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**Food, Space, and Mobility: The Railroad, Chili Stands, and Chophouses
in San Antonio and El Paso, 1870-1905**

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Food, Space, and Mobility: The Railroad, Chili Stands, and Chophouses in San Antonio and El Paso, 1870-1905

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As the railroad changed the urban landscape of Texas cities after the Civil War, it offered new economic opportunities for restaurateurs in both public and private spaces. This dissertation illustrates the ways chili stands owners working in San Antonio plazas and Chinese restaurateurs working in El Paso chophouses at the end of the nineteenth century negotiated the use of space in the growing cities. While chili-stand owners subverted the prevailing narrative definition of the restaurant by performing with success another version outside of that narrative, the Chinese chophouses negotiated stories about their uncleanliness and vice by adopting some of those same prevailing, dominant ideas and definitions regarding the American restaurant. These two stories offer both a glimpse into contests over food space at the end of the nineteenth century and complicate the history of the American restaurant industry as it has been told over the last century. The railroad is very much an actor in this story as its presence brought attention to the

nightlife of the plazas and the downtown areas of each city as well as increased the real and imagined values of spaces throughout both cities, which only heightened the contests over those spaces.

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Introduction

In 1891, the city of San Antonio put the finishing touches on its new three-story, Italian Renaissance Revival municipal building, constructed over a three-year period right in the center of Military Plaza. In a rare moment of lamentation about his home, San Antonio booster, William Corner, described the new building's impact as disrupting the space of what "was from time immemorial the heart of Mexican life."

The small vendors, the freighters, the pastores, peones and vaqueros, all congregated here...At night, in the olden time, and in modified form up to within few months, was to be seen unique spectacle of open air life belonging rather to the tropics than to any part of the realm of Uncle Sam.¹

For over a century the plaza had been used as a public space for civic, social, cultural, and commercial activities. The Spanish and later Mexican militaries used the space for training and parading exercises in addition to its use as a space for public gatherings and events.² By the middle of the nineteenth century and especially after the Civil War, residents primarily used the plaza as an open-air market to sell hay, water,

¹ William Corner, ed., *San Antonio de Bexar: A Guide and History* (San Antonio, Texas: Bainbridge & Corner, 1890), 24.

² Arnold De Leon, *The Tejano Community, 1836-1900* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982), 178.



Figure 1.1: Hay wagons, freighters, and chili stands on Military Plaza in 1883.

Figure 1.1 illustrates the diversity of uses that could occur simultaneously in Military Plaza. Although difficult to see without magnification, a line of chili stands can be seen in the upper, center of the image nearer to the buildings in the background.

University of Texas at San Antonio's Institute of Texas Cultures, #079-0106..

food, candy, cattle and other goods (see figure 1-1).³ For fifteen years prior to the completion of the municipal building, Military Plaza had also served as the nightly home for the city's popular chili stands.

Following the railroad's entry into San Antonio in 1877, chili stands began to appear in greater numbers in San Antonio's plazas, primarily in Military Plaza. Residents from the nearby Mexican enclaves on the western edge of the city transported equipment and supplies into the plaza daily in order to set up numerous outdoor restaurants that reportedly served chili con carne, tamales, and enchiladas, among other dishes. Tourists, new immigrants, businessmen, writers, ranchers, travelers, and citizens sat together at these chili stands for evening meals and revelry. While Military Plaza had been known as an open-air market long before the railroad, the chili-stand vendors' entrance into the public space as a response to increased immigration and tourism brought regional and even national notoriety to plaza.⁴ However, as William Corner noted, the completion of San Antonio's municipal building signaled the beginning of the end for the chili stands in San Antonio, as they were progressively relegated to plazas further from the city center

³ Daniel Arreola, *Tejano South Texas: A Mexican American Cultural Province* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 134–36; Richard Flores, *Remembering the Alamo: Memory, Modernity, and the Master Symbol* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 39–58.

⁴ Stephen Crane, "From San Antonio," *Los Angeles Times*, January 8, 1899; Richard Harding Davis, *The West Through a Car Window* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1892); O. Henry, "The Enchanted Kiss," *Metropolitan Magazine Company*, 1904; Harriet Prescott Spofford, "San Antonio de Bexar," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 55, no. 330 (November 1877): 831–50.

before being banned outright in the early-twentieth century due to public health ordinances.⁵ The railroad influenced a new economy in San Antonio's plazas that benefited Mexican chili-stand operators by creating a market and demand for their food, while also contributing to a reorganization of space that eliminated public areas supporting that very economy by increasing the population of the city and creating demand for property in areas closer to the town center.

The railroad's entrance into the El Paso region tells a similar story, but with different results for ethnic eateries. In 1881, the American side of the Paso del Norte region was still a small community that had incorporated in 1873 in anticipation of the railroad eventually rolling through the town. Once it arrived, the railroad greatly influenced much of the original geographic setup of the city and created El Paso's identity as a regional transportation hub. Developers and boosters quickly encouraged growth and commerce around the railroad depot in an ordered grid expanding northwest and southeast with the railroad line as its anchor (see figure 1-2). El Paso saw increased immigration into the city and frenzied economic, commercial, and land development. In

⁵ Flores, *Remembering the Alamo*; Laura Hernandez-Ehrisman, *Inventing the Fiesta City: Heritage and Carnival in San Antonio* (Albuquerque, New Mexico: University of New Mexico Press, 2008); Jeffrey M. Pilcher, "Who Chased Out the Chili Queens? Gender, Race, and Urban Reform in San Antonio, Texas, 1880-1943," *Food and Foodways* 16, no. 3 (2008): 173-200; Donna R. Gabaccia and Jeffrey M. Pilcher, "'Chili Queens' and Checkered Tablecloths: Public Dining Cultures of Italians in New York City and Mexicans in San Antonio, Texas, 1870-1940s," *Radical History Review* Spring 2011, no. 110 (2011): 109-26; Judith Berg Sobre, *San Antonio on Parade: Six Historic Festivals* (College Station, Texas: Texas A&M University Press, 2003).

the first decade after the first railroad entered the region, El Paso's population more than tripled from approximately 3,000 residents in the early 1880s to over 10,000 residents by 1890.

The Southern Pacific Railroad Company, like its predecessor the Central Pacific, used Chinese immigrant labor to construct the second transcontinental railroad across the southwestern United States, through El Paso, and on to San Antonio. When the Chinese laborers had been dismissed after its completion in 1883, many settled in downtown El Paso. The new Chinese immigrants immediately established themselves in the local laundry industry and began occupying space near the Southern Pacific train depot and newly-built hotels.⁶ The Chinese also began to open American-style restaurants by 1885. These restaurants were commonly called chophouses with menus that usually featured various cuts of meat (primarily beef), potatoes, and stewed vegetables at lower prices than the French-style restaurants and Anglo-owned chophouses that were typically found in El Paso hotels. The Chinese version of these American restaurants was so popular that

⁶ "El Paso, Texas [map]" (Digital Sanborn Maps 1867-1970, 1883), ProQuest, <http://sanborn.umi.com/tx/8514/dateid-000001.htm?CCSI=985n>; "El Paso, Texas [map]" (Digital Sanborn Maps 1867-1970, 1885), ProQuest, <http://sanborn.umi.com/tx/8514/dateid-000001.htm?CCSI=985n>. The location and movements of the Chinese immigrants will be covered in greater detail later in this dissertation, but it is important to note that the El Paso Sanborn Insurance maps for both 1883 and 1885 show the Chinese settling and opening businesses very close to the depot. This location both placed their store fronts in proximity to travelers, tourists, and immigrants coming into the city as well as located their laundries very close to (and sometimes directly behind hotels) where these same potential customers slept.

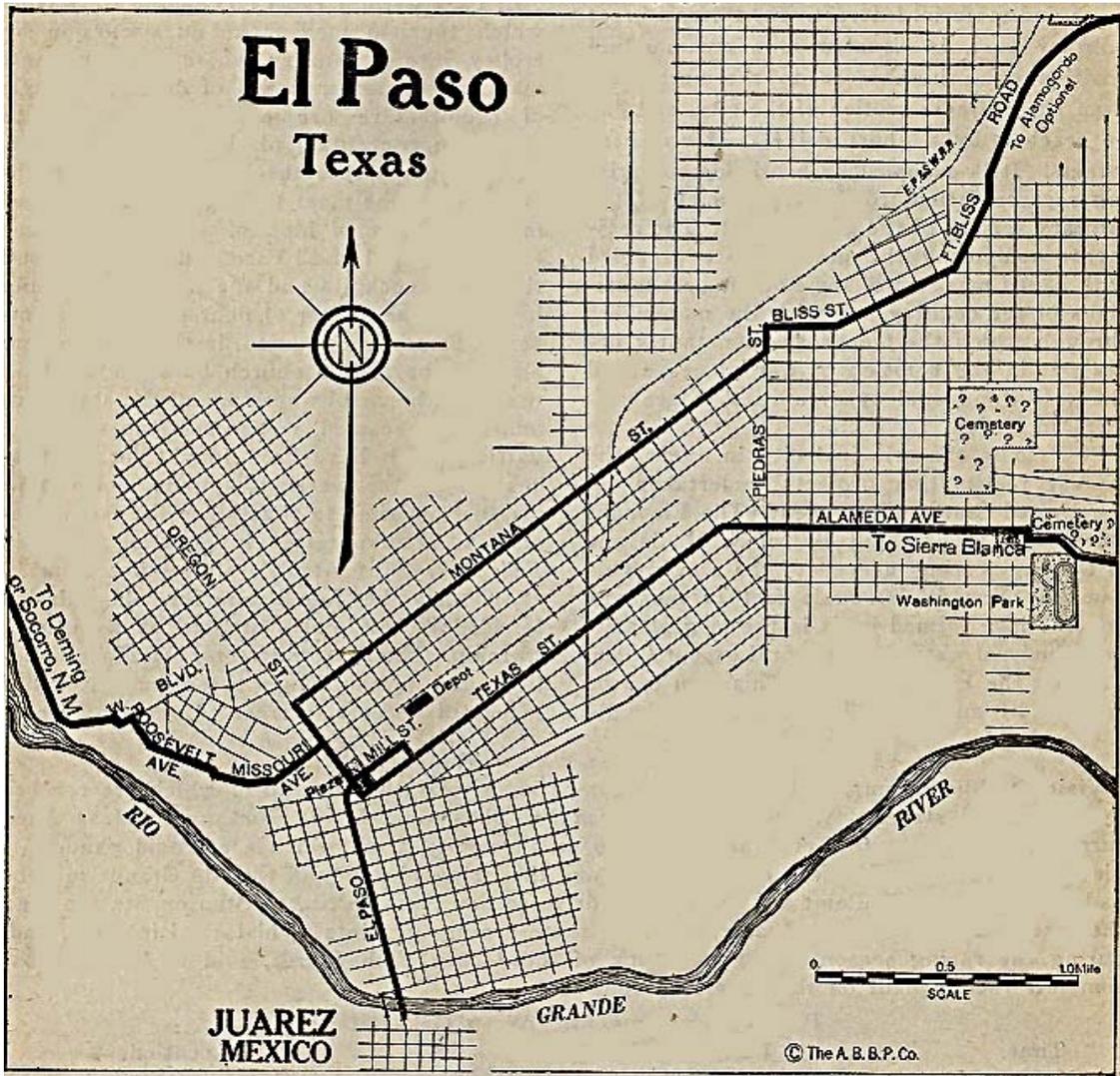


Figure 1-2. El Paso. Automobile Blue Book 1920.

Although this map depicts the El Paso grid from 1920, it reflects the early influence of the railroad on the orientation of the city. The Southern Pacific Depot is the small bolded rectangle near the center of the map. Most of the central and all of the northern development around the Depot is oriented with the tracks. The southern developed section that is tilted slightly clockwise to orient more closely to the river contained the main Chinese and Mexican communities.

Digital Map Collection. University of Texas Libraries, Austin, Texas.

by the late 1890s, over half of the restaurants were run by Chinese immigrants in what became a decades-long domination of the restaurant industry throughout the city.

In the early 1890s, while San Antonio city leaders were eliminating public space by repurposing historic plazas, El Paso authorities ramped up pressure on Chinese enclaves throughout the city.⁷ Spaces that once held Chinese shops and laundries near centrally-located hotels now housed Anglo-owned clothing stores and saloons. Chinese residences, laundries, and opium dens were pushed further south toward areas near stables, brothels, and the predominantly Mexican community of Chihuahuita along the Rio Grande River. However, Chinese restaurateurs managed to maintain restaurant space in many other parts of the city along busy streets with high tourist activity.⁸

Both the Chinese community in El Paso and the Mexican community in San Antonio were victimized by spatial (re)organization at the hands of government leaders, land speculators, railroad companies, and boosters all participating in modern economic

⁷ W. H. Timmons, *El Paso: A Borderlands History*, Second Edition (El Paso, Texas: Texas Western Press, 1990); Nancy Farrar, *The Chinese in El Paso* (Texas Western Press, 1972); Anna Louise Fahy, “Borderland Chinese: Community Identity and Cultural Change” (The University of Texas at El Paso, 2006); Edward J. M. Rhoads, “The Chinese in Texas,” in *Chinese on the American Frontier*, ed. Arif Dirlik and Malcolm Yeung, Pacific Formations: Global Relations in Asian and Pacific Perspectives (Lanham Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), 165–81.

⁸ “El Paso, Texas [map]” (Digital Sanborn Maps 1867-1970, 1893), ProQuest, <http://sanborn.umi.com/tx/8514/dateid-000001.htm?CCSI=985n>; *El Paso City Directory for the Years 1895-1896* (Frank J. McDevitt & Company, 1895), http://digitalcommons.utep.edu/city_direct/5.

processes spurred by the introduction of the railroad into communities west of the Mississippi River.⁹ San Antonio city leaders began the process of closing or restricting access to public plazas when they laid the initial bricks for their new municipal building in 1889. As a consequence, chili-stand operators took their businesses to other plazas throughout the city, such as Main Plaza, Milam Square, Alamo Plaza, and later, Haymarket Square. Similar economic processes confined much of the El Paso Chinese community to a specific and less-economically valuable area of the town that many termed a Chinatown. Chinese restaurateurs largely avoided this fate as they continued to operate their businesses in prime, high-traffic areas.

The success of the Chinese is remarkable when placed in the context of their larger national plight in the United States. While they certainly faced intense, violent prejudice in parts of the West for most of their time in the United States, the last two decades of the nineteenth century were particularly trying for Chinese immigrants. Murder, forced removal, dispossession of property and other atrocities perpetrated on Chinese miners, farmers, and other laborers forced many immigrant Chinese further east.

⁹ Richard Flores discusses this process in depth in his work *Remembering the Alamo*. Referencing Henri Lefebvre's concept of spatialization, Flores terms the process in San Antonio as "respatialization." See Flores, *Remembering the Alamo*.

The railroad offered escape to other parts of the West and South but it reached El Paso in 1881, just before Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882.¹⁰

While on the surface Congress passed the Exclusion Act in order to protect white labor from losing jobs to cheaper Chinese labor, the rhetoric surrounding its passage involved deeper racial, cultural, and religious prejudice.¹¹ Some of these arguments against Chinese labor and immigration were couched in the growing national interest in nutrition and food science. Food scientists pushed smaller, more nutritious meals, less waste, and better, more efficient cooking techniques. They focused heavily on the diet of the working class and believed that workers needed a certain level of nutrition in their everyday meals in order to complete their jobs, and meat, particularly beef, was a major piece of the nutrition puzzle.¹² Politicians used the work of food scientists to contribute to

¹⁰ Jean Pfaelzer, *Driven Out: The Forgotten War Against Chinese Americans* (University of California Press, 2008); Andrew Gyory, *Closing the Gate: Race, Politics, and the Chinese Exclusion Act* (Chapel Hill & London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

¹¹ Gyory, *Closing the Gate: Race, Politics, and the Chinese Exclusion Act*, 1–8. For more background on the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, see also Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton University Press, 2004); Grace Pena Delgado, *Making the Chinese Mexican: Global Migration, Localism, and Exclusion in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2012).

¹² Donna R. Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat: Ethnic Food and the Making of Americans* (Harvard University Press, 2000), 122–148; Harvey A. Levenstein, *Revolution at the Table: The Transformation of the American Diet* (University of California Press, 2003), 44–59. Reformers also used new ideas about public health and disease to exclude Chinese and other communities in the West. See Natalia Molina, *Fit to Be Citizens?: Public Health and Race in Los Angeles, 1879-*

the growing narrative of the proper American diet in their rhetoric and arguments against continued Chinese immigration. Perhaps United States Senator, James G. Blaine, summed up the position of lawmakers on further Chinese immigration in a letter to the *New York Tribune* that explained, "... You cannot work a man who must have beef and bread, and would prefer beer, alongside of a man who can live off rice, It cannot be done."¹³ Food continued to be used as a metaphor by anti-Chinese groups well into the twentieth century.¹⁴ Congress finally repealed the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1943.

Taking into account the increasing anti-Chinese sentiment at the end of the nineteenth century, two questions arise for this dissertation concerning the different outcomes for Chinese restaurateurs in El Paso and Mexican restaurateurs in San Antonio. First, broadly, is why did Chinese restaurateurs in El Paso have their sustained measure of success, while the Mexican chili-stand vendors were forced back into their homes over time? Second, how and why were ideas regarding food deployed to restrict or allow

1939 (University of California Press, 2006); Nayan Shah, *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco's Chinatown* (University of California Press, 2001).

¹³ James G. Blaine, "Letter," February 24, 1879; Gyory, *Closing the Gate*, 3.

¹⁴ For a prominent example of the use of food as metaphor in campaigning for the Chinese Exclusion Act see "Some Reasons for Chinese Exclusion: Meat vs. Rice, American Manhood against Asiatic Coolieism, Which Shall Survive?" (Washington D. C.: The American Federation of Labor, 1901). Samuel Gompers and the American Federation of Labor highlighted the benefits of the Chinese Exclusion Act that they perceived for Anglo-American labor and argued that not only should the act be renewed, but that it should be expanded to include other Asians, primarily the Japanese.

access to public and private space? The answers to these questions hinge on the increased mobility of citizens brought on by the railroad, the contests over the proper use of public space, and the emerging narrative regarding proper American food and the definitions of the restaurant.

CONTESTED FOOD SPACE

At its core, this dissertation tells a story about space, place, mobility, and foodways at the turn of the twentieth century in rapidly growing Texas cities. It argues that the struggle over the use of public space in both San Antonio and El Paso was influenced by national narratives about foodways and citizenship, and public space and the restaurant. Individuals and institutions with varying objectives used these narratives to marginalize both groups in order to maintain control of public space. The narratives were also used to gain acceptance into the local food economy. San Antonio chili-stand vendors navigated the prevailing narrative definition of the restaurant by performing with success another version of the restaurant outside of that narrative. They created open-air restaurants in the plazas that proved successful, but they ultimately lost their chili stands because they did not conform to dominant ideas regarding the definition of the restaurant, nor did they fit the narrative that San Antonio leaders wanted to tell about the city's past. Chinese restaurant owners countered stories about their uncleanness and vice by adopting that same prevailing narrative definition of the restaurant. They avoided marginalization for the most part due to their adaptability in conforming to predictable

“American” food in recognizable “American” spaces. These two stories complicate the history of the American restaurant as it has been told over the last century.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the restaurant as “an eating establishment at which meals are cooked and served to customers on the premises; a public eating house.”¹⁵ The definition is simple and broad, and at first glance should include open-air establishments constructed in the middle of urban plazas. However, the prevailing history of restaurants largely omits these types of eateries. The omission is not necessarily a reflection on how late-nineteenth-century customers, critics, and boosters viewed the restaurant. In the case of the chili stands, more than one contemporary considered them restaurants. Returning to booster William Corner’s lament, he legitimizes the stands as restaurants in the city by describing that

one might be served here [chili stand] with viands hot from the Mexican cuisine—Chili con carne, Tamales, Enchiladas, Chili verde, frijoles and the leather-like tortillas. The more fastidious American might enjoy delicately fried eggs and chicken with a cup of fair coffee... These al fresco restaurateurs have been hunted by electric lights and city improvements from Plaza to Plaza, until now a poor remnant of them may be found still further west on Milam Square

¹⁵ “Restaurant, N. : Oxford English Dictionary,” August 1, 2014, <http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/view/Entry/163915?redirectedFrom=restaurant#eid197305280>.

near the grave of the hero, whilst a few others cling tenaciously to a coign of vantage in front of the Federal building on Alamo Plaza in the east.¹⁶

Corner clearly, at least broadly, considers the stands restaurants. He also makes the distinction that they are “al fresco restaurateurs,” or open-air restaurateurs, probably in comparison to the hotel restaurants in the city. Regardless of distinction, Corner’s comment in the very least shows that some San Antonio citizens had a broad perception of the idea of the restaurant. Some of that complexity is lost in histories of the industrialization, homogenization, and Americanization of the food industry.

In *Revolution at the Table: The Transformation of the American Diet*, Harvey Levenstein argues that between the years 1880-1930, reformers of the American diet sought to shift emphasis on quantity to emphasis on quality.¹⁷ He describes the emergence and evolution of a national food culture at the turn of the twentieth century due to industrialized corporations centralizing the production of food, while culinary reformers and food scientists worked to Americanize immigrant groups by creating and encouraging a scientifically accepted diet. In most cases, reformers considered immigrant foodways inadequate nutritionally, and their acceptance of the new scientifically-based diet constituted an acceptance of their new country. According to Levenstein, culinary influences from Northern European immigrants, or the “Spanish/Mexican tradition”

¹⁶ Corner, *San Antonio de Bexar*, 24–27.

¹⁷ Levenstein, *Revolution at the Table*.

among others were “obliterated,” “shunted aside,” or “merged almost invisibly into those of the dominant culture.”¹⁸

Donna Gabaccia’s *We Are What We Eat* also explores the move to an industrialized and homogenized food economy, but counters Levenstein’s claim that an Americanized food culture “obliterated” immigrant foodways in the United States.¹⁹ While she agrees that Americanization and industrialization worked to homogenize food culture in the United States in the early twentieth century, she also asserts that the influence of ethnic foodways could be found in companies like Chef Boyardee, Eagle Brand and other national brands subsequent to homogenization. Both Gabaccia and Levenstein are describing larger, national trends in American foodways and their influence and transformation of regional and local traditions. However, the regional and local traditions covered are largely urban and in the northeastern United States.²⁰ The

¹⁸ Ibid., 29.

¹⁹ Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat: Ethnic Food and the Making of Americans*; See also, Hasia R. Diner, *Hungering for America: Italian, Irish, and Jewish Foodways in the Age of Migration* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001).

²⁰ Elizabeth S. D. Engelhardt, *A Mess of Greens: Southern Gender and Southern Food* (University of Georgia Press, 2011), 10 & 205–06n8. Engelhardt points out this shortcoming in terms of southern food culture and calls for more work devoted to “the full corporate story of food in the South.”

story of these national trends' influence on foodways in an urbanizing Texas has been largely ignored.²¹

The known history of Chinese food in the United States and the western reaction to that food is rather scant and begs for attention from historians. In *Chop Suey: a Cultural History of Chinese Food in the United States*, Andrew Coe provides an overview of Chinese food's history (especially in California) with his main focus on the transition to an Americanized version of the cuisine and the popularity of chop suey in early-twentieth-century Chinese restaurants in New York and San Francisco. His book is good resource for primary materials that describe early restaurants in San Francisco's Chinatown and American reactions to the food served in these establishments.²² The primary sources he uses consist mostly of newspaper descriptions and travelers' accounts, but they offer a complex reaction to the Chinese and their food, especially in the early years of Chinese immigration to the United States. The sentiment toward Chinese food in those early years (1849-59) was rather mixed, but as anti-Chinese violence and rhetoric increased, so did the criticism of Chinese food. The critics and racist rhetoric became

²¹ Jeffrey Pilcher has done some of this work examining Mexican foodways in terms of public health narratives in Mexico and the globalization of Mexican food. See Jeffrey M. Pilcher, *The Sausage Rebellion: Public Health, Private Enterprise, and Meat in Mexico City, 1890-1917* (UNM Press, 2006); and Jeffrey Pilcher, *Planet Taco: A Global History of Mexican Food* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

²² Andrew Coe, *Chop Suey: A Cultural History of Chinese Food in the United States* (Oxford University Press, 2009).

loud enough that by the 1870s when the transcontinental railroads helped Chinese immigrants to move to points further east, the restaurants they opened in communities along the rail overwhelmingly served “American” or “Western” fare, much like the chopouses found in El Paso.²³

Anti-Chinese rhetoric used food and public health as symbols for the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, but much of that racist sentiment arose out of conflict over railroad labor and land rights. Literature regarding Chinese workers employed by railroad companies is relatively extensive, but typically focuses on the politics of using foreign labor and the history of the anti-Chinese sentiment in the West, obviously two very important topics. Two studies exemplify this practice: Alexander Saxton’s *The*

²³ For descriptions of Chinese food and Chinese communities prior to the Chinese Exclusion Act, see John D. Borthwick, *Three Years in California* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1857); Samuel Bowles, *Our New West: Records of Travel between the Mississippi River and the Pacific Ocean; over the Plains-over the Mountains-through the Great Interior Basin-over the Sierra Nevadas-to and up and down the Pacific Coast; with Details of the Wonderful Natural Scenery, Agriculture, Mines, Business, Social Life, Progress, and Prospects; Including a Full Description of the Pacific Railroad; and of the Life of the Mormons, Indians, and Chinese; with Map, Portraits, and Twelve Full Page Illustrations* (Hartford, CT; New York, NY: Hartford Publishing Company & J.D. Dennison, 1869); Otis Gibson, *The Chinese in America* (Cincinnati: Hitchcock and Walden, 1877); William Kelly, *An Excursion to California Over the Prairie, Rocky Mountains, and Great Sierra Nevada with a Stroll Through the Diggings and Ranches of That Country*, vol. 2, 2 vols. (London: Chapman and Hall, 1851); Charles Nordhoff, *California: For Health, Pleasure, and Residence: A Book for Travellers and Settlers* (Harper & Brothers, 1873). Many of these descriptions will show up later in this dissertation.

*Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California*²⁴ and Jean Pfaelzer's *Driven Out: The Forgotten War Against Chinese Americans*.²⁵ Both texts focus on racism against the Chinese while describing the politics and business of hiring Chinese railroad workers. Recent studies on the public health movement in the United States, race, and the use and organization of public and private space further show how new immigrants at the turn of the twentieth century faced racist narratives that arose out ideas about assimilation and Americanization that gained steam during the Progressive Era.²⁶

Space, place, and mobility are key concepts for this dissertation and two texts have helped to frame the argument: Richard Flores's *Remembering the Alamo: Memory, Modernity, and the Master Symbol* and Dolores Hayden's *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History*.²⁷ Both authors use Henri Lefebvre heavily in their conception of the production of space and their ideas about the experience of place. Flores's description of the spatialization of public spaces, primarily plazas, in San

²⁴ Alexander Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (University of California Press, 1975).

²⁵ Jean Pfaelzer, *Driven Out: The Forgotten War Against Chinese Americans* (University of California Press, 2008).

²⁶ Three examples of this work include, Molina, *Fit to Be Citizens?*; Shah, *Contagious Divides*, 2001; John Mckiernan-Gonzalez, *Fevered Measures: Public Health and Race at the Texas-Mexico Border, 1848-1942* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2012).

²⁷ Flores, *Remembering the Alamo*; Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* (MIT Press, 1997).

Antonio is thorough and heavily relies on Lefebvre.²⁸ This dissertation builds on Flores's analysis by adding foodways as a data point for understanding the contests over space in the plazas. Flores asserts that beginning in 1880s post-railroad San Antonio, dominant Anglo-Texan ideas and historical memory about the city and its spaces replaced memories and histories of the colonial Spanish and Mexican periods, "subjugating" the Mexican historical narrative. For example, the imagined history of San Antonio shifted focus to the narrative of Texas independence with the Alamo and its plaza as the master symbol for the Anglo-Texan imagined history as opposed to a colonial Spanish or independent Mexican past that focused the center of Spanish and Mexican life on its plazas.²⁹ This shift is exemplified in the story of the chili stands and the political pressure exerted upon them to move out of traditional public spaces by, in Flores's parlance, "respatializing" the Alamo and historic plazas throughout the city.

In *The Power of Place*, Dolores Hayden offers a framework to analyze contests over urban spaces. She suggests that in studying the politics or production of space, the

²⁸ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991). Lefebvre's historical notions of space are split into three aspects or forces and the shifting balance of these three aspects of space define historic spatialization. The three aspects are: perceived space – the way space is understood in everyday social life or the way we use space daily; conceived space – the way space is understood as commodity (urban planners, property values); and lived space – the way space is understood in the imagination. Flores uses this idea as well to show how spaces are respatialized when new dominant ideas about space gain control of its value and the way it is perceived.

²⁹ Flores, *Remembering the Alamo*, 11.

human attachment to space, or “senses of place,” should be given equal measure. She posits that “place needs to be at the heart of urban landscape history, not on the margins, because the aesthetic qualities of the built environment, positive or negative, need to be understood as inseparable from those of the natural environment.”³⁰ Flores operates within this framework briefly by describing his own childhood experiences with the Alamo, but on the whole *Remembering the Alamo* is a study in the politics of spaces.³¹ Environmental Psychologist, Setha Low offers an ethnographic study of plazas in Central America *On the Plaza: the Politics of Public Space and Culture*, that does use the framework that Hayden set forth. It is a multidisciplinary study that uses oral history, personal observation, historical documentation, ethnohistorical archival research, and photography to describe the plaza “a focus of contestation and as a place where disagreements and conflicts over cultural and political objectives become concrete.”³²

Over the course of this project, I used government documents, literature, letters, memoirs, biography, newspaper articles, advertisements, oral histories, city directories, Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, archaeological studies, and contemporary public histories

³⁰ Hayden, *The Power of Place*, 18.

³¹ For other examples of studies of the politics of space that informed this dissertation, see William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (W.W. Norton, 1992); Richard J. Orsi, *Sunset Limited: The Southern Pacific Railroad and the Development of the American West, 1850-1930* (University of California Press, 2005).

³² Setha Low, *On the Plaza: The Politics of Public Space and Culture* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 2000), 238.

to illuminate the social world of the San Antonio plaza and the El Paso downtown area. Without primary sources that capture the words, ideas, or thoughts of the chili stand vendors, I made substantial use of photos to compare chili stands to eateries that fit the prevalent definition of the restaurant. Through the photos and with help from literary pieces, memoirs, eyewitness accounts, and oral histories, I was able to glean more about the social world of the plazas and chili stands.

Other than the obviously biased contemporary newspaper accounts of the Chinese in El Paso, a couple of oral histories recorded in the late 1960s / early 1970s, and a biography of one man's experience in the city as told by his son long after he died, the Chinese seem to be erased from El Paso's history. Perhaps that is why comprehensive histories of the city gloss over the Chinese experience. For instance, in 1990, historian Bill Timmons published his comprehensive history of the city.³³ The 472-page work has since seen at least a second printing (2004) and is considered by many to be an important history on the El Paso region. It is also one of the few histories of El Paso that does not rely heavily on stories passed down about the town as a "Sin City" in the West. However, the story of the Chinese railroad workers who built the first railroad into the town and then stayed in significant numbers to control the laundry industry and majority of the restaurant industry for nearly three decades receives little attention.³⁴ In addition to those

³³ Timmons, *El Paso*.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 197, 204, 218, 223–24. The Chinese railroad workers are mentioned in a word on three pages, and then the Chinese "colony" is discussed over three paragraphs where Timmons mostly

newspaper accounts, oral histories, and the biography, I examined El Paso fire insurance maps and city directories of the period to gain a clear understanding of spatial shifts over time as well as locations of Chinese-owned businesses. I relied on accounts of Chinese food and restaurants from other parts of the West in order to get an idea of what the Chinese might be serving in their El Paso restaurants, in addition to a comprehensive archaeological study of a property in El Paso that housed Chinese residences and businesses at the end of the nineteenth century.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Chapter two of this dissertation presents the massive body of historical literature on the railroad, railroad companies, railroad workers, etc. The railroad as a metaphor for progress shows up throughout this dissertation, so the remaining parts of the chapter are organized with that metaphor in mind. It first provides an overview of pre-railroad transportation and shipping and the early development of railroad travel, providing a

uses as evidence two articles written about the group in the 1970s. The focus of the three-paragraph history is largely about the insular nature of the community and their tendency toward vice, smuggling, and opium dens. He mentions briefly that they had a near monopoly on the hand-laundry business, then retells two popular stories in El Paso lore about the Chinese. The celebratory life of Sam Hing, the man who fathered the first Texas-born baby with Chinese blood (his wife was “creole”), made a fortune in the dry-goods business, and then moved to Mexico because his wife felt ostracized by the women of El Paso, and the popular myth that the Chinese community in El Paso has a “beehive” of underground tunnels that connected to their neighbors home presumably in order to hide from authorities while in the process of committing illicit crime.

general history of transportation and how advances in technology changed perceptions of space and time. The significant effect the railroad had on the Texas economy and land development has been well established, but the chapter add a bit of depth for San Antonio and El Paso since the particular effects on specific communities is not as well documented. Finally, the chapter examines booster literature and tourism as ways that the dominant groups in both El Paso and San Antonio used to define the value of spaces associated with the railroad, especially in the West.

Chapter three explores the transition from wagon freighting and river transport of goods to and from markets to shipping via railroad. It examines the increase of railroad lines in East and Central Texas in some detail in order to provide a view into the many companies involved in the process. It was not just a Southern Pacific and Union Pacific venture. Galveston emerged as the trade leader among cities in Texas due to its advantageous location on the Gulf of Mexico and its jump start with railroad connections prior to the Civil War. As the railroad expanded, so too did wholesale companies based in Galveston (and later Houston). The chapter briefly looks at one such company and their massive network of customers in Texas and around the country. For most of the post-war nineteenth century, the Heidenheimer Brothers Wholesale Grocers dominated the market for grocery distribution in Texas and were prominent nationally. They forged connections with retail grocers in nearly every town and city in Texas. In addition they invested heavily in other sectors of the grocery and shipping trade by managing a major railroad line, investing in flour mills and sugar plantations, and co-owning a retail grocer in Austin. The primary goal of this chapter is to illuminate the changes in the Texas food

world brought on by the railroad and large food networks set up by grocery wholesalers like the Heidenheimers. The types of networks set up by the Heidenheimers, although young, were well established in central and east Texas by the time the railroad finally reached San Antonio and El Paso.

Chapter four is an in-depth look at the plaza chili stands, the railroad and its influence in San Antonio in terms of the economy, population, social structure, and space and how that influence changed the spaces left over from the colonial Spanish period. It examines the layout and use of the plaza in history and the uses and contested nature of San Antonio plazas specifically. Using eyewitness accounts of chili stands in the plazas, evening fandangos, and encounters with residents of Laredo and Chihuahua, it outlines the ways that Anglo city leaders and travel writers defined themselves against a Mexican “other,” and the ways they attempted to pull the city of San Antonio into their version of Texas history. It shows how the early myth of the chili queen at first fits the modern dominant fantasy history of “old Mexico” and is needed to tell that story before that myth is personified in some of the female chili vendors at the turn of the twentieth century at which point the myth becomes a threat to the fantasy history. Finally, it looks at the chili stands themselves as restaurants and determines that the stands countered the popular idea of the restaurant.

