

Part III

Schools

Getting an education has been important to Hispanic children and parents throughout their Georgetown history. The only big differences have been in the kind of schools, the availability of educational opportunities, and living circumstances which affected the way children learned then and now.

Schools Before World War II

In the years before World War II, Hispanic children were forbidden to attend Georgetown and other area public schools. Instead, they attended the “Escuela Mexicana”, a one-room schoolhouse located at the corner of 10th and Bridge Streets near the San Gabriel River. Here children of the 1920’s and 1930’s learned to read and write in Spanish from teachers like Otila Jiron and “Professor” Carter. Jovita Zavala is one of many residents who recalls walking across town

— there were no school buses available — to the old metal bridge which led over the river to the school.

Children who lived too far to walk to the Escuela often were unable to attend school. Josefa Rodriguez, for example, was educated at home during this time. She explains, “We lived a long way from school ... but Papa taught us how to read, write, and add.” Some children whose parents were unable to teach them never had an opportunity to be educated at all.

After World War II: Integration

After World War II, local policies changed to allow Hispanic children to attend area public schools. For most San Jose residents, this meant going to Annie Purl Elementary school at Main and University Avenue. Many children during this time enjoyed their classes and having the opportunity to learn more English. As Margaret Miranda recalls, “School — it was great. I knew a little bit of English, and there, at school, I learned even more.”

Other children had a more difficult adjustment. Prejudice and the language barrier sometimes strained relationships between Hispanic and non-Hispanic students. Josefa Rodriguez remembers, “They said that the kids who went to school came back with their clothes all torn because others would catch them and beat them up. My Mama and Papa were scared.” Similarly,

John Miranda says, “The first thing I had to learn [in school] was how to tell them to quit. My first word was ‘quit’ ‘cause they were banging me too hard — I was the new kid.” He adds, however, “As soon as I learned [the other kids’] ways I was just one of the bunch as it usually is in school ... I just had to learn their language and they had to learn mine.”

Another ongoing obstacle to San Jose children’s education was financial difficulty. Until the late 1950’s a large percentage of area children had to quit school early to help support their families. John Miranda, for instance, dropped out after the first grade to help on his father’s farm. Margaret Miranda left school after seventh grade to take a job. Children of migrant workers missed months of school each year when their families traveled out of state to find work.



Pictured, left to right: front row; Jesse Zavala, Unknown, Unknown, Unknown, Unknown, 'LaMuca', Manuel Zavala, Ponciano Zavala, Unknown; second row; Concha Frias Tafoya, unknown, Emma Zamora, Mage Vasquez, unknown, Santos Vasquez, Lupe Zavala, Anita Zamora Diaz, Herminia Flores Riojas, unknown, Javita Zamora, Maria "Chuia" Flores, unknown, unknown, Matilde Zamora, Gerardo?; third (short) row; Pedro Martinez, unknown, unknown; back row; Inez Valadez Lopez, Marta Martinez, Eva Davila, unknown, unknown, Concha Davila, unknown, Otelva Vasquez, Sra. Otila Jiron, Southwestern Professor Dr. Carter, Juanita Vasquez, Richard Vasquez, Sr., Vicente Hurtado, Procoro Ochoa. (Courtesy of Petra Lopez Bracamontez)

Education Today

Today there are Hispanic students in all of Georgetown's public schools, with many more graduating from high school than in previous decades. A substantial number of these students go on to college, sometimes paid for with scholarships provided by the community. In 1980 the first community scholarships, sponsored by the Los Unidos Club, went to Delfina Zavala, Henrietta Marin, and Michael Valdez.

Education has helped many Hispanics to rise to prominent positions in the city and in the state.

Lorenzo "Shorty" Valdez, for example, has served as a City Council member for the past two years. Llorente Navarrette works as a congressional aide for U.S. Representative Greg Laughlin and serves on the school board. Another resident, Jesse Lozano, led the Georgetown Volunteer Fire Department before taking an instructor position with the city public schools. These few examples show the ever-widening range of educational and professional goals being pursued by members of the Hispanic community.