

Ethnic Oral History Project, 1977-1978

Fresno Historical Society

Emilio Canales

Emilio Canales, owner of Casa Canales Restaurant, was interviewed on August 16, 1977. He was born in Colton, California, between San Bernardino and Riverside, in 1931. His father, Jose Canales, moved to Fresno in 1925 and worked for the railroad loading refrigerated cars with ice. Canales describes his father's various businesses, a store that grew in Colton and a popsicle business in Fresno. He describes the popsicle carts being peddled from Jose's place on F Street between Tulare and Mariposa Streets in downtown Fresno out to Roeding Park in 1927. Jose Canales soon had a *tortilleria* and expanded his businesses to add a delicatessen, a panderia (the first Mexican bakery in Fresno), and a dulceria. He was supplying the *falluqueros*, food peddlers, carrying Mexican goods to rural communities like Firebaugh. Jose added a restaurant to his businesses he originally called Canales Hermanos, which later became known as Las Palmas restaurant. He developed the restaurant into an entertainment venue with a patio. Due to his stature in the community, Canales' father was often asked for help with immigration issues.

Canales describes attending Edison High School. He did not graduate and regrets it. During World War II, Canales served with the 84th Infantry Division in Germany on the Siegfried Line and Belgium. He "was with communications in the artillery."

Canales describes the early Mexican American organizations in Fresno, such as the *Alianza Hispan Americana*, *La Progresista* and the *Morelos*. His father was a member of *Los Mutualistas y Obrero Mexicano*. He describes the dances on Saturday at Ryan's Auditorium as the high social point of the week.

Canales discusses the expansion of the Mexican community in Fresno to 25% of the population of Fresno County. Canales describes being one of the first Mexicans, along with his friend Bob Rodriguez, to register to vote in 1947. He describes the efforts to register other Mexican American's to vote. Canales discusses other leading Mexican business leaders. He describes his involvement with the West Fresno Rotary Club and the North Fresno Rotary Club, as well as being a commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 8900. In about 1973, he and three others started the Latin American Businessmen Club, now fifty strong.

Canales describes gathering the funding to start Casa Canales restaurant in 1953, the second Mexican restaurant in Fresno. He was determined not to take money from his father, but he ended up getting seed money from his wife's grandfather, Francisco Navarro. Canales wraps up his narrative with a discussion about the preservation of Mexican and other ethnic history in West Fresno.

Interviewer: Ben Garza

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Fresno City and County Historical Society
Interview with Mr. Emilio Canales
August 16, 1977

Today is August 16, 1977. I, Ben Garza, am interviewing Mr. Emilio Canales at his restaurant, the Casa Canales Restaurant.

Garza: Mr. Canales, when were you born and where were you born?

Canales: I was born in Colton, California. This is between San Bernardino and Riverside. I was born in 1931.

Garza: Where was your longest place of residence? Where is it that you lived the longest?

Canales: Here in Fresno. We moved to Fresno in 1925. Well, my father moved here in 1925 from Colton. He had a big mishap there and he wasn't talking with his brother, Jose Canales. He sold his house and moved over here. He went to work for the railroad company, filling up railroad cars with ice. You know, refrigerator cars. In the old days, they used to refrigerate them with ice. Since he used to work with the railroad company, at one time in Colton, he came over here and went to work for them.

Garza: Do you remember how much your father was paid in those days?

Canales: No, I don't, but even though that type of work was paid pretty good, the hours were long. They used to days, nights, depending on when they used to get those cars in. During the season here, naturally, they did keep cars. My father used to work day and night. I guess he made money, considering the old days. I never did ask him.

Garza: I am told by people in the community that your father had business inclinations?

Canales: He was very, very business-like. He came from Mexico. In Colton, he started his own first business. It was a small little store. It could have been the size of a bedroom; I guess like ten feet by fifteen feet. A small little tiendita. From that tiendita, he got to build a big store. He had one of the largest Mexican stores in Colton. Consequently, he bought his own property, he had his own building and was just a good, hard working businessman with ideas. He just was very innovated. I just admire him.

Garza: Is that where you learned your line of business?

