

Ethnic Oral History Project, 1977-1978

Fresno Historical Society

Antonio G. Garcia

Oral history is in Spanish. Transcript is in English.

Antonio Garcia Garcia was interviewed on March 23, 1977. Garcia was born on June 13, 1905 in Churintzio, Mexico. Garcia says that he came to Madera, California in 1923 in order to find better work. Garcia describes moving around various cities in California, and how he would normally find work on ranches. Garcia mentions only getting paid two dollars per day to pick grapes in Sanger. He recalls a few Mexican families being in West Fresno when he arrived in 1924. Garcia worked on a railroad in Yosemite for one to two years and learned how to line railroad tracks. Garcia goes on to recall several Mexican business owners within the Fresno community.

Garcia does not remember facing any discrimination in the United States. He discusses the Mexican barrios and how the *Sociedad Morelos* worked to improve the community. Garcia recalls Mexican-American kids in Pinedale teasing him for being unable to speak English. Garcia was in Mexico at the time of World War I and did not know what was going on in the United States. Garcia was not accepted into the Army or the Navy during World War II because of an injury to his hand. Garcia also recalls the Prohibition Era and details how he acquired liquor during this time. Garcia talks about working in Firebaugh during the Depression as well as how much money he made. Garcia says he did not participate in politics because he was not a U.S. citizen.

Garcia says he is not good at speaking or understanding English and cites this as the reason he never tried to gain citizenship. Garcia talks about political leaders who helped the Mexican community positively. Garcia recalls feeling happy after World War II was over because everyone he knew came back home. Garcia says that after the war, life for Mexicans improved greatly. Garcia briefly mentions the Bracero Program and how the program took Mexican men to war.

Interviewer: Marie Cassano
Transcript: 10 pages
Audio: 00:41:48
OH-EOHP-MA06

Interview with ANTONIO GARCIA GARCIA

CASSANO: Today, March 23, 1977, I Marie Cassano, a student at CSUF, enrolled in an Ethnic Studies class in Oral History, will tape an interview with Antonio Garcia Garcia, a Mexican, male, senior citizen, born June 13, 1905, and his daughter, Maria Carmela Garcia. Maria will be taping the interview, asking questions in Spanish and Mr. Garcia will be answering in Spanish, as he speaks very little English. Okay, Maria, continue...

MARIA: Dad, what year where you born?

GARCIA: In 1905

MARIA: What month?

GARCIA: June

MARIA: What day?

GARCIA: The 13th.

MARIA: Where were you born?

GARCIA: In Churintzio, Michoacan

MARIA: Mexico?

GARCIA: Mexico.

MARIA: When did you first come to the United States?

GARCIA: In 1923, October.

MARIA: Why did you come here?

GARCIA: Because I didn't have a job in Mexico and I came here to work.

MARIA: Did you have any friends or relatives living here?

GARCIA: Yes, my brother, my uncle and Aunt. At that time, I arrived in Madera. From Madera, we moved to Pinedale, in 1924. From Pinedale, I went to work in Livingston.

MARIA: In what work did you do?

GARCIA: Ranch.

MARIA: Picking grapes or what?

GARCIA: It didn't matter, as long as I worked on a ranch.

MARIA: How did you come to the United States? Bus? Plane? or boat?

GARCIA: I came in a pick-up from El Paso. In Madera, my brother moved to Pinedale and I came with him to Pinedale. There, in Pinedale, I was working on a ranch. For a time, I worked in the lumber mill in Pinedale. Then I went to Livingston and lived there about 15 years. Then I went to San Jose and then I lived in Watsonville.

MARIA: In Watsonville, what type of work did you do?

GARCIA: There I picked peas?

MARIA: How much did they pay you for picking peas?

GARCIA: 25¢ the hamper. Later, I returned to Pinedale, where I went to work in Sanger.

MARIA: In Sanger, what did you do?

GARCIA: I also worked on a ranch.

MARIA: On the ranch did you pick grapes?

