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Juntos: vivieron, trabajaron y aprendieron (together: they lived, worked and learned); the history of Latinos In Valley Junction, Iowa

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Juntos: Vivieron, trabajaron y aprendieron
(Together: They lived, worked and learned)
The History of Latinos In Valley Junction, Iowa

by

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A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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Program of Study Committee:
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INTRODUCTION

Global, international, cosmopolitan—these words are not typically associated with Iowa or the Midwest, especially during the early part of the 20th century. However, the small town of Valley Junction exhibited several of these traits, even as early as the 1930s to the 1950s. While starting as a railroad town, the actual inhabitants created very diverse neighborhoods including African Americans, Mexicans, Serbians and a few other minority groups. Furthermore, these immigrants—while initially separated from the other residents—provided a crucial, integrated and definable component to the history of Valley Junction. Several specific individuals made their marks by becoming well known singers, boxers and local celebrities.

From a historical perspective, America was built by immigrants—Europeans, Asians, Latinos, and other ethnic groups traveled in search of land, better opportunities and more resources; most hoped to escape from their destitute home countries and poverty-stricken lives in order to build a new life for themselves and their families. While immigrants held common motivations for immigrating, each person's or family's experiences varied as they traveled and upon their arrival to the United States. Despite the probable culture shock encountered with different languages, customs and traditions, fortunately some newcomers' family and/or friends awaited them in the United States. Many others, however, arrived with no one waiting for them. As more work became available, though, more single adults and families traveled to the United States. As a result, as immigrant numbers increased across the nation, diverse communities with ethnic enclaves and neighborhoods grew. Furthermore, while the new settlers and families attempted to adjust to their new environment, they also

retained some of their native customs and traditions, creating a fascinating combination of old and new.

Among the diverse cultures, the experiences of Latinos in the United States provide an interesting example of reasons, consequences and resulting relationships between countries involved in the “push/pull” factors of migration. The current controversy and disagreements regarding immigrants from Mexico and Central America are not new phenomena or conflicts; historical events and facts portray the long-standing love/hate relationship between the United States and its southern neighbors. Even the establishment and existence of the boundary between the U.S. and Mexico perpetuates animosity between the two countries. As the U.S. focused its time and energy toward expanding territory to gain more power and authority, Mexico became increasingly distrustful and resentful. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and the Gasden Treaty both contributed to the negative feelings and actions between the countries—especially because Mexico felt exploited and forced into land dealings that adversely affected them.

Although citizens of the United States essentially just went in to the southern states and settled as they pleased, the circumstances in Mexico towards the end of the 19th century and first few decades of the 20th century contributed to some of the tension between the countries. The political and economic situations in Mexico during this time were notoriously unstable. From the Diaz dictatorship to the Mexican Revolution in 1910 and beyond, many problems existed in the country. The economic decline and severe poverty for the majority of the population was intense. Furthermore, the corrupt political system enabled the wealthy to become wealthier, while the poor became poorer—a common theme in poverty stricken

developing Latin American countries. Despite the proximity of Mexico to the United States, little of the perceived wealth of the U.S. ever trickled south.

By the early years of the 20th century many Mexicans, unhappy with the situation in their home country and tempted by the opportunities across the border, began migrating in higher numbers. While some came on their own account, others were recruited to the United States. Two labor programs, one in 1917 and the other 1942, brought Mexican men to the U.S. due to wartime labor shortages. Neither program was successful; many of the men recruited up for the 1917 program faced deportation by the 1930's during the severe depression. "After 1931, however, government agencies undertook well-planned deportation campaigns, feeling it more economical to deport people than have them drain relief sources indefinitely."¹ While certain church and Mexican-American groups attempted to assist those deported, there was obvious and understandable resentment to this type of treatment. "All totaled, it seems as if the several deportation and repatriation initiatives produced the return of some 500,000 people."² The second attempt initiated during World War II, the Bracero Program, was an agreement between the Mexican and United States governments and provided uncertain opportunities for many Mexican men and their families. Proposed by the United States government, Mexico was understandably reluctant to accept, considering the historically strained relations between the two countries and the relatively recent memories of the 1917 program and the mass deportations during the 1930s. In view of the economic decline in Mexico, however, "as much as any other programme or strategy, the benefits which the Mexican government derived from the Bracero era provided a way out of the

¹ Richard Griswold del Castillo and Arnolde De Leon, *North to Aztlan: A History of Mexican Americans in the United States* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996), 87.

² *Ibid*, 87.

developmental dilemma of the early 1940's.”³ Initially proposed for *only* wartime due to the shortage of male labor, the agreement signed on July 23, 1942, lasted 22 years and employed approximately 4.5 million workers from Mexico in various U.S. occupations. Largely, the railroad companies and agricultural growers utilized the influx of manpower. The Bracero Program was largely successful for its initial purpose, but ultimately adversely affected both the United States and Mexico. Official negotiations by the governments attempted to create fair and safe working environments for the migrant laborers. “These provisions of the early, informal agreements between the two countries persisted throughout the long life of the programme. Despite abuses in the U.S. and exploitation by government officials in Mexico, this pattern persisted for twenty-two years.”⁴ Issues regarding the terms of the contracts between the employers, workers and two governments constitute a completely different story.

While many states benefited from the Bracero Program—mainly California, Minnesota, and Texas, the central Midwestern states (considered here as Nebraska and Iowa) encountered few of the workers. However, Latinos did reside in states such as Iowa prior to the 1900's. While railroad expansion definitely contributed to the number of Mexican immigrants to the Midwest, especially Iowa, the state experienced even earlier Spanish presence. This perspective of Spanish settlers in Iowa as a new state will be discussed further in Chapter I.

The history of Latinos in Iowa is not well known or documented. Despite the growing Latino community in various Iowa towns and cities, the history of this culture in

³ James A. Sandos and Harry E. Cross, “National Development and International Labour Migration: Mexico 1940-1965,” *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 18, No. 1. (Jan., 1983), 53.

⁴ *Ibid.*

Iowa is rarely mentioned. Most scholarship focuses on recent immigration and the economic and social effects on the United States. Books and articles abound on topics such as Mexican Americans, Chicanos, immigration and border disputes. However, few sources address the historical aspect of immigration and even fewer discuss the Latino experience in Iowa.

Apple Pie & Enchiladas: Latino Newcomers to the Rural Midwest by Ann V. Millard and Jorge Chapa, and Mexicans in the Midwest, 1900-1932, by Juan R. Garcia are two examples of the limited literature available regarding the history of Latinos in Iowa and the lack of historical information available. Garcia's book contributes to the overall picture by providing insight into economic conditions in Mexico and the U.S., family relationships, labor and housing conditions, and other social and cultural aspects but focuses mainly on larger cities such as Chicago, Kansas City, Detroit, Minneapolis and St. Louis. Similarly, Millard and Chapa's book provides important essays about Latino communities, but limits the time period to the 1980's onward.

Additionally, few local sources exist referencing Iowa as a specific case study for Latino immigration. Three examples to mention all concern the Latino population after 1970. First, The Hispanics: A Missing Link in Public Policy, The Official report of An Hispanic Conference in Des Moines, Iowa, edited by Virginia Correa-Jones, Alfredo Benavides and Miguel A. Teran compiles information regarding a variety of issues Latinos faced in Des Moines, including employment, education, health, and justice as addressed by the Conference on Public Policy. Despite the conference being considered a success for its purposes, the publication mentioned little about the history of Latinos. Additionally, for her dissertation "Latina Voices of Des Moines" Patricia Dawn Taylor interviewed twenty-four documented or undocumented women over the age of seventeen from a variety of Spanish

speaking countries, including Cuba, Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Argentina, Peru, El Salvador and Ecuador. “The purposes of this study was to provide Latinas in Des Moines an opportunity to describe their lives to others: their families. Latinas who followed in their footsteps, and those in the Des Moines community concerned with fairness and opportunity for all.”⁵ Taylor’s qualitative study investigated various topics relating to religion, education, language, family, immigration, gender roles and identity.

Another portrayal of recent immigration to the Des Moines vicinity and the effects of same is the documentary film “A Little Salsa on the Prairie,” by Professor Jody Swilky about Perry, Iowa. Due to the emerging meatpacking industry, the Latino population has greatly increased since the 1980s, causing significant changes in the town. Because of the cultural gaps, Perry residents were forced to deal with communication and social barriers. “The final idea of the film is a bilingual dialogue process that was held in Perry. This dialogue process is supposed to stimulate the future of Perry as the members of the dialogue speak about immigration, community change and improving communication among the ethnic groups that live in Perry.”⁶ Ultimately, the film provided insight from both perspectives and offered many residents an opportunity to voice concerns and create solutions together.

As shown above, while academic literature regarding the history of Latinos in Iowa, specifically Des Moines, is limited, other accounts of community experiences attempt to explain and memorialize the importance of the historical presence of Latinos in the state. One example of an event that ties historical meaning and contemporary issues together is sponsored by the Des Moines Art Center. Since 2001 the Des Moines Art Center has

⁵ Patricia Dawn Taylor, “Latina Voices of Des Moines” (PhD diss., School of Education, Drake University, May, 2001), i.

⁶ Kit Sesterhenn, “Documentary Brings a Little Salsa to Perry,” *The Times-Delphic*, October 12, 2006.

organized and hosted Dia de Los Muertos, or Day of the Dead celebration. This holiday is based on Christian and indigenous values and beliefs; originally Aztecs celebrated it to honor children and the dead. After the Catholic Church's and Spain's attempt to Christianize Mexico, the day moved from mid summer to early November to coincide with All Saints' Day and All Souls' Day. Typically, the lost children are remembered on All Saints' Day and All Souls' Day is reserved for adults. Combining the three important commemorations provides an opportunity for everyone to respect their unique traditions and dearly beloved dead. And for the past six years, the Des Moines Art Center has combined the history of Latinos in Des Moines with this important holiday by acknowledging the first Latino families in Des Moines and celebrating with Mexican food, music and art. Furthermore, besides honoring the Latino heritage and traditions, the celebration provides an educational opportunity. Although the focus is on Dia de Los Muertos, the goal is to offer an inclusive environment for everyone to learn about a different culture while enjoying the experience.

Part of the 2007 Dia de Los Muertos celebration was in honor of the first families in Valley Junction, including the following:

Aguiniga, Alatorre, Albizo, Alcantar, Argumedo, Avila, Ayala, Barajas, Barron, Bejarano, Bejarno, Bernadino, Bernal, Briseno, Burriola, Camacho, Campero, Campos, Cantu, Cardenas, Carrasco, Castellanos, Castro, Cerrato, Chia, Cortez, Cuevas, Delatorre, Del Prado, Diaz, Dominguez, Enriquez, Fernandez, Flores, Gallardo, Galvan, Garcia, Garza, Gomez, Gonzales, Gonzalez, Guzman, Hernandez, Jimenz, Lagunas, Lara, Lemos, Leon, Llamas, Lopez, Lozano, Luna, Macias, Maldonado, Manriquez, Martinez, Medina, Meza, Mireles, Mora, Moreno, Mosqueda, Muñoz, Murillo, Negrete, Ochoa, Ortega, Pabon, Paloma, Perez, Plasencia, Quijano, Ramirez, Renteria, Rios, Rivas, Rivera, Rocha, Rodriguez, Rodriquez, Rosillio, Ruiz, Salazar, Salgado, Sanchez, Sandoval, Torres, Trujillo, Valadez, Valdez, Vallejo, Vasquez, Villalobos, and Zepeda.⁷

⁷ 7th Annual Day of the Dead/Dia de Los Muertos Celebration, Sunday, October 28, 2007, pamphlet.

While many of these families remain unknown, some of these original families actively participated in the Valley Junction community. Through researching *The West Des Moines Express* from 1939-1960, many of these same names surfaced in articles regarding church, social and community events, as well as school related news involving athletics, awards and academics. Besides utilizing the twenty years of newspaper accounts, a personal oral interview with a long time resident of Valley Junction provides supplemental information, especially during the earlier years, for the following account of the history of Latinos in Valley Junction.

The approach taken consists of three chapters, separated by themes. Chapter I discusses the history of Iowa and the various early Latino communities around the state, with a focus on the Valley Junction community. While little documentation is available for these early years, various sources contribute to the information. Chapter II utilizes the newspaper to show community participation and involvement from the Mexican residents, through the church, clubs, military service and school related programs and/or events usually sponsored by the community. Chapter III focuses on the youth of the community; because many of the Mexican railroad laborers brought their families, the children obviously attended school and became involved in sports, academics and other school related events programs. Each chapter begins with the earliest year and follows through chronologically, with each theme encompassing the time period. The goal is to develop the themes in a chronological manner. Overlap between the themes, names, and discussion does occur at times, however. The Epilogue focuses on the 1960's and forward. Because of the increased number of immigrants as well as heightened awareness, exposure and controversy surrounding the Latino community, the Epilogue's purpose is to provide information regarding the Latinos in

Iowa, specifically Des Moines, since 1960. However, this discussion continues to focus on the local historical aspect; no argument or perspective is presented regarding the controversy surrounding current illegal immigration.

While the current controversy of immigration is not addressed, an aspect of this matter is examined. Contrary to some ideas and arguments, the paper provides solid examples of how these immigrants assimilated and became a crucial part of the community. Rather than perpetuating the belief that Latinos are incapable of assimilating and contributing in positive manners, the research promotes and strongly supports the truth which is that during the first thirty years of the 20th century in Valley Junction, Iowa, Latinos did indeed live, work and learn from each other and their interaction with other residents. Furthermore, the relationships and experiences gained by everyone created a small and tight knit community with global perspectives and understanding.

Despite the earnest attempt to provide a small glimpse into the lives of these immigrants through use of newspapers and oral history, in no way does the following provide an exhaustive and inclusive portrayal of life for these Mexican families. Indeed, the true emotions and events are difficult to accurately recount, especially considering the barriers and lack of initial interaction between the residents. Furthermore, many Mexican immigrants simply had little time for social involvement and participation due to their work schedule. Lastly, these residents wanted to fit in—although they retained their culture and certain traditions, many took measures to ensure their acceptance into the community, including changing names and doing their best to blend in. Ultimately, the goal of this paper is to provide another perspective regarding the history of Valley Junction, incorporating and

emphasizing the crucial and effective contributions these Mexican railroad laborers and their families made on the town West Des Moines and state of Iowa.

