

Washington County Museum
Oral History Interview with Daniel Garza
At: Centro Cultural
Date: May 17, 1978

Informant: Daniel Garza, Volunteer Worker, Centro Cultural, a volunteer organization geared to assisting migrant families with their various problems
Interviewer: ??
Transcriber: Ellen Rogalin

D = Daniel
I = Interviewer

I: Mr. Garza gives a formal history of the Mexican-American migrant laborer and how they arrived here in Washington County. Mr. Garza, at one time a migrant worker himself, arrived in Washington County in the early 1960s.

I: We can start. Just to begin, I'd like you to introduce yourself.

D: I'm Daniel Garza. I've been living in Washington County since 1966 in this county and I been doing a lot of the labor work in the fields and work for other people. I got _____ for other people, too. And some people got a big bonus. Some people they make a pretty good living, some of 'em. Some of 'em not.

I: So how old are you now?

D: Well, I'm 60 years, I'm 58 years old, and that's what I been telling you, with some people they take good care of people who come into the camps and some of them not. ____ clean up the camps and all that, you know.

I: I'd like to ask you a couple more questions about the camps, but first I'd like to know a little bit about your own personal history. You mentioned you're 58 years old. Where were you born?

D: I'm born in Texas, all my life.

I: Your family? Your parents are from Texas?

D: Yeah, all in Texas. We come here from _____, _____ Texas.

I: How about before Texas? Did your family come from Mexico? Do you know that?

D: No, we don't have no business in Mexico. We're American citizens, of the United States. Home is _____ Texas, and the same my fathers, in Texas. We're American citizens in Texas. I've been to the service in 1942, ___ Uncle Sam, in the Army and I spent three years, about three years, three years and half in the Army, and right now I'm disabled to work, ____ the

veterans disabled me to work. _____ operations _____, a hernia operation. The first hernia operation I had, it was, I was at the farm _____.

I: What did your family do down in Texas then?

D: I was working for the _____, I was working in Houston, Texas, and my family was living in _____ Texas. I was by myself ___ over there, Houston, Texas, working for the company. At the company where I was working, there was the junkyards in Texas. I do all the kind of work. I'd do some labor work and I'd do the head man work; everything. [chuckle] And I had a little experience in, you know, in _____ing other people. Maybe sometimes I had about 10, 10 or 11 people working for me, under me, all the time. I like was a boss man to them.

5:00

D: I received the orders, _____ the orders of what I was supposed to do.

I: Were there a lot of farm laborers there in the community then?

D: Yeah. I used to work all my life to rent some ground. I rent a third and fourth, you know, bed. The rent, you know. When the _____ was coming in, you make three or four bales, you give one to the donor and you keep the three. The guy he rent you the place he would bring nothing. His rent go free. All, I need to pay everything, all the bills.

I: Was that common among Mexican-Americans then, to rent land down in that area?

D: Yeah, yeah. There was a bunch of farmers in there. All, most were Spanish speaking at that time. Just a little later on you know they . . . Well, I said these, the people, you have some more money you going to rent the places and you take them away from the poor people. They don't have no chance no more. You see the rich people _____ and they rent the places and take them clean away __ keep _____ing money _____. And we never did pay cash money. The rich people they was paying cash money and they rent all the places and took them away from the poor people.

I: When did the . . . Well, before I ask this question, you mentioned you're an American and you definitely are then. What do people of Mexican descent call themselves – Chicanos, Mexican-American?

D: Well, the most I know, the Spanish people, some call them Spanish people and some Latino and some Americanos, some of them.

I: So what do you call yourself then?

D: Well, I call myself, you know, I was a Latino-Americano. I was born in the United States. I think I had the rights to call that. Others were coming from Mexico; others were coming from the northern parts. I was born in Texas. I had the rights to do it _____ to do it. I am an American citizen of the United States.

I: What does the term Chicano indicate?

D: Well, the Chicano, I don't even know, I can't explain the name. I never hear that Chicano before. I never heard that word before. It was 1972, 1973 when I heard that word Chicano. I think most of that word come down from California, most of the words come from California. I think the same, the **petrucco**, I don't think you can remember that word, what **petrucco** was. **Petrucco** had, was a fancy pants, used to be that you _____ them there and called **petruccos** and they had a piece of change like over here and the people was all right, you know. I don't have nothing to complain from **petrucco**. Was nice, clean and all that, you know.

10:00

D: And I don't get no complaints from **petrucco**. It was nice people to me.

I: How about the term bracero? Are you familiar with that?

