TRANSCRIPT OF AN ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

WITH

CARLOTA FELIX ARELLANO

This interview was conducted as part of a series on the Mexican American in Minnesota.

Carlota Felix Arellano was born in 1905 in Las Petacas, in the state of Zacatecas, México. Her father owned a ranch in San Jeronimo In Zacatecas. During the Mexican Revolution of 1910 her family saw several battles. Many of her relatives were killed. Her father and some of her relatives decided to seek refuge in the United States. In 1916, her family came to the United States in shifts. Carlota was 11 years old when they arrived in El Paso, Texas by train.

In 1922, she married José Arellano in El Paso, Texas. He worked for the railroad plus Swift and Armour Companies. In 1932, she arrived in Arlington, Minnesota. They worked the fields in Arlington and Gaylord, Minnesota and in Wisconsin.

Mrs. Arellano was an active member in the Mexican American community. She participated in clubs, community activities, family celebrations and religious feast days. As of this date, she still resides in St. Paul.

This is a transcript of a tape-recorded interview edited to aid in clarity and ease of comprehension for the reader. The original tape recording is available in the Audio-Visual Library of the Minnesota Historical Society.

Mexican-American Oral History Project
Minnesota Historical Society

INTERVIEW WITH CARLOTA FELIX ARELLANO

July 30, 1975

INTERVIEWER: VICTOR BARELA

Barela: This is Victor Barela interviewing Mrs. Carlota Felix Arellano, at 518 Dayton, St. Paul, Minnesota 55102, on July 30, 1975, for the Mexican American History Project, which is under the auspices of the Minnesota Historical Society. Do I have permission to record your whole history, Mrs. Arellano?

Arellano: Yes.

Barela: What is your full name?

Arellano: Carlota Felix Arellano.

Barela: Where were you born?

Arellano: In a town near Netazcape that is called Las Petacas, Zacatecas.

Barela: What year?

Arellano: 1905.

Barela: Who were your parents?

Arellano: Juan Francisco Felix and Josefa Ramos de Felix.

Barela: Where were your parents born?

Arellano: My mother was born in Zacatecas. My father was born on a ranch in San Jeronimo, Zacatecas.

Barela: Do you remember when they were born?

Arellano: I don't know. My mother was 25 when she married my father. My father was a widower for 15 years before he married my mother. He had a son that was 15 years old when they married.

Barela: What did your father do for a living?

Arellano: He had his own farm, which he inherited from his parents.

Barela: Do you remember your parents?

Arellano: Yes, I remember he was a gentle man. He had a light complexion, red hair and

Mexican-American Oral History Project
Minnesota Historical Society

Arellano: blue eyes. My mother had a pearl like complexion, black eyes and brown hair.

Barela: Wa your family well accepted in the town?

Arellano: Yes they were.

Barela: Did you have any brothers and sisters?

Arellano: There were five brothers and sisters. Rebecca was the oldest, then Jesus, after him was Manuel, he died about three years ago in El Paso, Texas, and myself.

Barela: Did you have any other brothers and sisters from the first marriage?

Arellano: No, there were only the four of us, from my mother. Well, really five of us, except that one died when he was very young.

Barela: Did your brothers come to the United States like you did?

Arellano: Yes, all of them did in 1916. I don't remember the exact date.

Barela: Did you spend some of your childhood in Mexico?

Arellano: Yes, I went to school here for five years and two years in Mexico.

Barela: How old were you when you came to the United States?

Arellano: I must have been about 11 years old.

Barela: Do you remember the Revolution?

Arellano: Yes, I remember it very well.

Barela: Do you recall a certain episode of the Revolution?

Arellano: Oh, there is so much to remember.

Barela: Was your family affected by the Revolution?

Arellano: Yes, this is why we came to the United States.

Barela: Was your farm taken away?

Arellano: No, they did not take our farm away. My father rented it out when we came here, with the understanding that he would recieve a third of the product of the farm. He only benefited from it for a year. Later, they did not plant anything because the Revolution was going on. Then we came in 1916 because my uncle had been killed by General Banuelos. This was because he travelled with merchandise from Zacatecas to Torreon. My uncle was bringing dry goods and soap to keep his market going. An uncle of ours told us that it would be impossible for us to remain there. He

Mexican-American Oral History Project
Minnesota Historical Society

Arellano: first brought some members of each family, so they could bring the rest of the family later. This is how my uncle brought our families to the United States. My father was very old and he was one of the last to come.

Barela: So your family did not have to leave because of the Revolution?

