the brushland, the scarcity of water, the danger of banditry, and what they assumed to be the residents' lack of interest, as obstacles too formidable to tackle.[1]

Nevertheless, by the turn of the century things began to look up for the Valley. Railroad companies with money to invest were seeking

new places to extend their lines. Several of these companies made it known that they wanted to build lines to the Valley. By 1903 Southern Pacific was planning a line from Alice south into the area. Due to legal problems she was not able to complete the project, and the St. Louis, Brownsville, and Mexico Railroad took the lead.[2]

Uriah Lott, of Corpus Christi, was one of the organizers of the St. Louis, Brownsville, and Mexico Railroad. In 1903 his company acquired a charter to lay track from Sinton to Brownsville with a branchline extending from Brownsville to Starr County. In order to gain support for this enterprise, Lott formed his company's board of directors of land owners and influencial people along the proposed route. Lott's plan was successful, for money and land were made available to his company by the local people.[3]

The Railroad

On July 28, 1903 construction on the railroad began at Robstown. Work continued with only a few minor problems. Although there were many Mexicans and Mexican-Americans willing to work on this enterprise, few, if any, were hired. Many Anglo ranchers and farmers who had lent support to Lott had done so with the condition that Mexicans and Mexican-Americans not be hired. Average wages for railroad workers were $2.00 per day while farm and ranch hands averaged fifty to seventy-five cents. Anglo employers feared that if Mexicans or Mexican-Americans were hired by the railroad they would be left with no farm or ranch hands. Consequently, most of the railroad workers were Anglos or blacks.[4]

Due to the flatness of the terrain few bridges had to be constructed on the proposed route, so progress was rapid, and for a while the work

ran ahead of schedule. However, since most of the work had to be done by mule-power or by brute manpower, work schedules started falling behind. More manpower was needed. To solve this problem the company brought in 104 Greeks from St. Louis.[5]

The Greek employees were a constant problem to the company. They refused to do as told, were always complaining and did not adapt well to the working conditions--long hours and hot days. At the end of the first month, when their first payday came around, they confronted the paymaster and foreman with the charge that they had been underpaid. The company had deducted their fare from St. Louis to Corpus Christi, something which, they claimed, was not part of their contract. Soon afterwards all the Greeks quit and were given transportation back to St. Louis. The railroad company, still in need of manpower, finally hired Mexicans. But the Mexican workers were not supposed to be farm or ranch hands. Most were brought in directly from México, and later left the Valley to work for other railroad companies.[6]

Finally, on June 7, 1904 the Valley threw off a century-and-a-half of isolation and ox-team slowness as the first train arrived at Brownsville over the newly constructed tracks of the St. Louis, Brownsville, and Mexico Line. Then, in the late summer of 1905, the Sam Fordyce Branchline was built across the Cameron-Hidalgo County line, then westward, setting the stage for further development of the Valley.[7]

Land Sales

After the railroad was completed it was realized that there was not enough business for the line to prosper. The railroad, finding itself in this precarious condition, soon (1904-1910) started advertising all

over Texas and the United States for people to settle in the Valley.

In 1904 the Rock Island Railroad purchased the St. Louis, Brownsville, and Mexico Railroad and started promotions for the development of the Valley or, as they called it, "The Gulf Coast Country." The railroad's propaganda was so convincing that many of its own employees bought land in the Valley. Land sales were so successful that the company sent Mr. Clyde Craig to the Valley with $500,000 in capital for speculations in land. Ultimately this company bought over 72,000 acres throughout the Valley at an average price of eight dollars an acre. Most of the land purchased was not cleared, nevertheless, there were plenty of buyers in the Chicago and Minneapolis area who were willing to pay as much as $12.50 per acre.[8]

Like Mr. Craig there were many other land speculators. Mr. B.F. Yoakum, who was one of the persons responsible for bringing the railroad into the Valley, was also responsible for land advertisement. In 1904 his railroad company set a budget of $25,000 for such advertising. This endeavor proved to be successful, for in the first eight months of 1905 it brought in 251 train cars with immigrants and in 1906 it brought 11,700 home seekers with special roundtrip fares of fifteen dollars, from Chicago, Minneapolis or St. Louis. Brownsville was so crowded with potential land buyers that hotels were forced to put six persons in a room.[9]

As the land boom of 1904-1910 got into full swing, lands worth 25¢-$1.00 per acre before the railroad came jumped to $10-$50 in 1906 and by 1910 had gone up to $100-$300 per acre.[10]

Irrigation companies also played a tremedous part in this land boom. In 1907, these companies originated the practice of scheduling land seekers' (popularly called "Snowdiggers") parties by train from Chicago, Kansas City and St. Louis. Mr. William Doherty, traffic manager for the railroad, made a deal with the irrigation companies. He started advertising "home seekers' rates;" a round-trip ticket from Chicago to Brownsville was $25.00.[11]

During the years 1910-1920 there was a new influx of northern settlers. Land speculators like George Freeman, John Conway, A.J. McColl, C.H. Swallow and John Shary attracted investors by advertising in national magazines as well as in major newspapers around the country. The advertisements announced that Valley citrus was bringing a premium of 25¢-30¢ per box over California or Florida fruit, and predicted that in the future Valley citrus would bring an even better price.[12]

Soon there was a long waiting list of people who wanted to come to the Valley. Pullman cars were chartered with twenty people riding each of the three or four cars per train. On the way to the Valley only one stop was made, which was in San Antonio, for sight-seeing purposes. Upon arrival in the Valley the train was met by local men in automobiles. The land seekers would step into the automobiles and go, caravan style, on a sight-seeing tour of the Valley. This caravan was known as a land crowd. The driver of each car was immediately responsible for those in his car. Drivers were obliged to follow many rules and regulations, but the pay was good, and the driver was paid a commission when a sale was made to one of his riders. Naturally, every driver did his best to sell land.[13]

The promoters and salesmen who during this period helped to populate the area, not only used the standard tricks of their professions, but had to think of some new ones. Some land salesmen, in order to impress the buyer, had truckloads of palm trees in tubs placed on each land-site before the prospective buyers arrived. The trees would be taken up when the buyers left and rushed to the next land-site. Because of these sales tactics, and with the hope of striking it rich in the Valley, many bought property. However, out of every three who bought land only one succeeded. Many, besides being inexperienced farmers, paid more than the land was worth. Some suffered from crop freezes, while others, as in the case of growing citrus fruits, lacked the capital to wait for the trees to mature. A few even went to work for other orchard owners while waiting for their own trees to bear fruit.[14]

Scandals

Because of the high-pressure techniques employed by the land salesmen many land buyers were swindled. Some buyers bought more land than they could pay for; some got poor land; others, when they came to occupy the land which they thought they had purchased, found their deeds were for other lands.[15] Many arrived in the Valley to settle on their land only to find that they could have purchased better land at cheaper prices. Consequently, many land buyers lost heavily and some were financially ruined.[16]

Angry land buyers sought redress through the United States Post Office, claiming that land companies had used the mail to defraud.[17] Eventually, in 1921 the Post Office conducted an investigation which concluded that land salesmen had indeed been guilty of misrepresentation and fraudulent claims.[18]

In January of 1924 new charges of land fraud surfaced, with six hundred Valley land buyers claiming that they had been defrauded.[19] But by early 1925 most of these charges and allegations were dropped, perhaps for political reasons.[20] One thing is certain, that while these investigations were taking place and for a long period to follow, land sale practices took a turn for the better.

Originally, many land buyers had bought more land than they could afford. Sellers had been in the habit of pushing sales of 160 acre tracts. They now suggested that twenty acres were enough to make a comfortable return on a buyer's investment. Some companies would sell forty acre tracts only when the buyer could show the realtor that he could afford to pay for more than the twenty acres suggested without putting a crimp on his finances. Because of these reformed sales practices many companies were able to sell only from fifty to seventy-five percent of the land that they had on the market. But in the end, the new sales policies proved to be better for the Valley, for they caused more settlers to come. During the month of November 1922, more than a thousand home-seekers visited the Valley, and about sixty percent decided to buy and make the Valley their permanent home.[21]

The prospective land buyers arriving in 1922 were told that a citrus grove could easily accommodate one hundred trees per acre and that each tree could produce seven boxes of citrus which could be sold at $6.00 per box, thus, a net return of $4,200 per acre. Realtors claimed that even if an orchard was to average $500 to $1,000 per acre it was better than a gold mine.[22] These claims became so attractive that many citrus growers from California and Florida came to the Valley and

purchased lands for citrus orchards.[23]

As more people became interested in citrus orchards landowners became successful land speculators. For example, Mr. E.M. Chase, from Brownsville, established a land company and put 5,000 acres of choice citrus land on the market. His enterprise became so successful that the Chase company constructed a club house with every convenience and comfort--good beds and good food--necessary to provide properly for the visiting prospective buyers. To further entice customers a ten-acre orchard was planted across from the club house for exhibition purposes. Many liked what they saw and decided to invest their money in the citrus industry of the Rio Grande Valley.[24]

Because of the many new settlers who had come to the Valley to make their fortune in the citrus industry the production of citrus fruit increased. By the 1920-1921 season between forty and fifty carloads of citrus were available for shipment to out-of-the-Valley markets. The problem was that not many consumers from out-of-the-area knew of Valley citrus. Not only were out-of-the-Valley potential consumers unaware of Valey citrus, but many local consumers were reluctant to purchase the home-grown product. Local orchard owners were aware that California's success in this industry was the product of good advertising and they hoped to do the same for the Valley.[25]

Valley Citrus Exchange

In 1921 the Valley Citrus Exchange was organized with its headquarters in Harlingen. During the first meeting about fifty orchard owners were present. Their principal objectives were the establishment of a citrus experimental station for the Valley, the securing of additional citrus inspectors, and the reduction of freight

and express rates. During the meeting Mr. R. T. Thomas, an orchard owner from La Feria, told of his troubles in marketing his citrus to local people. He severely criticized the local stores and soda fountains for using California and Florida products when they could get home-grown citrus at as cheap or cheaper prices and of very much superior quality. After much discussion a campaign for the education of the local people on the use of home-grown products was agreed upon. The organization also agreed to promote the boycott of any business establishment that used any fruit other than the home-grown when available. It was also agreed to direct their advertising to the Texas housewife, since it was she who did most of the marketing. It was assumed that once the housewife was educated the merchants would be compelled to carry home-grown products.[26]

To convince the Texas housewife that Texas citrus was as good if not better than out-of-state citrus, Texas citrus growers began advertising in Texas newspapers as well as in magazines. The advertisements informed the housewife that Texas citrus was less expensive than California or Florida citrus, which meant that for the same amount of money she could buy a larger and juicier fruit. To further entice the Texas housewife, fruit was individually wrapped in paper. The wrapper, white and orange, had the state of Texas outlined in the center and "Valley Sweet," the name chosen for Citrus Exchange fruits, imprinted inside the state outline. Texas housewives, being proud of their state, started buying Texas citrus.[27]

Local growers estimated that by the 1922-1923 season 150 to 200 carloads would be available for shipment and that this number would

increase every year. They also estimated that, in spite of their previous advertisement, Houston, Dallas, San Antonio and Fort Worth would consume only up to 35 carloads. Thus, it was decided that even though it would be expensive, it would be necessary to launch a propaganda campaign to educate the American consumer to use Valley fruit.[28]

Propaganda

Orchard owners searched for a way and for a place to propagandize Valley fruit in out-of-state markets. Mr. B.G. Irish, president of the San Antonio real estate board, was invited to attend the Valley Mid-Winter Fair held in Harlingen in December 1921. Mr. Irish was so impressed with the Valley and its potential that he decided to stage a "Valley Week" commencing December 10th the same year during the San Antonio Fair.[29]

Valley citrus growers and land promoters realized that a good way to sell Valley fruit would be to get the people attending "Valley Week" in San Antonio to eat Valley fruit. Therefore, several Valley representatives attended the Fair to give out fruit and to answer questions concerning the Valley. The Fair was such a success that it was extended for an extra week. During the two week activity Valley fruit was displayed in show windows throughout the city. There were also thirty-nine luncheons where Valley citrus was served. Each place setting had a card describing the Valley and its citrus in glowing terms.[30]

During the second week of the Fair display booths were erected throughout the city, where Valley fruit was either sold or given away. It was estimated that approximately 1500 state and out-of-state persons per day had been exposed to Valley propaganda, many of whom were not aware that citrus was growing in Texas. Because of the success of the

Fair plans were made to hold it again the following year. San Antonio realtors, realizing the money that could be made in the Valley, started to add Valley-land salesmen to their firms.[31]

Orchard owners, aware that through fairs many could be exposed to what the Valley had to offer in its citrus industry, began planning ahead. The next fair to which they concentrated their efforts was the Houston Fair to be held on November 10-19, 1922. This, like the San Antonio Fair, was a tremendous success. Mr. H. Raymond Mills, head of the Harlingen packing plant, was placed in charge of promoting the Valley. He and four other men attended the Fair at their own expense, to make themselves available to answer questions regarding the Valley and its citrus industry.[32]

Some local citrus growers were aware that during the San Antonio Fair there had not been enough Valley fruit to either display or give away. Consequently, for the Houston Fair, growers provided 150 boxes of grapefruit, each individually wrapped with a "Texas Sweet" wrapper. This fruit was sent to be placed on display at various booths which were to be constructed with a $600 fund provided by the growers. Those citrus growers who refused to donate either citrus or money were severely criticized. They were accused of being selfish for not wanting to do anything to promote the Valley.[33]

During the Houston Fair, Valley propaganda affected an estimated 250,000 state and out-of-state visitors, many of whom were amazed to hear that citrus was growing in the Valley. Local orchard owners were pleased with the results of this Fair, because it kept the Valley in the

limelight for many months.[34]

Many who attended the Fair returned home and continued to talk about the "Foster Pink" grapefruit which they had eaten. Originally many had thought that the fruit had been tinted for the show. Upon hearing otherwise, they were amazed. They were even more surprised to hear that such fruit had come from a Texas orchard--that of Mr. John Barge from Mission. Of the sixty-four ribbons awarded during the fair, thirty-three were awarded to orchards in the Mission-Sharyland area. Mr. Barge was awarded a blue ribbon for the size, taste, and color of his grapefruit.[35]

Through both fairs and other advertisements orchard owners fulfilled their dreams of attracting out-of-state buyers. Mr. Charles A. Rodgers, an auctioneer and buyer of fruit in Chicago, became attracted to Valley fruit. In 1926 he bought the first carload of Texas grapefruit ever offered for sale there. Although the pack was flat and the fruit was not carefully graded, Rodgers and other fruit buyers were impressed by the price and eating quality of Valley fruit. Within a few years, as supplies became more regular and the grading was improved, the consumers in Chicago as well as in other markets throughout the United States came to demand Texas grapefruit.[36]

With the improved railroad transportation and increasing demand for Valley fruit, farmers realized that it was important for them to join forces to provide better distribution and marketing. From this realization was born, in March 1922, the Lower Rio Grande Citrus Exchange, a non-profit co-operative that grew from the original nineteen members to nearly one hundred fifty members in a year's time.

