DALLAS BARRIO WOMEN OF POWER

THESIS

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By

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This thesis discusses Mexican immigration into Texas, and the communities in which the immigrants settled. The focus is on Dallas, with particular emphasis placed upon the women of Little Mexico, a specific barrio there. Sources include interviews with the subjects and their descendants, newspaper articles, journals, unpublished theses about Little Mexico, and books.

After sifting through all this information, I concluded that the Mexican immigrant and the Mexican American have not had an easy time acculturating to our way of life. Women in this culture have endured more hardships than the men; however, despite hardships, some women became successful.
PREFACE

When I was a child, my father's business was in Little Mexico. He usually took me there on Saturdays and I would busy myself while he worked. In this way, we spent time together, and I became acquainted with a neighborhood that is no more. While it seemed exotic and foreign to my eyes, nevertheless it was a friendly place. All of the people around his building knew him, and the men tipped their hats when they saw him. Sometimes we would walk over to El Fenix and have lunch together. Surely, one of the purposes for writing this thesis is to take me back to those happy days. I wanted to do a master's thesis about Little Mexico, so I asked Anita Martinez, my friend and one of the subjects of this thesis, to introduce me to Dennis Zamora, the curator for the exhibition, "Hispanic Beginnings of Dallas: Into the Twentieth Century, 1850 to 1976," which the Dallas Independent School District had commissioned. Although the exhibition was called "Hispanic," it primarily concerned the contributions made by Mexicans and Mexican Americans to Dallas. During our conversation, Mr. Zamora discussed all of the aspects of Hispanic life covered by his research. Since his summary seemed complete, I asked him which part of the life in Little Mexico had not been covered adequately. He immediately answered, "the women."
In my examination of these brave women, I have included personal interviews with either the principals or their descendants. I have also included an interview with Vivian Castleberry, the author of a forthcoming book about women who have made outstanding contributions to the quality of life in Dallas, who was kind enough to give me her unpublished chapter about the Martinez women. I am grateful to her.

In my research, I was surprised to discover that few historical studies examined the roles Mexicans, and particularly Mexican women, played in the Dallas community. I hope to correct this oversight. These women, who had been virtually ignored by the earlier chroniclers of the history of Dallas precisely because of their ethnicity and gender, have contributed to the development of Dallas. Their lives are American success stories and they epitomize the American dream of achieving success through hard work. Because these women and their families played such an integral part in the history of Dallas, the time has come to reexamine their contributions.
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CHAPTER ONE

BEFORE THE BARRIO

Texas history was Mexican history until 1836, when Texas separated from Mexico and won her independence. However, Mexico never recognized this fact. As a result of this war, Tejanos, the indigenous population of this area, became American citizens. When the treaty was written following the Mexican War, the boundary that it created between the United States and Mexico seemed artificial to the people who lived along the border. It arbitrarily divided their families, their communities, and, more importantly, their race (La Raza).

Generally, these Tejanos were not accepted by the Anglos who moved into the area from the United States, and the legacy of this second-class citizenship continued to be a great onus for many Mexican-Americans throughout Texas. Bearing the double burden of sexism and racism caused Mexican-American women to suffer even more. However, in spite of these difficulties, some exceptional women from the Dallas barrios became role models for La Raza and for women in general. They proved that hard work, talent, and persistence could destroy barriers that seemed insurmountable.
Americans had been interested in settling Texas since the beginning of the nineteenth century. The original plan of Moses Austin, and his son Stephen, called for the establishment of a colony in Texas that would serve as a base for linking the rich Santa Fe trade with Texas Gulf ports. Although this dream was never realized, Texas was seen from the beginning as a trading port and a potential slave state. When the Americans came to Texas, they brought their prejudices with them. In addition to a general distrust of Spaniards (a legacy they had inherited from the English), many of them subscribed to a belief in the superiority of the white race. Therefore, when the American immigrants encountered the Tejanos, who were largely a mixture of Spanish and Indian blood, the Tejanos were treated as inferiors. These Anglos, particularly those from the South who were accustomed to thinking of most dark-skinned people as slaves, considered the Tejanos as, more or less, another race of dark, and therefore inferior, people. In fact, as early as the 1850s, the contemptuous word "greaser" was used to identify Mexicans as well as Indians, since the Indians' olive color was thought to be the result of their practice of anointing their bodies with grease.

John C. Reid, a settler passing through Texas in the 1850s, found that Mexican males were called "greasers from Texas to California," and that Mexican females were labeled "greaser women." Another traveler, going through El Paso,
hypothesized that Mexicans were called "greasers because of their appearance." As the history of this pejorative term indicates, the Anglos, from the beginning of their migration to Texas, viewed the Tejanos as inferior to white men and treated them as such, in differing degrees, throughout the state's history.

Unlike their Spanish and African ancestors, these Mexicans were the only large group of immigrants to come to this country without having to cross an ocean. Since the United States shared a common border with Mexico, America was, and still is, easy to enter. A few days journey by train, by car, or even on foot would bring the Mexican immigrant to the United States. Because of this proximity, a large number of these Mexican immigrants were not willing to abandon their ancient cultural and linguistic heritage in order to accept the cultural pattern common to native speakers in America. Therefore, the strong assimilationist impulses of other immigrant groups, such as the Jewish, Irish, and Italian peoples, were not so conspicuous among the Mexican-Americans. For these reasons, many Mexicans entered this country illegally in the first thirty years of the twentieth century. Because they faced embarrassing medical examinations for tuberculosis, venereal disease, and lice, these immigrants considered it humiliating to cross legally into a country that had been settled by their forefathers. Crossing was also cheaper and easier at the
largely unprotected border. If they attempted to cross legally, the Mexicans would be required to pass a literacy test, and to waste both time and money on the Mexican side of the border waiting for their request to be processed. In addition, they would have to spend eighteen dollars to cover the consular visa and the head tax. Also, individuals whose labor had been contracted previously in Mexico were not able to enter the United States lawfully. For these reasons, many broke the law in order to cross the border.7

They came north for many reasons. For some, it was a great adventure—a chance to see a strange, new people and culture. Others considered the United States to be a superior country and wanted to leave their backward, native land.8 The main stimulus for migration began just before the turn of the century, when social conditions in Mexico forced a large number of Mexicans to leave their country in search of a better standard of living. The flow of this immigration increased rapidly, and soon hundreds of thousands of Mexicans entered the United States. The towns on the frontier developed with the help of the Mexican labor provided by this migration, and, eventually, a large part of the commercial activity of these cities came to be dependent upon Mexican labor. This fact was proclaimed constantly by employers who used their political and financial influence to combat the existing hostility to the Mexican immigrants.9
By the late 1920s, the American Federation of Labor, one of the largest American labor unions, expressed its hostility towards Mexican immigration. The AFL insisted that since the Mexican worker would work for lower wages than American workers, the wages of American workers would increase if the competition of Mexican workers was eliminated. The immigrant felt that he had to work for lower wages, since union membership was available only to American citizens and, therefore, he was unable to join the union. Because the Mexican worker usually was not willing to become a naturalized citizen, as a non-union worker he could not command union wages. The AFL refused to relax this restriction, since it believed that even if he were to be admitted to union membership without being naturalized, he would not be a satisfactory union member. The hostility of the AFL increased when some Mexican workers became members of a rival group, the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). The IWW was founded in response to the AFL's opposition to industrial unionism for unskilled workers and its hostility toward revolutionary unionism. Most of the IWW's members were itinerant, unskilled workers for whom the AFL had made little provision. The workers hoped the IWW would help them to increase their wages.