CHAPTER I. HISTORY OF LATINOS IN IOWA

Despite the distance from Iowa to the U.S./Mexico border, the history of the Spanish in Iowa dates back much further than most people realize. “Very few historians have enlarged on the fact that what is now Iowa was once owned and settled by Spain. Spain extended her empire into this area from 1770-1803. Interestingly, Chicanos have been proud of the fact that were are products of the merging of Indian, European and African peoples and cultures – El Mestizaje occurred in what is now Iowa in the late 18th century.”⁸ Intermarriage, land grants and trade among Spanish settlers all pre-date Iowa history; as a result of the Mexican War, some counties such as Cerro Gordo and Buena Vista bear Mexican names. Additionally, Spanish-speaking people resided in Iowa shortly after statehood. “The 1850 U.S. Census, taken just after Iowa became a state, lists 16 residents from Mexico, and one from South America.” “In 1856, the state of Iowa took its own county by county census. That census included several of the state’s earliest Hispanic residents, including a Venezuelan living in Butler County, a Mexican in Clinton County, a South American in Dubuque County, eight more South Americans living in Iowa City and a Chilean living in Marion County.”⁹ Clearly, Iowa experienced early diverse ethnicities other than European. The chart below provides basic information regarding foreign-born white, with Mexico as country of origin from 1850-1940 in the state of Iowa:

⁸Jorge Garcia, “Chicanos in Iowa” in Correa-Jones, Virginia, Alfredo Benavides and Miguel A. Teran, eds, The Hispanics: A Missing Link in Public Policy, The Official Report of An Hispanic Conference in Des Moines, Iowa (Conference and Conference Report Printing was in part funded by: The Iowa Board for Public Programs in the Humanities; The Iowa Arts Council/National Endowment for the Arts; The Spanish Speaking Peoples Commission of Iowa, 1979), 3.

⁹Mary Challenger, “Hispanics Tie a Family Knot Where the Heart is in Iowa,” *The Des Moines Register*, May 15, 2000, Iowa Life Section, 1.

Table 1: Latino Population by Year

YEAR	POPULATION
1850	16
1860	6
1870	14
1880	18
1890	41
1900	29
1910	509
1920	2560
1930	2517
1940	1335

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The numbers indicate the significant increase in the Latino population after the turn of the century. Furthermore, specific Iowa towns also experienced concentrated numbers of early Mexican immigrants.

A. Early Latino Communities in Iowa

The town of Fort Madison, for example, included a Hispanic group that migrated in the early 1900's that primarily worked for the Santa Fe Railroad. "All that community, the main root of the Mexican population are the roots of the state of Guanajuato. Guanajuato is a silver state in the central part of Mexico. They have good workers all over, farm workers, you name 'em, textile workers, painters, every kind of work they do. Jewel factories, Guanajuato is one of the richest places where they make the best jewels in all the world."¹¹ Several Mexican communities existed in Fort Madison, including El Cometa, El Jarda and Esta Fiate. Even though life was difficult and many of the workers lived in boxcars provided to them by the railroad, the community was strong. They took care of each other in times of

¹⁰ "Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940, Population" Volume II, Part 2: Florida—Iowa. Prepared Under the supervision of Dr. Leon E. Truesdell, (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1943), 865.

¹¹ Merle Davis, Interview with Sebastian Alvarez, *Iowa Labor History Oral Project, Iowa Federation of Labor, AFL-CIO, Des Moines*, 1993, 28.

illness and celebrated times of joy. While the majority of the residents, especially the older generation, stayed close within their communities, the children became involved in the schools and sports such as baseball. Many also served in the military in wars ranging from World War I to Vietnam.¹²

Besides Fort Madison, another former settlement of Mexican immigrants in Iowa was located in Davenport, and named Cook's Point, after Ebenezer Cook, an early settler. Called the "community eyesore," and originally a sawmill, Cook's Point was founded in approximately 1917. "Mexican-Americans made up the bulk of the 270 people inhabiting the 56 dwellings. In at least one house, 13 people inhabited three rooms."¹³ Although the majority of the dwellings were shacks, most of the residents were happy and comfortable with their lives. Basilisa Herrera, born in Leon, Guanajuato, Mexico, immigrated to the United States in 1919 with her family. Starting in North Dakota as vegetable pickers, they moved to Cook's Point in 1922. Despite being poor, the residents formed a strong community. "When we would get off the electronic trolley cars we'd walk home without fear because everything was passive there. We'd have dances, baptisms, funerals, if someone was sick everyone would go visit them. We all lived united. We would help one another."¹⁴ As in the Fort Madison Mexican communities, residents pulled together not only to help each other in times of need, but created also an environment similar to their home country to provide a certain level of familiarity.

Holy City, an additional Mexican community, was located in Bettendorf, and was established in the 1920's. The railroad's need for labor once again factored into the equation

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Jim Arpy, "Remembering Cook's Point," *The Times-Democrat*, August 22, 1974.

¹⁴ Grace Nunez, "Voices of a Different Color," *An Oral History of Eastern Iowa Mexican American Women*, University of Iowa Women's Collection, University of Iowa, Iowa City, 1993, 11.

and companies recruited Mexicans north. Similar to Fort Madison, housing consisted mainly of boxcars, but flats and cottages also existed. Estefania Rodriguez was born in Bettendorf in 1923, and described some of the more difficult times, and how they survived. “My Dad made wine. In those days there was no money. It was like the bootlegging days. No money for food, no money for nothing because it was Depression time. They made money however they could. My mom made beer. My dad dug a hole in the ground outside where she put her beer to keep it cold.”¹⁵ Even with the wine and beer making, leftover food did not exist when Rodriguez was a child. But essentials such as rice and corn were always available and a garden full of beans, turnips and other vegetables also helped.

In addition to the supplemental income from the wine and beer making, Rodriguez worked in the onion fields to help with expenses. “I worked in Pleasant Valley onion topping. We use to go onion topping. I was 13 then. Me and my friends use to get up on the highway and hitchhike. Me and my friend Lucy would be the only ones up on the highway flagging down cars.”¹⁶ Life in Holy City was not about all work and no play, however. Similarly for residents of Cook’s Point, the theater provided relatively inexpensive fun entertainment, even if popcorn, candy or soda did not accompany the outing.

A fourth railroad neighborhood, Valley Junction in West Des Moines, was “partly built by Mexican workers employed by the railroads in the early 1900s. Many newcomers to the area first settled in a neighborhood south of Railroad Avenue, once a 26-home community that was primarily home to Mexican and black railroad workers.”¹⁷ Most of local residents called the area “Hyde Park” because of the general assumption “that the

¹⁵ Ibid, 38.

¹⁶ Ibid, 40.

¹⁷ Mark Pleiss, “Junction Fiesta,” *The West Des Moines Register*, May 10, 2005, 1.

Mexican population in West Des Moines came about because Superintendent R.C. Hyde, a master mechanic from Oklahoma, brought Mexican and African American laborers to work as scabs during a 22-month strike.”¹⁸ Beyond the railroad, field labor in the area also offered opportunity for the Hispanic workers. Mary Campos, a long-time resident of Des Moines, and her family came from “Oklahoma to help harvest sugar beets, corn and potatoes.”¹⁹ A few of the current Valley Junction merchants actually can trace their roots back to these original settlers. Lori Stull’s “grandfather, Miguel Moreno, was riding on a train from Dodge City, Kan., to Gary, Ind., when his train stopped in Valley Junction one night in the early 1900’s. He heard music playing, and because he was an avid trumpeter and guitarist, he got off the train to investigate.”²⁰ After being recruited by the railroad master mechanic, R.C. Hyde, to not only play in his band but also work on Rock Island, Moreno decided to give Valley Junction a try. When Moreno passed away in 1989, he had lived in Valley Junction for 65 years and worked for the railroad for 48 years.²¹

B. The Railroad and Latinos in Valley Junction

In the beginning of the twentieth century, West Des Moines was known as Valley Junction and was primarily a railroad town. “The town was populated then by railroaders and coal miners. The shops were here then and were the main thing of the town. There were two big roundhouses; two turn-tables, turned by hand; a big ice house, a machine shop, a paint-shop, a blacksmith shop, a tire shop; east and west yards, coach yards for storing

¹⁸ Randall Parkin, “Railroads and Transportation” by Randall Parkin in *West Des Moines: From Railroads to Crossroads 1893-1993* edited by Terri L. Frederickson and Alda V. Post. (West Des Moines Centennial, Inc. 1993), 14-15.

¹⁹ Challender, 1-2E.

²⁰ Linda Yang, “Festivale Cinco de Mayo Returns After Big Debut,” *The Des Moines Register*, May 2, 2006, Community Life, 11.

²¹ Ben Haller, Miguel Moreno, in “Railroads and Transportation” by Randall Parkin in *West Des Moines: From Railroads to Crossroads 1893-1993*, edited by Terri L. Frederickson and Alda V. Post (West Des Moines Centennial, Inc. 1993), 15.

coaches, a coal chute...”²² Because the railroad offered the main source of employment for the town at that time, the majority of Mexican individuals in Valley Junction typically became employees of Rock Island Railroad. Single men often traveled to Iowa when family members advised them of work. If they had family back in Mexico, they usually went back for them later. Because of the lack of development and housing in Valley Junction during this time, however, most of the original Mexican families lived in boxcars.

...the railroad decided they wanted to destroy them completely or clear the area or something and they said, okay, you're on your own. That's what they gave us. Well, yeah, the boxcars, they were going to destroy them anyhow so they said hey, if you can haul them away, take them away. So I'm not sure how they got the boxcars to where they finally wound up but to the ingenuity of the people in the community found a way of dragging them from where they were dumping them to where they, to where they settled them into.²³

This boxcar community consisted of approximately 25-40 Mexican families, a very tight-knit group that relied on each other for everything from daily concerns to celebrations to difficult times. Unfortunately for these workers and their families, neither the railroad company nor the town of Valley Junction offered much assistance. Ultimately, the families fended for themselves and took care of each other, amid many obstacles and challenges faced on a daily basis.

So the people did all the work of cutting windows, making doors, and planting little gardens outside—flowers and such to make them liveable. Water and heat were a problem. Electricity was non-existent, so for light they used..., kerosene burning lamps. For heat, they had... and in some cases made, wood and coal burning stoves. So you had to be very creative to take something that was thrown away and make it into something that was liveable for families.²⁴

²² Dudley Reid, “The Story of West Des Moines, As Told by the Old-Timers, No. 7—Van L. Beer,” *The West Des Moines Express*, November 7, 1946, Vol. 54, No. 13.

²³ Personal interview with Salvador Salgado by Andrea Tucker, December 2006.

²⁴ Ibid.

C. Social Aspects and Changes for Valley Junction Latinos

Since these families arrived directly from Mexico, Spanish was their native language, and usually only, language. This created a significant barrier between the boxcar community and the existing residents of Valley Junction. Not only did the language problem prevent interaction between the adults, but it also created obstacles for the children and their participation and education at school. At this time, the concept of ESL, or English as a Second Language was virtually non-existent. As a result, the younger members of the Mexican families learned English through immediate and intense immersion at school. Unfortunately at first, many of the students and teachers considered the Mexican students stupid because of their lack of participation.²⁵

A second barrier encountered by the immigrants regarded their religion. Hispanic countries predominantly practice the Catholic religion, dating back to the conquest by Spain and the forced conversion from their indigenous traditions and customs. At this time, however, Valley Junction was predominantly Methodist. Despite the practice of the different religion and the seven or eight block walk to the one Catholic church in the community, many of the Mexican immigrants faithfully attended Mass, even though it was almost always celebrated in English. “So the church became a very, very important part of the community cause we got more help and direction from the church than we did from the town itself.”²⁶ Besides the encouragement and fulfillment received from attending Mass, the church also provided a place for Latinos to gather and enjoy conversation and spend time with one another.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Personal Interview with Salvador Salgado by Andrea Tucker, December 2006.

The physical location of the Mexican boxcar community created a third barrier. The railroad deposited most of the old boxcars south of the railroad tracks; the existing residents of Valley Junction lived north of the railroad tracks. Whether the barriers were real or imagined and usually not explicitly stated, discrimination existed. Perhaps the Mexican laborers were viewed as a necessary evil; regardless of the perception of them they likely often encountered and struggled against stereotypes and thoughtless comments. As a local doctor described it, “There was no sanitation at that time. Many Mexicans were living in box-cars, greatly crowded and other places were not much better. There were no screens in those days, and flies were so thick that I always kept my hat on when waiting on patients.”²⁷ Despite the blatant disregard and indifference by others and the daily challenges and struggles, the Mexican community was strong, happy and very tightly knit.

Family is a vital and important aspect of Hispanic culture, not just the immediate members but extended also. In an unknown and strange environment, family provided the essential encouragement and assistance for surviving and succeeding. Salvador Salgado was born in Valley Junction in 1929 and when at age six his father died, he experienced first hand how much family and friends factored into basic survival. “It was really a community and it was being such, it was one of those things where everybody pitched in and helped each other. And I think now, as I think about it at this moment, that I am sure is one of the things that helped my mother. Cause I know there were times when the husbands of some of the women would bring over a bucket load of coal or wood for the stove.”²⁸ Salgado’s mother and his three siblings definitely encountered challenges and tough times, but family and friends

²⁷ Dudley Reid, “The Story of West Des Moines, As Told by the Old-Timers, No. 5—Dr. Charles W. Burt,” *The West Des Moines Express*, October 24, 1946, Vol. 54, No. 11.

²⁸ Personal Interview with Salvador Salgado by Andrea Tucker, December 2006.

helped ease some of the difficulties. Besides helping one another through rough patches, the Mexican community also celebrated and played together.