During the first year of its existence, this exchange was able to market out-of-the-Valley about fifty percent of the fruit produced.[37]

The Citrus Exchange, although appearing to be running smoothly, actually operated rather haphazardly. To correct the situation, it hired the Valley Packing Company of Harlingen to standardize the packing of citrus fruits in the Valley. The packing company received one dollar per box for the service of cutting, sorting by size, packing, treating, and loading the fruit for out-of-the-Valley shipments.[38] As a result, the Valley was able to put on the market a product superior in quality and equal in packaging to that of other citrus producing areas. The response from the jobbers, dealers and consumers was immediate. The demand for Valley citrus became so great that for a while it appeared that demand would exceed supply.

Exchange members projected a five-times-greater citrus season for 1923-1924. Consequently, it was decided at a special meeting held in March 1923, to install at least two, perhaps three, new modern packing plants to care for the anticipated increase in the next season's crop. These plants were to be owned and operated by the exchange, and were to be financed and maintained with membership fees.[39]

Through the combined efforts of the Citrus Exchange and the Harlingen packing company 39,469 boxes of citrus fruits were shipped out of the Valley up to March 15 during the 1922-1923 season. Railroad agents estimated that there would be 3,105 more boxes from March 15 to the end of the season, of which 1,100 boxes were being held in storage in Harlingen. This would make a total of 42,574 boxes to be processed during the season. This the railroad viewed as 142 carloads which would

represent a good profit for the railroad company.[40]

As had been anticipated, the demand for Valley citrus, in-state and out-of-state, had increased. Citrus growers were able to meet the demand, but they had problems with shipping their products. Originally the local railroad lines picked up citrus and produce from various shipping points in the Valley and concentrated them in Harlingen. The Missouri Pacific Railroad in Harlingen would not transport out of the area until a certain number of boxcars were full. This number was determined by the railroad agent. From Harlingen, goods were shipped to St. Louis, Missouri, from where they were rerouted to their ultimate destination.[41]

Valley citrus growers were not only dissatisfied with the delay in Harlingen, but also with the length of time (118 hours) it took from Harlingen to St. Louis. The railroad responded to grower protests by offering better service for the Valley. Between 1925 and 1928 the Missouri Pacific cut its time from 188 hours to 72 hours. This was accomplished by running trains of solid "fruit blocks," which stopped only when icing and inspection were required.[42] This improvement in transportation was one of the best things that happended to the citrus industry.

Paved Roads

While the citrus industry in the Valley was developing, one obstacle which needed to be overcome was that of inadequate local transportation facilities. The roads were almost impassable during bad weather. Citrus products which the orchardists wished to sell had to be hauled through these deplorable roads from the orchards to the market or railroad.[43]

The evolution of transportation in the Valley from ox-drawn and horse-drawn vehicles to motor-driven cars and trucks had directed the attention of many local citizens to the need for hard-surfaced roads. Realizing this need, Cameron county voted its first bonds of $300,000 for the building of concrete roads in 1918. This was for the highway which was later designated as U.S. Highway No. 281. In 1923, an additional $350,000 of bonds were voted, making it possible to connect with the Hidalgo county highway in 1924.[44]

As early as 1926 plans were being made for the improvement of feeder (farm) roads. Although major highways were now hard-surfaced, orchard owners were having problems getting their crops from the orchards to the highways. Mr. S. Finley Ewing, Mayor of Harlingen was the chairman of a committee to support a feeder-road project. At the first committee meeting Mr. Ewing stated "this is a critical time in the history of the Valley. The present growth has proven that the greatest developer of the Valley is good roads." And on January 29, 1927, Cameron county residents approved by a vote of nearly four to one a $6 million bond issue to pave feeder-roads. This was a major undertaking: it was the largest bond issue for concrete roads ever voted on in the history of Texas, and the largest concrete feeder-road issue ever proposed in the United States. The ultimate completion of this project practically eliminated the orchard owners' transportation problems.[45]

The good reliable transportation medium now enjoyed was not the end of the orchardists' problems. Manpower was now their major concern. However, the availability of manpower depended on the laws and attitudes

of the United States and her people.

ENDNOTES

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[2]Ibid.

[3]Lee J. Stambaugh and Lillian J. Stambaugh, The Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas (San Antonio: The Naylor Co., 1954), pp. 168-169.

[4]Ibid., pp. 170-171; and Oral History: Antonia Benavides, from Harlingen remembers that members of her family from Cerralvo, Nuevo León were recruited to work for the railroad that was coming to the Valley. After the completion of the railroad, her relatives were transfered to Kansas to work for the same construction company there.

[5]Stambaugh, Texas, pp. 170-171.

[6]"Greeks Quit Work," Brownsville Daily Herald, 4 March 1904, p. A1.; and Antonia Benavides.

[7]Frank H. Dugan, Hidalgo County Centennial 1852-1952, (Mission, Texas: Times Publishing Co., December 1952), p. 14.

[8]Mr. Clyde Craig, Lyford, Texas, to Mr. Venice, 6 November 1965, Personal letter to Mr. Venice where Mr. Craig recounts his experiences as a land salesman in the Valley. Author has a copy.

[9]Ira G. Clark, Then Came the Railroad: The Century From Steam To Diesel in the Southwest (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1958), p. 260.

[10]T. C. Richardson, "Where I Would Plant My Citrus Orchard," Monty's Monthly, November-December 1922, pp. 87-91.; and Dugan, Hidalgo County Centennial, pp. 14-16.

[11]Ibid.

[12]"The Passing Pageant," Monty's Monthly, November-December 1922, p. 58.

[13]Miriam Chatelle, For We Love Our Valley Home (San Antonio: Naylor Co., 1948), pp. 56-57.

[14]Wayne Gard, Rawhide Texas (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1956), pp. 187-188.

[15]Stambaugh, Texas, p. 232.

[16]Richard P. Walsh, "The History of the Alamo Land and Sugar Co.," unpublished research paper, Pan American University 1981, p. 6.

[17]Alamo Land and Sugar Company et. al. v. James R. Page et. al., Hidalgo County District Court, September 8, 1921, p. 2.

[18]Ibid. p. 3.

[19]"Edinburg Thronged as Land Case Opens," San Benito Light, 15 September 1921, p. 1.

[20]Walsh, pp. 1-21.

[21]"Conditions in the Lower Rio Grande Valley," Monty's Monthly, November-December 1922, pp. 16-19.

[22]"Orchard and Orchardist," Monty's Monthly, August 1922, pp. 20-21.

[23]"Pioneers Saw Value of Citrus," Valley Evening Monitor, 1 March 1961, p. E11.

[24]"Cameron County Proposes," Monty's Monthly, January 1924.

[25]"Orchard and Orchardist," Monty's Monthly, August 1922, pp. 20-21.;

"The Citrus Tree Supplement," Monty's Monthly,November-December 1922, p. 19.; and Mr. Ray C. Burrhus, who wrote his family history sometime in the 1950's. Mr. Burrhus came from Iowa and settled on a 60 acre tract which he purchased from Mr. Shary. Author has a copy of the Burrhus' travels to Texas.

[26]"The Valley Citrus Industry Citrus Exchange Annual Meeting," Monty's Monthly, August 1922, pp. 10-12.

[27]"Buy the Home Product," Monty's Monthly, August 1922, p. 30.; and "Citrus" Lower Rio Grande Valley Magazine, October 1928.

[28]"Musings of Monty," Monty's Monthly, November-December 1922, pp. 72-74.

[29]"Valley Is Indebted to L.E. Snively of Harligen and Monty's for Success of San Antonio's Valley Week," pp. 6-9 and "The Mid-Winter Far," p. 11, Monty's Monthly, January 1922.

[30]Ibid.

[31]Ibid.

[32]"Citrus Exhibit at Houston Fair," Monty's Monthly, November-December 1922, pp. 7-8.

[33]Ibid.

[34]Ibid.

[35]Ibid.

[36]"Citrus Packing Plant Uses Latest Handling Machinery," Valley Evening Monitor, 1 March 1961, p. E11.

[37]J.M. Delcurto, E.W. Halstead and H.F. Halstead, The Citrus Industry in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas, No. 75. (Austin, Texas: Texas Department of Agriculture, March-April 1923), p. 73.

[38]Ibid. p. 75.

[39]Ibid. p. 73.

[40]Ibid. pp. 26-27.

[41]Ira G. Clark, Then Came the Railroad: The Century From Steam To Diesel in the Southwest, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1958), p. 297.

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[43]William Bennett Bizzell, Rural Texas, (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1924), pp. 223-224.

[44]Chatelle, For We Love Our Valley Home, p. 41.

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Laws and Attitudes Concerning the Mexican Immigrant

Immigration 1904-1910

Through the latter part of the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries there was a need for a large number of Mexican and Mexican-American laborers for the development of the Valley. While it is true that the railroad and irrigation contributed greatly to the area's prosperity, the success of the agricultural development, and more so the citrus industry, was based largely on the use of Mexican and Mexican-American workers.[1] As one area orchard owner remarked: "If it were not for those hard-working Meskins this place would not be on the map. It is true about the Anglo know-how, but without those Meskin hands no one could have built up the prosperity we have in this part of the nation."[2]

Both Mexicans and Mexican-Americans were employed, but the citrus industry's debt to the Mexicans is much greater. There were plenty of Mexican-Americans in the area, but orchard owners were not happy with them. They considered Mexican-Americans lazy, arrogant, and even vicious. Land-owners even regretted having encouraged their education, limited though it may have been. Even a little learning, they thought, caused Mexican-Americans to believe that they were worth more than their uneducated counterparts, and to demand higher wages for their labor. Some orchard owners even commented that the younger generation of Mexican-Americans were not worth their salt! They would go to school for a while, and when they came out they would not work like their fathers. So it was that the Mexican was preferred, for he

made no trouble, took orders well, and was not uppish like the Mexican-American.[3]

The need for Mexican laborers and the attitude toward them depended on the stage of development of the citrus industry, the laws of the country and the conditions that existed in Mexico. Many Mexicans came to the Valley during the first decade of the twentieth century to satisfy the labor needs of the first stage of development of the citrus industry. The physical proximity, the relatively low cost of moving and the varied opportunities for crossing into the United States made it easy for Mexicans to come on a temporary basis.[4] Most of those who came during this period were from Tamaulipas. One of the reasons why they came was because in their state 92.3 percent were landless. To compound the problem, most of Tamaulipas was brushland with only eight percent of the land under cultivation, which made it difficult for many poor Mexicans to provide for themselves and their families.[5]

Mexicans came to the Valley under a variety of arrangements. It is hard to estimate how many entered the country, for there were some who came legally, but many came in illegally. This was still the period of the United States "open door" immigration policy. Admission to the United States was arranged at the border station and no visa from an American consulate was required. One thing, however, is certain: most of those who came did so for temporary work in agriculture.[6]

Mexicans crossed the border in response to an economic urge and because the Valley employers needed cheap labor for the economic prosperity of the area. Some employers even asserted that they could not get along without the Mexicans.[7]

Tamaulipas, as well as the rest of Mexico, during this time was

stagnant under the regime of Porfirio Díaz. With rampant inflation and low wages many started looking toward the Valley for solutions to their problems.[8] Thus, the Valley with its development provided a pull factor for many Mexicans.[9]

Ernesto Galarza, a sociologist, and many others have suggested that the reason for the Tamalipeco coming to the Valley was that transportation to Matamoros or Reynosa from the interior of Tamaulipas had been made easier with the construction of the railroad in México.[10] This, however, must be disputed, for there was no railroad from the interior to the mentioned border towns. The only existing railroad ran along the border--from Matamoros to Nuevo Laredo. It would have been impractical for most Tamaulipecos to have used rail transportation to come to the border, for it would have taken them out of their way. Furthermore, many who might have availed themselves of such transportation could not afford to do so. And even those who could have paid the rail fare often preferred to travel from their villages to the border on foot in order to save money. It was not uncommon to hear of entire families who had walked as much as three hundred miles to the border.[11]

Not all who came to the Valley perceived themselves as entering a foreign country. To many Mexicans, coming to the United States was just a journey of several days, crossing an invisible line and continuing to mingle with their own countrymen. Some Mexicans knew that they were entering a formerly Mexican territory which they dreamed would some day be returned.[12] Crossing the river was a mere obstacle in their path toward employment.