The focus of chapter five is the influence of and the adoption, integration, and/or exclusion of Chinese restaurants in El Paso. It briefly describes the history of the Chinese and Chinese food in America before delving into what the Chinese railroad laborers took with them into communities along the tracks as well as what they cooked in camp and at

their residences and places of employment. Although there are no studies regarding the combined influence of Chinese foodways and the construction of the railroad on communities, there are numerous popular and cultural studies on Chinese-American food and the labor of the Chinese on American railroads.

The chapter spends a good deal of time outlining El Paso's history as first a migration hub and stopover and later a major transportation crossroads between the South, New England, the Midwest and California. It also acts as a border crossing and has historically been a place to pass through on the way to California, the South, or Mexico. The bulk of this chapter focuses on El Paso's acceptance or not of parts its Chinese community and economy utilizing city directories, Sanborn insurance maps, and newspaper reports to get a greater understanding of the Chinese community in El Paso.

Chapter One: The Railroad, Mobility, and Space

During the middle decades of the nineteenth century, the railroad quickly made its way across lands west of the Mississippi drastically changing the landscape as it went. Communities that had maintained a stable population size inhabiting a relatively unchanged terrain for a couple of centuries looked completely different by the turn of the twentieth century.³⁵ Growth followed the tracks; communities were born out of dirt along its routes in order for railroad companies and their East Coast interests to exploit interior resources. The railroad brought increased immigration, tourism, and development and with it the need for new and/or additional services to accommodate both immigrants moving into their communities and visiting tourists spurred by a burgeoning western-tourism industry. Both San Antonio and El Paso in Texas represent communities that

³⁵ Since the railroad arrived to Texas later than most other states in the West, its communities represent excellent subjects for the study of changes brought by the railroad. See Flores, *Remembering the Alamo*; Neil Foley, *The White Scourge: Mexicans, Blacks, and Poor Whites in Texas Cotton Culture* (University of California Press, 1997); Edward King, "Glimpses of Texas, Volume 1: A Visit to San Antonio," *Scribner's Monthly: An Illustrated Magazine*, January 1874; Oscar Martinez, *Border Boom Town: Ciudad Juarez since 1848* (Austin & London: University of Texas Press, 1975); David Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987); Frederick Law Olmsted, *A Journey Through Texas: Or, a Saddle-Trip on the Southwestern Frontier* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1978); Raul A. Ramos, *Beyond the Alamo: Forging Mexican Ethnicity in San Antonio, 1821-1861* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008); Andres Resendez, *Changing National Identities at the Frontier: Texas and New Mexico, 1800-1850* (Cambridge, U.K.; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

experienced rapid and significant change after the railroad's entry into their respective city limits.

The railroad in the United States has been studied and written about at length by scholars throughout the twentieth and into the twenty-first centuries. There certainly exists localized stories with a narrower scope that scholars need to write that taken in aggregate could shift our perception of the grand stories of the transcontinental lines and their western romance. Numerous histories have focused on the railroad companies, the tycoons, their rivalries, and their business dealings.³⁶ Scholars have examined the romance of travel, the herculean effort to construct thousands of miles of road over remote, unforgiving terrain, and the labor that actually traversed that terrain.³⁷ Historians

³⁶ See Stephen E. Ambrose, *Nothing Like It in the World: The Men Who Built the Transcontinental Railroad, 1863-1869* (New York: Touchstone, 2000); Theresa Case, "Free Labor on the Southwestern Railroads: The 1885-1886 Gould System Strikes" (Dissertation, University of Texas, Austin, 2002); William Deverell, *Railroad Crossing: Californians and the Railroad, 1850-1910* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Orsi, *Sunset Limited*; Richard White, *Railroaded: The Transcontinentals and the Making of Modern America* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2011); Earl Young, *Tracks to the Sea: Galveston and Western Railroad Development, 1866-1900* (College Station, Texas: Texas A&M University Press, 1999).

³⁷ See Ambrose, *Nothing Like It in the World*; David Bain, *Empire Express: Building the First Transcontinental Railroad* (New York: Penguin Books, 1999); Jeffrey Garcilazo, *Traqueros: Mexican Railroad Workers in the United States, 1870 to 1930*, Al Filo: Mexican American Studies Series 6 (Denton, Texas: University of North Texas Press, 2012); Sarah Gordon, *Passage to Union: How the Railroads Transformed American Life, 1829-1929* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1996); J. Philip Gruen, *Manifest Destinations: Cities and Tourists in the Nineteenth-Century American West* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2014); Maury Klein,

have established the railroad companies' power and influence in late-nineteenth-century politics, its ownership of lands surrounding tracks (greatly exaggerated as it turns out), its organization, founding, and settlement of railroad towns, and its role in the cultivation and development of lands west of the Mississippi River including the massive irrigation projects spearheaded by the U.S. Reclamation Bureau into the twentieth century.³⁸

However, while a good portion of this history has focused on town boosters, business owners, obvious candidates for profit and benefit, positive and negative effects on a town's economy, and the death of frontier towns bypassed by the line, less has been written that examines the effects on communities of people that many times had no hand in land speculation or railroad stock, yet were affected greatly by the changes wrought upon their landscape by the marriage of town and rail. This dissertation will tell two

Unfinished Business: The Railroad in American Life (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1994); Martinez, *Border Boom Town*, 3–37; Shih-Shan Henry Tsai, *The Chinese Experience in America* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986), 1–55.

³⁸ See John S. Garner, "The Saga of a Railroad Town: Calvert, Texas (1868-1918)," *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 85, no. 2 (October 1981): 139–60; Mark Fiege, *Irrigated Eden: The Making of an Agricultural Landscape in the American West* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1999); David Igler, *Industrial Cowboys: Miller & Lux and the Transformation of the Far West, 1850-1920* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001); Donald William Meinig, *The Shaping of America: A Geographical Perspective on 500 Years of History, Continental America, 1800-1867*, vol. 2, 4 vols. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993); Char Miller, "Tourist Trap: Visitors and the Modern San Antonio Economy," in *The Culture of Tourism, the Tourism of Culture: Selling the Past to the Present in the American Southwest* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2003); Orsi, *Sunset Limited*; White, *Railroaded*.

stories about two communities who lived and worked mostly in two boom towns in late nineteenth-century Texas – Mexican chili-stand operators in San Antonio and Chinese restaurant owners in El Paso. This chapter sets the stage for these stories to be told; it provides an overview of the changes the railroad brought generally to the landscape – economic, social, cultural, and spatial. It looks back to many of the earlier histories mentioned in the footnotes above in order to come to an understanding of the ways railroad companies operated in cities, and the ways that cities, towns, and rural areas dealt with railroad companies, especially in areas of Texas where the railroad arrived later than other parts of the West. It focuses on the general ways that both railroad companies and railroad towns used and attempted to control space due to their economic and social relationship. As others have theorized, the spread of the railroad throughout the United States, Mexico, and Canada made it clear that space is political and contested when it is imagined as economically and/or culturally valuable in different ways to different individuals, groups, and social structures.³⁹ This chapter provides background for discussion of some of the imagined spaces in San Antonio and El Paso and the conflicts that arose over those spaces before and after the railroad lines came to town.

THE RAILROAD AS METAPHOR

Following the Civil War, the railroads and the idea of a transcontinental route in particular, captured the imagination of a populace who had just witnessed the near

³⁹ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*.

severing of the union with the death and destruction caused by the nearly half-decade-long conflict.⁴⁰ However, plans for the first transcontinental route were underway even before the war had ended.⁴¹ The pre-war calls for Americans to take up and fulfill their “manifest destiny” by settling the continent resonated once again with the populace. The railroad embodied popular ideas of progress and destiny, and the completion of the first transcontinental line symbolized the reality and attainability of those ideas.

According to historian Richard White, the images of workers and investors of both the Union Pacific and the Central Pacific railroads meeting at Promontory Point that have been so pervasive in American history books “reveal nothing of the history that led up to the transcontinentals and none of the ambivalence of the men whose lives came to revolve around” those railroad lines.⁴² There is only the idea of a new union in the photographs capturing that moment. “Promontory Summit quickly became less a place than a metaphor” and when Leland Stanford’s silver hammer tapped the last spike home prompting a telegraph signal to be sent across the nation that triggered “bursts of cannon fire in New York and San Francisco and...celebration and speech making across the country,” that metaphor “caused millions to imagine events and possibilities they could

⁴⁰ Ambrose, *Nothing Like It in the World*; Bain, *Empire Express: Building the First Transcontinental Railroad*; Gordon, *Passage to Union: How the Railroads Transformed American Life, 1829-1929*, 133–213.

⁴¹ White, *Railroaded*, 3–26.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 37.

neither see nor hear.”⁴³ It sent many of those millions across the country searching hopefully for new opportunities, new markets, and the realization of destinies.

To many in the nineteenth century, the railroad was sublime. Its descriptions in booster literature depict the technology as a natural force as comfortable in the landscape as a river and with the selfsame power that humans must shape their lives around, while also possessing the supernatural ability to transform landscapes into agrarian Edens and dirt into dollars simply by its appearance on the frontier.⁴⁴ These types of descriptions of course make up only one end of the spectrum of nineteenth-century railroad descriptions, but they created lasting images and provoked a good portion of the population to imagine themselves farming the prairies of Kansas or the valleys of central California. In the very least, these metaphors created by railroad companies, travel writers, boosters, and speculators about the railroad figuratively moved people to literally move across the continent.⁴⁵

The advance of transportation technology throughout the nineteenth century transformed Americans’ ideas and perceptions of space. Movement for the most part had been confined to a specific localized sphere around individual communities that

⁴³ Ibid., 37–38.

⁴⁴ William Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (W.W. Norton, 1992), 63–74.

⁴⁵ Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis*, 1992; Gruen, *Manifest Destinations*; Miller, “Tourist Trap: Visitors and the Modern San Antonio Economy”; Barbara Rozek, *Come to Texas: Attracting Immigrants, 1865-1915* (College Station, Texas: Texas A&M University Press, 2003).

influenced the economies of those communities. Space could be traversed at bounded intervals based on the limits of human and/or animal movement.⁴⁶ In the Spanish colonial territory of Alta-California, missions and settlements were arranged at distances of approximately thirty miles because it took the length of a day by horse to traverse that distance. A farmer in New England knew when to start picking vegetables in order to have them loaded in his cart for the trip to the market in town, because he knew how long it would take to ride to town. More importantly, he controlled his movement as well as what he moved.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, new transportation technology including the railroad changed local perceptions of space by shrinking the amount of time it took to travel between places. Producers could now move goods over longer distances quicker, cheaper, and usually more efficiently.⁴⁷ A farmer could still operate within his localized economy, but the likelihood that he would now compete with farmers from many miles

⁴⁶ Gordon, *Passage to Union: How the Railroads Transformed American Life, 1829-1929*; Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the Nineteenth Century* (Oakland: University of California Press, 1977); Carol Sheriff, *The Artificial River: The Erie Canal and the Paradox of Progress, 1817-1862* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996); George Taylor, *The Transportation Revolution, 1815-60* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

⁴⁷ The “quicker, cheaper, more efficient” narrative of new technology’s benefits always needs context. In the nineteenth century and in terms of the railroad, “quicker” and “more efficient” was usually the case, but “cheaper” depended entirely on the rates set and imposed by the railroad and its monopoly. For more on the issue of freight rates and monopoly, see Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis*, 1992; Frank Norris, *The Octopus: A Story of California* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Doran, 1928); Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey*; White, *Railroaded*.

away became a certainty over time. In offering an expanded economy to producers, railroad companies shifted the control of movement in terms of tickets rates, scheduling, speed, and safety from the individual over to the railroad.⁴⁸

PRE-RAILROAD TRAVEL

Before 1800, long distance travelers typically utilized water routes in the Americas. Coast dwellers traveled along the coast usually in boats and ships trading goods along the coasts at ports. Those in the interior United States used river routes, which is why pioneers founded settlements on navigable streams that emptied into major arteries like the Ohio, Hudson, and Mississippi Rivers. Travelers in most areas made use of Native American trails that had been used for hundreds of years like the Old Natchez Trace in Mississippi. Riding horseback or walking these early trails was the norm, but some were flat and wide enough to accommodate small wagons and could be used for trade over short distances or to connect to river systems. Other roads typically built by and for the military and designed to accommodate the movement of large groups, supply wagons, and equipment would become more prevalent and reliable by the turn of the nineteenth-century so that settlers could live further away from the coast and/or rivers.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Tim Cresswell, *On the Move: Mobility in the Modern Western World* (CRC Press, 2006), 2–24; White, *Railroaded*, 140–178.

⁴⁹ Gordon, *Passage to Union: How the Railroads Transformed American Life, 1829-1929*, 14–16.

Spanish Colonial America experienced much the same limitations for travel and trade during this time, although roads and trails likely maintained their integrity longer in the arid climates of the Southwest. Just like indigenous trails in the eastern portion of North America, the Spanish utilized routes that had been traveled for thousands of years by indigenous tribes for hunting or trade. The Spanish mapped a system of these indigenous routes for travel between missions and settlements that they termed El Camino de Real, or the Royal Road in English. Fewer rivers were navigable in the Southwest and Northern Mexico, although the Rio Grande River accommodated ferries part of the way upriver.⁵⁰ Stage service operated in most regions inhabited by Europeans as early as the early 18th century, but it was largely limited to short distances, until the antebellum period.

New York constructed the Erie Canal in 1825 in order to connect to trade in the western part of the United States via the Great Lakes, marking the first major shift in trade from the north/south routes dominated by natural waterways to man-made east/west routes.⁵¹ Soon however, New England states began constructing the earliest railroads and created direct competition for trade with water routes as well as overland stage and wagon routes. Railroads could avoid weather issues like canals freezing in the winter that

⁵⁰ Edna White, "Stern-Wheelers of the Sabine," *Texas Gulf Historical and Biographical Record* II, no. November, 1966 (1966): 29–34; Louis C. Hunter, *Steamboats on Western Rivers: An Economic and Technological History*, 2nd ed. (New York: Octagon Books, 1969).

⁵¹ Gordon, *Passage to Union: How the Railroads Transformed American Life, 1829-1929*, 16; Sheriff, *The Artificial River*.

waterways experienced. Due to the dangers of the earliest steam engines, however, railroads did not pose major competition for waterways until later as technology progressed in the antebellum period.⁵² Even then, technology along the largest rivers progressed in kind allowing steamship companies to travel up river making trade between regions along the Mississippi River, for instance, much more efficient.⁵³ Steamships along the major rivers began to take on different types of passengers. No longer did the passenger manifests list mainly migratory one-way travelers or traders moving along the river with their goods, but folks of higher station with the wealth to travel for fun or leisure began to do so.⁵⁴

Railroad companies backed by states continued to build new lines into places steamboats could not travel and by mid-century railroad travel began to eclipse travel along America's waterways. In fact, in eastern communities the railroad created a new standard for the way people traveled and conducted business. Businesses that even in the 1830s had participated in localized economies with a fairly clear radius inside which they operated, began to expand their reach while citizens began to imagine traveling longer distances from home. This development was not welcomed at first by farmers in a world

⁵² Steam locomotives required constant attention to make sure the pressure in the engine did not cause an explosion. In addition, earlier engines were made in part from wood, so the fire needed to create steam could cause the engine and its train of cars to go up in flames.

⁵³ Gordon, *Passage to Union: How the Railroads Transformed American Life, 1829-1929*, 27–29.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 36–37.

of localized economies, because they feared railroad companies would import crops and food from great distances that would compete with their local farming economies.⁵⁵

LANDSCAPE TRANSFORMATION ON THE FRONTIER

Early migration followed rivers as much as trade and travel before the railroad established east/west routes to lands unsettled by Americans. Colonists had largely expanded to settlements up river from larger towns and cities along the East Coast, or followed pioneers overland to areas further west at a greater rate in the mid-18th century.⁵⁶ The steamboat hastened development upstream in western areas especially along larger rivers like the Mississippi where cities like Memphis, Saint Louis, and Cincinnati grew at much greater rates as transportation technology progressed. Railroads changed the way citizens migrated inland almost immediately, however. No longer did settlers and pioneers need to establish homes near waterways for travel; they could instead travel into areas with streams and rivers that were less navigable, but had land in greater abundance.⁵⁷

More so than other railroads, the “transcontinentals” were heavily subsidized and protected by public entities. They were given land grants and rights of way by the federal

⁵⁵ Ibid., 16–18.

⁵⁶ For example, the Kentucky of Daniel Boone as well as settlement in Missouri, in and around Chicago, and other parts of the Ohio Valley.

⁵⁷ Gordon, *Passage to Union: How the Railroads Transformed American Life, 1829-1929*, 35–45.

and various state governments in order to build across and develop the West, and when the companies went bankrupt as many did, the government bailed them out.⁵⁸ In addition, during labor disputes toward the turn of the century the federal government backed the railroad. Unlike other railroads that were constructed east of the Mississippi River largely to satisfy the needs of already settled communities of non-Native American settlers, the “transcontinentals” were constructed with no real demand for their use. Instead, they created that demand through advertising, exaggeration, and the elimination of a Native American presence with the help of the federal government. As White states, the transcontinentals “were agents of the expansion” of states west of the Mississippi.⁵⁹ These railroads constructed their rails with public money (in reality, credit) on land stolen from Native Americans by the United States government and then gifted to the companies for construction. In turn, the “transcontinentals” successfully promoted settlement, farming, mining, and ranching of the lands surrounding their roads. People, commerce, and European-style civilization did follow the railroads into the vast region that before had merely been claimed by nations and/or states. White’s main argument in *Railroaded* is that regardless of the influence of the “transcontinentals” in the settlement and development of the West, for the most part, taking into account their bankruptcies, corruption, and monopolism, railroad construction was a bad idea at the time.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ White, *Railroaded*.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, xxiii.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, xxi-xxxiv.

In 1871, Charles Frances Adams, Jr., railroad promoter, future president of the Union Pacific, and great-grandson of President John Quincy Adams wrote with clear foresight of the challenge of the railroad:

here is an enormous, an incalculable force practically let loose suddenly upon mankind; exercising all sorts of influences, social, moral, and political; precipitating upon us novel problems which demand immediate solution; banishing the old before the new is half matured to replace it; bringing the nations into close contact before yet the antipathies of race have begun to be eradicated; giving us a history full of changing fortunes and rich in dramatic episodes.⁶¹

Of course Adams wrote these words of caution before he became a railroad promoter himself and over a decade before he became the president of the Union Pacific. Town boosters across the west knew what they stood to gain with the railroad's appearance at their town limits. Many boosters hoped to coax the railroad companies to lay track through their towns or adjacent to lands that they had purchased on speculation, anticipating a railroad's path.

In 1862, Congress passed the Homestead Act in hopes that settlers would take up the 160 acre tracts to farm and develop and that the resulting move to settle the West would prove to make the Union Pacific profitable since members of Congress and those who influenced them held stock in the company.⁶² The plan included land grants to

⁶¹ Ibid., xxii.

⁶² Gordon, *Passage to Union: How the Railroads Transformed American Life, 1829-1929*, 152.

railroad companies along their tracks to use for further development. Railroad companies in turn sold this land as a way to recoup construction costs and with an eye to future development, since the companies' primary profits came from transporting freight and passengers.⁶³

The Southern Pacific, for example, had a large staff of attorneys and land agents who would first verify that no other claims had been filed, no legal buyers existed, and no squatters resided on the federally granted land before they would attempt to develop it. If they found any of those issues, they would delete the relevant lands from the grant and apply with the government to move that lost amount of acreage forward to future lines. The railroad preferred an agrarian landscape to increase the chance that farmers who purchased land platted by the railroad would later use the railroad to transport their commodity crops into areas of demand. Once they deemed the land clear of obstacles, the railroad land agents then subdivided the land into tracts of varying size and then promoted the subdivision.⁶⁴

The railroad's role in transforming Texas, the Southwest, and the West cannot be overstated. The settlement of lands by Anglo-Americans up to the Missouri River had taken roughly two and a half centuries. After the first transcontinental railroad connected at Promontory Point in 1869, it took only three decades to bring the non-Indian

⁶³ Orsi, *Sunset Limited*, 79.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 79–81; White, *Railroaded*, 455–56.

population in the West from two million in 1870, up to ten and a half million by 1900.⁶⁵ Rural towns all over Texas and the greater West were built based upon relationships between producers and the railroad, and usually in concert with larger urban areas. In most cases, these relationships were set up to send wealth east back to New York and New England. In the case of Texas towns, wealth flowed southeast to the Gulf of Mexico port complex that included Houston and Galveston.⁶⁶

The major expansion of railroad infrastructure, especially in the 1880s, quickly and profoundly changed the economic landscape and accelerated the population growth of the West as a whole. In some instances, the railroad changed entire economies at the regional level.⁶⁷ These types of changes occurred throughout the western United States as the railroad made its way across the territory and railroad companies quickly expanded their systems. Historian Richard White views the economy of the late-nineteenth-century West as an extractive economy in the sense that settlers and farmers produced commodities in the west for foreign markets in the East and overseas while consuming

⁶⁵ White, *Railroaded*, 459–59; University of Virginia Library, “Historical Census Browser,” 2004, <http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu/index.html>.

⁶⁶ Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis*, 1992. When I began this project, I originally thought that San Antonio might have the same relationship to the surrounding rural areas that Cronon describes in his history of Chicago and its relationship to the rural Midwest. However, Houston and Galveston fit that description in many more ways including their trade in agriculture commodities, timber, and later petroleum.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

goods from those same markets. “Trees felled in western forests became masts for European ships and boards for Asian and South American buildings. The gold and silver mined in western mountains circulated throughout the world. The cattle that grazed western plains and prairies fed eastern and European cities” and so on.⁶⁸ According to White, railroads were part of a larger economic system that moved across the West after the Civil War displacing traditional subsistence economies to exploit natural resources for the industrial markets of the eastern United States and Europe.⁶⁹

The railroad directly expanded the mining and lumber industries by making the transportation of minerals and timber quicker and easier while allowing for larger shipments to be transported to eastern markets. In addition, previously high-cost minerals and ore such as marble were suddenly profitable due to the ease of transportation to the mines of new equipment and technology used to extract and crush stone for hauling.⁷⁰ The railroad companies’ need for track ties and engine fuel also created a major market for timber and coal from the outset. In 1890 alone, the railroads used approximately 73-

⁶⁸ Richard White, *“It’s Your Misfortune and None of My Own”*: A New History of the American West (Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 242–243.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 245–247; Also see Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986*, for an exhaustive study of the displacement of small South Texas Tejano farms and ranches with larger consolidated and corporate operations.

⁷⁰ Jeffrey Garcilazo, *Traqueros: Mexican Railroad Workers in the United States, 1870 to 1930*, Al Filo: Mexican American Studies Series 6 (Denton, Texas: University of North Texas Press, 2012), 20–22.

million railroad ties for maintenance and new construction.⁷¹ While northern and mid-western lumber companies could rely on rivers to transport fallen trees to markets such as Chicago,⁷² most of the West and Southwest needed the railroad to arrive before lumbering became an important industry especially in the mountains of Arizona and northern Mexico.⁷³

The railroad introduced large-scale farming to the West and transformed the cattle industry in much the same way it expanded the mining and timber industries. As the railroad pushed across the plains, it opened up new swaths of land that railroad companies, town boosters, and politicians sold to immigrants as cheap and fertile. In some cases, such as the Blackland Prairie of Central-East Texas, the land proved to be just that and became major producers of cotton and other crops. The transformation of land in the West and Southwest from primarily open prairie cattle grazing to farm land forced the cattle industry to adapt. According to Neil Foley, “the arrival of railroads onto the Great Plains widened the market for cattle considerably, but it also forced the cattle industry to seek less productive cropland farther west as growing numbers of settlers followed the railroads.” The same year the railroad reached San Antonio (1877) cattle magnate Charles Goodnight started the first major cattle ranch in the Panhandle. Cattle

⁷¹ White, *It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own*: A New History of the American West, 257.

⁷² See Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*, 1992, 148–206.

⁷³ Garcilazo, *Traqueros: Mexican Railroad Workers in the United States, 1870 to 1930*, 25.

trails shifted west as well and as railroad construction moved west across Texas and ranchers realized the benefit of shipping cattle to market by rail, the trail drives ended forever.⁷⁴

As the railroad pushed cattle operations farther west and opened up new markets for agriculture, mining, timber, and other enterprises, the population of the West exploded. The railroad both coaxed immigrants to western locales through booster literature and physically transported those immigrants to the West. Between 1860 and 1890, the combined population of Kansas, Nebraska, and Colorado increased by over 2000% in large part due to development spurred by the railroad.⁷⁵ During the same period the population of California increased by 217% most of which happened between 1870 and 1890, reflecting its position as one of the furthest points west in the United States.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Neil Foley, *The White Scourge: Mexicans, Blacks, and Poor Whites in Texas Cotton Culture* (University of California Press, 1997), 27.

⁷⁵ University of Virginia Library, "Historical Census Browser," 2004, <http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu/index.html>. The total population increased from 136,047 to 2,898,204.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* The total population increased from 379,994 to 1,208,130. California started with a larger population in part due to Spanish colonization and the Gold Rush of the 1850s. However, the close proximity of Midwestern states to Eastern markets prompted quicker growth after the Civil War. California would of course have a major population boom in the early to mid-twentieth century.

BOOSTERS, TOURISM, AND THE RAILROAD

Western boosters, both employed by railroads and independent and separately backed by other eastern capital, many times played a game of luck in attempting to found and development communities along railroad lines or in anticipation of their future path. For every sweeping success in cities like Chicago, Denver, and Tucson, there were multiple ventures that stagnated all across the country. In many cases, the projects were absolute failures where the planned settlements either never materialized or became ghost towns by the beginning of the twentieth century. Still, the dream of founding the next great western city drove boosters of nearly every town site organized across the West in the nineteenth century. Although portrayed in film and literature as hucksters and confidence men, Western town boosters usually “expounded serious theories of economic growth” that most nineteenth-century boosters, investors, and scholars used when contemplating frontier development.⁷⁷

As historian William Cronon notes, boosters offered a “coherent model” for “urban and regional growth” in promoting their plans to future investors and potential merchants and residents. A defining feature of their plans usually incorporated descriptions of the countryside and its potential to support the future metropolis they were selling.⁷⁸ Writing in 1849 about San Antonio’s promise, Dr. Ferdinand Roemer described the potential of the surrounding areas as farm land,

⁷⁷ Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis*, 1992, 34–35.

⁷⁸ Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis*, 1992, 34.

the beautiful fruitful valley...what an earthly paradise could be created here through the hands of an industrious and cultured population...the climate is delightful...figs and pomegranates and all fruits of the warmer parts of the temperate zone grow here out of doors...the soil is of great fertility and this could be...increased by restoring and expanding the irrigation system used under Spanish rule...⁷⁹

Roemer continued his description by noting a railroad connection to the coast and military protection from indigenous tribes were the only two things San Antonio needed in order to tap into its potential. Booster pitches tapped even further into religious imagery, sometimes overtly claiming God's providence for the location of regions. In describing Chicago's potential, newspaper editor William Bross asserted that "Nature...or, to speak more reverently, He who is the Author of Nature, selected the site of this great city...and hence her future will not be subject to those causes which have paralyzed or destroyed many of the cities of past ages."⁸⁰ The natural world surrounding

⁷⁹ Ferdinand Roemer, *Texas: With Particular Reference to German Immigration and the Physical Appearance of the Country. Described through Personal Observation by Dr. Ferdinand Roemer*, trans. Oswald Mueller (Waco, Texas: Texian Press, 1967), 133–34; quoted in Cecilia Steinfeldt, *San Antonio Was: Seen through a Magic Lantern, Views from the Slide Collection of Albert Steves, Sr.* (San Antonio, Texas: San Antonio Museum Association, 1978), 74.

⁸⁰ William Bross, *Chicago and the Sources of Her Past and Future Growth* (Chicago: Jansen, McClurg, 1880), 3; quoted in Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*, 35.

a booster's potential urban paradise would need convenient modes of transportation and logical routes on which to move goods and people from place to place as needed.

As Roemer noted in the quote above, San Antonio merely lacked a railroad connection to Galveston in order to export its goods to the world. The Spanish settled the El Paso del Norte region mainly due to its convenient location in a fertile river valley along natural migration routes that had existed for centuries. Once the United States took most of the American West and Southwest from Mexico and created a geo-political border along the Rio Grande River, El Paso sprung up on the American side of the border. It lacked only a railroad to realize its potential and in 1881, railroad companies granted city boosters' wishes when three of the five lines building toward El Paso finally reached the city. In one of its first city directories, the El Paso Daily Times praises 1881 as the year that solidified their future as a great western city.

El Paso is no longer a stand-still city, and those who do not move with the procession must go farther and farther behind till lost sight of. The future holds up to view the largest possible amount of promise, and the people are awake in the opportunities of the hour; in fact, all visitors here invariably speak of the life and thrift they see on every side, and if we did not occasionally speak of hard times the stranger would never imagine such a thing could exist here.⁸¹

⁸¹ *Directory of the City of El Paso 1888* (El Paso, Texas: El Paso Directory Company, Times Publishing Company, Steam Printers and Binders, 1888), 2.

The railroad brought with it easy, fruitful times, as well as loads of cheap labor and significant property value increases.⁸²

The railroad's arrival certainly changed both San Antonio's and El Paso's demographics, economies, and geographies, all of which I will examine in later chapters. First, I want to cut to the roots of the city and railroad boosters' hyperbole and take a peek at the image of the railroad in the United States leading up to its entrance into San Antonio. First, as Richard White elucidates in *Railroaded*, the "transcontinentals" as he calls them must be distinguished from other lines throughout mostly the eastern section of the country.⁸³ Companies such as the Southern Pacific and Union Pacific in the United States, the Canadian Pacific, and the northern railroads of Mexico created lines that were in two major ways different from lines constructed before the Civil War. Although they were not true "transcontinentals" (at least initially) in the sense that they did not stretch across the entire continent when they were built, these lines were a vast interconnected

⁸² Cleofas Calleros, *El Paso: Then and Now* (El Paso, Texas: American Printing Company, 1954); Farrar, *The Chinese in El Paso*; Mario T. García, *Desert Immigrants: The Mexicans of El Paso, 1880-1920* (Yale University Press, 1982). El Paso, Chinese labor, and space is the subject of this dissertation's chapter three.

⁸³ The Southern Pacific is the "transcontinental" that eventually connects San Antonio in 1881 to the rest of the railroad system that White speaks of in *Railroaded*. The Sunset Route of the Galveston, Harrisburg, and San Antonio would quickly be purchased by Collis Huntington and absorbed into the Southern Pacific.

system that were controlled by a small group of directors and primary stockholders that derived financing from the same sources.⁸⁴

While boosters touted the connection between farmland and future urban growth, early tourists to the West after the Union Pacific and Central Pacific completed the first transcontinental route were largely interested in western cities. Although most scholarship about nineteenth-century western tourism focuses on the sublimity of the natural world, many tourists before the mid-1880s “reserved their most visceral reactions for the technological and engineering processes transforming western cities, many of which they encountered firsthand.”⁸⁵ Rail transportation was certainly a draw, but waterworks systems, grain elevators, bridges, etc., being constructed in the west and surrounded by the mythical wild frontier that dime novels and guidebooks had created, caught the imagination of tourists.⁸⁶

In order to diversify their income, railroad companies through groups like the Association of Passenger Traffic Officers created group rates for students, individuals in clubs, etc. that were traveling to the same destinations.⁸⁷ Members of these groups were the earliest members of a rapidly-forming middle class who had some disposable income as well as contacts and other interests that the railroad companies hoped to bring to the

⁸⁴ White, *Railroaded*, xxiii.

⁸⁵ Gruen, *Manifest Destinations*, 12.

⁸⁶ Gruen, *Manifest Destinations*.

⁸⁷ Gordon, *Passage to Union: How the Railroads Transformed American Life, 1829-1929*, 180.

west. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, as mining towns became ghost towns, population shifted to urban areas, and rural small farms began to give way to larger consolidated operations, the railroads ramped up their promotion of tourism in order to keep people riding the rails.

After promoting free land in the West and Southwest for years, railroads took a different tack with tourism. While both the South and the West were popular destinations for tourists from the Northeast and the Midwest, that popularity no longer depended upon a region's future development potential. Instead, tourists sought out rural and unpopulated areas for an experience that differed from their daily lives in the city.⁸⁸ As early as the 1870s, not long after Yellowstone National Park had been set aside by the Federal Government, tourism companies began conducting tours across the West. Yellowstone, San Antonio, The Grand Canyon, and San Francisco among other places were all major draws for tourists heading west in search of personal connections to a mythologized past.⁸⁹

EATING ALONG THE RAILS

While the next two chapters of this dissertation cover dining options offered to travelers and citizens by Chinese restaurateurs in El Paso and Mexican chili-stand vendors in San Antonio, another version of the restaurant developed specifically for the

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 304.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 302–11.

western railroad lines should be noted. The now famous Harvey Houses, created by Fred Harvey, began operations along the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe in 1876, and before long became the standard for dining along the railroad in the Midwest and Southwest into the twentieth century.⁹⁰

Before he became a restaurant magnate, Harvey contracted for a smaller railroad company during the Civil War selling tickets for the main line that ran several miles north of Leavenworth, Kansas, Harvey's home. When a branch line reached the city a few years later, Harvey took full advantage by expanding his business and hiring others to run his locations while he set off across the country as a freight agent for a railroad company.⁹¹ During his travels, Harvey learned that the dining options throughout the United States that were convenient to railroad depots and stops were far from consistent. He sought to remedy that situation, especially in the West, by creating a chain of standardized restaurants in and near railroad depots and stops along the route. He opened the first Harvey House restaurant in Topeka, Kansas, in 1876.⁹²

Harvey Houses competed directly with saloons, hotel restaurants, and chopouses for business along the lines. Harvey hoped to set his restaurants apart by establishing a

⁹⁰ Stephen Fried, *Appetite for America: Fred Harvey and the Business of Civilizing the Wild West - One Meal at a Time* (New York: Bantam Books, 2010); Jeri Quinzio, *Food on the Rails: The Golden Era of Railroad Dining* (Lanham Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014); Levenstein, *Revolution at the Table*.

⁹¹ Fried, *Appetite for America*; Quinzio, *Food on the Rails*, 13–18.

⁹² Fried, *Appetite for America*, 49; Quinzio, *Food on the Rails*, 14.

system of standardization and efficiency and offering “good food, clean accommodations and civil behavior to railroad service.”⁹³ Harvey’s convincing sales pitch that a traveler would not be able to find this type of clean, civilized atmosphere with high-quality food at other restaurants across the West highlights the ideas and national narratives about accepted restaurants, proper food space, and ethnicity that existed at the end of the nineteenth century.⁹⁴

One major defining characteristic of the nineteenth-century Harvey Houses is today the defining characteristic of any chain – that is consistency across time and space. A train passenger could leave Topeka just after breakfast, stop in Wichita around lunch, and pull in to the Amarillo station in time for dinner and see the same menu, same shiny seemingly clean interior, and be served their meals by a mythic Harvey Girl, the restaurants army of young, white, single easterners that they brought to the west as a civilizing presence.⁹⁵

In many cases, that same passenger would have the opportunity to dine at a Chinese-owned restaurant near the depot, but as the quote above assumes, passengers could not receive the same type of high-quality service and cleanliness at other

⁹³ Gordon, *Passage to Union: How the Railroads Transformed American Life, 1829-1929*, 206.

⁹⁴ Again, see Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat*; Levenstein, *Revolution at the Table*, for their analyses of the industrialization of American food and restaurants at the turn of the twentieth century.

