TRANSCRIPT OF AN ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

WITH

LUZ AND VIRGINIA CAMPA

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

Luz, was born in San Luis Potosi, Mexico in 1909. In 1914 he came to Bridgeport, Texas to work in the coal mines. It was 1929 when he brought his wife to Minnesota with him, where he held a variety of jobs. The Campa family owns and operates a successful restaurant, the "Red Pepper", in Brownton, Minnesota.

In this oral interview Mr. and Mrs. Campa discuss their personal life history as well as the development of their business.

This is a transcript of a tape-recording 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.

INTERVIEW WITH LUZ AND VIRGINIA CAMPA

July 2, 1976

Interviewers: Grant Moosbrugger and Ramedo Saucedo

MOOSBRUGGER: This is Grant Moosbrugger, along with Ramedo Saucedo, interviewing Mr.

Luz Campa in Brownton, Minnesota. Today is July 2, 1976. We're conducting this interview for the Minnesota State Historical Society. Do we have your permission to interview you for the Minnesota Historical Society, Mr. Campa?

MR. CAMPA: Yes.

MOOSBRUGGER: Could you start off by telling us when and where you were born, and any interesting background data about your family in Mexico?

MR. CAMPA: Well, I was born in San Luis Potosi in 1909. Then I came with my mother to the United States in 1914. We came to Bridgeport, Texas. That's a coal mining town. That's where I was raised. That's where I met my wife.

MOOSBRUGGER: How old were you when you came to Bridgeport?

MR. CAMPA: Five years old.

MOOSBRUGGER: What year was that?

MR. CAMPA: 1914. Yes, I was born in 1909 and in 1914 I came.

MOOSBRUGGER: How long did you work in Bridgeport?

MR. CAMPA: Well, I worked until I got married. I was twenty years old at the time.

We got married and we found that oil well that they have for the trains...

MOOSBRUGGER: What's your wife's name?

MR. CAMPA: Virginia.

MOOSBRUGGER: What was her maiden name?

MR. CAMPA: Vallejo.

MOOSBRUGGER: Was she living in Bridgeport, too, at the time?

MR. CAMPA: Yes, at the time.

MOOSBRUGGER: What made you decide to move out of Bridgeport? Because the mines closed?

MR. CAMPA: Well, we had no work in there. In 1932-1934 they had the Depression.

Then we decided to come and work the sugar beets in 1928.

MOOSBRUGGER: How did you hear about the sugar beets here?

MR. CAMPA: The company from here came looking for laborers. So my brothers and I decided to come and work sugar beets.

MOOSBRUGGER: How many brothers did you have working with you?

MR. CAMPA: Four brothers, three and me..

SAUCEDO: Are they all living here in Minnesota?

MR. CAMPA: Well, no. Two live in Iowa and one died. We buried him in the winter in Minnesota. Then we came to work sugar beets and when we went back, we decided to get married. So we got married. In 1929 we came and worked sugar beets.

SAUCEDO: What area did you come to work? What town?

MR. CAMPA: The first year I came to work sugar beets, it was in Chaska, Minnesota.

SAUCEDO: Then did you go back to Texas?

MR. CAMPA: Yes. When we came back, we went up to Lake Lillian, Minnesota. Then in 1934 we were in Lafayette. I was married already. That's when my second kid was born and my wife just stayed there, because she was expecting. So we came alone: my brothers and I and my mother. Finally, back in 1936, we came back here and worked and decided to stay here.

MOOSBRUGGER: So after 1936 you decided to stay in Minnesota?

MR. CAMPA: Yes.

MOOSBRUGGER: How many children have you had? How big is your family?

MR. CAMPA: Thirteen.

MOOSBRUGGER: Are most of them living in Minnesota?

MR. CAMPA: Yes, most of them. One is overseas, working for the government. He's retired from the Air Force.

SAUCEDO: What year did you come to Brownton? How is it that you came to Brownton and settled here?

MR. CAMPA: Well, I had a friend from St. Paul. He was running that hotel-restaurant in Brownton. I came to help him one Sunday. He asked me to come help him. My wife and I liked the restaurant. I helped that Sunday night and the other week we came back. It was not there anymore. The owner told me he pulled out. He didn't want the place anymore. I said to him, "How much do you want to rent the place for?" He said, "Yes, I'll give you a chance." That's how we started. We started here and I said, "I don't know if we'll make it here because we cook only Mexican food." Well, we did pretty good. By the way, we built up the business. Nicky came one time and his brothers and they looked at the place full of people.