Most immigrants from the interior of Tamaulipas had friends or relatives living on both sides of the river. Those who through these

acquaintances had already been assured employment in the Valley crossed the river upon arrival. Others who had not yet made work contacts stayed on the Mexican side only long enough to be recruited for jobs in the Valley.[13]

Most Mexicans arrived at the border without funds. There was little problem for those who had already had a promise of employment. Their friends and relatives on the United States side provided for their needs until payday. Those with no contracts on the border were promptly enticed and recruited by labor agents, usually Mexicans or Mexican-Americans, with a promise of good paying jobs plus room and board.[14]

Because of the ease of crossing the river, it was not unusual to see sixty or more row boats transporting people to the United States along the border towns. Many of those boats were provided to labor agents by area land owners to transport needed Mexican laborers.[15]

Most Mexican workers came for short periods, making themselves available to Valley growers from January to May. When the rainy season began in México, usually in May, they would return to México for the planting season. They were willing to return to the Valley during the growing season, but would once more return to their homeland for the harvest.[16]

Who were these Mexican workers? The majority who came during the first decade of the twentieth century were poor agricultural workers who were trying to improve themselves and their families. However, many employers in the Valley saw them as unambitiuous, listless, physically weak, undependable and indolent. Others saw them as individuals wearing sombreros, sometimes barefooted, dirty, illiterate and people who did things mañana. Everyone claimed that their strongest asset was

that they were willing to work for low wages.[7]

Many Anglos in the Valley were under the impression that Mexicans were willing to work for low wages because they were of the peon or migrant labor class of México, and as such did not need much for their survival. Others thought that because they were villagers their wants were simple and they did not need much money to fulfill them. It was thought that if they were paid well they would squander their money on whiskey, gambling and fine clothing. This alleged Mexican lack of foresight and planning pleased many an orchard owner, for the emergencies of a thriftless worker would motivate him to work for lower wages. Many orchard owners stated that if the situation were to change the Mexicans would no longer be desirable as laborers.[18]

The prevalent Anglo attitude toward the Mexicans resulted in much unfair treatment. It was common practice to over-recruit workers. Labor agents were given a commission for every Mexican they contracted. Consequently, laborers arriving at worksites often found that there was a surplus of field hands there, and under such conditions they were offered less pay than had originally been promised. Nevertheless, the Mexican workers typically found it expedient to work for the duration of their contracts even at these low wages. However, as soon as their contracts expired they would usually leave in search of other employment. This process might be repeated over and over.[19]

Immigration 1910-1917

The Mexicans who came to the Valley during the second decade of the twentieth century were different from their predecessors. Many were agricultural workers, as before, but they were now accompanied by their families. And during this period some Mexican immigrants were from the

upper and middle socio-economic classes, leaving México because of the instability created by the Revolution. There were armies fighting everywhere, and the more affluent felt threatened by the unrest. Since most armies in México lived off the country, all were required to contribute to their sustenance. The army not only relied on the country for its food but also for its men. Many Mexicans who had no desire to fight decided to come to the Valley. Some of the wealthier citizens, because of their concern for their families and their children's education, decided that South Texas could provide them with not only sanctuary but also with an escape from a bloody and protracted conflict.[20]

How many refugees of the revolutionary era eventually returned to México is not certain. However, it can be assumed that many decided to stay in the United States, for Mexican records show a loss in population between 1910 and 1921--a loss which cannot be explained solely by revolutionary casualties or by natural causes.[21]

United States immigration records although loosely kept, indicate a significant immigration from México during the second decade of the century. In 1910 17,000 Mexicans came to the United States. The figure increased to 18,000 in 1911 and to 22,000 in 1912. Between 1912 and the end of World War I the number see-sawed back and forth between 11,000 and 17,000 yearly. In 1919 nearly 29,000 came and in 1920 51,000 were reported to have entered the United States. But these figures represent only those who entered legally. It is estimated that over one million Mexicans entered the country illegally during the same period. How many of them came to South Texas is not known.[22]

With the development of the citrus industry and the advent of World War I, the "push" of the Mexican Revolution was reinforced by the "pull" of Valley labor requirements. Valley employers needed hundreds and even

thousands of workers. The most convenient source was south--México.[23]

Prior to the Revolution few Mexicans had brought their families to the Valley, but with the increasing chaos in México the number of those who uprooted their families increased. Getting to the border remained a difficult experience. Many continued to walk from their homes to the border in order to save money for their support until jobs were found. The more affluent took whatever means of transportation was available. Many left their homes in carretas (wagons) to towns like Ciudad Victoria, San Fernando, or Linares, from where they traveled to the border by truck or bus.[24]

Those with money who wanted to immigrate legally, stayed in border towns until entry papers could be arranged. With the desperate need for Mexican labor in the Valley one could have expected American authorities to have treated the Mexicans better at the crossing. Yet, upon arrival at the point of entry, the Mexican families were subjected to abuse and humiliation.[25]

Although during the first half of this century open immigration still existed many Mexicans were taken to examination "pens" for processing. The pens were described as being dark, poorly ventilated, dirty and unsanitary. There was an effort to try to improve this situation, but it was virtually hopeless because of funding restrictions. It was difficult to process the numbers of Mexicans coming daily for their papers due to the shortage of working personnel. Those who had not been processed by the end of the working day were told to return the following morning. Many had to return day after day to endure the proecessors' abusive language and humiliation. After a few days of paying for food and lodging from their rapidly dwindling resources some resorted to bribing the officials, while others decided to cross

illegally. Thus, in both cases, their crossing was expedited. [26]

Once in the United States most Mexicans proceeded to work in agriculture. Even some of the wealthier immigrants, who had little or no agricultural experience and even less in working with citrus, found employment in the fields. Wages for Mexican males in the United States had remained the same as the previous decade. From economic necessity and the desire to earn money with the idea of one day returning to México with American dollars, many women and children started working.[27]

Many Anglo employers now thought that since the Mexican was accompanied by his wife and that she, too, in some cases, was earning money, they were better off financially. To pay better wages to the Mexican, it was thought, would be wasteful. Furthermore, the resourceful Mexicans could get by with little money. What can the Mexican "need," it was asked, that Nature had not provided? After all, Anglos continued to believe that the Mexicans had had nothing at home, so they were better off than before. Many were under the impression that Mexicans needed little for their survival, that they were able to eat things that Anglos would consider dietetically inadequate or unsuited to their taste.[28]

That the Mexican was resourceful, there is not doubt, but this was out of necessity, rather than by choice. According to many Anglos, the Mexican needed money only for a few articles of clothing, a little sugar, flour, corn and beans. Anything else that he needed was abundantly available, and free, growing wild in the area. The mesquite tree, for example, provided material for shelter and firewood. It also provided pods which could be ground and used as a meal for tortillas. Cactus leaves could be used as a main course when cooked with chili peppers,

and its fruit could serve as a dessert. The bark from certain trees in the area could be used for coffee. Several Anglos commented that a Mexican could work harder, longer and better on three tortillas per day than an Anglo could with three meals per day and a full stomach. If the Mexican did not eat much, why should he be paid much?[29]

Because of these attitudes it is no wonder that labor was so cheap in the area. Although most Mexicans were not satisfied with their low wages, they took their money with little complaint. Due to their lack of organization and an over abundance of Mexicans seeking employment they were afraid of losing their jobs.[30]

Immigration 1917-1920

Valley growers were pleased to be able to profit from this abundance of Mexican labor. However, they were concerned that when México returned to normal there might be a shortage of Mexican labor. Later this proved to be of no consequence, for even after the Revolution ended, México remained in a state of chaos, and immigration increased instead of decreasing as expected. It would be a change in United States' immigration policy that would startle Valley growers.[31]

At the time when the citrus industry was at one of its most rapid stages of development, the "open door" immigration policy in the United States changed. On May 1, 1917, the Immigration Act of 1917 went into effect. This act required all adult legal entrants to the United States to pass a literacy test. Furthermore, an eight dollar head tax was levied on all except those under sixteen years of age accompanied by their parents or guardians. The eight dollar tax was to be refunded to those returning to their country within six months. The literacy test required every entrant to read between twenty and forty lines in the

language of his choice. These lines were always taken from the Bible. This act was passed to limit the number of aliens entering the United States. Although it was estimated that between fifty and seventy-five percent of the Mexicans who sought to enter were illiterate, many of these were allowed to cross because United States officials chose to ignore the requirement. But despite this leniency, the Immigration Act of 1917 encouraged illegal entries, for the eight dollar head tax was more than most could afford.[32]

With the advent of World War I and the shortage of domestic and foreign workers, Valley growers began exerting pressure on the United States government to exempt Mexicans from this law. Within six months of its passage Congress yielded to these pressures, voting to allow the Secretary of Labor to suspend this law as it applied to Mexicans. Furthermore, a six month work permit system was instituted.[33]

A minor crisis in labor availability occured during the period from August through November of 1917. Some Mexicans started going home. Since México had gained a sort of stability some laborers gathered their few belongings and went home. Others left because it was rumored that Mexican aliens who had registered at the border upon entering the United States were going to be conscripted into the United States military. The United States government did indeed send notices to legal immigrants to present themselves at the border, not for conscription, but only to keep a more accurate record of registered aliens living in the United States. However, many Mexicans believed the rumor and failed to report. Many of those who failed to report and remained in the country either went into hiding, changed their names or moved to a new address. Local growers thought that these rumors had been started by Mexican officials

to discourage prospective emigrants and encourage the return of those who had left the country.[34]

The great number of Mexicans who had left their country in search of security had created a shortage of labor in México. Because of this dilemma the Mexican government had threatened to stop the flow of emigrants. Furthermore, Mexican officials had long been concerned with the problems caused by returning emigrants. Many, after returning to their country with a few dollars saved, threatened the establishment. They encouraged others to stop working for low Mexican wages and to leave the country for higher paying jobs in the United States. Those who stayed started demanding higher wages for their labor in their own country.[35]

The 1917 Mexican Constitution had established regulations restricting Mexican emigration, but these proved to be difficult to enforce and eventually were either repealed or forgotten. As long as the Mexican government could not provide jobs, adequate wages, and security for its people, regulations prohibiting emigration could simply not be enforced. Although the worst of the revolutionary violence had passed, conditions in México remained unstable through the third decade of the twentieth century. This instability would encourage many more to leave the country.[36]

Immigration 1920-1924

The influx of Mexicans into the Valley gathered momentum in the 1920's. A major factor for this increase was the continued economic development of the Valley. Irrigation projects, some which had been made possible by government funds, had brought huge areas of previously desolate land under irrigation and cultivation. Most of the area

continued to produce seasonal crops, and Mexican workers came and went with the season. During harvest periods thousands of Mexicans came to the Valley, most of them illegally, but few questions were asked about the legal status of essential harvest-time workers.[37]

Nearly half a million legal entrants entered the United States during the 1920's. Mexican immigrants accounted for nine percent of all immigrants to the United States between 1920 and 1925 and nearly sixteen percent during the second half of the 1920's when a quota system restricted certain immigrants.[38]

Although legal entry into the United States was not as easy as before--Counsuls now issued visas, entry could no longer be arranged at border stations, and the cost of legal crossing rose--Mexican immigration increased nevertheless. Mexicans at home were still being faced with economic problems and chaotic conditions, while north of the border the era of prosperity served as a strong magnet.[39]

Not all of those who came during this period returned home after the harvest. Many decided to stay, purchased a small home, and sent their children to school, thus enjoying some of the security and economic prosperity that the area had to offer. As the number of Mexicans in the Valley increased, some Anglos became concerned. They did not trust the Mexicans. Many thought that their appearance of contentment was just a front. They feared that while the Mexican appeared to be singing or dozing, he was actually having "dreams of just where to plant his knife in his pet enemy," the "gringo."[40]

Regardless of how much concern there was in the area, authorities were helpless in controlling the flow of immigrants. There was such a demand for Mexican laborers that farm owners were willing to pay for the

Mexican's crossing. Boatmen on the Rio Grande charged one dollar per person to ferry Mexicans across the river illegally to avoid paying the eight dollar head tax for legal entry. Between January and June of 1920 it was estimated that more than 100 thousand had entered Texas through this method.[41]

