

ESTABLISHING A COMMUNITY: 1870-1900

In conjunction with Anglos, residents of Mexican descent built the town of Phoenix, including establishing residential neighborhoods and developing businesses sustained by local industries. Farming was at the core of the creation of Phoenix in 1868 — a foundation of agriculture and related industries that extended over the next one-hundred years. The Mexican residents of Phoenix were the primary labor force that made farming in the area successful from the very beginning.

Early Mexican settlers migrated from northern Sonora during the political and social conflicts of the 1860s and 1870s, eventually arriving in Phoenix. Mexican settlers in Phoenix also came from Wickenburg, Florence, Solomonsville, Tucson, Yuma and other towns in the southern region of Arizona. By 1870, the census recorded at least 240 residents living in the Phoenix town site, and 124 were Mexicans. Many of them helped construct *acequias*, or canals, along the Salt River. The construction of these canals made a controlled and dependable supply of water available to valley farmers. This water distribution system constructed by the Mexicans was also the early beginning of the Salt River Project. Mexican workers helped in the first survey directed by William A. Hancock in 1870. They leveled and maintained the first public streets of Phoenix. By 1877, the Phoenix population grew to 500 people, one-half of whom were Mexicans. At that time, the county of Maricopa was created by legislative enactment and Phoenix was declared its county seat. Subsequently, Phoenix became an incorporated city in February, 1881 and John T. Alsap was elected its first mayor.¹⁴

	1870	1880	1890	1900
Total Population	240	1,708	3,152	5,544
Hispanics	124	772	N/A	802
Percent of Total	52%	45%	N/A	14%

In 1886 and 1887, Mexicans graded the roadbed and laid the tracks for the Maricopa and Phoenix Railroad, connecting the city of Phoenix with the Southern Pacific mainline at Maricopa. Lencho Othón recalls that his grandfather came at that time to Phoenix to help build the line from Maricopa. Mexicans also laid the tracks for the mule-drawn streetcars of the Phoenix Street Railway Company, which brought public transportation to Phoenix in 1887. In his research on the early history of Phoenix, Geoffrey P. Mawn suggests that Phoenix had the appearance of a Mexican settlement in the late 1870s and early 1880s. Mexicans made the sun-dried adobe bricks used in business and residential structures in south and central Phoenix. Writer and early Phoenix resident Will Robinson recalled that “the first house in Phoenix . . . was made of adobe in the prevailing boxlike style . . . the floor was of dirt and the windows were innocent of glass for a year. In the same block was a long, low adobe building which was the court house. . . . It was in the adjacent

¹⁴ Jean Reynolds, *We Made Our Life As Best We Could With What We Had: Mexican American Women in Phoenix, 1930-1949* (M.A. Thesis. Arizona State University, 1998), 19, hereafter Reynolds, *We Made Our Life*; Marin, “First Mexican Americans,” 9.

¹⁵ U.S. Bureau of Census, *Census of Population, 1870-1900*, (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office).

room, in October 1871, that R.C. Darrochs opened the first school.” Adobe buildings dotted Washington Street, the main business thoroughfare of Phoenix, including Clemente Romo’s store and Jesus Otero’s buildings.¹⁶ Thick adobe walls were ideally suited to the needs of keeping rooms cool during the scorching summers and warm in the winter.

The earliest residents in Phoenix were a mixture of European immigrants, Civil War veterans, former miners, Mexican nationals who converted their citizenship to the United States as a result of U.S. land acquisitions, and immigrants from Sonora, all seeking the economic opportunities of a new settlement. Since its beginnings, Phoenix was home to both English and Spanish speaking communities. In the early years, many residents were bilingual, and many Anglo men married Mexican women. One example is German immigrant David Balsz, who married Luz Redondo in Yuma. Balsz owned a cattle ranch in east Phoenix and supplied meat to U.S. military installations. Another example is Wilson Walker Jones and his wife Alcaria Montoya. Jones was a former doctor, freighter, miner and rancher. Montoya was a native of Altar, Sonora, and wed Jones at the age of 18 in Yuma. The couple settled in Phoenix in 1879 and built an adobe house at the present-day address of 1008 E. Buckeye. This house is the oldest known documented house still existing in the city. They farmed in the area and raised seven children.¹⁷

At first, race relations were civil. The celebration of the Mexican Independence Day (*Fiestas Patrias*), held on September 15th and 16th illustrates this point. In 1885 the *Phoenix Daily Herald* newspaper reported on the celebration in both Spanish and English, and commented that “the exercises will be highly interesting to both our English and Spanish speaking population.” The feeling of partnership began to change as more Anglo Americans arrived. By the end of the 1890s, Anglo Americans were the dominant group in the city, particularly because Phoenix did not have an “extensive leadership class” of Mexican residents like Tucson. There, many families of Mexican descent “dated back a half-century or more” before the arrival of Americans in the region, who increased in numbers once the railroads and accompanying capital resources from East Coast cities arrived.¹⁸

Residential Development

The population of Phoenix increased from approximately 1,700 residents in 1880 to over 3,100 in 1890. These early residents settled in various parts of the city, and at least twenty subdivisions had emerged in Phoenix by the early 1890s.¹⁹ Early Mexican residents established their own

¹⁶ Florencio “Lencho” Othón, Interview by Pete R. Dimas, March 24, 2004; William Robinson, “Heritage of Salt River Valley” manuscript, n.d., Arizona Collection, Department of Archives and Special Collections, Hayden Library, Arizona State University, 5; Geoffrey P. Mawn, Unpublished research notes, Arizona Historical Foundation, Hayden Library, 1981. Hereafter, Mawn, *notes*.