Canales: Yes, and sometime, of course I don't tell this to anybody. I mean like my wife, 'cause she's always getting after me, teasing me: Where do you get all these ideas? It seems I get involved in many things,

You know, in the restaurant. I am always changing things, I am always doing things different and she says, "You're always coming up with something new." I think probably that I think I have something of my dad.

Well I tell you how from that, working for the railroad, filling those cars with ice, he got enough money together. His first business was making popsicles. Well, that was his first business. He went into the popsicles. How you can imagine un Mexicano making popsicles. Well, that was his first business. He went into the popsicle business. He had pretty much in the old days. Had Fresno controlled; he was making all the popsicles in Fresno. He had little carts or push carts that he had made. I remember them because I use to; it was part of my job. I was eight years old when I came to Fresno. My dad would tell me "Come on son, we'll go and fill up those boxes". I used to fill them up with ice and then get this salt, what do you call it?

Garza: Grain salt.

Canales: Yeah, and he'd say, "Throw that salt in there and pack it in there". Then you'd get gunny sacks and put it around to keep the ice. Then we'd put the ice cream inside and peddle it out. They used to peddle all over town. There was three or four of them that used to peddle all the way to Roeding Park from my dad's place, between Tulare and Mariposa on 'F' street. From there, they used to walk all the way to Roeding Park.

Garza: Is that where the people congregated in those days?

Canales: Well you know Mexican people; they've always loved the open, the trees, and Roeding Park has always been a favorite place. That was his first business in Fresno.

Garza: What year was that?

Canales: That was 1927, when he operated there. He had in the back a small area that he wasn't using too much. So he said, "You know what I think? I can put a little tortilla machine over here and a little comal. I think I can make some tortillas". See, so he had that little space out there and well that's what he did, he bought a tortilla machine. Now the tortilla machine then wasn't like the automatic machines that they have now.

Garza: Oh, of coarse not.

Canales: The other ones were.

Garza: De cranque.

Canales: They were motor, they were mechanized already, this particular one. They used to have, un planch, and it goes on a rubberized fan belt and it would, I bet it's the same principle as it is now, only that the pestal would fall on to this plancha. The plancha would come and squash it, that's about what it amounted to. The machine made the tortilla and then somebody at the other end--it had a sharp turn here so that when the tortilla was coming down it would slip off. Then you would catch it and then you would have to put it on the comal or the hot plate by hand. That was the automatic tortilla that first ever came out. So, anyway, that's what he had. Pretty soon, he had the first tortilla shop in Fresno. He had them working day and night on the popsicles and he used to get a lot of the falluqueros. The falluqueros were the food peddlers that used to go out to the countryside. In the old days, there weren't any stores up there in the fields--Firebaugh. Very few stores in between. This falluqueros would fix their trucks to carry all types of meats, Mexican products, tortillas and quesos and popsicles. That's why we started getting these falluqueros to buy these tortillas. Soon he had two shifts going, three shifts going day and night, just making tortillas.

Garza: This was after the railroad?

Canales: This was after the railroad, after he left the railroad to work his own business.

Garza: How long did he work on the railroad?

Canales: About three years, four years, something like that. Well, of course, that place got too small and then he moved to 'G' street and that place was about three times as big. It was three times as big; so he said, "Well, I sure do have a lot of room over here". He opened up a delicatessen type when he expanded into more of these spices. Then he expanded his tortilla. He bought two machines, he had two machines going and he had extra space. He thought he'd open up a bakery. He had a little corner and he opened up a bakery. He got himself a baker and started making bread. He ended up being the first Mexican bakery. He had another little corner and he said, "You know what we are going to make? Our own candy, Mexican candy". I said, Dad, but you don't know how to make candy. He said, "I know a little bit, but I know a friend of mind in Los Angeles. He says he wants to move over here and I think I'll bring him over and we'll start a candy shop". So we started making Mexican candy, calavasa, camote, all the candies. My dad did good because he still had all these falluqueros coming in and buying all this merchandise. Then they were

