TRANSCRIPT OF AN ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

WITH

ESIQUIA MONITA

July 7, 1975

INTERVIEWER: VICTOR BARELA

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

Esiquia Monita was born in Casas Grandes, Chihuahua, Mexico in 1902. She does not remember her life in Mexico because she crossed the border with her mother in 1906. They paid 2-5¢ and crossed to live in El Paso, Texas. She has more vivid memories of growing up in Kansas, working in the beets. She married once in Kansas and went with him to Chicago. She married again in Chicago and came to St. Paul with her second husband.

Esiquia discusses her parents and early life, brothers and sisters, her children, harvesting beets and corn, the first people she knew in St. Paul, the early St. Paul Mexican American Community festivals, her husband's occupations, and food.

This is an English translation of the tape-recorded interview in Spanish. The original cassette recording is available in the Audio-Visual Library of the Minnesota Historical Society.

INTERVIEW WITH ESIQUIA MONITA

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Barela: This interview is with Sra. Esiquia Monita. Today is July 7, 1975. Sra. Monita lives at 469 Ada, St. Paul, Minnesota. She lives alone. Sra. Monita, I will start by asking you for your complete name?

Monista: Esiquia.

What was your maiden name? Barela:

Monita: Saenz.

Barela: Was your family from Mexico?

ONPROIS Monita: My mother used to say that I came to the United States when I was four years old. I don't remember anything about Mexico and I have never gone back to Mexico.

Barela: Where were you born?

Monita: In Mexico. They brought me here when I was four years old.

Barela: Were you born in Mexico City?

Monita: No, I was born in Chihuahua. I think the little town was Casas Grandes. I don't know for sure. She used to tell us about it.

Barela: When were you born?

In 1902. April 10. Monita:

Barela: Did you come to Minnesota then?

Monita: No, we didn't come to Minnesota. My mother crossed the border at Ciudad Juarez. We lived in El Paso, Texas.

Barela: What year was that?

Monita: 1906.

Barela: How long did you lived in El Paso?

Monita: I don't know how long we lived there. The first thing that I remember is one time when they were asking for workers. By then my mother did not have a husband. My father, I think, had died many years before.

Barela: What was your father's name?

Monita: Modesto. I don't know too much, at that time the parents did not inform their children of family matters like they do now. My mother was a person that was hard to talk to.

Barela: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

Monita: I have brothers and sisters, but they did not live with us. I met a sister here when she lived in St. Paul.

Barela: Lupe?

Monita: Yes Lupe, and I had another onewho's name was Maria. She never lived here.

She lived in Colorado. I also had a brother, he died.

Barela: Do you remember your brother's name?

Monita: Jose Teofilo Medrano. I can't say anything because like they say, they came and went like a cyclone. My brother lived in Minneapolis, Consuelo lived in Milwaukee. I am the one who lived here the longest. Maria never came.

Consuelo did come to see me. My other sister Olimpia lived in Davenport, Iowa, she died about two years ago.

Barela: Are any of your brothers alive?

Monita: No brothers or sisters. I am the only one alive of the whole family.

Barela: Do you remember how you came across the border to the United States?

Monita: No, I think my mother crossed the border by paying two or five cents. Then there wasn't any border patrol. I think she paid two or five cents to cross the border. She and my stepfather came across.

Barela: What was your stepfather's name?

Monita: Antonio Bàutista.

Barela: So after you crossed the border you lived in El Paso?

Monita: Yes, I guess so. I wasn't too old, but I do remember when we came here to a farm to work in the beet fields. Not here in Minnesota. We were brought up in Kansas. In many small towns working the beets. I did not come to Minnesota until I was married.

Barela: Do you remember anything about Kansas?

Monita: No, except that it was full of weeds.

Barela: Did you work the beets?

Monita: No, not as a young girl. We were very young. All of us.

Barela: Did your mother talk about how hard it was to work the beets?

Monita: No. They worked in groups of people.

Barela: From Kansas to Minnesota, did you work?

Monita: Yes. We also worked for a short time in Iowa. Then all of us started working.

Barela: In what part of Iowa?

Monita: In Davenport, Iowa. But my mother wasn't with us anymore.