¹⁷ Frank Barrios, “Phoenix: A Divided City, A History of the Hispanic Community of Phoenix prior to World War II,” Presented at the Arizona Historical Convention, Tucson, Arizona, 2006, 1-2; G. Wesley Johnson, *Phoenix: Valley of the Sun*, (Tulsa: Continental Heritage Press, Inc., 1982), 51; Daniel Woods, “Settler Forfeited Wealth for Pioneer’s Life,” Tri-Valley Dispatch, 20 June 1979. Because Jones family had one son who died with no children, the family legacy continued through the daughters with surnames such as Gomez, Romo and Frank, who settled in Tempe. The Balsz school district in east Phoenix is named for the David Balsz family. City directories indicate that in the 1890s, the Balsz family lived four miles east of Phoenix, on Tempe Road (now Van Buren Street).

¹⁸ Arturo Rosales, “Lost Land: Origins of Mexicans in the Salt River Valley of Arizona, 1865-1910,” unpublished manuscript, 1993, 15; *Daily Herald*, 12 September 1885, and 16 September 1885.

¹⁹ Luckingham, *Phoenix*, 99.

neighborhoods in the fledgling settlement. One neighborhood was along east Monroe Street, from Central to 4th Street. This area, located near the adobe St. Mary's Church, "contained a number of Mexican and Chinese tenements, saloons, a brewery, several Chinese laundries, a few billiards establishments, an assortment of stores, feed and stable businesses, one doctor's office, and a Mexican fire house directly behind St. Mary's." This fire house may have been that of "Yucatec Hose Company No. 2," an all-volunteer fire fighters group. Mexican Independence Day celebrations were held in this area in the 1880s, and the Anglo press called this neighborhood "the Sonora Corner of Phoenix." This neighborhood, comprised of Mexican owned homes and businesses, was located in the northeast part of town.²⁰

In the 1880s and 1890s, located south of the railroad tracks, several subdivisions formed that would gradually transform into a primarily Hispanic neighborhood by the 1920s, known as *La Palestina*. The core of this area later became the Grant Park neighborhood, bounded by Central to 7th Avenue, Harrison Street to Buckeye Road. This area began as a section of a 160 acre homestead purchased from the U.S. government by Bryan P. Duppa in 1873, five years after settlers established the small town of Phoenix. The second owner of this land, James Miller, sold the property to John and Alabama Montgomery in 1880 for the price of \$3,400. In 1887, the Montgomerys filed the plat of the Montgomery Addition with the county, which included the area from Harrison to Buckeye Roads, and Central to 7th Avenues. In 1894, a section from Buckeye Road south to Apache Street, from Central to 7th Avenues was included in the Addition. All of this land was divided into blocks and lots, and sold to individuals for residential and commercial development.²¹



Ignacio Espinoza and friends in Gold Alley, c. 1900. Courtesy of Romo Family

Residents living in this area were both Anglo and Mexican, and were of a middle and lower economic class status. One of the early settlers in the area was the Gomez family. Manuel Gomez was born in 1888 in the area of 6th Avenue and Tonto Street. Manuel's parents, whose family roots traced back to Spain, lived in Yuma until they came to Phoenix some time prior to 1888. When Manuel's parents died, his aunt Lupe Romo raised him and his siblings. The establishment of the Maricopa and Phoenix Railroad (a shortline of the Southern Pacific) through Phoenix in 1887 opened up the Midwest and Eastern markets for exporting and importing goods into the Valley. Businesses, warehouses and factories opened near the railroad line, located just north of the present-day Grant Park neighborhood. Industrial development began on that northern border and continued for many years, thus setting the stage for the neighborhood's transition into a working-class community.²²

²⁰ Julie Corley, "Conflict and Community: St. Mary's Parish, Phoenix, Arizona," (M.A. Thesis, Arizona State University, 1992), 14; Bradford Luckingham, *Minorities in Phoenix: A Profile of Mexican American, Chinese American, and African American Communities, 1860-1992* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1994), 19-20. As an example of the town boundaries at this time, see C.J. Dyer's "A Bird's Eye View of Phoenix" map, 1890, referenced on page 36 of Luckingham, *Phoenix: The History of a Southwestern Metropolis*.

²¹ Jean Reynolds, *We knew our neighbors, and it was like one family: the history of the Grant Park neighborhood, 1880-1950*. (Phoenix: City of Phoenix, 1999), 3, hereafter, Reynolds, *Grant Park*.

²² Reynolds, *Grant Park*, 3.

The development of neighborhoods south of the railroad shifted during the 1890s, when a number of large-scale floods brought water from the Salt River as far north as Washington Street. As a result, “the city’s more affluent residents left the southern area of the city and its suburbs and moved to new residential districts on higher ground north of the city along Central Avenue, westward along Washington Street, and adjacent to the Grand Avenue diagonal. This northward movement marked a permanent change in the direction of the city’s development.”²³ One source notes that the flood of 1891 “destroyed a good part of the Mexican community in Linville, a new southern addition to the town site.” Linville was an older area just east of Central Avenue, between Lincoln and Buckeye roads. It was composed of two subdivisions: the Linville Addition, established in 1884 and extended later in 1893; and Central Park Place, established in 1910.²⁴

Members of the working-class and minority families began to increasingly populate the southern sections of Phoenix (south of the railroad). One study notes that in 1911, many “lower economic class members” were living in the Irvine Addition, west of 7th Avenue and south of the railroad, along with the Montgomery Addition area. Lower economic class families tended to live at the outskirts of the city limits, where land was cheaper. As distinctively poorer neighborhoods developed, municipal services to these areas changed proportionately. Many of the problems of the area were not caused by its residents. Drainage and debris from the upper parts of the city floated down gutters to the southern section, and a poor sewage system made matters worse. These factors caused the transition of a desirable residential neighborhood into a depressed area. Property values and the price of homes decreased, and real estate developers turned their attention elsewhere in the city.²⁵