buying all the quesos, tortillas, bread, candy, all the spices and Mexican cheese you can imagine. He was the only one. He had all these things going at the same time. Like I say, he wasn't just satisfied having one little thing, one little tortilla shop. He had to go on into other things. Right after the war he quit. Actually the tortilla machines were coming out. They were being more mechanized. My dad used to make a good product, a good tortilla, nice thick tortilla, real meaty, real tasty, not like the tortillas they sell today. The ones that they make now are too thin, they're not good, they're good for making enchiladas and corn chips. The tortilla that they make now is too thin, you have a tortilla that is too thin. Actually, it's tasteless. My dad used to make them. He was proud of his tortilla. He used to sell a lot of them over the counter. He never wanted to go, but it was expensive and he couldn't compete against it. He liked it. I said, get a machine that is mechanized. He'd say, "No, son, I'll never get into that stuff". Either you're going to join them or forget it; then we were too busy. Then from 'G' street, we moved over to 'F' street in 1936. He had the delicatessen, the tortilleria, the panaderilla, the dulserilla. The place he bought was a big place and it's still there, which is Las Palmas. The place was big and he thought, you know, we still have room in here, we can put some tables and start a little restaurant. That's what he did, he started a restaurant.

Garza: What did he call it?

Canales: Well, the name that he used all these years was Canales Brothers, or Canales Hermanos. He was known as Canales Brothers, his place was known and he always went as Canales Brothers. The store in Colton was known as Canales Brothers' Grocery Store. He just kept the same name. I don't know why, sentimental reasons or whatever. He called it Canales Brothers. When he went into that business, well when he moved onto 'F' street, or where the Palmas is now, the property next door he fixed into a patio. He opened up this dance hall, he'd have dancing, entertainment, he'd bring groups from Mexico, artists, plays, good professionals. He used to bring these artistas like Azteca Theater brings now. Then, besides the restaurant, he had that open air beer garden he used to run in the summer. (laughter) Now, you see, how many things he had going at one time, he was a busy man, always thinking. He'd say, "I can build a parking lot out here, but, we won't gain anything, so I think we'll do better if we do something with it".

It had trees in, so he kept the trees. He said,

"We'll keep the trees". He kept the trees and they gave us shade in the summer. Then he bought some of these outdoor umbrellas and tables and things like that. He went into all these different things, he had quite an imagination. He knew what to give the people, knew what they wanted.

Garza: Is he still alive?

Canales: No, he died three years ago. He was very well-liked, always willing to help. People would come over and they would ask, "Don Jose tengo esta problema y no puede ayudar". He would reply, "Seguro que si, pos toncante". Well, whatever would take care of their problems. If it was immigration, he never went to these private businesses. He would take them to the International Institute. He knew people over there and he'd say, "This is my friend and he has a problem". All right, Mr. Canales, we'll take care of him, we'll help him. They would help him, and it wouldn't cost him anything.

Garza: You mean the International Institute of Language?

Canales: No, the International Institute is an organization that helps foreign born.

Garza: Is it still around?

Canales: Oh yes, they have their building out on Waterman street, they are very active.

Garza: Talking about yourself now, did you attend school? I am assuming that you did.

Canales: Yes, I attended Edison, then I also attended high school in Colton. Unfortunately, I didn't graduate. I went to continuation and I took some courses, just a few business courses. I guess I was a little too anxious to get into the business. I am sorry I never did finish. This is one thing that I always recommend to people. If you get into business, first of all take a good business course, especially now. In the old days, there wasn't this much, well, about running a business. It didn't take that much. I remember my dad used to run his business from the back of his wallet and that was payday. That's how far back that was. Now you need an accountant, you need a bookkeeper. If you have no knowledge at all of business, and you go in and open up a business, that's your first mistake. Especially now, I did it the hard way, I learned as I went along. It was expensive 'cause you make mistakes and they cost. They were costly.

Garza: Did you serve in the armed forces?

Canales: Yes.

Garza: Can you tell me something about that?

Canales: Well I served with the 84th Infantry Division. I was with communications in the artillery.'

Garza: Was this during World War II?

Canales: During World War II, right.

Garza: Where did you serve?

Canales: I served in Europe. I served in Germany and I was the Siegfried Line and I also served in Belgium during the victory.

Garza: Was there a lot of Mexicanos with you?

Canales: Oh yes, in my outfit alone there were six of us in my company. We all got along real good, real good kids.

Garza: Mr. Canales, what were some of the early Mexican-American organizations in Fresno? Do you happen to remember any when you were younger?

Canales: Well, there was Alianza Hispana Americana, La Progresista, I think there still own, the Morelos, or Los Mutualistas y Obrero Mexicano, my father was a member of it.