D: Braceros, braceros is what come for those things like what are called braceros are sometimes from Mexico or sometimes from the other states. That's why they're called braceros. Like I had, you know, a long time ago we had a lot of people on contract from Mexico. United States contract out people from Mexico to come to work to the United States. This ones we would call braceros.

I: The government would go down into the country of Mexico . . .

D: Well, it has some kind of system to put in, they put in some office ___ the Rio Grande, this side of the border, and from there, you know, they say I got so many jobs I need so much ___ to come to work, and he contract out people from Mexico to come to work for six months or seven months or maybe a year. They had a contract from Mexico to the United States. That's what we call the braceros. It's a contract.

I: It was legal then?

D: Yes, it was legal. They're the same when _____ went to Michigan, was in, I can't remember what year it was, but it was a long time ago. We went to work on the sugar beets there in Michigan. And when we ___ a contract, we went for so many months to work that way. We went from San Antonio Texas to Michigan, Lansing, Michigan, and the contract, well the contract it explained everything, you know, in the contract for the workers. If you want to do this, you have so much acres to contract _____ and the company, it was holding the contract. You sign the contract. You go over there. Make all their jobs and they pay you so much per acre in the contract.

I: When did the migrants start traveling around the United States?

D: Well, I think, I can't remember perhaps it was a long time ago, it was the depression, it was in 1932 when they had that depression and most people were moving around.

I: Originally, then, most Latino-Americans were from Texas, then?

D: Some from Texas, some from Mexico, some are from New Mexico, some are from Arizona and all places, go up to Montana and go up to Michigan. They went to different states to work.

I: Why was this?

D: Well, I'm thinking for most of the people they want to – maybe about '36 or '37, at that time, when we first get into Michigan, you know. They had the guys to take the people and the trucks from San Antonio Texas. It's all contractors, in San Antonio Texas, take them all down to Michigan. Some off to Michigan, some off to Montana, some went off to northern parts from there. The company pays so much to get you there and they pay someone to the driver when he takes the people he needs.

15:05

D: And to get him to the company, to report to the company to go to work. And when we got all there, the company set up, they had to set up, they had some houses and all that all ready for the people to go, to go stay with the work.

I: Why was it that the migrants starting to move? Were they unemployed where they were?

D: Well, the most you know my cousin has trucks, he has some trucks, you know, and he takes some people for Crystal _____ all the way to Michigan. And he had a contract with _____, that's what they called it and so they got people to work that way.

I: Was it really hard times for the Mexican-Americans during the '30s in Texas where you lived?

D: Yeah it was pretty hard _____. At that time we had inflation and the people, you know, don't make enough money to live. That's why, that's why a lot of people was travel to most of the other states. Especial I was working in the fields at that time, that was in 1934 and '35, I was working the _____ fields that time. We'd cut some spinach in Texas and sometimes you might ____ 30 cents a day a person. Rough times. I used to work in the field pick some strawberries in _____ Texas – you know how much you pay me? 35 cents a day. Bad years. 35 cents a day. You think that a person's going to make it especially if he's got a big family?

I: It would be tough.

D: Yeah.

I: Was that the case with most of your other fellow Mexican-Americans then?

D:

32:43

I: So then you did live in the camps?

D: Well, before then, yeah _____

33:44

D: _____ a labor camp then. You rent the houses for so much a month, I think it was 40 dollars a month, that I was paying was 40 dollars a month at that time. And when we come in there to the labor camp, _____ in May, you see the, the day you come to work, to pick those blueberries, they pay the rent. As long as you help him, they pay the rent for three months. But after three months if you want to stay you need to pay your own rent, _____ the harvest season, so that's all, for three months.

I: There were many people staying the camps?

D: Some of them stayed, yeah. _____

I: How could they afford to pay the rent year-round?

D: Well, for some, some would look for work and some might find some work. ____ I was working myself that time when I stayed that year, you know, and I rent for _____ month . . .

I: Would most of the migrants go back to Texas?

D: Most would go to Texas, some to New Mexico, some to Arizona, all the places. Some of them from Mexico. There were a lot of people there.

I: Aliens or . . . ?

D: Some were aliens, some of them not. Some must have got a passport to come.

I: How about that? Has there been a problem with the aliens up here in Washington County and migrant laborers from Mexico?

D: I don't think so. You just see the people that are working here, especial the peoples and American citizens _____. They going to look for something new. But you got more protection. Especial my boys, they got a good education

all my boys. They made it through all the schools and some of them go to college. They're not going to go back to the farm. He's planning to do a better job and make a better living. Well, I don't blame him. He's got a good education.