To correct this situation, in early 1920, the House Immigration Committee considered a bill aimed at controlling general immigration to the United States. However, opposition errupted as soon as this bill was introduced. Representative Hudspeth, Democrat from Texas, was one of the main opponents of the bill. Hudspeth argued that there was a shortage of labor in the Southwest, and that Mexican workers could relieve the situation. After much deliberation the committee voted against Hudspeth's resolution to allow Mexican laborers to work in the Southwest without any restrictions.[42]

The Southwest, including Texas, had for a long time enjoyed an over-abundance of cheap Mexican agricultural labor. This advantage had put the Southwest on the map agriculturally. Other states had not been so fortunate, for while the number of farms was increasing in the Southwest, the number in other areas was decreasing.[43]

Because of their dependence on Mexican labor, Southwest farmers continued exerting pressure on the House Immigration Committee, which finally approved a bill aimed at controlling general immigration. In December of 1920, the committee approved the curtailment of Mexican immigrants for a two year period. However, to satisfy labor requirements, the bill allowed Mexicans who had relatives living in the United States to enter the country with work permits. This gave Southwest farmers more than they had expected. Under this procedure their labor needs

were satisfied.[44]

Congress finally enacted legislation restricting Oriental and European immigration, but Mexicans were allowed continued free entry into the United States. The liberal policy toward Mexican immigrants ended in 1924, however, when they were subjected to an eight dollar head tax and a ten dollar visa fee. Also during this year an annual quota of 89,336 immigrants was imposed on México. The new restrictions temporarily reduced the numbers of legal entries from México. In 1924 there were an estimated 87,000 legal entrants; in 1925 32,000; in 1926 42,000; and in 1927 66,000 entered the United States. These figures, it should be noted, represent only the number of legal Mexican immigrants. The new restriction forced or encouraged many more Mexicans to come in illegally.[45]

Immigration 1924-1929

Regardless of the need for labor it is surprising that no restrictions had been placed on Mexican immigration prior to 1924. Long before this time many Americans had become convinced that the bulk of Mexican immigrants were inferior to those from Central and Southeastern Europe, and that the Mexican immigrants were of Indian stock, incapable of advancing or even sustaining themselves in a white civilization like that of the United States. As these attitudes brewed something eventually was done.[46]

As early as 1917, the Border Patrol had been organized to patrol the Canadian and Mexican borders, but it was not until 1924 that Congress appropriated sufficient funds for the performance of its duties. The Border Patrol began to operate in July 1924 with 450 men to shut off illegal immigration. Because of the pressure placed on the border

patrolmen by local farm owners, patrolmen made little or no effort to carry out their duties. Consequently, illegal immigration persisted.[47]

Near every point of entry along the Rio Grande there were certain illegal crossing places used by the Mexicans wishing to come to the Valley. The crossings were generally close to large Mexican settlements on the American side like Hidalgo and Brownsville. The Mexicans who reached these settlements could find help in finding a job and in hiding from the patrolmen if necessary. Generally, illegal Mexican agricultural workers who were apprehended in town would be merely reprimanded and told to return to their place of employment. Illegal alien urban workers caught were usually deported, but due to the ease in crossing they were often back at their jobs the next day.[48]

By 1925 many Mexican and United States labor organizations started working together to curb this influx of Mexicans to the United States. Mexican labor unions complained of labor shortages in their own country. They also argued that Mexican workers were becoming spoiled in the United States, and in many cases refused to work back in their own country for the low wages that were being paid. In fact, many workers had started demanding higher wages, and when refused encouraged their peers to come to the United States with them. American labor groups claimed that the Mexicans were taking jobs that could otherwise be held by Americans. Thanks to the efforts of labor organizations on both sides of the border, there was a decrease of about 55,000 legal entrants from 1924 to 1925. This decrease worried Valley growers.[49]

During the month of August 1926 the labor situation grew critical for Valley growers. There was a sort of "battle" for Mexican workers, because Mexicans were being recruited to work in various other parts

of the United States. The Harlingen area alone, during this period, could have used 1,000 more workers during any given week. The labor shortage was costing local farmers thousands of dollars. To combat this problem it was suggested that farmers organize, that instead of competing with each other for the few hands available they should stick together and plan their work schedules around the existing Mexicans in the area.[50]

Labor problems persisted. Things became so critical that some farmers resorted to physical force to "steal" workers from other farmers. Several trucks hauling Mexicans out of the Valley were stopped and their workers hijacked. Some farmers told their workers that it was against the law for them to go farther north than Corpus Christi.[51]

The severity of the labor shortage problem came to the attention of George A. Toolan, secretary of the Harlingen Chamber of Commerce, who immediately set things in motion by organizing the South Texas Chamber of Commerce. Toolan summoned Valley growers to a meeting at which he presented his analysis and solution to the problem. He told farmers that the problem was not a decrease in the number of workers, but that the area was developing so rapidly and that higher yields per acre required more laborers. According to Toolan, the number of Mexican workers in the Valley had not increased as fast as the demand for labor.[52]

While labor inadequacies in the Valley persisted, opposition to Mexicans entering under a nonquota basis reached the national level. Representative John R. Box of Jacksonville, Texas proposed to limit to 1500 the number of Mexicans allowed into the United States yearly. This proposal angered Valley growers. According to Valley farmers, Box, who

represented an agricultural area in East Texas, was out to ruin the Valley. By restricting the Mexican immigration on which the area depended, Box could accomplish his goal and thus provide an economic advantage to his own district, where higher wages were paid to agricultural workers.[53]

While the government was deliberating this issue, labor groups from México and the United States began advocating a quota system for México.[54] This worried Valley farmers, and the newly organized South Texas Chamber of Commerce began exerting pressure on immigration officials. The Assistant Director of the San Antonio Immigration and Naturalization Service soon assured local growers that the United States had no interest in curtailing Mexican immigration.[55] But area farmers were skeptical of this assurance, for it contradicted what the Secretary of Labor and the Commissioner General of Immigration had stated earlier.[56]

While Valley growers anxiously awaited the decision on whether the quota system would affect Mexican immigration, hearings were taking place before the House Immigration Committee. During the hearings various opinions were voiced regarding the qualities of Mexican workers, but there was little argument concerning their low cost.[57]

During the hearings rumors persisted that the quota system was to be applied to México. The threat of a quota for Mexican immigrants led to the organization in 1927 of the Central Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce, composed of farmers from Texas and other states where Mexican laborers were employed.[58]

Most witnesses testifying before the committee supported the free

admission of Mexican laborers. They admitted that they would have preferred almost any class of European immigrants to the Mexican. Yet, because of the pressing labor requirements and low wages the Mexicans were willing to accept, they agreed that Mexicans were adequate for their needs.[59]

How many non-farmers in the Southwest supported this group and their opinions is not known. One thing, however, is certain: most of those who were against quotas had been led to believe that nobody but the Mexican worker could or would labor in the fields of the Southwest. Some city dwellers, of course, disagreed, but they did not verbalize their opinion, for they did not wish to antagonize and possibly hurt their rural neighbors. So, privately they were for a quota system, but publicly they were against it.[60]

The general claims of those before the committee who opposed quotas for the Mexicans were: 1) Anglo workers are not willing and able to work in the extreme heat of the Southwest at the wages paid to Mexicans. 2) The best obtainable laborers are Mexicans. They do as they are told and go back to México when work is not available. 3) If Mexicans are not allowed to come we will be ruined. We need the Mexican laborers.[61]

Some of these claims were exaggerated, for there were many Anglos who were looking for employment. However, they would not work for the same wages as Mexicans.[62] In most cases Mexicans did what they were told, not because they liked it, but because of necessity. Not all Mexicans returned home when work was not available. Many either migrated elsewhere in the United States in search of employment or lived off what little savings they had until work was available. In retrospect,

it seems unlikely that Valley farmers would have been ruined with the quota system. They opposed quotas because they had become accustomed to an over-abundance of cheap labor, and they wished to perpetuate the situation.[63]

Those who supported a quota for Mexican immigration argued that Mexicans were racially inferior, and poor workers. Mexican inferiority, they claimed, was biological and could not be changed. Consequently, any efforts to educate them would be futile. These American racists argued that the outcome of a nonquota for Mexicans would be future inter-marriage and the eventual mongrelization of America. Their final cry was, "Do we want to mongrelize America for the sake of economy?"[64]

In the end, the anti-quota lobbyists won the day, and no quotas were imposed on Mexican immigration. Nevertheless, by 1929 the number of legal aliens entering the United States had decreased. Before 1929 the State Department had allowed its consuls in México to maintain a lower standard for granting visas than was required by law. But in 1929 requirements were suddenly tightened with the consequence that during the first half of the year the average monthly number of visas issued to Mexicans dropped to 1,354 as compared with 4,152 during the same period in 1928.[65]

Another reason for the decrease was a new American law passed on May 4, 1929 making it a misdemeanor to enter the United States illegally for first offenders, and a felony punishable by a year in prison or a fine of up to $1,000 for second offenders. Before the enactment of this law, undocumented aliens had simply been deported, and in some cases a file (indexed) started on them. This had not caused much of a problem for the deportees,because it was easy for

them to simply reenter the United States under an alias if the occasion demanded.[66]

But the passage of the 1929 law caused illegal aliens who had been deported to fear incarceration if they returned to the United States. Many chose to remain in México rather than risk a felony conviction. Consequently, there again existed a shortage of labor in the area. This shortage benefitted those Mexicans in the Valley, both legal and illegal. Since there were not enough laborers for everyone, farmers started bidding against each other for what laborers there were, and wages rose appreciably. The Mexican laborer in the United States was now materially better off than ever, but he still suffered injustices and humiliations. Ernesto Galarza made a profound statement concerning the Anglo attitude toward Mexicans of this period: "When we want you, we'll call you; when we don't--git."[67] In future years this was to be exactly true.

Endnotes

[1]Abraham Hoffman, Unwanted Mexican Americans in the Great Depression (Tucson, Arizona: The University of Arizona Press, 1974), p. 51.; and Hubert J. Miller, "Mexican Migration to the U.S., 1900-1920, With A Focus On The Texas Lower Rio Grande Valley," paper written for presentation at the meeting of the Latin American Studies Association, Indiana University, October 17-19, 1980, p. 19.

[2]"Six Hundred Acres of New Land is Cleared," Lower Rio Grande Valley Magazine, February 1925, p. 23.

[3]Victor S. Clark, "Mexican Labor In The United States," Bulletin of the Bureau of Labor. Department of Commerce and Labor No. 78-September 1908. Washington Government Printing Office 1908. pp. 500-501.; and Charles A. Thomson, "The Man From Next Door: The Man Who Is Filling the Cheap Labor Vacuum," Century Magazine Vol. III November 1925-January 1926, p. 278.; and Robert N. McLean, "Tightening the Mexican Border," Survey, 1 April 1930, p. 29.

[4]Leo Grebler, Joan W. Moore and Ralph C. Guzman, The Mexican-American People (New York: The Free Press, 1970), p. 210.; and Arthur F. Corwin, ed., Immigration and Immigrants: Perspective on Mexican Labor Migration to the United States (Wesport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1978), pp. 47, 109.

[5]Hubert J. Miller, "Mexican Migration to the U.S." pp. 15-16.

[6]L. Grebler, J. Moore, R. Guzman, The Mexican-American People, pp. 210-11.; and Arthur F. Corwin, Immigration and Immigrants, pp. 39-47.

[7]Abraham Hoffman, Unwanted Mexican Americans, p. 7.; and R. Crawford, "The Menance of Mexican Immigration," Current History, February 1930, p. 902.

[8]Ibid.; and-Charles A. Thomson, "The Man From Next Door," pp. 279-80.; and Ernesto Galarza, "Without Benefit of Lobby," Survey, 1 May 1931, p. 181.

[9]Hubert J. Miller, "Mexican Migration To The U.S.," pp. 16-17.; and Victor S. Clark, "Mexican Labor In The United States," p. 473.

[10]Abraham Hoffman, Unwanted Mexican American, p. 6.; and Ernesto Galarza, "Without Benefit of Lobby," Survey, 1 May 1931, p. 181.

[11]Victor S. Clark, "Mexican Labor In The United States," p. 473.; and interview with Don Pilar de la Rosa, semi-retired small farm-owner from Burgos, Tamaulipas, 12 and 13 July 1980. Pilar started coming to the Valley in 1914 when he was fifteen years old and was a seasonal worker until 1933.

[12]Sylvius M. Handman, "The Mexican Immigrant in Texas," Political and Social Science Quarterly Vol. VII No. 1, January 1926, pp. 33-35.

[13]Hubert J. Miller, "Mexican Migration To The U.S.," p. 15.; and Robert N. McLean, "Rubbing Shoulders on the Border," Survey, 1 May 1924, pp. 184-85.; and interview with Don Tadeo Garza, retired in Pharr, Texas, various days in March 1982. Tadeo, from Burgos, Tamaulipas, was a seasonal worker in the Valley from 1915-1920 when he finally decided to make the Valley his permanent home.

[14]Victor S. Clark, "Mexican Labor In The United States," pp. 471-75.