Along with labor groups such as the AFL, the American government also was not in favor of Mexican immigration in Texas or anywhere else in the United States. Many
government officials believed that if it continued indefinitely, this immigration would create cultural, racial, and economic problems. By 1930, however, industry depended heavily on Mexican labor, which was cheaper than hiring domestic workers.¹²

During the 1920s, John Nance Garner, a Texas congressman who later became Vice-President of the United States under Franklin D. Roosevelt, argued that Mexicans could never make particularly good citizens because of their innate inferiority to whites. He also believed that American labor organizations did not need to worry about these immigrants undercutting the wages of American workers, since their genetically determined "homing pigeon" mechanism would compel them to return to Mexico.¹³ During the economic crunch of 1920-1921, his assumption was given credence and effectually put into practice in some places. As Anglo unemployment grew, resentment against the Mexican worker increased. Rather than providing these workers with relief during the depression, localities implemented a policy of transporting workers and their families back to Mexico—often under duress. While this program was practiced sparingly at the time, it set a precedence for municipal officials to follow during the Great Depression when they extensively used it to rid their communities of a great number of unemployed Mexicans.¹⁴

Despite this overt hostility expressed by Americans,
most Mexicans still found the rewards of crossing the border enticing. While the average worker earned only $17.76 a month in Mexico in 1930, he could make as much as $104.78 a month in the United States.\textsuperscript{15} Gamio found that not only did Mexican workers in the United States earn, on the average, six times their salary in Mexico, but that they made enough money both to meet their basic needs and to have a discretionary income. With this extra income, they were able to buy things they could never have owned in Mexico, such as automobiles, phonographs, and refrigerators.\textsuperscript{16}

Among those people of Mexican heritage who sought work, there were basically four types of Mexican workers. The first type was the international worker. These workers were citizens of Mexico who crossed the border when their labor was needed, but returned home once their labor was no longer necessary. Literature of this period is full of references to this Mexican worker and his homing instinct, and American employer representatives routinely used him as an example before congressional committees to encourage them to support laws allowing for continued Mexican immigration.

The second type of laborer was the regional worker. These people would travel, on a limited basis, within one general area. Mexican workers who lived in one part of the United States were often used as a labor reserve by other areas that needed seasonal workers. The sugar beet industry in Michigan was one example of this process. Local
communities also served as labor pools for surrounding agricultural areas. In some localities, growers preferred to have their own individual labor reserves. This type of worker would be a particular laborer.\textsuperscript{17}

A third kind of worker was employed by the railroads. Railroad companies continued to be a major employer of Mexicans through 1930. The Houston and Texas Central Railroad came to Dallas in 1872, and the Texas and Pacific Railroad arrived a year later. As a result, new job opportunities for Mexicans became available in Dallas. A 1922 survey estimated that Mexican workers comprised eighty-five percent of the Southwest's railroad track workers.\textsuperscript{18} In the late 1920s, Mexican workers composed sixty-seven percent of the section crews, whose job was to maintain a particular section of the track, and ninety percent of the extra crews, who maintained track but also moved about as needed.\textsuperscript{19} Jobs were stratified on all the railroad lines according to ethnicity, with Anglos holding the better-paying, more highly skilled jobs. Although several different writers observed this practice of discrimination during the first thirty years of the twentieth century, in Dallas this practice continued up to the 1970s.\textsuperscript{20}

Not only did the railroads offer new employment opportunities for Mexicans, they also served as a means of transportation to other jobs. From Dallas, Mexican families traveled to the sugar beet fields of western Nebraska and
eastern Colorado, and to the meat packing plants of Chicago and Omaha in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Through the transportation provided by the railroads, the fourth group found work in industries related to agriculture, such as the canneries.

When the Mexican laborer crossed the border into the United States, he often brought his entire family with him, including his children. These children created a problem for the public schools, since Article VII, Section 1 of the Texas Constitution of 1876 called for "an efficient system of free public schools." Mexican children often had a limited English vocabulary when they entered school. For example, it was estimated in 1930 that ninety percent of the Mexican children entering Texas schools could not speak or understand English. As a result of this language barrier, they faced obstacles from the beginning of their education. In addition, racial prejudice against them led, more often than not, to inferior, segregated buildings, less equipment, older supplies, poorer teachers, and a shorter term. Schools were more apt to be segregated around the border where the highest concentration of Mexicans lived. Farther north, in cities such as Dallas, schools were not segregated.

Traditionally, the family was the strong foundation upon which activities in the Mexican community were organized. Roles were delineated according to sex and
place within the family circle. The father was the head of the household. As a rule, women were employed outside the home only in cases of dire necessity. However, by 1880, they were found working in domestic service and as agricultural laborers. They also found work in other agricultural industries, such as the fruit canneries.\textsuperscript{27} For the first thirty years of the twentieth century, Mexican women (called Chicanas after the 1970s) worked in two basic situations. In the first, the entire family would work together. This type of labor was employed primarily in agriculture. In the other situation, they worked alone at jobs considered appropriate for females. These generally low-paying jobs were located in laundries, garment factories, and food-processing plants. In essence, women worked in places that could be considered extensions of the home. And, when they worked alongside Anglo women in these industries, they were paid less for the same type of work.\textsuperscript{28}

In response to the prejudice directed against them, Mexican workers began to form protective organizations in order to defend themselves against discrimination. On August 14, 1927, several of these organizations met in Corpus Christi, Texas, to found the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC). Composed of permanent residents of the United States, LULAC was created to improve the living conditions of Mexican-Americans in the United
States.29

The convention adopted the motto, "All For One and One For All." This motto served as a constant reminder of the trials of the past and laid a foundation for all future activities of the organization.30 From its beginning, education was a primary concern of LULAC. In fact, the desire for an equal education led to the creation of this organization.31 LULAC was instrumental in desegregating schools so that Mexican-American children could attend the school in their neighborhood. In 1945, Mexicans in Orange County, California, brought charges in a federal court against the Orange County School Board for segregation in the schools. This case led to a permanent federal injunction, which called for the abolition of the practice of segregating school children for reasons of color, race, or natural origin. The decision, which was rendered by the judge in favor of the segregated children, was the first of its kind involving public school practices in the United States. LULAC was the instigator and the source of financial support for this action.32 LULAC also became involved with the Boy Scouts and the Girl Scouts, the Red Cross, Community Chest Drives, and other civic causes. By 1951, LULAC had sponsored five Boy Scout troops, one Girl Scout troop, and a Junior LULAC council. These groups were composed of approximately 175 boys, fifteen girls, and twenty-five members of LULAC, who served as scoutmasters,
troop committee members, and sponsors. Socially, Mexican-Americans had, and still have, limited interaction between the sexes, including adolescents. Machismo has been given a bad press; it does not necessarily refer to an abusive person, but can have several connotations—both positive and negative. Among the positive aspects are the insistence on good manners, responsibility for leadership in the family, the sacredness of the family, pride in oneself as an individual, a love of children, and a respect for religion. The negative aspects are well known. Interestingly, when Mexican men (Chicanos) speak of machismo, they are referring to the positive aspects. However, when Chicanas define machismo, they refer to its negative aspects. Every writer speaks of the cohesiveness of the Mexican, or Chicano, family. Machismo may be one reason these families have been able to persevere through their many hardships, including being treated as strangers in their native land.

NOTES


4. De Leon, They Called Them Greasers, 16.


7. Manuel Gamio, Mexican Immigration to the United States, 10.


9. Cardoso, Mexican Immigration to the United States, 11-12.


12. Gamio, Ibid., 175.

13. Cardoso, Mexican Immigration to the United States, 125.


17. Barrera, Ibid., 81.


24. Manuel, Ibid., 120.


33. Garza, Ibid., 39.


CHAPTER TWO

LIFE IN THE BARRIO

The barrio was not a ghetto, although there were ghettos in the barrio. It was a microcosm of a Chicano city and a place of dualities: a liberated zone and a prison, a place of love and warmth, and a place of hatred and violence. It was a place where most of La Raza lived out their lives. "So it is a place of weddings, bautismos, bailes, velorios, and patriotic enchilada dinners. It is a place of poverty and of self-reliance, of beloved ancianos (the old ones), of familias, of compadres."¹

Barrio, a Spanish word meaning "neighborhood," was subtly changed by Spanish rulers in colonial Mexico to designate the native quarter where the Indians lived. Therefore, from colonial times, "barrio" was a pejorative term. Although today the word "barrio" is a modern version of that colonial term, Mexican-Americans living in these areas have attempted to change the pejorative meaning of the old colonial word into one of pride.²

In Dallas, Little Mexico was a neighborhood of shotgun frame houses, boxcars, and tents surrounded by the huge warehouses and towering smokestacks of the wholesale district. (Shotgun houses were so named because one room
was located directly behind another, and it was said that one could shoot a shotgun through the front door and the buckshot would go out the back door.) The neighborhood, which was located north of the city in a formerly Jewish area, originated around 1914. It was bordered by McKinney Avenue on the east, by the Missouri, Kansas and Texas Railroad on the west, and by North Pearl Street on the north. Since Little Mexico was the largest settlement of Mexicans in Dallas, a business district, including restaurants, a beauty salon, barbershops, a photographer, and grocery shops, developed along McKinney, Caroline, and Payne streets. This enclave expanded northward to Maple Street in the 1930s. A reporter, Felix Garcia, described Little Mexico as an area that

had irregular, narrow, twisted, unpaved streets, flanked by ancient wooden shacks grouped closely, as if the inhabitants would only have to thrust a hand out the side window to shake their neighbor's hand in greeting "buenos dias," while nearby stand sky-reaching smokestacks and the comparatively enormous buildings.