Agriculture

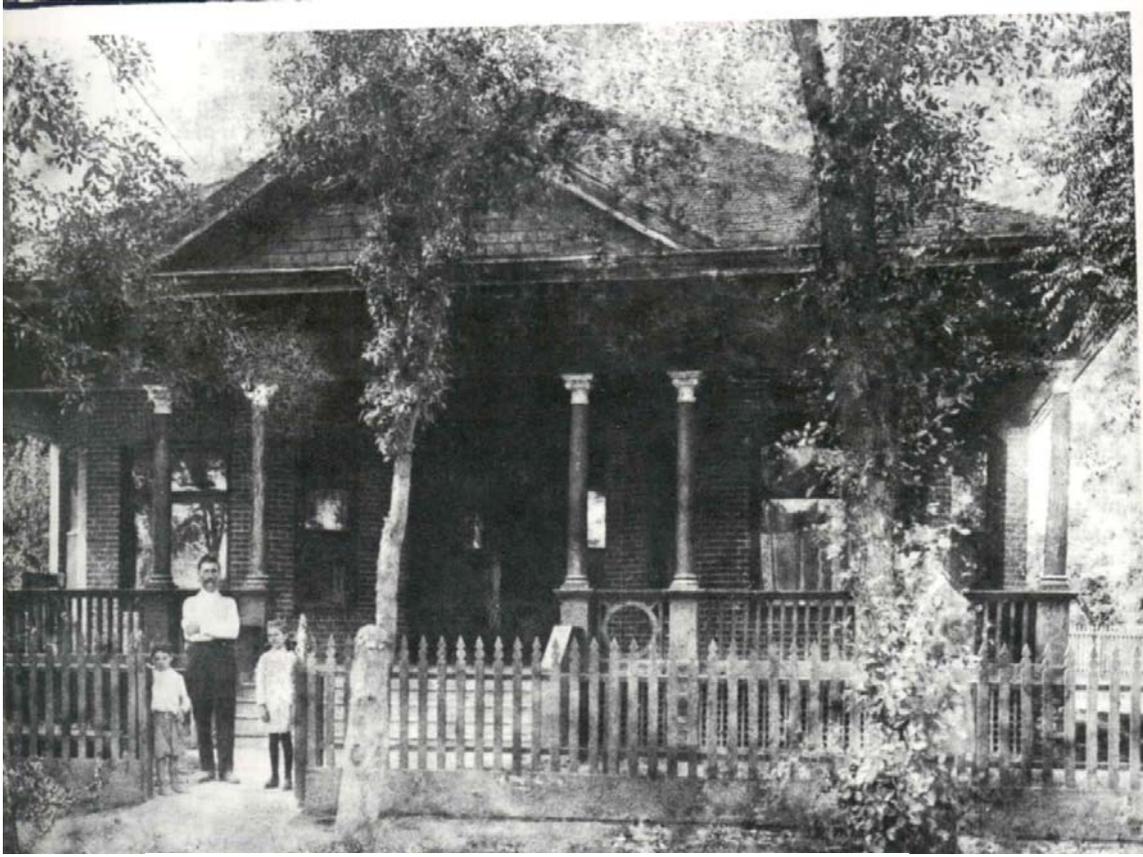
Mexican settlers also moved into the local agricultural economy, which would become a major source of work for Hispanics, and a major part of their contribution to the growth of Phoenix. In 1870, the census listed 30 farmers or ranchers of Mexican descent, but only 9 by 1900. One such farming family prior to 1900 living north of the Salt River was the Silva family. Alejandro Silva, of Portuguese descent, left railroad work in 1884 to homestead 160 acres near 16th and Grand Avenues. He began raising horses and fruit, and hired many Japanese workers. In 1895 he married Hermosillo native María Jesus Alvarez, who managed the Beehive store in Phoenix. After their marriage, she became the business manager of Silva’s “Orange Ranch.” They adopted two Mexican girls, and attended St. Mary’s Church regularly. In 1905 they bought a home at the corner of 7th and Adams Streets, which is now preserved in the City’s Heritage Square. Silva managed the Orange Ranch until her death in 1948.²⁶

²³ Marsha Weisiger, *Boosters, Streetcars, and Bungalows*, (Tempe: Arizona State University, 1984), 12.

²⁴ Jean Reynolds, *The Architectural and Social History of Grant Park and Central Park Neighborhoods: A Preliminary Survey*, (Phoenix Historic Preservation Office, 1998), 1; Johnson, 47.

²⁵ Mark Hackbarth, *Archaeological testing at Verde Park*, (City of Phoenix, 1992), 47; Geoffrey Mawn, *Phoenix, Arizona: Central City of the Southwest, 1870–1920*. (Ph.D. diss., Arizona State University, 1979), 139-140.

²⁶ Luckingham, *Minorities in Phoenix*, 27; Gary Weiland, *St. Francis Cemetery Centennial Celebration Book, 1897-1997*, (Phoenix: James Palmer & Daughter Publishing, 1997), 10. The two Silva daughters sold their family home to Salt River Project.



Silva family and their home, c. 1910.
Photo from *Phoenix: Valley of the Sun*.