[15]Hubert J. Miller, "Mexican Migration To The U.S.," p. 15.; and interview with Don Tadeo Garza.

[16]Victor S. Clark, "Mexican Labor In The United States," pp. 473-74.

[17]Ibid., pp. 488-501.; and Charles A. Thomson, "The Man From Next Door," pp. 275-78.

[18]Ibid.

[19]Charles A. Thomson, "The Man From Next Door," pp. 277-78.

[20]Ibid., p. 279.; and L. Grebler, J. Moore, R. Guzman, The Mexican-American People, p. 63.

[21]Kenneth L. Roberts, "Wet And Other Mexicans," The Saturday Evening Post, 4 February 1928, p. 11.

[22]Ibid., pp. 11, 137.

[23]Abraham Hoffman, Unwanted Mexican Americans, p. 7.

[24]J.B. Gwin, "Mexcian Labor Problems," Survey, 20 November 1920, pp. 273-74.

[25]This abuse and humiliation appears to have been common in Laredo and El Paso. However, based on several interviews with people that entered the U.S. through Matamoros or Reynosa, it appears to have rarely occurred at these two southmost points of entry.

[26]Vera L. Sturges, "Mexcian Immigrants," Survey, 20 November 1920, pp. 273-74.

[27]J.B. Gwin, "Mexican Labor Problems," Survey, 20 November 1920, pp. 273-74.

[28]Virgil N. Lott, "Life in a Rugged Land Where Dame Nature is Providing Dwellers With Their Necessity," Lower Rio Grande Valley Magazine, December 1924, pp. 12-14.

[29]Ibid.

[30]Ibid.

[31]J.B. Gwin, "Mexican Labor Problems," Survey, 20 November 1920,

pp. 272-73.

[32]Abraham Hoffman, Unwanted Mexican Americans, p. 9.; and J.B. Gwin, "Back and Forth to México," Survey, 6 October 1917, pp. 9-10.

[33]Ibid.

[34]J.B. Gwin, "Back and Forth to México," Survey, 6 October 1917, pp. 9-10.

[35]Ibid.; and Victor S. Clark, "Mexican Labor In The United States," p. 513.

[36]Abraham Hoffman, Unwanted Mexican American, pp. 9-10.; and J.B. Gwin, "Mexican Labor Problems," Survey, 20 November 1920, pp. 273-74.

[37]Robert N. McLean, "Tightening the Mexican Border," Survey, 1 April 1930, pp. 28-29.; and L. Grebler, J. Moore, R. Guzman, The Mexican-American People, pp. 209-10.

[38]Ibid.

[39]L. Grebler, J. Moore, R. Guzman, The Mexican-American People, p. 214.

[40]"Welcome Mexican Invasion," New York Times, 20 June 1920, p. 6.

[41]Ibid.

[42]"Won't Waiver Rules for Mexican Labor," New York Times, 3 February 1920, p. 8.

[43]"Welcome" New York Times, 20 June 1920, p. 6.; and R. Crawford, "The Menace of Mexican Immigration," Current History, p. 902.

[44]"Back 2-year Ban on Immigration," New York Times, 3 December 1920, p. 1.

[45]Kenneth L. Roberts, "Wet and Other Mexicans," The Saturday

Evening Post, 4 February 1928, pp. 137-38, 141-42, 146.; and Editorial "Secretary Davis on Immigration," New York Times, 4 December 1924, p. 20.

[46]Kenneth L. Roberts, "Wet and Other Mexicans," The Saturday Evening Post, 4 February 1928, p. 11.

[47]Ibid.; and L. Grebler, J. Moore, R. Guzman, The Mexican-American People, p. 66.

[48]Kenneth L. Roberts, "Wet and Other Mexicans," The Saturday Evening Post, 4 February 1928, p. 137; and "For Border Patrol to Keep Out Aliens," New York Times, 19 April 1924, p. 2.

[49]"Plan Check on Mexicans," New York Times, 13 August 1925, p. 20.; and Kenneth L. Roberts, "Wet and Other Mexicans," The Saturday Evening Post, 4 February 1928, p. 137.

[50]"Demand Grows For Laborers in Harlingen," Harlingen Star, 3 August 1926, p. 1.; and "Farmers Who Will Stick," Harlingen Star, 3 August 1926, p. 2.; and Charles A Thomson, "The Man From Next Door," Century Magazine, January 1926, pp. 275-82.

[51]"Force is Used In Stealing Cotton Pickers," Harlingen Star, 6 August 1926, pp. 1, 8.; and interview with Don Israel Cano, retired independent merchant, Harlingen, Texas, 15 March and 10 October 1980. Israel came to the Valley from Burgos, Tamaulipas as a young man in the early 1920's and worked for various Valley citrus labor contractors. After his arrival in the Valley he made only occasional visits back to Burgos.

[52]"Solution of Labor Problems is Sought by C. of C. Officials," Harlingen Star, 3 August 1926, p. 1.

[53]Editorial, "Method in Madness of Representative Box," Harlingen Star, 23 November 1926, p. 2.; and "C. of C. Is To Fight Ban on Mexican Labor," Harlingen Star, 29 March 1927, p. 1.

[54]"Labor Would Limit Mexican Immigration," New York Times, 20 January 1927, p. 48.

[55]"Immigration Probe by U.S. Not Probable," Harlingen Star, 16 November 1926, p. 4.

[56]"Immigration Cut Opposed by Italy," New York Times, 3 January 1924, p. 2.; and "Wants Limit Placed on All Immigration," New York Times, 13 May 1926, p. 8.

[57]Kenneth L. Roberts, "Mexicans Or Ruin," The Saturday Evening Post, 18 February 1928, pp. 14-15.

[58]Ibid.

[59]Ibid.

[60]Ibid.

[61]Ibid.; pp. 145-146.

[62]Ibid.

[63]Ibid.; and Chester H. Rowell, "Why Make México An Exception?," Survey, 1 May 1931, p. 180.

[64]Kenneth L. Roberts, "The Docile Mexican," The Saturday Evening Post, 10 March 1928, pp. 39-41, 165.; and Paul S. Taylor, "More Bars Against Mexicans?," Survey, 1 April 1930, pp. 26-27.

[65]Robert N. McLean, "Tightening the Mexican Border," Survey, 1 April 1930, pp. 28-29.; and Paul S. Taylor, "More Bars Against Mexicans?," Survey, 1 April 1930, pp. 26-27.

[66]Robert N. McLean, "Tightening The Mexican Border," Survey, 1 April 1930, p. 29.

[67] Ibid.; and Ernesto Galarza, "Without Benefit of Lobby," Survey, 1 May 1931, p. 181.

Burgos

In order to further understand why so many Tamaulipecos came to the Valley one must consider some of the internal problems that were taking place in the state. A typical Tamaulipas village whose population was uprooted, and whose people greately contributed to the development of the Valley was Burgos.

Burgos, Tamaulipas is located about 150 miles south of Reynosa or sixty miles west of San Fernando. Burgos is the center of an agricultural area that is poor, due to lack of water for irrigation. This area extends north to near the Nuevo León border close to Vaquera, northeast and east to Méndez, south to San Carlos, and west to the Nuevo León border near Linares. Total population of this area is approximately 4500 with Burgos itself counting about 370 inhabitants.[1]

The Anglos thought most Tamaulipecos that came to the Valley to be inferior and of Indian stock. No doubt there were some mestizos in the Burgos area. However, one must conclude that the Burgueños were racists in their attitudes toward the Mexican Indian. The few official records that still exist and the well-kept tombstones in the cementery indicate that there were many marriages between members of related families contracted to avoid a further mixture of blood.[2] This deliberate in-breeding succeeded in preserving a marked European physiognomy in the local population. Many Burgueños are tall, light-complexioned, blue-eyed, and have light brown hair.[3]

The peace and tranquility of Burgos was shattered with the coming of the Mexican Revolution. Many people who had lived in the rancherías

around Burgos now moved into the village in search of security. Later, during the 1920's, many Burgueños left their natal village and moved to larger Mexican cities and to the United States. So, as some were moving away, they were being replaced by the Nuevos Burgueños coming in. Consequently, the population of Burgos has remained more or less static.

Today many Burgueños and their descendants find themselves scattered throughout the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas.[4] These Burgueños are not here by accident. Most of them left their homes during the instability in the state of Tamaulipas during the 1920's. But why this instability? Was not the Revolution over?

Power Struggle.

When the Mexican Revolution ended in 1917, many Mexicans expected a return of stabilty. But troubles continued in Tamaulipas, troubles that were to affect Burgos. In January 21, 1918, General César López de Lara resigned his position as Governor of México City's Federal District and declared himself a candidate for governor of Tamaulipas under the "Green Party." This position was also sought by General Luis Caballero under the "Red Party."[5] Both Generals had served under President Venustiano Carranza during the Revolution.

The elections in Tamaulipas were held on February 3, 1918. After the votes were counted both Generals claimed victory. Because of the disputed returns the state legislature was to decide the victor. But the legislature, which was composed of seven members of the López de Lara faction and six members of the Caballero faction, was stacked in favor of López de Lara. Consequently, López de Lara was declared the winner. Caballero and his followers, refusing to recognize defeat, left the congressional chambers and established a rival "official"

government of Tamaulipas.[6]

President Carranza, realizing the problems that such a dispute could cause, refused to recognize either faction and ordered that the congressional chambers be closed. But both generals refused to abide by Carranza's order and continued to claim victory. And for the remainder of the month of February, Tamaulipas had two governors and two legislatures.[7]

Because Carranza refused to recognize either general as the victor, Caballero decided to challenge the President's authority. He organized an army, and on April 18, 1918, took over Ciudad Victoria by military force.[8]

Six days later, the angered Carranza sent federal troops under the command of Generals Carlos Osuna and Eusebio Galindo to crush the Caballero Rebellion. Caballero and his army fled to Cruillas and Burgos. On April 28, 1918, the federal troops surprised the Caballero troops near the ranch El Marquesote and defeated them. However, Caballero and his second in command, General Eugenio López, managed to escape to Burgos, from where they fled to places unknown. Carranza, assuming that he had seen the last of Caballero, appointed Andrés Osuna in charge of the provisional government.[9] But much to Carranza's and Osuna's surprise, Caballero reappeared a year later in Ciudad Victoria with an army of twenty-five men. He temporarily took over the city, and released all the prisoners in the city jail, hoping they would join his army. Before the day was over federal troops under the command of Generals Fortunato Zuazúa and Gregorio Osuna were able to expel Caballero from the city and to recapture most of the prisoners.[10]

Carranza was unhappy with the way Andrés Osuna had handled the

Caballero problem, and replaced him with General Francisco González Villarreal, who promised to bring stability to Tamaulipas and to hold elections as soon as possible. He soon fulfilled one of his promises, for Caballero was captured, and on January 2, 1920 was sent into exile in Cuba.[11] But Caballero's exile was not to last long. By May 30, he returned to México, and was later sent to Guatemala as México's Ambassador representing the new president Álvaro Obregón.[12]

For several years following the disputed gubernatorial election of 1918, several had claimed the governorship or had been appointed as provisional governors of Tamaulipas. General César López de Lara, Caballero's arch enemy, considered himself the constitutional governor of the state, a position which he claimed would not expire until February 5, 1925. However, on September 3, 1923, Emilio Portes Gil was appointed Governor of Tamaulipas, an appointment that López de Lara refused to recognize. This brought new problems to Burgos.[13]

Instability in Burgos.