Garza: Was he the founder of it?

Canales: No, he wasn't, but he was a member. These are the ones I remember when I was small; those are the only ones.

Garza: What kind of activities did they have? Were they political, or were they cultural, social?

Canales: They were more social, more than anything. In the old days, the dances, the weekly dances, they used to have, that was the main social point of the week. I guess everybody waited for the dances on Saturday at Ryan's Auditorium.

Garza: Was there a lot of people that followed these organizations?

Canales: I think Calianza was the biggest one. Could of been maybe a couple of hundred in them.

Garza: How old were the members in those days? Do you remember what ages they went up to?

Canales: Well, to them, in those years, it must have been young. I think they were probably in their forties. It was active for a long time. Like everything else, they just keep on passing away. The organization loses interest; the members are the ones that used to carry the burden.

Garza: When you came to Fresno, was there a lot of Mexican people here already? Was there a Colonia? Was there

a comunidad Mexicana?

Canales: Yes, but very small. They were sort of spread out, more in the west area. From Fresno street east to California street and from Chinatown is what they used to call the west Fresno, in the old days. It was from Chinatown down to Edison.

Garza: How many people do you think were there in those days?

Canales: Gosh O'mighty, I don't know. It's hard to say. We used to get a lot of people from the outside in the summer, the agriculture workers. In the old days, the families they would go out, the whole family used to go out and work in the fields.

Garza: What do you think is one of the main factors that had made the Mexican community equal to twenty-five percent of the population in Fresno County?

Canales: I think probably the Mexican-American over here or the Mexican Colony. I think that we are probably more closer together, and, of course, a lot of the people used to work. I don't know that they had that many, but I think probably one thing that attracted them was the jobs offered in Fresno in agriculture. I think that agriculture could have been one of the factors in people coming to Fresno. Whether they are doing it now, I don't know. Their sons now, of course, that were fortunate or wanted to get an education probably are working some place else. The main reason I would think is work. That there was work here.

Garza: Do you remember any Mexican-American politicians when you were younger?

Canales: No, there weren't any.

Garza: When do you think that the Mexican-American politician started to increase?

Canales: It wasn't until recent. I and a friend of mine, Bob Rodriguez--after the war we were very good friends. We would always talk, have serious talks about politics or whatever. When we came back, we felt, well, we went to war, we came back and we feel this, that we are Mexicans. And he says, "Fine our ancestry but, we are Americans". So we should feel and think that way. You go out and they send you to war. You get drafted like anybody else. They send you to war. We were lucky, we came back. I mean, why can't we be Americans, why can't we think as Americans? So these are talks him and I used to have. We decided we were going to do something. We went out to the hall of records and we applied for deputy and to be registration deputy. This friend of mine, Bob Rodriguez, and

I, we must have been the first Mexicans. But we went up there and we registered as voters; it was funny. This was right after the war, like in 1947. We went all over, we had to fight dogs, (laughing) everything else. I remember we were around, como se llama Biola por alli. We really went out in the country. We canvas all the west side, all that area. We are a lot of Mexicanos, and let's go to Biola. Let's take a look around over there andale pues, vamos para Biola. Like I said, by god, we had to fight dogs and you explain to the people. What's it for, cuanto va costar, no le cuesta nada sinor? The people would say, "Yo no se, es para que usted pueda ir a votar, cuando iga elecciones". Puede ir usted a votar para su candidato. So these are the things we used to come up with, the constable over there, he was mean and all that. Well, this is why, you know, register and kick him out. You can put a Mexican there as constable. He said, "There is enough Mexicanos around here, but you all have to register to vote". He said, "If you don't vote, if you don't register to vote, you're nothing". He said, "You have to register. Once you register all the Mexicanos you can, you can put your own constable up there". These are things. It took us more time explaining about registration than the names we got registered, the people we got registered. (laughing)

Garza: But in essence, you aided political education, right?

Canales: We enjoyed it, though, because we loved it. We were young and we believed in it, we were hot on it.

Garza: How old were you?

Canales: Well, I was 36 or 37, somewhere there. I am a democrat. Board of directors--every district has so many representatives. Central committee--I ran for it. I walked up and down, I didn't put too much into it. I was working. I was busy at the time, but, anyway, regardless of the excuse, I lost. (laughing)

Garza: Do still have those documents?

