

Part IV

Business and Work Force

Changing opportunities and changing technology have resulted in economic growth for Georgetown's Hispanic community. Whereas early settlers worked primarily in manual jobs, today's residents work at a wide variety of professions. According to Linda Cisneros, "Hispanics are taking root ... in the city's business community."

Early Years

Town Businesses:

Restricted opportunities for minorities meant that most of Georgetown's early Hispanic residents worked in manual jobs. One major employer during the 1930's was a turkey slaughterhouse located on the corner of Rock and 9th Streets, where 80% of the workers were Hispanic. Workers were hired to pluck the turkeys then haul them into town to sell. Other businesses who employed Hispanic workers included the Texas Cafe, Peasley's Meat Market, and the Ralph Bakery.

Working in San Jose:

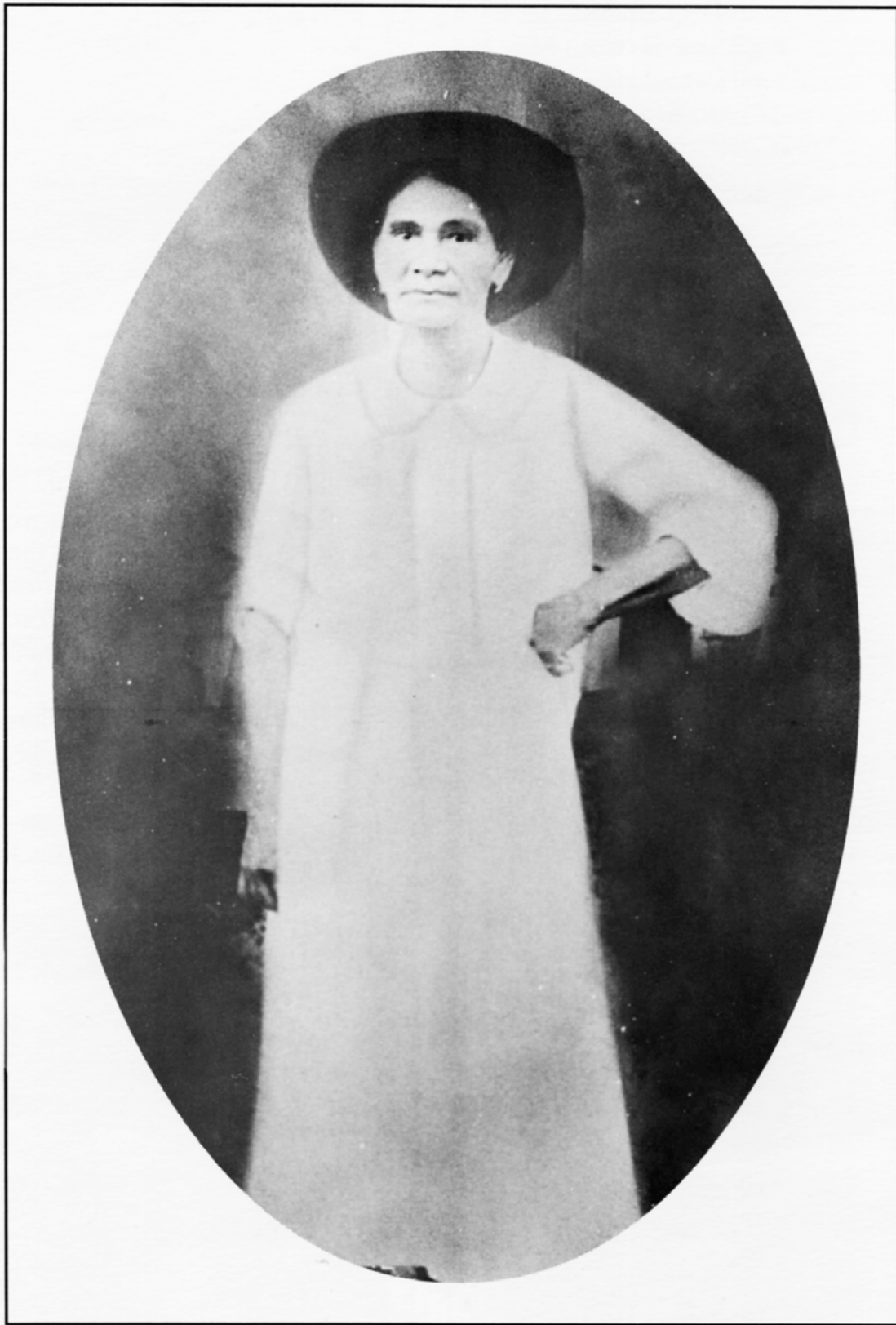
Some of Georgetown's early Hispanic residents were able to work within their community, often providing necessary services and help to their neighbors. Angelita Alejandro Garcia and Mage Ramirez, for instance, worked as midwives during the 1920's and 1930's. Margaret Miranda recalls Garcia, saying, "She (my grandmother) delivered me right here in Georgetown in 1930. She delivered lots of babies; she even helped the poor [women] who didn't have any money." The midwives were also known to cure residents of "susto" (fright) and "ojo" (the evil eye.)

Several residents started successful neighborhood businesses during this time. Georgetown's first Mexican restaurants were Antonio Martinez's Restaurant, located at the corner of 8th Street and

Martin Luther King; Brijido Rodriguez's Cafe and Dance Platform, and Benito Perez's "Chili Stand." Santiago Sanchez became locally famous for peddling delicious homemade tamales. Other early Hispanic-owned businesses included the Hernandez Grocery, owned by Don Ramon Hernandez; Adolfo's Grocery, run by Adolfo Barrera; Eugenio and Henry Zavala's barber shops; and Maldonado Kash and Karry Grocery, founded by Eustacio and Josefa Maldonado.