Barela: Do you remember the year?

Monita: No, I don't recall.

Barela: What age were you then?

Monita: About thirteen or fourteen. I was married twice. I got married for the first time when I was thirteen or fourteen years old. I have a daughter in Chicago from my first husband, and a son, but I never hear from him.

Barela: Where were you married for the first time?

Monita: In Emporia, Kansas.

Barela: What was your first husband's name?

Monita: Nicolas Hernandez.

Barela: Did you stay in Emporia and work?

Monita: No, as soon as we were married, my husband wanted to go to Chicago. He didn't want to stay where my mother was. My mother stayed in Emporia with my sister Olimpia. Olimpia also got married, but I don't remember when. We came to

Monita: Chicago right away and we lived in some railroad cars. There I had my first child, Rebecca. She is the one that still lives in Chicago. Then we came to Davenport. In Davenport my husband got a job in a foundry.

Barela: What kind of work did your husband do?

Monita: He worked for Battendorf. All the people worked there.

Barela: So you had your first child in Chicago?

Monita: Yes, the first one in Chicago. The second one was a boy and he was born in Davenport, Iowa.

Barela: From your first husband?

Monita: Yes, from my first husband. We were not married for long. I was very young and if he did not come home I would get very angry. There were rumors that he had been seen entering a house a couple of doors away from ours and I investigated and it was true. I left him right away because sometimes he would drink and miss work. So I had two children from him. A boy and a girl.

Barela: Do you remember their birthdates?

Monita: Rebecca, the one in Chicago. I had their certificates, but I left the children with my husband and he wanted the certificates. I don't know why he wanted them. My daughter was the one that asked for them. I came here with my husband, the one that died here. My husband's real name was Gonzalo Monita. All the Monitas are part of our family: Margaret Lucio; Consuelo Velasquez; all are Monitas. Alejandro (Alex) and Gonzalo the youngest. He has been in the service for 20 years. He was here withome for Mother's Day. Now he is stationed in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. We also lived there for a while, in Milwaukee. We went to visit my sister Consuelo, who was sick, then she died, so we stayed there. I left my house here with all my furniture. But I was so saddened by her death that I told the girls, my daughters, to get my furniture out of the house because we were paying rent. We stayed there for about two years.

Barela: So you went from Chicago to Davenport, Iowa. Did you marry your second husband

Barela: in Davenport?

Monita: No, we got married here in St. Paul.

Barela: Did you come by train?

Monita: Yes, we came by train.

Barela: After you came here with your husband, where did he work?

Monita: He worked for a long time in Armour's and Swift's. We would also go to the beet fields at first. This is when I worked the beets.

Barela: Is it hard work?

Monita: It is terrible. Now that I remember, I get the chills! But at that time my husband did not want to be on welfare. We would leave our home rented. At that time everything was very inexpensive. We used to charge \$10 dollars.

Barela: Did you take your children with you?

Monita: Yes. We did not go very far. We would go to Mankato, Sleepy Eye and Jordan,
Minnesota. Those are the ones that I remember.

Barela: Do you remember the year?

Monita: No.

Barela: How old were you then?

Monita: Only God knows! I had a son, Roberto, that was killed by a corn truck in LeSueur. I think this was in 1939. There I worked with the Samora family in the kitchen.

Barela: Working the beets meant more than just harvesting, right?

Monita: Always. We would first hoe it. Later we would clear it up, in August. That I remember because you would do the work standing and I liked that. After that, until the crop is ready, between August, September and October, we would finish. Then we would come back. That was when I worked. My husband would pick corn and I worked in the kitchen.

Barela: Do you remember how much they paid you for the beet?

Monita: No, I don't remember how much they paid then.

Barela: So then you would pick corn, too?

Monita: Yes, the corn was ready for picking right after we were through with the beets.

Mr. Zamora was in charge of the farm and he would let me work in the kitchen

because my husband worked for him in the corn. Later my son also worked for

him. There was always a group of young boys working for him.

Barela: Was it hot working in the fields?