Mexican farmers and agricultural laborers also settled south of the Salt River. The pastoral and agricultural nature of today's south Phoenix attracted Mexican families who homesteaded and made their living in farming and ranching. In 1870, a group of Mexican farmers who lived in the South Mountain area (south of the Salt River between present-day 24th and 40th Streets) constructed the San Francisco Canal to bring the waters of the Salt River to their farm lands. The head of the canal was located near what is now downtown Tempe and the channel extended three and one-quarter miles in a southwesterly direction toward the northern foothills of South Mountain. Known in the early 1870s simply as the "Mexican Ditch" by many local residents, the Mexican settlers who relied on the canal to irrigate their fields formally named it after Saint Francis (*San Francisco*) in the hope that the new patron saint would bless the channel — and with it their farming efforts.²⁷

Unfortunately, these farmers fell on hard times. The costs of canal repairs and maintenance mounted while their returns from grain crops dropped due to a depression in market prices.²⁸ For many, however, their dreams of land ownership were quashed in the 1890s by Michael Wormser, a merchant from Prescott. Between 1873 and 1896, Wormser acquired at least 9,000 acres south of the Salt River to Baseline Road between present-day Central Avenue and 48th Street. He also

²⁷ Don Ryden, *South Mountain Agricultural Area: Historic Resources Survey* (Phoenix: City of Phoenix. Planning Department, 1989), 16, 27.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 27.

obtained the rights to the San Francisco Canal and convinced the Mexican farmers that he would provide their land with water.

When Mexicans encountered financial difficulties in maintaining their land and proving their homestead claims, Wormser took advantage of the situation and purchased their lands. He hired the Mexicans to make much-needed repairs on the canal, and convinced them that he could safeguard their land at the same time. He provided them with seed grain and supplies on credit, and soon held liens on much of their farm lands when they could not repay what they owed. In the meantime, the Mexican farmers turned their under-developed tracts of land into prime agricultural acreage. They still held hopes that they could gain a financial return from their crops and pay off their debts to Wormser. But Wormser knew he could take away any claims the Mexicans held to their land because he had financial power over them. He cut off their water supply from the San Francisco Canal and forced them to sell him their now unproductive land at his price.²⁹

The Sotelo family is one example of a south Phoenix family caught up in Wormser's schemes. Pedro Sotelo, who helped build the San Francisco Canal, was a son of Ygnacio Sotelo, Commander of the Tubac Presidio in the early 1800s. Pedro's brother, Tiburcio, became an early settler of Tempe. For a while, Pedro Sotelo managed Wormser's farming operations, but eventually much of his land (over 550 acres) was purchased by Wormser and the Bartlett-Heard Company by the 1890s.³⁰

While some of the south Phoenix farmers may have tried to start farms elsewhere in the Valley, or perhaps even moved away, it seems likely that many became landless farm laborers, or shifted to new types of employment. One example is early settler, Pedro Pérez. Born in 1860 in Pitiquito, Sonora, Pérez arrived in Phoenix with his family in 1870, following the route called the *Cuájar*, a trail that went through Casa Grande. He remembered that the Mexicans there called the Phoenix area *El Salado*. A year later the family returned to Pitiquito, but in 1875, at the age of fifteen, Pérez came back to Arizona, where he worked at the Vulture Mine in Wickenburg. Two years later the entire family once more settled in *El Salado* on a ranch owned by the Henshaws (probably near present-day Buckeye Road). In 1880 Pérez married Anita Ortega, in a wedding on David Balsz's ranch, with a "Mexican Orquesta, lots of food . . . and plenty of dance till the early hour of the following day." Pérez received his citizenship papers with the help of Town Marshall Enrique (Henry) Gárfias. He ranched with his family south of the Salt River until 1898, when they moved into the Phoenix city limits. Later he freighted materials for the Roosevelt Dam construction project with his Studebaker wagons.³¹

In the 1890s agricultural ventures in the Phoenix vicinity included farms, canal companies, creameries and dairies, flour mills, hay and grain companies, ice plants, livery and feed stables,

²⁹ *Phoenix Gazette*, "'Self-Reliance' characterizes 'Southside.'" September 20, 1985; Scott Solliday, *Mexico/Arizona Biographical Survey*; "Pedro Sotelo." Available <http://www.mexicoarizona@ix.netcom.com>; Richard B. Goldbert, "Michael Wormser, Capitalist" *American Jewish Archives*. Vol. 25 no. 2, 1973, 161-206; Blaine P. Lamb, "Frontiersmen in Broadcloth: Jews in Early Phoenix, 1870-1920." *Western States Jewish History*. Vol. 25: no 1, 1992, 3-21.

³⁰ K.J. Schroeder, *An Historic Sketch of Sotelo-Heard Cemetery in South Phoenix, Arizona*. (Tempe: Roadrunner Publications in Anthropology, 1997), 14.

³¹ "Early Mexican Pioneer of Arizona," RG 91, Works Progress Administration, Box 10, Phoenix, AZ: Arizona State Archives, Department of Library, Archives and Records. The Balsz School is named for this family.

nurseries, and fruit and produce distributors. Mexicans experienced in farming put their skills to work, leasing land for farming on which they and their families lived. Laborers were needed for planting, cultivating and harvesting crops; clearing land and plowing fields; caring for livestock and draft animals; cleaning canals and laterals; forging blacksmithing tools, and working with metal, wood, and leather for wagons, harnesses, and related items.³² A strong working knowledge of farming was necessary to operate a farm or ranch, and Mexican laborers were often far more skilled than the landowners who hired them.