⁹⁵ I will comment on the Harvey Girls in comparison to the equally mythic “chili queen” of San Antonio later in chapter three.

establishments. In reality, Chinese restaurants in the western United States had been complimented and praised for their service, cleanliness, and food quality that bordered on consistent across restaurants as most served an Americanized menu with chops of varying sorts, potatoes, stewed vegetables, and wild game. However, as I will illustrate in chapter four, the racist assault (both physical and verbal) by labor groups and western communities upon the Chinese in America and the spaces they inhabited marked them as unclean and uncivilized in the eyes of many people for many years.

CONCLUSION

The railroad brought large-scale economic, social, cultural, and geographical change to lands west of the Mississippi River after the conclusion of the Civil War. Boosters sold investors and immigrants on the potential and abundance of lands in the West, and the completion of the first transcontinental railroad proved that those lands were available. The first transcontinental carved an east-west artery through the Great Plains, over the Rocky Mountains and into California by 1869, and soon thereafter, railroad companies began branching out from that major artery into other areas of the west to exploit natural resources for East Coast markets. The railroad prompted the development of regional, national, and international networks for trade in all manner of goods, but especially for resources such as ores, timber, cattle, and commodity crops like cotton. Land adjoining the track became a valuable commodity in most cases, creating communities out of nothing seemingly overnight. Immigrants, tourists, and business travelers visited and moved into areas along the railroad lines creating major growth and

demographic change in existing communities, drastically changing some communities within a few years.

The arrival of millions of new immigrants into western lands required a host of new services in places that had not seen restaurants, cleaners, hotels, and dry-goods stores prior to the railroad connecting their community to East Coast markets and populations. It spurred the creation of streamlined, consistent experiences from tourist attractions to restaurants. Fred Harvey created the Harvey House and placed them inside or adjacent to railroad depots across the Great Plains and into the Southwest in part to provide travelers with a recognizable eating experience across space and in the face of independent restaurants, saloons, and hotels. The Harvey House and its Harvey Girls embodied the idea of the restaurant in America. Harvey's reach in Texas was limited, but rail travelers headed to Texas witnessed and/or experienced the Harvey House on the way to their destination and found a very different experience in the plazas of San Antonio and the chop houses of El Paso.

The development of the railroad system in East Texas began modestly just before the Civil War but had matured by the end of the 1870s when the first line reached San Antonio, over two decades after it had arrived in other parts of Texas. By that time, railroad companies and their partners had created a vast network of exchange from Galveston to Dallas to Austin that also connected the region nationally and internationally. Chapter two will highlight the spatial, economic, and demographic changes the railroad brought to the landscape in Texas in order to point to the differing

ways its arrival affected both San Antonio and El Paso. It also sheds light on the important regional food networks that were established before it rolled into these areas.

Chapter Two: Food Networks and Railroad Development in Texas

While visiting the United States in the 1860s, British novelist Anthony Trollope captured importance of the railroad to the survival of communities and its increasing control of the economy and information in the United States when he wrote “The town that is distant a hundred miles by the rail is so near that its inhabitants are neighbors; but a settlement twenty miles distant across the uncleared country is unknown, unvisited, and probably unheard of by women and children. Under such circumstances the railway is everything. It is the first necessity of life, and gives the only hope of wealth.”⁹⁶

Trollope’s angst-laden comment lays bare the influence the railroad had upon the landscape of the United States and perhaps there is not a better example of this influence than its development in Texas after 1870.

The railroad created prosperous farming communities out of nothing throughout the Brazos River Valley in East-central Texas, while nullifying the importance of river-port cities like Jefferson, Texas, which at the time was one of the larger cities in the State until the railroad bypassed it in the 1870s. The railroad forever changed the way goods and humans moved along trade and migratory routes in the state by shrinking its massive open space with quicker travel times. It effectively ended the era of the wagon and river freighter by connecting production and farming space directly with Galveston and other ports along the Gulf of Mexico. It also changed the complexion of major cities like San

⁹⁶ Anthony Trollope, *North America* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1862), 442, quoted in White, *Railroaded: The Transcontinentals and the Making of Modern America*, 141.

Antonio by eliminating the need for the cattle-trail drive and connecting the city to ports on both coasts, Mexico, and Canada nearly overnight.

WAGON FREIGHTING IN CENTRAL AND EAST TEXAS

Prior to the major railroad development of central and east Texas during the 1870s and 1880s, wagon freighters transported the bulk of goods to retailers in towns without railroad service. Freighters took orders from retail-store owners, and large farmers and ranchers and could then take shipments to the nearest port or train depot to sell or trade in exchange for the customers' orders. As an example, a wagon freighter carrying a load of cotton to Richmond, Texas, the typical northernmost navigable point on the Colorado River, could take up to twenty days and cost the farmer six dollars per bale just for the wagon trip. On the occasion that the Colorado was navigable all the way up to Bastrop, farmers could ship their cotton on flat boats to the bay port in approximately five days at about two dollars per bale.⁹⁷

Unfortunately, the three largest rivers that ran through most of the central- and east-Texas farmland were nearly unnavigable. They required constant maintenance to prevent snags from sinking transport ships and outside of rainy seasons, the rivers were

⁹⁷ Earl Woodward, "Internal Improvements in Texas in the Early 1850's," *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 76, no. 2 (October 1972): 163–68.

typically too shallow to be safe for shipments.⁹⁸ The river port at Jefferson in northeast Texas along the Big Cypress Bayou allowed shipments downstream to New Orleans up until about 1875, but once the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers began improving the river to stem flooding the upper portion near Jefferson became too shallow to navigate.⁹⁹ Even when the rivers were useable, wagons were still the primary means of transporting commodity crops and other goods to the port.

Wagon freighting was a difficult and unpredictable profession. Freighters traveled lightly maintained roads that became too muddy to traverse during wet periods, which were frequent in East Texas. Depending on their cargo, weather could pose a major threat as well especially to perishable goods, which could not be hauled great distances. They also faced the threat of theft and death at the hands of indigenous tribes and outlaws, especially on the frontier where most wagon freighters operated. By the early 1870s when the railroads connected most of central Texas to bay ports, the fifteen to twenty day wagon trip from Bastrop became a two to three train ride. As the railroad companies expanded their networks, wagon freighting became too expensive for most customers forcing freighter traffic further west. Most, like the Overland Transportation Company in

⁹⁸ The Colorado, Brazos, and Trinity Rivers were used off and on before the Civil War, but most years they were only navigable approximately 100 miles or less from the coast. Woodward, "Internal Improvements in Texas in the Early 1850's."

⁹⁹ Hunter, *Steamboats on Western Rivers: An Economic and Technological History*.

Denison, just closed their books and moved on to other opportunities in anticipation of the railroad's arrival.¹⁰⁰

RAILROAD DEVELOPMENT IN TEXAS

Much like other states throughout the Southwest, Texas lagged in railroad construction when compared with states in the Midwest and along the East Coast. Trains operated on 12,908 miles of track in other parts of the United States before Texas built its first 20 miles in 1853. That same year, Chicago's first full connection between to the East Coast was put into operation with a connection to Saint Louis the following year.¹⁰¹ The

¹⁰⁰ Edward King, "Glimpses of Texas," 143. At the time that Edward King was visiting north Texas (after his visit in San Antonio), the Houston and Texas Central Railroad Company had already pushed through Calvert from Houston and arrived in Dallas in 1872. In anticipation of its arrival in Denison from Dallas in 1873, the Overland Transportation Company shut down its operations.

¹⁰¹ Charles Zlatkovich, *Texas Railroads: A Record of Construction and Abandonment* (Austin: Bureau of Business Research, University of Texas at Austin and Texas State Historical Association, 1981), 3. While I rely heavily on Zlatkovich for this section due to his very meticulous documentation of railroad development, the following sources also provide background on the business of railroad development in Texas: James Lewellyn Allhands, *Boll Weevil: Recollections of the Trinity & Brazos Valley Railway* (Houston, Texas: Anson Jones Press, 1946); Douglas L. Braudaway, *Railroads of Western Texas: San Antonio to El Paso*, Images of America (Charleston SC, Chicago IL, Portsmouth NH, San Francisco CA: Arcadia Publishing, 2000); Keith Bryant, *History of the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway* (New York: Macmillan, 1971); Case, "Free Labor on the Southwestern Railroads: The 1885-1886 Gould System Strikes," 2002; Donovan Hofsommer, *Katy Northwest: The Story of a Branch Line Railroad* (Boulder, Colorado: Pruett, 1976); Orsi, *Sunset Limited*; Charles S. Potts, *Railroad*

Civil War halted most railroad construction that was not specifically for the war effort, but work picked up again soon after fighting ceased with the drive to build the first transcontinental railroad. By the time the Central Pacific and Union Pacific met at Promontory Point in Utah on May 10, 1869, railroads in Texas had completed a mere 486 miles of track compared to 46,844 miles constructed and in use nationally. The next decade would see that amount increase drastically.

From 1870 to 1879, twenty nine different railroad companies built 1,972 miles of track in Texas, nearly five times the track built in the previous two decades.¹⁰² Much of the work occurred in the eastern and north-central sections of the state where crews were busily connecting Houston, Galveston, Beaumont and other points along the Gulf of Mexico to the Brazos Valley, Austin, Dallas, Fort Worth, and San Antonio.¹⁰³ In

Transportation in Texas, University of Texas Bulletin 119 (Austin: University of Texas, 1909); St. Clair Griffin Reed, *A History of the Texas Railroads: And of Transportation Conditions Under Spain and Mexico and the Republic and the State* (Houston, Texas: St. Clair Publishing Company, 1941); Don Watson and Steve Brown, *Texas & Pacific Railway: From Oxteams to Eagles* (Cheltenham, Ontario: Boston Mills Press, 1978); White, *Railroaded*; Young, *Tracks to the Sea: Galveston and Western Railroad Development, 1866-1900*, 7–25.

¹⁰² Zlatkovich, *Texas Railroads: A Record of Construction and Abandonment*, 26–29. As with other parts of the country, the story of railroad companies in Texas is a convoluted tale. Most of the story will be relegated to the footnotes of this section.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 27–29. By 1870, the Texas & New Orleans had already pushed through to Houston, while the Houston & Texas Central had made its way from Houston up to Bryan where in the early 1870s, it split building one line to Austin and the other to Dallas by 1872. Additionally in 1871, the Houston & Great Northern built track Crockett, Palestine, and Mineola before it

addition, railroad companies were building across the northeastern section of the state connecting points in the Midwest and East Coast to the Dallas / Fort Worth areas with a goal to continue laying track to the Pacific Ocean. The Missouri-Kansas-Texas railroad, or KATY, first appeared in Texas building a short five-mile section of track from the Red River to Denison in 1872.¹⁰⁴ While its first entry into the state was rather modest, the KATY was the first railroad to enter Texas from the north and would later be part of a vast and influential system run by railroad magnate, Jay Gould.¹⁰⁵ In 1870 (see figure 2.1), Houston and parts of the Brazos Valley were the furthest points west in the state of Texas that were serviced by a railroad. See figure two and three for a comparison of railroad construction by decade.¹⁰⁶ By 1880, that line had move to San Antonio and Fort Worth.

combined with the International to become the International & Great Northern (IGN) in 1873. Jay Gould would eventually take over the IGN and oversee its construction through San Antonio and on to Mexico. In 1956, the IGN became part of the Missouri Pacific (MOPAC).

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. Notable railroad companies besides the KATY that were working predominantly in North Texas in the 1870s include the International (building a route from Longview through to Austin) and the Texas & Pacific, which attempted to build through to the Pacific Ocean via El Paso, New Mexico, and Arizona before losing out to the Southern Pacific Railway company. The T&P eventually connected with the Southern Pacific in 1881 at Sierra Blanca, creating what most consider the second transcontinental railroad.

¹⁰⁵ White, *Railroaded: The Transcontinentals and the Making of Modern America*, 197.

¹⁰⁶ Zlatkovich, *Texas Railroads: A Record of Construction and Abandonment*, 109–10.



Figure 2.1: Completed Texas railroad lines as of 1870.
From Zlatkovich, Texas Railroads, 108.

The rapid growth of the railroad in Texas and throughout North America only accelerated during the 1880s. “The national rail network grew by over 75,000 miles, equivalent to 90 percent of its former size during the decade, while the Texas rail network expanded to almost 3.5 times its former size.”¹⁰⁷ By 1890, railroad companies operated 8,486 miles of track throughout the state with lines extending west to El Paso, north to Amarillo, and south to Laredo and Corpus Christi.¹⁰⁸ Dallas, Fort Worth, Houston, and San Antonio enjoyed a direct connection to the west coast via the Texas & Pacific and the various companies and lines of the Southern Pacific. Although shipping goods long distances required negotiation and partnership with numerous railroad companies along any particular route, most major population centers in Texas enjoyed at least the potential to connect with United States coasts, Canada, and Mexico.¹⁰⁹

The 1880s (see figure 2.2) count as the busiest decade for the construction of railroad lines in Texas as three of those years, 1881, 1882, and 1887, remain the top three years for railroad construction mileage at 1527, 1352, and 1112 respectively. Some of the longest lines and most iconic railroads were built during this period including the bulk of the Sunset line, the KATY, and the main sections of what would become the Missouri Pacific (MOPAC). Notably, two new transcontinental lines were completed and

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 3–4.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 7.

¹⁰⁹ Brownsville is the only major exception for Texas cities at this point in history, although it was still connected to trade partners via its port on the Gulf of Mexico.

connected in west Texas in the early part of the decade when the Texas & Pacific completed its line to Sierra Blanca in 1881 and the Southern Pacific's westward and eastward construction crews met near the Pecos River in 1883.¹¹⁰ Both new transcontinental lines could claim to operate year-round while the first line (the northern route) faced spotty service during the winter months as it traveled through the Rocky Mountain and Sierra Nevada Mountain ranges.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ Zlatkovich, *Texas Railroads: A Record of Construction and Abandonment*, 29–31; Braudaway, *Railroads of Western Texas: San Antonio to El Paso*, 7.

¹¹¹ White, *Railroaded*; Orsi, *Sunset Limited*.

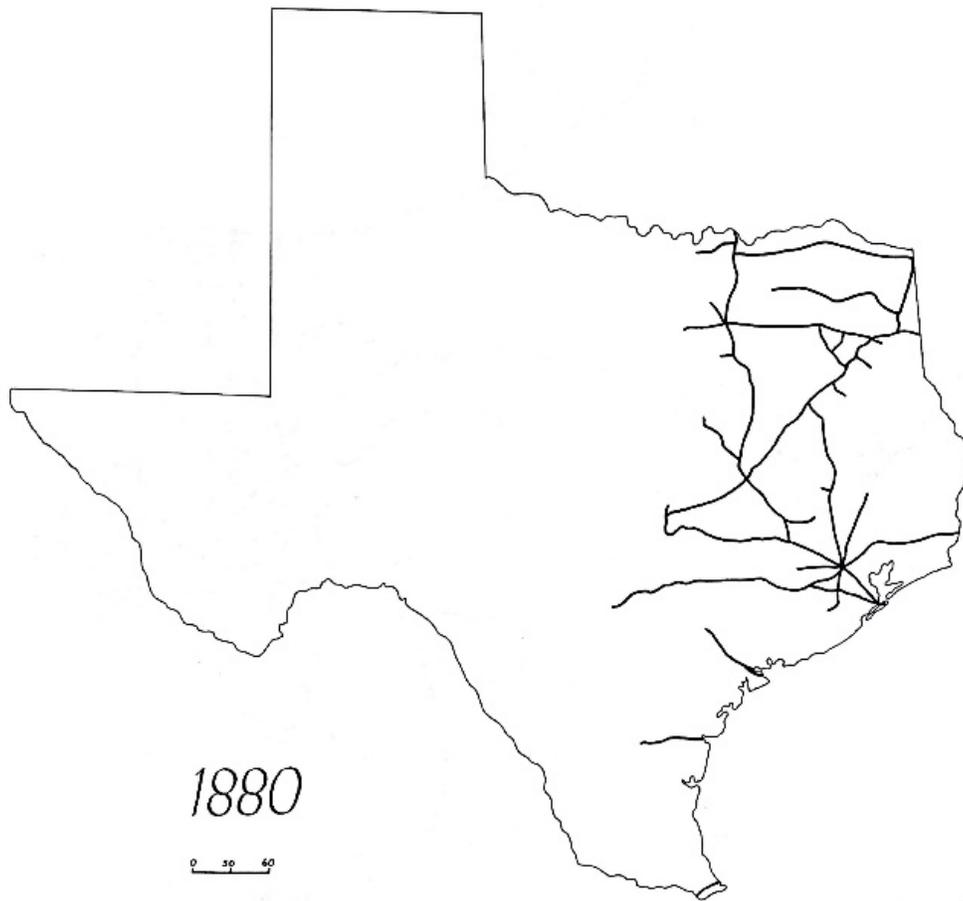


Figure 2.2: Completed Texas railroad lines as of 1880.
From Zlatkovich, Texas Railroads, 109.

Although the transcontinental lines created many miles of track, the bulk of the railroad construction during the 1880s occurred east of a line from Fort Worth to Laredo.¹¹² Galveston was still the main seaport in Texas during this period and many of the roads originated near its ports. The Texas railroad that eventually connected to the famous Atchison, Topeka, & Santa Fe (AT&S) originated in Galveston in 1873, its planners' ultimate goal the popular destination city of Santa Fe. The Gulf, Colorado, & Santa Fe (GC&S) began construction in 1877 moving 62 miles northwest to Richmond, Texas before 1880. By 1890 (see figure 2.3), the company had been acquired by the AT&S and had completed track to San Angelo, Dallas, Fort Worth, the Red River, Houston, and numerous branch lines in between. Another famous line, the KATY, completed a large portion of its system in the 1880s, but did not have major influence until later near the turn of the twentieth century due to financial woes caused by Jay Gould's business dealings. By 1890, it had established a major network of lines in the Dallas area and down into the heart of central Texas cotton country through Taylor down to San Marcos. It would eventually become one of the major routes of Mexican-migrant-farm workers toiling in the Texas cotton fields during the early-twentieth century.¹¹³ The

¹¹² Roughly the path of Interstate 35 today.

¹¹³ Foley, *The White Scourge*, 1997, 43–44; Eric Covey, “Keep Your Eye on the Boll,” in *Republic of Barbecue: Stories Beyond the Brisket*, ed. Elizabeth S. D. Engelhardt (University of Texas Press, 2009), 82–87.

International & Great Northern (I&GN), another Gould project that would later become the Missouri Pacific (MOPAC) expanded south from Longview down through central Texas to San Antonio and then on to Laredo to connect with Gould's interests in northern Mexico.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ More information on the International & Great Northern including its other lines effects on San Antonio will come later in this section.

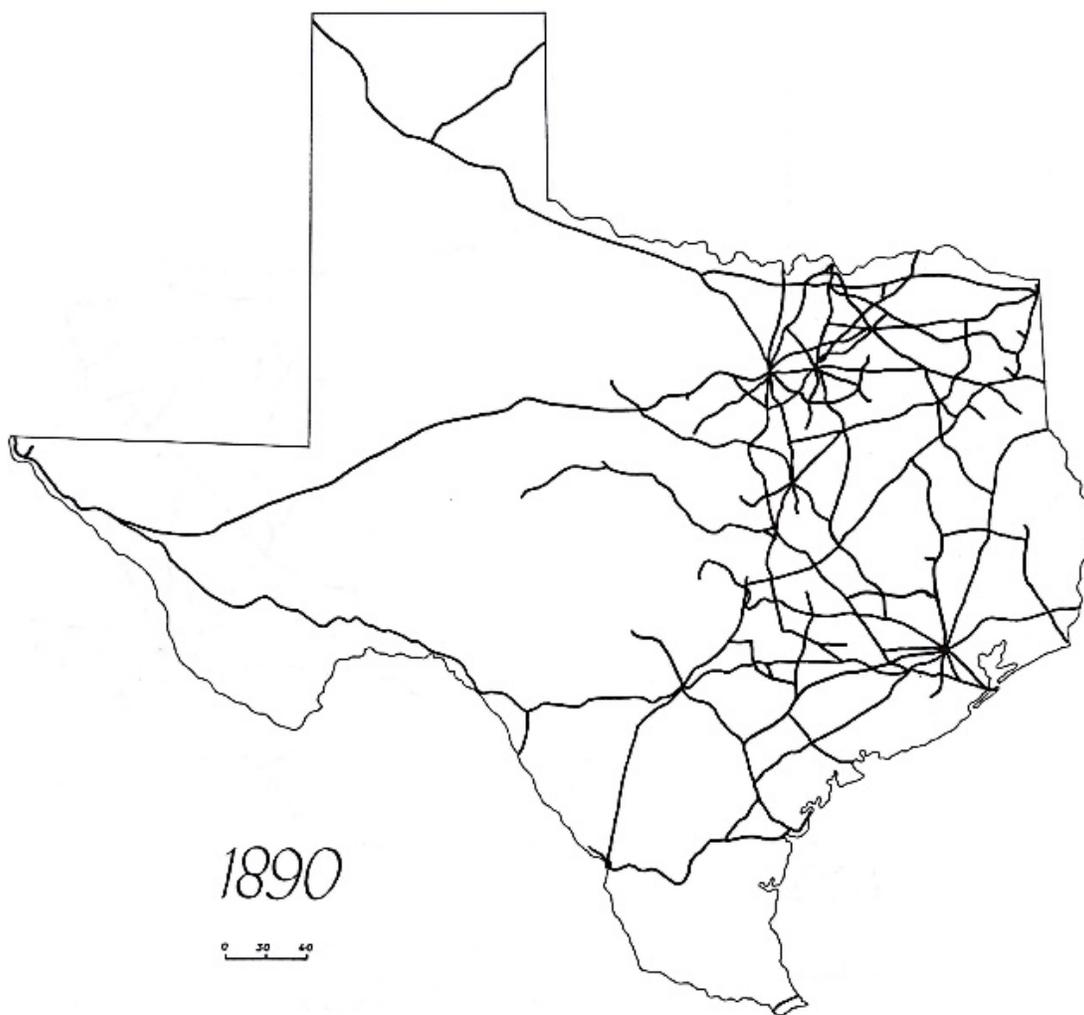


Figure 2.3: Completed Texas railroad lines as of 1890.
From Zlatkovich, Texas Railroads, 110.

Railroad construction in Texas is closely linked with the early development and urbanization of the state much like other parts of the United States. Texas population more than doubled between 1860 and 1880 to 1.6 million and reached 2.3 million by 1890.¹¹⁵ The bulk of new immigrants arrived from points in the southern and eastern United States, but a healthy portion of Europeans arrived as well.¹¹⁶ In 1870, six Texas cities had populations greater than 4,000 and two of those cities, San Antonio and Galveston had more than 10,000 residents.¹¹⁷ By 1880, another six cities joined the 4,000 residents club with Austin, Dallas, and Houston joining San Antonio and Galveston with populations over 10,000.¹¹⁸ Each of these cities was served by two or more railroad lines and several acted as major railroad junctions for three or more railroad companies.¹¹⁹ As

¹¹⁵ University of Virginia Library, “Historical Census Browser,” 2004.

¹¹⁶ Theresa Case, “Free Labor on the Southwestern Railroads: The 1885-1886 Gould System Strikes” (Dissertation, University of Texas, Austin, 2002), 22–25.

¹¹⁷ Zlatkovich, *Texas Railroads: A Record of Construction and Abandonment*, 5–7. The other cities with greater than 4,000 residents were Austin, Brownsville, Houston, and Jefferson. Houston and Galveston were the only two cities with railroad connections, while Brownsville and Jefferson acted as important shipping ports. Brownsville served southern Texas and northern Mexico sitting at the mouth of the Rio Grande on the Gulf of Mexico, and Jefferson was the westernmost shipping outpost in the Red River basin northeast of Shreveport serving New Orleans.

¹¹⁸ Brenham, Dallas, Fort Worth, Marshall, Sherman, and Waco. Jefferson began to decline in importance with the railroad by-passing it for other towns like Marshall between Shreveport and Dallas.

¹¹⁹ Zlatkovich, *Texas Railroads: A Record of Construction and Abandonment*, 7.

the railroad expanded, it signaled the demise of large, bustling river-port towns in Texas. It also dictated where growth would occur depending on its path.

Two major lines reached San Antonio during this period of railroad expansion in the 1870s and 1880s. The Galveston, Harrisburg, & San Antonio (GH&S) made its grand entrance as the first railroad to reach San Antonio in 1877. It formed in 1870 when it acquired the first railroad line built in Texas, the Buffalo Bayou, Brazos and Colorado.¹²⁰ The GH&S was mired in lawsuits and slowed by the down economy in the early 1870s, but began its trek west in 1874 finally reaching San Antonio in 1877. The company caught the eye of Collis Huntington who had been steadily building his Southern Pacific road across the Southwest reaching El Paso in 1881. Since the Southern Pacific was not chartered in Texas, Huntington quickly acquired the GH&S in order to build a line between San Antonio and El Paso to complete the second transcontinental railroad in 1883.¹²¹

The second line, the International & Great Northern (I&GN) formed when the Houston & Great Northern Railroad and the International Railroad Company

¹²⁰ Ibid., 69. The Buffalo Bayou, Brazos & Colorado (BB&C) connected Harrisburg, a small community formed on the Buffalo Bayou (a tributary connecting present day Houston to the Galveston Bay that is now the Houston Ship Channel) that predated but is now a part of Houston with the southern portion of the Brazos Valley and the Colorado River. It eventually reached the town of Columbus in 1866 on the Colorado River west of Houston along present day Interstate Highway 10. It was acquired by the Galveston, Harrisburg & San Antonio Company in 1870 with the goal to extend the line to San Antonio and Galveston.

¹²¹ Ibid., 61–94.

consolidated in 1873. By 1876, the road had formed an upside down Y with tracks connecting Longview to Palestine and then Palestine to both Austin and Houston. It remained intact until Jay Gould took over the company in 1880 in order to complete his plans to connect his Midwestern and Northeastern interests to Mexico via the Missouri Pacific (MOPAC) and the Missouri-Kansas-Texas (KATY). The I&GN line passed through San Antonio in 1881 on its way to Laredo eventually connecting with rail lines in northern Mexico. In a short five years, San Antonio had gone from being limited to stagecoach, wagon, and horse traffic to boasting east/west rail connections from San Francisco to New Orleans and on to most major cities along the Atlantic Coast and north/south rail connections from Mexico to Chicago and on to Canada. In addition, the new railroads constructed in the late 1870s connected San Antonio to major ports along the Pacific and Gulf Coasts.

The Southern Pacific was only the first of five railroad lines that would arrive in El Paso by the mid-1880s. The first four arrived within two years of each other, while the last began operation in the city before 1888.¹²² Although, the Paso del Norte valley had

¹²² In May 1881, the Southern Pacific (under the charter of the Galveston, Harrisburg, & San Antonio) reached the city of El Paso. Three weeks later the Atchison, Topeka, & Kansas (under the charter of the Rio Grande & El Paso) also rolled into El Paso. The two lines effectively connected El Paso to Kansas City and the West Coast in a matter of weeks. Later that year, Jay Gould's Texas & Pacific met the Southern Pacific in Sierra Blanca, Texas, to form a second transcontinental line. In 1883, the westbound line of the Galveston, Harrisburg, & San Antonio connected with the eastbound Southern Pacific to form the fabled Sunset Route from New Orleans to San Francisco, through San Antonio and El Paso. Finally, in 1888, the Mexican

supported life for thousands of years and European settlements for over two hundred years, those communities remained economically, culturally, and socially unchanged relative to the transformation that the railroad wrought on the region on both sides of the border. By 1884, “the city was connected to major trade centers to the east, north, west, and south. The impact this transportation revolution had on El Paso’s demographic, economic, and social growth cannot be overstated.”¹²³ The railroad transformed El Paso from a stopover along numerous trade routes into an “Instant City” of regional, if not national importance.¹²⁴ The Southern Pacific also brought the first significant infusion of Chinese immigrants into the state, many of whom ended up settling in El Paso. Prior to the Southern Pacific’s entry into Texas, the Chinese were involved in the creation of another railroad community further east in the Brazos Valley, Calvert, Texas.

Northern railroad connected interior Mexico with El Paso. For more on the railroad and its entry into El Paso, see García, *Desert Immigrants*, 11–17; Garcilazo, *Traqueros: Mexican Railroad Workers in the United States, 1870 to 1930*, 19–23; Martinez, *Border Boom Town*, 19–25; Orsi, *Sunset Limited*, 22; Timmons, *El Paso*, 197–200; Braudaway, *Railroads of Western Texas: San Antonio to El Paso*; Zlatkovich, *Texas Railroads: A Record of Construction and Abandonment*.

¹²³ Staski, Edward, “The Overseas Chinese in El Paso: Changing Goals, Changing Realities,” in *Images of the Recent Past: Readings in Historical Archaeology*, ed. Charles E. Orser (Rowman Altamira, 1996), 171.

¹²⁴ Edward Staski et al., *Beneath the Border City: Urban Archaeology in Downtown El Paso*, vol. Volume 1, 2 vols. (Las Cruces, New Mexico: New Mexico State University, 1984); Gunther Barth, *Instant Cities: Urbanization and the Rise of San Francisco and Denver* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975).

LANDSCAPE TRANSFORMATION IN TEXAS

The cotton town of Calvert is one example of the railroad's direct impact on land development in Texas. In the nineteenth century, Calvert's fortunes were tied directly to cotton just like so many other communities in Central and East Texas. The town is located approximately thirty miles northwest of Bryan-College Station in Robertson County along state highway six, a road that mostly follows the original railroad line of the Houston and Texas Central from Houston to Waco. As part of an agreement with Mexico in 1827, the Nashville Company of Tennessee organized a group led by pioneer, Sterling Robertson, to settle the area in 1830.¹²⁵ After the confusion and chaos of the Texas Revolution, additional permanent settlers began to move into the area from Alabama and Mississippi and created a plantation culture with slaves imported from the south and tracts of land that averaged 1,500 acres.¹²⁶

Transportation of their crops to market was one of the primary obstacles for Robertson County plantation owners. A 1,500 acre plantation with twenty or so slaves could produce approximately 500 to 750 bales of cotton, each weighing 500 pounds. In order to get their bales to market, planters and their slaves had to load six bales per wagon and travel two weeks one way overland to Houston. A successful trip required multiple teams of oxen, at least two men per wagon, and the hope that the prairies north

¹²⁵ J.W. Baker, *History of Robertson County, Texas* (Franklin, Texas: Robertson County Historical Survey Committee, 1970).

¹²⁶ Garner, "The Saga of a Railroad Town," 139–40.

of Houston were not wet and impassable. The nearby Brazos River drains into the Gulf of Mexico just south of Houston, but is only navigable part of the way to this day. Most planters chose the overland route.¹²⁷

Robert Calvert, a local plantation and slave owner, took up the call to bring railroad transportation to the Brazos Valley. Once established, the same 500 to 750 bales that took two weeks of arduous travel would now take a mere half day to arrive in Houston.¹²⁸ He and other area plantation owners convinced Houston businessmen who had already received a charter from the State of Texas to form the Houston and Texas Central Railway, to bring their line through Robertson County. The landowners convinced the consortium to build through their community by offering slave labor to the assist with the construction effort.¹²⁹ In 1855, Abraham Groesbeeck, a Houston and Texas Central trustee, obtained the lease to a little over 1,000 acres from one of Calvert's

¹²⁷ Ibid., 141.

¹²⁸ Calvert moved into Robertson County in the 1850s bringing seventy-four slaves with him and purchasing nearly four thousand acres for his enterprise. See Ibid., 142.

¹²⁹ Richard Denny Parker, *Historical Recollections of Robertson County, Texas* (Salado, Texas: Anson Jones Press, 1955). There are several familiar names included in the group of investors and businessmen from Houston who founded the Houston and Texas Central Railway. William Marsh Rice's fortune founded Rice University in Houston; Paul Bremond (Rice's father-in-law) chartered other railways in East Texas that had a hand in founding numerous communities in the area, including Bremond, Texas; William Robinson Baker also made his fortune in railroad land speculation and became a the Houston Mayor and a Texas State Senator after his retirement from the railroad; and finally, Abraham Groesbeeck, whom the town of Groesbeck in East Texas is named after.

neighbors for a future town site. After the Civil War, once railroad construction was again underway, Groesbeeck purchased that land for \$3 per acre, before selling it later at upwards of \$2,000 per acre.¹³⁰

Two prominent Chinese labor contractors out of San Francisco, Cornelius Koopmanschap and Kim Wing, began signing labor agreements with plantation owners across the South and Texas in the early 1870s.¹³¹ In Texas, as noted earlier, railroad construction was in its infancy. Companies began to reestablish connections with the Texas state government in the wake of the Civil War in hopes of continuing pre-war construction project plans that had been put on hold in the early 1860s. Those delayed projects began again in earnest in the 1870s and continued through the early twentieth century. The reputation that Chinese railroad workers had gained with their contributions to the first transcontinental railroad line spread to Texas causing an initial demand for their service on new and resumed construction projects. The first attempt to bring the workers to Texas through an agreement between Koopmanschap and the Memphis, El Paso and Pacific (ME & P) Railroad Company in 1869 failed. Newspapers across the

¹³⁰ Ibid., 80; This appears to be the modus operandi for railroad companies in the era, and is investigated and covered in detail by Robert Orsi, in Orsi, *Sunset Limited*. Orsi's main historical contribution regarding this practice is to shift idea that railroad companies (the Southern Pacific in his case) profited by this ethically questionable land speculation and reveal that the profits mainly went to company executives and employees who had prior knowledge of routes and railroad operations. This is instructive when examining the Texas and Pacific, which went bankrupt in the early 1870s while its trustees prospered.

¹³¹ Rhoads, "The Chinese in Texas," 165.

state reported the imminent arrival of five hundred Chinese workers before the deal ultimately fell apart. Later, after the anti-Chinese sentiment so prevalent on the West Coast began to build in Texas, one editorial would ridicule Koopmanschap for attempting to bring the “heathen Chinese” to Texas.¹³² After the ME & P’s failed attempt, the first large group of workers arrived on January 10, 1870, to work on the Houston and Texas Central’s line in Calvert.¹³³

Early reports from the construction site paralleled the Chinese railroad workers’ reputation for hard work and industriousness. The railroad company’s chief engineer praised the Chinese work in relation to other groups at work on the project. Numerous eyewitness reports, most from newspaper reporters, shined a favorable light on the daily results of the Chinese work gangs. However, by July the same newspapers were publishing reports about the “lazy and trifling” nature of the workers, comparing them unfavorably to Anglo workers and describing the experiment of bringing in Chinese

¹³² “Our Old Friend, Koopmanschap, Whose Liberal Offers to Populate Texas with Heathen Chinese Were Neglected, Has Returned to San Francisco Direct from China, after an Absence of over Six Months.,” *The Galveston Daily News*, February 28, 1875, Sunday, Issue 45 edition.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 166. Although the agreement between Koopmanschap and the Memphis, El Paso, and Pacific was publicized and folks expected the Chinese workers by the end of 1869, the agreement fell through due to the railroad's "financial difficulties." In addition to Rhoads, see “Koopmanschap & Co. to B. H. Epperson, November 1, 1869,” n.d., B. H. Epperson Papers, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin; *Galveston Tri-Weekly News*, November 24, 1869; *Galveston Tri-Weekly News*, September 29, 1869; *Dallas Herald*, January 27, 1870.

workers as a failure.¹³⁴

The perception of Chinese workers in Texas began to change when newspaper reports about labor issues in Calvert and the description of an instance of approximately 150 Irish workers walking off the job so they would not have to work with the Chinese emerged. The Chinese contractor and workers filed suit in September of 1870, after leaving the work site themselves due to a failure on the part of the railroad company to honor the contract. Perhaps the pressure from Anglos workers forced the company to reconsider their contract with the Chinese, or perhaps, as was common in the period, the company could not meet its financial obligations and the Chinese workers were the first to suffer. It is clear, though, that the Chinese work ethic went unquestioned by area plantation owners as they immediately entered into contracts with some of the railroad workers to transition to farm laborers on their properties. For many years after the incident with the Houston and Texas Central Railroad, Chinese workers could be found working on plantations in the Calvert area, usually as contract laborers or sharecroppers.¹³⁵ By 1880, the census reported 72 Chinese farm laborers still living in and around Calvert in Robertson County.¹³⁶

Unlike San Antonio, which has a town plan originally based upon its plazas, Calvert and hundreds of communities like it were designed and platted around the

¹³⁴ Rhoads, "The Chinese in Texas," 168.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 168–71.