In sharp contrast to the poverty of the area, bright flowers and potted plants dotted the yards, which were filled with chattering children and yelping dogs.

Originally, the neighborhood had been a red light district until immigrants, who were lured by the low rents, began to settle there. The immigrants who established themselves there before the Mexicans arrived included Germans, the Swiss, the Irish, Scots, and many Polish
Jews. Gradually, over a period of years, Mexicans joined the other immigrants living there.

In 1912 and 1913, a city-wide morality campaign successfully removed the illicit businesses of the area, and a park was established by the Park Board. This park, originally called Summit Play Park, was the first of its kind to be established under an innovative program of park design. Prior to its creation, park sites had been selected in undeveloped areas and purchased from a single owner in one transaction. Summit Play Park, however, was purchased by Nat G. Turney, James H. Turney, and Mrs. Lou White over a two-year period, from 1912 to 1914, at a cost of $18,085, which had been withdrawn from the board's ad valorem tax revenue.

During the 1920s, many of the immigrants living in the neighborhood tried to prevent the Mexicans from using Summit Park. The Park Board settled this dispute by changing the regulations of the park in 1931. The new policy clearly delineated the joint use of the park facilities by "Mexicans and Americans." The Park Board changed the name of the park on July 12, 1927, to honor Edgar L. Pike, who had served as a member of the Park Board from 1908 to 1919.

In 1923, when the Luna family moved to 2209 Caroline Street, they were the first Mexican family on the block. By this time, all of the other families living on the block were Jewish. Francisco Luna recalled that, in 1926, when he
started the first grade at the Cumberland School, he was bilingual, but spoke no English. His languages were Spanish and Yiddish! Although the Jews moved from the area to a large Jewish neighborhood in South Dallas by the early 1930s, Francisco Luna recalled that "there used to be a saying that you could walk all the way from Jerusalem to Mexico on Akard."\(^{12}\)

Although Little Mexico was the largest of the Dallas barrios, it was not the only one in the area. A barrio, known as Cement City, began to develop in 1910 around the Southwestern States Portland Cement Company at Eagle Ford—a train stop west of Dallas. In 1915 the company changed its name to Trinity Portland Cement Company. To attract workers, the company built frame houses and operated a company store at Cemento Grande. A smaller barrio, called Cemento Chico, was located to the east. When many children in Cemento Grande died in an influenza epidemic in 1912, the company provided land for the first exclusively Mexican cemetery. Mexicans also lived in a barrio in East Dallas, around Indiana Alley and the Texas and Pacific Railroad behind the Tennessee Dairies, and in another along Nussbaumer Street and Floyd Street. In the 1930s, Mexican families also bought homes in Juarez Heights along Chihuahua Street and St. Patrick Streets in West Dallas.\(^{13}\)

While these other settlements had large Mexican populations, Little Mexico was the hub of Mexican life in
this period. Pike Park, at 2807 Harry Hines Boulevard, was in the heart of the barrio, and served as its cultural center. By the early 1930s, Pike Park was used almost exclusively by the Mexican-American community. The development of the neighborhood was mirrored by park activities and followed the evolutionary pattern of Mexican colonies across the Southwest: mutual benefit societies, patriotic Mexican organizations, newspapers, social clubs, small stores, and restaurants were founded; and meetings were held in the park building. Since a large number of Mexican-Americans in Dallas entered the United States after the First World War, their heritage was linked almost exclusively to Mexico's past, and the celebration of Mexican national holidays at Pike Park was an integral part of barrio life.14

Little Mexico itself was subdivided into areas with similar socioeconomic standards. The poorest of these subdivisions was located in the MK&T Railroad yards, where families lived in old boxcars. The next area extended to Caroline Street, where fifteen to twenty people often were crowded into each small shack. Caroline Street, Payne Street, and McKinney Avenue, which were located in the center of the barrio, constituted the business district. The better homes of the area were located north of Akard Street. Although this area was adjacent to Little Mexico and, therefore, was considered a part of this barrio, in
reality it was distinct. This area differed markedly from the rest of the neighborhood in its physical exterior and in the higher economic status of its residents. Many community members considered it to be an area of second settlement, since the first settlement had been in the Caroline Street area.\textsuperscript{15} For the most part, Little Mexico was a poor neighborhood. In fact, as late as the 1940s, some streets in the barrio were still unpaved.\textsuperscript{16}

The family was, and still is, the cornerstone of Mexican society, and religion always played a significant part in the life of the family and in the community. In keeping with the importance placed on religious life, Little Mexico itself was home to several churches. Originally founded in 1913, Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church dedicated a sanctuary on Rosemond and Wichita Streets in 1925. The Methodist Presbyterian Church was organized in 1912 and was located on Payne Street. However, Methodist missionary work had begun as early as 1904 at the Gospel Settlement Home. This work continued at the Wesley Community House, the Dallas Methodist Mission, and the Floyd Street Mission until the 1930s.\textsuperscript{17} In addition to religious instruction, these congregations offered educational and social opportunities. Many of the churches in the barrio sponsored clubs for men and women, art and music classes, kindergartens, and carpenter shops. Some even offered medical and dental clinics.\textsuperscript{18} In spite of the
proliferation of churches throughout the neighborhood, a majority of the people in the barrio were Catholic.

Outside of Little Mexico, not all of the churches welcomed Mexicans as members. Anita Martinez recalled an incident from the 1950s. After she had married, she and her family moved out of the barrio to Gilbert Street in the Oak Lawn section of Dallas. Her three sons were altar boys at the Holy Trinity Catholic Church, where they and their sister also attended school. One day, toward the end of the school year, the priest in charge of the altar boy program took all of the altar boys on a field trip. They went to Vickery Park—a private park in North Dallas that had picnic grounds and a swimming pool. When the priest and the children reached the gate to the park, the three Martinez boys, along with two other Mexican altar boys, were told that the park was off-limits to Mexicans and that they would not be allowed to enter. The priest then took the other boys into the park, and the five Mexican children were forced to wait outside the gate until the other children had finished swimming and picnicking before they could return home. After this humiliating experience, Anita Martinez recalled that her husband refused to attend that church, especially since he had complained about the incident to the senior priest, who had refused to even reprimand the young priest in charge of the outing.¹⁹

Although the inhabitants of Little Mexico originally
took whatever employment was available, and therefore many were day laborers and domestics, several enterprising members of the community were able to start their own businesses. Typical enterprises in the barrio included barber shops, cobbler shops, seamstresses, bakeries, restaurants, and boarding houses. For the most part, however, they were not especially lucrative businesses. For example, in 1935, a lawyer, who was born in Mexico but had graduated from the School of Law at Southern Methodist University, debated whether to return to Mexico since the barrio could not offer him enough clients with which to support himself. He believed that the only people willing to hire him would be other Mexicans, regardless of his degree.20

Unlike other schools in South Texas and the Panhandle, the Dallas Independent School District did not segregate Mexican children into separate schools from white children.21 Cumberland Public School was attended by most of the children in the barrio. It offered classes for only the first six grades. In the school year 1935-1936, it had an enrollment of 1,097 children, of whom 1,026 were Mexican. Out of a population of 597 parents of these 1,026 students, 165 were laborers, twenty-nine were domestics, eleven worked for the railroad, fifteen were employed at hotels, eleven worked for the public utilities, five were shoemakers, four picked cotton, nine were bakers, and the remainder held down
various jobs, ranging from elevator operator to nightclub owner. The number of unemployed parents was unknown. Among the 116 Mexican parents of children enrolled at the Travis Public School (the preferred public school for Mexicans entering the seventh grade), nine were listed as laborers, four were tailors, four worked in hotels, and the rest had various jobs, including two store-window cleaners, one radio man, one man worked at the Dallas Country Club, and a cafe owner. However, the vast majority--forty-eight to be exact--were listed as unemployed. Many of the parents whose children attended Cumberland and who claimed to be laborers were probably also unemployed but refused to admit it.