Monita: Yes. It was enough to go crazy. I would put beet leafs on my head, like a hat, to cool off. But it was a beautiful life, working with my husband. We would get home and he would chop wood for the stove and get it going, while I made tortillas and cook the potatoes. We had Beto, the one that was killed by the truck, Consuelo, Lucinda, Margarita, Alejandro and the one that is in the service. He has been in the Marines for 20 years. He feels sad because I am all alone. He called me the day before yesterday. He says he is very sad and misses his father. He is the baby of my kids.

Barela: Did you ever go to school?

Monita: I went to school for two weeks, but my mother was always sick, so she took me out of school. There were only the three of us. All the others had gone their way. It was just my mother, my sister and I. My sister did go to school, in Kansas.

Barela: So after you finished the beet work, you would come back to St. Paul for the winter?

Monita: Yes.

Barela: Where did you live in St. Paul?

Monita: All over. We lived on State Street for a long time and also on Indiana Court.

My youngest son was born there. He is in the service and has the same name
as his father, Gonzalo Guillermo Monita. His second name is from his confirmation. But my husband, in his alien card, used the name that he gave himself
here in the United States, George G. Monita. All the people knew us by our

Monita: last name and not our first names. When he died, a lot of people did not know who it was.

Barela: Until when did you work in the fields?

Monita: For about fourteen years. The first time I was married I was thirteen years old. We lasted together for about five years.

Barela: How many years did you go to Mankato and LeSueur to work?

Monita: Not until there was enough work here. As soon as we came back he would get a job at the packing house. He worked at Swift's, Cudahay's and Armour's.

Barela: Did you live in Milwaukee?

Monita: Yes, that was after one of my sister died. We lived there for about ten years. That is where my son graduated from. My husband worked in the rail-road tracks there, not a packing house.

Barela: And from Milwaukee you came back to St. Paul?

Monita: Yes, we came back to St. Paul.

Barela: Did you work while you were in Milwaukee?

Monita: No. I stayed home.

Barela: Did you suffer a lot of hardships?

Monita: Never.

Barela: Were you always happy?

Monita: God helped us. I have nothing to complain about. We never tried to get separated. Whenever the check came he would go buy groceries. When Swift closed down my son-in-law got transfered to California.

Barela: Did you have a lot of friends here in St. Paul?

Monita: All the old people. Those of us who are left. Mrs. Huerta and I have known each other for a long time. Some of the others I have only known for a short time. I remember Mrs. Huerta. Her husband's name was Matias Huerta, she is also a widow. She used to give baby showers and everything. Some of the other people I can't recall. There are many more: Concha; the Coronado family,

Monita: and there are all my compadres. Arturo Coronado, they are good people.

During the summer we went over to their restaurant to eat. My son from

California took us to the restaurant. I also got to know my compadre Arturo

Coronado's parents. I remember when my compadre Arturo first came, he wasn't

married yet. Piedad Ruiz and Florentino Ruiz were also my compadres, he died.

Pomposo Guerra was my compadre. My comadre Luisa Guerra, died in Mexico, he

died here. These are some of the older people I know or have known. George

Galvin, my compadre Agustin Rodriquez, and his son Pete Rodriguez. My compadre

Agustin Rodriquez' wife also died. All the old timers. My compadre Alfonso

and Margarita Bravo, they have also died. There are many more. All of which

are people that I haven't known for too long. There were not many people here

in St. Paul when we came. There was Pomposo Guerra, Alvina and Lupe Cruz, I

have known them for a long time. They live near here.

Barela: Were you one of the first families to settle here?

Monita: Yes, not the very first, but some of the first. My compadre Pomposo Guerra was here. The Coronados came much later than we did. We met Florentino Ruiz in the beets.

Barela: You said you went to dances. Were these dances put on by the community?

Monita: No, these were dances we had for baptisms, marriages and for the clubs. The

Anahuac Society would have fund raisers. We would sell food and pinatas. My
husband was a member of this club.

Barela: Did you help with the cooking?

Monita: Yes.

Barela: What kind of food did you prepare?

Monita: Whatever they told me to help with. We still do that now because I am a member of the Guadalupe Society. Even now that I am like this, I still help out. Not with heavy work, but I pay for someone to help me.

Barela: Do you still cook?