I: These aliens that come up here, the Mexicans that have come up here, do they replace the migrants from Texas wanting to work in the fields?

D: Well, I'll tell you, most of the people that are staying here right now I don't think, I don't think there's very many working on the farms. Maybe you find, you find 20 farmers working in the farm _____ . . . come from Texas, stay there . . . But some of them, some of them work on the farm for someone's got a good position _____

I: What percentage then, say back in the early 60s when there was five thousand or so migrant laborers, how many were actually from Mexico and actually able to move here?

D: We don't have too much down there where I lived, maybe about ten percent or maybe less than that. Most of them come from Texas, Arizona, New Mexico and other places.

I: And then that ten percent figure just gradually increased through the years?

D: It increased more than that, I think.

I: Up to what now?

D: It's increased to twenty-five or thirty percent, there are more today.

40:00

D: _____ I think that most of the people, they're from Mexico. Maybe he's got two three families from there _____. I think that most of the people's from Mexico.

I: How do the farmers in this area get the Mexicans or illegals to come up to their farm? How does that work? How's that done?

D: Well, I want to tell you one thing. I had problems, too. I was a farmer myself in Texas and at that time was a lot of people coming up from Mexico too. We lived pretty close to the border, about a little over three hundred miles from the border. A lot of people just can't make it there in Mexico and they'd come, especially if they had car or something like that, they'd come. A lot of people just come _____ and they said well, we'll give you a job. Well, see I was a farmer. . . You want to work? Come in. But I'm not going to ask them _____ That's no way to get them. That's _____ It's the same as I tell you. I don't want to put them in this kind of position. You _____ a chance to work in the field. You come to tell me . . . I'm the boss man, you come and tell me you got any work . . . and I say well, yeah, you want to work? I don't care where you're from. _____ from Mexico or from Germany. I don't _____ it, but I need the work. _____, you do the work.

I: Do you think some of the farmers have recruited some of these workers from Mexico?
Contract laborers to use in the States?

D: I dunno. I can't tell you

I: All right then, during the harvest season would the migrant families stay pretty much in the camps or would they have their own cultural life among themselves you think or?

D: Well, they mostly come to the camps _____ and they stay in the camps

I: They wouldn't have much contact with the people, the native Oregonians that lived in surrounding areas?

D: _____ Sometimes Centro helped the people, hired some people and all that. That's why we got this place, for the people. You know, when they need something, well, you see, we know something, we can tell the people.

I: What kind of services do you provide here at Centro?

D: Well, we can provide the most ___ to help the people.

I: In what ways, do you think?

D: The way we can, that's _____ We can get all the information we want. housing, medical services, things like that.

I: Do you work together with other agencies, government agencies, or how about the Oregon Rural Opportunities?

45:00

D: No. We have some people _____ and sometimes we send them to the camps, when we get those professions in the camps _____ get some information for the camps. Sometimes, you know, sometimes we _____, sometimes _____ call for the bread, what do you call it, for the baker _____ and we get the bread for the people to help them.

I: Is there a lot of _____ families that came up originally to farm that now have been ameliorated into society here with other Oregonians, other types of occupations?

D: Well, for most of the people that were here and _____, I don't think these people are looking for jobs. _____ coming in, I think sometime next month. Some are looking for houses, places to stay. Sometimes we give help _____

I: Well, how about, you were telling me a little bit before that your children have acquired an education to get out of the farm. Is that something most migrant families want their children to do?

D: Well some, I won't say all but some of them. Some of the people, you know, especial right now with the young people, some of them want a better education to get better jobs _____ working on the farm you never get nothing, you don't find a job, you don't find a job _____

I: Do you see the migrants, then, or some of the families that stay here in Oregon improving their lot?

D: Some of them. I'll tell you one thing, working on the farm, you look at insurance. This is one of the first that you need it there especial when you're a farm worker, you see somebody get sick. _____ the farmers; he can't pay that kind of insurance. The only insurance you pay is for yourself; your workers _____ but they ain't got no insurance on the farm. So somebody else coming in, you pay from your own pocket.

I: OK, I think we've covered quite a bit of ground here in this hour of conversation. That's about all the questions that I have, unless you want to add something in conclusion about the whole migrant situation or the . . .

D: Well, I told most of my story, but I think you would hear the same for another person.

I: I would hear the same from another person?

D: Most of the same words

50:00

I: Then your story's pretty much representative of the other migrant men? OK, well thank you very much.

SEARCH TERMS

Agricultural Laborers – History
Agriculture
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Aliens
Arizona
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Camps
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Communities
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