

Guillermo Gonzalez
Interview Transcription

By

Cristina M. Gonzalez

Spring 2010

Dr. Russell Skowronek

Star County, Rio Grande City, Texas

Porcion & Oral History Project

University of Texas Pan American

Community Historical Archaeology Program for the
Schools (**CHAPS**)

Your Name and date of birth:

Guillermo Gonzalez, Jan. 6, 1959

What is your occupation?

7th Grade Math Teacher

When did you begin going out to the ranch?

I first started going to the when I was very young, probably as a toddler.

Do you know the specific address or general location of the ranch?

There are 2 ranches that my grandparents owned. Both ranches are just north of El Sauz, Texas in northern Starr County. One belonged to my grandmother, Antonia Guerra Gonzalez, and it was located at San Carlos Ranch TX and the other Monterrey Ranch belonged to my grandfather, Crisoforo Gonzalez. Monterrey Ranch was established by my great grandfather, Silvestre Gonzalez.

How was the ranch used by your ancestors?

Both ranches were inherited by my grandparents from their parents. My grandmother was born and raised at San Carlos Ranch TX and my grandfather was born and raised at Mirasoles Ranch TX. My grandparents married in 1916 and established their home in Monterrey Ranch part of Porción 108. There they raised their children. My grandfather worked the ranch for his father, he was a true vaquero. My grandmother on the other hand stayed home and raised the kids. Mind you life on a ranch was very hard, no phone, no electricity, no running water, no indoor plumbing, no doctors, and NO HEB. My grandmother would tell stories of having to get water from the pond that the cattle also shared, so it had to be boiled. They did this until they could dig a well. What ever they could grow they did. My grandfather would hunt game. Other supplies they had to go to town for. They wouldn't go to Rio Grande very often because back then they would travel on horse back or on mule and wagon and the trip which today takes less than an hour, would take most of the day, a very long and tiring trip.

How was the work divided up?

When dad, third oldest of 12 brothers and sisters, was about 6 years old (@ 1927), my grandparents decided to move to town (Rio Grande City TX) so that the children could go to school. By this time my great grandfather, Silvestre Gonzalez, had already divided his land among his nine children, each inheriting about 250 acres. My grandfather worked the land and cattle until his boys were old enough to help. Old enough meant around 9 or 10 years of age.

When my father was about this age, my grandfather would leave him and his older brother at the ranch for week or so during the summer alone to plow the field and work the ranch. He would

leave them with enough supplies to last the time there, meat they would hunt for and water was available from a well. Shelter was also available in a small shed my grandfather had built. So to keep cool they would sleep on the roof looking at the vast clear sky. If something came up where they needed help, they would ride on horseback to one of neighboring relative's ranches.

Dad, though not the oldest, was who my grandfather put most of his confidence in to take care of the ranch and his older brother. My grandfather had mules and horses at the ranch which were used for pulling the farm implements such as the plow; the plow was not a single plow, but a five to six disc plow. The hard part was in catching the five animals needed to pull the plow and getting the harnesses on them. Dad though very young was the only one of the brothers who could handle the animals, which were pretty wild.

After WWII, when all the boys came home, dad and his brothers continued working the ranch mainly raising cattle. Dad who worked for US Department of Agriculture had learned how to inoculate cattle and other things required for a healthy ranch. Growing up we would work the ranch along with dad and his brothers, of course we couldn't do half the stuff he did, but we did our best. Working the ranch was something we loved, something dad and his dad loved. It was in their blood.

Tell me about your family life on the ranch.

We would spend days, mending fences, fixing the "papalote" (windmill), cutting mesquite limbs for fence post, and of course working cows. We helped dad with round ups when calves/cows were old enough and heavy enough to sell. We helped him deliver calves when mamma cow couldn't do it alone. We helped with branding and castrating of calves. During the winter, when grass was scarce and droughts came often, I would go with dad every day after school to the ranch to burn cactus using the "Chamuscadora," flamethrower.

Around 1975 and due to many reasons the land was divided among Dad and his brothers. Droughts and low beef market caused them to start selling away the land and that wonderful chapter of our lives came to an end.

How long has your family lived in the valley?

Well first of all, if you come from Starr County, Rio Grande City in particular, we did not consider us as part of the valley. To us the valley started around the mission area.