During the Mexican Revolution, and up until the latter part of 1923, Burgos and the surrounding area had suffered only slightly from the instability that had been taking place in Tamaulipas. But conditions were to deterriorate rapidly because of an event which occurred on December 6, 1923. On that day López de Lara and his Congress, angered by the Portes Gil appointment, abandoned the state capitol and went to Burgos to organize an army in open rebellion against the president of the Republic of México. The rebels declared themselves in favor of Adolfo de la Huerta, a general who aspired the presidency.[14]

One of the Congressmen who left with López de Lara was his compadre Arnulfo Garza Cano, a prominent Burgos merchant. Garza Cano

offered the rebels sanctuary, and promised to help raise money for the army they were trying to organize. Within a few days Garza Cano and Lopez de Lara managed to recruit an army of approximately 100 men and 200 horses.[15]

This army remained in Burgos for about two weeks. During this period the army demanded food and lodging from the local citizens. Those who refused had their homes pillaged or burned. Since the rebel army needed a place to pasture its horses, it took them to surrounding farms, where they destroyed most of the crops. The soldiers in this makeshift army were virtually uncontrollable, and they helped themselves to whatever they wanted.[16]

Many Burgueno parents knew that their families, especially boys of fighting age andyoung women, would not be safe from this army. Consequently, they sent their young sons and daughters into hinding, with enough provisions to last three days, along the arroyos, or wherever they felt was safe. The absence of young women and men of fighting age did not long go unnoticed by the army.[17] The soldiers, realizing what most parents were doing, now had an excuse for forcing them to cook their meanls, wash their clothes, and tend their horses. Some parents who refused found their possessions thrown in the middle of the street where they were set fire at night to provide warmth for soldiers.[18]

Meanwhile, the federal government became upset with Lopez de Lara, and on December 14, 1923 recalled Caballero from Guatemala and ordered him to return to Tamaulipas to organize an army to combat the Huertista movement. On December 30, 1923, one of Caballero's officers, Colonel Aureliano Guerrero caught up with Lopez de Lara's army in a

place called El Lobo--outside of Burgos. After a short battle, López de Lara retreated with what was left of his army, leaving behind several dead soldiers, and horses, arms, and ammunition. After this battle the federal troops took over Burgos and remained there for several weeks.[19]

The federal troops remained in Burgos for three reasons: 1) to offer the town protection from López de Lara's soldiers, 2) to apprehend Garza Cano in the event that he returned to his hometown and, 3) to capture López de Lara in the event he returned to his former stronghold. During the weeks that the federal troops stayed in Burgos, instead of protecting the town as had been originally planned, they created more havoc than the rebel army. The federal soldiers vented their anger on the town, for they considered it to be Huerta land.[20]

While Colonel Guerrero was awaiting the return of his adversaries he was notified that on January 21, 1924, the rebel army had managed to take over Ciudad Victoria. Guerrero left Burgos with his army at the same time that Benecio López, another army commander, left from Tampico, both enroute to Ciudad Victoria to capture López de Lara and Garza Cano. The rebel leaders managed to evade the approaching armies: López de Lara and part of his army escaped to San Fernando; and Garza Cano and the remaining part of the army, approximately twenty-five men, escaped to Burgos. Once again Burgos suffered at the hands of rebels.[21]

México's federal government, wishing to restore order in the state of Tamaulipas, on February 2, 1924, appointed Professor Candelario Garza as governor of Tamaulipas, an office which he assumed nine days later.[22] The new governor, soon after his appointment, instituted a program to control the rebels and bandits in the state. He appointed

a local citizen and supporter of his party from each town to be in charge of no less than ten state or federal soldiers to maintain order. If a town needed additional assistance, the neighboring towns were to send up to half of their troops to her aid. The new military officer for Burgos was Alfredo Treviño, a man known to be a political enemy of López de Lara and Garza Cano.[23]

Soon after this system was instituted it was challeged by García Cavazos a Huertista colonel. On February 19, 1924, Cavazos attacked Cruillas and Burgos, but was unsuccessful, for the federal and state troops located in Méndez, Burgos and Cruillas managed to resist the attack.[24]

López de Lara and Garza Cano made several other unsuccessful attempts to regain control of the Burgos area. López de Lara, as he had done in the past, went to Matamoros, Reynosa, and Laredo, where he tried to organize a new army. But this time his efforts were futile. Garza Cano, also unsuccessful at organizing an army, went to Reynosa and from there to Pharr, Texas. From Pharr he made several futile attempts to return to Burgos. In June 1927, he and his family found themselves in Mercedes, Texas where his wife, Doña Remigia Cano de Cano, died. After his wife's death, and with conditions somewhat settled in Tamaulipas, Arnulfo Garza Cano returned to reside in Ciudad Victoria. It is doubtful that he ever returned to Burgos.[25]

The key to the migration phenomenon of the Tamaulipeco in general and the Burgueño in particular from 1900 to 1926 was the political and economic climate in Tamaulipas. The period of revolutionary disorder following the overthrow of Porfirio Díaz in 1911, and the problems in Tamaulipas starting in 1918 produced an atmosphere of fear and un-

certainty which many Burgueños found difficult to endure.

Migration

With conditions worsening, and with soldiers coming and going through Burgos, many citizens--farmers and merchants--were unable to tend to their businesses or farms. As chaotic conditions continued, provisions and employment became scarce. This instability forced many merchants and unemployed to go elsewhere in search of goods for their stores and jobs.

Genaro Cano Sr., Arnulfo Garza Cano's brother-in-law, was a small merchant and farmer in Burgos. His business depended on trade. He used to buy crops from other small farmers in the area for transport in ox-carts to Linares, Nuevo León where he would sell or trade them for resale in his store. On several occasions on his way back from Linares he was stopped by revolutionaries who stole his money and goods, leaving him only his horse, oxen and carts. Therefore, by the time he returned to Burgos he was in worse financial shape than when he started. On two occasions, after he had been robbed, the unfortunate merchant was met by a messenger from Burgos who informed him that his home and business had been burnt because of his relationship to Garza Cano.[26]

The first time his home and business were destroyed the senior Cano was able to rebuild and continue as before. But the second time this occurred, due to apprehension and lack of money, he decided to go to Linares in search of employment. Many other Burgueños had preceded him to Linares. Genaro had been in contact with them during his business trips to Linares and, thus, felt that they would be able to help him in finding employment. So he set out for Linares

with his oldest son, Israel, leaving his wife, two daughters, and a younger son behind.[27]

In Linares, Genaro soon found a job as a store clerk, and Israel in a molino de caña (sugar cane mill) where liquor was made. Most of their combined wages were either sent home with people going to Burgos or taken home by Genaro himself, on an occassional trip. He saved some of his money, however, with the hope of someday rebuilding his business in Burgos.[28]

Unfortunately, it was not long before the instability of the Revolution had reached Linares, too. Realizing that their predicament was not improving, father and son chose to return home, only to decide, shortly thereafter, to venture in a different direction. Their next undertaking was to go to San Fernando.[29] The Canos, Genaro and Israel, together with four other men--for numbers offered security--left Burgos on foot for San Fernando. This trip took three days. They planned their travel so they could spend each night at a ranch, and continue on their journey at dawn the next day. But upon arriving in San Fernando, they found much the same situation as in Linares, so they decided to return home once again.

By early February 1921, the climate in Burgos was worsening. Genaro was encouraged by his father, Félix Cano, to go to Ciudad Victoria to request assistance from Arnulfo Garza Cano, who was responsible for the problems of Burgos and its inhabitants. Again Genaro and Israel walked to San Fernando, where they caught a bus to Ciudad Victoria.[30] In Ciudad Victoria they were unable to locate Arnulfo Garza Cano, but they found his son, Arnulfo Jr., who took them to see Colonel Modesto García Cavazos. The Colonel recommended that they go

to Tampico, and provided them with a letter of introduction and instructions for Presidente Municipal, Dr. Vidal, who promptly found them jobs: Genaro with the post office; and Israel, who was too young (fourteen years old) for the post office, work with a local merchant.[31]

After six months, Genaro became worried about his family in Burgos. Since Israel was well-employed and could send money, Genaro returned home. Israel rejoined his family in Burgos in early May 1923, when the death of his boss terminated his employment.[32]

Decision to Emigrate

After returning to Burgos, Israel, now a young man of sixteen years, sensed that he could not cope with the chaotic conditions that existed there. Five days after his arrival he resolved to emigrate to Texas.[33] Israel had heard of the job opportunities in the Valley from other Burgueños who had been coming to South Texas for years. His father, Genaro, had ventured to present-day San Benito years before, but had returned home after staying in the Valley only four months. Nevertheless, Genaro told others of the good wages he had received in the Valley. Israel's uncle, Esiquiel Treviño, visiting Burgos from Matamoros during this time, also told of the good times and decent wages a young single person could find in the Valley. Above all, Vitalio Zúñiga, who had been a seasonal worker in the Valley since 1910, encouraged Israel and others to leave Burgos and go to Texas in search of better opportunities.[34]

Many other Burgueños had been coming to South Texas seeking temporary employment. Those who had experience in the Valley talked not only about the opportunities, but also of the dangers that could be encountered along the way. They recommended traveling to the

border in groups, for numbers offered security against bandits. Therefore, when Israel, his uncle Eziquiel Treviño, and four other Burgueños decided to come to Texas they joined a tequilero caravan on its way to Río Bravo, Tamaulipas.

During the Prohibition Days of the 1920's, tequila was cheap and popular in Texas, and a lot of it was being smuggled in from México. The tequileros used mules to transport the liquor and, they needed extra hands to help with the mule trains. These extra hands provided a stronger force against any possible liquor hijacking.

Upon arriving in Río Bravo, and after a day's rest, the tequileros asked the Burgueños to stay with them for the remainder of their trip to San Diego, Texas. All six refused. Israel and Eziquiel boarded a train for Matamoros. The other four, however, took a train to Reynosa from where they expected to cross into Texas and eventually go to Pharr, where they knew other Burgueños were working.[36]

Israel and Eziquiel had chosen to go to Matamoros because they knew that Eziquiel's brother, Genaro Treviño, lived there and might be of some assistance. But it turned out that Genaro Treviño could not help them. In fact he, too, was in need of aid, due to bad health. Faced with the dilemma of where to go, Israel opted to come to Texas, while Eziquiel was recruited into an army that was being organized by one of César López de Lara's colonels in Matamoros.[37]

The Burgueños who found themselves in Matamoros found it easy to come into the United States. There was only one immigration officer at a time at the bridge connecting Brownsville with Matamoros. Those who were afraid to try crossing while the officer was on duty had only to wait for the officer's lunch time, to cross while the bridge was

unattended. Those who tried to cross while the officer was on duty found him to very compassionate. Knowing that Mexican laborers were needed in the Valley, and why the Mexicans were coming into Texas, the officer suggested to the Mexicans that they go into Brownsville, have their picture taken and return with the picture to the bridge where he would issue them work permits.[38]

Mexicans finding themselves in Brownsville with working permits realized that there were not enough jobs available there. But in Brownsville the new arrivals' compatriots told them that work might be found in Harlingen, or west of Harlingen, where it was rumored that Mexican workers were needed in the growing citrus industry.

Endnotes

[1]These figures are at best an estimate. They were drived from a conversation with the priest from the Virgen de Loreto Catholic Church, and from the loosely kept records at the Presidencia Municipal of Burgos on July 1980.

[2]Interview with Don Vitalio Zúñiga, retired in Pharr, Texas, February and March 1982. Vitalio was born in Burgos and started coming to the Valley in the 1910's.

[3]Personal observation by author and from various conversations with several Burgueños.

[4]Ibid.; and interview with Doña Remijia de la Rosa, a housewife in Burgos, 12 and 13 July 1980.

[5]Ciro R. Treviño, La Revolución Mexicana en el Estado de Tamaulipas II (Cronología) 1914-1973 (México 1, D.F.: Librería de Manuel Porrúa, S.A., 1975), pp. 254-58.

[6]Ibid.; and interview with Don Genaro Cano, Jr., retired independent merchant, Harlingen, Texas, 8 March 1980. Genaro and the rest of the Cano family left Burgos and joined Israel, a family member already in the Valley, in 1924.

[7]Treviño, La Revolución, pp. 258-59.

[8]Ibid., pp. 267-68, 272.

[9]Ibid., pp. 273-75.; interview with Don Pilar de la Rosa, semi-retired small farm owner in Burgos, Tamaulipas, 12 and 13 July 1980. Pilar started coming to the Valley in 1914 when he was fifteen years

old and was a seasonal worker until 1933; and interview with Don Israel Cano, retired independent merchant, Harlingen, Texas, 15 March and 10 October 1980. Israel, born in Burgos, came to the Valley in 1923 where he worked for several labor contractors who were involved in the citrus industry.

[10]Treviño, La Revolución, pp. 287-88.; interview, Israel Cano, 15 March and 10 October 1980.; and interview, Genaro Cano, 15 March 1980.

[11]Treviño, La Revolución, pp. 288-92.; and interview, Israel, 15 March and 10 October 1980.

[12]Treviño, La Revolución, pp. 311-20.

[13]Ibid., pp. 320, 364-65.

[14]Ibid., pp. 364-65, 370-71.

[15]Ibid.; and interview, Israel Cano, 15 March and 10 October 1980.

[16]Interview, Remijia de la Rosa, 12 and 13 July 1980.; and interview, Genaro Cano, 15 March 1980.

[17]Ibid.; and interview with Doña Bricelda C. Martínez, born in Burgos, retired, Harlingen, Texas, 15 March 1980. Bricelda and her family crossed from Matamoros to Brownsville in 1924 during the noon hour when the bridge was unattended.

[18]Ibid.

[19]Treviño, La Revolución, p. 374.

[20]Interview, Genaro Cano, 15 March 1980.

[21]Treviño, La Revolución, p. 381.; interview, Israel Cano, 15 March and 10 October 1980.

[22]Treviño, La Revolución, p. 381.

[23]Ibid.

[24]Ibid., pp. 385-87.

[25]Interview, Israel Cano, 15 March and 10 October 1980.; and interview, Genaro Cano, 15 March 1980.

[26]Ibid.

[27]Ibid.

[28]Ibid.

[29]Ibid.

[30]Ibid.

[31]Interview, Israel Cano, 15 March and 10 October 1980.

[32]Ibid.

[33]Ibid.; and interview, Pilar de la Rosa, 12 and 13 July 1980.

[34]Interview, Genaro Cano, 15 March 1980.; and interview, Vitalio Zúñiga, February and March 1980.

[35]Ibid.; and interview, Pilar de la Rosa, 12 and 13 July 1980.

[36]Interview, Israel Cano, 15 March and 10 October 1980.

[37]Ibid.

[38]Ibid.; interview, Bricelda C. Martínez, 15 March 1980.; and interview, Vitalio Zúñiga, February and March 1982.