¹³⁶ Garner, "The Saga of a Railroad Town," 157.

railroad. The tracks and accompanying depot were the defining features of the town. The line divides the town at its center with business and residential lots set up in grids on either side of the tracks. Two main thoroughfares run parallel to the track on each side with one commercial block in between Main Street and the railroad. The commercial block between Main Street and the railroad consists of numerous store fronts facing Main and was intended for civic, residential, and personal travel. Railroad Street, on the other hand, was specifically set up to accommodate railroad business with a lumber yard, depot and storage space, and on additional commercial block between the street and track. Each thoroughfare is 100 feet wide to accommodate commercial traffic and the large turning radius of a horse team and wagon.¹³⁷

The defining feature of Calvert's town plan is the railroad track and depot. It lacks a nucleus like plaza towns possess, such that it is very easy to pass through Calvert. From one end of town along Main Street to the other end, a traveler would meet no obstacles. If one had attempted to pass through San Antonio in the same way during this period, they would find themselves in the middle of Military or Main Plazas facing the San Fernando Cathedral and likely an urban market along the edges of the plaza. Planners had designed, founded, and constructed Calvert "for transportation first, urban amenities second."¹³⁸ When cotton (Calvert's sole crop) prices dropped and the boll weevil infested crops at the end of the nineteenth century, Calvert's boom ended.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 146–49.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 147.

RAILROAD FOOD NETWORKS

Prior to 1900, Galveston was the largest city in Texas, the primary entry point for immigrants to the region, and the largest trade center on the Texas Gulf Coast. It boasted train connections with quicker access to Dallas, Austin, and the agricultural regions of East Texas than other ports along the coast. Giant wholesalers in the city had built vast networks along railroad lines across Texas by not only supplying retailers with goods, but also investing in both the production and retail side of the economy. Galveston's prominence ended prematurely that year. Although San Antonio's increase in population pushed it past Galveston to become the largest city in the state, Galveston's port access and shipping and receiving networks set up through the state assured it would remain the economic leader of the state. Unfortunately, the city was not prepared for the deadliest hurricane in United States history. On September 8, 1900, the Galveston Hurricane destroyed much of the city and killed approximately one fourth of its population. The city's growth slowed and much of the port traffic move further into Galveston Bay to newer ports nearer to Houston.

Just prior to the Civil War, the Galveston, Houston, and Henderson railroad had connected with several other small lines creating a star formation centered on the Houston area with points reaching to Galveston, Louisiana, Millican, Alleyton, and East Columbia.¹³⁹ For the next two decades the vast majority of railroad development

¹³⁹ See Figure 2-1. Zlatkovich, *Texas Railroads: A Record of Construction and Abandonment*, 26–27. Millican is a small farming community southeast of College Station; Alleyton is also a

occurred as an extension of these first lines out of the Galveston – Houston area. The railroad companies continued to invest in areas along the track, much like the Houston and Texas Central did in Calvert. Every new community that the railroad or other speculators created needed supplies and services, such as dry goods stores, grocery stores, and lumber yards. Men like Paul Bremond and William Rice from Houston and Galveston were happy to help the citizens with those needs. They invested in every aspect of the railroad enterprise, from the property to plat towns, the retail stores to supply goods, and the wholesale companies at port to import goods to supply the retail services.

Heidenheimer Brothers operated one of the larger wholesale operations of the period in Galveston beginning in 1867. The brothers, Sampson, Moses, and Isaac, were from a Jewish family in Archshofen, Germany, that immigrated to the United States just before the Civil War. According to local tradition, Sampson arrived in Galveston alone in 1859 and immediately began selling produce as a street vendor saving enough money to keep himself out of the Civil War when it broke out a year after he arrived. He supposedly made enough money running cotton past the Union blockade of Galveston during the war that he was able to start Heidenheimer Brothers Wholesale Grocery with

small farming community near Columbus on Interstate 10 (which essentially follows a prior railroad line); and East Columbia is one of the oldest Anglo-American settlements in Texas (1823) began as a plantation near the northernmost point for safe navigation of the Brazos River.

his brothers once they joined him in the city. The business quickly became one of the largest wholesalers in the state.¹⁴⁰

Sampson served as the director of the Gulf, Colorado, and Santa Fe Railroad beginning in 1873, which owned a line that cut through the Brazos Valley from Galveston to Fort Worth by 1881.¹⁴¹ Sampson's brother, Isaac, became the senior partner in 1883 when they changed the name of the company to Heidenheimer and Company. Isaac also invested in the Austin grocery store, Nelson, Davis and Company, owned a flour mill in Kansas, a sugar plantation in Louisiana, and was one of the principals of Hawley & Heidenheimer, importers of coffee and salt.¹⁴² The company and its owners had their hands in nearly every aspect of the food business in Texas. They could sell Heidenheimer flour and sugar from their own facilities along with products they imported from Mexico, Brazil, and England to retailers along railroad lines, charge freight if it traveled on their line, and sell the products to Austin citizens from their retail store.

¹⁴⁰ Mary Jenkins, "Barker Center Gets 19th Century Grocery Papers," *On Campus* February 28-March 6 (1983): 16; "Heidenheimer Brothers Business Records, 1869-1881," n.d., Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin.

¹⁴¹ Jenkins, "Barker Center Gets 19th Century Grocery Papers," 16. The brothers invested in property just southeast of Temple that became the small farming community of Heidenheimer, Texas. The Gulf, Colorado and Santa Fe later became a part of the Atchison, Topeka and Kansas network.

¹⁴² Andrew Morrison, *The Port of Galveston and the State of Texas* (Saint Louis & Galveston: George W. Engelhardt & Co., 1890).

HEIDENHEIMER BROTHERS,
WHOLESALE GROCERS
DEALERS IN
LIQUORS, TOBACCO & CIGARS,
AND
DIRECT IMPORTERS OF SALT,
Nos. 179, 181, 183 and 185 Mechanic Street.

Figure 2.4: Heidenheimer Brothers Wholesale Grocers, Dealers in Liquor, Tobacco, and Cigars, and Direct Importers of Salt.
From the Galveston Daily News, September 1, 1876.

The company employed six salesmen who traveled their sales routes in designated regions of the state taking orders from retail stores for a diverse set of products. By the end of the 1870s, Heidenheimer Brothers' client list was vast including grocery and dry-goods contacts in nearly every city and town in the state along with most major cities across the country. Customers put in their orders sometime weeks in advance anticipating their inventory amounts, communication time between the salesman and the main office in Galveston, and shipping times, which varied greatly depending on which lines linked Galveston to the store's town. For instance, if Heidenheimer Brothers shipped an order to Waco, they could use their own railroad line without a need to transfer the freight and the customer could expect to receive it within a few days. If the customer resided in Round Rock, a shorter distance to Galveston, the freight would require at least one transfer and could take closer to five days to reach its destination.¹⁴³ In some cases, the company owned or leased warehouse space in cities or towns that retailers could purchase from directly, such as in Taylor, Texas, a major shipping point for cotton.

CONCLUSION

The railroad altered the landscape of Texas in several ways including the creation of new towns like Calvert, the transformation of open space into crops or other exploitable resources, and the spatial reorganization of established communities around

¹⁴³ "Round Rock Depot Records, 1881-1928," n.d., Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin.

the local depot. It brought new immigrants, tourists, and other travelers by the thousands into established communities like San Antonio and El Paso. The economic connections and networks the railroad companies and their subsidiaries had facilitated in Texas were not long established but very influential with plenty of cash (and credit) to invest in new ventures by the time San Antonio and later El Paso connected to the network. Much like the rest of the country, the railroad forced residents of these communities to face a new social reality. As the next two chapters will detail, both chili stand vendors in San Antonio and Chinese restaurateurs in El Paso carved their respective niches in these changing cities largely influenced by the location of the railroad and the influx of people that it brought.

Chapter Three: The Plaza Chili Stands of San Antonio



Figure 3.1: The Fandango

Unknown engraver. "The Fandango." Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, 1858, University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, crediting Star of the Republic Museum, Washington, Texas, <http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph30326/>.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁴ The process used to print sketches like "The Fandango" was changing in this period, but it is likely that a wood engraver employed by Frank Leslie created this image from a rough sketch by correspondent Frank Everett.

In 1858, Frank Everett, a correspondent for *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, toured San Antonio as part of a wagon train bound for silver mines in Arizona. Everett walked the town sketching scenes in different sectors as he made his tour and took notes for an article that would eventually be published in January of 1859.¹⁴⁵ In addition to “The Fandango,” (see figure 3.1 above) the piece includes sketches of “Texas Herdsman” (likely vaqueros) on horseback, a bustling “Main Plaza” with the San Fernando Cathedral in the background, nude Tejano women and children “Primitive Bathing” in a river, and a scene depicting a cock fight, “The Mexican National Sport,” all of which depict an essentialized and stereotypical view of Mexican culture that Everett places in contrast to his idea of an “American” culture. Everett creates a narrative (with accompanying images) for his readers where San Antonio and its culture are attractive and in some ways ideal, as long as most of the Mexican citizens are removed from the landscape.

After a twelve-day wagon ride across the coastal plains, San Antonio appeared to Everett and his group “like the Mecca of some wearied Caravan.” The landscape was breathtaking, the lack of a good bakery, ice, or a flour mill disappointing. The majority Mexican population were of a lower order than the Americans or foreigners (Germans) living in the city. The native population unfortunately bathed nude in public or wandered the streets in scant clothing, although city officials had recently “concluded [nudity] with

¹⁴⁵ Frank Everett, “Things in and about San Antonio,” *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, January 15, 1859, No. 163, Vol. VII edition, University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, crediting Star of the Republic Museum, Washington, Texas.

propriety might be dispensed with.” Mexican men were only good with livestock when they have the energy to do anything, while the Americans and German immigrants were enterprising, cleaner, and are actively building a civilization.¹⁴⁶

For most of his story, Everett is clearly participating in a developing and contested narrative of antebellum-American nationhood that privileged Anglo-American males and feminized (in this context) Mexican males. Then Everett reaches the part of the San Antonio experience that thrilled him. After marginalizing every aspect of perceived Mexican culture, he describe the “Mexican amusements,” in this case fandangos and cockfights as serving to “elevate and refine” the population.¹⁴⁷ This statement seems as out of place in his narrative as he feels walking the streets of San Antonio, but it serves his ideas about the character, romance, attractiveness, and potential of the San Antonio landscape. The space of San Antonio is ripe for American economic exploitation and development, as long as his perception of the Mexican other can be enveloped by his American narrative of nation. The fandango and the cockfight, or at least their images add value to San Antonio’s landscape.

Everett’s description of this particular fandango predates later descriptions of San Antonio’s plaza night life from travel writers and newspaper reporters describing night-long fandangos outside in the plazas amongst chili stands by nearly two decades. Remove the walls from this sketch and place the female vendor (bottom right of figure 3-1) behind

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Everett means the entire population of San Antonio here, including Anglos.

a larger serving table in a plaza and the similarities would be easy to recognize.¹⁴⁸

Everett's depiction of a fandango takes place inside of a

large hall or square room, lighted by a few lamps hung from the walls, or lanterns suspended from the ceiling, a pair of negro fiddlers and twenty or thirty couples in the full enjoyment of a 'bolero,' or the Mexican polka, help make up the scene. In the corners of the room are refreshment tables, under the charge of old women, where coffee, frijoles, tortillas, boiled rice and other eatables may be obtained, whiskey being nominally not sold.¹⁴⁹

The folks attending the fandangos according to the author included the muleteer, the discharged ranger, and the herdsman among the women of "all colors and ages," including "the Creole, the Poblano, the Mexican, and rarely the American or German," who, if there, is likely a soldier's widow or mistress.¹⁵⁰

On closer inspection of Everett's sketch, the scene matches that of later descriptions of chili stands and fandangos in San Antonio's plazas. Chili stands appeared

¹⁴⁸ Kirk Munroe, "San Antonio de Bexar," *Harper's Weekly*, September 25, 1897; "Chili Queens," *San Antonio Daily Express*, June 3, 1879.

¹⁴⁹ Everett, "Things in and about San Antonio," 102–103.

¹⁵⁰ It is unclear what the author means by "the Poblano." It is likely he is describing a woman from the state of Puebla south of Mexico City, although that phrase does not indicate race in the way the other descriptions are meant to. The story of the China Poblana, the Pilipino princess brought to Puebla as a slave and who later was thought to be a prophet, may also be the reference here. The story of China Poblana is said to have influence the dress style worn at celebrations and fandangos.

en masse in the plazas once the railroad reached San Antonio in 1877, bringing thousands of tourists and immigrants to the city. The vendors filled Military Plaza in central San Antonio each night attracting tourists and locals alike, as well as travel writers who would popularize the edible offerings of the stands and the nightlife that seemed to center upon the stands themselves. The scene described and depicted by Everett above is certainly a precursor to the nightlife of the plaza in 1880s San Antonio.

However, the chili-stand operators of the 1880s offered a more diverse set of dishes to their customers than the vendor located in the bottom right of this scene appears to offer.¹⁵¹ As Everett describes, she is operating something of a concession stand or bar in support of the party going on around her. It is clear that she is selling either rolled tortillas or possibly tamales judging from the string tied around the stack near her left hand. The bearded man leaning over the table to her left is handing her a coin in his open palm while she looks at him and gestures to the stack of tamales or tortillas as if to wordlessly ask if food is what he is after. The bucket and ladle on the floor to her left could contain frijoles or chili con carne, but it more likely contains an alcoholic beverage like mescal or pulque judging from the couple consuming drinks and leaning on the table as if it were a bar.

¹⁵¹ Chili stands offered more than chili con carne. Their menu included tamales, enchiladas, beans, tortillas, coffee, and hot chocolate, among other dishes. See Corner, *San Antonio de Bexar*, 24–27.

S. Compton Smith, another writer contemporary to Everett, also described scenes of fandangos in northern Mexico as a surgeon for the United States Army during the Mexican – American War. He is the first Anglo to mention the dish “chile con carne,” and he put it front and center as the title of his account of and exploits during the war, *Chile Con Carne, Or, The Camp and the Field*.¹⁵² Smith does not leave an explanation about why he named his book after the dish, but it is a good bet that he or perhaps his publisher sought to add a bit of the exotic to the book. He highlights the adventure and romance of the war in greatly embellished tales of chasing down “bloodthirsty and troublesome” guerrilla fighters who preyed on both the United States Army and the Mexican villagers, setting the Americans soldiers up as saviors of Mexican and American citizens alike.

Smith’s description of a fandango near Monterrey, Mexico, sounds very much like that described by Everett. In Autumn of 1846, after the battle of Monterrey, his battalion had set up camp not far from the town to recover and establish a base for winter. As he describes, the neighboring rancheros “would assemble and display their stock-in-trade, consisting usually of carne seco and carne fresco, leche de cabro, chile con carne, tamales, frijoles, tortillas, pan de maiz, and other eatables, with puros, blanket, saddles, etc.” He includes a footnote to describe “chile con carne” as “a popular Mexican dish –

¹⁵² S. Compton Smith, *Chile Con Carne, Or, The Camp and the Field* (New York: Miller & Curtis, 1857).

literally red pepper and meat.”¹⁵³ Along with this seemingly impromptu prepared foods and goods market,

the people of the surrounding villages...as another means of lightening our purses, would frequently get up fandangoes and invite our men to join them...All the señoritas of the neighboring ranchos would be assembled on these occasions to grace the party. Arrayed in their holiday dresses, they were very pretty. Their forms are models of womanly beauty, and their motions in the dance are free and graceful as the waving of forest boughs...The matrons presided at the tables, and dispensed the good things which covered them, in the way of eatables and drinkables, and pocketed the change which was freely thrown into their laps. Aguardiente, pulque, and mescal were the favorite beverages of the hombres, while the weaker and harmless vino dulce was served to the señoritas.¹⁵⁴

There is so much to unpack in this account, including the romantic description of the “señoritas” or the gender dynamics involved in consuming alcoholic drinks in northern Mexico, but the main take away for this dissertation is that fandangos in nineteenth-century northern Mexico and southern Texas were social gatherings that included dancing, drink, and food.

In the two cases above, both told from an Anglo male perspective, enterprising, matronly women sold a variety of food and drink including “chile con carne” to the

¹⁵³ Ibid., 99–100.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 101–102.

partygoers.¹⁵⁵ The chili stands in late-nineteenth-century San Antonio that are the focus of this chapter were more sophisticated versions of these fandango refreshment stands. They were much larger affairs that occupied prime real estate in the heavily trafficked plazas of San Antonio. Their setups included makeshift kitchens, lunch-counter-style seating around banquet tables, china, silverware, glassware, and the labor of entire families. Rather than support community dances, or fandangos, chili stands catered to the tens of thousands of immigrants and tourists brought to San Antonio after the introduction of the railroad in 1877. While these fandango refreshment stands certainly set the precedent, chili stands emerged as a different type of space in a new post-railroad economy and context in San Antonio.

In late 1890s San Antonio, two decades after the railroad had finally reached the city and four decades after Everett's published sketch, the city's plazas and their nightlife had become legendary. The railroad's entry in 1877, brought record numbers of tourists, as well as an explosion in the population of Bexar County.¹⁵⁶ While the city had changed dramatically from the era that inspired Everett's sketch, the image lived on in journalists' and travel writers' accounts of visiting San Antonio. It had also lived on in booster

¹⁵⁵ While many of the early mentions of "chile con carne" spell the word with one "L" and an "E" at the end like the country Chile, for the rest of this dissertation I will use the more common form used today in Texas, "chili," which is derived from the original word for the plant, "chilli."

¹⁵⁶ The population of Bexar County was just over 16,000 in 1870, but had ballooned to nearly 70,000 by 1900. University of Virginia Library, "Historical Census Browser," 2004.

literature as a city attraction at the very moment when city leaders were attempting to repurpose the same spaces that the image inhabited.

Kirk Munroe's piece quoted above in the "Introduction," is an instructive comparison to Everett's and Smith's pieces above. It shows the power and influence a narrative can have in the hands of those with the means to create and perpetuate its ideas. By the time Munroe visited San Antonio, city leaders had already displaced the chili stands from the two central plazas and moved them west into Milam Square. That recent history is forgotten though, as he describes Milam Square with its "world-renowned" chili stands and reputation for seedy, bawdy nightlife.

while in the plazas, notably in Milam Square, appear scores of venders [sic] of Mexican dishes – tortillas, frijoles, chile con carne, tamales, chile verde, enchiladas, bitter black coffee, and cigarritos wrapped in soft corn-husk. These are prepared by the uncertain light of small camp-fires, lanterns, or flaring torches, and served by little black-eyed girls, whose every movement is jealously watched by beetle-browed hags squatting beside the fires or by dark-visaged men who lounge in near by shadows. None of the things sold in these rudely improvised restaurants are really good to eat, but they are interesting to taste, and contain many surprises.¹⁵⁷

For Munroe, Milam Square and the plazas of San Antonio are spaces where migrants pass through in their wagon trains, families in tow, pushing herds of cattle west or to

¹⁵⁷ Kirk Munroe, "San Antonio de Bexar," 957.

market, and where cowboys from nearby ranches can stay in “free camps” set up for their comfort. Contrasted with his nostalgic history of the Alamo and the city’s other missions, the beauty of the springs in San Pedro Park, and the city’s affluent sections with their “charming people and beautiful homes,” Milam Square and the “Mexican Quarter” (especially at night) are difficult places for Munroe to comprehend. This Mexican space is at once interesting and repulsive. The food served by “Chile Queens” is “interesting to taste” but not “really good to eat.”¹⁵⁸

By the time Munroe wrote his travel essay in 1897, numerous newspaper and magazine articles had been written about the Laredito and Chihuahua sections of San Antonio and their primarily Mexican residents who set up stands in the various plazas near downtown to sell their wares and serve food to those passing through the market space. In 1897, Milam Square and Alamo Plaza were the primary spaces to find the fabled chili stands of San Antonio.¹⁵⁹ However, the stands came to fame as main attractions in Military and Main Plazas around the time when the railroad entered the city, bringing a flood of tourists and attention to the chili stands over the next couple of decades. During Reconstruction, the plazas teemed with business during the daylight

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ The earliest reference to Chili Stands that I have been able to find is a photo of a stand in Military Plaza in 1872. However, I question the date of the photo due to written accounts in the mid-1870s that mentioned eating in restaurants run out of Mexican homes in Laredito, but make no mention of chili stands even while describing the plazas or depicting them in wood engravings.

hours as open air markets for produce, livestock and livestock feed, medicine shows, and prepared foods sold from stands and carts. Ranch hands driving cattle along the Chisholm Trail made San Antonio an overnight stop, migrant workers came to town looking for work, and military supply wagons stopped to replenish supplies before heading west to their frontier garrison. The plazas were major points of contact and conflict in San Antonio before and after the railroad changed the city.

The “viscous” cultural practice of joining, sometimes clashing with others over a bowl of chili at an “improvised restaurant” in San Antonio’s plazas complicates the highly racist, dualistic descriptions of an Anglo culture acting upon other “inferior” cultures exhibited in Munroe’s article and many others of the time. For example, in a piece for *Scribner’s Monthly* in 1874, travel writer Edward King, describes the men he encounters in communities west of Military Plaza as wandering “about in the most purposeless fashion” and “perpetually waiting for someone to come and feed them.”¹⁶⁰ King clearly includes all Mexican men from these communities, yet men from these same communities cooked chili con carne and other dishes at their own chili stands in local plazas three short years later for citizens, immigrants, tourists, and travel writers visiting or relocating to the city. These descriptions suggest that the chili stand was considered

¹⁶⁰ Edward King, “Glimpses of Texas,” 107–111. Edward King was an American journalist and author from Massachusetts. This piece is part of a larger set of travel pieces contracted by *Scribner’s Monthly* wherein King documented his travels across the South and into Texas during 1873-74.

something less than a restaurant, but simultaneously call into question the precise definition of the word “restaurant” in the late-nineteenth-century. Might the chili stand represent a successful example of restaurant culture on the frontier outside of the dominant idea and definition of the restaurant?

Questions about mobility and the contested space of the plazas are key to this story. The success of the chili stands relied not only on the mobility of customers, but also of the proprietors themselves, their equipment, their heat sources, and their ingredients. In the very least, customers had to be able to get to the plazas and navigate the space in order to sit down with others over a bowl of chili or a plate of enchiladas while the proprietors needed to be able to move their equipment and tables into the space of the plaza. In addition, chili vendors’ mobility in and through the plazas relied on the plazas’ traditional and cultural uses to continue, something the city leaders made difficult even in the Mexican period of the early nineteenth century.¹⁶¹ City leaders and promoters utilized the myth of the “Chili Queen” and the exciting and romantic notion of plaza chili stands to promote the city, while simultaneously seeking to eliminate the space in which they operated.

SAN ANTONIO BEFORE THE RAILROAD

Before the 1880s, San Antonio was still largely a frontier town. It was accessible for visitors only by stagecoach, which was a long, grueling form of public transportation.

¹⁶¹ Flores, *Remembering the Alamo*, 40–41.

A seventy-mile trip “to or from Austin took seventeen hours, including meal stops.”¹⁶² Still, San Antonio served as a connecting point for immigrants, travelers, ranchers, the military, and speculators. Six stagecoach lines passed through the town, connecting San Antonio to most parts of the United States, with one of the routes connecting Monterrey, Mexico to San Antonio via Eagle Pass on the Rio Grande River.¹⁶³

Military Plaza served as a stopping point for supply wagons heading to forts and garrisons further west as well as for cowboys and vaqueros driving cattle through the streets of San Antonio along the famous Chisholm Trail to points north. The plaza “served as a temporary holding station for small herds, a public lot for the trading of goods, and an ideal location for overnight stays of covered wagons.”¹⁶⁴ San Antonio’s strategic location on the southwestern edge of the southern states, at the intersection of the Edwards Plateau and the Texas coastal plains, upon a primary north-south migration route that linked the Mexican central plateau with the U.S. Great Plains made it a stop on nearly every route passing through the Southwest.¹⁶⁵ San Antonio was a frontier hub, acting as something of a gateway to Mexico and the American Southwest for much of the

¹⁶² Edward King, “Glimpses of Texas,” 306–308.

¹⁶³“Stagecoach Routes in Texas in 1861. (Texas Almanac),” November 20, 2012, Texas Transportation Archive, http://www.ttarchive.com/Library/Lists/Stagecoach_Routes-1861.html; Daniel Arreola, “The Mexican American Cultural Capital,” *Geographical Review* 77, no. 1 (January 1987): 21.

¹⁶⁴Flores, *Remembering the Alamo*, 43.

¹⁶⁵Arreola, “The Mexican American Cultural Capital,” 20.

southern and eastern United States. Still, as late as 1877, the city remained unconnected to other parts of the Americas by railroad.¹⁶⁶

Like Kirk Munroe's fascination with San Antonio as an exotic locale in 1897, Anglo-American visitors to the city immediately after the Civil War, especially from the northeastern United States, marveled at its character. According to journalist Edward King, "San Antonio is the only town in the United States which [sic] has a thoroughly European aspect, and it is more, in its older quarters, like some remote and obscure town in Spain than like any bustling villages of France or Germany."¹⁶⁷ King was likely familiar with the history of town planning in Spanish colonial America, and that San Antonio's spatial organization was heavily influenced by Spanish town-planning conventions in the decades after its founding in 1718.

Much like most mission towns throughout the Southwest, the original city plan of San Antonio was conceived using the 1573 Laws of the Indies issued by the Spanish

¹⁶⁶ See Zlatkovich, *Texas Railroads: A Record of Construction and Abandonment*; Young, *Tracks to the Sea*; Garner, "The Saga of a Railroad Town"; Foley, *The White Scourge*, 1997; Potts, *Railroad Transportation in Texas*. For information on railroads in Texas. Before the Civil War, Galveston and Houston were the only major cities in Texas with any sort of railroad connection. The first transcontinental line connected the East and most of the South with San Francisco in 1869, granted a traveler would still need to change railroad companies several times during the trip. In Texas, Austin, Dallas, Longview, most of the Brazos Valley, Beaumont, Plano, Sherman, Texarkana, Tyler, Victoria, and Waco all had railroad connections at least four years prior to San Antonio.

¹⁶⁷ Edward King, "Glimpses of Texas," 310.

crown, which among other very specific guidelines called for the construction of a Plaza Mayor, or main square, with approximately eight streets running at right angles and forming a grid with the plaza at its center.¹⁶⁸ According to Setha Low, the Laws of the Indies are significantly influenced by “the ceremonial and commercial uses” as well as the “sacred and civil meanings and regular form” of the indigenous plazas that Cortes and company marched into during the conquest of the Aztecs.¹⁶⁹

During the Spanish conquest of the New World, especially Tenochtitlan, conquistadores and their armies razed existing indigenous structures and ceremonial sites and built entire Spanish cities over the ruins. Richard Flores notes an example “in Tenochtitlan, or Mexico City, the Catholic cathedral was erected near the Templo Mayor

¹⁶⁸ In addition to town layout as described above, the Laws of the Indies set out guidelines for such things as the location and elevation of the potential site, the potential for military fortification, the quality and quantity of farmland, the availability of natural resources (fuel, food, etc.), the need for a native population, and advice on situating the layout of the town so that it is open to the north wind. For a more in-depth discussion as well as one of the only English translations of the Laws of the Indies, see Axel I. Mundigo and Dora P. Crouch, “The City Planning Ordinances of the Laws of the Indies Revisited. Part I: Their Philosophy and Implications,” *The Town Planning Review* 48, no. 3 (July 1977): 247–68. One thing to note since many of the earliest towns in the Spanish colonies were built on the ruins of previous indigenous settlements (Mexico City for instance) with pre-existing grid structures is the potential indigenous influence in the organization of towns throughout the American southwest. Although San Antonio was not built upon an indigenous settlement, elements of its spatial organization may well include influence from previously built Spanish cities (like Mexico City).

¹⁶⁹ Setha Low, “Indigenous Architecture and the Spanish American Plaza in Mesoamerica and the Caribbean,” *American Anthropologist* 97, no. 4 (1995): 749.

and the National Palace was constructed atop the living quarters of Montezuma II. In the New World, as in San Antonio during the late nineteenth century, spatial dissolution and displacement was a key element of political conquest, as the subsequent respatialization of conquered terrains served to fortify the norms, values and cultural practices of the dominant group.”¹⁷⁰ The trend continued in 1880s Anglo-controlled San Antonio for example, when the city built their main office in the center of Military Plaza, while landscaping Main Plaza for use as a park, both changes preventing gathering in the public space in the same way it had been used prior.

SAN ANTONIO PLAZAS

Figure 3.2 below is a close-up of downtown San Antonio in a lithograph looking southeast that shows grids built around a couple of plazas near downtown. In the center of the lithograph, you will see two plazas bracketing the San Fernando Church. The plaza to the left is San Antonio’s Plaza de las Yslas, or Main Plaza as it is known today, and the plaza to the right is Plaza de Armas, or Military Plaza.¹⁷¹

¹⁷⁰ Flores, *Remembering the Alamo*, 36–37.

¹⁷¹ San Fernando Church is right in the center of figure 4.2 with Military Plaza on the right and Main Plaza directly left. The small stream to the right of Military Plaza is San Pedro Creek and directly to the right of the creek is Laredito, the part of town in which most of the chili stand vendors lived.



Figure 3.2: Augustus Koch, *Bird's Eye View of the City of San Antonio Bexar County Texas, 1873*.
Lithograph (hand-colored), 1873.¹⁷²

¹⁷² Koch and other artists traveled across the country documenting cities in this fashion, usually at the request of the city officials. Many of the lithographs can be found online at the Texas Bird's-Eye Views website of Fort Worth's Amon Carter Museum - <http://www.birdseyeviews.org/index.php>.

The artist Augustus Koch completed the lithograph in 1873, prior to the disruption of the plaza spaces. Although Military and Main Plazas served as the center of town prior to 1850, this lithograph reveals several more plazas throughout the city that follow these guidelines.¹⁷³ The creation of additional plazas in other parts of San Antonio illustrates how quickly San Antonio grew in population after the Civil War.

Military Plaza, as the name implies, originally served as a staging, training, and parade for the military stationed at the nearby garrison. During Mexican control of San Antonio, residents began building homes around the plaza and for many year town officials attempted to curb commercial use of the public space. Still, residents created markets in the plaza to sell produce, trade goods, sell wood and water, as well as use the space to slaughter and sell “goats and other small livestock.”¹⁷⁴ The plaza continued to be contested space after the Texas Revolution and into the American period with town officials working to mark the space for residential use and eliminate commercial enterprise. On July 25, 1845, the council forbade “the selling of fruits and meats on Military Plaza except on holidays and feast days,” and again in 1847 the city ruled that “peddlars of cigaritos and sweetmeats absent themselves from the plaza during the

¹⁷³ Augustus Koch, *Bird's Eye View of the City of San Antonio Bexar County Texas, 1873*, Lithograph (hand-colored), 1873.

¹⁷⁴Flores, *Remembering the Alamo*, 40–41.

day.”¹⁷⁵ In spite of their efforts, town officials found it difficult to curb commercial activity on its central plazas. Removing vendors became a near impossibility as the cattle industry grew and San Antonio became a major stop along the cattle trails, serving as a spot for overnight stays of cowboys and cattle.¹⁷⁶

Returning to the lithograph drawing by Augustus Koch, let us continue to examine other plazas and features of San Antonio as they were before the railroad entered the town. On the western fringe of downtown situated between San Pedro creek to its west and the San Antonio River to the east as shown above, San Fernando Church dominated the skyline.¹⁷⁷ The church formed the western boundary of the Main Plaza and the eastern boundary of Military Plaza. Although it was considerably smaller than it is today, the church was an imposing structure in contrast to the buildings surrounding it along the adjoining plazas. Most of the buildings of the period were two-story structures that at different times housed influential citizens, commercial enterprises, civic organizations, saloons, and hotels among other uses.

¹⁷⁵City of San Antonio, “April 15, 1844 - December 3, 1848,” *Journal of the Council of the City of San Antonio*, n.d., 173; City of San Antonio, “March 1, 1839 - April 5, 1844,” *Journal of the Council of the City of San Antonio*, n.d., 280, quoted in Flores, *Remembering the Alamo*, 40–41.

¹⁷⁶ Cecilia Steinfeldt, *San Antonio Was*, 46–47.

¹⁷⁷ In 1874, one year after Koch completed his lithograph, San Fernando Church attained Cathedral status. Today the cathedral is also known as the Church of Nuestra Señora de la Candelaria y Guadalupe and is one of the oldest cathedrals in the United States having been built between 1738 and 1750.

By the 1870s, changes were already occurring along the plaza as pre-Republic of Texas adobe structures “built by the most important Mexican American families were gradually replaced by one-or two-story structures of a commercial nature in the Anglo-American style” along the edges of the plaza.¹⁷⁸ Along both Main and Military plazas surrounding the church, small hotels, saloons, dry-goods stores, and other commercial establishments replaced these residences throughout the late 1850s and into the 1870s. Hotels such as the Plaza Hotel on the north side and the Hord Hotel on the south were supported by the expanding cattle industry that reached its peak in the 1870s as well as growing wool trade that would eventually help San Antonio escape the economic downturn of the early 1870s. During the day, “Main Plaza continued to serve as an important location for public religious events and festivities associated with the cathedral [San Fernando Church/Cathedral],” the nightlife in the plaza was teeming, raucous, and dangerous as a result of the growing influx of transients passing through the city, staying at the hotels, and frequenting the saloons.¹⁷⁹

On the east side of the San Antonio River, Alamo Plaza contained the remains of the Alamo, the now famous Menger Hotel, the Vance Bros emporium, the Bresel and Briam dry goods store, and in the center, a meat market and “storage house for volunteer fire equipment.”¹⁸⁰ Some of the city’s more influential residents had moved to the areas

¹⁷⁸ Judith Berg Sobre, *San Antonio on Parade*, 12.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*; Flores, *Remembering the Alamo*, 42–43.