Commerce

North of the Salt River, Mexican residents contributed more directly to Phoenix's economy. The availability of work in agriculture or the railroads had attracted working-class families and individuals to the Phoenix area. For example, in 1879, over 1000 Mexican and Chinese railroad workers arrived in the Phoenix area to work on the Maricopa and Phoenix Railroad, as well as in the fields. Yet new Mexican settlers of all social levels were settling in Phoenix, where some became "property owners, teachers, dressmakers, grocers, laundresses, blacksmiths, harness-makers, bakers, butchers, saloon-keepers, jewelers...and as such, provided essential services to Anglo and Mexican members of the community."³³

There are a number of early businessmen who were well-known in the community. Merchant Miguel Peralta was born in Ures, Sonora in 1838, and came to Arizona in 1864 to try his hand in the Black Canyon mines. He, along with other Mexican miners, panned \$35,000 in gold. In the late 1870s, Peralta became a merchant in Wickenburg, and also owned cattle which grazed near the Santa í River. He moved to Phoenix with his wife Dolores and seven children in 1878 and established a large general store at the corner of Washington and Center Streets. He also ran for county treasurer on the Democrat ticket but lost. Inside his large new mercantile business, Phoenix's first post office opened. On March 22, 1879, the local newspaper reported that an "immense quantity of goods" arrived by rail for the store, and seven days later, a "brick pavement" was installed in front of Peralta's store, "the first sidewalk of the kind in Phoenix." Next to his store, local farmers arrived to weigh their hay and barley on his scales, the only ones in the Phoenix area. In 1880, the newspaper referred to him as "the oldest merchant in the valley," although a year later he closed his store and moved to Cochise County to go into business with Joseph Goldwater. At the age of 59, he committed suicide in Nogales, Arizona, after losing his fortune gambling. They found his suicide note on a table with a Mexican dollar resting on it, which read, "I had the money, I lost it: Goodbye."³⁴

Other Mexican merchants settled in Phoenix as well. For example, Jesus Otero was a prominent butcher and cattleman who lived at 1st Avenue and Washington Street. He was a member of the Otero family from New Mexico where his father was a Civil War veteran, and his brother, Miguel

³² *Phoenix City Directory*, 1899-1900, 176 [listings of blacksmiths], 182-202; the 1899-1900 directory lists among the local blacksmiths Alex Figueroa (at the corner of 2nd Street and Jackson), F. Gonzales (at 109 W. Jefferson), and Fernando Valverde (at 1179 E. Van Buren).

³³ Arturo Rosales, *Lost Land: Origins of Mexicans in the Salt River Valley of Arizona, 1865-1910* unpublished manuscript, 3-5, 8; Pete R. Dimas, *Progress and a Mexican American Community's Struggle For Existence: Phoenix's Golden Gate Barrio* (Ph.D. diss, Arizona State University, 1991), 35.

³⁴ Biography of Miguel Peralta, Hayden Pioneer Biography Files, Arizona Collection, Department of Archives and Special Collections, Hayden Library, Arizona State University. Peralta is buried in Nogales, Arizona.

Otero, served as territorial governor in New Mexico between 1897 and 1906.³⁵ Ignacio Espinoza, a native of Sonora, opened Espinoza's Grocery at 2nd and Jackson Streets in 1879. Since Phoenix was still largely rural, he also made money selling hay and grain from a barn behind the store. Other merchants included Jesus Montano, a wine, liquor and grocery dealer, and Jesus Contreras, a freighter and a baker.³⁶



Espinoza Grocery, c. 1880.
Courtesy of Romo Family.

While some Mexicans prospered as merchants, others were in the skilled trades. Miguel Pesquera is thought to be the first tinsmith and plumber in Phoenix, beginning in the mid-1870s. Miguel married Yuma native Carmen Aguayo and they had four children before his death in 1886. He operated a business selling stoves and tin ware in 1892, located on Maricopa (2nd Street) between Jefferson and Washington Streets.³⁷ Businesses catering to the Mexican culture also developed. For example, D. Manuel Manzo began a music school, and a number of men began Spanish language newspapers. During the 1880s, eight short-lived Spanish language publications circulated through the community. These papers provided information to the community and existed as advertising opportunities for Mexican business people. The first newspaper, *La Guardia*, started in 1881 under the leadership of José Garcia, who was also a pressman for the *Phoenix Herald*. After Garcia left, Jesus Meléndrez, also a staff member of the *Phoenix Herald*, began the *Phoenix Tecolote*. Meléndrez, a native of New Mexico and an officer of the *Alianza Hispana Americana* lodge in Phoenix, later became the editor of *El Mensajero*.³⁸ Other newspapers came and went between 1881 and 1890, including *El Progreso del Valle*, *La Union*, *El Mercurio*, *La Verdad*, and *El Hijo del Fronterizo* (owned by a Tucson newspaperman).³⁹

³⁵ Luckingham, *Minorities in Phoenix*, 20; Mawn, *notes*.

³⁶ Mawn, *Notes*.; Weiland, *St. Francis Cemetery*, 12.

³⁷ Newspaper clipping, Sammy Jones scrapbook #1, Sammy Jones Collection, Arizona Collection, Department of Archives and Special Collections, Hayden Library, Arizona State University; Mawn, *notes*.; untitled article, *Arizona Capitol Times*, n.d.; 1892 Phoenix City Directory.

³⁸ *El Mensajero*, (Phoenix, AZ), May 13, 1939; *El Ocasional*, (Phoenix, AZ), January 21, 1899.

³⁹ Mawn, *notes*.; Men associated with these newspapers included Cristobal Aguirre, Alberto Celis, Francisco Davila, Asunción Sanchez, Manuel Garcia, and Gumesindo Meléndrez, brother of Jesus Meléndrez.