Arellano: No, not exactly. My father did have to leave because they threatened his life in Zacatecas. So we started to go to Torreon.

Barela: Who were the people that threatened him?

Arellano: I don't know if they were the people that wanted our land. My father was one of the main land owners and that is probably why they threatened him.

Barela: Did you ever get to see any of the Revolution troops?

Arellano: Yes, I did get to see them in Torreon, not in Zacatecas. In Torreon our house was a refuge for Argumedo. I saw him run and they killed his horse. He was shooting in between the legs of the horse so they killed his horse. One of his men brought him another one. He took refuge in our home because we lived on the foot of a hill. After this experience my father saw the big risk we were under. He asked the boss of the soap factory if he would let us move into the office of the factory. We lived in a basement, where the grinder for the rocks for the soap, was located. We stayed there for three days without eating. We had some meat but we could not go out to get it because there was battle going on. One of my aunts went out and brought us a pot of boiled corn, without washing it, and that is what we ate. Later they started to kill the watchmen. All there were, were girls. My uncles had been captured by Huerta, who accused them of stealing everything we had. They took them to the penitentiary in Torreon, Coahuila. Now, my father was in charge of the whole family. The watchmen asked my father if they could go and visit their families because they were in the outskirts of the town and their families lived in the middle of the city. At this time there was a law that dictated that no man was supposed to cross through the middle of town without their wives. So since there were only girls there, they asked my father to let us go with them. There were not enough girls to go around so they even

Mexican-American Oral History Project
Minnesota Historical Society

Arellano: took a blind woman. This is how they got across town.

Barela: How did you get to the border?

Arellano: This was later, after they had killed my uncle. We came by train. The first members of each family worked and then brought the rest of their family to the United States.

Barela: So you came to the United States to get away from all that?

Arellano: Yes, to get away.

Barela: You said that you crossed the border?

Arellano: We crossed at El Paso, Texas.

Barela: Did you have to pay some money?

Arellano: No, I did not pay anything. I got off the train and came across. We got to El Paso in the afternoon around 4 O'clock.

Barela: Did you have any problems?

Arellano: No, we did not have any problems. After that I never went back to Mexico. I did not return until I had been here in St. Paul, I was about 40 years old. I went back to El Paso.

Barela: After you crossed the border where did you go from there?

Arellano: From the border to El Paso then we went to Omaha, Nebraska.

Barela: Did you work in El Paso?

Arellano: My husband and my brothers worked at Swift Company in Omaha. Later, we got married, in 1922, this was when we came here to work in the fields.

Barela: So you did not work in El Paso?

Arellano: Yes, my sister was a nurse and she worked at one of the hospitals.

Barela: How long did you stay in El Paso?

Arellano: It wasn't long. It was about a year.

Barela: From there you went to Omaha. What year was this?

Arellano: In 1923 we went to Omaha.

Barela: How long were you there for?

Arellano: I was married in El Paso in 1922, but I returned to Omaha after I was married.

Mexican-American Oral History Project
Minnesota Historical Society

Arellano: I resided there for three or four years.

Barela: So you attended school, here in the United States, in El Paso?

Arellano: In El Paso and Omaha.

Barela: Did you go to high school there?

Arellano: No, I only completed elementary school. I only completed the elementary school because I went to school for two years in Spanish in El Paso. I lost the opportunity to go to school in Mexico because we did not have school all the time. This was because of the Revolution. Otherwise, I could have gone far. I went up to 5th grade in English and also had two years of school in Spanish. So I went for seven years.

Barela: You were married in El Paso?

Arellano: Yes. I took my fiance to El Paso to get married, otherwise there would have been no wedding.

Barela: Who did you marry?

Arellano: Jose Arellano.

Barela: Did you have children?

Arellano: Yes, my first child was born in El Paso. His name is Antonio Arellano. I also had some children in Omaha and some here in Minnesota.

Barela: Who was born in Omaha?

Arellano: Francisco and Trini Arellano.

Barela: And all the others in Minnesota?

Arellano: Yes, in Minnesota. Genoveva Arias.

Barela: From Omaha, did you come to St. Paul?

Arelleno: No, we came to Arlington, Minnesota. We worked there for a year in the beets. One year we were short on funds, but we did not receive any aid. I got what I have from my own efforts. I have never asked for Welfare for anything! I don't want to be a burden on this country.

Barela: What year did you arrived in Minnesota?

Arellano: In 1932.

Mexican-American Oral History Project
Minnesota Historical Society

Barela: Did your husband keep on working for Swits's?

Arellano: No, he worked for them and then we came here. He worked for the railroad for awhile and then for Armour's.