Canales: I don't know, I think I do. I might have them. I lost my first bid for public office. Then some fellow that belongs resigned; then they appointed me. It was interesting, I learned a lot. I met Helen Gahagen Douglas. I thought she was the smartest woman in the world. She's about the only woman I would vote for. She was a peach, she was sharp. That's too bad she had to lose the election. Not to say anything that's why. I don't know.

Garza: When did she lose that election?

Canales: Well, she was running against Nixon for the United States Senate.

Garza: I didn't know that?

Canales: Oh, you didn't?

Garza: No, I wasn't in California.

Canales: Oh yeah, that was a dirty battle. That was Nixon's first dirty battle. I don't know if you put this one in there, but anyway, I was with her. I mean we ran her campaign here in Fresno. We were active. We really, you get in all that. What he was doing, she she was in tears. How can you fight a man like that? How can a woman fight him?

Garza: What other Mexicanos were involved in the Douglas and Nixon campaign?

Canales: You know, I don't remember. I don't think anybody was.

Garza: So you were the only political worker?

Canales: I was, I don't remember ever seeing anybody there unless they were disguised. I was a member of the board for awhile.

Garza: Were you ever conscience of that? Did it ever really bother you? Did you ever say, "It's time to open up eyes in our community"?

Canales: Well, you know, my dad, he knew a lot of politicians, he had a lot of friends. My dad was well-liked by all people. He could walk into any place, not because he used to barnstorm it. He would knock, and they would say, "Come on in Joe". He was well-liked and in his business. He used to have a lot of men come in and eat and all that. That's how we got to know a lot of these people, a lot of these politicians. Name them you know. In the old days, I wasn't conscious about the political situation. It wasn't what it is today; it was entirely different. I didn't look at it that, what we should have Mexicanos and things like that. I just thought that maybe I wanted to belong to the Democratic Central Committee because I was a democrat and I wanted to help. I I didn't think too much about it; running for any other office at all.

Garza: How long did you serve in the Central Committee, Democratic Central Committee?

Canales: Oh maybe--I am not sure if I served. I think I served four years, which was two terms.

Garza: You must have really sharpened your mind, politically, by being in there. You must have learned a lot?

Canales: Yes I did. When I went in there I didn't know anything, but it was interesting. Truthfully, I even recommend to start off that way: Run for the Democrat Central Committee and learn how they function. I

don't care whether they are Democrat or Republic. Mexicanos should go out and do their thing regardless of what they are.

Garza: Do people ever look up to you and say, "Hey, give me some tips"; like Armando Rodriguez? You're a good friend of his. Did he ever ask for tips?

Canales: No, I don't think he ever asked me for tips. I don't remember. We helped him in the campaign. We've known Rodriguez since he was, well, his father and my father were real good friends. We've known some of the kids, he was one of them. I think he's younger than we are, but we've known them a long time. We knew the families. So we were family friends from way back.

Garza: What was some other Mexican-Americans who are in business today who had a past history of economic development in the Spanish-speaking community?

Canales: I think Alfredo Flores might be one. He has the Cucararacha. He, like my dad, started way back.

Garza: Are there any other people that are still around?

Canales: Well, you have the Moras, Mr. Mora from the Victorillatortilla. He's been here quite awhile. Other than that, by god, no I don't, I think, by god, looking back I think they are all dying out.

Garza: What is your feeling about discrimination? Do you think that the Mexican-Americans are discriminated against in this society?

Canales: You mean here in Fresno?

Garza: Sure, right here.

Canales: I don't think so. I think there is discrimination, but I don't think it's just against Mexicans. I think that if you behave, not behave, I don't think it's behave. I think that if you make yourself respectable. If you work hard, if you got a good business or if you have a good job. I think you can get a good job if you have the education. I see no reason why you can't and if you wanted to go into business, there is opportunity. I don't think that or I've lived in Fresno all my life. I don't think there was discrimination. I think sometimes you do it yourself. I think we've all discriminated against somebody that's probably, maybe, I don't mean the word lower, but we discriminate against somebody else that is less fortunate than we are. I mean that's only human nature. I don't think that they are; I don't know. This nation was born in discrimination, discrimination was born from discrimination. The first people that hit this country were people that were being discriminated upon.