¹⁸⁰ Judith Berg Sobre, *San Antonio on Parade*, 12–13.

surrounding Alamo Plaza prior to the Civil War, in some cases, to escape a cholera epidemic in 1849. Compared to the areas around Main Plaza that sat between San Pedro Creek and the San Antonio River, the area around Alamo Plaza was considered high ground. It was also a move away from Laredito and Chihuahua, Mexican enclaves west of San Fernando Church. Mary Maverick describes the epidemic and subsequent move in her memoirs: “Monday the second of April [1849], cholera appeared in San Antonio. For two weeks it was confined to Mexicans in low, damp places, and Dr. Cupples thought it was easily managed and would not become epidemic, but suddenly, in gloom overhead and in our hearts it appeared everywhere in the most violent form and would not yield to treatment. April 22nd, twenty-one died of cholera.”¹⁸¹ By July, she had lost a daughter and the family had moved to “high ground on Alamo Plaza” that they concluded “would be a more healthful location.”¹⁸² With the opening of the Menger Hotel in 1859, along with the relocation of prominent citizens like the Mavericks and the continued restoration of the Alamo itself both physically and as a narrative of Texas independence, Alamo Plaza began transitioning to a more commercial and tourist destination eventually surpassing other plazas throughout the city in this regard by 1900.¹⁸³

¹⁸¹ Mary Adams Maverick and George Madison Maverick, *Memoirs of Mary A. Maverick: Arranged by Mary A. Maverick and Her Son Geo. Madison Maverick*, ed. Rena Maverick Green (San Antonio, Texas: Alamo Printing Company, 1921), 103.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 107.

¹⁸³ Flores, *Remembering the Alamo*, 51–54.

In 1855, William Menger and his wife Mary (Guenther) built a home just south of the Alamo that also served as a boarding house and brewery. The Mengers expanded the home in 1859 into the city's first 50-room hotel and claimed by some to be its first hotel period.¹⁸⁴ However, Mary had run her own boarding house as early as 1847 when she met and later married William. It stands to reason that other boarding homes and small hotels populated the plazas in San Antonio prior to the Menger Hotel's opening, but solid evidence is lost to history.¹⁸⁵ According to descriptions of the day, one could stay at the Menger at a hefty price but receive service and comfort unrivaled west of the Mississippi. Guests could walk half a block to the ruins of the Alamo, or travel three quarters of a mile to the chili stands at Military and Main plazas. Certainly the hotel restaurant and bar were legendary and attracted a roster of high-powered guests, including "Sam Houston, Robert E. Lee, U. S. Grant...Buffalo Bill...Jenny Lind...Sidney Lanier, O. Henry, Oscar Wilde, Benjamin Harrison, William Jennings Bryan, William Howard Taft, and William McKinley."¹⁸⁶ Poet and author, Sydney Lanier described the hotel in a letter to his wife as reminiscent of Cuban hotels with "a fine paved court in the rear" and "broad pavement

¹⁸⁴ Frank Prassel, "Leisure Time Activities in San Antonio, 1877-1917" (M.A. thesis, Trinity University, 1961), 43; Flores, *Remembering the Alamo*, 44.

¹⁸⁵ Cecilia Steinfeldt, *San Antonio Was*, 118–121. An article about the Menger Hotel's opening from the February 2, 1859, issue of the San Antonio Herald takes a stab at other establishments by calling them merely "well-kept" in comparison to the Menger, which suggests that the Menger at least had some sort of early competition for hotel business.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 120.

in the front where we sit in armchairs and look out upon the Alamo Plaza.”¹⁸⁷ Probably the most famous guests or at least the ones who left us with the most stories to tell were Teddy Roosevelt and Cornelius Vanderbilt when they visited at the turn of the 20th century during their recruitment of the Rough Riders in the Menger Hotel bar.

Many considered the Colonial Dining Room at the Menger Hotel to be the best dining experience west of the Mississippi. Over time, especially in the heyday of railroad travel before the 1930s, travel writers praised “its elegant presentation of local food,” including “turtle soup made from snapping turtles caught in the San Antonio River and main courses featuring...wild game” from the surrounding area.¹⁸⁸ Its fame preceded the railroad as well. In 1871, while raving about a “bear steak breakfast,” a reporter from the *San Antonio Herald* offered that “the Menger, every one knows...is an excellent one – the apartments, including the dining saloon, are good, and the cuisine soignée. In this latter point the Menger is excellent and in civility and attention the waiters have the advantage of most Hotels.”¹⁸⁹ Other restaurants of renown opened after the railroad

¹⁸⁷ Quoted in Donald Everett, *San Antonio: The Flavor of Its Past, 1845-1898* (San Antonio, Texas: Trinity University Press, 1975), 3.

¹⁸⁸ Walsh, Robb, *Texas Eats: The New Lone Star Heritage Cookbook, with More than 200 Recipes* (New York: Ten Speed Press, 2012), 173.

¹⁸⁹ *San Antonio Herald*, December 6, 1871, quoted in Everett, *San Antonio: The Flavor of Its Past, 1845-1898*, 77–78; for more on the Menger Hotel, see Cecilia Steinfeldt, *San Antonio Was*, 127.

arrived in 1877, but prior aside from the Menger, a hotel restaurant, the remaining eating establishment were typically in boarding houses and other hotels.¹⁹⁰

Edward King describes a different kind of restaurant in the Laredito and Chihuahua sections of San Antonio that he toured during his 1874 trip through San Antonio and other parts of Texas.

Wandering along the unpaved [in either Chihuahua or Laredito] street in the evening, one finds the doors of all the Mexican cottages open, and has only to enter and demand supper to be instantly served; for the Mexican has learned to turn American curiosity about his cookery to account. Entering one of these hovels, you will find a long, rough table with wooden benches about it: a single candlestick dimly sending its light into the dark recesses of the unceiled roof; a hard earth-floor, in which the fowls are busily bestowing themselves for sleep; a few dishes arranged on the table, and glasses and coffee-cups beside them. The fat, tawny Mexican *materfamilias* [sic] will place before you various savory compounds, swimming in fiery pepper, which biteth like a serpent; and the *tortilla* [sic], a smoking hot cake, thin as a shaving, and about as eatable, is the substitute for bread. This meal, with bitterest of coffee to wash it down, and dulcet Spanish

¹⁹⁰ Cecilia Steinfeldt, *San Antonio Was: Seen through a Magic Lantern, Views from the Slide Collection of Albert Steves, Sr.*, 127–28; For more on hotels and tourism in the nineteenth-century West, see Gruen, *Manifest Destinations*; Kenneth Rose, *Unspeakable Awfulness: America Through the Eyes of European Travelers, 1865-1900* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

talked by your neighbors at table for dessert, will be an event in your gastronomic experience.¹⁹¹

Again, King very much separates the life and the culture of this sector of San Antonio from his own experience and those of Anglos in San Antonio in ways that marginalize the Mexican-ness of the experience as one that you “would never suspect could exist on American soil.”¹⁹²

One note that I think deserves mention about King’s description of San Antonio culture is that throughout his time in San Antonio, even during visits to the plazas he never mentions chili stands. In fact, other than the questionable photo supposedly taken in 1872 that I mention in a footnote above, there is no mention of plaza chili stands in the public record. We hear about fandangos, chili, and other aspects of Mexican culture and foodways, but the chili stand does not show up until the railroad is at least near San Antonio. I suggest that the home-restaurant owners King mentions above realized the value of space in the plaza as the railroad brought more tourists to visit, who in turn traipsed through the so-called “Mexican quarter” west of the plazas.

The transition of San Antonio’s plazas from wealthy residential populations to transient and commercial populations is what anthropologist Richard Flores claims as “the first phase in the respatialization of San Antonio from a Spanish-Mexican town to a

¹⁹¹ Edward King, “Glimpses of Texas,” 108–109.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 109.

city on the western frontier of the United States.”¹⁹³ Although the plazas were still public spaces, their original use as military, religious, and civic spaces shifted to serve the economic, commercial, and promotional interests of the city. According to historian Alwyn Barr, by the 1870s San Antonio was a “diverse and cosmopolitan city, the largest military depot in the state, the commercial center for South Texas cattle and sheep raisers, and the staging point for trade with Mexico.”¹⁹⁴ The commercialized, cosmopolitan city that Barr describes along with the “respatialization” of its plazas significantly influenced the food and foodways of the city by creating an atmosphere conducive to commercial enterprise in the space of the plazas and allowing enterprising chili stand operators a space to serve their customers. These changes were occurring even before the railroad reached the city and significantly changed the landscape and use of its public spaces.

Before the railroad’s arrival in early 1877, the primary modes of local transportation available to residents were horseback and various versions of horse-drawn carriages. Most people walked. As such, residents lived close to downtown for easy conveyance to and from their offices, markets, and other conveniences. As the plazas transitioned to commercial spaces, the affluent residents who had lived along or very near the plazas moved just north of downtown and along the San Antonio River. Relatively new Anglo settlers like the Mavericks, older, prominent Spanish families, and

¹⁹³ Flores, *Remembering the Alamo*, 43.

¹⁹⁴ Alwyn Barr, *Reconstruction to Reform: Texas Politics, 1876-1906* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971), 14; quoted in Flores, *Remembering the Alamo*, 43.

descendants of the original Canary Islanders primarily make up this group.¹⁹⁵ Germans and Alsatians moved into San Antonio from settlements like New Braunfels and Castroville to work in their own groceries, breweries, etc. downtown.¹⁹⁶ Most lived just east and south of downtown, most prominently in the King William district. Laredito and Chihuahua, mostly working-class Mexican neighborhoods sat on the west side of San Pedro Creek west of downtown. Many of the vendors and chili-stand operators who sold their wares in the open-air market of Military Plaza would come in from Laredito and Chihuahua. Black residents typically lived further west of Laredito on the absolute fringes of the town, or near the quarry north of downtown.¹⁹⁷

As the 1870s progressed, businesses began to expand slowly, mostly toward service-oriented industries. More dry goods stores appeared along each of the plazas to

¹⁹⁵ The Canary Islanders who helped to settle San Antonio joined the military community at the mission on March 9, 1731, forming the first nucleus of colonists in the city. They established the first civil government in Texas, as well as assisted in organizing and platting the city plan for development. In July of 1731, the Spanish Viceroy named them “persons of nobility.” See Jesus F. De La Teja, *San Antonio de Bexar: A Community of New Spain’s Northern Frontier* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995).

¹⁹⁶ Castroville emerged as part of Sam Houston’s plan to use Empresario development to settle parts of Texas. Henri Castro recruited numerous families from Alsace-Lorraine who settled west of San Antonio in the mid-1840s. For more on the Empresario era, see Jefferson Morgenthaler, *Promised Land: Solms, Castro & Sam Houston’s Colonization Contracts* (College Station, Texas: Texas A&M University Press, 2009); Bobby D. Weaver, *Castro’s Colony: Empresario Development in Texas, 1842-1865* (College Station, Texas: Texas A&M University Press, 1985).

¹⁹⁷ Judith Berg Sobre, *San Antonio on Parade*.

help supply the growing cattle industry as well as the larger U.S. military presence due to wars with various Native American tribes. Although more people were passing through to various destinations to the west, especially El Paso, and the population steadily grew during this period, San Antonio “was still relatively isolated from the rest of the United States.”¹⁹⁸ In describing the declining Mexican and Spanish character of San Antonio after the Civil War, David Montejano states that “the town of about ten or twelve thousand inhabitants had a mingling of American, German, and French colonists with a large Mexican population. In the plaza could be heard a babble of voices from three or four languages” and while Spanish was still the common language when conducting business in the plazas the German population had surpassed the Mexican population by 1880.¹⁹⁹ Before 1877, change had occurred in San Antonio especially in comparison to periods before the Civil War, but with the arrival of the railroad the city’s rate of demographic, economic, and spatial change would accelerate immensely.

SAN ANTONIO AFTER THE RAILROAD

The Sunset Route of the Galveston, Harrisburg, and San Antonio railway rolled into San Antonio on February 19, 1877. Some eight thousand San Antonio citizens joined by investors and prominent citizens from Houston, Galveston, and Austin participated in a torchlight procession to welcome the train into the city. It was considered enough of a

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 18–19.

¹⁹⁹ Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986*, 35–36; Judith Berg Sobre, *San Antonio on Parade*, 20.

momentous occasion that the governor joined in the days-long festivities of speeches, balls, and “organized gatherings in local beer gardens.”²⁰⁰ San Antonio boosters and journalists hailed its arrival as a harbinger of wealth and population growth. One publication hoped that “with her railroad in operation, San Antonio can now take a position in the great family of first-class cities of the American continent, and move grandly on to that greatness and prosperity that could never have been reached without the aid of the iron horse.”²⁰¹ It was indeed a major event in the city’s history, one that had been decades in the making, and the first of several other railroad line arrivals over the next few years.

Two weeks after the arrival of the Galveston, Harrisburg, and San Antonio, the *San Antonio Daily Express*, the same newspaper that had two weeks prior envisioned a move to “greatness and prosperity,” reported that “property values had increased rapidly in recent weeks and many of the immigrants departed the city where property values were suddenly higher than in the more settled areas of the country.”²⁰² The perceived value of property changed almost immediately with the arrival of the railroad. The railroad brought the first group of winter Texans to San Antonio over the winter of 1877-78. According to a reporter from *The Texas Sun*, in that three-month period, over 2,000

²⁰⁰ Donald Everett, “San Antonio Welcomes the ‘Sunset’- 1877,” *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 65, no. 1 (July 1961): 47.

²⁰¹ “The Grand Celebration,” *San Antonio Daily Express*, February 20, 1877.

²⁰² *San Antonio Daily Express*, March 2, 1877; Everett, “San Antonio Welcomes the ‘Sunset,’” 54.

visitors registered at the Menger Hotel, which would mean that 22 visitors registered per day.²⁰³ That number seems a bit steep for a hotel with fewer than one hundred rooms, but it is likely that enough visitors were arriving daily that the hotels in the city were full.

The influx of travelers in the immediate aftermath of the railroad's arrival did not let up for decades. Many of those travelers stayed in the city. In the first two decades of railroad service, the city's population exploded from 21,207 to over 53,000.²⁰⁴ In the first couple of years after 1877, the city received its first street car to supplement public transportation, its first public high school, and in year prior in anticipation of the railroad's entry, the city built its first water plant. The street car, a cart on rails pulled by a mule, bypassed both Main and Military plazas on its trip from San Pedro Springs to the end of the line at Alamo Plaza, but would begin making trips to the area in the 1880s.²⁰⁵

San Antonio and surrounding areas felt the economic impact of the railroad almost instantly. The wool industry for example, in 1872 produced over 650,000 pounds of wool. It reached three million pounds by 1879, five million pounds in 1881, and over seven million pounds in 1884. In addition, total production from manufacturing increased over a ten year period from over \$132,000 in 1870 to over \$643,000 in 1880. The agriculture industry exhibited similar trends. The number of farms in production

²⁰³ *Texas Sun*, February 1878.

²⁰⁴ Judith Berg Sobre, *San Antonio on Parade*, 20.

²⁰⁵ Everett, "San Antonio Welcomes the 'Sunset,'" 57.

increased by over 300%, their property values doubling in the period 1870-1880, while cotton production grew from 117 to 1,543 bales over the same period.²⁰⁶

The plazas began to see significant changes after 1877 as well. Two hotels, The Central and The Hord, opened on Main Plaza by the end of 1877, with a third, the St. Leonard, opening in 1883.²⁰⁷ The hotels closer to the original railroad depot catered to a clientele used to more lavish surroundings. The Menger House and the Vance House were considered the extravagant option in the city, while the hotels around the Main and Military plazas were considered more practical options and catered to cowboys and cattle men.²⁰⁸ Activity in the plazas indicated a growing city as well.

CHILI STANDS IN THE PLAZAS

It is not an overly difficult task to describe the scene in Military and Main Plazas during the decades that chili, produce, candy, and other vendors filled the public spaces in downtown San Antonio with their various stands. We have several accounts in newspapers and other publications of the time as well as numerous photos depicting the scene. Written descriptions tend to shape the scene for tourists looking for an exotic experience. San Antonio booster materials and newspapers regularly offered visitors

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 59.

²⁰⁷ Cecilia Steinfeldt, *San Antonio Was*, 118–126. These hotels accompanied other large hotels that opened after 1878. Both the Vance House and The Maverick Hotel opened during this period between Main Plaza and Alamo Plaza.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 125–26.

stories of new culinary experiences, exposure to Spanish architecture, and interactions with people of Hispanic and Native American descent. The *Alamo City Guide* of 1882 describes the scene in this fashion:

The Plaza is a large open square surrounded by business houses and crossed by the street railway. On the east side of the Plaza, after leaving room for the passage of vehicles between the curbstone and the central space, are long lines of tables for the sale of vegetables, etc. and here one can purchase fresh vegetables during the entire year. The butter, poultry and eggs department is located on the north of the vegetable stands, while south of them are the Mexican lunch tables, where one can get a genuine Mexican breakfast with as good hot coffee as can be found in the city. Those who delight in the Mexican luxuries of tamales, chilli [sic] con carne, and enchiladas, can find them here cooked in the open air in the rear of the tables and served by lineal descendants of the ancient Aztecs. All the tables are without roofs, so that a pleasant morning must be selected for this visit in order to make it enjoyable, but rain or shine the tables are there and served by their regular attendants, who reap a considerable profit from their business.

The west side of the central portion of the Plaza to the rear of the tables is reserved for the wood, cotton, wool, hay, grain, and produce wagons ... the wagons are placed in perfect order and lines so as to preserve the adjacent street lines, and along there Mexicans squatted on the ground before small squares of

cloth or canvas on which are small piles of Mexican necessities, peppers, and wild fruits, and nuts in their season.²⁰⁹

Obviously, the guidebook aimed to attract visitors to San Antonio, so it does not go into great detail regarding the scene. Instead, the reader is assured that they will meet real Mexican people and eat “a genuine Mexican breakfast” or enjoy food from “Mexican lunch tables.” Missing from this passage is information about the vendors (aside from the generic “Mexican”), their customers, what a “Mexican lunch table” looked like, and what constituted a “genuine Mexican breakfast.” However, it is clear that vendors (perhaps many new ones) by 1882 are taking advantage of the railroad’s influence on immigration and tourism.

Other written accounts add some context to the above scene. Some witnesses note that serving food at these outdoor tables was a twenty-four-hour affair not limited to breakfast and lunch. For instance,

On Military plaza, every night will be observed a scene... as this square has been converted into a regular camping-ground for Mexican men and women who vend articles in the eating line, served up *a la mode Mejicana* to all who may call... Here long tables are placed, with benches around them in front and at the

²⁰⁹ Stephen Gould, *The Alamo City Guide, San Antonio, Texas: Being a Historical Sketch of the Ancient City of the Alamo, and Business Review; with Notes of Present Advantages, Together with a Complete Guide to All the Prominent Points of Interest about the City, and a Compilation of Facts of Value to Visitors and Residents*. (New York: Macgowan & Slipper, Printers, 1882), 138.

ends, with the cooking apparatus to the rear. Men and women prepare the articles of food which are sold at their homes during the day, but often do considerable cooking and all of the warming up after the plaza has been reached.²¹⁰

The above sketch indicates that the vendors were male and female, which complicates the popular story of the chili queens of San Antonio. Popular versions of the story today describe the so-called Chili Queens as the primary cooks and servers at the chili tables, leaving out the fact that many of the tables were operated as a family affair or run exclusively by men.

CHILI STANDS AS RESTAURANT

A goal for this dissertation is to support the claim that chili stands in San Antonio's plazas should be included in historical descriptions of restaurant culture in the United States, especially in the Texas and the Southwest. In addition, I want to suggest that they be included in a broader definition of the restaurant, that relies less on racist narratives of sanitation and public health and instead recognizes the culture itself and its

²¹⁰ "Chili Queens," quoted in Everett, *San Antonio: The Flavor of Its Past*, 32. Although Everett, titles this entry in his collection of newspaper article about San Antonio, "chili queen" does not show up in the article and in fact, there is not a description of a young, sexualized female vendor either. Everett's anachronism confused many, but the context of the article actually seems to be a report on the ability of the Mexican population to maintain their customs, namely congregating in the plazas even while their homes are being replaced by "substantial and imposing edifices of modern architectural beauty and of skilled finish."

restaurant work.²¹¹ National food historians like Harvey Levenstein and Donna Gabaccia have suggested that places on the frontier in the nineteenth century as well as the South after the Civil War experienced slower a developing infrastructure and food economy that “led to an emphasis on home-cooked, regionally specific foodways, and hence, the persistence of a unique southern food culture.”²¹² They argue that “giant food processors” like Kellogg’s, the National Biscuit Company (Nabisco), Campbell’s, and Frito Lay “homogenized everyday food in the United States.”²¹³ They leave very little room for a subversive food and restaurant culture in these areas, mainly recognizing the outside of the hotel or the train car.

I contend that the presence of chili stands in our histories disrupts the narrative of a “unique Southern food culture” and the prevailing narratives about the definition of the restaurants in the nineteenth century – that regardless of a slow developing infrastructure and economy prior to the railroad era in the San Antonio, a vibrant restaurant culture did exist in the plazas and the homes in the communities of Laredito and Chihuahua. Food traditions migrated with farm laborers, were introduced into new communities by

²¹¹ For examples of histories and analyses of racist public health practices, see Shah, *Contagious Divides*, 2001; Mckiernan-Gonzalez, *Fevered Measures*; Molina, *Fit to Be Citizens?*

²¹² Engelhardt, *A Mess of Greens*, 10. Considering the railroad did not reach San Antonio until 1877, I lump Texas into these places on the frontier that experienced slower developing infrastructure.

²¹³ See *Ibid.*; Harvey A. Levenstein, *Revolution at the Table*, Donna R. Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat*.

recently settled immigrants, and aroused curiosity in established, dominant populations as those traditions passed through with the construction of the railroad or the passage of a wagon train.

One of the questions in making this claim is whether patrons, critics, writers, and cooks in this period actually recognized elements of a restaurant in chili stands. Did eaters seated at a chili stand, a portable kitchen, in Military Plaza equate the atmosphere surrounding their bowl of chili with that of the Menger dining room? Probably not, and those from the eastern states certainly did not equate chili stands with the French-style restaurants of the big cities in New England and New York. However, when examined closely, aside from walls and a roof all the needed elements of a restaurant were on display at the chili stands. Before I get to those elements, I want to first discuss the early meaning and creation of the “restaurant.”

The etymology of the word “restaurant” according to the Oxford English Dictionary begins sometime in the 1400s stemming from the word, “restorant” describing “a food, cordial, or medicine, which has the effect of restoring health or strength.” Later uses include “a fortifying meat broth (1666)” and “public premises where food (originally this fortifying meat broth) is served (1771).²¹⁴ The popular story of the first restaurants is retold and debunked by Rebecca Spang in her book, *The Invention of the Restaurant:*

²¹⁴ “Restaurant, N. : Oxford English Dictionary.”

Paris and Modern Gastronomic Culture.²¹⁵ The story emerges from the scrum surrounding the French Revolution and the revolt against powerful medieval catering guilds. “Nearly every discussion of restaurant history briefly tells the tale of how a few early restaurateurs in the 1760s and 1770s – maverick, unregulated purveyors of the ‘restorative’ bouillons now known as restaurants – encroached on the rights of the established catering guild” by serving dishes beyond (in this case sheep’s feet in white sauce) their accepted expertise.²¹⁶ According to the tale, the guilds, which also had restrictions on what they could cook and serve, brought legal charges against a man named Boulanger that ultimately resulted in a victory for the guilds and a defeat for revolutionary sentiment.

The story has a powerful message for revolutionaries and it is easy to understand why it persisted through decades, but Spang promptly quashes its validity and instead steers the narrative of the emergence of the earliest restaurants in France from “corporate contestation to cultural innovation.”²¹⁷ Rather than a story of resistance to an old regime, which certainly seems like it would sit well with an American audience and likely was the popular narrative of restaurant origins for those interested in restaurant history, Spang tells the story of restaurants emerging from one man’s ability to not only market himself,

²¹⁵ Rebecca L. Spang, *The Invention of the Restaurant: Paris and Modern Gastronomic Culture* (Cambridge, Mass. and London, England: Harvard University Press, 2000).

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 11.

but also to read trends and markets at the end of the 18th century in France. Mathurin Roze de Chantoiseau, “the self-styled ‘Author’ of the restaurant, managed to tap into “eighteenth-century elite culture’s preoccupations with the pursuit of health” by marketing his own bouillon as a restorative, a “restaurant,” alongside other types of restoratives like hoteliers, innkeepers and doctors in a popular almanac of his own creation. The restoratives included in his expansive almanac “catered to the needs of those from out of town, those who were ‘traveling through’ – those who were, literally, in circulation.”²¹⁸

By juxtaposing both Spang’s description of the first restaurants in France and the popular story told about their emergence to chili stands in San Antonio’s plazas, elements from both versions tag chili stands as clear participants in an emerging restaurant culture in a growing frontier city. The proprietors of chili stands certainly demonstrate cultural innovation in much the same fashion that Mathurin Roze de Chantoiseau in recognizing a need in a market and working to creatively satisfy that need while skirting the bounds of established tradition and law. Chile stands provided a restorative service to a mobile population who were “traveling through.” At the same time, chili stands and those who frequented them also exhibit elements of the popular story of revolutionary resistance. Chili stands existed in the face of established upper-class eateries like that found in the Menger Hotel and a varied and ethnically diverse set of customers joined in the resistance by taking a seat at the table. “For ten cents a hungry man can satisfy his appetite. This

²¹⁸ Ibid., 32.

custom is of no little help to the poor, or those whose purses are run low, as it enables them to obtain good, palatable and healthy food for a mere pittance per day compared to what they would have to pay in expensive hotels and restaurants.”²¹⁹ Ultimately though, the chili stands would lose out to an old regime that (ironically) used scientific discovery and modern ideas to shut the stands down.

The hidden story in the descriptions of chili stands from the previous section, the story that moves beyond sexualized female vendors serving the outlaw set, can be gleaned from photos of the period. It is a story of an open-air restaurant culture that fostered contact among classes, genders, races, and ethnic groups. From the 1880s through the 1930s, Military Plaza and other San Antonio plazas offered spaces of interaction amongst all of these groups. “Chili Queens” were certainly a part of that narrative, but there is a much more complex story to explore. As mentioned in the excerpt from the *Alamo City Guide*, Military Plaza was essentially a farmer’s market surrounded by a diverse set of businesses that included drug stores, saloons, groceries, and general stores as well as doctor’s offices, law offices, and other civic enterprises.

In *The Search for a Chili Queen on the Fringes of a Rebozo*, author Marian Martinello postulates that the patrons, owners, and employees of these businesses likely sat at the chili stands for meals more than once. She suggests that doctors sat down with hay farmers, residents of the Laredito and Chihuahua neighborhoods enjoyed the same meal (together) as descendants from the original Canary Islander families, tourists from

²¹⁹ “Chili Queens.”

the Northeast chatted up their local servers, and members of the military made room for prostitutes and gamblers. Freedmen, Anglo property owners, Chinese railroad workers, and Mexican migrant farmers were all seemingly welcomed to these open-air restaurants and photos of the period appear to back this observation.

Before 1900, photographs of the chili stands in the various plazas of San Antonio were all taken during daylight hours. One photo entitled “Military Plaza” by photographer Frank Hardesty taken sometime in the latter half of the 1880s depicts a plaza bursting with activity (see figure 3.3). It is early morning and chili stands are transitioning to breakfast and coffee after a long night of serving chili and other dishes to customers. Wagons fill the plaza, many stuffed with wood for sale, while others stand empty perhaps ready for loading chili stand equipment when the tables are taken down. Several dogs are roaming about, a couple of wagons filled with barrels and milk jugs seem to be passing through while numerous vegetable vendors have already set up their stands for the day. Two men stand conversing in front of a table covered with vegetables, several Anglo men seem to be perusing the wares of a female Mexican vendor, five young boys appear to know one another, two with books under their arms perhaps heading to school, and in the middle of the scene are numerous patrons milling about several chili stands. The scene is similar to many other photos of Military Plaza, some depicting Chinese men among the wagons and stands, men in suits and derby hats, women in rebozos enjoying dinner or breakfast at the chili stands, and vendors of all sorts along the edges of the plazas. The plazas offered spaces for contact between different

ethnic groups, genders, and social classes by way of the chili stands and open-air markets.

Perhaps most intriguing are the stands themselves. Most of the stands in the photographs included several six to eight foot rectangular tables arranged in U or L-shaped formations enclosing a wood fire with a wagon backed up to the “kitchen” side of the table. Bench seating was placed along the outside of the formation and vendors and servers work the interior of the formation much like as if they were behind a counter in a café. Tablecloths adorn each of the stands’ tables (see figure 3.4). Since they operated for long stretches of time after dark, ornate lanterns provided light for the tables. Plates, cups, cloth napkins, and cutlery are stacked along the table while pots, pans, and baskets of bread sit either in the wagon, on smaller tables, or warming over a fire. Some of the stands, like the one shown below, display more elaborate serving dishes holding sugar cubes, trays of baked goods, smaller arrangements of condiments or oils. The setup and arrangement of the stands are strikingly similar to restaurants even today (see figure 3.5).



Figure 3.3: Military Plaza.
Frank Hardesty, *Military Plaza*, Photography, 1880s, #075-1078, Institute of Texan Cultures at
the University of Texas, San Antonio.



Figure 3.4: Chili Stands in Military Plaza, ca. 1880s.
From Cecilia Steinfeldt, *San Antonio Was*, 47.



Figure 3.5: Men at chili stand in Military Plaza, ca.1887-90.
Men Working Chili Stand, Photography, 1880s, #083-0477, Institute of Texan Cultures at the
University of Texas, San Antonio.

As a comparison, I want to offer one of the only photos available from the period of a restaurant interior in San Antonio. Figure 3.6 above is an image of San Antonio residents of likely German heritage enjoying a meal at “Old Ernst’s” Restaurant. The legend of William Ernst was that he served as “chef for the Emperor Maximilian and the Empress Carlotta before he came to Texas.”²²⁰ Whether true or not, his grilled steak from cattle fattened on Frio River Country guajillo [acacia beans] and slathered with a special sauce was renown in San Antonio. He ran a restaurant on Commerce Street that advertised “Oysters, Fish, and Game in Season,” before later moving to the Market House in 1890 where he proficiency with a slab of beef became the main attraction.²²¹ Once in the Market House, he gained even more fame for “preparing just so many steaks each day and, when these were gone, closing his shop...going home,” and leaving groups of hungry customers to try again the next day.

“Old Ernst’s” Restaurant is a sparse affair according to the photo (see figure 3.6). It contains all of the elements of a restaurant, including tables, chairs, walls, and a ceiling.

The man in the rear with the apron appears to be Mr. Ernst, although there is no indication on the photo to indicate for sure. Ernst cooked on a grill over mesquite coals,

²²⁰ Cecilia Steinfeldt, *San Antonio Was*, 127–28.

²²¹ Mooney and Morrison, ed., *General Directory of the City of San Antonio for 1877-78: Containing a History of the City, a Complete Index of All Societies, Associations, Corporations, Etc. Also, the Full Address of All Residents, Their Occupations, Pursuits, Etc. Also a Complete Business Directory; An Exhibition of the Various Classified Kinds of Business Pursued in the City* (Galveston, Texas: The Galveston News, 1877).



Figure 3.6: "Old Ernst's" Restaurant in the Market House, about 1900.
From Cecilia Steinfeldt, *San Antonio Was*, 129.

which means his kitchen setup likely did not differ appreciably from the fires and grills used in the plaza. If one were to take those tables, chairs, plates, bowls, glasses, cooking implements and Old Ernst, and then set him up to cook and serve his fare in the plaza alongside a chili stand, the setup would not look out of place (although Ernst and his food might).

By the time the chili stands became popular (late-1870s), restaurants like Delmonico's in New York and the restaurant in the Menger Hotel were respected establishments among the upper classes. They were enclosed in structures with lavish interiors and very attentive personal service. "The Menger Hotel became noted...for the distinctiveness of its cuisine..." and journalists mentioned its name in comparison with French cuisine.²²² These upper class establishments had printed menus. Granted, some of these differences are significant, especially the open-air setting of the chili stands, but German Biergartens in San Antonio were also mostly open-air establishments.

Although historically the stands are known for chili (in no small part due to the legend of chili queens), in reality they served a variety of dishes to their patrons. One journalist states that a meal "can be obtained in the shape of a large cup of atole, a chocolate-like drink, and tamales."²²³ James Wright, fondly recalling that the food on his 1880 visit to Military Plaza included "in addition to chili, the most appetising [sic] dishes of other Mexican cooking I had ever met with." In the quote that began this chapter, Kirk

²²² Cecilia Steinfeldt, *San Antonio Was*, 127.

²²³ "Chili Queens."

Munroe provides a longer list of the variety of fare available to patrons, including tortillas, beans, chile, tamales, chile verde, and enchiladas.²²⁴ John Bourke in his article for the *Journal of American Folk-lore* adds “chili rellenos, huevos revueltos, lengua lampreada, many other kinds of pucheros and ollas, with leathery cheese, burning peppers, stewed tomatoes, and many other items too numerous to mention...were always on sale.”²²⁵ Perhaps the variety of dishes available stemmed from the competition from numerous vendors who sold their wares in the plazas.

In addition to dish varieties, chili stand proprietors competed with each other for customers by providing signature flavors to their foods. Numerous differing descriptions of the taste and relative spiciness of their food is evidence that proprietors were experimenting with flavors. Marian Martinello points out the story of Stephen Crane describing the taste of chile as “exactly like pounded firebrick from Hades.”²²⁶ Martinello juxtaposes this description with others that do not mention spicy heat, as well as her own experience with attempting to recreate the chili of chili stands. She also uncovers mention of different prices for similar meals described by contemporary journalists as well as an element of secrecy for the recipes prepared by the vendors. Martinello suggests “that the

²²⁴ Kirk Munroe, “San Antonio de Bexar.”

²²⁵ John Gregory Bourke, *Folk-Foods of the Rio Grande Valley of Northern Mexico* (Published for the American Folk-Lore Society by Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1895), 107.

²²⁶ Marian L. Martinello, *The Search for a Chili Queen on the Fringes of a Rebozo* (Fort Worth, Texas: TCU Press, 2009), 42; She pulls this quote from Frank W. Jennings, “Women for All Seasons: San Antonio’s Chili Queens,” *Texas Highways*, January 1996, 44–47.

chili stand families were competing for customers with the unique tastes of their stews, as well as the attractiveness of their hostesses” in addition to pricing reflecting the current market.²²⁷

THE IMAGE OF THE CHILI QUEEN

The image of the Chili Queen was certainly attractive for printed stories throughout the country and became the dominant narrative regarding chili stands in San Antonio plazas by the late nineteenth century. No doubt Chili Queens described as “pretty little soubrettes that serve the customers those pungent eatables”²²⁸ and “little black-eyed girls, whose every movement is jealously watched by the beetle browed hags squatting beside the fires, or by dark visage men who lounge in the nearby shadows”²²⁹ piqued the imagination of the reader. Boosters used the image of the fandango and chili queens to sell San Antonio’s past, while city leaders sought to remove them from the plazas altogether. Along with the Alamo, cowboys, gunslingers, Mexicans, American Indians, and saloons, open-air chili stands lit by ornate lanterns and serviced by numerous, beautiful, sexualized Mexican Chile Queens designated San Antonio as an exotic destination.

²²⁷ Ibid., 43.

²²⁸ Kirk Munroe, “San Antonio de Bexar,” 957–58.

²²⁹ *San Antonio Express*, June 17, 1894.