Barela: Did he work the beet for awhile?

Arellano: No, we came and went. I would take the children to work in the fall and summer.

Barela: Did you suffer a lot of hardships working the beet?

Arellano: No, it was only during that one year. It is up to the people, not in what they do. Some people do not know how to handle the hard times and if they do, they pretend they don't, to lead a bad life.

Barela: Did you have a little house in Arlington?

Arellano: No, we only had a house in Gaylord where we spent the winter. It was a humble place. We lived there until the following year when we worked the beets.

Barela: Did you have a comfortable home?

Arellano: It was fair.

Barela: Did you have running water?

Arellano: Running water at that time did not exist in the city, so how could it exist in a small town?

Barela: Did you have a well?

Arellano: Yes, we did. It was somewhat cold there. I had one of my daughters, Rebecca, and it was 10 below zero inside the house. This was January 29, 1934.

Barela: Did you have a doctor to attend you?

Arellano: Yes, there was a doctor, but he did not attend me because it was too cold. He could not get to the house until 12 noon and my daughter was born at 7 O'clock in the morning. He did not come until he could get his car going because he lived quite far and it must have been about 40 below zero outside. Then I sent my son to the farmer so he could call the doctor, but my son almost froze.

Barela: From Arlington you went to Gaylord, and from there?

Arellano: Here, to St. Paul.

Mexican-American Oral History Project
Minnesota Historical Society

Barela: Did you keep working the beets?

Arellano: Yes, we went out one year, 1937, to Wisconsin to work.

Barela: Did your husband work the beets, too?

Arellano: Yes, he did. Later he got a job at Armour's after the war started.

Barela: Did you make a good living from working the beets?

Arellano: Yes, but like I said it is up to the person to see that they do the things they have to do to get ahead. Not to spend money foolishly.

Barela: Your children went to school here?

Arellano: Yes, they went to Lafayette School.

Barela: Did they all graduate?

Arellano: Not all of them, but they attended high school.

Barela: Do you remember what St. Paul was like when you first came? Was there a large Mexican community?

Arellano: No, there was not a large community. There were only a few.

Barela: Do you remember some of the families that were here?

Arellano: I don't remember them.

Barela: Do you remember the Rangel family?

Arellano: Oh, yes.

Barela: Did they get together for certain activities?

Arellano: Yes. We started to have festivals. I always participated because I liked it.

Barela: Did you help with the cooking?

Arellano: Yes, I cooked, but I was not the only one. Mrs. Rangel, Mrs. Ramirez and others also helped.

Barela: Did you make tacos?

Arellano: Yes.

Barela: Did your husband also participate?

Arellano: No, he did not. He never liked that.

Barela: Were you a member of any of the organizations?

Mexican-American Oral History Project
Minnesota Historical Society

Arellano: Yes, I always took part in the church. I belong to the Guadalupanas, I was a member of the clubs at the Neighborhood House, and also other organizations and activities. I don't recall the exact names.

Barela: When you first came, did they already have patriotic festivals?

Arellano: Yes, I think so.

Barela: Did you ever go to any of the functions of the Anahuac Society?

Arellano: I was a member of the Anahuac Society's women's group.

Barela: What activities did the women's group organize?

Arellano: We were not too successful because we did not have enough support from the members. It was very difficult to organize anything.

Barela: Did you celebrate the 5th of May and 16th of September?

Arellano: Yes, the Anahuac Society alway did.

Barela: What society replaced the Anahuac Society?

Arellano: No one replaced it. There was no one to replace it.

Barela: Was this a successful group?

Arellano: Yes, the person in charge did a good job. He was an honest man and he never charged anyone for doing their paperwork.

Barela: Are you talking about Mr. Rangel?

Arellano: Yes, he was my compadre. Mrs. Rangel and I worked together. We are very much alike.

Barela: I have heard the term "jamaica", what does it mean?

Arellano: It is lika a carnival. Everyone has their own booth to sell what they want. There is food, games and a jail. It is a national pastime.

Barela: Were these for the benefit of the church?

Arellano: Yes, for the church.

Barela: Did you have them for the 16th of September?

Arellano: Yes, for the patriotic fiestas. Mrs. Rangel was always the one to do all the work. They never received any credit for it.

Mexican-American Oral History Project
Minnesota Historical Society

Barela: Did people in the Mexican community live well?

Arellano: There were some. There have always been Mexican people living here but they did not know each other. It wasn't until 1923 that they brought people to the north of here to work in the beets. I have always paid my way to go from place to place. No one brought me here.