Due to the impoverished living conditions, hard work and cultural differences, any type of respite necessitated creativity and ingenuity. Ice cream made of kool aid and ice chips offered a treat for the children and the adults engaged in homemade beer and wine making—the final products offered enjoyment but the actual process of making them also enabled the immigrants to socialize and relax. Other activities passed time and offered a break from the daily grind.

An evening pastime for families quite often was just to... sit outdoors, in the warmer weather, and watch the in particular the passenger trains go by because, right at Valley Junction and right just yards where our housing was at uh the trains would stop uh to pick up fuel, to pick up water and uh, food I guess and so just sitting outside the house and watching the people that were sitting in these passenger trains, wondering where they were going and what kind of stories they had to tell. Obviously since we didn't have any cars we couldn't be driving around scooping the loop.²⁹

Additionally, holidays provided a time for celebration and festivities. Some Hispanic countries celebrate Christmas and other major holidays differently than the United States; the Mexican community in Valley Junction combined their own traditions with those of their new country. "...the custom from the United States of hanging your socks by the fireplace, you know, well we didn't have a fireplace, so right close to our wood burning stove, we hung up our socks."³⁰ Holidays, whether American or Mexican, provided an opportunity for celebration with friends and family. And ultimately for these Mexican families, that was most important.

²⁹ Personal interview with Salvador Salgado by Andrea Tucker, December 2006.

³⁰ Ibid.

D. After the Initial Settlements

As noted previously, the early 1900s saw a significant increase in the Hispanic population in Iowa. Census reports for the 1940's and 1950's for specific towns in Iowa offer limited information since ethnic and/or race differentiation essentially did not exist.

The below table sets out the available census information for the acknowledged foreign-born:

Table 2: Census Data for 1940 and 1950

	1940	1950
State of Iowa	1335	1253
Polk County	256	247
Valley Township/West Des Moines	223	60

In 1940, the state and county numbers specify country of birth for the foreign born; the above numbers represent Mexico. In the Valley Township census, the 223 encompasses all foreign-born with no country specified.³¹ The numbers for 1950 are similar in that the state and county reflect Mexico as country of birth. However, by 1950, no census was available for Valley Township; rather, West Des Moines showed 60 foreign-born residents designating Mexico as their country of birth.³² Although these figures decreased as time passed, they do not necessarily accurately represent the population at the time. The terminology and definitions changed decade by decade, especially considering the various countries of birth for most immigrants. Regardless, they do provide a basic idea of how many people who claimed Mexico as their country of birth and resided in the state, county and town.

³¹ "Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940, Population," Volume II, Part 2: Florida—Iowa. Prepared under the supervision of Dr. Leon E. Truesdell, (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1943), 864-865, 957.

³² "A Report of the Seventeenth Decennial Census of the United States, Census of Population: 1950, Characteristics of the Population," Volume II, Part 15—Iowa. Prepared under the supervision of Howard G. Brunsmann, (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1952), 15-47, 15-74, 15-107.

Although it is difficult to know precisely how many and how long certain Mexican families lived and worked in the Valley Junction area during the first few decades of the twentieth century a few obituaries from the years between 1939-1960 prove that they were present in the community. In May of 1945, Eulalia Valdez died at age 22 at Broadlawns Tubercular hospital, with services at Sacred Heart church and was survived by her parents as well as six sisters and five brothers.³³ Mrs. Manual Salazar was also a victim of tuberculosis at the age of 30. She died in June of 1945, leaving behind a husband and two children.³⁴ While the obituaries for Valdez and Salazar do not mention length of residency in West Des Moines, others specifically state information regarding number of years, employment and family members.

Georgia Diaz, “a resident of West Des Moines for the past 31 years” but born in Mexico, died in October 1946 at the age of 60. Her husband, six sons and three daughters survived her.³⁵ Another long time resident from Mexico, Jessie Reyes Mesa had lived in West Des Moines for thirty years before dying in December 1946 at the age of 74. “Surviving are two sons, John and Manual Valdez, both of West Des Moines. 16 grandchildren and three greatgrandchildren.”³⁶ Services for both Diaz and Mesa were held at Sacred Heart church. In January 1950, Mr. Severo Ruiz died at the age of 77. “A native of Mexico, Mr. Ruiz was employed by the Marquette Cement company”³⁷ and had lived in West Des Moines for twenty-five years. Jesse Fernandez, an employee of the Rock Island

³³ “Eulalia Valdez, 22, Died at Broadlawns,” *The West Des Moines Express*, May 24, 1945, Vol. 52, No. 42.

³⁴ “Two Residents Are Tuberculosis Victims,” *The West Des Moines Express*, June 7, 1945, Vol. 52, No. 44.

³⁵ “Mrs. Georgia Diaz Dies At Her Home,” *The West Des Moines Express*, October 3, 1946, Vol. 54, No. 8.

³⁶ “Long Time Resident Dies,” *The West Des Moines Express*, December 12, 1946, Vol. 54, No. 18.

³⁷ “Rites for Severo Ruiz Held, Monday,” *The West Des Moines Express*, January 12, 1950, Vol. 57, No. 21.

Railroad was killed in March 1950, and had lived in the town for seventeen years.³⁸ In August 1951, another railroad worker, Lorenzo Garcia, died of a stroke. “Born in Mexico, Mr. Garcia came to Des Moines 31 years ago. He worked for the Rock Island railroad the past 10 years and was a member of the Sacred heart church in West Des Moines.”³⁹

Donotea Vasquez, also a resident of Valley Junction, died in May 1952. “Ms. Vasquez was a native of Mexico but had lived in and near West Des Moines for the past thirty-three years.”⁴⁰ A heart attack was the cause of death for Antonio Salazar in August of 1952.

“Born in Mexico, Mr. Salazar had been a West Des Moines resident since 1922 and became an American citizen in 1948. He was a roundhouse laborer at the Rock Island railroad, and a member of the International Brotherhood of Firemen and Oilers. He was a member of Sacred Heart church.”⁴¹ A resident with many family members in the area, Manuel Valdez,

died in September 1952 from pneumonia. Originally from Mexico, Valdez had lived in West Des Moines for thirty-four years and also worked for the Rock Island railroad.⁴² Although

Doroteo Vasquez died in California in 1956, he was a former resident of West Des Moines for forty years, where he worked at the Marquette Cement Plant. His funeral services took place at Sacred Heart and he was buried in Jordan cemetery.⁴³ In April of 1957, another

long-time resident passed away. Pedro Rodriguez was “born in Nuevo Leon, Mexico, he had lived in West Des Moines for 38 years and had been a second man on the Rock Island railroad for 40 years.”⁴⁴ That same week, Antonio Muñoz died after a long illness with

³⁸ “Rites for Fernandez Held Saturday,” *The West Des Moines Express*, March 23, 1950, Vol. 57, No. 30.

³⁹ “Lorenzo Garcia, Rail Worker, Dies,” *The West Des Moines Express*, August 23, 1951, Vol. 59, No. 1.

⁴⁰ “Local Woman Buried Today,” *The West Des Moines Express*, May 8, 1952, Vol. 59, N. 38.

⁴¹ “Rites for Antonio Salazar Held Monday,” *The West Des Moines Express*, August 7, 1952, Vol. 59, No. 51.

⁴² “Manuel Valdez Dies at Age 55,” *The West Des Moines Express*, September 25, 1952, Vol. 60, No. 6.

⁴³ “Services Saturday for Doroteo Vasquez,” *The West Des Moines Express*, May 10, 1956, Vol. 63, No. 39.

⁴⁴ “Pedro Rodriguez Rites Held Wed.,” *The West Des Moines Express*, April 18, 1957, Vol. 64, No. 34.

cancer. “He formerly worked for Hawkeye Cement Co. He was born in Mexico and had lived in West Des Moines for 40 years.”⁴⁵ Totalling thirteen members of the community, these obituaries clearly indicate the longevity of the Mexican community in Valley Junction and the connection to Sacred Heart Catholic Church, since the majority of funeral services and rosaries occurred there. Additionally, several of the obituaries indicate the general trend for employment as five of the deceased worked for the Rock Island Railroad for significant amounts of years and three worked for cement plants. Furthermore, they provide limited insight into the number of family members surviving the deceased.

The Mexican boxcar community originally lived south of the railroad tracks. This created one of the barriers between the groups. After a few years, however, the boxcars disappeared, the families moved into houses and became more integrated into the community, although still remaining closely connected and tight knit with each other. Several factors contributed to their integration; as time passed, perhaps the other residents of Valley Junction became accustomed to the Mexican families. In addition, as the children grew older and became involved in school activities, this also helped facilitate interaction and involvement. World War II and the Korean War offered opportunities for many young men and women of the Mexican community, which deepened their roots to the community and helped to establish positive reputations.

While records for the early years for the Mexican community in Valley Junction are spotty and reveal limited information, those available provide bits and pieces to prove that the town clearly relied on their labor contributions. Also shown through the sources is the importance of family and close connection to the Catholic Church, in this case Sacred Heart.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

Despite the distance imposed by the tracks and language barrier, the Latino members of the community maintained their priorities and slowly flourished in the community.

CHAPTER II. ES LA VIDA, COMMUNITY LIFE

Despite the serious difficulties and challenges encountered by the Mexican immigrants during the first few decades of the 1900's, the families were still part of Valley Junction, even if they were not necessarily visible. However, with time, they became more involved in community activities and events. By the late 1930's, the Mexican families had either become more established or assimilated more into society. Perhaps the residents of Valley Junction realized that the Mexican families were there to stay. Regardless, as the town grew, encouraging opportunities and positive exposure of these immigrants increased.

A. Social Activities

In August 1939, "Angelo del Prado, local Mexican vocalist of ability, rose to the heights in the community band concert last Wednesday evening at the high school stadium. Del Prado demonstrated remarkable range and power and scored a distinct triumph in his mastery of both English and Spanish."⁴⁶ Three years later in May 1942, the Mexican's Men's Club celebrated "the anniversary of Mexico's independence from France" with a program consisting of "the National anthems, Spanish, and English, sung by a group of young girls; a Mexican hat dance, by Salvador and Stella Salgado; presentation of American and Mexican flags, by a small group of girls; a song, by Delores Fernandez; songs by Sally and Frances Murillo; a dance by a group of six girls, and a song by Mr. Julio Vallejo."⁴⁷ Perhaps this was an early version of current day Cinco de Mayo celebrations; regardless, the event was successful with about three hundred people present to enjoy the Mexican music and food provided.

⁴⁶ "Del Prado Stars Wednesday Night As Guest Soloist" *The West Des Moines Express*, August 3, 1939, Vol. 46, No. 46.

⁴⁷ "Large Crowd Present at Mexican Banquet," *The West Des Moines Express*, May 7, 1942, Vol. 49, No. 30.

Other Latino-based organizations besides the Mexican's Men's club also existed and offered opportunities for participation and involvement. A Citizenship Club and Americanization class sponsored by the Mexican Club of West Des Moines consisted of many Mexican residents. In August 1942, the Citizenship Club publicized their organization and one of their purposes to teachers of Adult Education classes during a dramatized Military Aircraft Warning. First aid demonstrations completed by women such as "Margareta Rodriguez, Lena Carranza, Ramona Esparza, Prisca Rocha and daughter, Mary Alcantar and daughter Felicita Alcantar, Marie Muñoz, Gregoria Diaz, Andra Prado...Mary Salgado, Victorina Fernandez," while specific men of the group carried out the simulated Warning, including "Rosalio Rocha, Ramon Gallardo, Ysabel Enriquez, Ben Villalobis, Mike Moreno, Louis Moreno, Arcadia Alcantar, Luz Freyre, Cruz Diaz, Martin Rameriz...Pedro Rodriguez, Nick Leon, Mike Morillo, Jessie Carranza, Tony Munoz and Lorenzo Garcia."⁴⁸ The training event resulted not only in prepared and organized responses but also respect for the participants. "The thirty-five teachers who are employed by the Work Projects Administration, were amazed at the readiness for emergency displayed by this club. They are enthusiastic about carrying on this same type of work with their classes in their own local communities."⁴⁹ In all probability, both the Mexican's Men's Club and the Citizenship Club did not experience regular publicity or acknowledgement by the community. However, the above examples indicate the two groups' existence and some of their basic functions, as well as community responses.

⁴⁸ "Citizenship Club is Now Prepared for Emergency: First Aid Divisions and Military Aircraft warning Systems Ready for Emergency," *The West Des Moines Express*, August 13, 1942, Vol. 49, No. 44.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

In the 1950s a few more examples depict the social environment of the community. In November 1952, a bilingual radio program hosted by Paul Gomez, leader of the Latinaires, began and aired every Thursday evening for just over an hour. “His show will feature Latin records which he has imported from such countries as Mexico, Cuba, etc. Paul will sing and play his guitar, and occasionally the Latinaires will perform.”⁵⁰ Approximately a year later, the paper advised about a celebration to be held at the American Legion for Mexico’s independence, sponsored by Las Doce Estrellas, a Mexican girls club. The festivities included voting and crowning of a queen, with the candidates and their escorts named as “Florentine Rivera and Salvador Salgado; Elvira Flores and Jesse Valdez and Ramona Gallardo and Vincent Bejorano” and music provided by Ramon Villa.⁵¹ Furthermore, in 1955, Margarita Rodriguez and Guadalupe Valdez, both originally from Mexico, were part of a naturalization class that resulted in taking an oath to become citizens. “This class, administered the oath by Federal Judge William F. Riley, was the second largest in the history of the court” with 136 total persons from 31 different foreign countries.⁵² By 1959, more Hispanic clubs existed on a more public level. In September of 1959 a newspaper noted, “The Polk County Lulac Council (League of United Latin American Citizens) will have their 7th annual Mexican Fiesta...”⁵³ The state-wide organization also had councils in other towns, including Fort Madison, Davenport and Mason City—all communities with a history of Latinos. One of the big events for the 1959 fiesta included the first awarding of a LULAC scholarship. Additional excitement included the selection and

⁵⁰ “Paul Gomez to Have Radio Show,” *The West Des Moines Express*, November 20, 1952, Vol. 60, No. 14.