Monita: No, not anymore.

Barela: What did you like to make the most?

Monita: I liked to make tamales, tacos, enchiladas and mole.

Barela: Do you have a good reciepe for mole?

Monita: No. I no longer have a "metate."

Barela: Did you make use of a "metate?"

Monita: Yes, but I sold it to Chencha (Cresencia) Rangel. The Rangel's were also good friends, but I never made them my compadres. They had a big family.

Barela: Do you remember the first Neighborhood House?

Monita: I only went there for the dances. I never participated in any of their activities, like sewing and that. Now many go to sister Giovani to sew, etc.

Barela: Since you were some of the first Mexicans to settle here in St. Paul, do you recall some of the problems you encountered, like discrimination?

Monita: No, I don't remember. God forbid, I kind of remember an incident when someone got killed. I never saw anything. My husband was the one that would tell me about it.

Barela: Did you know how to read?

Monita: At first, I did not, but later I learned. My husband was the one that read a lot. I only read Catholic books. I never asked my husband about what was going on because then he would tell me to read the paper and keep informed.

No, not me. I would rather not ask any questions. We were always very happy, all those years with our family. We had a round table and I would look forward to their coming home for dinner. It is not like that anymore. The children hit their parents and they don't even finish their food. They claim that they do not like this or that. Now the people have enough money to buy things even though they are very expensive, but not before. When we worked the beets, we barely had enough to buy a sack of flour, beans, and lard, all those things for the winter time. I also did a lot of canning at the farm. My husband

Monita: would help me with the canning and also with the dishes. When we came back to St. Paul, we would bring 250 quarts of tomatoes, and none of it ever went bad. I would also can four bushels of green peppers with garlic. I would toast the peppers, then we would peel them. My husband was good at peeling the peppers, and I would boil them. Then I would have the jars ready for canning.

Barela: Did you cook this on the stove?

Monita: Yes, boil them. I did not do any cold pack canning. I never liked it.

Barela: So then you boiled the peppers?

Monita: It was more like cooking it, ready to be mixed with meat or whatever.

Barela: Where did you get the pepper?

Monita: We would grow our own and also we would buy some from the farmers. The farmers would grow them and bring them here to sell. They brought all different kinds. I liked green peppers because they were really hot. Jalapeno peppers are also very hot. It is a big pepper.

Barela: Did you put hot pepper in all your foods?

Monita: We had a grinder to grind the peppers and tomatoes and the garlic I would add to it. I can't eat any of that stuff anymore. It does not agree with me.

Barela: Does your family like Mexican food?

Monita: Yes, all my family. They were used to eating it. Now they make a lot of different kinds of food; like hot dish and Sloppy Joes, because of their families.

What I could never do like they do is eat a hot pepper just plain with salt.

I could never do it. I have to have them toasted and cooked with something else.

Barela: When you first came to St. Paul, did they have anything special for Christmas?

Monita: Yes, we did.

Barela: Did you have a Nativity scene?

Monita: Yes, we use to have a beautiful manger, we still have one every year but not entirely as we had in those years. That is at Our Lady of Guadalupe church,

Monita: where I belong and where they will someday bury me from.

Barela: Did they ever have anything for the children?

Monita: Oh yes, they used to have big parties for them. Beautiful parties with gifts and piñatas.

Barela: Did you like to go to church?

Monita: I used to like to go a lot, but now I can't always go. But if their is something especial and I want to go, I call a cab to take me there.

Barela: Did you have rosaries?

Monita: Oh, yes. We have rosaries and novenas.

Barela: Are there some special novenas?

Monita: Yes. The Novena of Our Lady of Guadalupe. We used to take out the statue of Our Lady of Guadalupe in a procession. We would take her around the different homes in December. She would be taken from house to house at night. A list was made up, so that one would know ahead of time when or where it would be. Her feast is December 12th. On December 12th, no matter how cold it would be, we would go to the church and sing the "mananitas" to Our Lady. They are still doing it, but for the last three years I haven't been able to participate in this type of service because of my health.

Barela: Does your family still eat the Mexican food?

Monita: Yes, they all have their "molcajetes." And they make "tortillas", they might not make them all the time, but they sure like to eat them.