Barela: Were all the Mexicans in one community or were they all over?

Arellano: There was only one community in the West Side.

Barela: Do you remember where you lived on the West Side?

Arellano: I lived on Fifth and Omaha.

Barela: So you had patriotic, as well as religious, feasts?

Arellano: I participated in the church.

Barela: Who was the priest that was here when you first came?

Arellano: There was Father Ward, but I don't remember the name of the first priest.

Barela: Do you remember when the church was part of a bar?

Arellano: Yes.

Barela: Did you get to attend mass there?

Arellano: Yes, three of my children were baptized there.

Barela: What year did they buy the other side?

Arellano: I think it was in 1955.

Barela: Did you celebrate the Posadas, the novenas, and Our Lady of Guadalupe's day?

Arellano: Yes, we always participated in these feasts.

Barela: Did you celebrate Christmas here in spite of the weather?

Arellano: Yes, we celebrated. One time the Rangel's home burnt down, around the time of the celebrations.

Barela: Did you celebrate the weddings Mexican style?

Arellano: We celebrated them the same way.

Barela: Are there some things that are different for a Mexican wedding?

Mexican-American Oral History Project
Minnesota Historical Society

Arellano: Things change with the times.

Barela: I have heard that baptisms were causes for big celebrations?

Arellano: Yes, they were.

Barela: Did your family celebrate baptisms?

Arellano: My manner of celebrating a baptism is the same as my ancestors. I would sit four compadres. On the decorated table I would put a plate of dessert, the best of whatever I had, and four cups of chocolate. You cross the four cups and everyone drinks from the cup and then they return to the others. This signifies friendship. It shows that whatever you have you are willing to share. What is good for one is also good for the other. You only take one drink of each cup. That is how I do it and my grandmother did it, too. My other grandmother was Spanish and my father was part French.

Barela: Did a lot of people get together for funerals too?

Arellano: Yes, they did.

Barela: Did the rest of the Mexican community get together for anything else other than patriotic festivals?

Arellano: Sure, they got together all the time.

Barela: So then you said that all your family was educated in the United States.

Arellano: My family was and I was too.

Barela: And your husband?

Arellano: Since he came to the United States when he was eighteen, he received his education in Mexico. He went to school here and could speak very good English, as well as write it and translate it.

Barela: Do you also speak English? Did you receive your education in English?

Arellano: I don't know if I speak it very well, but I wish I could speak more of it.

Barela: Then your family still practices Mexican traditions, foods, and speaks Spanish?

Mexican-American Oral History Project
Minnesota Historical Society

Arellano: Yes. Everybody speaks Spanish.

Barela: And your children, have they married Mexicans?

Arellano: One is married to a Mexican, the other to a French.

Barela: Have you been back to Mexico?

Arellano: Yes, recently I went there on vacation.

Barela: Does your family go to Mexico?

Arellano: They also go to Mexico on vacations. They visit and get acquainted with my husband's family, who remained in Mexico.

Barela: Did you feel lonely when you came to St. Paul?

Arellano: No, not at all. I have never been lonely, I have always felt like I feel now.

Barela: And your husband?

Arellano: He felt differently because he was more set on his Mexican customs.

Barela: Then you didn't miss Mexico too much?

Arellano: No, why should I? What did I owe Mexico? I grew up here so why should I owe anything to Mexico? I was born there but that was it.

Barela: Then you consider yourself more from the United States?

Arellano: I consider myself more from here than from there.

Barela: Has your philosophy affected anyone's way of thinking? Of life?

Arellano: No, not much.

Barela: You have your own personal philosophy, so what advice would you give to the new generation?

Arellano: I have given them advice.

Barela: What advice would you give them so that they can live well?

Arellano: It's very hard to give that kind of advice. Most won't take it because they feel they know more than I do. But anyway, I have given it, and some do need it.

Barela: I am a very young person with little experience who needs to learn a lot about life. What advice would you give me about life, about being happy, about jobs?

Mexican-American Oral History Project
Minnesota Historical Society

Arellano: That is up to the person to live it well. A lot of patience is required in finding a job. One needs to be docile. Always look for people who are one step above you, someone who can instruct you.

Barela: It seems to me that you have not placed too much emphasis on money.

Arellano: No, I haven't. I like to live as I do. Wealth is not everything, it does not attract me in the slightest. Like I said before, I have what I have worked for. The same goes for my children.

Barela: Mrs. Arellano, I am very grateful to you for this interview. Thank you.

Mexican-American Oral History Project
Minnesota Historical Society