Another prominent journalist was Pedro G. de la Lama. He was born in Cadiz, Spain in 1863 and was college educated before serving as a captain in the Mexican army. He came to Arizona in 1886 and settled in Solomonsville, where he became a teacher. In 1893 he moved to Phoenix, and worked as a journalist, beginning several Spanish-language newspapers. As a community activist, he started his first newspaper, *El Democrata*, in 1898. In 1912 he began a new newspaper, called *La Justicia*. This paper operated until 1940. He also owned *El Machete* newspaper, in which he advocated the “betterment of the Spanish race.” A resident in Phoenix for many years, he died in 1945.⁴⁰



Trinidad Escalante Swilling Schumacher, c. 1920.
Courtesy of Phoenix Museum of History

Women also worked, in an informal economy rather than as business owners. For example, Phoenix founder Trinidad Escalante Swilling worked in town as a seamstress after her husband died in the Yuma Territorial Prison in 1878. With this money and income obtained through ownership of Swilling’s ranch in Wickenburg, she built a new house in Phoenix. At the age of 33, she married a German immigrant named Henry Schumacher, who operated a local bar. She stopped working and raised three more sons. Nine years later, in 1896, her second husband died, and she again resumed seamstress work.⁴¹

By the 1880s, many of the Mexican merchants could not keep up with the competition of the growing Anglo business community. While some became managers or clerks in more prominent Anglo-owned businesses in town, others formed partnerships with Anglos in order to remain successful. For example, early residents shopped at the meat market of Otero & Blake, while others patronized Haefner & Garcia’s local saloon.⁴²

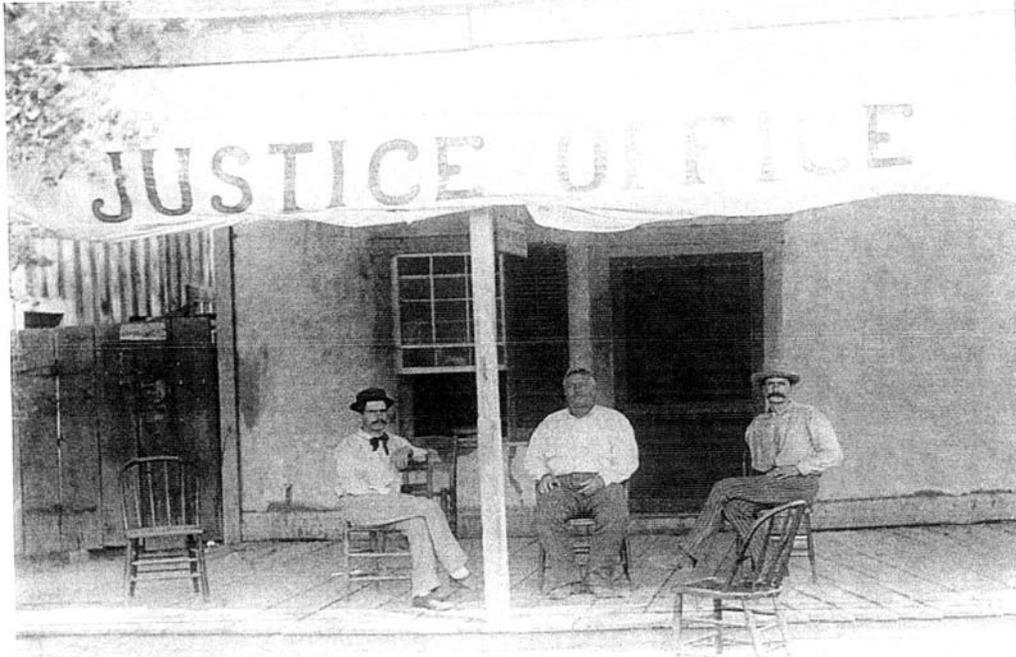
Enrique “Henry” Gárfias was an early Phoenix community leader, and the first Hispanic to hold an elected office in the city. Gárfias was born in Mexico, and grew up in California. He came to Phoenix in 1874. Four years later he ran for town constable and won, defeating several Anglo candidates. His duties included serving legal notices and assisting in operations of the peace court. In 1881, Gárfias ran for the position of Phoenix’s first city marshal. Once elected, his duties included assessor, tax collector, road commissioner, dog catcher, and zanjero, in addition to law enforcement. He held this office until 1886, and was popular with Anglo and Mexican residents. He developed a reputation as a tough lawman who always caught the criminals. He married Elena Redondo in 1883, originally of Yuma. They had two children, and she died in childbirth after the third. Gárfias remarried in 1891. He also owned cattle at Castle Hot Springs, served as the editor

⁴⁰ *Arizona Republic*, “Death Takes Publisher,” February 20, 1945.

⁴¹ *Arizona Republic*, “Pioneer Woman of Early Period Dies Following Illness” December 28, 1925. “Statement of Mrs. Trinidad Shoemaker (sic) (Formerly Mrs. Jack Swilling)” Oral History transcript, March 2, 1923, Salt River Project History Services. When Trinidad died in Phoenix in 1925, she was survived by one son, two daughters, and six grandchildren. Little is known about her life in general. Before her death, she donated to the present-day Phoenix Museum of History her mother’s rosary, prayer book, and shawl, as well as a rifle owned by Jack Swilling. One of her daughters, Georgia Swilling Whiteside, became a well-known “Lady Doctor” in Wickenburg, providing informal health care and midwife services to many residents in the late 1800s and early 1900s.

⁴² Mawn, *notes*.

of the *El Progreso del Valle* newspaper (owned by José Luis Redondo, his father-in-law), and provided services as a language interpreter. In 1892, the Phoenix city directory lists him as living at Papago (3rd Avenue) and Jefferson Streets. Gárrias died in 1896. The *Phoenix Herald* memorialized him, remarking that he “gave the greatest satisfaction to the citizens of Phoenix. He was brave and conscientious and never failed in his duty no matter how danger menaced him.”⁴³



Enrique Gárrias, on the left, c. 1880.
Courtesy of Phoenix Police Museum.