MOOSBRUGGER: This was where?

MR. CAMPA: In the Brownton Hotel. They said, "Father, you're doing pretty good here."

I said, "Yes, we're doing good. The people like me here and...so I thought
well, I want to stay here." That's how I started in 1967.

SAUCEDO: And you've been in business ever since? On the same location?

MR. CAMPA: Yes. In Brownton.

MOOSBRUGGER: Right before you started the restaurant business in 1967, what kind of work did you do?

MR. CAMPA: I was working for Tony Down's Food Company.

MOOSBRUGGER: Tony Dowan's Food?

MR. CAMPA: Yes, over there in Medalia. I was a meat cutting foreman. I said to the guys, "I've got my business and I can work day and night." They offered me more money. I said, "No, I quit."

MOOSBRUGGER: So you've been doing restaurant work ever since?

MR. CAMPA: Thanks to God, they'll have me too.

MOOSBRUGGER: What schools have your children gone to?

MR. CAMPA: Some of them graduated from Gibbon and some graduated from Winthrop. Most of them graduated here.

MRS. CAMPA: Have you seen our picture in the paper at some time? We had three sets of twins. They were in the Minneapolis Tribune.

MOOSBRUGGER: Three sets of twins?

MR. CAMPA: Yes.

MOOSBRUGGER: When did you have the twins?

MRS. CAMPA: 1951, 1953, 1956.

MOOSBRUGGER: So you had three sets of twins?

MRS. CAMPA: Yes, boys and girls.

SAUCEDO: What are their names?

MRS. CAMPA: Dolly and David in 1951; Christine and Christopher in 1953; then Monica

and Michael were born in 1956.

SAUCEDO: Where did you get started in business in Brownton? In what year? In what

place?

MR. CAMPA: They used to call it the Brownton Inn, but now it's called the Brownton

Hotel.

SAUCEDO: How long were you at the Brownton Hotel?

MR. CAMPA: We stayed there until 1972. Five years.

SAUCEDO: What kind of food did you sell there?

MR. CAMPA: Mexican food.

SAUCEDO: How big of a town is Brownton?

MR. CAMPA: A little over 1200.

SAUCEDO: Did you also sell American food?

MR. CAMPA: Yes. American food and Mexican food both.

SAUCEDO: Why did you leave the Brownton Inn?

MR. CAMPA: Because it was a pretty old place and the landlady wanted to fix it. They

said it didn't pay to fix it anymore. They were going to sell it. The

village bought it. So we moved up here and found this place. They were

going to sell it for pretty cheap and so I decided to tackle it. We

fixed it up ourselves. We put all the carpeting in.

SAUCEDO: So what year did you move up here?

MR. CAMPA: 1972, in November.

SAUCEDO: What do you call the restaurant?

MR. CAMPA: "The Red Pepper."

SAUCEDO: What hours are you generally open?

MR. CAMPA: We used to open early, but now my daughter opens from 11:00-1:00.

SAUCEDO: Who, besides your daughter, helps you?

MR. CAMPA: Just the family. We never hire anybody. My daughters and boys come and

help us on the weekends when we get the groceries. That's when we need

a lot of help. They say they're going to help us, so they come over.

SAUCEDO: What are some of the problems you've had in running the restaurant?

MR. CAMPA: We didn't have any problems. They've treated us pretty nice here.

SAUCEDO: Are you pretty well accepted in the town?

MR. CAMPA: Yes.

SAUCEDO: Do you know most of the people who live here?

MR. CAMPA: Yes, most of the people live on the farms. We get a lot of people from

Winthrop and Gibbon. I know a lot of people around here. They come in

here. They like the Mexican food. They say, "If we want American food,

we can stay in town." They want Mexican food, so we make Mexican food.

SAUCEDO: Do you have any other property besides this restaurant?

MR. CAMPA: Yes, I've got "Cozy Corner". It's a beer joint.

SAUCEDO: Right here in town?

MR. CAMPA: Yes, right here in town. I've bought another house here, too.

SAUCEDO: You're quite a businessman. That's great!

MOOSBRUGGER: Are there any other restaurants in this part of the state that serve Mex-

ican food?

MR. CAMPA: Not around here. There are two in Mankato.

MOOSBRUGGER: Are they franchised places or home operated places?