Even Fresno, look here, gosh O'mighty, Armenians were discriminated, Chinese, I guess we were too. Now it's maybe the Black's turn. (laughing) Even we discriminate against them. I don't know, discrimination is a thing that I just never--maybe it's because, I always, I've been in business. I help out wherever I could, whatever, which ever way I could do it. Whether it was financially and I don't mean I haven't got, but if it was the case, for if it meant a couple of dollars would help I would be more than glad to do it or help out in anyway. People will respect you for that. I belong to the Rotary Club, North Fresno Rotary Club. Last year I got sick and I wrote a letter of resignation. The president came over to see me. He says, "How come you're quitting?" He says that's not a good enough excuse. I say, it's good enough for me. I said, I am sick; and besides the business, it's a hardship right now for me to make meetings every week. He says, "No, take a leave of absence." He says, "Try it with a leave of absence." We don't want to lose you. I've been a member of the North Fresno Rotary for fifteen years. Before that I was a member of West Fresno Rotary for ten years. I am one of the few members that have ever gone from one club to the other. They very seldom let anybody do that. I quit one club and a year later they got me into another one. They got me into North Fresno Rotary. I've been a member ever since, and these people, the fellows and members, a few members came. They dropped by to eat. "Emilio, don't quit," they said, "'cause we need you there." Well, they had so many guys coming in telling me not to quit that it makes you feel good that they want you in. This is why I mean that discrimination, I was never discriminated against. Heck, I was asked to come in. It's different to me.

Garza: Do you belong to any other organization besides the Rotary Club?

Canales: Yes, I belong to the Veterans of Foreign Wars, a charter member. Commander of that, close to two years. During my administration, we built a house for Rudy Hernandez who was a Congressional Medal of Honor winner from Korea.

Garza: Is he living here?

Canales: No. He lived here in Fresno. This was his home town, but he acquired some injuries and he could not get the job here. The government offered him a job in Los Angeles, so he moved to Los Angeles. We built a home for him. I was commander of V.F.W. Post 8900. During my administration, that was accomplished. Now, about four years ago, myself and three others started the Latin American Businessmen Club. We are about fifty

strong.

Garza: Does it have anything to do with C.A.S.A.?

Canales: No, this is strickly businessmen; we meet twice a month. Strickly businessmen together, that's about all. To see what we can do.

Garza: Do you have a publication or something?

Canales: No. Other than a newsletter, news bulletin.

Garza: How old is this organization?

Canales: Oh, it's about four years old, it's still a young organization. You need time for it to grow. Like I said, we are fifty strong and it's hard to get members, 'cause we are those businessmen. Then when you find one you know, well I don't know. Talking about discrimination-- (laughing) sometimes you discriminate against yourself, I don't believe, even though I don't believe in organizing a group, it's not the idea to discriminate against other people. I was instrumental in organizing this and it was strickly just for us to get together. The Mexican-American businessmen just got together without anybody else like the teachers, Latin American teachers. There are other organizations, but just businessmen. We get together and we have fun. As a matter-of-fact, we meet once a month. We have lunch, we talk about business, whatever comes to your mind. It's just guys that talk the same language. We don't have no government employees, no school teachers, we discriminate against them. (laughing) Only that we just wanted to have businessmen.

Garza: Did your father ever get to see this organization that you guys were building?

Canales: No he didn't, he died. He knew I was working for that, but he died right after that. The members sent a big beautiful bouquet; real touching. The card said from First Mexican-American Businessmen. That's what they put on the card.

Garza: Do you still have that card?

Canales: I think so, because it was--I don't know, about discrimination. (laughing) We all discriminate.

Garza: How did this Casa Canales get together? How did it flourish into a prominent business? How long did it take you to get something so beautiful together?