Saint Ann Parochial School, which was operated by the Sisters of Charity, was the school of choice for those residents of the barrio who could afford the tuition. Saint Ann's had an enrollment of 400 students. As a child, Anita Martinez longed to go to Saint Ann's, but was discouraged by her parents, since the cost of the tuition and uniforms was beyond the means of her family. However, because she was determined to attend at any cost, Anita made an agreement with the nuns. In return for running errands and performing other tasks, she was given tuition and uniforms.

The other educational option for residents of the barrio was night school. The director of Dallas night
schools began holding classes for adult Mexicans in the 1920s. These classes met in the Saint Vincent de Paul Building on Caruth Street, and were held mainly for the benefit of newly arrived immigrants. These classes were so popular that, on the first night of class, fifty to sixty men showed up. Many of them came directly from work, and a few even had their spades and shovels with them. The teacher of these classes, Flora Lowery, held them for five years. While her students greatly appreciated the classes, many had trouble with the immigration authorities and were deported back to Mexico. She described her employment in these classes as "a five-year experience replete with interesting incidents which have taught me many things about Little Mexico and the Mexicans." Although she first considered them to be "an assemblage of rough, dirty, uncouth creatures," they soon became to her "a group of interesting people" who had "a natural love for music and indeed for anything artistic and colorful, an instinctive courtesy, and, above all, sensitive and gentle natures." By 1930 Little Mexico was considered one of the most poverty-stricken areas of Dallas. The "Blighted Area Survey," which had been prepared by the Dallas County Relief Board, vividly portrayed the problems plaguing the 397 dwelling units and 357 residential structures located in the southern and most depressed half of the barrio. Of the 397 dwelling units, none had hot water, 58.4 percent had no
electric lights, 79.8 percent had no gas, 74.1 percent had no indoor toilets, and 76.8 percent lacked a private bath. In addition, of the 357 residential structures, 32.5 percent needed minor repairs, 25.5 percent needed major repairs, and 40 percent were overcrowded. Only 1.9 percent were considered to be in good condition. Since only 2.2 percent of the people residing in Little Mexico owned their own homes, the vast majority were renting and, therefore, had little control over their surroundings.

In spite of this poverty and lack of influence, in 1930 5,901 Mexicans were living in Dallas and constituted 2.3 percent of the city's 260,000 inhabitants. One out of every forty-four people living in Dallas was a Mexican--either first, second, or third generation. By 1940, 506 Mexican-Americans had lived in Dallas for at least ten years.

During the 1930s, the types of businesses that hired Mexican-Americans included cleaning services, tailoring establishments, clothing and department stores, food service establishments, hospitals, hotels, and manufacturing companies. Utility companies, particularly the Dallas Gas Company, also hired significant numbers of Mexican-Americans in 1930, but had discontinued this practice by 1940. Despite the difficult times in Dallas during the Depression, there was no mass exodus of Mexican-Americans from Dallas. This may be attributed to the fact that their largest
employer in this period was the food service industry. During the 1940s, Mexican-Americans worked in auto and paint shops, in barber and beauty shops, in the building services, for the cities of Dallas and University Park, in the furnishing and fixtures industries, for the railways and airlines, and for the U.S. government.

Along with this fairly steady employment, the barrio also offered its residents several social programs. Some families lived in Little Mexico for several generations. The inhabitants of the barrio experienced a strong sense of community, which was partly due to Pike Park. In the 1930s, it provided free movies and a swimming pool for the people in the neighborhood, as well as craft classes, chili suppers, hiking tours, candy pulling, sing songs, and dances. The park even had a public drinking fountain, which was donated by Mrs. Edgar Pike, by 1930. Also in this period the Park Board worked with several social welfare programs to offer residents other services. The Works Progress Administration recreation program provided salaries for additional assistant recreation leaders in lower-class areas. In addition to these recreational programs, the park served as a food distribution site, a medical center, and a routing station for Mexican-American laborers on welfare work.

Both during and after the Second World War, the park continued to be the focal point of the community. The club,
"Arte Manual," operated a "hospitable center" for Mexican-American servicemen passing through Dallas. In 1953 the park began a boxing program. This extremely successful program gave direction and discipline to many of the boys in the neighborhood who were often involved in gangs and other kinds of violent activities. The program was open to all boys at no cost to them. Mike Rodriguez, the first boxing coach for Pike Park, grew up in Little Mexico. He later coached three young men to state championships in their divisions in the Golden Gloves boxing league. He also coached two teams who placed second in both open and novice class points.

This feeling of belonging to the neighborhood carried over to most of the activities performed there. Florentino Ramirez, the grandson of Maria Luna (who was the founder of the Luna Tortilla Factory located in the barrio), also experienced the feeling of community which permeated the barrio:

When I was growing up in Little Mexico in the fifties, we had a really strong community where people lived together, worked together, and played together. Most of the business people lived in the neighborhood, above their stores or next door. We lived in an apartment upstairs from the tortilla factory.

In those days, you took a great many things for granted. I never felt cut off from the rest of Dallas, but we did everything on a neighborhood basis. You shopped in the neighborhood stores, dated the neighborhood girls, went to the same church and dances and social events as your neighbors, attended the same schools, played on the same athletic teams. The unique thing was, we came from all walks of life and all income levels,
yet we made no distinction between ourselves.³⁹
Ramirez recalled that one of his duties as the youngest
member of the Luna family in the late 1940s and early 1950s
was to deliver tortillas to local restaurants late at night.
Since the cash register was locked, he would deliver
tortillas—sometimes as late as two o'clock in the morning,
get the receipt from the restaurant, and return home. The
fact that a child, who was less than ten-years-old, was safe
in the neighborhood in the middle of the night says volumes
about this community and its inhabitants.⁴⁰

Of the many types of work performed by people living in
Little Mexico, few owned their own businesses, and even
fewer succeeded. This low success rate, combined with the
male-dominated family structure, make it interesting to note
that the female entrepreneurs who succeeded in the barrio
shared one thing in common—they were often the heads of
their households. Maria Luna, the founder of the Luna
Tortilla Factory, was a widow. Irene Martinez, the daughter
of the founder of El Fenix restaurant, went to court during
her first marriage to be declared sole owner of her
property. And Anita Nanez owned her own beauty salon.
Although Anita Martinez, a civic leader and the first
Hispanic to be elected to the Dallas City Council in 1969,
had no business, she was not kept from her goals by her
husband. She was featured in D Magazine as "one of the
fifty people who made Dallas."⁴¹ By understanding how
these women achieved their goals--through hard work, intelligence, and a refusal to submit to male dominance--one begins to understand the drive that led these women to succeed.

NOTES


12. Luna, Ibid.


23. Davis, Ibid., 52.

24. Davis, Ibid., 52.


32. Schemerhorn, Ibid., 36.

33. Schemerhorn, Ibid., 35-36.


36. Simpson, Ibid.

37. Simpson, Ibid.


CHAPTER THREE

THE WOMEN AND THEIR WORK

Little Mexico was largely a neighborhood of immigrants and first-generation Americans, who were linked by a common ethnicity, religion, and cultural background. Although the neighborhood no longer exists, it is remembered by former residents as almost a small town in the middle of a large city. Like most of the activities in the barrio, the purpose of the businesses in Little Mexico was to serve the local community. As a result of this emphasis, community members did not need to go more than a few blocks to get a haircut, have shoes mended, or buy groceries. Since private transportation was scarce, and public transportation was not always convenient, local merchants benefited from their proximity to their customers. In addition, many of the people in the neighborhood spoke little or no English. Therefore, the possibility of conducting business in one's native language was a great asset to earning a livelihood in the barrio.