But to answer this question, my family on Dad's side has been here since the mid 1800's.

Does the entire family live in the area?

Yes, my immediate family all live in the valley, with the exception of my youngest sister who lives in Oklahoma City, OK

Describe life growing up in the valley and the area your from?

I grew up in Rio Grande City TX, the middle child of seven children. As a child my dad ran a service station, back when full-service was the rule. I remember he had to check the oil, tire-pressure, and clean the windows of every car that came in, whether they bought gas or not.

Life in Rio at the time was great, at least for us kids. Everyone knew everyone in town. Windows and cars were never locked and adventures were plentiful. We didn't stay in the house except to eat and sleep, there was so much outdoors, that we didn't want to miss out on anything.

My older sibling and I went to Catholic school, from Kinder to 8th grade, except for me I went until 6th grade. From there we were introduced to public school and Fort Ringgold, an old cavalry fort from the pre-civil war era which was converted to a school. Dad would take us to and from school everyday, so if we ever got into trouble, he already knew it and then we were really in trouble.

As we became teenagers, Rio had little to offer, no movie theatre, no dance clubs, no bowling alleys; all these were located in the Magical Rio Grande Valley, where palm trees lined every road for miles upon miles. Going to McAllen or "El Valle" from Rio was something special. We shopped downtown because mall did not exist. Glick Twins downtown had the best strawberry pie and if we were lucky Dad would take us to the only Whataburger in McAllen at the time, which was located over by Boggus Ford.

Does your family have any land that ties to any of the porciones? If so how did they come to own the property?

As far as porciones are concerned, my family has ties to a number of them. They include:

Porción 60 (5,640.92 acres) was initially issued to Blas Farias by the King of Spain. It was reissued to Gregorio Saens grandson of Nicolas Gonzalez, by the State of Texas under legislative act of Feb. 10, 1852. Porcion 64 (1,402.5 acres) was initially issued to Jose Cruz de La Pena. Both porciones are located in Starr County Porciones 60 & 64 under the jurisdiction of Mier were purchased by my Great Great Great Great Great Grandfather Nicolas Antonio Gonzalez

Porcion 66 (4,299.88 acres), jurisdiction of Mier, was issued to Francisco Guerra Canamar; my great great great great great grandfather on the Guerra side of the family. Porcion 66 is located in Starr County where Fronton, Texas is located today. It was re-issued to Ysidro Guerra grandson of Francisco Guerra by the State of Texas under legislative act of Feb. 10, 1852.

Porcion 108, Camargo (Granted: 1767), 6199 acres located in Starr County, was issued to Francisco Antonio Villarreal. It was re-issued to the heirs of Francisco Antonio Villarreal by the State of Texas under legislative act on Feb. 10, 1852.

Another porcion that we have connections too is porcion 301, jurisdiction of Camargo. Porcion 301 consisted of 6,198 acres in Starr County. It was initially issued by Cuervo under the authority of the King on July of 1767 and re-issued by the State of Texas under legislative act on February 10, 1852. Porcion 301 was issued to Bartolome Trevino. Bartolome Trevino's daughter Maria Isabel married Juan Manuel Guerra. Juan Manuel was the son of Francisco Guerra Canamar, which I previously mentioned as my great great great great grandfather on the Guerra side of the family

Another porcion that we have connections to is porcion 74, jurisdiction of Mier. Porcion 74 consisted of 6,049.17 acres in Starr County (Roma, Texas area). It was initially issued by Cuervo under the authority of the King on July of 1767 and re-issued by the State of Texas under legislative act on February 10, 1852. Porción 74 was issued to Geronimo Saens. Geronimo Saens' granddaughter Martina de Los Santos married Juan Jose Lopez. Juan Jose Lopez and Martina de Los Santos were the parents of Emeteria Lopez y de Los Santos, who married Canuto Gonzalez. This couple was my grandfather Crisoforo's grandparents.

Martin de Leon, another of our ancestors was issued Colony by the Mexican Government, The de Leon Colony issued by Mexico on April 13, 1824, one day before Steven F. Austin was issued his Colony. The de Leon Colony was located in present Victoria, Texas.

This information was provided and researched by my cousin Juan Manuel Escobar, ex-Texas Representative and now Kleberg County Judge.