Canales: I tell you a funny thing. I think I started like my dad started, with nothing. I worked for dad. I lost one business. I was determined. This is why I say that if you want to, you can make a go at it. I lost one business in Merced. I lost it; my business went

down, my lease came up. I said, no use staying here. So I came back to work for my dad. My dad needed me, he wanted me to come back. I saw the handwriting on the wall about westside Fresno or chinatown, and I use to tell him, you know dad we better get out of here. This thing is not--he loved this place, he loved it. You couldn't move him out of there with a cannon. When I came back from Merced and I came to work for him I said, I will come back and work for you under one condition, that we start looking for a location in the north area. He said, "All right." I said, you promise me? He said, "Yes I promise you." So I worked with him a year, I mean a season. A season over there was like from May through December, no January, cotton picking time. When we use to have cotton pickers, not mechanical, just a lot of pickers. My dad said, "We would." A year passed by, another year. Dad--we went to look for property. Oh yeah, we'll get it. He just didn't want to leave it. The Japanese came from the war and they wanted to buy this property out there. He didn't want to sell. Sell it, and we'll move up north; that's were the money is going to be. No, he didn't want to do it. Finally, I said, Pop, I just don't see it. This chinatown is going to go down, they are tearing down 'H' street. These people are going. He says, "Pretty soon they will be knocking at your door; you know, the poor winos and so forth." I said, I am leaving. He says, "You can't go." I say, I just can't--I said, I don't blame you, it's your property. I know how you feel about it. You just are not going to go. I am just going to have to do it on my own somehow. I took like a couple of weeks to think and look around. What am I going to do? I didn't have a job. I never worked for anybody before in my life, other than my dad. What am I going to do? I looked and buildings were very scarce. They were just barely begining to build new buildings and I mean you couldn't even get them. I couldn't go to my dad for help, financially. I had an uncle out in Colton, my dad's ex-partner. I said, I'll go see him. I went to see him and told him my idea. I wanted to open up a resturant. I think I can do it, roughly about four or five thousand dollars. He says, "You know the resturant business. Don't worry about it, I'll lend it to you." I only had one car. That's the only money I had, when I sold that car and I sold it for \$600.00. There was a new building on Olive, right off Palm, and they wanted \$200.00 a month. So there went my \$600.00; \$200.00 for the first month, \$200.00 for the second month, and the last month; \$400.00. So that left me with \$200.00 which I don't know what happened. It just disappeared. Then I called my uncle up there in

Colton and I told him, I got the building, when are you coming over? He said he was going to come over the following week, and, fate, he got terribly sick, to the point where he couldn't make it. So I said that it's my second venture and I didn't make it. My wife's grandfather who also used to have one of those little baritas in the old days. O las Barras or cantina and he made money; señor Navarro, Francisco Navarro. She told me, why don't you ask my grandfather? I said, no way I am going to ask your grandfather. I won't ask my father, no way I am going to ask your grandfather. She said, "Well he helped some of the kids buying houses, down payments so forth, I see no reason why he can't help me." I said, well he's your grandfather. I told her I didn't like the idea. She said, "Well you can't stop me." I said, okay; so she went. Well he was over the next day and he said, "How come you don't want to borrow the money?" I told him, I am not going to ask my dad and I am not going to ask you. He says, "Okay, I'll lend you the money, whatever you want, not because of you, but because of my granddaughter. Is that understood?" I said fine. He says, "How much do you want?" "All I want you to do is pay my interest every six months." When you want to pay up the loan just let me know. He gave me the money and I started my business. I opened up and I did real good, real good.

Garza: When was that?

Canales: That was in 1953. There were just two Mexican restaurants then. Trinos on Belmont and Palm and myself. Casa Canales started. I do say one thing that my dad helped me a lot after, because what I borrowed from my wife's grandfather was not enough. My dad helped me because I used his name as credit. If anything would have happened to me, I would have felt sorry for my dad. Then, his restaurant out there had two kitchens. So, any way, my dad comes over and he says, "How come you haven't invited me to come over to see what you were doing." I said, I thought maybe we weren't speaking. He says, "No. What do you need?" I told him, well you have two kitchens, I need some of that, some of that kitchen. He says, "Just leave one kitchen." So I went over and picked up some refrigerators, some stoves and some equipment that I needed. Then I told dad, I do want you to help me with something else. When I order the groceries, I am going to tell them that you will be responsible for it. He said, "Yeah." It was pretty good, well, you know, I just--you're young, but we got along good, we were close. I think probably because, maybe, we sort of thought about the same. Tenia muchas ideas. He's like myself, always looking ahead. You should

always do something to a place, especially a restaurant. I change colors in this restaurant. It's unbelievable only because you get tired of them.