⁵¹ “Queen Will Reign At Mexican Fete,” *The West Des Moines Express*, September 10, 1953, Vol. 61, No. 4.

⁵² “7 WDM Persons Take Oath to Become Citizens,” *The West Des Moines Express*, October 27, 1955, Vol. 63, No. 11.

⁵³ “LULAC Fiesta to be Held September 11,” *The West Des Moines Express*, September 10, 1959, Vol. 67, No. 2.

coronation of a queen. A week later, a short notice in the paper indicated that Virginia Torres reigned as the queen. These examples, combined with the above mentioned activities and events provide clear indication not only of the integration and acceptance of the Mexican community into Valley Junction, but also their valuable cultural contributions.

B. Military Enlistment and Service

A solemn and committed contribution made by several young residents of West Des Moines, indeed of youths all of the country, consisted of military service. In the 1940s and 1950s the wars changed circumstances and priorities for many people. Just as American men and women felt compelled to enlist for service to their country, so too did the Mexicans in Valley Junction. Ultimately, by the time the wars had ended, many Hispanics served for the United States, and several lost their lives. In 1942, “The Magnet,” which was Valley High School’s section of *The West Des Moines Express*, noted the men enlisted in the military. Included in this list was Aurelio Barron for the Army, Paul Gomez, Rufine Ruiz and Raymond Rodriguez—all names of Latino families in Valley Junction. A month later, the *Express* requested addresses for Gomez, William Rocha, Rodriguez, and Ruiz, among others, in order to accurately keep tabs on the West Des Moines boys serving in the military. By May of 1942, more men of West Des Moines had enlisted, including Max Moreno, Abundio Aquiniga, Jack P. Diaz, Jessie Rodriguez, Julian Diaz and Esarel Marino. In November of the same year, another young man, Tito Murillo, enlisted and in March 1944, Bob Rodriguez joined the state guard.

Between 1945 and 1950, a lull of military enlistment occurred. However, by 1951, more men joined, including “Pfc. Anthony Diaz;...Pfc. Robert Rodriguez; Pfc. Ralph

Vasquez...”⁵⁴ among many others. Three months later in April, Richard Diaz, with the 124th Fighter Group also left. And in October of the same year, John Valdez was inducted and began basic training in the Marines. Throughout the peak years of the wars, *The West Des Moines Express* did a good job of keeping up with the service men from the community. Whether the news was regarding promotions, furloughs or welcome news of the serviceman’s safety, this section of the paper was devoted to and diligent about this responsibility.

Not all enlisted men returned home safely. In July 1944, the *Express* reported the death of Corporal Buster Rodriguez, killed in a plane crash and brought back to Sacred Heart Church for burial. This family experienced a double loss in October 1945 when they received news about Lt. Bernardo M. Navallo, Rodriguez’s half brother, and “a prisoner of war of the Japanese since the fall of the Philippines” and his death at Fukunka camp.⁵⁵ Other soldiers wounded during the war included Staff Sergeant Manuel P. Muñoz and Cpl. Leno A. Gallardo, wounded in Okinawa. A few of the men notably served in the armed forces. In February 1942, the paper reported that P.F.C. Aurelio Barron obtained a promotion to corporal. Several other men received awards and promotions including Muñoz being awarded the combat infantryman’s badge, Pfc. Julian P. Diaz “the meritorious service plaque with star for its outstanding achievement in the North African theatre of war in 1944”⁵⁶ and Corporal Canuto Leon promoted to sergeant. In 1951, Frank Vasquez was also promoted to sergeant. Oftentimes, several members of one family served; in April 1946, the military section of the newspaper listed information about Pfc. Robert James Rodriguez and his

⁵⁴ “With the Armed Services,” *The West Des Moines Express*, January 25, 1951, Vol. 58, No. 23.

⁵⁵ “Lt. Navallo, 31, Dies A Prisoner of Japs,” *The West Des Moines Express*, October 18, 1945, Vol. 53, No. 11.

⁵⁶ “With Our Service Forces,” *The West Des Moines Express*, March 22, 1945, Vol. 52, No. 33.

assignment in Germany but also noted his “three brothers in service. Sgt. Ray Rodriguez, with the Ranger battalion; Pvt. Jesse Rodriguez, with the 34th infantry division, and Cpl. Frank Rodriguez, also with the infantry.”⁵⁷ Undoubtedly, when families received word of a soldier’s return, as in the case of Corporal Gallardo and Sergeant Frank Enriquez in December 1945, relief and gratitude for their safety accompanied their returns.

The military provided an option for many boys to “become men” by serving and proving their ability, allegiance and strength. The men noted above all risked their lives, and in some cases lost their lives, for this country. Their service shows their willingness, dedication and commitment to maintaining freedom as well as reflects their hard work ethic and loyalty. While military service per se is not indicative of the Hispanic culture, the necessary characteristics for participation, survival and success are. Another deeply rooted aspect of Hispanic culture involves their faith. In the early years, religion created a barrier between the Catholic Mexicans and other denominations. As noted in Chapter I, however, many Mexican families remained true to Catholicism, faithfully attending Mass and having their wedding and funeral services at a Catholic church, usually Sacred Heart.

C. Latino Influence in the Local Catholic Church

In the early years of Valley Junction, no physical Catholic church existed; the Catholics in the community numbered few, so they met in a local building in the town whenever a neighboring priest might make his way through. As the congregation grew, however, the members built a frame church and then replaced it several years later in 1905

⁵⁷ “With Our Service Forces,” *The West Des Moines Express*, April 4, 1946, Vol. 53, No. 34.

with the completion of a brick church.⁵⁸ By the 1950s, the parish constructed and opened the school and in the 1960s, the church and school both experienced expansion.

By the mid 1940s, Sacred Heart and the Catholics became more noticeable in the news and the Mexican families were also present. In a news article of August 1946, the first annual picnic was planned for September 1. Two societies of the parish, Holy Name Society and Rosary Society, had earlier planned and appointed committees. The event included lunch, games, prizes, and gifts. “Another special feature will be music from south of the border played and sung by Paul Gomez, Manuel and Darrel Valdez.”⁵⁹ This picnic offered attractions for everyone, while encouraging participation and enjoyment by the entire community. A week later the paper reported the picnic a success when “over two hundred members of the Sacred Heart parish turned out... While relaxing after enjoying a good lunch the crowd was entertained by music furnished by the Mexican Troubadours and the singing of Perfidia Diaz.”⁶⁰ Also during major holidays such as Christmas and Easter, the local churches all advertised their service times and any special components of the festivities. For example, near Christmas of 1952, Sacred Heart Church noted the times and events of their Christmas services. Specifically, during the Holy Communion, the candle light and singing of Silent Night in Spanish by choir members “Miss Catherine Gallardo, ... Eamona Gallardo, Molly Muñoz, Mary Helen Garcia, Lela Garcia, Alice Salgado, ... Olga Vasquez, Delphine

⁵⁸ Tom Schmitt, *Places of Prayer and Celebration, The Diocese of Des Moines: A Pictorial and Historical Perspective on the Catholic Churches in the Diocese of Des Moines* (Des Moines: TLS Enterprises, 2006), 164.

⁵⁹ “Sacred Heart Church Plans First Annual Picnic Sept. 1,” *The West Des Moines Express*, August 29, 1946, Vol. 54, No. 3.

⁶⁰ “Sacred Heart Picnic Was Enjoyed Sunday,” *The West Des Moines Express*, September 5, 1946, Vol. 54, No. 4.

Vasquez, Mary Murillo,...Irene Muñoz...”⁶¹ provided an experience somewhat unusual, but appropriate considering the number of Mexican parish members.

Other happy events also took place at Sacred Heart Catholic Church as shown by several engagement and wedding announcements in the paper. In October 1945, Elena Vasquez’s engagement to Jess Rodriguez preceded their wedding at Sacred Heart. Elena was the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Salvador Vasquez of West Des Moines, and Jess was the son of Mr. and Mrs. Joe Rodriguez and also a veteran of the 34th infantry.⁶² Three years later, the paper reported on the wedding of Mary Lou Hernandez and Joe Salazar at Sacred Heart on November 27. Bridesmaids included “Kathryn Gallardo, Miss Velma Rodriguez, Miss Theresa Delatorra and Miss Frances Salzar” with the best man being “Raymond Rodriguez while Victor Delatorra, Henry Rodriguez, Darrell Valdez and Tony Diaz were the ushers.”⁶³ A double wedding occurred in 1950 when two female cousins married two brothers. On September 2, Delores Fernandez married John J. Valdez and Helen Salgado married Manual J. Valdez. The maid of honor and bridesmaids included “Stella Salgado...Mrs. Anthony Diaz, Mrs. John Torres, Alice Salgado, and Frances Valdez” and “Corporal Salvador Salgado was best man while ushers were Anthony Diaz, John Torres, John Muñoz and Robert Rodriguez.”⁶⁴ Another wedding ceremony was for Ivadrell Muñoz marrying William G. Rocha in October of 1950. Katherine Gallardo served as maid of honor while Phil Muñoz and Ramona Rocha were bridesmaids. The best man was John Muñoz; Manual Muñoz and John Rocha served as ushers. After a reception and dance with three hundred people, the

⁶¹ “Sacred Heart Church,” *The West Des Moines Express*, December 18, 1952, Vol. 60, No. 18, Section 2.

⁶² “Cupie’s Arrow to the Mark!” *The West Des Moines Express*, October 4, 1945, Vol. 53, No. 9.

⁶³ “Hernandez-Salzar Wedding,” *The West Des Moines Express*, December 2, 1948, Vol. 56, No. 14.

⁶⁴ “Double Wedding at Catholic Church, Saturday,” *The West Des Moines Express*, September 7, 1950, Vol. 58, No. 3.

couple left for a trip to Colorado.⁶⁵ Almost six years after one daughter's wedding, Mr. and Mrs. Salvador Vasquez announced the marriage of another daughter, Aurelia Vasquez to Joseph N. Segura. Maid of honor and bridesmaids included Vicki Villalobos, Theresa Segura, Hortense Villalobos and Lupe Murillo. Leonard Aguirre served as best man while Manuel Terronez, Jess Murillo and Ralph Vasquez were ushers.⁶⁶ Mary Dolores Ramirez and Jerrold W. Van Horne also married at Sacred Heart. Angelo Del Prado sang and Olga Vasquez was the maid of honor.⁶⁷ These seven weddings all occurred at Sacred Heart Catholic Church and involved many members of the Mexican community.

Other community members married elsewhere in the Des Moines area. Almost seven years after fulfilling the best man role at his sister's and cousin's double wedding, Salvador Salgado, at this point the owner of La Petite Beauty Salon, married Mary Jayne McConville in February 1957. Manuel Valdez and John Muñoz were best man and a groomsman. After the ceremony, the couple honeymooned in Mexico City.⁶⁸ Furthermore, some announcements were made by parents who lived in the area, for their children did not. In December 1948, Delores Del Prado announced the engagement of her daughter Molly Manriques to Albert Segura of Rock Island, Illinois. The wedding was to take place in the home of a family member of the bride, and the couple was to reside in Rock Island.⁶⁹ Although not all the weddings of the Mexican community took place at Sacred Heart Catholic, the church obviously kept busy between regular masses and special occasions.

⁶⁵ "Beautiful Formal Ceremony," *The West Des Moines Express*, October 5, 1950, Vol. 58, No. 5.

⁶⁶ "Miss Vasquez and Joseph N. Segura Take Vows," *The West Des Moines Express*, September 27, 1951, Vol. 59, No. 6.

⁶⁷ "Miss Ramirez—J. Van Horne Are Wed," *The West Des Moines Express*, February 28, 1957, Vol. 64, No. 27.

⁶⁸ "Miss McConville , S. Salgado Are Wed," *The West Des Moines Express*, February 14, 1957, Vol. 64, No. 25.

⁶⁹ "Molly Manriques to Wed Friday," *The West Des Moines Express*, December 30, 1948, Vol. 56, No. 19.

An additional way the Mexican residents participated in the church and through that, the community, was with a local baseball team. Essentially every summer between the years of 1946-1950, the paper reported on the church's baseball team and games. In July 1946, "sparked by the sharp pitching of Roy Garcia and Manuel Valdez's three base hit the Catholic softball team defeated the American Legion 7 to 2."⁷⁰ By the end of that season, the Catholics remained undefeated and held first place in league standing with eight wins. In May of the following year, the Catholics won their first and second games and by August, the season looked successful with five wins already due to the strong pitching from Garcia, combined with the home runs from Johnny Valdez.⁷¹ By the final game of the 1947 season and with the "outstanding" pitching from Garcia, "Catholics Finish Season Undefeated to Top Other Ball Clubs in the League."⁷² At the end of September in that same year, the Catholic softball team received recognition from the Lions club for their accomplishments. "Highlight of the meeting was the presentation of a traveling trophy by Virgil Fox, playground director and also a member of the Lions Club, to Roy Garcia, manager of the first-place Catholic church club."⁷³

In the first game of the following season, the Catholics again started out strong with a win over the Christians team. By June of the same year, "Sacred Heart Crew Is In First Place In Softball Loop at End of First Round"⁷⁴ with Garcia, Valdez and Murillo all playing in the game against the Methodist team. In August of 1948, Catholic players "Roy Garcia, p;

⁷⁰ "Catholics Victorious Again Monday," *The West Des Moines Express*, July 4, 1946, Vol. 53, No. 47.

⁷¹ "Catholics Win Loop Title With Five Straight," *The West Des Moines Express*, August 21, 1947, Vol. 55, No. 1.

⁷² "Methodists Down Christians Friday in Final Contest," *The West Des Moines Express*, September 4, 1947, Vol. 55, No. 3.

⁷³ "Softball Teams Are Honored At Lions Banquet," *The West Des Moines Express*, September 25, 1947, Vol. 55, No. 6.