Women in this community were, as a rule, considered subservient to men both in business and at home. Their roles in this society were those of wife and mother. If a woman worked outside the home, her neighbors whispered that
she was not fulfilling her primary function as a homemaker, and that, somehow, her family was shamed. All of the businesses discussed in this thesis were either started or taken over and improved by women, and, therefore, were unusual in this respect. All were family businesses that employed as many relatives as possible before outside help was hired. Each business required long hours—seven days a week if necessary—in order to be profitable. Nevertheless, the desire to be master (or mistress) of one's fate and to achieve financial independence—in short, to realize the American dream that lured countless immigrants to this country—motivated these women and contributed to their success. Here are the stories of six exceptional women who broke through the invisible barriers of race and gender to become successful. They are considered to be the most successful women to have lived in Little Mexico. Facing obstacles of language, discrimination, and gender, these women managed to overcome the odds against them in triumph.
CHAPTER FOUR

MARIA LUNA

Maria Luna was the founder of Luna's Tortilla Factory. As a family-owned business, it has been in Dallas in the same location for over thirty years. She arrived in Dallas a young widow, on June 19, 1923, from San Luis Potosi with her two children.1 Carmen, her daughter, was seven-years-old and Francisco, her son, was three-years-old. The small family went to Dallas where Mrs. Luna's father and sister had previously settled. Mrs. Luna had supported her family by working as a meat vendor at a stall in the market in San Luis Positi. She left there in search of a better life for herself and for her children in the United States. After she arrived in Dallas, she looked for the same type of employment she had had in Mexico. She soon found a job working in a grocery store, which was located on Griffin Street in Little Mexico and was owned by a Mexican family, Jesus and Anita Porero. The Poreros had a corn grinder in the store, and their customers would bring in home-cooked corn to be ground into masa so they could make tortillas. In December 1923, Mr. Porero sold the corn grinder to a person who was unable to make the payments on it, and it was repossessed. Mrs. Luna then offered to buy it. Since she
had been working for the Poreros for several months she had earned their trust. It was the last time she ever bought anything on an installment plan. After buying the corn grinder, she moved from Burlington Street to 2209 Caroline Street and opened Dallas' first tortilla factory in 1924. She called her new business Luna's Tortillas.

Initially, she had difficulty hiring women to work for her, since the neighborhood men would not permit their wives to work outside the home. To get around this obstacle, she filled dish pans with masa and took them to the women in their homes. She had calculated how many tortillas could be made from a dish pan filled with masa, so she knew what the output would be from each of her at-home workers. She would deliver the dish pans filled with masa to them in the morning and pick them up later in the day after they were finished. Then they would be sold over the counter at the Caroline Street store. By early 1925, the local men realized that Maria Luna was a honorable business woman who wanted to succeed in her undertaking, so they permitted their wives to work in her factory. About twenty-five women worked for her at this time. Although all work was done by hand, the workers at the Luna Tortilla Factory produced around five hundred dozen tortillas per day. They took the masa, formed it into the shape of a plate, and cooked it to make a tortilla. By comparison, when she mechanized the tortilla factory in 1940, the output was one
hundred dozen tortillas per hour. She was determined to sell the highest quality tortillas in her factory. In order to increase production, she designed her own equipment. Originally, the workers cooked the corn in number three washtubs over open wood fires. Maria Luna realized that it would be more efficient to cook the corn over gas, so she designed a long stove with openings for ten washtubs with gas burners and found someone skilled enough in welding to construct it for her. She had long stoves built with a quarter inch of steel. With the machinery she designed, she could have four women cooking tortillas, another kneading the dough on the counter, and yet another using the tortilla press all at the same time. Thus production was increased. Since she had established the first tortilla factory in Dallas, business was brisk.  

In 1925, she married Rudolfo Gonzales. The marriage lasted for twelve years, and finally ended in divorce. In 1926, Mrs. Luna-Gonzales asked the Dallas Paper Company to print a logo on the butcher paper she used for the business. The logo, a picture of a Mexican woman grinding corn, was designed by Mr. Gonzales. The paper company said they had to buy ten rolls of paper at a time if they wanted printing on it. Although this was an added expense, Maria Luna-Gonzales decided it was worth it. Therefore, as early as the 1920s, tortillas were delivered to eight stores in the community with the company's logo on them (which is still in
By 1929, the tortilla factory began a home delivery service. Mr. Gonzales and Maria's son Francisco began delivering tortillas and masa to customers in the various Mexican neighborhoods in Dallas, which included Little Mexico, Juarez Heights in West Dallas, Cement City at Eagle Ford, a train stop west of Dallas, and the area where Texas Stadium stands today, then a ranch called El Rancho Grande. Tortillas were ten cents a dozen, and two pounds of masa could be purchased for five cents. The vehicle used was a 1925 Model T that Mr. Gonzales converted into a pick-up truck. Although the Anglo community had begun to develop a taste for Mexican food, and several Mexican restaurants in the barrio had become well known, it was not served outside the barrios. However, enterprising restauranteurs realized that serving Mexican food in Anglo neighborhoods might be successful. In 1936, Sammy's Restaurant in Highland Park Village, which was owned by the Messina family, became the first customer outside the barrio to buy Luna's tortillas.

The business acquired its first out-of-town customer, a Mexican restaurant in Wichita Falls, Texas, in 1929. From there the business spread to New Orleans, Oklahoma, and north to St. Louis until ten or fifteen years ago, when a local manufacturer began producing them so there was no need to ship them from Dallas and pay the freight charges.

By 1930, according to family legend, the business had
become so successful that it attracted the attention of the Department of Internal Revenue of the United States Treasury. Prohibition was still in effect, and the fact that the Luna Tortilla Factory was buying between four and five hundred pounds of corn per week aroused the suspicion of the enforcers of the Volstead Act. Two men arrived one day at the factory and demanded to know what was being done with all of the corn. They were unfamiliar with tortillas, and even after Maria Luna-Gonzales asked her workers to demonstrate how they were made, they were still skeptical about the need for such a constant amount of corn. They searched the barn behind the factory, but failed to find the still they were sure had to be there. They saw the water the corn was cooked in, and noticed that it was simply poured down the drain, so they followed the drain all the way to the sewer to ascertain that the Lunas were not operating a subterranean still. They finally left, empty handed, but educated about the manufacture of tortillas.\(^7\)

When the business was at 2209 Caroline, the factory was downstairs, and the family lived in a two-bedroom apartment upstairs. In 1937, Maria Luna-Gonzales moved the business and her family to the present location on McKinney Avenue, where she lived the rest of her life. When she bought the McKinney property, it was in a partnership with Mike Martinez, the founder of El Fenix restaurants. The two families had become personal friends as well as business
associates. On three separate occasions, the last being 1937, she and Mr. Martinez conducted financial transactions involving as much as ten thousand dollars in cash, and sealing each deal with a handshake.

By 1939, Francisco Luna, her son, graduated from Crozier Technical High School. He wanted to go to the University of Texas and study medicine so he could become a doctor, but his mother refused him permission. She told him that since she and his stepfather had divorced (in 1937), he was the sole man in the family and was needed in the business. He attended Metropolitan Business College in downtown Dallas for six months, where he learned accounting, business English, and other skills necessary in the business world. He married, and he and his wife opened another aspect of the business. They went around to all the drive-in restaurants and sold chili, and taught them how to make enchiladas and serve them with rice and beans. This was called the basic enchilada dinner. Mr. Luna said that he and his wife taught this dish to short-order cooks all over Dallas, and established a market for their products as they did so. As cooks moved to other restaurants, they would call Luna's for tortillas, since they were still the only tortilla factory in Dallas. 8 Mrs. Luna was still making all the decisions for the business during this time. While she would listen to her son's suggestions, the final decision was as always hers. By the early 1940s, he would
make business calls in the morning and take all the orders, and in the afternoon he would make deliveries until all the customers were served, working sometimes until eight o'clock at night. In this way, the business was built up.