Garza: I notice that you have a lot of art work. Do you get into art?

Canales: Yes, I have Diego Rivera. I got some of those in Jalisco. (looking at the walls inside the restaurant)

Garza: Well, Mr. Canales, I guess that will do it unless you have any other things you want to add.

Canales: I wish we had people or young kids like you to do this type of work. Especially in the old days. Mexicans they just never, there was too much friction; they never got along. Way back, tambien, in the old days, there was a lot of tortillerias, panaderillas, tienda de avarote, grocery stores, bars, cantinas. A lot of small businesses and they form a Chamber of commerce. Unfortunately, they just could never get along good together. I think jealousy is one thing more than anything. I don't say that you find it only in Mexicans, probably more noticeable to us because we are. That's part of what makes us move, anyway it makes you motivate better, makes you want to better yourself because you want to be better than the other guy, which is good motivation.

Garza: What would you like to see become of all this material; all these photographs that we have gathered? What would you like to see us do with that? What are some of your ideas you think we could do with it?

Canales: I think they should be part of the art center or I don't know whether the museum would be a part of that. I don't think that it should be housed alone some place for just Mexicans to go see it. It should be housed where it would be part of Fresno's history, Armenian history, maybe like the Chinese history, Black history, or Japanese history.

Garza: So what your saying is that you would like to see a history of these people?

Canales: Sure, the people that populated Fresno, the people that migrated over here. Migrated or started or came to Fresno, built buildings.

Garza: Do you think that we have been neglected, historically?

Canales: Well, I don't think so. I don't think that they took a good look at it. You see, you know what you are doing right now. You're focusing only on--you see times like now aren't what they use to be in the old days. Right now there are ten times or fifty times more Mexicans than there were before.

Garza: So they are more conscious?

Canales: Yes, in the old days there weren't that many in Fresno. I think that they neglected an area, they neglected the westside area, or west Fresno, that's the area they neglected. We were in there, we were part of that area and that's why they neglected us, because of that. They neglected the Japanese, the Chinese, the Mexicans, the Blacks; we were a small community, very small. We lived in a neighborhood full of Italians which was from Fresno street clear on to Plumas. Well, between Calaveras, from Fresno to Calaveras, I think it was, all of that was a neighborhood, all Italians. There were only two Mexican families right in the middle of that; we were one of them. You see how it was. Well that area now is that development area that they've developed. Where the Fresno Bee is and Gottschalk and all that; they tore all of that down. That was the oldest part of Fresno. That was in the old, old days, not the slum area. The foreign born--that was the Italians area. You crossed the street east on Fresno street, then you walked into the Chinese area. Then the Mexicans were around there. The Chinese first. (laughing) You'll never believe this; they were on 'G' street. (laughing) They used to live in Chinatown in the alleys, on China alley. Then from there they moved up. They built homes around Waterman, all those streets around that area, around Fresno street. So there you had a lot of Chinese around there. Then the Mexicans. Then you go towards California Avenue; then you would run into the German area. All of that was German, the side of California to the freeway, which was where the old highway used to be, clear up to Elm were Germans. They used to call them Germans or Russians, depending on who was fighting, and who were our allies. (laughing) The Germans and the Russians used to be all around there. This

was Fresno, this is the area that was neglected. Nobody took pictures, they always turned this way. [laughing] Right, you never see anything about West Fresno. I am not saying that they never do, I think that they took maybe 100 to the one they took of West Fresno.

GARZA: Who are some of the people that you would recommend for me to talk to about getting Fresno's past history involving the Mexican American community?

CANALES: Well one of the last of the old timers is Alfredo, Alfredo Flores. Maybe Alfredo can think of others.

GARZA: He is from the Victorilla?

CANALES: No, he's from the Cucaracha. I think maybe Alfredo can tell you more about who else.

GARZA: Well that about raps up our discussion in terms of the history of the Spanish-speaking Mexican American, in particular, here in Fresno County. I want to thank you for your time.

"BY MY SIGNATURE, I MAKE THIS TRANSCRIPT AVAILABLE TO RESEARCHERS IN THE FRESNO CITY AND COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY ARCHIVES."

Emilio Canales
Emilio Canales, Narrator

3-9-78
(Date)

Ben Garza, Interviewer

(Date)