⁷⁴ "Catholics Defeat Methodist Team In Thriller Tuesday," *The West Des Moines Express*, June 10, 1948, Vol. 55, No. 43.

Valdez, ef; Mike Murillo, ss; M. Valdez, lb; R. Diaz, lf; Joe Murillo,2b; Rodriguez, c; L. Murrillo, rf”⁷⁵ and the team experienced a defeat by the Independents. By 1950, however, the Catholics were back into the game, winning the title in August. In June of the 1952 season, the Catholics were 2 and 2, with Garcia usually pitching, Rodriguez catching and Valdez running.⁷⁶ Regardless of the wins or losses, the Catholic softball team offered an opportunity for involvement from many men, including members of the Mexican community. While the proportion of Mexican players to non-Mexican players is unknown due to the newspaper only reporting wins or losses and singling out certain players’ contributions, the involvement by Mexican players is apparent.

Perhaps the ultimate dedication to the Catholic Church was shown through a lifetime of service. In January 1951, the paper reported that a local girl joined the convent. After graduation in 1948, “Miss Timotea Leon of West Des Moines has entered the Ottumwa Heights convent at Ottumwa, starting her training there January 6 in the Order of Humility.”⁷⁷ August of 1956, another Sacred Heart parish member, Delphine Vasquez also entered the “Congregation of the sisters of the Humility of Mary at Ottumwa Heights.”⁷⁸ In October of the same year, Mary Muñoz joined the same convent. Her sister, formerly known as Trini Muñoz, had also joined and was at that time known as Sister Mary Lucinda.⁷⁹ A few months later in January 1957, a third sister—Irene Muñoz also joined the same convent.

⁷⁵ “Independents Win From Catholic Ten,” *The West Des Moines Express*, August 26, 1948, Vol. 56, No. 1.

⁷⁶ “Methodists Down Catholics 7 to 2 Last Tuesday,” *The West Des Moines Express*, June 26, 1952, Vol. 59, No. 45.

⁷⁷ “WDM Girl Has Entered Convent,” *The West Des Moines Express*, January 11, 1951, Vol. 58, No. 21.

⁷⁸ “WDM Girl to Enter Religious Community,” *The West Des Moines Express*, August 30, 1956, Vol. 64, No. 3.

⁷⁹ “Mary Munoz Enters Convent,” *The West Des Moines Express*, October 11, 1956, Vol. 64, No. 8.

D. School Related Community Gatherings

The military and church were not the only links for the families; because many of them were young families, a lot had students of various ages enrolled in the schools. Activities and events for the community through the school offered opportunities not only for the students to shine, but also parents to become involved and interact. Specifically, plays, operettas and athletics all provided avenues for the community to proudly display their stars of the school. In 1942, the Valley Junior High School presented a talent show with two plays, “Iowa’s Gift” which featuring participants such as Delores Fernandez, Bob Rodriguez and “Harlem on Parade” with “Catherine Gallardo and Porfedia Diaz, vocal duet; Margaret Garcia, Spanish song and guitar;...Delores Fernandez, vocal solo.”⁸⁰ In November 1946, the paper reported on the popularity of the “annual ‘Valley Varieties’ musical show” and

the “evening’s finale, ‘Fiesta in Mexico,’ featured the singing of Porfedia Diaz, the famous Mexican ‘hat dance’ by Dolores Fernandez and Stella Salgado, and the string band of Manuel, Johnny and Darrell Valdez, Salvador Salgado, Augustine Garcia and Richard Diaz, proved to be one of the top notch hits of the evening and was a fitting climax to an excellent program of entertainment. It reflected greatest credit upon the performers.”⁸¹

The Fiesta group became popular; in late November of 1946, they were invited to Callahan Junior high, as the students there were briefly studying Mexico. And in December of the same year, the show went on the road, presenting at Lincoln High School and Indianola High School. “Fiesta has been praised highly by everyone and we wish them success on all their

⁸⁰ “60 Junior High Students Will Appear in Service Club Program Friday Night,” *The Magnet, The West Des Moines Express*, April 23, 1942, Vol. 49, No. 31.

⁸¹ “Many Stars in High School’s Big Musical Event: Valley Varieties Thrills Crowd at Friday Show,” *The West Des Moines Express*, November 21, 1946, Vol. 54, No. 15.

engagements.”⁸² These musical performances and events obviously went over very well with the schools and the community. Furthermore, by performing Mexican themed dances and songs, the students retained and shared their culture.

Other Mexican students received random awards, notice and mention from a variety of school and community related events, programs and contests. In a scrap metal drive in October 1942, Richard Rodriguez set an individual record for the most pounds collected with “a total of 5,080 pounds of scrap to his credit.”⁸³ In 1944, several elementary students who participated in the school patrol, including “Abel Murrillo, Johnny Valdez,... Tony Diaz”⁸⁴ were honored by the local Lions Club. In March 1946, one student “Jimmy Salazaar received triple honors, second class and first class ranks and two merit badges”⁸⁵ in recognition and designating his advancement in the Boy Scouts. In May 1946, Salvador Salgado “placed third in the recent state-wide Michael J. Dowling Art Contest to design an Easter Seal for 1948”⁸⁶ and in the same newspaper issue, students Arega Vasquez and Mary Rodriguez were contestants at the Mother’s Club carnival. And Stella Salgado won a \$5.00 door prize.⁸⁷ Other articles simply acknowledge participation in specific community groups. For example, in March 1944, Velia Vasquez was part of the Takongza Campfire girls, while in 1946 several girls including Carmen Argumendo, Rosie Enriquez,... Mary Louise Muñoz,... Delphine Vasquez” were part of the Bluebirds, a “junior organization of the Camp

⁸² “Fiesta ‘On the Road’,” *The Student Express: News and Notes from the Local Schools The West Des Moines Express*, December 12, 1946, Vol. 54, No. 18.

⁸³ “List of Winners in Big Contest for Scrap Metal,” *The West Des Moines Express*, October 29, 1942, Vol. 50, No. 3.

⁸⁴ “Elementary School Patrol Members at Lions Club,” *The West Des Moines Express*, January 13, 1944, Vol. 51, No. 21.

⁸⁵ “Thirteen Boy Scouts Are Given Insignia for Achievements,” *The West Des Moines Express*, March 14, 1946, Vol. 53, No. 31.

⁸⁶ “West Des Moines Student is Third Easter Seal Bout,” *The West Des Moines Express*, May 2, 1946, Vol. 53, No. 38.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

Fire Girls.”⁸⁸ Specific local businesses in the community also sponsored activities for the students. In December 1950, approximately fourteen contestants, including Jim Salazar and Jesse Valdez, participated in a “truth or consequence Quiz Program.”⁸⁹ About twenty-four merchants backed the event. A few years later, Farmers Mutual insurance company jointly sponsored a girls softball team. The team won their first game in July 1952, with players including Cruizy Diaz and Mary Rodriguez.⁹⁰ Through the community, then, many students participated in a variety of events and programs.

E. Local Celebrities

Certain students stood out in specific events. Porfedia Diaz, a student of Valley High, especially excelled in music. In early 1942 along with Delores Fernandez and other students, Diaz performed in “Love Pirates of Haiwaii” a play that took “place in a fashionable girls’ school in the Hawaiian Islands. Interesting complications arise when a young marine and a band of pirates invade the school.”⁹¹ In June of the same year Diaz received first place for her performance in a program of summer concert series. She was popular in the school as well. In October 1947, Diaz was crowned Homecoming Queen. After graduation in 1948, Diaz entered “the College of Fine Arts at Drake to continue her musical studies on a scholarship from the Za Ga Zig shrine Music Committee. Porfedia sang over Radio Station KSO last Monday on the Flying Saucers program as Miss Polk County.”⁹² Besides attending Drake, Diaz continued to be active in the community. Under her teacher Grace DeGraff, she

⁸⁸ “Bluebirds Have Gained Many New Members in City,” *The West Des Moines Express*, October 31, 1946, Vol. 54, No. 12.

⁸⁹ “Merchants Back Quiz Program,” *The West Des Moines Express*, December 21, 1950, Vol. 58, No. 19.

⁹⁰ “Girls Softball Team Organizes,” *The West Des Moines Express*, July 3, 1952, Vol. 59, No. 46.

⁹¹ “Two-Act Operetta Appears Tonight at Elementary: ‘Love Pirates of Hawaii’ by Local Talent, Directed by Ruth Sloan and Sponsored by P.T.A.” *The West Des Moines Express*, February 5, 1942, Vol. 49, No. 20.

⁹² “City Briefs,” *The West Des Moines Express*, September 16, 1948, Vol. 56, No. 4.

gave public recitals in 1951 and 1953. Diaz was noted as “a first place winner in the national music contest during her high school days” and “a talented musician”⁹³ in 1951. She also sang several Spanish songs during her recitals. By 1955, Diaz studied at the Chicago Conservatory, was highly rated and a “first place winner in the coloratura soprano division of the Cook County (Chicago), Ill. preliminaries for the annual Chicagoland Music Festival...one of the 49 women singers from throughout the nation to compete for the honor of singing at the festival held last Saturday at Soldiers’ Field.”⁹⁴ The following year, as a junior at the Conservatory, Diaz had performed at several recitals and “sung on both television and radio in the Des Moines and Chicago areas, and is currently featured soloist every Tuesday evening on ‘The Spanish Hour.’”⁹⁵ In July of 1958, Diaz was back in West Des Moines for a performance. With several local sponsors and the public invited, the event provided an opportunity for the community to see a local celebrity. Furthermore, as noted in the paper, “Miss Diaz will leave shortly for Claremont, Calif. where she will become a member of the Padua Hills Spanish Theater. Plays and musical comedies are presented there in both English and Spanish.”⁹⁶ Her talent and ability are clearly represented through her activities and achievements as followed in the paper.

Beginning in June of 1947 and continuing for nearly a year, the paper followed a local high school student, John Valdez and a few of his schoolmates, and their achievements in boxing. The boxers performed well, with Valdez specifically triumphing. “Johnny Valdez, Valley High student, added another win to his string of amateur boxing triumphs last week, defeating Ernie Nisser in a match at the Jewish Community Center. Valdez, a golden

⁹³ “Porfedia Diaz to Give Recital,” *The West Des Moines Express*, September 13, 1951, Vol. 54, No. 4.

⁹⁴ “Perfidia Diaz Rated High As Singer,” *The West Des Moines Express*, September 1, 1955, Vol. 63, No. 3.

⁹⁵ “Perfidia Diaz Will Give Chicago Recital,” *The West Des Moines Express*, January 10, 1957, Vol. 64, No. 20.

⁹⁶ “Diaz Concert Tonight,” *The West Des Moines Express*, July 17, 1958, Vol. 65, No. 47.

gloves welter weight champion...”⁹⁷ Later in the same month, Valdez, Rodriguez and de la Torre all three won their matches. The next month, the community recognized the boys’ potential and “The Emerick-Williams Post 8879 in West Des Moines became the fathers of the first boys boxing team ever originated in this city... Those participating are as follows: John Valdez, Victor De Torre,... Henry Rodriguez.”⁹⁸ Throughout the first six months of 1948, Valdez continued his boxing. Although he lost in Chicago in late February, “he won the plaudits of the crowd before losing the decision in what was one of the best early round matches.”⁹⁹ Furthermore, in June of the same year, Valdez and Henry Rodriguez competed in a summer boxing show, both against men they had boxed against before. “The feature attraction will pit West Des Moines’ favorite son, Johnny Valdez, twice golden gloves welterweight champion, against Pat Judge of Boone... Another bout which is expected to be a thriller is the rubber match to be fought off by Joey Valadez, of Des Moines and Henry Rodriguez, of West Des Moines.”¹⁰⁰ Despite the tough competition, both boxers obviously had the support from the community. The results were shown a week later, with Valdez winning but Rodriguez defeated by Joey Valdez.

These examples shown through musical and athletic ability portray the high level of participation and contributions in the community and at the school level. Even though these Mexican families worked hard and had little, the children’s opportunities gained through school for additional community involvement provided a variety of benefits and advantages. Ultimately, the children made the experience much better and more positive for the entire

⁹⁷ “Johnny Valdez Wins From Des Moines Foe,” *The West Des Moines Express*, June 12, 1947, Vol. 54, No. 43.

⁹⁸ “VFW is Sponsoring Boys Boxing Team,” *The West Des Moines Express*, July 10, 1947, Vol. 54, No. 47.

⁹⁹ “Johnny Valdez is Loser in Chicago,” *The West Des Moines Express*, February 26, 1948, Vol. 55, No. 28.

¹⁰⁰ “Johnny Valdez to Oppose Pat Judge in the Main Event,” *The West Des Moines Express*, June 3, 1948, Vol. 55, No. 42.

family through their activities and achievements. However, the other examples mentioned also created a valued and respected place in the town for many members of the Mexican community, whether through military service or church involvement.

CHAPTER III. EL FUTURO, STUDENT LIFE

Survival was priority number one for these Mexican families, but education also became important. Because many of the parents knew little or no English, their children often served as teachers and interpreters through their own learning of the language and, indeed, the American culture. As noted briefly in Chapter II, the several students during the years of 1939-1960 created a substantial name for themselves, in a variety of ways. In general, however, music, athletics and daily interaction offered opportunities for all the students to fit in and excel. Sports are notoriously important in Midwestern states and Iowa was no different during the time period examined. The Valley High football Tigers and basketball Cagers boys' and girls' teams experienced many highs and lows throughout the 20 years and provide abundant examples of participation by the Mexican students.

A. Assimilation and Acceptance Through Sports

At the beginning of the 1939 football season, three boys played with the squad: Canuto Leon, Richard Rodriguez and Tito Murillo. By October of the season, they succeeded in winning their first conference game in two years. At the end of that school year in May of 1940, several athletes were given awards, including Canuto Leon, a senior who graduated the same month. A few years later in the spring of 1942, the track team had one returning letterman with Tito Murillo and other students including, sophomore Roy Garcia for high jump and broad jump and Richard Rodriguez for the dashes.¹⁰¹ At the end of that season, the track team won crown at the Valley Relays.