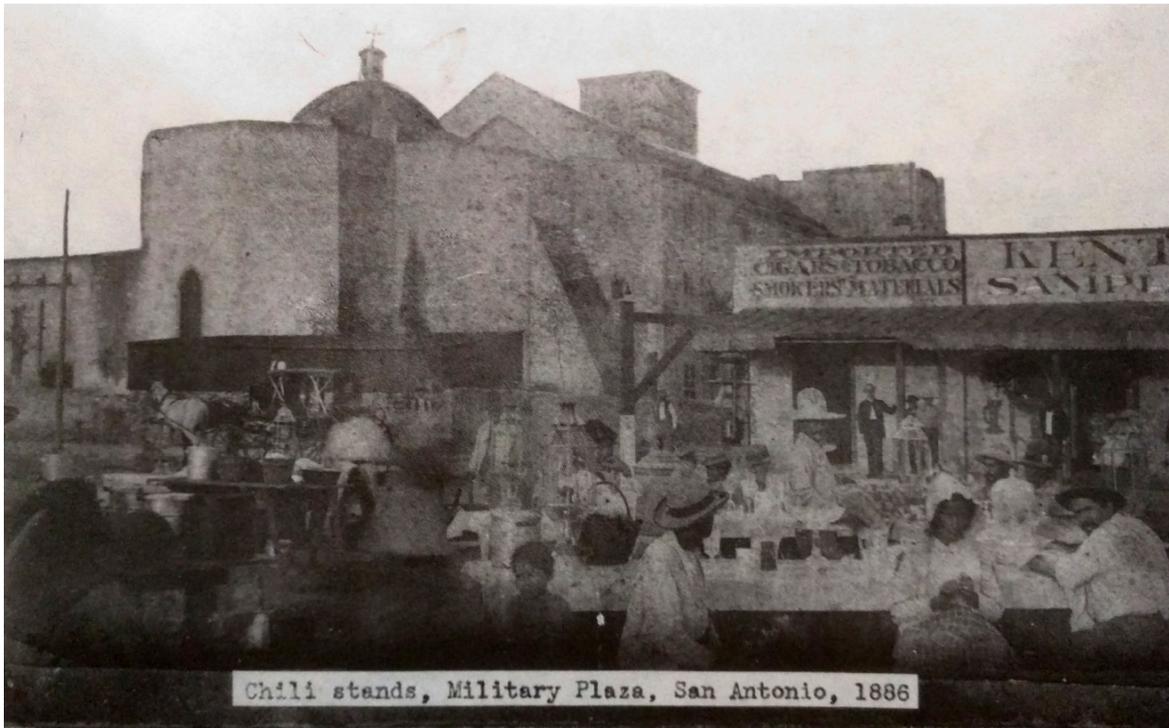
Noticeably absent from the available photos that depict chili stands before 1900, are the chili queens themselves. Women are regularly seen eating at the tables in most of the images, and several of the articles quoted above mention old women serving chili to customers, but none of the pictures clearly show a young, female server.²³⁰ Of course, this fact does not mean that the chili queens did not exist. Many contemporary observers place the queens at the chili stands in the evening and late night hours, so it is possible they were just not captured in photographs. It is clear that the majority of chili stands did not begin operation until after 1877, but that Mexican vendors quickly realized the opportunity that the growing city and tourists' interest in the plazas and their communities presented. By the end of the next decade, the chili stands were ubiquitous on both Military and Main Plazas as well as dotting the other plazas across the city. When did the chili queens join the other vendors in the plazas?

I can only speculate that they were likely there the entire time, working at the stands with their families. At some point, someone (a booster? a patron?) created or adopted the sexualized image of the chili queen and both vendors and boosters put it to good use. Historian Marian Martinello attempted to find a nineteenth-century-historic persona that she could track over time and hopefully attach to one of the many photographs of the chili stands and chili-stand vendors.

²³⁰ Note in figure 3.6 the two women seated on the bench in the bottom right of the image who appear to be chili stand customers.



Figure 3.7: "Chili-con-carne stand at 6 a.m. Military Plaza, San Antonio, Texas." University of Texas at San Antonio's Institute of Texas Cultures, #083-0080. Courtesy of Captain T. K. Treadwell, Bryan, Texas.



Chili stands, Military Plaza, San Antonio, 1886

Figure 3.8: Chili stands, Military Plaza, San Antonio, 1886.
Courtesy of the Witte Museum, San Antonio, Texas. Published in Marian L. Martinello, *The Search for a Chili Queen*, 9.

Her search was largely fruitless and uncovered only one photo that she believes “appears to have been a chili stand hostess” (see figure 3.7).²³¹

The earliest use of the phrase “chili queen” in the public record dates to an article in the *San Antonio Express* that describes several women, Rosa, Ella, and Jovita (no surnames) as “ever attentive, always jolly chili queens: They are ‘good fellows’ these ‘chili queens’ and are able and willing to talk on any subject that may be named from love to law. As a general rule, they go to much trouble to please their too often rowdy customers.”²³² Thus began the legend of the chili queens. Over the next three decades city boosters and city officials would both use the image to sell San Antonio’s past as a way to continue to attract tourists to an ever-expanding food- and hotel-service sector. At the same time, city officials sought to respatialize the plazas around San Fernando Cathedral, threatening to truly make the chili stands and chili queens remnants of the past.²³³ In 1889, the city began the construction of their newly designed City Hall, an imposing three-story structure that would occupy the center of Military Plaza, the main gathering space for vendors of all sort including chili vendors. The City Hall was

²³¹ Martinello’s chili queen is in the center of the image seated on a bench on the opposite side of the table from the viewer looking at the camera and partially hidden behind a lantern.

²³² *San Antonio Express*, June 17, 1894. quoted in Marian L. Martinello, *The Search for a Chili Queen*, 6–7.

²³³ Flores, *Remembering the Alamo*.

completed in 1892 and as figures 5 and 6 show, Main Plaza received similar treatment a year later when officials converted it to a park.²³⁴

The chili stands persisted into the twentieth century by utilizing other plazas around the city, as well as transgressing city code by continuing to set up their stands on Military Plaza as long as possible. At the turn of the 20th century, female vendors began to take up the image of the chili queen as their own, embodying the myth. One such “chili queen” vendor transitioned from performing the chili queen in San Antonio’s plazas to performing the “Indian princess” in “Captain Jesse Bennet’s Wild West show.”²³⁵ Another, Sadie Thornhill even possessed a carte de visite that read “compliments of Sadie Thornhill, The Chile Queen, San Antonio, Texas.”²³⁶

²³⁴ Cecilia Steinfeldt, *San Antonio Was*, 34–50.

²³⁵ F.H. Bushick, *Glamorous Days*, vol. 1st ed. (San Antonio, Tex.: Naylor, 1934), quoted in Marian L. Martinello, *The Search for a Chili Queen on the Fringes of a Rebozo*.

²³⁶ Marian L. Martinello, *The Search for a Chili Queen on the Fringes of a Rebozo*, 7–8.

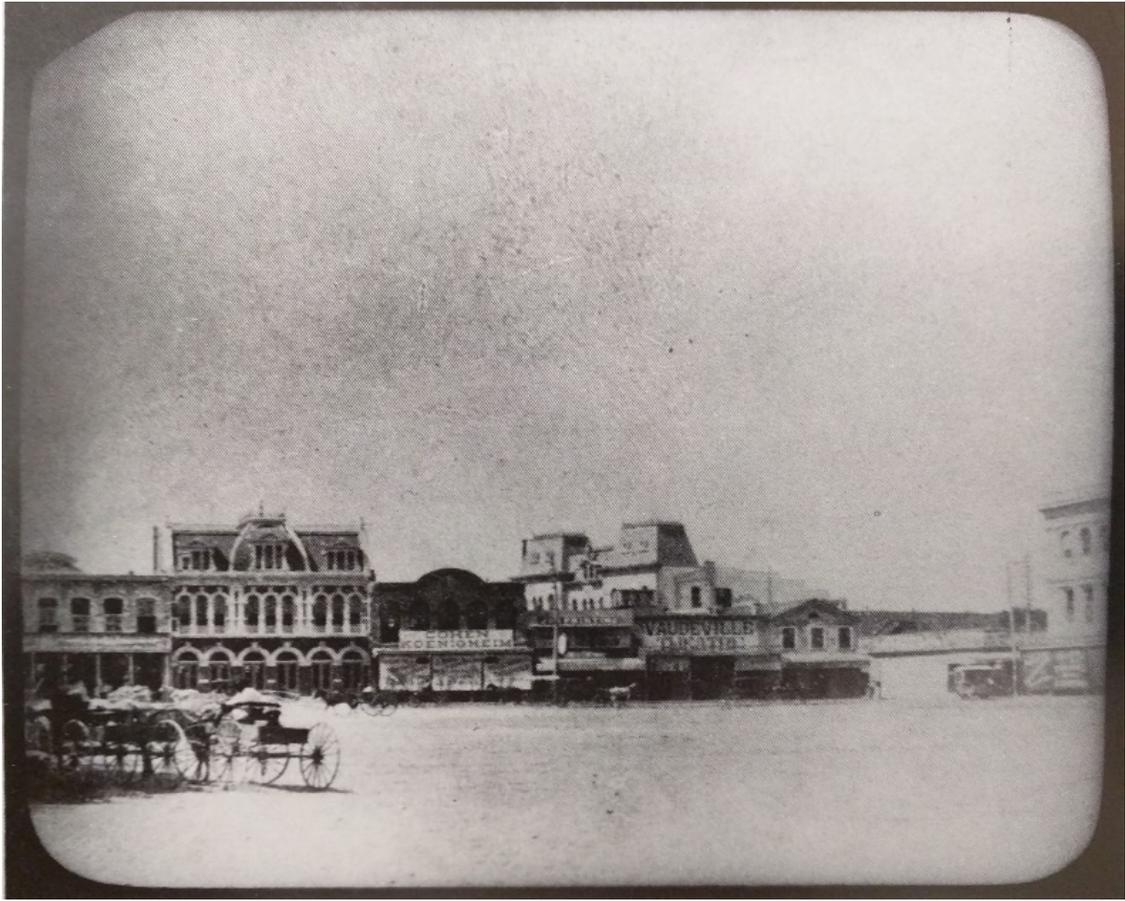


Figure 3.9: Main Plaza, the north side after 1882.
Published in Cecilia Steinfeldt, *San Antonio Was*, 40.



Figure 3.10: Main Plaza, the north side after 1893.
Published in Cecilia Steinfeldt, *San Antonio Was*, 41.

The image of the chili queen and the threat to her livelihood is noted as well by Jeffery Pilcher and Donna Gabbaccia in a recent article about public dining cultures in both New York and San Antonio.²³⁷ The aim of their work is to come to some understanding of why public dining has been successful in some areas and for some groups, but not for others. Italian street foods did not survive as such in New York, instead moving into family-style indoor restaurants, while chili stands survived in some form into the twentieth century. In addition to environmental determinism (climate) and the relative market for the food and its support from dominant institutions, the authors conclude that the main factor was likely “the differences of governance and racialization between European immigrant and colonized Mexican minorities.”²³⁸

In the case of the chili stands, the vendors both capitalized upon and helped to maintain a healthy tourist sector in San Antonio’s growing, post-railroad economy, in part due to the early perception of the plaza as a valuable economic space in San Antonio’s landscape by city boosters. Chili vendors obviously perceived the value of the plaza in different ways, as at least a space to practice cultural foodways as well as support families. They also subverted the idea of the restaurant in American narratives of civilization and nationhood, existing in stark contrast to the ubiquitous Harvey Houses

²³⁷ Gabbaccia and Pilcher, “‘Chili Queens’ and Checkered Tablecloths: Public Dining Cultures of Italians in New York City and Mexicans in San Antonio, Texas, 1870-1940s.” By “public dining” the authors specifically mean the type of dining done in the open air, such as street vendors in Mexico, which is one example they spend time discussing.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, 122.

that likewise benefited from the spread of the railroad and the massive migration that followed it.

Fred Harvey created the Harvey House as an alternative to saloons, chophouses, and hash houses along western railroad line that he and others considered inconsistent, lacking proper service, and with food of low quality. He also offered a restaurant that utilized scientific efficiency and cleanliness, fitting snugly into the mid-century reform movement where cleanliness, morals, and respectability became synonymous.²³⁹ Harvey also employed an army of young, white, single females as a wait staff to replace the black male staff that had worked in his restaurants. Harvey and family friend, Tom Gable, believed that the young women “could have a positive, calming influence, first and foremost on the men working at the eating house and the train depot but...on the customers as well. The women could help alleviate racial tensions, and maybe even make the cowboys a little more gentlemanly.”²⁴⁰

It was a brilliant business move to bring thousands of young women into a region that lacked women in general. Similar to the myth of the chili queen, the press, boosters, Harvey’s company, and others created a mythologized version of the Harvey Girl as pure, proper, sirens that, as Harvey and Gable themselves expressed, could settle and civilize the wild men of the West. Whereas the myth of chili queen offered the excitement of a

²³⁹ Kathleen M. Brown, *Foul Bodies: Cleanliness in Early America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

²⁴⁰ Fried, *Appetite for America*, 86–88.

potential, primitive sexual experience, heightened by the fiery foods of the chili stands, the Harvey Girl myth offered a cleaner, sanitized version where the wild cowboy who might raise hell in the plazas of San Antonio would settle down to marry his Harvey Girl.

While Harvey Houses proved successful in serving food along the Atchison, Topeka, and Kansas lines and other railroad routes in the West by embodying reformers ideas of morality, respectability, and sanitation, a decidedly white world in all respects, the chili stands with food no less exciting and highly praised could not withstand the loss of their plaza spaces and later campaigns for public health within the city that ultimately resulted in their disappearance into that mythic old San Antonio that boosters and city officials continued to sell to tourists and travelers after the stand were gone.²⁴¹

CONCLUSION

The railroad's entrance into San Antonio created an instant customer base for chili stand owners in the public spaces of the city. It also made those public spaces more valuable, especially the buildings that lined the plazas. Mexican and Mexican American restaurateurs took advantage of the instant customer base and filled a demand for cheap food on the go in the city's plazas. The chili stands were popular in the nineteenth century. To be clear, they were popular up until the city banned them from public spaces in the 1930s, but the popularity existed differently in a new context. While many of the

²⁴¹ Gabaccia and Pilcher, "'Chili Queens' and Checkered Tablecloths: Public Dining Cultures of Italians in New York City and Mexicans in San Antonio, Texas, 1870-1940s"; Pilcher, "Who Chased Out the Chili Queens?"

stories written in the late nineteenth-century about the chili stands highlighted the excitement of tasting food that was foreign and/or exotic for the writers, the judgements on the taste of the food were mixed with many comments about the unknown source of the meat. The city's elimination of the chili-stand vendor's public space beginning in the 1890s was part of the respatialization of the city to fit the fantasy past that the city sought to market to tourists and the world. In the 1930s, indoor restaurants (especially Anglo-owned) in San Antonio were serving chili in different forms as an accepted dish on their menus. The fight over space between pro- and anti-chili stand factions was mainly about sanitation and public health.²⁴² Even so, they were popular outdoor restaurants frequented by customers from all classes, races, and ethnicities throughout their run.

There is no solid evidence that chili stands, in the form that travelers, citizens, and new immigrants found them in the late 1870s, existed before the railroad entered the city in 1877. There is some evidence that chili con carne, likely very similar to that served in Military plaza after the railroad reached the city, was being served to soldiers fighting in Mexico during the U.S. – Mexican War in the late 1840s. We also have archival drawings and newspaper accounts of vendors selling food to temporary gatherings of people, such as fandangos, before the Civil War, as well as accounts of pre-railroad travelers enjoying Mexican-style food in the homes of folks living in the predominantly Mexican sectors of the city west of Military Plaza. The chili stand in its al fresco restaurant form in Military and other plazas was a post-railroad occurrence in San Antonio.

²⁴² Pilcher, "Who Chased Out the Chili Queens?"

The assertion that chili stands likely did not exist prior to the railroad does not discount the probability that Mexican vendors served chili at informal gatherings of people, or sold their food to large groups of moving people, such as the United States military. While the pre-chili stand stories do not make it clear if the vendors they describe were business owners taking their product to the people, or more likely, enterprising families taking economic advantage of situations of increased demand for food products, it is clear that the chili-stand owners in San Antonio plazas, at least in some cases, served food out of their homes to residents and some travelers before 1877. When the railroad increased foot traffic to San Antonio's public spaces and the stores, saloons, and hotels lining them, the vendors simply filled an economic need by creating restaurants in proximity to their potential customers.

One of the main arguments for this dissertation is that the chili stands were in fact restaurants. They represented a different type of restaurant, set outdoors but still full service. They were not individual vendors selling pre-made food to customers in passing. Chili stands were restaurants with kitchens, seating, plates, silverware, and food served to order. However, they did not fit the prevailing ideas about restaurants in the late-nineteenth century. Their outdoor setting with food cooked over open fires by people of Mexican ancestry were reminders of a colonial-Spanish past instead of the modern, cosmopolitan city that the now dominant Anglo population attempted to sell to the outside. They were reminders of fandangos and public markets and did not fit San Antonio city leaders' new, mythologized Anglo past.

Chapter Four: El Paso Chinese Chophouses

In the spring of 1875, thirteen-year-old Mar Yum Eh and his uncle boarded a ship in a Hong Kong harbor that would take him across the Pacific Ocean to his fortune somewhere in “the land of the Gold Mountain.” Young Mar Yum Eh would represent the Mar family in the new land, sending money and other valuables to help support them while he saved enough to return home to Bok Sha in the Guangdong Province of southern China in order to retire and raise a family. He also hoped to prove successful enough to build a new home and support the family of a future bride as well.²⁴³

Although his biography is entitled, *The First of Many*, Mar Yum Eh was not part of the first group of Chinese immigrants to voyage to California in search of fortune. In fact, his uncle and traveling partner had been to California prior and was now returning to earn enough money to retire to his village. Ten of thousands of Chinese immigrants had made the trip before Mar Yum Eh was born in 1862, many of whom left villages much like Yum Eh’s throughout the Guangdong Province. Most of the earliest immigrants were from the merchant class in China who sought to tap into markets created by the new immigrants seeking gold in the Sierra Nevada Mountains of central California during the

²⁴³ Julian MarDock, *The First of Many: The Story of a Pioneering Chinese Family Who Lived in Texas for One Hundred Years*, 1998, 3–4. In Julian MarDock’s biography of his father Mar Yum Eh, he names his parents’ village as Bok Sha (possibly Bok Sai or Baisha) but there is some confusion on the place where his father was raised. In 1980, Julian and his wife set off for China, hoping to find the house that his father did eventually build for his bride’s family. Unfortunately, the home and others surrounding it did not survive.

1850s. They continued their professions in the newly erected cities both inland in places such as Sacramento as well as in cities such as San Francisco along the coast. These Chinese merchants capitalized on the prospectors' need for supplies on their treks into the hills and their need for places to sleep and eat while they recovered and spent their gold in the ever-growing communities.²⁴⁴

Soon new groups of Chinese immigrants, many from the poorer, rural areas of southern China, would stream into California in much greater numbers. Most would find themselves mining for their fortune among prospectors from across the world up in the Sierra Nevada Mountains. As the 1850s wore on, the Chinese working in the gold mines and tracer claims along mountain streams would face violence and prejudice from primarily Anglo-American prospectors who believed it was their sole right to claim and work the land in order to extract the gold it contained. Nonetheless, Chinese miners, merchants, farmworkers, and cooks persisted in California, contributing to the growth

²⁴⁴ See Sue Fawn Chung, *In Pursuit of Gold: Chinese American Miners and Merchants in the American West*, The Asian American Experience (Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2011); Andrew Coe, *Chop Suey: A Cultural History of Chinese Food in the United States* (Oxford University Press, 2009); Mary Roberts Coolidge, *Chinese Immigration, American Public Problems* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1909); Jean Pfaelzer, *Driven Out: The Forgotten War Against Chinese Americans* (University of California Press, 2008); Ronald Takaki, *Strangers From a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans* (New York: Little, Brown And Company, 1989).

and settlement of communities throughout the region.²⁴⁵

Independent claims held up through most of the 1850s and even into the years of the American Civil War, before the minerals became scarce and larger mining companies controlled most of the fertile claims. Chinese miners became Chinese farm-workers, launderers, cooks, and railroad laborers during the 1860s and into the later decades of the nineteenth century. After the Civil War, when railroad companies resumed their quest to build a transcontinental line, the Chinese played a major role in building the Central Pacific's road across the Sierra Nevada Mountain Range, through the desert of Nevada, and into the Utah territory before linking up with the Union Pacific at Promontory Point in Utah. After playing a major role in constructing the first transcontinental line, the Central Pacific, later the Southern Pacific, continued to hire Chinese labor as the company expanded its roads across the western and southwestern United States.²⁴⁶

Mar Yum Eh entered the United States during this post-Gold Rush period of Chinese immigration, just prior to the Chinese Exclusion Act that would greatly diminish new immigration from China, especially for those immigrants shuffled into the

²⁴⁵ See Pfaelzer, *Driven Out* for an in-depth look at violence against Chinese immigrant miners and later against immigrant communities. Also, Coe, *Chop Suey*; Coolidge, *Chinese Immigration*; and Susan Lee Johnson, *Roaring Camp: The Social World of the California Gold Rush* (W. W. Norton & Company, 2001) cover violence against Chinese immigrants as well as violence among the mining camps in general.

²⁴⁶ Sucheng Chan, *This Bittersweet Soil: The Chinese in California Agriculture, 1860-1910* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1986); White, *Railroaded*.

“unskilled” labor force.²⁴⁷ Soon, Yum Eh and his uncle were separated for different types of work since his uncle “was older...and had soft hands as a result of house servant work in the city...”²⁴⁸ Mar Yum Eh’s young body, was strong, calloused, and accustomed to working long hours farming for his family every day of the week. The day their foreman divided the workers based on potential future occupation was the last day Yum Eh would ever see his uncle. He was likely fourteen when he set off to work on central-California farms alone; he would be on his own for the rest of his time in this new, strange land.²⁴⁹

At his first job as gardener on a small farm, Mar Yum Eh adopted (or was given) the thoroughly western name of Sam. He would be known as Sam in his new home for the rest of his life. Over the next four years, Sam served as a farm hand, ranch hand, bookkeeper, house servant, cook, and horse caretaker for a number of small farms in the central valley. Sam’s employers realized quickly that he could handle tasks involving greater responsibility around the farm, so he moved from pulling weeds and tending fields to work duties that brought him closer to and frequently within the main farm and ranch homes. During this period, Sam became proficient with horses as well as learned

²⁴⁷ Mary Roberts Coolidge, *Chinese Immigration*, American Public Problems (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1909); Gyory, *Closing the Gate*; Nayan Shah, *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco’s Chinatown* (University of California Press, 2001); Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*.

²⁴⁸ Julian MarDock, *The First of Many: The Story of a Pioneering Chinese Family Who Lived in Texas for One Hundred Years*, 8.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 7–9.

much as an assistant cook to both house cooks and camp cooks on cattle drives. Farm and ranch work didn't pay very well, though, and Sam soon realized that he would need to move on if he hoped to send support back to his family in China.²⁵⁰

In 1879, after years of delay due in part to the economic panic of 1873, the Southern Pacific Railroad Company (a subsidiary of the Central Pacific) finally began constructing what would become the second transcontinental railroad line in the United States. Investors expected this new route across the desert southwest to be a more lucrative venture than the original transcontinental line that had been completed in 1869 across the central and northern United States. Due to the mild winter climate along the majority of the line, the southern route could be used throughout the year unlike its northern predecessor.²⁵¹ The company also used the strategy of employing Chinese immigrant labor to help construct the line first connecting southern California with El Paso and then continuing on to other sections of Texas. When Sam heard from the Chinese recruiter and others that railroad work paid better than farm work and that Texas "land was cheap and could be purchased by anyone with money, with no restrictions," he signed up for the trip.²⁵² In 1879, at the age of eighteen, Sam set off with the Southern Pacific across the desert Southwest.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 10–11.

²⁵¹ Orsi, *Sunset Limited*; White, *Railroaded*.

²⁵² Julian MarDock, *The First of Many: The Story of a Pioneering Chinese Family Who Lived in Texas for One Hundred Years*, 13.

Laying track across the desert was the hardest work Sam had endured since landing in San Francisco four years earlier. He thought the transition from Southern California's hot days and cool nights into the Arizona territory's hot days and hot nights was nearly unbearable. Water became scarce as did the wild animals that could be hunted to break the monotony of rice soup and salted fish.²⁵³ Although the railroad company supplied the Chinese workers with food and other provisions from Chinese-owned dry goods store in San Francisco, the supply cars could not be relied on to arrive when needed. The workers rationed food daily regardless of stores held at the camp, a practice which frequently saved the workers from ending the day without a meal.²⁵⁴ Still, some nights the workers retired to their tents with empty stomachs.

As an assistant to the engineer, Sam learned to use the transit level to assist in leveling and grading the road in advance of the workers laying track. He was lucky in this aspect as he was exposed to English numbers and letters as part of his daily duties. An understanding of the English language as well as a basic understanding of the writing system would later prove invaluable during his years in Texas. He was forced to learn other skills during this time as well. Sam and others were called upon to provide food to supplement the Chinese camp stores, so he became proficient using a rifle. He found other equally life preserving uses for his rifle in protecting the group from wild predators

²⁵³ Ibid., 14.

²⁵⁴ J. A. G. Roberts, *China to Chinatown: Chinese Food in the West* (London: Reaktion Books, 2002); Coe, *Chop Suey*, 2009, 137–38.

and the occasional raid from indigenous tribes along the route. The Southern Pacific commissioned protection from the United States Army at intervals along the route, but Sam still witnessed the deaths of whole groups of his companions at the hands of indigenous peoples desperate to stop the advancement onto and appropriation of lands they had occupied for hundreds of years.²⁵⁵

In May of 1881, the Southern Pacific rail construction had reached an area close enough to El Paso that Sam could ride a horse into town for supplies or to scout the construction path and still make it back to the Chinese railroad camp the same night. The population of the town had surpassed 3,800 by 1880 and was nearing the 4,000 mark as the railroad closed in on the town limits. Sam rode into a part of the El Paso region that did not support a significant permanent population until well after the end of the U. S – Mexican War when the geo-political border was drawn along the path of the Rio Grande River separating the main settlement and mission of El Paso del Norte on the Mexican side of the border from some of its settlements on the American side.²⁵⁶ By the time Sam reached the town, Americans had been steadily settling the area and boosters had sought out the railroad barons in hopes of bringing their lines through the area. Over the next ten years, four railroad lines would link El Paso with the rest of the country as well as parts

²⁵⁵ Julian MarDock, *The First of Many: The Story of a Pioneering Chinese Family Who Lived in Texas for One Hundred Years*, 13–16.

²⁵⁶ The Rio Grande is known as the Rio Bravo south of the border. El Paso del Norte would later change its name to Ciudad Juarez to avoid confusion with the newly formed and rapidly growing American town of El Paso.

of Canada and central and southern Mexico. El Paso's population and that of the region ballooned during this period and continued expanding into the twentieth century much like the populations of San Antonio and other western and southwestern cities effected by the railroad. Sam witnessed these changes and, in many ways, used them to his advantage.

Sam gained valuable experience in El Paso spending the first decade after the railroad's entry into the region taking on numerous diverse jobs including ranch hand, horse trainer, and restaurant cook and server. He used El Paso as his home base while traveling throughout Texas as a railroad foreman on continuing construction projects, as an interpreter for the U.S. Government, and as an entrepreneur scouting other areas of the state where he might make his fortune.²⁵⁷ Of course, Sam's story continues beyond his ten or so years in El Paso. It is a fascinating story and truly one of the few accounts from a Chinese American's perspective of Chinese railroad labor on the Southern Pacific's second transcontinental line. It is quite possibly the only individual account of a Chinese railroad worker in the El Paso region.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁷ Julian MarDock, *The First of Many: The Story of a Pioneering Chinese Family Who Lived in Texas for One Hundred Years*, 17–30.

²⁵⁸ I have listened to numerous oral history interviews from El Paso citizens, many recorded in the 1970s and archived at the University of Texas, El Paso. Of the interviews with citizens of Chinese descent, very few include mention of railroad work and those that do offer very general information about their family (for instance, one interview describes a subject who worked for the railroad in the 1880s but offers no other detail). Those interviews from non-Chinese citizens offer interpretations of the Chinese community in El Paso generally.

This biography of Mar Yum Eh, who later would be known as Sam Mardock, comes from a set of stories edited together into a biographical account of Sam's life by his youngest son, Julian Mardock, M.D. As is the case with many biographies, the story is told from the perspective of a family member who believes with absolute certainty based on memory and documents available for research that the story is accurate. In this case, the author relies heavily on his own memories of his father as well as those told to him by his mother. Outside of these memories and stories, there is very little else available to a researcher investigating Sam's life. Julian mentions no letters, but does include newspaper articles about his father in later years. In some instances, it is clear that he is filling in the gaps of his father's story with guesses based on other published histories about Chinese immigrant life in the United States. The method employed by the author raises numerous questions about the accuracy of the work, but I think it offers valuable information that will serve well the purpose of this chapter.

Neither Mar Yum Eh nor his American identity, Sam Mardock, show up in El Paso directories for the period in which he used the city as a home base. He received a "Certificate of Residence" from the federal government in 1894 that shows his occupation as "laborer" and his address as 216 Oregon Street in El Paso. On the 1893 Sanborn map that address is sandwiched between a printing supply store and a Chinese druggist (who is listed in the directory), but is only listed as "Chinese" with no description of its use. It is possible that Sam merely used the space for an anchor during his travels across the state, or perhaps he just did not find it necessary to respond to canvassers for the directory (or maybe they did not even venture to that address). If Sam

had returned to China instead of settling in Texas, it is likely we would only see his name on records at his entry point.

In 1890, after traveling the State of Texas as an interpreter for the U. S. government and a railroad construction foreman for the Southern Pacific, Sam Mardock made the decision to settle down in a farming community and open a business. Tyler, a booming, rural, railroad town southeast of Dallas needed a good restaurant and Sam thought his experience working for restaurants in El Paso would carry over to his own place. That summer, with the blessing of town leaders and money that he had saved working across the state, Sam opened the Grand Star Café on the Tyler town square.

In order to open the business, Sam relied on connections back in El Paso to help fill out his employee roster. He brought in Chinese cooks, butchers, and waiters all from El Paso for a grand opening that was met “with a bit of fanfare.” The new employees lived in the basement and second floor of the building that housed the restaurant, just like their likely living situations while working at restaurants in El Paso. The restaurant did well, “waiters wore white coats and bow ties,” and just like other Chinese restaurants across the western United States, the Grand Star Cafe served a chophouse-style menu from seven in the morning until ten at night. Sam and his business partner and cousin, Louis Marion, prospered. When the opportunity arose to acquire a building directly across the street from the Cotton Belt Railroad, Sam took it and opened a second restaurant with an attached general store in 1897. The Cotton Belt Restaurant would serve as a stopover for travelers and workers on the Cotton Belt line for the next forty years.

Much like Sam Mardock in Tyler, the Chinese restaurateurs in El Paso clearly

opened establishments in the city with the intent to serve American customers. They chose names like “American Café” and “Virginia Restaurant” while serving menus heavy on beef steak, potatoes, and stewed vegetables. While laundries were marginalized in El Paso and Chinese cookery was maligned publicly all over the country, Anglo-American citizens in El Paso frequented restaurants owned by Chinese proprietors and considered at least one to be the best restaurant in town. Simultaneously, Chinese merchants imported goods from China for El Paso’s Chinese residents to use at home. While restaurateurs could have served traditional dishes, they chose instead to serve food with which El Paso Anglos were familiar and that fit into larger narratives about American food in American restaurants. As a result, the food spaces they occupied, which often served the dual purpose of homestead, were rarely threatened.

First, the character, the person of Mar Yum Eh, or Sam Mardock, and his life in a sense offers an analog to El Paso. When Mar Yum Eh landed in San Francisco harbor, he began a transformation from his identity in China to Sam Mardock, the entrepreneur who spoke three languages. Simultaneously, El Paso would undergo an identity change during this period from a small stopover community at a migratory crossroads in the Texas-Mexico borderlands to a major transportation hub connecting the United States and Mexico as well as the east and west coasts of the country. With the arrival of the railroad, it quickly became one of the largest commercial regions in the southwestern United States. Today it ranks in the top sixty “Combined Statistical Areas” (CSA) in the United States, but if you add Ciudad Juarez in with the other communities in the region, the El

Paso CSA moves into the top twenty.²⁵⁹ Both transformations had much to do with the railroad, while Mar Yum Eh's also involved the growing restaurant industry in the region spurred by Chinese cooks and restaurant owners. The following sections will first add some historical context to both the El Paso region and Chinese immigration into the United States. I will follow that context with a closer look at the El Paso of 1881 and how the newly immigrated Chinese railroad workers were able to navigate the city and other parts of Texas. The El Paso region's story is much longer than the city's story, and its role as a migratory stopover can be traced back before Europeans began exploring the Southwest for riches.

PASO DEL NORTE

The El Paso – Ciudad Juarez region sits at the northern end of a high-desert plateau that stretches down into central Mexico. To its north and east sit the barren high plains of west Texas and New Mexico, while to the west lays the rugged desert mountains of northern Mexico. Accounting for its dry, desert climate and subsequent lack of vegetation, the region should be an inhospitable place for human habitation. If not for the Rio Grande River, which runs from southern Colorado south through the El Paso region and then southeast to form the Texas-Mexico border before emptying into the Gulf of Mexico, El Paso would likely resemble some of the numerous small, dusty

²⁵⁹ U.S. Census Bureau, "Combined Statistical Areas of the United States and Puerto Rico," 2009.

railroad towns that dot western Texas.²⁶⁰ The Rio Grande River brings life to the region, however. Its waters have supported human settlement for over 4,000 years, a valley oasis in a sea of barren desert. It was a welcome sight to European explorers traveling north upon the desert plateau along one of the famed Camino Real trade routes from what is today central Mexico. The Paso del Norte (Pass of the North) has supported a European settlement since 1659, when Spain founded the mission of Nuestra Senora de Guadalupe in what is today downtown Ciudad Juarez. Throughout the ensuing 350 years, the region has changed hands several times, experienced numerous wars, but ever remained a popular trading center and stopover in the Southwest.²⁶¹

The area north of the Rio Grande where modern day El Paso and its suburbs sit began to take shape soon after the Pueblo Revolt of 1680 in what is now New Mexico when a significant refugee population moved into the area. Prior to 1680, the lands on the north side of the Rio Grande River were minimally used as ranch and farmland in support of Paso del Norte (later Ciudad Juarez), the primary settlement in the region. Once Mission Guadalupe was founded in Paso del Norte amongst established Native American settlements in 1659, European settlers slowly moved into the area; and some members of the area tribes began to settle near the mission. However, the settlement's primary purpose was to serve as a stopover along the Camino Real between Mexico City and

²⁶⁰ W. H. Timmons, *El Paso: A Borderlands History*, Second Edition (El Paso, Texas: Texas Western Press, 1990), 1–3.

²⁶¹ Timmons, *El Paso: A Borderlands History*., xxi-xxvii.

Santa Fe, New Mexico. In addition to Mission Guadalupe in Ciudad Juarez, two other missions were built in the area during the 1660s in order to minister to additional Native American tribes inhabiting the valley and surrounding areas.²⁶² At the time of the Pueblo Revolt of 1680, these three missions were the only permanent European settlements in the area surrounding Paso del Norte.²⁶³

In 1680, Native Americans from pueblos across northern and central New Mexico coordinated attacks against Spanish settlements. Over a century earlier, the Spanish had pushed into northern New Mexico in search of the fabled Seven Cities of Gold. They established missions near native pueblos and began displacing established religious beliefs by introducing Christianity to the native population. During “the period from 1598 to 1680, it is apparent that through alliances, censures, excommunications, and physical force the Franciscans had realized, if only imperfectly, the theocracy of which they so dreamed. During those years they virtually reigned supreme over the land and silenced all their opponents. They succeeded because they held sway over the colonists through various exchanges and psychological ploys, and retained their leadership in the Indian

²⁶² Ibid., 19. In addition to Nuestra Senora de Guadalupe de los Mansos, Spain founded missions San Francisco de la Toma de los Sumas and Nuestra Senora de la Soledad de los Janos during this period. The Spanish missions in the area primarily ministered to the Mansos, Jumanos, Janos, Sumas, Tanos, and Apaches – all tribes inhabiting or moving through the valley.