Perhaps the proudest moment of the Luna Tortilla Factory occurred in 1981. The Luna Tortilla Factory shipped five hundred dozen tortillas to the White House for a presidential reception.9 Luna's tortillas are served at The Mansion, one of Dallas's most exclusive restaurants, as well as others, including the Blue Goose on lower Greenville Avenue.

Maria Luna wanted to produce the highest quality product. Since she trusted no one else with such an important task, every night she sharpened the grinding stones herself. She purchased her corn from Morrison Mills, which produced the highest quality corn. Even from the earliest days of her business, she paid close attention to the length of time the corn was cooked to assure its quality. She traveled to Monterey Park, California, to buy the latest machines that had been developed for making tortillas, and went to Mexico to buy the stone mills still found there. Despite her state-of-the-art equipment, she believed that the stone mills produced a superior product. Originally, the tortillas were wrapped in white paper—the only kind available at the time. Later, the factory began to use waxed paper instead. In fact, she had asked the
paper company to develop a thinner, more flexible paper for her products. The tortillas were wrapped in this paper, and the logo of the Luna Tortilla Company was printed on the waxed paper along with recipes. Although Polyethylene is now being used, the customers at the factory on McKinney Avenue still prefer the paper wraps. They say the tortillas stay fresher in paper than in plastic.\textsuperscript{10}

In addition to owning and running the first and largest tortilla factory in the Southwest, Mrs. Luna sold other products at her factory to accommodate her drop-in customers. She sold salsa, rice, beans, and chili con queso that were cooked on the premises. Although Mrs. Luna did not have many competitors in the beginning, today her factory has many. However, the Luna tortillas are still made the old-fashioned way; the Luna factory cooks its own fresh corn and grinds its own masa.

Throughout her life, Maria Luna remained a devoted Catholic and attended Our Lady of Guadalupe Church in the barrio. She was also a frequent contributor to church funds. Although Maria Luna was a successful businesswoman, she was never an ostentatious person. In fact, she lived in her apartment over the factory until she died in 1971, at the age of seventy-one. She was always devoted to her family. She loved to go dancing and frequently would take her grandson, Florentino Ramirez (now an attorney practicing law in Dallas), along as her escort. Although she ran a
successful business, she never forgot that she was a parent and her family was foremost in her mind. Francisco Luna recalled that by 1951, he, his wife, their three children, his sister, her husband, their two children, and Mrs. Luna were all living in the three-bedroom apartment over the factory on McKinney Avenue. Francisco Luna had purchased a house for his family two years earlier on Denton Drive in Dallas, about two miles from the factory. He had been renting it to other tenants for two years before he found the courage to tell his mother he was moving out of her house. Just as he had feared, his mother took the news badly and worried that he was weakening family ties. He recalled that it took some time before she forgave his disloyalty.

Maria Luna was an extraordinary woman by any standard. With only a few years of education in Mexico and a limited command of the English language, she created a product which was in demand by her customers. She insisted on the finest ingredients and was always seeking new ways of improving production. She created new markets for her products and developed a business which is still in existence. Her children and grandchildren proudly remember her as a lady of honor and dignity. As the only woman to be a charter member of the Little Mexico Chamber of Commerce in 1940, she certainly has played an important part in the history of women and Hispanics.
NOTES


2. Francisco Luna, Interview by the author, Dallas, Texas, 5 February 1991.


4. Francisco Luna, Interview by the author, Dallas, Texas, 5 February 1991.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.


10. Ibid.
Guadalupe Zambrano was a photographer. She and her two older brothers, Samuel and Jesse, owned and operated Zambrano Photographers. Although she was born in Mexico, Guadalupe spent her early childhood in San Antonio, Texas. In April 1935, just before Easter, she moved, with her parents, Jesse, and a younger sister, to Dallas, where her other brother Samuel had opened a photography studio. Since the previous photographer had closed his studio and returned to Mexico, Samuel operated the only photography business in Little Mexico at this time.\(^1\)

While Samuel was learning his trade as a photographer, Lupe, as her family called her, was attending Crozier Technical High School where art was her favorite subject. When her teachers told her that she had to take industrial courses such as drafting, she refused and quit school. By this time, Samuel needed help in his photography studio, so he taught Lupe and Jesse everything they needed to know to help him run the business. Samuel founded the studio on Bookout Street in his home, but later moved it to a house on Amelia Street. The business continued until the late 1970s, when Lupe had to close it because of the deaths of her
brothers.²

From her initial employment in the studio, Lupe Zambrano was an equal partner with her brothers in the business. Samuel needed her, as well as Jesse, in all aspects of the business, and the three of them were equally important to the success of Zambrano Photographers. While it was unusual for a girl of sixteen to do the same work as a man, she had to be on an equal footing with her brothers, since the business needed all three siblings in order to survive. Each of them specialized in certain aspects of the photographic process. Samuel specialized in printing, while Lupe's specialty was retouching and colorization. Although Samuel originally taught Lupe these skills, she became such an expert in these processes that she was hired by other studios in Dallas (even Anglo studios) as an outside artist. Her talents and skills were recognized beyond the boundaries of the barrio. Lupe was also the official make-up artist of the studio. Every time a woman came to have her portrait made, Lupe applied the make-up prior to the sitting. In addition, when the studio was photographing a wedding, she applied the bride's make-up prior to the ceremony.³ Fortunately, Lupe did not face any skepticism about her professionalism because of her gender; from the start, she was regarded as a businesswoman. Sometimes, people would ask her how she carried all the heavy photographic equipment (she was a slight person and barely five feet tall), she did
not recall a single incident when her competency was questioned due to her sex.⁴

Zambrano Photographers was busy from the beginning. Every wedding, christening, quinzeano (fifteenth birthday party), and anniversary celebration in the barrio was recorded by a Zambrano. Lupe could not recall any other Mexican woman who worked in the photography business in Dallas in the early days. Because of the volume of their business, Lupe would often have to go alone to a job if her brothers were working at other sites. Although the customers could not always pay the fees of the studio, the business somehow absorbed the loss and continued to be successful.⁵

Zambrano Photographers was a demanding business that required the active participation of all three family members to survive. The Zambranos mastered every aspect of photography, including mixing their own chemicals. Because of her involvement in the business, Lupe never married. Regarded as an equal partner to her brothers and being involved in every facet of the business, Lupe broke new ground for Hispanics in her profession. She shared the responsibilities and success of the studio for over forty years. As her brothers would most likely admit, they could not have done it without her.⁶
NOTES


2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.
Irene Martinez Garcia was the first child born to Faustina and Mike Martinez, who was the founder of the first El Fenix restaurant in Little Mexico in 1918. Irene was born in Little Mexico, but the family moved out of the neighborhood to Cole Avenue when she was in her early teens. She was the second Mexican-American to graduate from North Dallas High School, where she served as the president of the Spanish club. In spite of her involvement in school activities, Irene was not allowed to attend school parties and proms. Her father, who had very traditional values, forbade her to go anywhere unchaperoned.

Following her graduation from high school, Irene went to school in Mexico for a short time, but she eventually returned to Dallas. Although she had originally wanted to become a doctor, her high school counselor had advised her against going to medical school, since he felt she had too much compassion and would not be able to stand the sight of sickness. Instead, after her return to Dallas, she began attending the Metropolitan Business School. Upon her graduation from Metropolitan, she got a job at an attorney's
office. However, Irene was afraid to tell her father about her new job; therefore, he believed she was still attending school. When he discovered that she was employed, he became very upset, but eventually he decided that if she wanted to work (though he could not understand why), she could work for him.

Her initial experiences at her father's restaurant were very pleasant, and she gained valuable knowledge of the restaurant business. Her father put her at the cash register and, before long, she became "his right hand." Irene also served as a hostess in the restaurant, where her father taught her some of the secrets of the trade, such as how to seat people. Irene recalled that if a pretty woman came into the restaurant, her father would insist that Irene seat the woman in the middle of the room so that all of the other customers could admire her. Unattractive people were relegated to the dark corners of the business, in order to keep them from disturbing the other customers.