¹⁰¹ "Track Team Has 3 Returning Lettermen; Sexton Cards 10 Meets for Thinclads," The Magnet, *The West Des Moines Express*, March 19, 1942, Vol. 49, No. 26.

In the fall of 1942, the football coach once again prepared for the season. “Returning letterman include Leno Gallardo...”¹⁰² with Roy Garcia and Richard Rodriguez also part of the high school team. Meanwhile, the junior high team also had several students readying themselves for the new season. “Bob Rodriguez,...Manuel Murrillo,...John Rocha,...Willie Salagar,...Lewis Murrillo” helped comprise the junior high squad while the pee wee team included “Fernando Villalobus,...Frank Vasquex,...Salvador Salgado...”¹⁰³ Manuel Murillo and Robert Rodriguez became regulars for the junior high team lineup. By the end of the season, two of the high school players, Richard Rodriguez and Roy Garcia, received letters.

The number of Mexican student players increased by 1944, when the paper listed, among others, “William Salazar,...Manuel Valdez,...Fernando Villalobos,...Salvador Salgado,...Tony Diaz,...and Johnny Valdez”¹⁰⁴ as part of the B squad of the Valley junior high. At the finals of the basketball tournament, “Valdez, Salgado and Rodriguez poured in the points...Valdez and Rodriguez were high point men of the tournament with 71 and 61 points respectively.”¹⁰⁵ These members of the junior high team obviously created a place on the ball court early in their careers. The following September, Trinidad Leon and Manuel Murillo were two of the returning lettermen for the high school football team. Out of the sixty boys who tried out for the junior high football, the best included “Tony Diaz and R. Diaz, J. Valdez,...H. Salazar, J. Muñoz,...F. Vasquez,...D. Valdez,...S. Salgado...”¹⁰⁶ The following spring during basketball season, several of the same boys played, including

¹⁰² “Coach Sexton Is Working Hard to Prepare Eleven,” *The West Des Moines Express*, September 3, 1942, Vol. 49, No. 47.

¹⁰³ “Junior High Football Team Enthusiastic Over New Season,” *The Magnet*, *The West Des Moines Express*, September 24, 1942, Vol. 49, No. 50.

¹⁰⁴ “A Few Happenings Along School Lines,” *The West Des Moines Express*, February 10, 1944, Vol. 51, No. 25.

¹⁰⁵ “A Few Happenings Along School Lines,” *The West Des Moines Express*, March 30, 1944, Vol. 51, No. 30.

¹⁰⁶ “Junior High Football Team to Meet Ames,” *The West Des Moines Express*, October 5, 1944, Vol. 52, No. 8.

Salvador Salgado, Richard Diaz, Tony Diaz and Johnny Valdez. “The locals were handicapped by the loss of their stellar center, Manuel Valdez, who has joined the Senior high squad.”¹⁰⁷ By the beginning of the football season of 1945, Manuel Valdez was a returning letterman and at the end of the season he received another letter. In track season of 1946, Manuel Valdez was also a returning letterman, along with Willie Salazar.

By the fall football season of 1946, Manuel Valdez was considered a “triple threat tiger”¹⁰⁸ as a veteran quarterback, but demonstrated his true priorities when he entered school late in order to help his parents. By October, however, he was declared eligible to play. Manuel wasn’t the only member of the Valdez family with notable athletic ability. His brother, Johnny Valdez also made a name for himself on the field as a halfback for the Valley High second team, and in an October game where he made half of the touchdowns in the total score of 28-6 against Roosevelt High. Richard Diaz scored another touchdown in the game through a completed pass.¹⁰⁹ Another game late in the same month again displayed the competence of Johnny Valdez, Richard Diaz and Salvador Salgado and the rest of the reserve team when they beat Tech High 33-0. By the end of the 1946 season, the expected letter winners included Dick Diaz, Bill Salazar, Manuel and John Valdez.

The 1947 basketball season started out tough with a loss to Winterset, but many of the same athletes played throughout. By March, the “Tigers bound back from a 13-game losing streak”¹¹⁰ and with the help of high scorer Richard Diaz, beat Madrid. Late March of the same year began the track season, with Richard Diaz, Salvador Marino and Johnny Valdez

¹⁰⁷ “Tiger Cagers Have A Bright Future,” *The West Des Moines Express*, February 1, 1945, Vol. 52, No. 26.

¹⁰⁸ “Triple Threat Tiger,” *The West Des Moines Express*, August 29, 1946, Vol. 54, No. 3.

¹⁰⁹ “Valley Subs Beat Teds, 28-6,” *The West Des Moines Express*, October 10, 1946, Vol. 54, No. 9.

¹¹⁰ “Tigers Upset Favored Madrid, Move On to District: Diaz Sparkles in Triumph At Granger Meet,” *The West Des Moines Express*, March 6, 1947, Vol. 54, No. 29.

all making an appearance for the team. At the end of the school year, Diaz, Manuel Valdez and Salvador Salgado were among the letter winners for basketball. By the fall football season of 1947, the famous “Tiger Brother Act” of the Valdez brothers combined again with Richard Diaz as well as Salvador Moreno, Abel Murillo, Vic DeLatorre and Salvador Salgado to comprise the team.¹¹¹ The Valdez brothers’ abilities were touted again in a game in late September when “the flying feet of Johnny Valdez and the sturdy pitching arm of brother Manuel Valdez, were outstanding...”¹¹² By the end of the 1947 season, the team had won seven games and many won letters, including Diaz, Murillo, Salgado and the Valdez brothers. On the junior high level for the season, new names such as Frank Gallardo, Jim Salazar, Jesse Valdez and Phillip Muñoz appeared on the roster. Although the season was Manuel Valdez’s last, his brothers Johnny and Jesse clearly possessed the similar athletic ability. Through the efforts of all the team members, the Tigers did well throughout the 1940’s.

By the early 1950’s, some of the names on the athletic rosters remained the same with Dick Diaz, Salazar, Murillo, Rodriguez and Valdez. A new player by the name of Dick Annunzio also appeared. In January 1950, the Tigers won conference after defeating Tech High. “Jesse Valdez proved to be the big spark in the Tiger attack”¹¹³ while Diaz also scored several points. In the game a few days later, Diaz again scored high with a total of 30 points, in a win against Urbandale. The Valley boys represented themselves well throughout the season; Diaz totaled 323 points and Valdez was seventh with 170 points. After basketball

¹¹¹ “Conference Game Tonight is First Test for Tigers,” *The West Des Moines Express*, September 11, 1947, Vol. 55, No. 4.

¹¹² “High School Grid Team Rallies to Beat Des Moines,” *The West Des Moines Express*, September 25, 1947, Vol. 55, No. 6.

¹¹³ “Tigers Upset Tech High in Conference Win,” *The West Des Moines Express*, January 19, 1950, Vol. 57, No. 22.

season, track started and Diaz and Mike Moreno competed in the state meet in April. By the end of the school year in May 1950, several received track letters, including Richard Diaz, Jim Salazar, Mike Moreno, Jesse Valdez, and Joe Murillo.¹¹⁴ In fact, Mike Moreno was the only track team member to attend state, where he won fourth place.

In the 1950 football season, Jesse Valdez and Jim Salazar each had significant play time, and at the end, senior classman Salazar received a letter. Both also participated in the basketball season and in March of 1951, the team obtained a spot in the district tournament. By the end of the season, both won basketball letters. The 1951 track team did very well, winning the State Indoor Championship for Class B schools—both Jim Salazar and Frank Gallardo were team members.¹¹⁵ During the 1951-1952 school year, Mike Murillo was a sophomore on the football team as well as on the basketball team, along with Jesse Valdez for which they both received letters. Murillo appears strong again in the 1952-1953 school year, playing on the football team and receiving another letter, along with junior Albert Salazar. The 1953-1954 school year saw the return of Albert Salazar, winning a letter for football. The basketball team included junior Fernando Moreno, who won a letter in March of 1954. While the years between 1950-1954 were random for Mexican students and participation in athletics, by the fall of 1954, more had entered high school. Sixty-nine boys reported for the football season, including seniors Ramon Rocha and Fernando Moreno; junior Ed Ramirez and Gene Ramirez; sophomores Dick Muñoz, Ronnie Vasquez, Richard De La Torre, Danny Moreno, Jackie Murillo; freshmen Dick Ramirez, Alfred Gallardo and

¹¹⁴ “Athletes Get Track and Golf Letters for the Year,” *The West Des Moines Express*, May 25, 1950, Vol. 57, No. 40.

¹¹⁵ “Meet the Champs! The 1951 Valley High Track Team,” *The West Des Moines Express*, May 24, 1951, Vol. 58, No. 40.

Frank Rodriguez.¹¹⁶ At the end of the season Fernando Moreno and Ramon Rocha were among the letterwinners. At the end of the school year in May 1955, Fernando Moreno also received letters for basketball and track while Gene Ramirez received letters for basketball and golf.

The boys' sports teams were not the only successful athletics in the school. The girls' basketball team also performed well for several years. In March 1944, the team defeated Johnston with the help of high scorer Timy Leon. In the game against Dexter in December 1946, Leon again was the high scorer. Velma Rodriguez also played for the team. A game in January 1947 resulted in another victory with Leon the second high scorer. By February of the same year when the girls won the sectional tournament, "starring honors were evenly divided among the winners, with Timy Leon standing out. Timy scored 21 points in the Johnston game. Her work all season has been outstanding."¹¹⁷ And at the end of the season, Leon was "placed on the all-state honor roll"¹¹⁸ in recognition of her hard work, and both she and Rodriguez received letters. The next season, Leon and Rodriguez returned to the basketball court as veterans, starting out the year with a win against Ankeny, with Leon scoring a total of seventeen points. In January 1948, the girls' team won the Polk county title. During the 1948-1949 season, Mary Ellen Rodriguez and Jane Murillo were part of the team, both playing often. In a game in February 1950, Murillo scored eighteen points to help defeat Colfax. Mary Rodriguez also continued strong throughout the basketball seasons.

¹¹⁶ "Tigers Snarl: 69 Boys Report for Football at Valley High," *The West Des Moines Express*, September 2, 1954, Vol. 62, No. 3.

¹¹⁷ "Valley High Tigerettes Advance to District Tourney," *The West Des Moines Express*, February 13, 1947, Vol. 54, No. 26.

¹¹⁸ "Valley's Elaine McPherson Named All-State Guard," *The West Des Moines Express*, March 20, 1947, Vol. 54, No. 31.

In March of the same year, the junior high girls' basketball team also showed promise. "Still unbeaten this season, the lassies appear to have the makings of some good varsity cagerettes in years to come."¹¹⁹ Team members included Cruzita Diaz and Frances Valdez and in mid March, the girls became the new county champs. The following year, Cruzita Diaz scored twenty-three points to help win another Polk county championship. "The junior high girls have now won 26 straight games, being unbeaten in two years. Mainstays of the sextet this year include Cruzita Diaz, Frances Valdez and Mary Diaz..."¹²⁰ By November 1953 several of these girls moved up to the high school team. Although during the 1953-1954 season Mary Diaz received little play time, Cruzita Diaz was "reliable junior guard who will likely become the 'backbone' of next season's court. She also received all-state honorable mention for her fine performances throughout the year."¹²¹ And in May 1955, both Cruzita and Mary received letters for their efforts on the basketball court.

By the mid 1950s, many of the athletic stars graduated, and few other Mexican students were mentioned in sports related matters. However, some still did well in certain sports and received mention in the paper. At the beginning of fall football season in 1956 Dick Muñoz, Ron Vasquez, Jackie Murillo and Gilbert Sanchez were all part of the team. Murillo also played basketball for the Cagers. By December of the same year, letters were awarded to all mentioned.

B. More Than Athletes: Additional School Programs and Activities

From an academic and extracurricular perspective other than sports, many students also engaged in activities, games and clubs. In March 1942, "Manuel Valdez won the club

¹¹⁹ "Junior High Girls Have Winning Ways," *The West Des Moines Express*, March 2, 1950, Vol. 57, No. 28.

¹²⁰ "Junior High Girls Champs of Polk County," *The West Des Moines Express*, March 1, 1951, Vol. 58, No. 28.

¹²¹ "Tigarettes Had Good Season in Basketball," *The West Des Moines Express*, March 18, 1954, Vol. 61, No. 31.

checker tournament sponsored recently by Miss Hafner by defeating Salvador Salgado in the finals.”¹²² Other players included Catherine Gallardo, Ralph Vasquez, Jessie Villalobos, Mary Hernandez, and Parfidia Diaz. In “the finals of the Chinese checker tournament” of the next month, Jesse Diaz, Catherine Gallardo, Porfedia Diaz, Mary Lou Hernandez and Ralph Vasquez again played. The same month, Richard Rodriguez competed in a current events quiz while Salvador Salgado won a rating in the elementary and junior high vocal contest. In May 1942, Delores Rodriguez and Hortense Villalobos made dresses and Helen Salgado, Avagale Murillo and Rose Camacho made skirts for a ninth grade style show through their Homemaking class.¹²³ The following September, Salgado, Camacho and Villolobos were all officers of the Home Economics club. A Games Club organized in October 1942 with team members of John Rocha, Stella Salgado, Timotea Leon, Manuel Murillo, and Salvador Salgado.

Other school related activities again portrayed the participation from other grades of Mexican students. In December 1946, the elementary students put on an operetta of Hansel and Gretel. Delphinia Vasquez was one of the gingerbread children, while members of the chorus included Irene Muñoz, Mary Garcia, Josephine Argumedo, Ramona Gallardo, Salvador Vasquez, Mary L. Muñoz, Crizita Diaz, Mary Murillo, Martha Salazar, Ramona Rocha, Mary Diaz, Lillian Moreno and Carmen Argumedo. Other participants in the operetta

¹²² “Manuel Valdez is Checker Champion,” *The Magnet, The West Des Moines Express*, March 12, 1942, Vol. 49, No. 25.