The Mexican Laborer

In México

Those who participated in the great exodus from México in the first quarter of the twentieth century were aware of the Anglos' feelings toward them. But if the Anglos did not like the Mexicans, the Mexicans did not like the Anglos either. They did, however, like the Anglos' standard of living.[1] Had they not been aware of the more attractive living conditions north of the Rio Grande, most Mexicans would have preferred to stay at home. But not only was their own country in turmoil at the time, Mexican laborers for generations had been paid very low wages and mistreated by those in power--the patrones.[2]

For years wages in México for the common laborer (peon) were stagnant, never exceeding $.25 (US) from the 1890's to the 1920's. During the same period the cost of staples such as corn and beans had more than doubled. Despite the gradual erosion of their buying power, many Mexicans probably would have been content with these meager wages, but they would not accept further abuse.[3]

Some of the peons owned small farms, but soils tended to be poor, and much of their land was uncleared. As the peon's family expanded so did his needs. One solution to this problem was to send the oldest son to work for a patrón and borrow money, at very high interest rates, from the patrón. The father would then invest this money in clearing and cultivating more of his land, hoping to gather

a large harvest to repay the son's patrón and fill his family needs. For several reasons--lack of water for irrigation and poor weather conditions--quite frequently, the peon's dream did not materialize. In many cases the patrón was able to confiscate the farm for non-payment of the debt. Ultimately, entire families ended up working for the patrones.[4]

Only the adult male members were paid monetary wages. But women and children were also obliged to serve the landowner. While the men toiled in the fields the women worked seven days a week as maids and babysitters. The patrona would give them their meals, but would subject them to all sorts of abuse. And the children could attend the nearby school only when there was no work for them in the farms and fields.[5]

Many Mexicans, dissatisfied with their abject poverty, demanded higher wages. To appease them the employers promised better wages. They offered to pay $.32½ (US) per day to illiterate laborers and $.37½ (US) to those who could read. But this was still not enough to guarantee a decent standard of living. And the poor rural Mexican wage earner continued to be mistreated by his employer. Thus, perhaps the most significant "push" factor for the Mexican was the realization that as long as he stayed in México his living conditions, commonly known as la miseria rural, would remain wretchedly poor.[6]

In the United States

On the other side of the border, the existing "pull" factor was most prominent in the poor abused laborer's mind. During the early 1900's the cost of living on the north side of the border was stable. The price of the Mexican's basic staples was about the same as in

México, but wages were several times higher.[7] Thus, one can readily see why many Mexicans chose to come to the Valley.

The Mexican male was attracted by the prospect of earning more in one week across the river than he could earn in México in a month's time. And one with a wife and children could make even more, for there was employment for women and children in the Valley. If for no other reason, the Mexican was willing to come because there would be more to eat here than there was in México.[8]

The deplorable conditions in México, and the visions of American prosperity aided the Valley employer in attracting Mexican hands.[9] Despite the Alien Control Labor Law of 1895, which outlawed direct labor recruiting, Valley growers for years had been sending Mexican-American agents into México to recruit hands for their fields. To circumvent the letter of the law, recruiters would urge the Mexicans to come to the American side, where they would be provided with a labor contract. Furthermore, Valley towns openly advertised for Mexican labor.[10]

The success of this type of recruitment was evident throughout the Valley. Many Mexicans found themselves working as cotton pickers, track workers, and grubbers clearing the land for farming. Before long, Mexican laborers would be working also as planters, pickers, and packers in the Valley's fruit industry. By the early 1900's "hardly an Anglo rancher or farmer in the borderland was without his Meskins."[11]

Mexican-American farmowners and ranchowners, too, were in desperate need of laborers. The Mexican laborer, however, preferred to work for the Anglo. Although the Mexican-American employer might not have shared the Anglo prejudices concerning Mexican workers, he was not

willing to pay as well as his Anglo counterpart. During the early 1900's while Anglos in the Valley were paying $.20-.25 per day, Mexican-American were paying only $.12-.15. Consequently, it was not unusual to hear the Mexican laborer declare that his worst enemy was the Mexican-American employer.[12]

Land Clearing

After the coming of the railroad, and the influx of new Anglo landowners, the character of the Valley's economic life changed. Most of the new arrivals were farmers, who soon started clearing their lands to convert them from mesquite brushland to farmland. In the beginning the new farmers cleared their own land. But they soon realized that this was a mistake, for they could hire Mexican labor, which was plentiful and inexpensive, to perform this task. The Valley had an abundant supply of needy Mexicans who were willing to work for $.35 per day.[13]

Later, land clearing contractors appeared in the Valley. These contractors provided landowners with Mexican crews to clear their land for approximately $20 per acre, depending on the density of brush and the number of workers available. The contractors preferred to hire a hand with a team of horses of his own for $1.00-1.50 per day, for he could do far more work. Other hands were paid $.50-.75 per day.[14] This type of business became very profitable, for a contractor with a large crew (20-25 men) could clear as many as five acres a day.[15] Since most Mexicans employed for this kind of work were already familiar with land-clearing, this task came to be considered a Mexican's job. Consequently, as more land was needed for cultivation, more land-grubbers were required.[16]

One of the first major land-clearing operations in the area was undertaken by the Henderson Development Company of Hidalgo County. This company planned to clear about six hundred acres of brushland east of Edinburg. It was estimated that no less than two hundred men would be needed. Since Anglo grubbers demanded higher wages, most of those employed were Mexicans.[17] As in previous land-clearing projects, wages varied. Supervisors, Anglos and Mexican-Americans, were paid from $1.50-2.00 per day, while Mexican grubbers like Aureliano Magallán were paid $.75 per day.[18] Again, men with their own teams of horses were paid more.[19]

Demand for cleared land increased rapidly, and soon other companies, such as the Harding-Gill Company, later known as Hargill, went into operation. This company had bigger aspirations. With two hundred men in action, it succeeded in clearing 5,000 acres of land. Due to the time schedule (60 days) alloted for this massive project, Harding-Gill employees were required to live in camps close to the worksite.[20] The company deducted $.10-.15 per day for rations consisting of beans, tortillas and chile. Workers desiring meat were charged extra.[21] Those who complained were told to be happy with what they had.[22] Those who did not complain declared that although their employers were profiting from this type of system, they were happy because they were better off than they had been in México.[23] Since both employers and employees benefited from this arrangement it was not uncommon to see recruitment posters which read: "No White Laborers Wanted. Only Mexicans Need Apply."[24]

In Agriculture

While some Mexicans were clearing land for future planting,

other less fortunate workers, were employed as farm hands. These envied the better-paid grubbers, but even though they were being paid less, many ordinary farm hands were still content, for they were better off than they had been at home. In several instances entire families were hired and provided with a small house.[25] One such instance was the family of Antonio Cobarrubias. Antonio's own salary, combined with that of his two children, totaled $1.50 per day. And his spouse, who worked for the employer's wife, was given fresh eggs, chickens and fresh milk daily.[26]

Employers were happy to have Mexican families working for them. A farmowner with 40-80 acres liked to have two or three families of five or six adult members each working for him. This number normally represented enough hands for his fields.[27] Employers who owned large tracts, besides having this arrangement, employed seasonal workers who had been hired by labor agents.

Labor agents enticed Mexican laborers to the Valley with promises of wages ranging from $1.25-1.50 per day for each adult. The worker, however, generally, did not receive wages that high. Because of overrecruitment, workers usually had to settle for less, generally $.75-1.00 per day.[28] In some cases where entire families had been recruited for the harvest, only the head of the household was paid what had been promised, while the remainder of adult members of the family were lucky to be paid $8.00 a month.[29] In some instance, housing was provided for the seasonal worker.[30]

Labor agents, besides getting a commission for the number of laborers recruited, were allowed to sell provisions to the field hands. They supplied them with food, clothing and other necessary

articles. Laborers bought on credit, at high prices. The amount owed was deducted from their wages. Those few who were able to pay cash for their goods were free to purchase wherever they wished. But since most workers did not have the money or transportation to purchase elsewhere, they had no choice but to buy from the labor agent's store.[31]

When the harvest was over, most seasonal workers remained in the Valley. They moved their families into the towns and proceeded to seek agricultural work again. The children would go to school until work was once more availablefor them. Many women worked as maids, where they earned as much as $10 per month. Others did laundry work for $.50 a day. Still others cooked and laundered for men who came alone, for $.50 a day.[32]

By the mid-1920's some Mexican laborers began looking for more stable employment. Valley towns employed Mexican workmen for installing sewer pipes, water mains and other public works projects.[33] But as the demand for field hands increased, Mexican workers, male and female, often gave up their stability, quit their city jobs, and took their children out of school to return to the fields. The family as a whole could earn more in agricultural jobs than in the city. Ten-year-old children would work ten hours per day hoeing or weeding. Twelve-year-olds were seen wrestling with eighty-pound lugs, or sacks, or crates. Women were seen doing the same.[34] A family of four thusly employed could earn $7.00 or more per day.[35]

In the Citrus Industry

For years those who worked as planters and pickers had envied the grubber. But later the grubber would begrudge those who found employ-

ment in the citrus industry. As time progressed it would be the citrus worker who found the most stable employment and who would be paid better than most laborers.[36]

Prior to 1910, a number of American experts had been employed to manage a large experimental citrus orchard in México. Many northeastern Mexican landowners hoped that citrus could one day be their main crop.[37] With these hopes in mind, they began clearing and planting huge orchards. But, little did they know that they were actually training Mexican laborers for the Valley citrus industry. Average daily wages in the Mexican citrus industry were only $.20 (US). Consequently, the $.50-.75 paid in the Valley seemed very attractive.[38]

By the 1920's as the Valley citrus industry was in full swing, the demand for citrus workers was at its peak. Many Mexican workers were enticed to the Valley by reports of high wages. Some claimed to be experienced in citrus when they really were not. But the need was so great that the majority of those who applied were hired anyway. However, orchard owners preferred to hire single males in order to avoid family-related problems.[39]

One of the Mexicans seeking employment in the citrus industry during this period was Israel Cano, who had just arrived in the Valley from Burgos.[40] Israel and several others, after their arrival in Harlingen, approached Mr. William Ellis from Harlingen for a job. Those whom Ellis hired were single.[41] Ellis, a citrus orchard owner and labor contractor, needed workers to care for his orchard and to meet his labor contract. He usually had a crew of 120 to 150 men and 10 to 12 trucks. Ellis was one of several individuals in the area with labor contracts to fulfill.[42]

Working conditions, as seen by many of the Mexican workers, were adequate. Early Monday morning the laborers would gather at a specified place from where the contractor would furnish them with transportation to the worksite. If the worksite was close by, the contractor would furnish daily transportation to and from the site. If daily transportation was not economically feasible, he would take the laborers to the worksite where he would set up a work camp. The work camps consisted of sleeping tents large enough to accomodate 10 to 12 Mexicans. Separate tents, however, were provided for Anglo workers and supervisors. The few existing Mexican and Mexican-American supervisors were not allowed to sleep in the supervisor's tents. The contractor provided meals for everyone, in a hastily built shelter. There was plenty of food and coffee. Campsites were always located close to an arroyo or canal, to facilitate bathing and the washing of clothes. The men would remain at the worksites from Monday through Saturday evening, when they would be driven to their homes, and if the work was not finished, picked up at the specified place again on Monday morning. If the work was completed they would pick up camp and move to the next worksite.[43]

Work for the Mexican laborer in the growing citrus industry was a year-round job, which consisted of three phases. Between July and September the contractor sent his Mexican laborers to work in nurseries grafting seedlings. About fourteen days after grafting, the seedling would sprout a sweet branch from the grafted bud. Fourteen days later, the Mexican laborer would return to the nursery, cut the original seedling above the sweet sprout, and straighten the sweet branch by tying it to a stake. By the end of September, when the

grafting of the trees has been completed, the next phase began. Some Mexican workers would start picking the fruit from full grown orchards, while others cleared land for future planting, a job which generally lasted until the end of January.[44] By early February the crew was back to the nursery, where they would dig up the young grafted trees and wrap their roots and dirt in burlap for transplanting in the newly cleared land. The next year the three-phase cycle would be repeated.[45]

In general, the Mexican laborer had few complaints. However, there were some who were unhappy because in many cases their supervisors knew less than those they were supervising. If a supervisory position had to be filled, chances were that an Anglo with little or no experience would be hired rather than promoting one of the experienced Mexican workers.[46]

The Mexican worker was paid a daily wage of $1.25. For this money the worker had to graft a minimum of 200 seedlings. The supervisor, who was in charge of 12 to 15 workers, was paid $.75 per day for each man he supervised plus $.01 for each tree that he himself grafted. The same daily wage was paid for picking the fruit and clearing the land, where a daily minimum amount of work was also required.[47]

Wages were somewhat better in the transplanting of trees. For this type of work a man could easily make as much as $3.00 per day. The men would organize themselves into groups of four men each. Two would work at the nursery digging and wrapping while the other two would transport the trees to the new orchard for transplanting. For each tree that was processed in this manner, the contractor was paid $.15 He, in turn, paid the workers $.10 per tree.[48]

As the citrus industry gained momentum, there was a demand for

more citrus trees. One way this demand could be met was for the contractor to pay better wages. Many contractors increased their laborer's wages to $15 per week, but also increased the minimum work requirement. Other contractors decided to pay their workers a piecework wage, of $.01 per grafted seedling. Under the incentives of this new system, many Mexicans were now grafting as many as 2,000 seedlings per day. This caused a problem, for the quality of grafting deteriorated in the interest of speed. Many grafters whose work was not satisfactory would quit their job and go to another contractor.[49]

To solve the problem of quality control, contractors with contracts to be fulfilled, tried another approach. They offered subcontracts to their experienced and most reliable Mexican and Mexican-American workers. The proposal was that the subcontractor would be responsible for the men working under him. For this he would be paid $7.50 per 1,000 seedlings grafted. He in turn would pay his workers $.01½ to .02 per tree. To insure that quality work was done the contractor would pay for the work only when 90 percent of the grafts had sprouted. Anything less than that, the subcontractor would have to regraft on his own time, without pay.[50]

This system proved to be very satisfactory for all parties, and of tremendous value toward the success of the citrus industry in the Valley, for now contractors were able to meet their contracts. Consequently, millions of trees were planted in the Valley during the period between 1920 and 1930. Eventually the citrus sector became one of the major industries in the Valley, and was able to compete with citrus producing areas elsewhere in the United States.