GARCIA: Yes, I picked grapes?

MARIA: Then, how much did they pay you?

GARCIA: They paid us \$2.00 and meals.

MARIA: Per day?

GARCIA: Yes, per day.

GARCIA: Later, I went back to Watsonville to pick peas again and then I went to Atascadero.

MARIA: Where did you work there?

GARCIA: Picking peas also.

MARIA: Did you find any difference in wages from place to place?

GARCIA: No, it was the same. I worked in Half Moon Bay picking peas too.

MARIA: Where did you reside the longest?

GARCIA: Pinedale.

MARIA: What were your parents' names?

GARCIA: My dad was named, Francisco Garcia.

MARIA: What was his occupation?

GARCIA: He was a farm laborer in Mexico?

MARIA: What was your mother's name?

GARCIA: My mother's name was Maria Garcia, she did housework.

MARIA: How many brother did you have?

GARCIA: I can't remember, but I think eleven (11), most of them are already dead.

MARIA: Where were your parents born?

GARCIA: My father was born in Churintzio, also.

MARIA: And your mother?

GARCIA: Me, Mama, she was born in El Salto. El Salto is the name of the ranch where she was born.

MARIA: Was El Salto close to Churintzio?

GARCIA: Yes, it was close to there.

MARIA: When did you first come to Fresno County?

GARCIA: In Fresno?

MARIA: In what year did you come?

GARCIA: 1924.

MARIA: Is it true, that you moved here because your brother lived here?

GARCIA: Yes.

MARIA: When you came to Pinedale, was there a lot of Mexican families?

GARCIA: Yes, there were quite a few, because they worked in the lumber mill.

MARIA: About how many families were there?

GARCIA: Quite a few, about 50, I would say.

MARIA: Did you ever go to West Fresno or Chinatown?

GARCIA: Not very often.

MARIA: Where there any Mexican families in West Fresno?

GARCIA: Of course, quite a bit.

MARIA: At that time, what occupations did the Mexicans have?

GARCIA: I really don't know, but most of them worked on the ranches.

MARIA: Ranches, railroads, or what?

GARCIA: Railroad yes.

MARIA: Where was the railroad?

GARCIA: I worked in Yosemite.

MARIA: How many years?

GARCIA: About a year or two.

MARIA: Did you like it there?

GARCIA: Yes, and I also worked with carpenters fixing the puestas of the railroad line tracks, then they switched me to carpentry helper. I just checked to see if trellises were good; and if not, we took the them out and laid new ones.

MARIA: How ^{much} ~~and~~ did they pay you?

GARCIA: I don't remember.

MARIA: Didn't you also work in the lumber mill?

GARCIA: For a time.

MARIA: What did you do there?

GARCIA: There I disconnected the boards on the chains because when the boards were moving on the chains they jammed-up and I had to watch everything to make sure that they wouldn't jam. That's what I did.

MARIA: In that time, were there any professional businessmen, lawyers, or Mexicans that owned stores.

GARCIA: Not in Pinedale. Since it was a small town, there were very small stores.

MARIA: Do you remember the names of the store, or owner.

GARCIA: The owner's name?

MARIA: Yes, was it Ascencion?

GARCIA: Ascencion came later and he's still there. In that time, I don't remember who owned the store; the man died already.

MARIA: What was the name of the store?

GARCIA: I can't remember.

MARIA: Wasn't it La Provencia?

GARCIA: No, that was Ascencion. I don't think the other store had a name because it was very small.

MARIA: Was the owner Mexican?

GARCIA: Yes, the owner was Mexican.

MARIA: What about the Cucaracha?

GARCIA: La Cucaracha? Yes, there was a store by that name.

MARIA: In what part of Fresno was it?

GARCIA: La Cucaracha was on Kern Street.

MARIA: Was the proprietor also Mexican?

GARCIA: Yes, he was.

MARIA: In that time did the Mexican Americans suffer from discrimination?