Irene continued to work for her father in the family business, where he taught her all aspects of the restaurant trade. Following the return of her five brothers from military service after the Second World War (on February 22, 1946—her mother's birthday), Irene's father gave the entire business operation to his eight children. He told them that the responsibility for running the operation was now theirs, and that he would be available only as a consultant. He
also gave his children some advice: a person could put a stick against his knee and it would break, but no one could break eight sticks at the same time. Therefore, he wanted all eight children to stay together.⁶

Under the guidance of the eight children, the restaurant grew into a chain of fifteen establishments and spread across Texas and Oklahoma. As the business expanded and El Fenix became a corporation, Irene was appointed to head the board of directors. In fact, all board members and officers of the company are family members. Under Irene's guidance, the business has grown from the original restaurant in the barrio to the multi-million dollar corporation it is today. She credits the success of the business to the fact that it has always been family owned: "We are able to keep policies that have worked for many years, and we really enjoy what we do." She believes that "any family that likes what they do will be successful."⁷

Irene Martinez Garcia's leadership has been recognized by her peers. In August 1978, at the convention of the Texas Restaurant Association, she received the highest honor that the organization can bestow. She was named the Texas Restaurant Association's Woman of the Year.⁸ Through her talent, intelligence, diligence, hard work, and strong sense of family, Irene Martinez Garcia has become a role model for many young Hispanic women.
NOTES


2. The Viking, North Dallas High School Yearbook, 1933.


4. Ibid.

5. Irene Martinez Garcia, interview with the author, Dallas, Texas, 28 February 1991.

6. Jim Key, "El Fenix: Where The Good Amigos Meet," Dallas Times Herald, 10 October 1985, section A. After his retirement, Mike Martinez often returned to his native village in Mexico, Hacienda de Potero. He helped to build the first water well in the village, financed roads, and brought the first electric mower to the town. The people of the village were so grateful that they named the town plaza after him and placed benches with his children's names on them throughout the town. Anita Martinez Garcia, interview with the author, Dallas, Texas, 12 February 1991.


CHAPTER SEVEN

LAS DOS ANITAS

Anita Mongaras Nanez was born in the hill country, near San Antonio, in the small town of Privileged Creek on July 26, 1896, and died September 24, 1950. Her great-grandfather had land that had been given to the family by the government of the Texas Republic. Unfortunately, his children were unable to hold on to it. Anita's father moved his family to Abilene, and it was here that Anita eventually met her husband, Jose Nanez. Following their marriage, they moved to Dallas in 1917 to work for her uncle's sheep shearing business.

Although Anita Mongaras Nanez was an active woman, she had married a very traditional man who believed that women should not work. Nevertheless, at her insistence, Jose reluctantly permitted her to attend Marinello's Beauty School and she eventually started a beauty salon at 2606 Caroline, in her own home. All of the homes of the neighborhood were shotgun houses, and, in the Nanez home, the front room served as the salon. She convinced her two oldest daughters to attend beauty school as well, so that they could help her in the shop. Since she always had a plate of pan dulce (Mexican sweet bread) and a fresh pot of...
coffee in the shop, the women of the neighborhood loved to congregate there.

Although the barrio contained many small businesses, such as tailors, bakeries, and seamstresses, Anita Mongaras Nanez was the first Mexican-American woman to open a beauty shop in Little Mexico.¹ She became a role model for many young women in the barrio, since she ran her own business. Before she opened her salon, the women of the neighborhood had no place where they could have their hair cut or get a permanent wave. After opening her salon, Anita encouraged many of them to attend beauty school so that they also could become hairdressers. Eventually, all four of Anita's daughters were put to work in the salon doing odd jobs, such as fanning customers while they were waiting under the hairdryer. Anita was one of the first Mexican women to graduate from beauty school in Dallas, and her daughter recognized her as a "go-getter."

Anita's business continued to thrive even during the Depression, since the women in the neighborhood considered its service a necessity. One of the most poignant stories concerning the shop that Anita Martinez, who was Anita Mongaras Nanez's daughter, recalled happened at dusk one evening in 1937, when she was eleven-years-old. That evening, while her mother and sisters were not at home, she heard a knock at the door. She opened it to find a woman standing on the porch. The woman asked young Anita if this
was the place where one could get a permanent wave. Anita replied that it was, but asked the woman to return the next day, when her mother and her sisters would be home. The woman replied that she needed it that night, because she was leaving the next morning to go to work in the Michigan beet fields. The woman allowed the young girl to give her the permanent, even though Anita told her that she had never given one, but had only watched her mother and sisters perform the service. She even talked the woman into having the deluxe oil permanent wave, which cost three dollars, instead of the regular one which was a dollar and fifty cents. When her mother and sisters returned, they were extremely proud of her for being so enterprising.

Although she was widowed in 1940, Anita Mongaras Nanez continued her business until a stroke forced her to retire and close her salon. However, to her daughters and to other Mexican-American women, Anita remained an example of a successful entrepreneur who ran her own business and coped with the conditions of the times.

NOTES


Anita Martinez, the fifth child and fourth daughter of Anita Nanez, was born in Dallas on December 8, 1925. She remembered her youth as a time of hard work. If she was not helping her mother in the beauty shop, she was running errands for the nuns at Saint Ann's school, cleaning houses for fifty cents a day, or washing dishes for an elderly neighbor. In her precious leisure time, Anita made dance costumes out of colored paper for herself and her siblings. She recalled the pride she felt when neighbors would stop to watch their performances.  

Anita always felt a strong sense of family and responsibility. Although her brother was exempt from the draft during the Second World War because he was an only son, he felt it was his duty to serve his country and enlisted in the army. When he was killed in battle in 1944, Anita's family was left without a male head of the household, since her father had died four years earlier. Anita, of course, shouldered the burden of supporting her mother, whose salon had recently closed due to her poor health. Her mother's only source of income at this time was from leasing rooms in her home to boarders.
Against her mother's advice, Anita graduated from Crozier Technical High School in 1943. She was the only member of her generation in the family to earn a high school diploma. The rest of her family, like most Mexican-Americans in this period, were so consumed with day-to-day living that they considered education beyond the basics as an unnecessary luxury. Anita went far beyond the basics by attending night school at the Dallas College of Southern Methodist University on Akard Street, which was in the neighborhood.

Anita's first job after high school was working as the secretary to the parts manager at Orand Buick, which was located one block from her home. Since very few Mexican-American girls were secretaries at this time, she became a role model for the younger girls in the neighborhood (like her mother before her). Continuing to improve her status, Anita took the civil service exam, passed it, and became the secretary to a colonel. While she worked as a secretary, she gave her mother her paychecks. Her mother would then hand her three dollars for streetcar fare and lunch money. Despite her responsibilities to her family, Anita continued to attend night school and dreamed of traveling the world as an airline stewardess. At this time, the job requirements for becoming a stewardess included either two years of college or two years of business school. However, this dream was not to be realized.
When Anita was fifteen-years-old, she had been looking forward to attending her first New Year's Eve party at a neighbor's house. Her sister was hat-checking that night at the El Fenix restaurant, and another person was needed. Anita's mother insisted that she go and help her sister, as the family could use the money. While at the restaurant, Anita met Alfred Martinez, the seventeen-year-old son of the owner. They married after a four-year courtship, conducted mostly by letter, during which time Alfred completed his service in the military. Anita, who had continued to work in this period, paid off the mortgage to her mother's home, then quit her job to marry Alfred.

Alfred Martinez worked for his father in the restaurant, and the business was successful enough to support his family. Because of the traditional beliefs of her family, work for pay was not an option to Anita, so volunteer work became her logical outlet. She became active in every aspect of her children's education, as well as being a Blue Bird and Cub Scout leader. By 1956, when her youngest child, Rene, went to school, Anita began looking for other role models. Civic leader Connie Condos filled this position. As an early volunteer for many organizations benefiting the city of Dallas, Condos had won two of the most prestigious awards that the city's civic organizations can bestow on volunteers--the Zonta Award and the Linz Award.
Anita decided she would become involved in programs that would benefit her children, her city, and the restaurant business. She joined the United Fund, raised money for the Children's Medical Center, volunteered in every capacity for Jesuit and Ursuline schools (that her children attended), volunteered at her church, Saint Monica Catholic Church, and helped to promote the Dallas Restaurant Association Auxiliary.