Although their activities were technically illegal, bootleggers also provided valuable goods and services to their neighbors. During World War II food rationing, Julio Miranda remembers bootlegging lard through the back door of Peasley's Meat Market. He made little profit, doing it because he knew that rationing policies were making it difficult for his friends and family to buy the food they needed. "I gave all the money I made to Mr. Peasley," he recalls. "I did it because I wanted to help my people."

At about this same time, Eugenio Zavala became well-known throughout the Hispanic community as a bootlegger of beer and whiskey. Because there had been no saloons in town since 1919, bootleggers were the only source for residents who wished to purchase alcohol. Zavala was eventually jailed by Federal agents, but the Georgetown Sheriff "would let him out at night or during the day as his job required," says Miranda. "The two were mutual acquaintances ... The sheriff was a bootlegger too!"



*Angelita Alejandro Garcia was a midwife to the Hispanic Community in the early
1900's.
(Courtesy of Josefina Ramirez)*

Migrant Work:

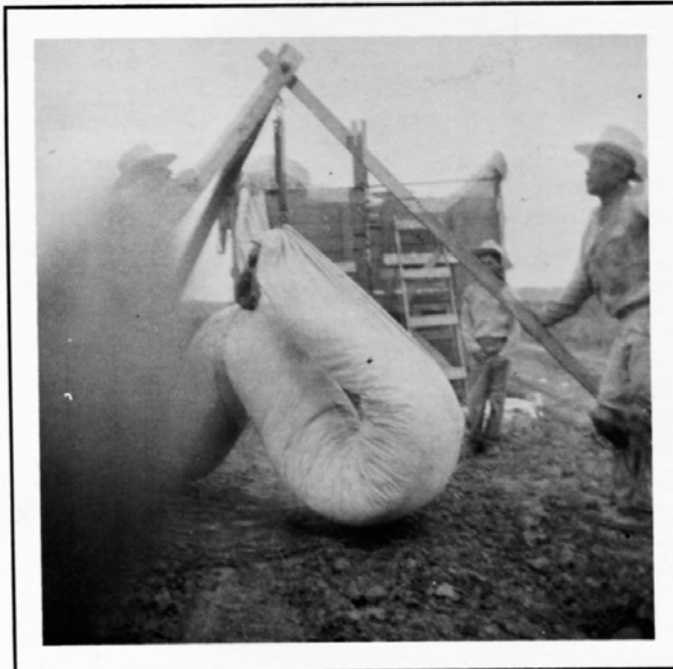
Although many Hispanics worked in town, the vast majority were farm workers — often migrant workers. Each year between May and September these families traveled north to Montana, Wisconsin and Colorado to work on farms. Most jobs involved picking beets, tomatoes, cherries, apples or cotton.



John Miranda describes a typical job: “The Maize [corn], you didn't gather it with a combine. You had to take a pocket knife all day long and put it in piles ... It was very rough because all your work you had to do bending down and your back would hurt all day long. It was a job to survive, but it wasn't a job to get rich on.”

During the picking season many homes in the Barrio were deserted, awaiting their occupants' return in the fall. Among those who migrated each year during the 1940's and 1950's were the Eustacio Maldonado, Pedro Guerrero, Amado Hurtado, Ramon Hernandez, Isidro Flores, and Margarito Lopez families.

By the late 1950's however, many of these families had moved from farm work into other kinds of jobs. One reason was that widespread use of combines and other farm machinery made migrant work harder to find. More importantly, Martha Acosta explains, “The families realized that this migrating was taking its toll on their children's education. Their children were mastering the English language, and this made school much more possible for them.” Times were changing in Georgetown, and new opportunities awaited this new generation of San Jose residents.



Cotton workers in the fields near Georgetown (summer 1956). This series of photos shows the workers picking cotton, dragging the heavy sacks behind, then weighing it and loading it on a truck. Some sacks weighed as much as 200 pounds. Eustacio Maldonado and Carmel Dela Cruz are shown weighing a 160 pound sack of cotton. (Courtesy of Martha Maldonado Acosta)

Georgetown's Hispanic Workers often migrated as far north as Montana for summer work.



*The Tomato Fields near Chicago
(Courtesy of Martha Maldanado Acosta)*



*Josefa and Jaciento Maldanado picking beets
in Hardin, Montana (Courtesy of Martha
Maldanado Acosta)*



*Martha Maldanado (reaching to ladder) and her family picking Wisconsin cherries
(Courtesy of Martha Maldanado Acosta)*

Hispanic Business Today

Today's San Jose Community represents a wide range of professions. More residents are well educated than in previous generations, and Hispanic-owned businesses make up an important part of Georgetown industry. Hispanic-owned businesses include many of the city's grocery stores, retail businesses, automotive centers, beauty and barber shops, and construction contractors.

Among the current owners of these businesses are Marcus and Susie Ramos, Daniel and Lois Vasquez, Henry Vasquez, Olivia Lopez, Tony Ancira, Maggie Lopez, Willie Vela, Vickie Valdez, Domingo and Ray Bracamontez, Jesse Torrez, Rosa Torrez Martinez, Nat Lopez, Isabel Carranco, Vincente Camacho, Pete Dela Cruz, and Frank Hernandez. These businesses provide vital goods and services to the entire Georgetown area.