²⁶³ Vina Walz, “History of the El Paso Area, 1680-1692” (Dissertation, University of New Mexico, 1951), 18–21.

pueblos through gifts, magic, converts, and force.”²⁶⁴ In doing so, the Spanish also disrupted social and familial traditions, planting seeds of resentment that matured in the middle of the seventeenth century with the 1680 Pueblo Revolt. Late in that summer, the Pueblos killed approximately 400 Spanish settlers and soldiers and drove out the remaining Spanish inhabitants along with Puebloan members of several tribes. Surviving settlers retreated south toward Paso del Norte, pausing to rest and take roll in La Salinera, “a post about three hundred miles south of Santa Fe some ten miles north of Spanish settlements in the El Paso area.”²⁶⁵ An estimated 1,946 “soldiers, servants, women, children, and Indians” made it to the camp at La Salinera before continuing on the Guadalupe Mission in Paso del Norte to begin forming new communities in the area.²⁶⁶

Among the refugees, 317 native inhabitants of five different pueblos made the trip south to Paso del Norte.²⁶⁷ They eventually settled in communities south of the

²⁶⁴ Ramon Gutierrez, *When Jusus Came, the Corn Mothers WEst Away: Marriage, Sexuality, and Power in New Mexico, 1500-1846* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1991), 127.

²⁶⁵ Elinore Barrett, *The Spanish Colonial Settlement Landscapes of New Mexico, 1598-1680* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2012). La Salinera (also La Salineta in some publications) is thought to have been somewhere near Vinton, Texas, approximately 20 miles north of present-day El Paso.

²⁶⁶ Timmons, *El Paso: A Borderlands History*, 19–21; Gutierrez, *When Jusus Came, the Corn Mothers WEst Away: Marriage, Sexuality, and Power in New Mexico, 1500-1846*, 130–140.

²⁶⁷ The Pueblo refugees included members of four Piro pueblos: Senecu, Socorro, Alamillo, and Sevilleta; as well as members of the Tigua from Isleta.

Guadalupe mission and built two new missions – the Mission Corpus Christi de la Ysleta del Sur for the Tiguas and the Mission Nuestra Senora de Socorro for the Piros. Although both of these settlements were initially on the southern side of the Rio Grande River just south of Paso del Norte, both ended up on the northern side of the river in the late 1820s after heavy flooding destroyed most of the dwellings in the area and shifted the path of the river south of the settlements.²⁶⁸ As such, some historians consider these two communities the oldest permanent settlements in Texas. However, due to its separation from the main settlement, the area north of the Rio Grande that would later become El Paso was vulnerable to continued attacks by numerous Native American tribes. Consequently, it saw very little population growth throughout the 18th century and first half of the nineteenth century.

Two other formative moments in the area’s history significantly spurred population growth and community formation on the north side of the Rio Grande River in the nineteenth century – the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo that ended the Mexican-American War (1846-48) and the arrival of the Southern Pacific railroad in 1881. Although it is not necessary to go in-depth into the events that led to the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, it is important to highlight a few occurrences that led to its signing. The Texas Revolution is the precipitate for the later Mexican-American War that

²⁶⁸ Timmons, *El Paso: A Borderlands History*, 20–21; Anna Louise Fahy, “Borderland Chinese: Community Identity and Cultural Change” (The University of Texas at El Paso, 2006), 22.

culminated in the treaty.²⁶⁹ Americans who had moved into the Mexican state of Texas beginning in the 1820s, along with a few prominent Mexican families in San Antonio rebelled in 1835 against the Mexican government for various social and political reasons, not least of which were two issues: the 1829 abolition of slavery by the Mexican government and the elimination of a stay on property taxes for American colonists.²⁷⁰ After the 1836 Texas victory and its declaration of independence from Mexico, the border between the two countries was tenuous at best. Texas believed its southern border to be the Rio Grande River, while Mexico believed it to be the Nueces River over 150 miles north of the Rio Grande in some places.

Throughout the late 1830s until 1845, the disputed border caused skirmishes between the Mexican army and Texas militia along the coast (with their Navies), in the disputed area, and even in Texas settlements with Mexico occupying San Antonio for a period in 1842. Once the United States annexed Texas in 1845, the young country entered the dispute with Mexico that escalated into all-out war in 1846. Most of the fighting

²⁶⁹ For an in-depth look at events that led to the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, see the following: H. W. Brands, *Lone Star Nation: How a Ragged Army of Volunteers Won the Battle for Texas Independence and Changed America* (New York: Doubleday, 2004); T.R. Fehrenbach, *Lone Star: A History of Texas and the Texans* (Boulder, Colorado: Da Capo Press, 2000); Resendez, *Changing National Identities at the Frontier: Texas and New Mexico, 1800-1850*.

²⁷⁰ Martha Manchaca, *Recovering History, Constructing Race: The Indian, Black, and White Roots of Mexican Americans*, The Joe R. and Teresa Lozano Long Series in Latin American and Latino Art Culture (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), 200.

occurred in what is today Mexican territory and played out with a methodical march toward Mexico City by United States forces over a one and a half year period and ended in the fall of 1847 with the capture of most Mexican cities. The war officially ended on February 2, 1848, with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo.

The war and resulting treaty would have lasting effects on the Paso del Norte region. To start, throughout the war the American military occupied several positions in the area and began to use it as a staging location for soldiers entering into northern and western Mexico. American merchants followed the military in support and also began moving into the area. At the war's end, the Americans essentially forced the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo upon the Mexican government.²⁷¹ The treaty called for the Rio Grande River to mark the geopolitical border between Texas (which was now a part of the United States) and Mexico. In addition, Mexico would cede most of its northern territory to the United States in exchange for fifteen million dollars. That territory included all of California, Nevada, and Utah, as well as major portions of Arizona, New Mexico, and Colorado.²⁷²

Since the Rio Grande had shifted south in 1829 due to flooding, those communities that had historically been Spanish missions serving displaced Pueblo tribes,

²⁷¹ Officials negotiated throughout the winter of 1847-48, and officially signed the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo on February 2, 1848.

²⁷² The United States would also assume the debt that American citizens owed the Mexican government.

Ysleta, Socorro, and San Elizario instantly became part of the United States after the treaty.²⁷³ Although, the people living in these communities became citizens of the United States and found themselves inside the border of a new country, their daily lives did not change drastically at the outset. They still had regular dealings with Paso del Norte (Juarez) and continued to govern themselves using Mexican laws and institutions.²⁷⁴ The border at this point remained porous and folks could generally cross unimpeded at any time into the established towns as well as into newly forming communities that began filling with Americans soon after the war.

By late 1848, the U. S. military decided that they needed a permanent presence in the area to guard the border from potential attacks by Mexican forces, to defend incoming settlers from Apache attacks, and to generally keep law and order in an area that had not yet established an organized, strong American form of local government. Although the U. S. army had maintained a presence in the area since early in the war, its decision to

²⁷³ W. H. Timmons, "American El Paso: The Formative Years: 1848-1858," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 86, no. July (1983): 2. The river actually created an island of these communities by forming two channels around them after the flood of 1829. As part of the treaty, the Americans deemed the southern channel to be the deepest therefore marking it as the boundary between the two countries.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 14–15. After the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, trade between the United States and Mexico was definitely strained. With an established customs house in Paso del Norte, Mexican officials immediately began levying high tariffs on American goods. The United States appointed the first "collector of customs" in the area in 1854, but the importation of "Mexican wine, brandy, sugar soap, rebozos, fruits, leather goods, and cigars" among other goods continued to make its way to established and newly formed communities on the American side of the border.

permanently occupy the old presidio at San Elizario instilled confidence in American merchants and settlers to move into the area in part to support the military, but also to attempt to make their fortune in the newly opened West that was beginning to be promoted heavily by proponents of Manifest Destiny.

The new border did not change the fact that the El Paso valley still acted as a stopover for migrants moving around the continent. Paso del Norte (Ciudad Juarez) remained one of the primary places of respite for immigrants traveling north or south between the two countries. However, with the United States' forced acquisition of most of northern Mexico, American citizens could now travel over land to the Pacific Ocean and never leave the country. As such, east-west migration increased steadily after the Mexican – American War, and travelers needed a place to rest on the United States' side of the border after trekking across hundreds of miles of Texas high plains desert.

OVERLAND ROUTE THROUGH TEXAS

On January 24, 1848, just nine days before American and Mexican officials signed the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, Foreman James Marshall noticed a few gold flakes in the stream near the sawmill where he worked for John Sutter. Soon people from all over the world were looking to find a quick fortune in California's Sierra Nevada Mountains. Ships carrying would-be prospectors sailed around the tip of South America on their way to west coast ports. Other travelers disembarked at the Panama isthmus, and trekked through heavy jungle terrain across the relatively short distance to the west coast in order to secure spots on ships heading north. The expense of sailing to California was

prohibitive for many and soon less moneyed travelers headed out across the continent by wagon, cart, and horseback.²⁷⁵

At the time Marshall discovered gold, the Oregon Trail was the most used route to the West by Americans thanks to Lewis and Clark. Once travelers reached Wyoming they would cut across northern Utah and Nevada on their way to central California. Before the U.S. – Mexican War, the Santa Fe Trail ended in Santa Fe or along a spur south to Paso del Norte for all but the most adventurous. The United States military explored other routes across the desert from Santa Fe to the west coast, but found the land mostly impassible by wagon. Philip St. George Cooke, a Colonel in the “Army of the West” under order of General Stephen Kearny, set out to locate a route that supply wagons could traverse. He essentially “located” the route along the Rio Grande (Rio Bravo) from Santa Fe that indigenous peoples had traveled for centuries before Spanish missionaries claimed it as part of the Camino Real network. Once in the Paso del Norte area, Cooke headed west across the northern-most part of Mexico that would later become southern New Mexico and Arizona via the Gadsden Purchase.²⁷⁶ Later in 1849 just before the frenzy of the Gold Rush would begin, *The Corpus Christi Star* reprinted a report from *The New York Courier and Enquirer* describing Cooke’s route as “a most important

²⁷⁵ Mabelle Martin, “California Emigrant Roads through Texas,” *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 28, no. April (1925): 287.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 287–88. The main route General Stephen Kearny attempted ran along the Gila River Basin, which eventually drained into the Colorado River before it emptied into the Pacific Ocean. This route was impassible for the army’s supply wagons.

discovery, and must prove of great service especially if that portion of Mexico should hereafter be annexed to the United States, as a railroad would in all probability be built over the route.”²⁷⁷ The Gadsden Purchase five years later ensured that the dream of a southern railroad route to the West Coast would later come true.

Communities in Texas had already been promoting routes to El Paso, foreshadowing the politics of railroad construction that would occur in the state three decades later. Before word got out about Sutter’s Mill, “the first explorations had already been made by the merchants of Corpus Christi and San Antonio, trying to find a road to Chihuahua, via El Paso, to compete with Independence, Missouri for the trade of Mexico.”²⁷⁸ Boosters from Houston, Galveston, and Austin clashed with boosters from Corpus Christi and San Antonio regarding the convenience and ease-of-travel along two potential routes – one headed west out of the Austin area and the other further south beginning in Corpus Christi and connecting to Paso del Norte via San Antonio. The most important aspect of each route, of course, was that it led travelers through the community promoting it before the long trip across the desert to Mexico. The stakes were high for these growing communities to increase commerce and population in order to make their towns attractive to outside investment. Many of these boosters had seen the effects of the railroad upon communities in the Northeast and Midwest and expected the same as the railroad moved west. In the end, the United States Army influenced travelers and future

²⁷⁷ *The Corpus Christi Star*, January 13, 1849.

²⁷⁸ Martin, “California Emigrant Roads through Texas,” 291.

railroad routes as much as or more so than town boosters by erecting Forts Clark, Hudson, Lancaster and Davis along the southern route.²⁷⁹ The appearance of protection that the U.S. Army might provide during later wars with the Apache and Comanche tribes prompted travelers to primarily embark upon this southern route across Texas, while the series of fortifications along military roads offered a market for traders as well as ideal landing spots for future railroad depots.²⁸⁰

This short history of the Paso del Norte region up to the 1850s is included here to highlight two points about the region. First, the Paso del Norte region's ideal placement in a mountain valley along the bend of a major river with high plains desert surrounding most of the area made it a place of respite for travelers heading in every direction. It is a landscape that can sustain settlement (and has for thousands of years), but even before European contact it also served as a stopover and trading post between major indigenous civilizations as well as a resting place for hunting parties. Since humans have populated the Southwest and Northern Mexico, Paso del Norte has been both an ideal place for permanent settlement and an ideal place for transient populations to rest and recover before moving through. Second, beginning with the Spanish Colonial period, movement through the area increased dramatically. The prospects for trade, numerous wars, rumors

²⁷⁹ Ibid., 192–195.

²⁸⁰ Timmons, *El Paso: A Borderlands History*, 159–169, offers an extensive look at the history and politics of scouting, mapping, and ultimately promoting various routes across Texas and other parts of the Southwest.

of golden cities, and news of the Gold Rush are just some of the reasons so many diverse groups of people moved across western North America. A healthy portion of those folks passed through Paso del Norte.

CHINESE IMMIGRATION TO THE UNITED STATES

The rumors of vast amounts of gold in the Sierra Nevada Mountains swept across the continent after January of 1848. By the middle of the year, those stories reached South America, Europe, and Asia; and soon hopeful, would-be prospectors from all over the world were planning their journeys to the United States' newly acquired territory on the west coast. Prior to 1848, California's coastal towns saw the occasional Chinese sailor or merchant ship, and certainly American sugar plantation owners in the Sandwich Islands²⁸¹ employed Chinese workers.²⁸² Once the rumors of gold deposits and of the opportunities that an emerging and growing economy could provide reached Chinese shores, immigrants from mostly southern areas of China began to flow into the western United States.²⁸³ That flow increased unchecked until 1882 despite the challenges presented to non-Anglo newcomers in the United States.²⁸⁴

²⁸¹ Now Hawaii.

²⁸² Coe, *Chop Suey*, 2009, 103–143; Takaki, *Strangers From a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans*, 79–131.

²⁸³ Including the provinces of Guangdong, Guangxi, and Fujian along the southern and southeastern coast of China.

²⁸⁴ The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 halted most Chinese immigration through the main ports but as I will cover later in the chapter, movement across the United States-Mexico border was a

The prospect of gaining wealth in the California gold mines brought the first group of Chinese immigrants into the San Francisco area in early 1849. Not only as prospectors themselves, but as merchants with the intent to bring goods to the west coast for all the gold-seekers to spend their treasure on. Adventurers “needed food, tools, blankets, clothing, shoes, wood, and stone for houses;” those goods could take over three months to reach California from the East Coast, while taking approximately half the time from China.²⁸⁵ While some of this first group were hired workers, most paid for their own passage to California with plans to prospect, speculate, and open support businesses including restaurants. Before the gold rush, San Francisco’s total population topped out around 300, but now the city’s streets were teeming with people from all over the world looking to make their fortune. Homes and businesses could not be built quickly enough, and the majority of the single men who had made the voyage did not cook for themselves. *New York Tribune* writer, Bayard Taylor, described the available culinary offerings as such:

There are French restaurants on the plaza and on Dupont Street; an extensive German establishment on Pacific Street; the *Fonda Peruana*; the Italian Confectionary; and three Chinese houses, denoted by their long three-cornered flags of yellow silk. The latter are much frequented by Americans, on account of

fairly easy task and contributed to the growth of the Chinese community in El Paso and other parts of the U.S. Southwest.

²⁸⁵ Coe, *Chop Suey*, 2009, 108.

their excellent cookery, and the fact that meals are \$1 each, without regard to quantity. Kong-Sung's house is near the water; Whang-Tong's in Sacramento Street, and Tong-Ling's in Jackson street. There the grave Celestials serve up their chow-chow and curry, besides many genuine English dishes; their tea and coffee cannot be surpassed [sic].²⁸⁶

By 1850, there was clearly an array of restaurant choices for those souls who had ventured to California to make their fortune, and the Chinese options were held in at least as high regard as other choices.

While authors have rightly used quotes like that above from Bayard Taylor to claim that San Franciscans frequented Chinese-owned restaurants because they were the most inexpensive and/or the most exotic meals in the city, clearly contemporary writers like Taylor enjoyed the food as well.²⁸⁷ In *Chop Suey*, Andrew Coe offers several

²⁸⁶ Bayard Taylor, *Eldorado; Or, Adventures in the Path of Empire* (New York: Putnam, 1850), 116–17. *Eldorado* was born out of Taylor's assignment to cover the gold rush in California for Horace Greeley and the *New York Tribune*. His journey to California, his experiences in San Francisco and among the gold mines, and his return home via Mexico are collected in the two-volume monograph he titled *Eldorado*, a nod to the fabled city of gold that Spanish conquistadores (and others) searched for in the Amazon Basin during the early Spanish colonial period. Perhaps a more accurate and geographically closer title might have been *Cibola*, the fabled "Seven Cities of Gold" that Cabeza de Vaca had supposedly viewed on his trek across the Southwest and northern Mexico.

²⁸⁷ After the success of Bayard's *Eldorado* which reportedly sold 40,000 copies in the first two weeks of publication, he later published an account of his travels in Asia entitled, *A Visit to India, China, and Japan in 1853*. His attitude toward the Chinese must have changed dramatically

contemporary examples of writers praising the skill of Chinese cooks. For instance, William Shaw states that “the dishes are mostly curries, hashes, and fricassees, served up in small dishes, and as they were exceedingly palatable, I was not curious enough to enquire as to the ingredients.”²⁸⁸ In another contemporary account, William Kelly praises the Chinese cooks and restaurants in Sacramento for their fare and service in comparison to the “American Tavern, the French Restaurant,” and “the Spanish Fonday”:

But amidst the host of competitors the Celestials carry off the palm for superior excellence in every particular. They serve everything promptly, cleanly, hot, and well cooked; they give dishes peculiar to each nation, over and above their own peculiar soups, curries, and ragouts, which cannot be even imitated elsewhere; and such is their quickness and civil attention, they anticipate your wants, and secure your patronage.²⁸⁹

As noted by Kelly, Chinese restaurants served both traditional dishes from their homeland as well as plates with recognizably Western ingredients like lamb chops that could be eaten with knives and forks rather than the traditional chopsticks. Chinese

during this trip where his one-time fondness for Chinese cuisine turned into a vicious, racist attack on the Chinese, their culture, and their food.

²⁸⁸ William Shaw, *Golden Dreams and Waking Realities* (London: Smith, Elder, 1851), 42; quoted in Coe, *Chop Suey*, 111.

²⁸⁹ William Kelly, *An Excursion to California Over the Prairie, Rocky Mountains, and Great Sierra Nevada with a Stroll Through the Diggings and Ranches of That Country*, vol. 2 (London: Chapman and Hall, 1851), 244.

restaurant owners cooked to please their clientele no matter their country of origin, much like the merchants who tended to the wants of gold seekers returning from the mountains.

By 1850, local estimates put 750 – 4,000 Chinese immigrants in California.²⁹⁰ That number increased quickly over the ensuing years. An additional 2,716 Chinese arrived in 1851 with 20,026 following a year later, most in search of fortune in the gold mines.²⁹¹ As early as 1850, the earliest Chinese immigrants had made enough money in California to return home bearing news of fortunes to be made at Gam Saan or Gold Mountain.²⁹² Each successive wave of Chinese returning home prompted many more to make the journey to the United States. By 1860, according to the United States census there were 33,149 “Asiatic Males” living in California, in 1870 there were 49,310

²⁹⁰ I found these estimates in both Coe, *Chop Suey*, 112, and Takaki, *Strangers From a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans*, 79. The same numbers are also compiled in Mary Roberts Coolidge, *Chinese Immigration*, American Public Problems (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1909), 499. Coolidge’s text compiles estimates from a variety of sources including United States committee reports, the California State census (which was at this time itself an estimate), and numerous reports from contemporary California and San Francisco newspapers that were used as evidence for other 19th-century writers whom Coolidge used as references. See her appendix pp. 497-504. Coe and Takaki do not cite their sources for this information, but I assume they pulled the information from Coolidge as well.

²⁹¹ Takaki, *Strangers From a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans*, 79; Shah, *Contagious Divides*, 2001, 17; Coolidge, *Chinese Immigration*, 1909, 499.

²⁹² Gold Mountain is the moniker used by 19th-century Chinese immigrants to describe the central California gold mines and later it would also stand in as a descriptor for America. Gold Mountain is Gam Saan in Cantonese and Jinshan in Mandarin.

“Chinese Persons,” and by 1880 that number had increase to 75,218. By contrast, there were 136 “Chinese Persons” in Texas in 1880.²⁹³

While some Chinese immigrants stayed in the cities as merchants, restaurant owners, cooks, clerks, and other forms of support staff for business owners, the vast majority of the incoming Chinese population, after the first couple of waves arrived in San Francisco, went directly to the countryside to labor on farms or to the mountains to prospect for gold. Each year throughout the 1850s, thousands of Chinese immigrants dispersed into Tuolumne, Mariposa, Placer, Shasta, and other counties among the Central California Sierra Nevada Mountains.

Although American sentiment toward the Chinese in the early years of their immigration into California has been interpreted by some as a “Period of Favor,” that sentiment was clearly just one strand of a complex set of ideas and feelings toward the newcomers that swayed to one side or the other depending on one’s place in California’s newly emerging economy.²⁹⁴ While the Governor of California in 1852 recommended “a

²⁹³ University of Virginia Library, “Historical Census Browser,” 2004. The numbers from the U.S. Census during this period are certainly questionable due to disorganization of California’s state government. For example, in its first decade California saw four state capitols, and very little law enforcement at the state level. In addition, the movement among the mines in the Sierra Nevada Mountains by the Chinese and other gold-seekers made it difficult to accurately count those living in California counties.

²⁹⁴ Coolidge, *Chinese Immigration*, 1909, 13–25. Coolidge, writing over half a century later about the seeming change in sentiment thought that “In the light of the fifty years of intolerance

system of land grants to induce the further immigration and settlement of the Chinese” due in part to the favorable view of their labor,²⁹⁵ white miners hoping to remove competition expelled some six hundred Chinese miners from their claims along the American River in the spring of that same year.²⁹⁶ The conflicting ideas about and treatment of Chinese immigrants did not manifest slowly over a period of years as some might expect. Rather, while writers were praising the service, skill, and industriousness of Chinese cooks, restaurant owners, and others engaged in business as early as 1850, white miners had already begun attacking Chinese claims the year prior.²⁹⁷

The developing racist rage against Chinese influenced mostly by labor issue, but becoming more of a racist narrative of the Chinese as unclean, lazy, uncivilized, and a danger to American laborers’ livelihoods. The narrative manifested later in tourists “slumming” in San Francisco’s Chinatown and fears of eating the food in Chinese-owned restaurants.²⁹⁸ The peak of anti-Chinese sentiment occurred in 1901 when the American Federation of Labor and leader Samuel Gompers put out a pamphlet that pitted

that followed, the cordiality with which the Chinese were welcomed by the first pioneers is almost incredible.” *Ibid.*, 25.

²⁹⁵ Coolidge, *Chinese Immigration*, 1909, 22.

²⁹⁶ Pfaelzer, *Driven Out*, 2008, 10.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 8–9. Specifically, the references to white miners in Mariposa county threatening to “inflict such punishment as they deem proper” upon any Chinese prospecting claims in the area.

²⁹⁸ Gruen, *Manifest Destinations*, 187.

“American Manhood against Asiatic Coolieism,” in a duel between “Meat vs. Rice.”²⁹⁹ In it, they repeat and rehash years of anti-Chinese writings, retell an account of a Chinese merchant murdered in San Francisco by Chinese assassins, and include racist opinions of well-known Americans with experience around the Chinese like General Douglas MacArthur, the former military governor of the Philippines. Gompers and the AFL put the pamphlet out in support of a second extension of the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act. Years before the pamphlet and part of the reason the AFL published it, the Chinese went to work for the Central Pacific building the first transcontinental railroad out of California. It was the beginning of more intense anti-Chinese sentiment, especially in western states, but it also dispersed the Chinese across the United States and into some places, like Texas, where the negative sentiment was not as intense.³⁰⁰

AMERICAN EL PASO

With the border between Mexico and the United States decided after the U.S.—Mexican War and the Gadsden Purchase of 1854, the American side of the Rio Grande river included two Native-American settlements that had been tied to the Mission in El Paso del Norte before the river shifted and placed them east (the American side) of the border, an early Spanish presidio, and five loosely-tied American settlements that

²⁹⁹ “Some Reasons for Chinese Exclusion: Meat vs. Rice, American Manhood against Asiatic Coolieism, Which Shall Survive?”

³⁰⁰ Gyory, *Closing the Gate*; Pfaelzer, *Driven Out*, 2008.

sprouted mainly from ranches and trade posts.³⁰¹ The Gold Rush brought numerous adventurers and opportunists into the area to recharge before embarking again on the trail to California. One traveler describing the area wrote that “the sight of this little place is truly refreshing to the weary traveller [sic] of the plains – indeed, the cool shady avenues, fragrant breezes, delicious fruits and luxuriant appearance of everything around makes one almost feel that he is transported to the bowers of Eden.”³⁰² Some of these emigrants stayed permanently to join veterans of the U.S.—Mexican War, enterprising ranchers, and members of the mission ejidos that found themselves on the east side of the Rio

³⁰¹ Timmons, “American El Paso: The Formative Years: 1848-1858,” 1–3. The Native-American settlements of Ysleta and Socorro dated to the Pueblo Revolt of 1680 when refugees from Spanish missions in northern New Mexico settled south of Mission Guadalupe in El Paso del Norte. San Elizario was founded much later as a Spanish settlement and presidio. In 1848-49, five American settlements were established: Frontera, a trading post; Hart’s Mill, a flour mill; Coons’s Ranch, a mercantile store and ranch; Magoffinsville, centered on trader James Magoffins’s home later became Fort Bliss; Stephenson’s Ranch, centered on miner, prospector Hugh Stephenson’s family ranch.

³⁰² C. C. Cox, “From Texas to California in 1849: Diary of C. C. Cox (continued),” ed. Mabelle Martin, *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 29, no. 2 (October 1925): 130. It should be noted here that Cox is describing the entire valley in his diary, including El Paso del Norte on the west side of the river (Ciudad Juarez). At this point, people moved freely across the border. Emigrants from Mexico and the United States in great numbers passed through the area headed to California gold mines. Cox estimated that 7,000 people lived in the valley on both sides of the border, but it’s unclear if he included the reports of thousands of emigrants in encampments on the American side. It’s likely that remnants of these encampments stayed behind in the small settlements in the U. S., helping to expand them into the communities that would later form El Paso.

Grande to form the core population of the American side of the valley.

The settlements grew slowly in the 1850s and then stagnated completely during the Civil War. They managed to weather the departure of the military immediately after the U.S.—Mexican War, which exposed the settlements to attacks by native tribes moving through the area. The army returned to the area in the early 1850s, first garrisoning at the old presidio in San Elizario before building Fort Bliss in Magoffinsville, a settlement founded by a wealthy prospector named James Magoffin. It brought with it a permanent population, relative stability, and a greater need for goods to be imported into the region. The stability also brought the formation of El Paso County by the State of Texas, with San Elizario becoming the first county seat. By the mid-1850s, a post office had been established near Coons’s Ranch, which was popularly called Franklin after the owner Benjamin Franklin Coons.³⁰³ By 1860, El Paso County had grown to a population of 4,051 not including the thousands of people living in El Paso del Norte across the Rio Grande.³⁰⁴

Through most of the decade, folks moving into the El Paso del Norte valley hoped and many expected that the railroads would reach the area soon in order to take advantage of both trade from Mexico as well as connections to a potential southern route

³⁰³ Timmons, *El Paso: A Borderlands History*, 132. The post office was established under the name, El Paso, Texas, but Franklin was the popular name until 1873 when several of the communities officially incorporated as El Paso.

³⁰⁴ University of Virginia Library, “Historical Census Browser,” 2004.

to the West Coast. The U.S. military had mapped usable routes from the El Paso del Norte area through to California early in the decade. Post offices were soon thereafter established in some of the settlements and John Butterfield's Overland Mail company began serving the area at stops throughout the valley in 1858. Its first trip from Missouri to California carried cargo quicker than the usual route, which included a train ride to New York and a cargo ship around Cape Horn. The Butterfield stage bested the train and ship by six days, arriving in San Francisco twenty five days after leaving Tipton, Missouri, thus cementing the dream of an overland route through the El Paso region.³⁰⁵ That dream was dashed with the onset of the Civil War and Reconstruction.

Throughout most of the decade of the 1860s, economic activities slowed to nearly nothing. After the California Column retook the Southwest from Confederate forces and began its occupation of Fort Bliss in 1862, the land and assets of many of the area's prominent landowners and businessmen were seized while they were held in prison for treason for their support of the Confederacy. Although most of the property was restored after the war, it took several years before citizens were pardoned and property released. The war took a toll on the population of the county as well. By 1870, the population of El Paso County had decreased to 3,671, although that would quickly change as the region resumed economic activities.³⁰⁶

In 1873, Franklin and neighboring communities incorporated and officially

³⁰⁵ Timmons, *El Paso: A Borderlands History*, 166–70.

³⁰⁶ University of Virginia Library, "Historical Census Browser," 2004.

formed under the name El Paso, which would cause confusion for the next fifteen years with El Paso del Norte just across the river.³⁰⁷ With the return to railroad construction in the West after the Civil War, the move to incorporate El Paso was strategic in attempting to reestablish the area as an ideal hub for a southern transcontinental route.³⁰⁸ Before the war, many residents thought a southern route was a forgone conclusion, but southern secession caused northern railroad companies to plan the more central route that was completed in 1869.³⁰⁹ The nationwide economic panic in 1873, delayed any further action on a second transcontinental route further. However, by the end of the decade, the Southern Pacific (formerly the Central Pacific) had begun to recruit Chinese workers in California for a push across the southwestern desert.

In addition, two other major lines, the Texas and Pacific Railroad and the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe began working their way toward El Paso in what became a race to complete the second transcontinental line ten years after the first had been completed.³¹⁰ Looking back, one piece of booster literature from the 1880s El Paso

³⁰⁷ El Paso del Norte changed its name to Ciudad Juarez officially in 1888, in part to prevent confusion with its counterpart across the river as well as honor Benito Juarez and his activities in the city during the French Intervention in Mexico (1862-67).

³⁰⁸ *El Paso, Texas, and Paso Del Norte, Mexico Business Directory* (Albuquerque, N.M.: Rackliff & Waaney, 1885), 4.

³⁰⁹ William Goetzmann, *Army Exploration in the American West* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), 304.

³¹⁰ White, *Railroaded*, 114–15; Timmons, *El Paso: A Borderlands History*, 197.

business community read,

During the years 1879 and 1880, the great railroads approaching here — the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe from the north, the Southern Pacific from the west, the Texas and Pacific, and the Galveston, Harrisburg and San Antonio from the east — pushed their work of construction so vigorously, that increased attention was directed to this place; and before the end of the year 1880, though the railroads were still more than 100 miles distant, the first sound and wave of the coming ‘boom’ had struck El Paso, and aroused the sleepy old adobe town from its fifty years of lethargy.³¹¹

Perhaps Mar Yum Eh, who had become Sam Mardock by this point, could feel the excitement that El Paso’s citizens exhibited at the potential of their “sleepy old adobe town.” The railroad’s arrival did ultimately change the region forever. Sam certainly witnessed the community’s transformation as the town of approximately 800 residents in 1878 ballooned to approximately 4,000 with the arrival of the railroad and its contingent of Chinese immigrant workers.³¹²

THE CHINESE IN TEXAS

It was not until after the completion of the first transcontinental railroad line that Chinese immigrants began showing up in Texas. The earliest groups arrived as contracted

³¹¹ C. A. Gould & Co., *General Directory of the City of El Paso for 1886-1887*. (Dallas: C. A. Gould and Co., 1886).

³¹² Fahy, “Borderland Chinese: Community Identity and Cultural Change,” 26.

work both for railroad companies constructing new lines in eastern Texas as well as for plantation owners adapting to new labor relationships in the post-Civil War, central-Texas cotton industry. Many plantation owners in this new labor landscape were “convinced that their recently emancipated slaves could no longer be depended upon and were seeking an alternative source of cheap labor.”³¹³ Following a late-1869 convention of plantation owners and railroad magnates held in Memphis to discuss their post-war labor prospects, the agriculture and railroad sectors looked to Chinese workers to replace their slave labor. With the transcontinental line completed, Chinese labor contractors began looking for other potential projects for Chinese workers along the West Coast and new immigrants coming in from China. The two groups found each other with numerous opportunities across the South to form labor agreements.³¹⁴

As described in Chapter Two, Chinese railroad workers first appeared in the town of Calvert to continue building the Houston and Texas Central Railroad through to Dallas. After their disagreement over the labor contract, approximately 75-100 Chinese workers stayed on as farm laborers for Calvert-area cotton farmers. The Chinese population in the state remained at around 100 until the Southern Pacific work crews reached El Paso in 1881.

³¹³ Rhoads, “The Chinese in Texas,” 165.

³¹⁴ Gunther Barth, *Bitter Strength: A History of the Chinese in the United States 1850-1870* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1964), 188–197; Rhoads, “The Chinese in Texas,” 165–166.

After this initial entry into the state, the Chinese population in Texas increased by over 400 percent between 1880 and 1890, before leveling off through about 1930.

According to the Department of Interior 1870 Census records, 25 “Chinese persons” lived in Texas. In 1880, just before the Southern Pacific Railroad’s eastbound contingent of Chinese workers reached the Texas border, the population numbered 136. The 1890 numbers are particularly interesting in that they truly reflect the idea of nineteenth-century Chinese immigrants as “sojourners,” staying in the United States for only a short time to attempt to earn enough money to retire back to China with their families.³¹⁵ In 1890, “Chinese persons” in Texas numbered 710, but it is clear that many more had passed through the El Paso area working on the second transcontinental line with the Southern Pacific Railroad. Once they completed the railroad in 1883, the bulk of that Southern Pacific assemblage made their way back to settlements in Arizona, California, and other parts of the West.³¹⁶ The Texas Chinese population leveled after 1890, reaching a peak of 836 by 1900 before dropping back to 703 in 1930.³¹⁷

One interesting episode of Chinese immigration to Texas occurred during the Mexican Revolution. By 1916, General Francisco “Pancho” Villa’s campaign in the north

³¹⁵ See Rhoads, “The Chinese in Texas,” 167, and Barth, *Bitter Strength: A History of the Chinese in the United States 1850-1870*, for more on the Chinese as “sojourners.”

³¹⁶ Fahy, “Borderland Chinese: Community Identity and Cultural Change”; Farrar, *The Chinese in El Paso*, 3–4; Rhoads, “The Chinese in Texas,” 172.