MR. CAMPA: One is a franchise and one's a family. They call it "Zapata".

MRS. CAMPA: The other one they call "Los Seis", because there are six in the family.

SAUCEDO: What about Mexican families in this area of Brownton or other areas?

Are there a lot of families living around here?

MR. CAMPA: Well, no, not too many. The only one who lives here is Sylvester Guerrero.

He's the only one close by, but there are some in Mankato. There are

some in Litchfield.

SAUCEDO: But you have Mexican families coming to your restaurant?

MR. CAMPA: Once in a while.

MRS. CAMPA: We used to have quite a lot when they came from working in the cornfield in Glencoe. They'd call here to tell him to come to pick them up. Then he would go get them.

MR. CAMPA: Then I'd go pick them up and bring them back. Sometimes I'd go interpret for them too. The company would call me to interpret when they'd get in trouble.

MOOSBRUGGER: Trouble communicating?

MR. CAMPA: Yes. Sometimes I'd get them out of jail too!

MOOSBRUGGER: Does it seem to you that there are more migrant workers of Mexican descent coming up from Texas each year? Or less? Or about the same?

MR. CAMPA: About the same. The only thing is that they used to raise a lot of beets around here. Since they closed up the American Crystal in Chaska. They moved northwest from here. They have another new factory built up there. It started last year. So now they're quite a few Mexicans up there.

MOOSBRUGGER: Do most of your sons and daughters live in Minneapolis?

MR. CAMPA: Yes.

MOOSBRUGGER: How do they feel? Do they have a tendency to want to stay in Minnesota or stay in the Twin Cities? Or do they think of moving back out?

MR. CAMPA: No, I don't think so. They like it pretty well where they're staying now.

MRS. CAMPA: We have one in Mankato.

Mr. Campa: Yes, and he works in the fire department as a fireman.

Mrs. Campa: We have four in Minneapolis and one in St. Paul and one working in Arabia.

Moosbrugger: Is your oldest son expecting to come back to the United States?

Mrs. Campa: Yes, he'll be coming back after two years.

Moosbrugger: Do you know which branch of the government he is working with?

Mrs. Campa: He is in the Air Force.

Mr. Campa: He is teaching electronics there.

Moosbrugger: What are you plans or hopes? Would you like to stay here in Brownton for

the rest of your lives? Or are you thinking of moving to the Twin Cities?

Both: No! No! (laugh).

Moosbrugger: You like it here?

Mr. Campa: Well, we are pretty well acquainted with the people here and I get along

pretty well. The kids get along pretty well, too.

Moosbrugger: Do they get back and visit you?

Mr. Campa: Oh, yes.

Mrs. Campa: They come and help me here. That's why we started in Brownton. Every week-

end everyone comes and helps.

Moosbrugger: How many grandchildren do you have?

Mrs. Campa: Twenty-nine.

Mr. Campa: And three great-grandchildren, too!

Moosbrugger: What are some of their family names that are different than Campa? Your

daughters are married, what are some of their names?

Mrs. Campa: Two are Bowmans. My oldest daughter got married, then Darnel and Christian,

my youngest daughter.

Saucedo: Mr. Campa, could you tell us the places where you have worked and the years

you worked for them and the kind of work you did?

Mr. Campa: Well, I worked for the Bixton Company in Arlington, I was planting. I

worked part-time like they say that's how you worked for them. We boarded

people. When we finished our gardens we would harvest our crops. In the

Mr. Campa: winter I would get my land ready for the next summer. That's what I would do. When I didn't have anything I asked the farmers if they had any work. Worked at making ditches for six months. Later I got tired of working at that. I went to work in Medalia at the Twenty Down Street Company. I

Saucedo: Are there any other families here in Brownton of Mexican ancestry? Could you give us their names and the year they arrived here in Minnesota?

Mr. Campa: The Sylvester Guerrero family came here in 1940. They worked for a farmer in Stuart, Minnesota. They left there and went to work in a creamery in Glencoe and he got a good job there.

Moosbrugger: Do they have children?

Mr. Campa: Yes, they have six or seven children.

worked there for five years.

Moosbrugger: Do they live here?

Mr. Campa: Yes, they live here.

Saucedo: Mr. Campa, we are very grateful to you for the information you have given us. We hope you continue having success in your business and we wish you luck.

Mr. Campa: Thank you for coming, and it's nice meeting you. We hope you come again!