Political Involvement and Social Organizations

While Enrique Gárrias was the only Hispanic elected official in Phoenix’s early days, Mexican residents, who still maintained cultural ties to Mexico, participated in both the Republican and Democratic parties. In 1876 Mexicans made up over 20 percent of the registered voters in Phoenix.⁴⁴ Mexican residents participated in U.S. patriotic activities in the late 1890s, during the Spanish-American War. Early cultural organizations also developed that maintained the link to their *patria* (homeland). These groups included the Mexican Literary Society and the Phoenix lodge of *Sociedad Zaragoza*, which gave an annual ball to celebrate Cinco de Mayo, a celebration of General Ignacio Zaragoza’s victory over the French at Puebla in 1862. A third was the *Junta Patriótica Mexicana*, which held September celebrations of the Mexican Independence Day.⁴⁵ Other early Mexican social organizations were benevolent and mutual aid societies.

Other early Mexican social organizations were benevolent and mutual aid societies. The *Alianza Hispano Americana*, a mutual aid and fraternal organization founded in Tucson in 1894, established a chapter called the Alma Azteca Lodge #9 in Phoenix in 1898, which boasted 60 members two years later. The *Alianza* was founded in response to growing hostility from Anglo Americans, and

⁴³ Earl Zarbin, “Henry Garfias: Phoenix’s First City Marshal,” *Journal of Arizona History*, Spring 2005, Vol 46, no 1, pg 55-70; 1892 Phoenix City Directory. Gárrias is buried in the Pioneer Cemetery in an unmarked grave.

⁴⁴ Rosales, 13-16.

⁴⁵ Luckingham, *Minorities in Phoenix*, 23.

worked to defend the civil rights of *Mexicanos* and to improve the quality of their lives. The *Alianza* used Masonic lodges, or *logias*, as models, and aimed to help others. Throughout its history, the *Alianza* provided death benefits for its members, encouraged assimilation and civic responsibility, and held events where members could socialize. Numerous lodges of the AHA throughout the Southwest encouraged members to campaign and vote for local and state candidates who supported their efforts to end racial injustice and discrimination against Hispanics and to bring an end to the segregation of Mexican and Mexican American children in public schools. By 1905 Lodge #9 hosted a convention drawing delegates from Arizona, New Mexico and California.⁴⁶

Religion

The formation of the Mexican community would not have been complete without a church, and early residents attended Catholic services when they could. The home of Trinidad Swilling on east Washington Street was “the site of the first Mass celebrated in Phoenix” in 1870 by Father Andre Eschallier.⁴⁷ In 1877, Edward Gerard, a priest from Florence, traveled 63 miles in a buckboard to hold occasional services in the home of local businessman Jesus Otero. Soon, Mexican residents set about to form a church. Under the leadership of Father Gerard, residents built *La Inmaculada Concepción de María*, or St. Mary’s Church, located in 1881 on east Monroe Street, between Pima (3rd) Street and Pinal (4th) Street. Businessmen Jesus Otero, Miguel Peralta, and Paolo Perrazzo donated the land for the church. The early church displayed statues and used furnishings from Otero’s home, and held 500 people.⁴⁸

The community also held special cultural celebrations that were tied to religious beliefs, such as the *Día de San Juan* festival, held on June 24. Historian James McClintock commented, “For years I had the impression that St. John the Baptist was the patron Saint of Phoenix. For years after my arrival in 1879, the principal holiday was Saint John’s Day . . . This was a veritable carnival that lasted a week and was joined by both American and Mexican people. The little church [St. Mary’s] was packed, mainly by Mexican communicants who knelt on the bare floor.” The community also celebrated the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, during which women created altars, “adorning them according to their means, and [they] worshipped as they were taught by their mothers.” Unfortunately this community fiesta suffered from Phoenix’s new prestige as the territorial capital when, in 1891, the territorial legislature abolished *El Día de San Juan* celebrations, considering them a public nuisance.⁴⁹

Another important part of Mexican tradition centers on the death of loved ones. Within the Mexican Catholic tradition, relatives take part in ceremonies to honor the dead, not only when they pass away, but also annually through visits to the cemeteries on *Día de los Muertos* or through personal altars in their homes. These traditions imbue burial places with strong cultural significance for the Mexican American community.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 24; W. Lane Rogers, “Alianza Hispano American,” *Arizona Capitol Times*, n.d. Between 1905 and 1915, the Alianza organization met at various halls open to masonic groups, such as the Melczer and Lamson Halls in downtown Phoenix.

⁴⁷ Weiland, *St. Francis Cemetery*, 2, 15.

⁴⁸ Luckingham, *Phoenix*, 19; C.J. Dyer map, Bird’s Eye View of Phoenix, Arizona, c. 1885.

⁴⁹ Corley, 13; Luckingham, *Minorities in Phoenix*, 2; (Hispanics in Arizona: A Timeline <http://www.azcentral.com/culturesaz/hispanic/hisphistory.html>).

Prior to 1896, most Mexican residents north of the Salt River who passed away were buried in secular cemeteries or private plots. In 1897, Father Novatus Benzing of St. Mary's helped to create the first Catholic cemetery in the area, St. Francis, located at Oak and 48th Streets. The cemetery features a number of shrines to St. Francis, altars, mausoleums and statues. St. Francis Cemetery is racially intermixed, but is the most used cemetery for Hispanic families who have lived in Phoenix for a long time. Notable individuals interred include Trinidad Swilling, Martin Gold, Paolo Perazzo, Pedro de la Lama, and the Silva, Gastelum, Espinoza, and Romo families.⁵⁰



Visitors at St. Francis Cemetery, c. 1915.
Photo from St. Francis Centennial Celebration Book.