Within a year of joining this organization, Anita was appointed program chairman. The first fundraiser she had planned, a tasting bee, was so popular with the other women in the Auxiliary, that she suggested getting the restaurants involved. Although she was told by women in the Houston Restaurant Association who pioneered the idea of the tasting bee that her organization would lose money the first several years of the program, Anita Martinez's program made money from the very beginning, and was continued by the local restaurant association for the next ten years. It was finally discontinued because the other ladies thought it was too much work. "A Taste of Dallas," as it came to be called, earned a lot of money during its time. Part of these funds went to several Dallas charities. At Anita's suggestion, money was donated to the West Dallas Teen Age Club, the Episcopal School in West Dallas, and the West Dallas Boy's Club. Anita was able to help children through her involvement in the Dallas Restaurant Association.
Her leadership in this organization attracted the attention of several prominent Dallasites, who asked her to run for the Dallas City Council in 1969. Although Anita was not well known in political circles then, her friend and mentor, Connie Condos, became aware of Anita's leadership ability while serving with her on the Y.M.C.A. board. Mrs. Condos was then the only woman on the Citizens Charter Association. This organization was a civic group which had membership by invitation only, and was originally composed of the leading businessmen in Dallas. Founded in 1937 by Robert T. Thornton, who was president of the Mercantile National Bank, and his friend Nathan Adams, who was president of the First National Bank, the Citizens Charter Association was the prime force behind virtually every civic undertaking in Dallas until the organization's demise in the 1970s. This organization endorsed a slate of candidates to run for municipal offices under its banner, and its slate won most of the time, since it was backed by the powerful business community. The CCA slate won sixteen out of nineteen campaigns. If a candidate were asked to run on the CCA slate, it was a powerful endorsement. However, the CCA had come under national criticism. It was viewed by many as being elitist, discriminatory against women, and lacking in minority members. Mrs. Condos insisted that the political novice, Anita Martinez (whose husband's family owned a large, successful restaurant chain), was the ideal candidate
to run for the ninth slot. Although Alfred was doubtful at first, he gave Anita his blessing. She became the first Mexican-American to hold an elected public office in Dallas. She is still the only Hispanic woman to be elected to the Dallas City Council and the only Hispanic elected to serve two consecutive terms.

During her years on the city council, Anita was often the object of derision by other Mexican-Americans who disapproved of her non-confrontational style. When the Brown Berets picketed her husband's restaurants, they carried signs denouncing her as a "coconut"--a person who is brown on the outside but white on the inside. Her detractors were wrong, however. She served as an at-large member on the City Council, and believed it her personal mission to alleviate poor conditions for Hispanics in Dallas. During her terms, more than 117 streets were paved in the barrios, traffic lights were installed, and police protection was increased. A clinic, a library, and a recreation center also were built there. She became the spokesperson for the neglected needs of the Mexican-American people, who credited her with the implementation of these long, overdue improvements. She also established a free lunch program for approximately 5,000 children, and recruited talented minorities for city boards and commissions. She remains a source of information to colleagues, corporate recruiters, and business leaders for
names of talented, young Hispanic leaders. After serving several years on the City Council, Anita was asked to run for election to the state legislature or for Congress, but her husband was opposed to the idea of her seeking higher office. Her life as an elected official came to an end. However, in 1974, President Richard Nixon appointed her to the Advisory Committee of the National Voluntary Service Council. As an advisor to this organization, which is better known as the Peace Corps, Anita traveled extensively in Central and South America, North Africa, the Near East, Asia, the Caribbean, and the West Indies. Thus was realized her dream of traveling.

In 1979, Governor Bill Clements appointed her to serve on the Texas Hispanic Business Leaders Committee. Throughout her career, Anita has been awarded many honors and appointments, including a position on the Dallas Regional Selection Panel for the White House Fellows from 1971 to 1972, and again from 1979 to 1980. In August 1984, Governor Mark White gave her a certificate of appreciation for Exceptional and Distinguished Volunteer Service from the State of Texas. Her most recent awards include being the first Hispanic to receive the Dallas Historical Society Award for Excellence in Arts Leadership, as well as another White House appointment—as vice chair of the Minority Business Resource Center Advisory Committee.

Needing another outlet in which to channel her
energies, she turned to helping children, especially Mexican-American children, to succeed in Dallas. As part of this effort, she was partially responsible for bringing the Ballet Folklorico of Guadalajara to Dallas in 1967. Since then, she has become interested in the dances of Mexico. In 1973, the Dallas City Council authorized the building of a recreation center in West Dallas to be named in her honor. At this new center, she started a ballet folklórico to help foster cultural awareness and pride in the young Hispanic people of the neighborhood. Through the medium of dance, the children are taught discipline, the value of education, ethnic pride, and a sense of accomplishment.

Since its founding, the Anita Martinez Ballet Folklorico has become a major part of the cultural scene. With a professional company of dancers, the organization performs regularly. Once the operating expenses of the company are met, the remaining funds are funneled to the teaching program for children. No child who wishes to take classes in the program is ever turned away because of his family's inability to pay tuition. Anita Martinez considers children's needs as paramount. Through her program, children are encouraged to stay in school and even to attend college. Although the company has an executive director and a staff, Anita Martinez is the Chief Executive Officer and is constantly busy raising money for the organization.

Her energy, drive, and competitive spirit are typical
of the women of power in Mexican-American communities. Called "the Godmother of West Dallas," Anita is considered one of Dallas's most important citizens.

NOTES


CHAPTER NINE

CONCLUSION

In the histories of Dallas, rarely is any mention made of the Mexicans who came to Dallas and helped to build this city. More importantly, to this thesis, nothing was said of the women who settled here, either with husbands, fathers, and brothers, or without them. Some women came here directly from Mexico, while others were natives whose families had migrated to Dallas earlier, either from Mexico or from other parts of Texas. Nevertheless, they shared a common heritage. And, in spite of the overwhelming discrimination they faced because of their race and gender, these women still had the overwhelming desire to overcome adversity in order to provide for their families. A strong sense of family pervaded their lives and was certainly one reason they were successful in their endeavors. While the most formal education any one of them received was a high school diploma and an education at a business school, they all had the same drive and imagination.

They proved to themselves, to their families, and to their communities that a Mexican woman could be an entrepreneur, a city councilwoman, a successful businesswoman, or whatever she wanted. Living in a
traditional Southern city and in a Mexican barrio where the lives of women center around the activities of the home, these women broke the mold and became role models for many young Hispanic women who otherwise might not have anyone to emulate.

Although they were poor when they began their careers, all but one of these women lived to enjoy material comforts. Lacking the advantages and the contacts available in other parts of the city, they stayed close to their barrio neighbors where they felt at home. Little Mexico provided these women with the foundation they needed. Their children left the barrio, but only in the physical sense. Although they now live in fine homes in affluent neighborhoods, they still speak of the closeness of the barrio. It must have seemed more of a small town than a neighborhood, since it was so self-contained. This may have been one of its strengths. Mexicans may have felt unwelcome in other parts of the city, but they knew the barrio was home.

Perhaps this attachment to the neighborhood was one reason why they still feel such a strong sense of community, and why they are still active in many charities either benefiting their church or their community. Anita Martinez devoted her life to such a cause. They remain devoted Catholics and attend church frequently, and yet they are proud of their families, above all else. From my conversations with these people, along with my observations
of them, it is clear that family ties are most important. They each conveyed the feeling that, while financial success has been nice and well-deserved after a lifetime of hard work, money does not come before the family. Since the businesses I have discussed are all family businesses, perhaps that is why they have been successful.

I have tried to shed some light on a corner of Dallas that has been under a shadow for some time. I have demonstrated how the American dream has been reached by people whom others ignored. I have tried to impart a feeling of the drive and the fighting spirit of these Mexican women who lived in Dallas from 1920 to the present. Dallas has benefited from their lives. I hope and trust the feeling is mutual.
REFERENCE WORKS


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Interviews


Newspapers