¹²³ “Ninth Grade Girls Present Style Show,” *The Magnet, The West Des Moines Express*, May 14, 1942, Vol. 49, No. 34.

included Salvador Vasquez, Stella Moreno, Margaret Argumedo, Salvador Salgado, Joe Muñoz, and Albert Salazar.¹²⁴

During the 1947-1948 school year, Valley High offered its first driver's training education class. "In leading to an operator's license, Mr. Carty teaches the fundamentals of safe driving and the proper attitude. A student must be at least 15 years and eight months to enroll for the course..."¹²⁵ In May of 1948, several students completed the course and therefore obtained their licenses: Victor De La Torre, Catherine Gallardo, Manuel Murillo, Salvador Salgado, Manuel Valdez, Frank Vasquez, Ramona Rocha, Timy Leon, Stella Salgado, Chuck Villalobos, and Joe Salazar. Due to the success of the program, it was continually offered over the next several years. John Gallardo, Victor Muñoz and Albert Salazar completed and passed the second semester course in 1951. During the first semester of the 1951-1952 school year, Mike Murillo, Jessie Valdez, Joe Muñoz, and Richard Villalobos passed the written examination test. The second semester course consisted of the driving exam—all four first semester students passed, as well as Cruzita Diaz. By this time, "a total of 223 Valley High students have completed driver training lessons and qualified for drivers' license. In addition to tests by a highway patrolman and reading assignments, each student spends an average six hours behind the wheel and 18 hours observation of other students' driving."¹²⁶ The following year, twenty-two students succeeded in obtaining their operator's license, including Margaret Argumedo, Fernando Moreno, Irene Muñoz, Martha Salazar, and Salvador Vasquez.

¹²⁴ "Hansel and Gretel Operetta Charms Audience: Elementary School Youngsters Present Excellent Program," *The West Des Moines Express*, December 12, 1946, Vol. 54, No. 18.

¹²⁵ "First Year Course Now Completed in Driver's Training," *The West Des Moines Express*, May 27, 1948, Vol. 55, No. 41.

¹²⁶ "223 Students Have Taken School Driving Training," *The West Des Moines Express*, May 22, 1952, Vol. 59, No. 40.

C. Representation Through Numbers

While a good percentage of students were represented through athletic events and other activities, many others did not participate in extracurriculars. However, class photos and notices, graduation lists, and other classroom information indicate the numbers and names of Mexican students present in the school through the examined years. A review of the Valley High alumni database records also provides information and comparison regarding class lists. Canuto Leon was one of a hundred students graduating in 1940 while Lupe Leon graduated with ninety other students in 1941.¹²⁷ In January 1942, senior Tito Murillo graduated mid-year with seventeen other students, while Salvador Salgado, Manuel Valdez, Jesse Villalobos, Parfidia Diaz, Catherine Gallardo, and Mary Lou Hernandez entered seventh grade with eighteen other students.¹²⁸ In the same newspaper issue, Helen Salgado, Barney Leon and William Salazar were all elected officers for their respective homerooms. A week later, Richard Rodriguez was also elected an officer of the student council. And in February of the same year, Roy Garcia set a record for serving the most terms as president of his homeroom. “Roy has been president of the present 10A1 home room so many times that some of his fellow classmates aren’t sure whether he’s served three or four terms. They’ve been calling him ‘Three Term Garcia.’”¹²⁹ In May 1942, the list of graduating elementary and junior high students included Delores Rodriguez, Hortensia Villalobos, Rose Camacho, Margaret Garcia, Avagale Murrillo, Helen Salgado from the junior high. Elementary seniors included Frank Vasquez, Charles Villalobos, Lupe Diaz,

¹²⁷ Valley High School Alumni Database Records, Valley High School, West Des Moines, Iowa.

¹²⁸ “Twenty-Four Students Enter Seventh Grade At Junior High,” *The Magnet, The West Des Moines Express*, January 22, 1942, Vol. 49, No. 18.

¹²⁹ “Three Term Garcia,” *The Magnet, The West Des Moines Express*, February 5, 1942, Vol. 49, No. 20.

Elpedia Garcia, Timotea Leon, Ramona Rocha, Stella Salgado, and Velma Rodriguez.¹³⁰

The senior high school graduates included Mary Muñoz, Victoria Villalobos and A. Judy Vasquez.¹³¹

Another mid-year graduation occurred in January 1943 with sixteen students, including Catalina Leon and Richard Rodriguez. According to the alumni database, Roy Garcia also graduated in that same year, with a total of seventy-seven graduates.¹³² In the following January, Antonia Leon and Madeline Rocha graduated, along with seventeen other students. By the end of the 1944 school year, Josephine Murillo was also among the graduates. In addition, sixteen new students started junior high in early 1944, including Virginia Enriquez, Trini Muñoz, Alice Villalobos, Anthony Diaz, Abel Murillo, and Johnny Valdez. The following year in January 1945, seventeen seniors graduated, including Trinidad Leon, Carmen Muñoz and Bessie Vasquez. The next month, members of the new student council included Dolores Fernandez and Salvador Salgado. At the end of the 1944-45 school year, Rose Camacho, Avagale Murillo, Ila Rodriguez, Helen Salgado and Hortense Villalobos were among the forty-six graduating students. A year later, Mary Argumedo, Consuelo Judy Camacho and Johnny Rocha graduated with thirty-two other students. In January 1947, another group of seniors graduated mid year, including Barney Leon, Ivadell Muñoz and William Salazar. Salazar also won a scholarship award for maintaining “consistently high grades throughout his high school career. He has won 16 A grades out of

¹³⁰ “118 Students Will Complete Courses At Elementary and Junior High Schools,” *The Magnet, The West Des Moines Express*, May 7, 1942, Vol. 49, No. 33.

¹³¹ Valley High School Alumni Database Records, Valley High School, West Des Moines, Iowa.

¹³² Valley High School Alumni Database Records, Valley High School, West Des Moines, Iowa.

a possible 32, which is an outstanding record.”¹³³ Seniors Dolores Fernandez and Josephine Vasquez also graduated in this year.

Also during the 1946-1947 school year, a series of photos run in The Express also provided indication of who was in the classes during these years. In September, the first graders posed for the newspaper photographer. Some of the youngsters included Freddy Gallardo, Tommy Muñoz, Marcellina Meza, Anita Perez, Lola Garcia, Lupe Alcantor and Joe Perez. In October and November of the same year, several different classes posed for photos. Kindergartners Everett Murillo, Raymond Murillo and Rosie Moreno of the kindergarten class; fifth graders Salvador Vasquez, Margaret Argumedo, Irene Muñoz, Troy Moreno, Mary Garcia, Mary Enriquez, Ramona Gallardo, Josephine Argumedo, and Stella Moreno; fourth graders Raymond Rocha, Fernando Moreno, Martha Salazar, Mary Murillo, Mary Lou Muñoz, Cruzeta Diaz; third graders Carmen Argumeda, Rosie Enriquez, Edward Ramirez, Mary Deaz, Delphine Vasquez, and Gene Ramirez; second graders Ronnie Vasquez, Joe Camacho, Frank Rodriguez, Rita Perez, Lucy Moreno, Dick Munoz, Danny Moreno, Dickie Ramirez, Jackie Murillo. The 7-A2 class was represented in January of 1947, including students John Gallardo, Olga Vasquez, Mary Ellen Rodriguez, and Jesse Valdez. Mike Murillo, Richard Diaz, Joe Murillo and Joe Valdez were likely the lone students in their respective classes of 6-A, 9-A2, 9A, and 6-A3 according to those photos and class lists. Another photo presented 8-A2 class, where Frances Salazar and Linda Rodriguez were among the students. The 7-A class photo included Richard Villalobos, Alice Salgado,

¹³³ “Salazar, Faber, Dipprey Among the Seniors Honored,” *The West Des Moines Express*, January 23, 1947, Vol. 54, No. 23.

Theresa De La Torre, and Victor Muñoz. Other junior high students posed a few weeks later, among them Frank Gallardo, Jim Salazar, and Phil Muñoz.

At the mid-year graduation of the 1947-1948 school year, several graduates listed have been mentioned quite often already: Salvador Salgado, Manuel Murillo, Manuel Valdez, Jr., Porfedia Diaz, Mary Louise Hernandez, and Catherine Gallardo. Manuel Valdez was also “awarded the Athletic Medal. He plans to keep right on playing football after graduation. He would like to do so at Drake. Considering his outstanding ability in this field, he should certainly have no trouble in carrying out his dream.”¹³⁴ By May of the same school year, fifty-nine additional students graduated, including Victor De La Torre, Lupe Diaz, Timy Leon, Ramona Rocha, Velma Rodriguez, Stella Salgado, Frank Vasquez, and Chuck Villalobos. According to alumni records, eleven Mexican students comprised the 1949 class which totaled eighty-seven. These included Virginia Enriquez, Elpedia Garcia, John F. Muñoz, Trini Muñoz, Louis Murillo, Rachel Murillo, Henry Rodriguez, Darrell Valdez, Ralph Vasquez, Alice Villalobos and Fernando Villalobos.¹³⁵

By May of 1950, a class of sixty-six graduated, among them Ermelinda Jane Murillo, Richard A. Diaz and Joseph Murillo. The following year, Phillip Muñoz, Lena Rocha, Erlinda Marie Enriquez, Frank Gallardo and Jim Salazar were part of the graduating class. Furthermore, Salazar ranked second in the top nine students of the class, with a 3.69. In 1952, the graduates included Teresa de la Torre, John Gallardo, Victor Muñoz, Mary Ellen Rodriguez, Alice Salgado, Jesse Valdez, Olga Vasquez, and Richard Villalobos. The 1953

¹³⁴ “V-H Seniors Who Won Special Commencement Honors,” *The West Des Moines Express*, January 22, 1948, Vol. 55, No. 23.

¹³⁵ Valley High School Alumni Database Records, Valley High School, West Des Moines, Iowa.

senior class totaled eighty-three, with Mike Murillo, Mary Ramirez and Joe Valdez.¹³⁶ The following year, eight of the total number of students included Mary Garcia, Abel Murillo, Mary Argumedo, Margaret Ann Argumedo, Ramona Gallardo, Irene Muñoz, Albert Salazar, and Salvador Vasquez. The alumni database for class of 1955 listed ninety total students with Cruzita Gonzales, Fernando Moreno, Mary Louise Muñoz, Mary Murillo, Ramon Rocha and Frances Valdez.¹³⁷

At the 1956 banquet for Valley High juniors and seniors, the superintendent noted that twenty-eight of the eighty-four seniors started kindergarten together and attended school together for thirteen years. One of these students was Mary Diaz. Other seniors included Carmen Argumedo, Lillian Moreno, Gene Ramirez and Edward Ramirez. Of the junior class, thirty-four of the ninety-nine started kindergarten together and graduated together in 1957. These included Joe Camacho, Ronnie Vasquez, Bobbie Valdez, Richard Muñoz, Jackie Murillo and Richard Ramirez.¹³⁸ Daniel Moreno was also part of the 1957 graduating class. The 1958 commencement roster listed Marcie Meza, Joe Fred Perez, Rita Marie Perez and Dick Ramirez. The last year examined, 1959, also included several Mexican students. Virginia Diaz, Lola Garcia, Rosalie Moreno, Anita Perez and Gilbert Sanchez all comprised part of the graduate class. As evidenced by these lists names, through the years many students of Hispanic heritage attended and graduated from the West Des Moines schools.

D. Candid Moments

The students obviously had significant interaction through a variety of opportunities, whether it be sports, academics, fine arts, or regular school attendance and graduation.

¹³⁶ Valley High School Alumni Database Records, Valley High School, West Des Moines, Iowa.

¹³⁷ Valley High School Alumni Database Records, Valley High School, West Des Moines, Iowa.

¹³⁸ "Supt. Amos Lee Tells Class Facts At Jr.-Sr. Banquet," School and Sport, *The West Des Moines Express*, April 26, 1956, Vol. 63, No. 37.

Random and casual surveys also offered the students a voice in the local newspaper from a different and fun perspective. In April 1947, the student section of the paper asked several students about their hobbies. Velma Rodriguez and Catherine Gallardo both collected scrapbooks; Rodriguez for important battles of the 34th division and for basketball games while Gallardo owned a scrapbook of Gregory Peck. Trini Muñoz's hobby was playing the piano while Alice Villalobos enjoyed dancing.¹³⁹ Other humorous accounts include the "Questions of the Month" from May 1947, "What Don't You Like About Girls" given to the boys, and "What Don't You Like About Boys" addressed to the girls. Victor De La Torre, Salvador Salgado and Henry Rodriguez all responded. De La Torre said, "Funny hats and too much make-up," while Salgado's comment was "They cause too much trouble," and Rodriguez, "Some of them cause too much trouble."¹⁴⁰ On the other side, however, Josephine Vasquez, Dee Fernandez, Porfedia Diaz, Virginia Enriquez, Alice Villalobos, Trini Muñoz, and Velma Rodriguez all contributed their opinions. Vasquez, Fernandez, Villalobos and Rodriguez agreed that conceited boys and boys who considered themselves really smart were unpleasant. Enriquez specified more with, "They're always combing their hair and they shoot too much pool," and Muñoz commented, "Some sure have the line!"¹⁴¹ A few weeks later, when students were asked their most memorable experience; Dolores Fernandez stated "The happiest day of my life will be May 23, when I receive my long-awaited, hard earned

¹³⁹ "What's Your Hobby," *The Student Express: News and Notes From the Local Schools, The West Des Moines Express*, April 10, 1947, Vol. 54, No. 33.

¹⁴⁰ "Question of the Month," *The Student Express: News and Notes From the Local Schools, The West Des Moines Express*, May 1, 1947, Vol. 54, No. 37.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

diploma (I hope).”¹⁴² Josephine Vasquez’s experience was “When I visited Radio Station KMA and met Ernest Tubbs and his Texas Troubadors. I’ll never forget that, believe me!”¹⁴³

Undoubtedly, some students attended school without participating in other activities. In all probability, these students helped their families with financial concerns and had little time to engage in the extracurriculars. However, as shown above, *many* students of Mexican origin were involved in a variety of aspects of student life. Athletics provided a good avenue, especially for the boys, to prove themselves and become known in the community. The Valdez brothers, for examples, excelled in sports and the community was proud of them. Porfedia Diaz also succeeded in doing so, represented the potential in the town. Ultimately, all the students in the schools during the examined years contributed in one way or another.