Endnotes

[1]C.M. Goethe, "Other Aspects of the Problem," Current History, August 1928, pp. 766-67.

[2]Ibid.; and J.B. Gwin, "Mexican Labor Problems," Survey, 20 November 1920, pp. 272-73.

[3]Ibid.; and Arthur F. Corwin, ed. Immigrants-And Immigrants: Perspectives on Mexican Labor Migration to the United States, (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1978), p. 239.

[4]Interview with José Fuentes, retired farm laborer, Mission, Texas, March 1982. José was born near Méndez, Tamaulipas and started coming to the Valley in the late 1910s.

[5]Ibid.; and interview with Bricelda C. Martínez, born in Burgos, Tamaulipas, retired, Harlingen, Texas, 15 March 1980. Prior to coming to the Valley, Bricelda was a school teacher in a rural school in Burgos.

[6]Corwin, ed. Immigrants-And Immigrants, p. 39.; and Gwin, "Mexican Labor Problems," Survey, pp. 272-73.

[7]The American dollar, based on the gold standard, equaled two silver Mexican pesos.

[8]Victor S. Clark, "Mexican Labor in the United States," Bulletin of the Bureau of Labor. Department of Commerce and Labor No. 78-September 1908.. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1908, pp. 473, 502.

[9]Ibid., p. 470.

[10]Corwin, ed. Immigrants-And Immigrants, pp. 29, 51.

[11]Ibid., p. 29.

[12]Interview with Vitalio Zúñiga, retired, Pharr, Texas, February and March 1982. Vitalio was born in Burgos, Tamaulipas and started coming to the Valley in the 1910s.

[13]"Six Hundred Acres of New Land is Cleared," Lower Rio Grande Magazine, February 1925, p. 23.; and J.L. Allhands, Gringo Builders, (Privately Printed, 1931), p. 166.

[14]Interview with Anselmo Quiroz, retired farm laborer, Pharr, Texas, February and March 1982. Anselmo came to the Valley from Linares, Nuevo León to join his brother in 1920. His brother Juan, owned a team of horses.

[15]Interview with Yndalesio Hinojosa, retired laborer, La Feria, Texas, March 1982. Yndalesio came to the Valley in the late 1910s from Reynosa, Tamaulipas. As a young boy he saw his father working clearing land in the Santa Rosa-La Feria area. By 1920 he was working as a land grubber.; and Miriam Chatelle, For We Love Our Valley Home, (San Antonio: Naylor Co., 1948), pp. 56-57.

[16]Carey McWilliams, North From México, (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1948), p. 176.

[17]"Six Hundred Acres," Lower Rio Grande Valley Magazine, February 1925, p. 23.

[18]Interview with Aureliano Magallán, retired farm worker, San Juan, Texas, February 1982. Aureliano came to the Valley from Reynosa, Tamaulipas in 1915 and worked as a grubber for several years in various parts in the Valley.

[19]Interview, Anselmo Quiroz, February and March 1982.

[20]Ibid.; and "Six Hundred Acres," Lower Rio Grande Valley Magazine, February 1925, p. 23.

[21]Interview with Bernarela S. Saldívar, retired housewife, San Benito, Texas, February 1982. Bernarela came to the Valley from Matehuala, San Luis Potosí in 1920 at the age of five years. Her parents worked as field workers in various parts of the Valley. She attended school when no work was available for children her age.

[22]Interview with Pánfilo Salinas Salinas, retired farm worker, Pharr, Texas, February 1982. Pánfilo crossed into Texas through Reynosa, México in 1918 and went to work as a land grubber near Rio Hondo, Texas.

[23]Interview, Aureliano, February 1982.

[24]Goethe, "Other Aspects," Current History, August 1928, p. 768.

[25]Sylvius M. Handman, "The Mexican Immigrant in Texas," Political and Social Science Quarterly Vol. VII No. 1, January 1926, p. 35.

[26]Interview with Antonio Cobarrubias, retired, McAllen, Texas, February 1982. Antonio and his family came to the Valley in 1920. He, his wife and his children worked for an Anglo family.

[27]Clark, "Mexican Labor In The United States," p. 482.

[28]Kenneth L. Roberts, "Mexicans Or Ruin," The Saturday Evening Post, 18 February 1928, pp. 14-15.

[29]Interview, Yndalesio Hinojosa, La Feria, Texas, March 1982.

[30]Ibid.; and Clark, "Mexican Labor In The United States," pp. 483-84.

[31]Ibid., p. 475.

[32]Gwin, "Mexican Labor Problems," Survey, 20 November 1920, pp. 272-73.; and interview with Jesús Galván, retired farm laborer, McAllen, Texas, January 1982. Jesús came from Burgos as a young boy, but remembers his mother working as a maid, laundress, and cook for

single males.

[33]Clark, "Mexican Labor In The United States," p. 495.; and "Demand Grows For Laborers In Harlingen," Harlingen Star, 3 August 1926, p. 1.

[34]Ernesto Galarza, "Without Benefit of Lobby," Survey, 1 May 1931, p. 181.

[35]Clark, "Mexican Labor In The United States," p. 482.

[36]Interview with Israel Cano, retired independent merchant, Harlingen, Texas, 15 March 1980. Israel worked in the Valley citrus industry for William Ellis, a labor contractor, and, later, for Potts' Nursery.

[37]Today the Montemorelos, Nuevo León area is the main citrus producer in México.

[38]Clark, "Mexican Labor In The United States," p. 515.; and interview, Israel, 15 March 1980.

[39]Ibid.

[40]Ibid.

[41]Ibid.; and interview with Genaro Cano, Jr., retired independent merchant, Harlingen, Texas, 8 March 1980. Genaro worked for the same people as Israel.

[42]Interview, Israel, 15 March 1980.

[43]Interview with Manuel H. Dávila, retired Baptist minister, Houston, Texas, 15 February 1980. Manuel entered the United States through Laredo, Texas and worked himself down to the Valley where he worked from 1920 to 1928. Later he moved to Corpus Christi and still later to Houston.

[44]"Citrus Workers, Nursery and Orchards," filmstrip, approx. 29

min., color, College Station, Texas: Texas A&M, n.d.

[45]Ibid.; and interview, Israel Cano, 15 March 1980.

[46]Ibid.; and interview, Genaro Cano, 8 March 1980.

[47]Ibid.

[48]Ibid.; and interview, Israel Cano, 15 March 1980.

[49]Ibid.

[50]Ibid.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

It would seem strange for anyone to admit or even suggest that the Rio Grande Valley of Texas was ever in a position to be economically hurt by a foreign country or to acknowledge that she was ever dependent on any foreign country for its economic prosperity. But although the lack of Mexican workers could not have destroyed the Valley, it could have retarded its development and it certainly would have made it more expensive.

With the signing of the treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, Mexicans residing north of the Rio Grande became American citizens. But they were discriminated against by the few Anglos who moved into the area. The ethnic conflict was only part of the problem. As time progressed many new Anglos arrived and soon dominated the area economically and politically. Several Mexicans, like "Cheno" Cortina tried to correct some of the injustices that existed. But these efforts were unsuccessful, and Mexican laborers continued to be used and abused as the development of the area gained momentum.

With the completion of the railroad in 1904, the Valley was transformed from a desolate place into one of the greatest crop-producing areas in the United States. Valley planters and investors were able to bring the Valley to this level of success by tapping the supply of Mexican laborers available north and south of the Rio Grande, while at the same time shipping their proudce to out-of-the-Valley markets. The railroad was a crucial element in the development of the Valley. But the valley would never have prospered as it did without

other essential elements, such as farsighted planning, massive capital outlays, a dependable water supply, and an accessible reservoir of cheap labor.

As the Valley was opening for development, settlers from all over the United States came to invest in what they considered to be a great fortune-making opportunity. They used their creative foresight and organizational abilities to develop the citrus industry. Very soon they realized the importance of irrigation, and they established mechanisms to ensure an ample supply of water. The newcomers knew that a supply of cheap labor would be essential to the realization of their plans. Mexican workers provided this missing element, and they played one of the most important roles in developing the agricultural potential of the Valley. It was they who cleared the land, dug ditches for irrigation, and planted, harvested, and packed for shipment most of the citrus grown in the area.

The chaotic conditions in México during and after the revolution, contrary to popular interpretation, should be understood, not as the major cause of mass migration, but as a catalyst to a population movement that was already in progress. The primary "pull" factor for this was the great disparity in wages between the United States and México.

Originally, few Mexican workers who came to the Valley competed directly with American laborers. Consequently, they were not seen as a threat. But American attitudes changed as the number of Mexicans entering the country increased, and as many brought their families and decided to stay. Several attempts were made by both governments to curb this influx. Even so, Valley orchard owners found ways to attract and contract Mexican laborers.

The demand for labor increased with the coming of the railroad and the development of the citrus industry. Before long, Valley citrus was making its way into markets farther and farther away. As the number of markets increased so did the demand for laborers to produce and harvest the crop.

The Mexican laborer who returned to his Mexican home after a harvest season had typically been able to accumulate enough money to make obvious improvements in his standard of living. This encouraged his neighbors also to leave their homes and come to the Valley in search of work. Although many of those who came had originally planned to return to their homeland, many ended up staying in the United States. Most of them, however, did not become American citizens; Mexicans they intended to remain.

Mexican workers in the Valley suffered various abuses from their employers. But whatever they had to endure while working in the United States was not new to them, for they had already experienced poor treatment in México. But they found abuses from their Anglo employers more tolerable because they were getting far better wages than at home.

There is no doubt that the Valley owes a tremendous debt to a few entrepreneurs for the success of the citrus industry. They had the foresight, money and dedication to bring this industry to the level of success that it enjoys today. However, a lot of credit, which few have acknowledged, should be given to the Mexicans who came to this country. How many of them went back to México is not known, but family histories show that a great number decided to stay in the United States. It is to those Mexicans who stayed, and later to their children born in the United States (now Mexican-Americans), to whom the greatest debt is owed.

It is unfortunate that a good fruit in the hands of the consumer does not tell the story behind its production. The consumer is unaware of the hard years of labor behind each orange or grapefruit he savours. He does not know that the hard work of Mexican laborers was instrumental in increasing the few acres of citrus existing in the Valley during the 1910's to thousands of acres by 1920, and to about a hundred thousand by the mid-1940's. Even today, when one rides over roads and highways in the Valley during the citrus season, one sees Mexicans and Mexican-Americans still doing most of the work, therefore, still contributing to the citrus industry.

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VITA

Camilo Amado Martínez, Jr. was born on February 18, 1935, in Harlingen, Texas, the son of the late Camilo Amado Martínez and Bricelda Cano de Martínez. After completing his studies at Harlingen High School, Harlingen, Texas, in 1953, he entered the United States Navy and twenty-two years later he retired with the rank of Senior Chief Meteorologist. In June 1956, he married Elida Dávila of Corpus Christi, Texas. They have four children and three grandchildren. In 1976 he entered Pan American University and was awarded the degree of Bachelor of Arts in August 1979. In September 1979, he entered the Graduate School at Pan American University and received an appointment as Teaching Assistant with the History Department.

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THE MEXICANS' AND MEXICAN-AMERICANS' CONTRIBUTION TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE LOWER RIO GRANDE VALLEY OF TEXAS AND ITS CITRUS INDUSTRY

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The little-discussed Mexican and Mexican-American contribution to the development of the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas into the great citrus producing area that it is today is exposed in general terms in this thesis. Due credit has been given to the Burgos, Tamaulipas, residents who came to the Valley during and after the Mexican Revolution in search of stability and better wages. In spite of the abuses they suffered, some of them decided to stay. Their children (now Mexican-Americans), are still contributing to the citrus industry today, although not in the strenuous way their parents did.

The Valley owes a tremendous debt to those few businessmen that came to the Valley and had the foresight to bring in the railroad and irrigation systems to this area. But the greatest debt for its success, as presented in this thesis, is owed to the Mexicans and Mexican-Americans.