Located south of the river, the Sotelo-Heard Cemetery is also significant to the Mexican community. The cemetery, located near 12th Street and Broadway Road, was used prior to 1896 and as late as the 1920s. The first recorded burial was in 1896, the child of Mr. and Mrs. José Rivera. The cemetery was located on Heard's Ranch and had a number of names, including the Mexican Cemetery, Southside Cemetery, the Heard Cemetery, and the Sotelo Cemetery. Individuals buried there are members of Mexican farming families, laborers on the Bartlett-Heard Ranch or other Anglo-owned ranches, and also some individuals who lived in the barrios north of the river in the 1910s and 1920s. The "Sotelo"

name may refer to Pedro and Francisca Sotelo who owned land north of the cemetery and did business with Michael Wormser and the Bartlett-Heard Company. Sotelo's land may have included the cemetery parcel at one time, or his family may have been the first to be buried there. A 1997 report suggested that as many as 200-400 burials are in the cemetery, and of the 177 recorded most have Spanish surnames. One example is the sister of *El Mensajero* (and *La Justicia*) owner Jesus Meléndrez, who was buried there in 1898.⁵¹

Another location where Mexican families buried their dead prior to 1900 was the Pioneer and Military Park, on Jefferson and 15th Avenue. There are seven historic cemeteries in this one location, which were established between 1884 and 1898. Burials in these cemeteries ended in 1914.⁵²

⁵⁰ Weiland, *St. Francis Cemetery*, 16-41.

⁵¹ K.J. Schroeder. *An Historic Sketch of Sotelo-Heard Cemetery in South Phoenix, Arizona*. Tempe: Roadrunner Publications in Anthropology, 1997, 1-16, 23. The obituary reported that Francisca Meléndrez Abril had recently "rescued her child from drowning in the river... and the strain on her mind at the time became so intense it became necessary to send her to the asylum." She had been released only a few days prior to her death in her home "from fever."

⁵² Pioneer Cemetery Association, *Phoenix Historic Cemeteries Burial List: The Cemeteries of Pioneer and Military Memorial Park in Phoenix, Arizona*. (Phoenix, Phoenix Pioneer Cemetery Association, 2005.), vi.

Education

Prior to 1900, Mexican students attended the same public schools as Anglo children. It is known that Mexican families sent their children to the first Phoenix public school classroom in 1871. This classroom was held in the Territorial Courthouse on south 1st Avenue, at that time known as Cortez Street. The first separate school building, the Central School, was made of adobe and located on Central Avenue, two blocks north of Washington Street. Phoenix's first high school began in 1895 in the Clark Churchill residence at 5th and Van Buren Streets.⁵³

Under Father Jouvenceau, St. Mary's Church established a parochial school in 1892, where things were different. Anglo children attended classes in a brick building located at 4th and Monroe Streets, while Mexican children went to classes in a frame home the Church purchased, located at Van Buren and 4th Streets. Five years later, Father Novatus erected a new brick school and named it San Antonio's, for the Mexican children. San Antonio's School provided free tuition while St. Mary's School charged for tuition. The intention of separate schools was to enable Spanish-speaking children to learn enough English at San Antonio's to transfer over to St. Mary's Grammar School, though this was not always the practice. In any case, the enrollment at San Antonio's was always higher than at St. Mary's Grammar School, and the former always had fewer teachers. The teachers at San Antonio's were not paid for their work, while the nuns who taught in St. Mary's Grammar School received a salary.⁵⁴

In the 1890s, Phoenicians of Mexican descent attempted to make public schools and the overall society "more bilingual." In 1893 an Arizona legislator called for teachers "to pass an examination in Spanish and teach Spanish to their pupils."⁵⁵ The Anglo population rallied against the idea and supported existing legislation where "all schools must be taught in the English language."⁵⁶ A political firestorm of opposition against bilingual education in the public schools ensued, with Phoenicians questioning the American loyalties and patriotism of Hispanics. The Phoenix press continued to fuel anti-bilingual education rhetoric and hinted racist overtones when Anglo critics suggested that schools "teach the Mexicans English instead of trying to make Mexicans of the Americans." Clearly issues of language and "American loyalty" have a long history in Phoenix.⁵⁷

By the 1890s changes in the town of Phoenix greatly diminished the role and status of Mexican citizens. The Southern Pacific (1879) and Santa Fe Railroads (1895) had established their lines through the town center, and in 1889 Phoenix became Arizona's territorial capital. Agricultural and business activity increased, primarily a result of the arrival of the railroads and easier access to outside markets and capital. Promoters wanted to "boost" Phoenix as a good city for new residents — a campaign that focused on white residents only. As a result, the economic ties which linked

⁵³ Robinson, "Heritage of the Salt River Valley," 5; Phoenix Union High School District, *A Bicentennial Commemorative History of the Phoenix Union High School System 1895-1976*, (Phoenix Union High School District, 1976), 17-19; Marin, 9.

⁵⁴ Corley, 15, 34-35; Weiland, 17. Some wealthy Mexican families such as the de la Lama family paid tuition to enroll their children at St. Mary's School, but this was uncommon.

⁵⁵ Luckingham, *Minorities in Phoenix*, 22.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

Mexican and Anglo settlers began to deteriorate. Mexican goods and services became less necessary as Anglo residents looked to the east and west coast for mass-produced items. Mixed marriages and inter-ethnic business partnerships decreased and discrimination frequented the Mexican community forcing upon them a second-class status. At this time small numbers of African American and Chinese American families also settled in Phoenix, many living in mixed neighborhoods with Hispanics. Mexican residents continued to experience social and economic marginalization by the rapidly increasing Anglo population. By 1900, Hispanics only composed 14 percent of Phoenix's population within the city limits, a drastic change from 20 years prior, when the Mexican community made up half the residents. Yet this community would continue to flourish and grow.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 25.