GARCIA: No, I never suffered through any.

MARIA: In that time, were there any barrios or ghettos?

GARCIA: Barrios, Mexican ones?

MARIA: Barrios in general were poverty stricken ones?

GARCIA: Barrios have always existed. There have always been poor Mexicans.

MARIA: Was there a person or a social worker you could go to if you had a problem?

GARCIA: My uncle, he belonged to a society called Morelos.

MARIA: What was the La Sociedad Morelos?

GARCIA: They did many things like, to improve the community.

MARIA: Has it improved since then?

GARCIA: It has always improved, that was a good society and it still exists. My uncle died and the society kept going.

MARIA: Did you attend any school in Fresno County?

- GARCIA: I was in Pinedale for a time, but not long because I didn't like; because the younger kids that were in school would talk to us and laugh at us, because we couldn't speak English. These were the Mexican kids. They would laugh and laugh at us and I couldn't stand that and that's why I didn't want to return.
- MARIA: The kids that laughed at you, were they Mexican-American?
- GARCIA: Yes, they were Mexican. They just wanted to listen how we talked and then would laugh at us.
- MARIA: In what year did you go to school?
- GARCIA: I can't remember, but it was about 1925.
- MARIA: Did the teachers treat you the same or did they treat you different than everybody else.
- GARCIA: The same.
- MARIA: Was your teacher Mexican?
- GARCIA: No, they were Americans and women.
- MARIA: Did they speak Spanish?
- GARCIA: No, they didn't.
- MARIA: Did they treat you good.
- GARCIA: Yes, they always did.
- MARIA: Were they patient with you?
- GARCIA: Yes, of course. The only think I didn't like was that they didn't kick the kids out that were laughing at us. They were in our class, listening to us, instead of their own class. hey had no business being in our class.
- MARIA : That really bothered you?
- GARCIA: Yes, because of their making fun of us. That's why I didn't return.
- MARIA: In that time, was it common for Mexicans to attend school?
- GARCIA: Very few, because in that time, Pinedale had very few people. Nobody went to school; I went. I wanted to learn English, but I quit because the kids always made fun of me.
- MARIA: When you attended there, did you participate in any school activities.

GARCIA: No.

MARIA: Why?

GARCIA: I didn't want to.

MARIA: After you left school, where did you work?

GARCIA: Always on the ranch.

MARIA: In the first World War, how did you feel about it, and were you drafted?

GARCIA: In 1918, I wasn't here.

MARIA: Were you in Mexico?

GARCIA: Yes.

MARIA: Did you hear of this war in Mexico?

GARCIA: Yes, of course.

MARIA: What was your reaction?

GARCIA: Nothing, because I was over there (Mexico) and I really didn't know what was going on.

MARIA: Did you have any friends or relatives that entered either the first or second World War?

GARCIA: My brother was here, but I don't know if he went, since I wasn't here.

MARIA: In that time, did you go to war of your own free will or did they make you?

GARCIA: In the second World War, they made you.

MARIA: Were there any Mexican-Americans at that time, receive any recognition, radio, newspaper, etc?

GARCIA: Yes, Gilbaldo Rodrigues. I knew him in Pinedale but I don't know what rank he was. In World War II, I went to Sacramento with him, but when we got to the department we were suppose to, they were choosing the ones that were selected to go and the ones that weren't. Anyways, they told me they were going to write to me to tell me what they decided. When they sent me the letter, they said I didn't pass neither in the Navy nor the Army.

MARIA: Why?

GARCIA: They didn't tell me.

MARIA: You didn't ask them either?

GARCIA: No, but I think it was because of my hand.

MARIA: What happened to your hand?

GARCIA: I had a car accident where the car flipped over.

MARIA: Dad, did you remember anything about the K.K.K.?

GARCIA: I don't remember it.

MARIA: Do you remember anything about the Great Red Scare, when they wanted to start communism in Mexico.

GARCIA: I never heard nothing of it.