The newspaper offered graduation lists for almost every year between 1939-1959. The Valley High Alumni Database also provided numbers and names for the graduating classes for every year. Between the two, comparisons were possible but discrepancies do exist regarding numbers. Furthermore, the paper noted mid-year graduations while the alumni records only notes the entire year. The following charts are included to portray the differences, but also to provide a quick reference as to how many students graduated from Valley High School by utilizing these two sources.

¹⁴² “Most Memorable Experience,” The Student Express: News and Notes From the Local School, *The West Des Moines Express*, May 22, 1947, Vol. 54, No. 40.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

Table 3: Newspaper Accounts of Graduating Classes

Month/Year	Total Number of Graduates	Number of Latino Graduates
January 1942	18	1
May 1942	58	2
January 1943	16	2
January 1944	17	2
January 1945	17	3
May 1945	46	5
May 1946	32	2
January 1947	19	3
January 1948	18	6
May 1948	59	8
May 1950	66	3
May 1951	49	3
May 1952	69	6
May 1954	77	6
May 1956	84	5
May 1957	99	7
May 1958	117	4
May 1959	123	5

Table 4: Valley High Alumni Database Records

Year	Total Number of Graduates	Number of Latino Graduates
1940	100	1
1941	90	1
1942	82	4
1943	77	3
1944	81	3
1945	75	8
1946	45	3
1947	66	5
1948	68	9
1949	87	11
1950	68	3
1951	51	5
1952	81	8
1953	83	3
1954	80	7
1955	90	6
1956	95	5
1957	93	6
1958	118	3
1959	122	5

EPILOGUE: THE 1960s AND BEYOND...

By the end of the 1950's, many of the families had lived in the Valley Junction community for decades. Most of the parents and older generations stayed; some ventured out elsewhere in the Des Moines vicinity and a few completely moved out of Iowa. By the 1960's, however, the Latino population in the greater Des Moines area increased, resulting in more visibility and exposure to their culture and contributions to the city. Because festivals, holidays and celebrations factor so strongly into the Hispanic culture, the following examples provide insight into how Latinos became interwoven into Iowa through those ways.

While there are many different aspects and components to Hispanic culture, one recurring theme throughout it all is the cuisine. Food factors into most celebrations, including births and baptisms, funerals, fiestas, holidays, and even simple family gatherings. Some dishes have specific meanings, and a few are closely associated with particular days of the year. Others reflect the richness and spice of Mexican life in general. And although many Mexican restaurants in Des Moines and throughout the Midwest feature mainly Tex-Mex cuisine, the menu items differ from the typical "meat and potatoes" fare of Nebraska and Iowa. A quote from *La Cocina Mexicana Atraves de los Siglos Fundacion Herdez* sums up the significance of food in Hispanic culture. "El arte culinario no es una tarea mecanica, es algo que hay que hacer con alma, poniendo sentimiento y estilo, como en todo arte. Which translates: "The culinary art is not a mechanical task, it is something that has to be done with your soul, sentiment and style, like any other form of art."¹⁴⁴ Vibrancy, color,

¹⁴⁴ Maria Elena Cuervo-Lorens, *Mexican Culinary Treasures: Recipes from Maria Elena's Kitchen* (New York: Hippocrene Books, Inc., 2004), v.

tradition and passion all help define Mexican food and heritage, and are often shown through cooking.

Richard and Antonia Mosqueda opened the first Tasty Tacos restaurant opened in Des Moines in 1961, and it is one of the oldest Mexican restaurants in Des Moines. Propelled by the belief that “nada es imposible,” or “nothing is impossible,” the Mosquedas’ goal was to give the people of Des Moines a taste of fresh homemade Mexican food. By taking a family recipe and starting with very little, the Mosqueda family transformed a dream into a success. Originally trained and employed as a barber, after reading an article about Bing Crosby’s sons opening a taco business in Hollywood, Richard was determined he also could succeed with a taco restaurant. With only a few hundred dollars and a store just big enough for the kitchen and few other necessities, the Mosquedas opened their first Tasty Tacos in 1961. In the beginning, business was slow, and Richard and Antonia struggled. “Richard kept his barber shop, arriving at 7 a.m. to cut hair for eight hours before heading to the restaurant, where he, his wife and another relative worked until midnight. They sold tacos for 19 cents.”¹⁴⁵ Richard’s motto, “nada es imposible” kept him going and soon a second restaurant opened in the 1970s.

The restaurant industry is fickle, however, and four businesses that Richard opened failed. The two existing Tasty Tacos remained his focus until an accident changed his entire outlook on life. After an almost fatal car crash, a hospital stay for six months, three additional months of recover time at home, and a limp he would carry all his life, Richard decided helping others was of higher importance. “He began spending money generously on friends in need, offering loans he never expected paid back, those who knew him said, and

¹⁴⁵ Bill Reiter, ‘Nada es imposible’ *The Des Moines Register*, March 9, 2006, Community Life, 1E.

offering random acts of kindness to strangers. All he asked for in return was anonymity.”¹⁴⁶ Richard donated his time, money and effort to many various projects, including bringing a community center to Des Moines. And as he helped others, his own business flourished.

Now forty-five years after the first restaurant opened, five Tasty Tacos exist and many Des Moines residents enjoy the most popular item on the menu: the flour shell taco, with choice of filling of meat or beans. The secret recipe is certainly a success with the restaurant patrons, and the Mosquedas’ only comment is that it was perfected when they first opened business. In addition to tacos, chips and salsa are common items on menus in Mexican restaurants in the United States. Other entrees include enchiladas, burritos, chimichangas, tostadas and chalupas for food, while margaritas are a favorite Mexican beverage. Because these dishes are well known in the United States, they are in reality Americanized. These fares are typically offered in Tex-Mex restaurants, while authentic Mexican food is slightly different. However, the basic food staples for the majority of Mexican recipes are similar whether Tex-Mex or authentic.

Besides food, many popular beverages have links to Mexico as well, including the famous margarita. Raul’s, a restaurant in Des Moines that opened shortly after Tasty Tacos, was well known for their “Grandpa Margaritas.” Raul Hernandez, the owner, was born to Mexican natives and grew up in New Boston, Iowa, near Fort Madison, as part of the immigrant population employed by the railroad. After traveling to and living in Des Moines for several years, Hernandez opened his restaurant in 1962. The “Grandpa’s Margaritas are based on a recipe for a drink that Raul Hernandez’s father, Jose, used to make for officers

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 2E.

during the Mexican Revolutionary War.”¹⁴⁷ Hernandez and the Mosqueda family utilized their culture’s culinary uniqueness and traditions to successfully offer variety for the Des Moines restaurant industry.

For many Americans, a common connection made with margaritas is to Cinco de Mayo, a relatively important event in Mexican history. Hispanic culture regularly incorporates food with fiestas and national holidays, and although Cinco de Mayo is recognized differently in Mexico than in the United States, it is still a reason to enjoy the traditions. Often confused with Mexico’s Independence Day, Cinco de Mayo is actually celebrated for the famous victory on May 6, 1862, in Puebla, Mexico. Two thousand Mexican troops, under the lead of General Ignacio Zaragoza, defeated the French army of Napoleon III, numbering six thousand, which was attempting to invade Puebla. “The Battle of Puebla is remembered as an example of the Mexicans’ resilience.” said Dr. Heriberto Godina, an assistant professor from the University of Iowa.¹⁴⁸ The actual Mexican Independence Day is celebrated September 16. Cinco de Mayo might instead compare closer to one of America’s other holidays. “It’s like St. Paddy’s Day,” said Hector Avalos, director of the Latino Studies Program at ISU. “Everybody is Irish on St. Patrick’s Day.”¹⁴⁹

Even though Cinco de Mayo is not the most important Mexican holiday, many Mexicans and Americans alike come together to celebrate. “Cinco de Mayo celebrations in America focus on Mexican food and music.”¹⁵⁰ Sharing these aspects of the Mexican heritage not only assists in bridging the cultural gap, but also provides an entertaining and

¹⁴⁷ Amanda Pierre, “Raul Now Tastes Success” *The Des Moines Register*, June 12, 2004, Iowa Life, 2E.

¹⁴⁸ Amanda Pierre, “Cinco de Mayo Extols Liberty, Not Beer” *The Des Moines Register*, May 4, 2004, Iowa Life, 2E.

¹⁴⁹ Dana Boone, “Educators: In Mexico, Cinco de Mayo isn’t Party” *The Des Moines Register*, May 4, 2006, Around Iowa, 6B.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

fun occasion. Des Moines, with its growing Latino community, has recently begun to offer events to celebrate the historic victory. In 2005, “The Valley Junction area of West Des Moines held its first Cinco de Mayo celebration on Fifth Street Thursday. The event recognized the Mexican heritage associated with the community.”¹⁵¹ By offering a variety of activities and portraying different aspects of Mexican heritage, these celebrations provided entertainment for everyone involved. “A ceremony with the mayor honoring the Mexican families in the area, and crowning a king and queen, will kick off the night. There will also be musical performances, paper flower making, displays of historical photos, storytelling, a vendor making wax hands, and authentic Mexican food.”¹⁵²

Another Mexican holiday briefly mentioned in the Introduction is Dia de Los Muertos. To a certain extent, Dia de Los Muertos may equate to Memorial Day in the United States, as visiting grave sites of deceased relatives to retain the memory of loved ones is common for both. There the similarities end, however, as many people not of Mexican heritage may view the actual activities at the graveyards as odd and even borderline morbid.

But what makes the visits distinctive in Mexico is their festive mood. Family members tell anecdotes about those who have passed on; special meals are prepared; food, drink, even cigarettes are placed beside graves, together with religious trinkets. Bright flowers are in profusion, as is colored tissue paper. These visits are not morbid affairs but rather moments of communion with the dead, and a sign of acceptance that while death comes to everyone, life goes on.¹⁵³

Therefore, rather than mourning the deceased family members, their lives are joyously celebrated. Fireworks, incense, candles and marigolds, the Aztec symbol of death, are present to help create the mood. Food, usually the special dish of mole, is often brought

¹⁵¹ Mark Pleiss, “Junction Fiesta: Community Celebrates Cinco de Mayo” *The West Des Moines Register*, May 10, 2005, 1.

¹⁵² Yang, 11.

¹⁵³ Peter Standish and Steven M. Bell, *Culture and Customs of Mexico* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2004), 51.

into the graveyard as well, and people gather together to celebrate life. Outside the graveyards, and around towns, the event also permeates the atmosphere. People eat snacks and candy such as “little pop-up coffins for children, sugar skulls and el pan de los muertos”¹⁵⁴ (bread of the dead, which is buns or loaves decorated with bones). Dia de Los Muertos is celebrated at different levels throughout Mexico; in Pomuch Mexico, the actual bones of the deceased are stored nearby and each year brought out. For the Mayan Indians in this community, “the last days of October are devoted to cleaning the bones: dusting, polishing, scrubbing and rearranging the skeletal remains of family members in time for the Day of the Dead, when Mexicans welcome the souls of the dearly departed back to Earth.”¹⁵⁵ This particular ritual again portrays the respect and honor held for those who have died. Ultimately, however, Dia de Los Muertos focuses on life and family.

Although many rural regions in Mexico continue the long standing traditions in celebrating their holidays, many larger cities are becoming more Americanized. In turn, the United States is beginning to incorporate more Mexican culture and heritage into its society, even if specifics may not be completely authentic. From agricultural and railroad workers to Jimmy Buffet’s Margaritaville and Taco Johns/Taco Bell, Hispanic influence has been a part of the United States for well over a hundred years. While not every aspect of Hispanic culture is understood, attempts have been made to provide clear, in depth knowledge of the rich traditions associated with the people from Mexico, and Central and South America.

In 1968, President Lyndon B. Johnson proclaimed National Hispanic Heritage Week to take place in September. In 1988, this extended to a month long celebration, from

¹⁵⁴ Herb Kernecker, *In Mexico, Do as the Mexicans Do: The Chued-In Guide to Mexican Life, Language and Culture* (McGraw Hill, 2005), 37.

¹⁵⁵ Associated Press, “Mexican Indians Get Ready to Welcome Spirits of the Departed” *Quad-City Times*, October 30, 2004.

September 15 to October 15. Countries represented in this observance include Mexico, Spain, Central and South America, and the Caribbean. September 15 was not chosen randomly; five Latin American countries celebrate their independence on this day: Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua. And of course, Mexico's Independence is recognized on September 16.

Also, some states, Iowa specifically, hold special events to promote further education about Latino culture, as well as celebrating the richness and diversity. Since 2002, Iowa's Latino Heritage Festival, supported by Latino Resources, Inc., a non-profit organization, offers Latino dance, music, food, children's activities, arts, and exhibits to Des Moines and surrounding communities. This event proves perspectives have changed since the 1950s and 60s, when Latinos were occasionally discriminated against due to misconceptions. While not all older Latino residents experienced discrimination throughout their early years in the town, acceptance and integration into the community certainly was not immediate considering all the barriers. The recent and current programs and events that attempt to expose and educate the community offer evidence that awareness of this rich ethnic heritage is increasing.

Although some of the celebrations mentioned above have become commercialized and perhaps even Americanized, such as Cinco de Mayo, many other customs and festivals of Latinos are also traditionally celebrated and remembered. In today's version of the "melting pot" many different ethnicities and cultures exist. For many Hispanic immigrants, however, both the ones in the early 1900's and the ones today, they simply desire better opportunities for themselves and more importantly, their family. While change is difficult for many people, it is a fact of life. The early Mexican immigrants in Valley Junction

experienced a very extreme form of change. The fact that they stuck together to help each other out, while continuing to survive and flourish proves their ability to adapt and succeed.

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