Barela: Did you use the corn or flour for "tortillas"?

Monita: Flour "tortillas" To tell you the truth I only liked corn "tortillas" when I made "enchiladas". I also use to make "tortillas". My husband made me a little board to make the "tortillas" on.

Barela: Do you remember some of the fiestas you had here?

Monita: Yes, I don't remember the years, but the Anahuac Society had various celebrations. They would have pinatas and it was very pretty.

Barela: How about Christmas?

Monita: At Christmas time, we would have the "Pastorelas". There was the man, Urbano, he would organized them at the Neighborhood House. They would have them but I never participated, I would just go and look.

Barela: How about the "Posadas"?

Monita: The Montez family would have them at their home. They had really nice "Posadas".

After the "Posadas" they would have "tamales" and "bunelos".

Barela: I see that you have statu es of saints, do you still pray novenas?

Monita: Yes, I do, every day.

Barela: To what Saint are you most devoted to?

Monita: To the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Our Lady of Guadalupe. They help me a great deal. I also pray the rosary every day, the litany, everything. My son brought me this picture of Our Lady of Guadalupe from the Basilica of Guadalupe in Mexico.

Barela: Have you visited the Basilica of Guadalupe?

Monita: I have never been to Mexico.

Barela: Would you like to go there some day?

Monita: Yes, I would, comeday. I hear so much about Mexico. My sons are the ones who have gone. Alex brought me this rosary from there. My sons have all gone to Mexico. The only one who has not gone to Mexico is Margarita Lucio, she's the wife of Frank Lucio. The Lucio family has been here a long time. I knew my son-in-law as a little boy.

Barela: You remember a lot.

Monita: I would like to have my memory back and be able to remember everything. I have had a good life. I thank the Lord every day for being able to get up and prepare my own food and wash my own clothes. There has been times in my life when I have been unable to do anything. Sometimes I have to pay someone to do things for me around here. I miss my family. But it's better that I

Monita: be alone. I am not the first one to be alone.

Barela: You have really watched St. Paul grow, right?

Monita: Yes, everything has beome modern. I remember the area around the old Neighbor-hood House. All of the houses have been torn down. I am sure that I can't recognize the old West Side.

Barela: When you first came, were there a lot of stores?

Monita: Yes, there were many stores belonging to the Jews. Then some Mexicans began to set up their stores. One of the first was Mr. Zamora. Then there was another store on Indiana. I believe the owner's name was Garzon. Mr. Zamora had a food store. He was a very good person. He would also get together with the men who handled the contract work in the farms.

Barela: Didn't you sign a contract directly with the farmers?

Monita: We would sign a contract with the labor contractor. You would sign directly with the farmer, once you got there. The farmers were very good to us here in Minnesota.

Barela: Were you paid weekly?

Monita: No, we were not paid until the entire job was finished, such as the thinning, the hoeing and so on. We had to completely finish the particular job first.

Barela: Did you make a great deal of money?

Monita: Yes, thanks to God, we did make enough money. Especially because my husband worked with the meat packing plant all winter long. We always had good luck. He never had any conflicts. We lived very comfortably until my daughters got married. Sometimes there were a few problems with their husbands.

Barela: Did they get married very young, like you did?

Monita: Only one, Margarita, we had to sign before she could get married. She was only seventeen years old. The others were of age. My son-in-law came to ask for Margarita's hand in marriage, but I insisted that his parents came to ask.

Barela: Did parents always : ask for the girls hand in marriage?

Monita: Yes, that was the custom.

Barela: Were there any Mexican doctors or lawyers?

Monita: No, just merchants.

Barela: Do you miss the "old St. Paul"?

Monita: Yes. I miss the little stores. Many of the old people are gone. Many people have moved to the East Side.

Barela: Does your family still retain some of the Mexican traditions?

Monita: Yes, they still eat the food. They speak Spanish, but not too well.

Barela: Did your family have any problems in school?

Monita: No. But we didn't encourage them to continue their education.

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.peration. Barela: Do we have your permission to record this interview in the Minnesota Historical

Monita: Yes, you have my permission.

Barela: We thank you for your cooperation.