MARIA: Did your mother ever talk about it?

GARCIA: No she didn't?

MARIA: What was it like during prohibition?

GARCIA: Liquor was prohibited. I got it anyways, from bootleggers. You went to buy your beer and wine from them, most of them were Italians.

MARIA: How much did they charge you for your wine?

GARCIA: About 75¢ a gallon.

MARIA: Where did the Mexicans work at during the depression?

GARCIA: On ranches, picking cotton in Firebaugh.

MARIA: Were there a lot of Mexicans in Firebaugh?

GARCIA: Yes, quite a few. They paid 40¢ per 100 pounds of cotton. They also paid as low as 10¢ per 100 pounds. We worked about 8 hours a day, We only made about \$6.00 or \$6.50 a week, sometimes \$30 if you were lucky.

MARIA: Was that good?

GARCIA: Everything was cheaper, since there was no money.

MARIA: Did you ever take part in politics?

GARCIA: No.

MARIA: Did Mexicans go vote?

GARCIA: Mexican-Americans did, but the ones that weren't citizens, didn't. I didn't.

MARIA: Did you ever have the desire to become a citizen?

GARCIA: Yes, but I couldn't speak or understand English. I never tried to get it.

MARIA: Did you know any political leaders?

GARCIA: Acosta, he helped me get my driver's license. That was about 1924. He worked for the Government. He helped lots of men for many different types of jobs.

MARIA: And Philip Sanchez?

GARCIA: I don't know his title now. When he was little, he use to go to school, our school. I got mad once at him because once I was drunk and him and his friends were teasing me because I was drunk, so I started chasing them down the ditch up to Blackstone. He passed the bridge to the other side of Fresno and I quit chasing them. I don't think he remembers me anymore though.

MARIA: Were there any people that wanted to make trouble for the Mexicans?

GARCIA: I never saw that.

MARIA: What was the Mexicans' reaction to the attack on Pearl Harbor?

GARCIA: It was very bad, because the people here were all right, but the people over there were in great danger. Most of their fear were just whether or not their relatives came back alive.

MARIA: How did you feel personally?

GARCIA: Bad.

MARIA: You said before you had relatives or friends in the war?

GARCIA: Yes, Gilbaldo my friend.

MARIA: I mean the second World War.

GARCIA: My nephews went: Francisco Garcia, Adolph, Lous Vasquez and I can't remember the rest. I didn't know their rank. I only know that Francisco took messages back and forth.

MARIA: Do you think that Anglos during the second World War appreciated the Mexicans and Blacks more?

GARCIA: I can't really say.

MARIA: Were there any Mexican leaders that you recall?

GARCIA: No.

MARIA: How did you feel after the war?

GARCIA: Happy, because everyone came back and things went back to normal.

MARIA: Did Mexicans want to come back to improve themselves?

GARCIA: Yes, they paid them better; wages went up.

MARIA: It is safe to say that Mexicans have a better life now than before.

GARCIA: Yes, jobs are better, wages are better and people are happier.

MARIA: Do you remember the El Programa Bracero?

GARCIA: It was in 1945, because they took all the men to war that's when it began.

MARIA: Did they pay them well?

GARCIA: Not too good; there wasn't any money. They lost many ranches because they didn't have enough to pay because of the war and the program continued until about 1965 and then it ended.

MARIA: Why did it end?

GARCIA: Because there was not much work and people had returned to work.

MARIA: Any further comments?

GARCIA: No that's all.....

"BY MY SIGNATURE, I MAKE THIS TRANSCRIPT AVAILABLE TO RESEARCHERS IN THE FRESNO CITY AND COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY ARCHIVES."

Antonio Garcia Garcia
Antonio Garcia Garcia, Narrator

3/30/77
(Date)

Maria Carmela Garcia
Maria Carmela Garcia
Interviewer/Interpreter

3/30/77
(Date)

Marie Cassano
Student Interviewer
Marie Cassano

3/30/77
(Date)