³¹⁷ All census records were pulled online from the University of Virginia Library, “Historical Census Browser,” 2004.

against the Mexican federal government had slowed and his revolutionary army had been badly damaged in part due to American assistance to the Mexican government. Partly as a raid for supplies and partly as revenge against the United States for their recognition of the Mexican government, Villa's forces attacked the border town of Columbus, New Mexico, and its American fortification. As a result, President Woodrow Wilson ordered General John J. Pershing to pursue Villa's army into Mexico. After weeks of pursuit without success, Pershing settled into an occupation of parts of northern Mexico while they searched for Villa.

During the pursuit of Villa and later occupation, Chinese immigrants who had formed communities in northern Mexico after attempting to enter the United States unsuccessfully after the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, followed Pershing's units. Much like in the United States, Chinese communities in northern Mexico had not fared well due to anti-Chinese sentiment and persecution. The Mexican Revolution only exacerbated their suffering with incidents like the massacre of over 300 Chinese at Torreón in the early years of the revolution.³¹⁸ The Chinese men who followed Pershing "with astonishing rapidity, put up eating houses and merchandising stands on the fringes of every military station in the occupied area."³¹⁹ Pershing eventually hired the Chinese to help ship supplies along the Mexican federal railroads that the American were restricted

³¹⁸ Rhoads, "The Chinese in Texas," 177.

³¹⁹ Edward Eugene Briscoe, "Pershing's Chinese Refugees in Texas," *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 62, no. 4 (April 1959): 469.

to use. After eleven months in Mexico, Pershing returned to the United States with approximately 2,700 refugees who had assisted his army in some way during the occupation, including 527 Chinese men.³²⁰

The Chinese refugees eventually settled at Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio where they worked for the U. S. Army during World War I. In 1921, after four years as wards of the U. S. Army, Congress passed a special act with Pershing's support that would grant residency to the remaining Chinese refugees. Most of those refugees stayed in San Antonio, effectively doubling the Asian population of Bexar County.³²¹ This influx of Chinese immigrants into Texas stemmed the receding tide of Chinese immigration in the states and keeping the population at just under 1,000 until the repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1943 spurred new immigration into the United States, which doubled the Chinese population in Texas each decade for the next thirty years.³²²

THE CHINESE COMMUNITY IN EL PASO

After the first railroad line entered El Paso in May of 1881, the city's population exploded. In less than four decades, El Paso would pass from a frontier town of less than

³²⁰ Ibid., 467. Mexican citizens and American Mormons who had formed polygamous communities in northern Mexico made up the remaining refugees.

³²¹ In 1920, the census lumps Indians, Japanese, and Chinese together as a "racial group." See University of Virginia Library, "Historical Census Browser," 2004.

³²² Rhoads, "The Chinese in Texas," 177–78; University of Virginia Library, "Historical Census Browser," 2004.

1,000 residents to a transportation hub of 80,000.³²³ Even more so than San Antonio, the railroad's entry into the city brought drastic, seemingly overnight changes. The first church buildings of any kind on the American side of the river were built in 1883, and within a year the Baptists, Catholics, Episcopalians, Methodists, and Presbyterians were either congregating in their newly built churches or in a temporary space while the building was under construction. By 1883, "El Paso had a street railway, two banks, three newspapers, four churches, an established city government," and an elected school board who planned and opened the first public school later that year.³²⁴ Unlike other railroad boom towns in the Southwest that were tied to mining or agriculture as their main economies, the transportation industry defined El Paso in its early years.

Chinese labor was the catalyst for this massive transformation. As in other parts of the American West, Chinese labor jump-started economies by quickly, efficiently, and cheaply constructing railroad lines across the West, Southwest, and into Texas.³²⁵ Some Chinese workers stayed behind to find work in the growing city after the Southern Pacific continued on toward San Antonio in order to link up with both the southbound Texas and Pacific, and the westbound Galveston, Harrisburg and San Antonio. Many Chinese

³²³ University of Virginia Library, "Historical Census Browser," 2004; Timmons, *El Paso: A Borderlands History*, 201.

³²⁴ Timmons, *El Paso: A Borderlands History*, 206–07.

³²⁵ Railroad companies exploited other labor as well, including Irish, Mexican, and Black workers especially in Texas where all groups were represented in large enough numbers. See Garcilazo, *Traqueros*.

workers continued to work for the Southern Pacific and later other railroad companies in other parts of the state. However, once the Southern Pacific ended construction operations in the middle of the decade, many Chinese workers retired from railroad work and made their way back to El Paso, the western United States, or back home to China. During the 1880s, the railroads brought thousands of Chinese through El Paso and into Texas, as a result creating one of the larger Chinese communities in the nineteenth-century Southwest.³²⁶

While most of the initial Southern Pacific crew of Chinese workers continued working railroad construction beyond El Paso, some stayed to take advantage of opportunities in the growing, changing city. This first group of Chinese established a community that would continue to grow into the twentieth century, first as the railroad work in Texas slowed and/or Chinese workers were pushed to other professions usually in urban areas by Anglo railroad workers, and then as Chinese immigrants ventured east and landed in established communities along the railroad. In El Paso, over the last two decades of the nineteenth century, the Chinese immigrant community owned or labored in laundries, restaurants, grocers, and dry goods stores, while a few Chinese worked as truck farmers, barbers, carpenters, and general laborers.

Forging a life in a foreign city was a difficult endeavor for the Chinese, especially with anti-Chinese sentiment in western states at its peak as well as the Federal government's newly established restrictions on immigration from China in 1882.

³²⁶ Fahy, "Borderland Chinese: Community Identity and Cultural Change," 27.

Conditions were harsh for the growing city as it attempted to navigate the massive infusion of residents. City services were non-existent and land in the middle of the city that had been donated for future use as a park, instead became the city dump.³²⁷ The earliest Chinese residents congregated near the railroad depot in overly-crowded dwellings among some of the first Chinese-operated businesses, but soon their residences and businesses were dispersed throughout the downtown area.³²⁸

Although the early Chinese immigrant community in El Paso has been described as a Chinatown by many, it was certainly not the dense, bounded ethnic enclave one might imagine in comparison to the Chinatowns of San Francisco and New York.³²⁹ In fact, many of the Chinatowns across the nineteenth-century West neither had static boundaries nor a dense Chinese-immigrant population. For example, the Chinese in late-nineteenth-century Tucson occupied half a block here or there along streets near the

³²⁷ Ibid., 29.

³²⁸ “El Paso, Texas [map],” 1883.

³²⁹ See Farrar, *The Chinese in El Paso*; Rhoads, “The Chinese in Texas”; Staski, Edward, “The Overseas Chinese in El Paso: Changing Goals, Changing Realities,” in *Images of the Recent Past: Readings in Historical Archaeology*, ed. Charles E. Orser (Rowman Altamira, 1996), 166–90; Edward Staski et al., *Beneath the Border City: Urban Archaeology in Downtown El Paso*, vol. Volume 2: The Overseas Chinese in El Paso, 2 vols. (Las Cruces, New Mexico: New Mexico State University, 1884), for descriptions of the community as a Chinatown. Fahy, “Borderland Chinese: Community Identity and Cultural Change” addresses the somewhat inaccurate description by describing the community as more dispersed throughout the downtown area and later the larger city.

town's old Spanish presidio, but there were numerous other small enclaves spread out across the downtown area interspersed among a diverse set of businesses and residents.³³⁰ In Denver, three different small sections of downtown held the Chinatown moniker between 1869 and 1900, some simultaneously.³³¹ Numerous other towns across the West saw Chinatowns shift borders and locations.

The experience of the Chinese community in El Paso in terms of the spaces they inhabited was not generally different from many other communities in the West. Their residential and business spaces shifted over time throughout downtown. In 1883, shortly after the Chinese built the second transcontinental railroad through El Paso, the largest concentration of Chinese occupied space at the intersection of Oregon and Saint Louis Streets two blocks from the Southern Pacific Railroad Depot (See Figure 4.1 below).³³²

³³⁰ Florence C. Lister and Robert H. Lister, *The Chinese of Early Tucson: Historic Archaeology from the Tucson Urban Renewal Project*, Anthropological Papers of the University of Arizona 52 (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1989).

³³¹ Gerald Rudolph, "The Chinese in Denver: Their Location and Occupations," in *Chinese on the American Frontier*, Pacific Formations: Global Relations in Asian and Pacific Perspectives (Lanham Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), 316–317.

³³² Figure 4.1 is the main grid map from the 1883 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map. The Southern Pacific Depot takes up all of block 15 east (map includes two block 15s) in section 3 of the grid just between the Pacific Hotel to the west and the Pierson Hotel to the east. The Chinese enclave described above is two blocks west along Saint Louis Street and occupies most of block 5 and the northeastern section of block 6.

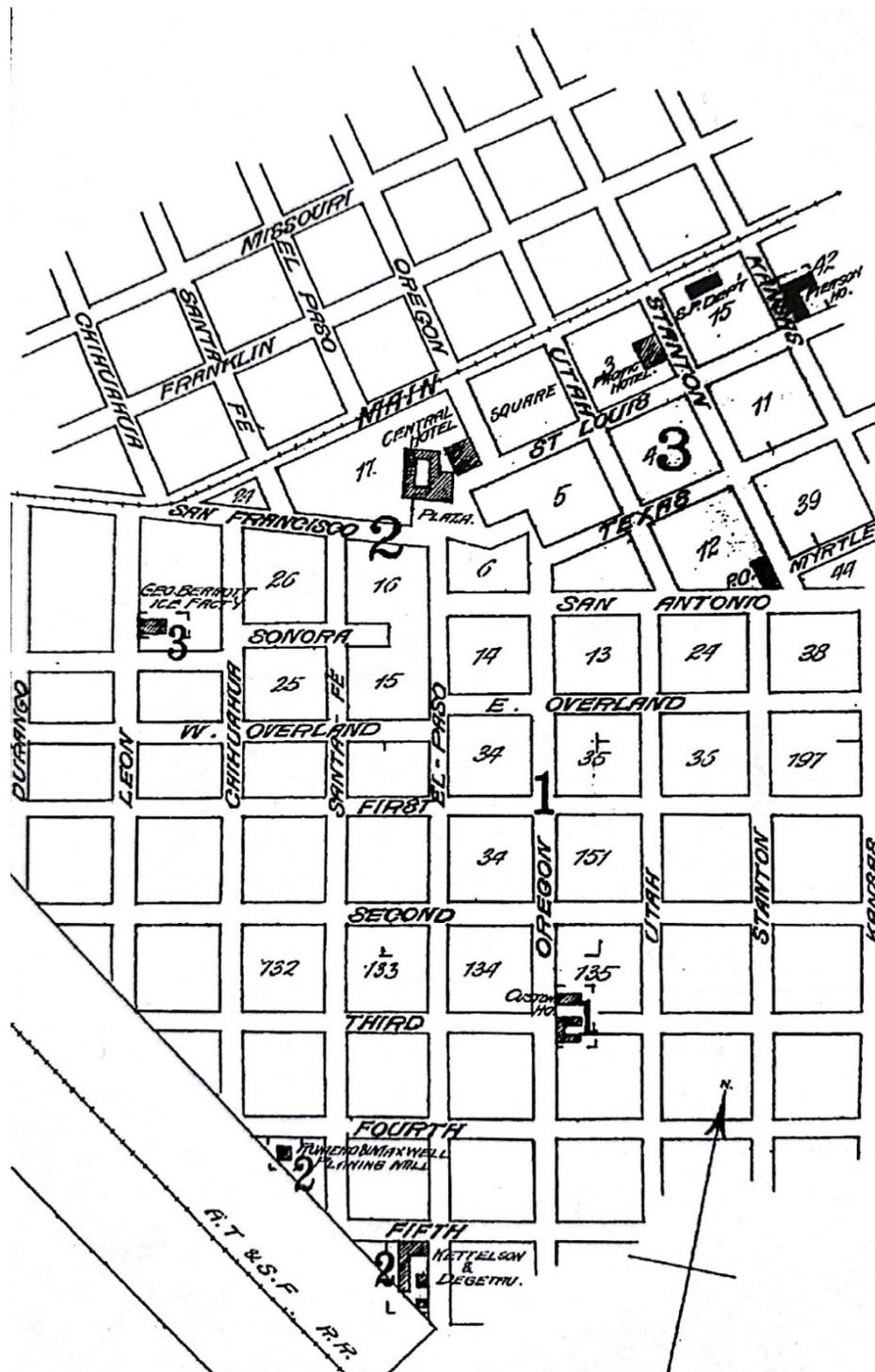


Figure 4.1: El Paso Business District, ca. 1883.
 "El Paso, Texas [map]" (Digital Sanborn Maps 1867-1970, 1883), ProQuest,
<http://sanborn.umi.com/tx/8514/dateid-000001.htm?CCSI=985n>.

It includes five lots in a row along the north side of lot 5 facing St. Louis Street that are clearly designated as “Chinese Stores” and “Laundries” on the map. The row of buildings is set off from the street by approximately ten yards, enough that they are not visible from the angle of the image in figure 4.2. The buildings themselves are approximately forty feet long and ten to twenty feet wide (depending on the specific building). Their layouts all include a “Chinese store” facing the street, a “laundry” partitioned from the store, and living space facing the back of the property. The remaining businesses on the block include a separate Chinese store adjoining a restaurant (it’s unclear if the restaurant is Chinese-owned), two tailors, three saloons, three unmarked dwellings, two Chinese dwellings, three offices, a grocer, a millinery, and a vacant two-story building.



Figure 4.2: El Paso looking southwest from the Pierson Hotel, ca. 1880s.³³³

³³³ In this southwestward looking view from the Pierson Hotel, the Pacific Hotel is in the immediate foreground with the open space of the public square visible over its roof. The two-story building just south of the square blocks the Chinese-inhabited structures from view. They are thirty feet from the road in the empty space between the two-story structure and the one-story structures just west down St. Louis Street.

A second group of Chinese occupied four lots abutting the Overland Corral on the west side of Oregon Street at the intersection of First Street approximately four blocks south of the public square.³³⁴ The one-story, adobe structures (similar construction to the Chinese-occupied buildings along St. Louis Street) housed both laundries and dwellings and contained the only Chinese presence on the block, although it is possible that the grocery next door to the laundries catered to Chinese workers. The remaining buildings on the block included a feed store, boarding house, and stable attached to the corral, two barbers, a saloon, and a collection of structures on the south side of the block that included two fruit stands, a restaurant, and a “restaurant tent.”³³⁵ The Chinese were concentrated in two sections of downtown, but very much surrounded by a diverse set of businesses, workers, and clientele.

The Sanborn cartographers did not identify other ethnic spaces in El Paso in the same way that they identify Chinese spaces. In rare instances, a map will show that a concentration of fruit and vegetable stands is dominated by Mexican vendors but restaurants, laundries, barber shops, etc. are never differentiated. Take for instance the “restaurant tent” mentioned above. There is not a second source to help identify or describe its owner, its purpose, or its clientele. However, Mexicans and Mexican

³³⁴ The second concentration of Chinese occupies the northeast portion of block 34 north on the map (for some reason, the map includes multiple instances of several blocks at different points in the town, including blocks 34 and 15).

³³⁵ “El Paso, Texas [map],” 1883.

Americans dominated the labor and service industry at the end of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century even in the face of increased Chinese competition especially in the laundry industry.³³⁶ It is likely that a Mexican proprietor set up the “restaurant tent” as an outdoor kitchen in the style of Fandango vendors and chili stand operators in order to serve workers and travelers using the nearby corral, stables, and fruit stands. The Chinese certainly, especially in the early years of their El Paso residency, frequented the surrounding Mexican and Mexican American establishments for food and supplies

As early as 1885, Chinese businesses (primarily laundries) began appearing all over the downtown area with a few pockets of higher density nearer the railroad depot. Most Chinese workers resided in their work places, so Chinese residences were dispersed throughout the downtown as well.³³⁷ The typical description of El Paso’s Chinatown included boundaries from Main Street (site of the Southern Pacific Railroad line) on the north, Stanton to the east, down to Fourth Avenue on the south, and finally El Paso Street to the west. However, those boundaries included most of the downtown area, especially

³³⁶ García, *Desert Immigrants*.

³³⁷ Again, there existed small pockets of density much like the businesses. For instance, a group of businesses and residences existed along St. Louis Street near one of the major Chinese dry goods stores, while a separate group of laundries and residences popped up several blocks south along El Paso Street near one of the major (Anglo-owned) hotels. See “El Paso, Texas [map]” (Digital Sanborn Maps 1867-1970, 1888), ProQuest, <http://sanborn.umi.com/tx/8514/dateid-000001.htm?CCSI=985n>; *Directory of the City of El Paso 1888*.

in the earliest days after the railroad entered the city. Chinese residences, businesses, and cultural/social institutions existed among residences and businesses owned or occupied by Anglo-Americans, African-Americans, Mexicans and Mexican-Americans, as well as numerous recent European immigrants.³³⁸ El Paso's downtown was very much a diverse community in the late nineteenth century.

By the end of the 1880s, Chinese businesses and residences had moved progressively south toward the river away from the Southern Pacific Railroad depot (see figure 4.3 below). Between 1883 & 1888, the city of El Paso connected the north and south side of Oregon Street through the middle of block five, a major space of Chinese activity just two blocks from the train depot (compare block five in figure 4.1 and 4.3).³³⁹ Soon after the city completed the street, the U. S. government built its new Customs House on one side while private interests purchased the block opposite the Customs House for the construction of an office building and merchant space. While at least two Chinese merchants had occupied that space, one being the prosperous Sam Hing who had solidified connections to the Chinese Six Companies on the west coast, neither took up space for their enterprises in the new building. Instead, their businesses along with several laundries and a restaurant were either closed or moved south. Later, because his

³³⁸ Farrar, *The Chinese in El Paso*; Fahy, "Borderland Chinese: Community Identity and Cultural Change"; Rhoads, "The Chinese in Texas"; Staski, Edward, "The Overseas Chinese in El Paso: Changing Goals, Changing Realities"; Timmons, *El Paso: A Borderlands History*.

³³⁹ "El Paso, Texas [map]," 1883; "El Paso, Texas [map]," 1885; "El Paso, Texas [map]," 1888; "El Paso, Texas [map]," 1893.

wife felt ostracized by some of the women of El Paso, Hing and his wife would both leave for Ciudad Juarez.³⁴⁰

Laundry owners and employees seem to have been the main victims of this economic-developmental push by the city, by Anglo business owners, and by land speculators as the property value around the depot and especially around nearby San Jacinto Plaza increased. Several Chinese laundries maintained their spaces near the depot because they were attached to or adjacent to hotels that had been constructed to accommodate tourists, immigrants, and other visitors that the railroad would bring to the city. It is likely these hotels hired the Chinese laundries to wash hotel linens at a cheaper price than other laundries in town. These hotel-attached Chinese businesses lasted into the early-twentieth century, but all were gone by 1905.³⁴¹

³⁴⁰ Hing had married a New Orleans creole in El Paso and they had a son. Although, they were economically prosperous, more so than many city leaders, the social climate was such that they moved to Ciudad Juarez where Hing made a second fortune. See W. H. Timmons, *El Paso: A Borderlands History*, Second Edition (El Paso, Texas: Texas Western Press, 1990), 223; Nancy Farrar, *The Chinese in El Paso* (Texas Western Press, 1972), 5–22 for more on Hing.

³⁴¹ “El Paso, Texas [map]” (Digital Sanborn Maps 1867-1970, 1905), ProQuest, <http://sanborn.umi.com/tx/8514/dateid-000001.htm?CCSI=985n>.



Figure 4.3. El Paso Business District, ca. 1888.
 “El Paso, Texas [map]” (Digital Sanborn Maps 1867-1970, 1888), ProQuest,
<http://sanborn.umi.com/tx/8514/dateid-000001.htm?CCSI=985n>.

As the Chinese were pushed south by development, a large group of laundries and residences carved out space along Oregon Street between Overland Street and Second Avenue adjacent to El Paso's red-light district on Utah Street.³⁴² By the turn of the century, this section along Oregon Street is described by writers and historians as the center of El Paso's Chinatown, but it is really the only section that could be identified as a Chinatown as the surrounding streets contain a diverse set of dwellings and businesses occupied by several ethnic groups including the Chinese. In addition, new Chinese immigrants to the city dispersed to several areas including new subdivisions and additions to the east and south of downtown.³⁴³ By 1905, even that Chinese community on Oregon that writers and residents remembered as a Chinatown progressively moved south toward the river as their businesses and residences were pushed further down Oregon Street toward 2nd Street.

I contend that a Chinatown was created over a period of fifteen to twenty years due to pressure from economic development closer to the railroad and town square, named San Jacinto Plaza. The Chinese laundries were pushed to areas of the city where vice ruled at the end of the century. A close examination of both Sanborn maps and city

³⁴² "El Paso, Texas [map]," 1888. The buildings along Utah Street are labeled as "Female Boarding" on most of the Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps.

³⁴³ *El Paso City Directory for the Years 1895-1896*. Numerous examples of Chinese residents living in other parts of the city appear in city directories of the period, including a group of thirteen residents listed under "Ah" of the 1895-96 directory who all lived in either the new Cotton addition or the Southern Pacific Yards.

directories illustrates this process over time. Even so, as the next section describes in-depth, Chinese restaurants do not show up on either Sanborn maps or city directories in the Chinatown section of Oregon Street up to 1905, which suggests that the restaurants were accepted into other parts of the city and that Chinese restaurateurs sought out the high-traffic tourist areas along San Antonio and El Paso Streets.

The intensity of the anti-Chinese sentiment in El Paso came nowhere near to that of parts of the western United States in this period. Although there were factions who criticized the Chinese monopoly on laundries, or walked off the job so as not to work alongside recent Chinese immigrants in the case of Irish railroad workers in Calvert, Texas, the Chinese community in El Paso was not forcibly removed from their homes like the Chinese community of Eureka, California, or massacred in the name of labor, territorial, or cultural disputes as occurred in Mexico during the Mexican Revolution.³⁴⁴ They were, however, subject to public ridicule, a heavier hand in local government enforcement of city code, and named as the primary cause of vice in the city by folks ranting in local newspapers and publication.³⁴⁵

³⁴⁴ Briscoe, “Pershing’s Chinese Refugees in Texas” describes the massacres of Chinese communities that occurred in northern Mexico during the Mexican Revolution; Pfaelzer, *Driven Out* describes the Anglo violence and intimidation that forced the Chinese from their homes in Eureka and other western towns.

³⁴⁵ Farrar, *The Chinese in El Paso*, 13–25; Fahy, “Borderland Chinese: Community Identity and Cultural Change,” 33–34; Rhoads, “The Chinese in Texas,” 175–76; Staski, Edward, “The Overseas Chinese in El Paso: Changing Goals, Changing Realities,” 172–73; “Street Fights, Saloon Brawls Was Daily Routine in Early El Paso,” *El Paso Daily Herald*, October 24, 1929.

Nevertheless, the El Paso Chinese community persevered and continued to slowly grow its population into the 20th century. The Chinese population fluctuated regularly due to its mobility and the “sojourner” goals of many of its group. Some put down roots; and their ancestors can still be found in the region, while others either moved back and forth between China and the United States or simply worked and saved long enough to return home to China, never to return. Sam Mardock is an excellent example of a member of the community constantly in motion. After arriving in the city with the Southern Pacific, he made El Paso his home base while he traveled the state of Texas, working various jobs with the railroad company and eventually the United States government. In between trips he worked for restaurants and ranches, while gambling regularly in El Paso.³⁴⁶ He eventually returned to China in the mid-1890s where he married and lived for over a decade before returning to Texas and settling as a fairly prosperous business owner in Tyler.³⁴⁷

In El Paso’s first city directory (1886), only thirty Chinese were listed as employed in the city.³⁴⁸ It is likely that number is inaccurate and the actual number of Chinese living in El Paso at this time was much higher. An article from the El Paso Daily Herald that chronicled the memories of local lawyer William Bridgers notes that in the

³⁴⁶ Julian MarDock, *The First of Many: The Story of a Pioneering Chinese Family Who Lived in Texas for One Hundred Years*, 17–22.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 23–36.

³⁴⁸ C. A. Gould & Co., *General Directory of the City of El Paso for 1886-1887*.

1880s there was “a considerable colony of them [Chinese] in an adobe building...[that] must have accommodated at least a hundred or more.”³⁴⁹ It is difficult to trust a fifty-year-old memory, but when Bridgers account is coupled with Sanborn Fire Insurance maps from the 1880s that notate numerous locations for Chinese dwellings across the downtown area that could accommodate many more than thirty immigrant Chinese, one must question the directory numbers.³⁵⁰

The Southern Pacific had completed the main portion of the southern transcontinental route by 1883, and most of the Chinese workers had been dismissed by 1886.³⁵¹ Although much of the Southern Pacific work force returned to more familiar territory in the West or simply completed their time in the U.S. and returned home, many stayed behind in the rapidly expanding railroad cities and towns of Texas in search of work and to escape the much more hostile climate for the Chinese in the West.³⁵² Certainly, obtaining accurate information about the very mobile Chinese residents proved difficult. In addition, the language barrier required that an interpreter be present when speaking with residents. Collecting accurate information on a somewhat itinerant foreign

³⁴⁹ “Street Fights, Saloon Brawls Was Daily Routine in Early El Paso.”

³⁵⁰ “El Paso, Texas [map],” 1883.

³⁵¹ The Southern Pacific Railroad Company actively built road spurs off of the main line to places like Eagle Pass and Del Rio until later in the decade.

³⁵² Rhoads, “The Chinese in Texas,” 172.

population proved to be a major chore and possibly not a task publishers were interested in getting right.

The discrepancies and the publishers' attitudes toward accurately gathering information regarding the Chinese residents is explained somewhat in the 1888 directory wherein the publisher explains that "the Mexican population not being accustomed to directories were loath to give names and information, and the Chinese could only be reached through an interpreter, while many engaged in questionable pursuits avoided the canvassers and could be reached only after the loss of much time and at great annoyance."³⁵³ The publishers qualify their work with a fairly rational assessment of the futility of claiming the absolute accuracy of directories of this sort in general, and especially in El Paso "as daily changes are going on, but a carefully compiled [directory] can be nearer correct than any other medium for collecting names and locations."³⁵⁴ I tend to agree on the point that the directories can be near correct in the case that they offer information that makes them useful as historical documents about the communities they describe. However, it should be noted that the information within had been compiled for a specific group of people mostly in the merchant class as a way to promote and boost the city's reputation and economic prospects and in turn generate revenue for its businesses.

As described earlier by Bridgers, the first Chinese to arrive in El Paso found lodging in a series of buildings along the south side of St. Louis Street across from San

³⁵³ *Directory of the City of El Paso 1888*, 8.

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

Jacinto Plaza, which at the time was the city dump. The main building occupied by Chinese notated on the map looks to be approximately 2,500 square feet according to the map scale. It included space for a laundry operation in the back of the building. The lot behind the building seems to be open space leading to another smaller Chinese dwelling that nearly bumps up against the buildings facing Texas Street on the other side of the block. It was common for the Chinese to nail extra beds to the walls or to sleep in shifts so that more of them could share the same accommodations to reduce living expenses.³⁵⁵ It is likely that the early Chinese in El Paso organized their dwellings in such arrangements.

From the outset, the El Paso Chinese engaged in a number of occupations. Like Chinese communities in San Francisco and throughout California, Chinese residents in El Paso also opened or worked laundries and restaurants as the primary forms of employment outside of railroad construction. Those two occupations certainly dominated the working life of the El Paso Chinese community in the early years, although truck farming and dry goods merchandising became major avenues for employment into the 20th century as well.³⁵⁶

The 1886 directory as noted above listed thirty Chinese as being employed in the city. Of that number, 60% owned a laundry business or was employed in the laundry business; Chinese residents owned thirteen of the fifteen laundries listed in the directory.

³⁵⁵ Staski et al., *Beneath the Border City: Urban Archaeology in Downtown El Paso*, 1984.

³⁵⁶ Rhoads, "The Chinese in Texas," 173.

In sum, eighteen launderers worked in thirteen businesses. Restaurant owners and employees made up 23% of the documented Chinese work force in El Paso, while the remainder of the residents broke down as two merchants, one domestic servant, one clerk (who worked for a merchant), and one railroad inspector. In 1886, Chinese restaurant owners controlled three of the twelve restaurants in town, while six total residents worked in the food service industry (including the three owners).³⁵⁷

In 1888, the *El Paso Times* published another city directory for El Paso. Due to new Chinese immigrants moving in monthly as well as a bit more sophistication and experience on the part of the canvassers, the directory documented 187 members of the Chinese working population. The publishers themselves (as noted earlier) are clear in telling the reader that the number is low and does not accurately reflect the Chinese population. However, the information that it does provide shows that once again and as would be the case into the 20th century when industrial washers became popularized, the Chinese dominated the laundry business. Of the 187 working residents listed in the directory, 48% or 90 of them owned or worked in a laundry. There are fourteen laundry enterprises listed in 1888 and the Chinese owned all of them.³⁵⁸ In 1907, after steam laundries were introduced and had gained popularity, Chinese launderers still owned twelve of the sixteen in the city.³⁵⁹

³⁵⁷ C. A. Gould & Co., *General Directory of the City of El Paso for 1886-1887*.

³⁵⁸ *Directory of the City of El Paso 1888*.

³⁵⁹ Rhoads, "The Chinese in Texas," 173.

EL PASO CHINESE FOODWAYS

The 1888 directory is the first evidence of Chinese moving significantly into the El Paso food industry. Some of the earliest Chinese restaurants in San Francisco and other parts of California had mixed reactions from Americans who dined at their restaurants. It has been shown that the earliest Chinese immigrants in California served food in their restaurants that could be found in their home regions of China. They adapted quickly to American palates, however. By the time Chinese immigrants began running restaurants in El Paso, Chinese establishments across the West were serving food mostly found in American Chophouses.³⁶⁰ The 1888 El Paso directory lists fifteen restaurants in the city not including the restaurant at the Grand Hotel and other hotels that operated their own restaurants. In addition to those sixteen, residents listed addresses for five other operations not listed under the business directory. In all, evidence of twenty-one restaurants shows up in the 1888 directory, seven of which were owned by Chinese residents.³⁶¹ The Chinese influence on restaurant culture in El Paso only continued to

³⁶⁰ Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat*, 102–03.

³⁶¹ *Directory of the City of El Paso 1888*, 126. In addition to the seven Chinese restaurants, three others without names are mentioned in the directory but not listed as businesses. It is likely these three were operated by Chinese residents as well. Further, of the non-Chinese owned establishments, two list Chinese cooks. In sum, of the twenty-one restaurants noted in 1888, twelve were either owned by or employed Chinese residents of El Paso.

grow into the 20th century as the 1900 El Paso directory lists the Chinese owning twelve of the city's twenty three restaurants.³⁶²

Not only restaurants, but grocers and truck farmers began significant operations in the late 1880s. The directory lists eleven residents as either gardeners or farmers.³⁶³ These growers were likely truck farmers who maintained small plots and then delivered their produce to residences around town in wagons and carts. Some larger operations supplied grocers as well, but most of the farmers in and around the city operated small-scale gardens and/or orchards. Groceries opened earlier than most businesses in new Chinese communities along the rail, but dwindled in importance as dry goods operations made their connections with the West Coast and China in order to import familiar foods into communities. Once the merchant with connections established himself in the community, he could usually take on the role of grocer as well.³⁶⁴

It is important to dwell on these merchant connections to the United States west coast and China for a moment. The traditional foods available to Chinese workers had been widely reported in contemporary nineteenth-century pieces as well as notated later by historians. Early contemporary reports establish that these connections to the Chinese homeland were made rather quickly upon establishing a community in San Francisco. John David Borthwick, a traveler from Scotland reported that during his stay in

³⁶² Fahy, "Borderland Chinese: Community Identity and Cultural Change," 60.

³⁶³ *Directory of the City of El Paso 1888*.

³⁶⁴ Fahy, "Borderland Chinese: Community Identity and Cultural Change," 55.

California (1851-54) prospecting for gold, Chinese stores in the cities and among mining camps were “stocked with hams, tea, dried fish, dried ducks, and other very nasty-looking Chinese eatables, besides copper pots and kettles, fans, shawls, chessmen, and all sorts of curiosities.”³⁶⁵ In his study of the manuscript records of the U. S. Customs House in San Francisco, Robert Spier found shipment receipts from Hong Kong as early as 1852 that included “oranges, pumelos, dry oyster, shrimps, cuttle fish, mushrooms, dry bean curd, bamboo shoots, narrow leaved greens, yams, ginger, sugar, rice, sweetmeats, sausage, dry duck, eggs, dry fruit, salt ginger, salt eggs” among others that included, tea oil, dry turnips, bettlenut, orange skins, kumquat, duck liver, melon seed, dried duck kidneys, minced turnips, shrimp soy, chestnut flour, birds’ nests, fish fins, arrowroot, tamarind, dried persimmons, dried guts, bean sauce, lily seed, beche de mer, Salisburia seed, taro, and seaweed.³⁶⁶

The level of loyalty that Chinese workers held toward the wares and food provided by Chinese merchants is condemned as the primary reason for contempt by one American merchant in the California gold mines. In a rant describing Chinese “sojourners” as taking from America and providing nothing in return, Hinton Helper relates that the only items the Chinese purchase from American merchants are “their mining implements and

³⁶⁵ Borthwick, *Three Years in California*, 75.

³⁶⁶ Robert F. G. Spier, “Food Habits of Nineteenth-Century California Chinese,” *California Historical Society Quarterly* 37, no. 1 (March 1958): 80. Beche de mer is the French term for sea cucumber and Salisburia seed is the seed of the Ginkgo tree.

boots.”³⁶⁷ These trade connections that supplied a steady supply of ingredients and food from China were established early and spread inland as Chinese railroad workers moved eastward with the rails.

A special train car housing a Chinese dry goods and grocery store typically accompanied Chinese railroad workers while constructing the first transcontinental railroad and subsequent railroad in California. A writer for the *New York Tribune* reporting on railroad construction in the San Joaquin Valley noted that this store contained,

Dried oysters, dried cuttle-fish, dried fish, sweet rice, crackers, dried bamboo sprouts, salted cabbage, Chinese sugar (which tasted...like sorghum sugar), four kinds of dried fruits, five kinds of desiccated vegetables, vermicelli, dried sea weed, Chinese bacon...dried meat of the abelona shell, pea-nut oil, dried mushrooms, tea, and rice. They buy also pork of the butcher, and on holidays they eat poultry...³⁶⁸

These specialized train cars accompanied Chinese workers in Texas as well. Accounts of the workers in Calvert described them as aloof with “their own Chinese foremen...they lived at their own camps and ate their own kind of food, consisting of rice, pork, dried

³⁶⁷ Hinton R. Helper, *The Land of Gold, Reality versus Fiction* (Baltimore: Henry Taylor, Sun Iron Building, 1855), 86–96.

³⁶⁸ Charles Nordhoff, *California: For Health, Pleasure, and Residence: A Book for Travellers and Settlers* (Harper & Brothers, 1873), 190; quoted in Coe, *Chop Suey*, 137–38.

fish, vegetables, and tea.”³⁶⁹ An archaeological investigation of a railroad workers’ camp in Val Verde County, Texas, concluded as well that the large Chinese work force continuing the Southern Pacific line in 1882 primarily ate food imported from China with some processed meats (especially beef) to supplement the camp in between shipments.³⁷⁰

In an early 1980s archaeological dig of El Paso’s Cortez Hotel parking lot, archaeologists likewise recovered thousands of artifacts that tell something of a story of Chinese immigrants who had resided on the block at the end of the nineteenth century.³⁷¹ Just like most of the early Chinese businesses and residences in El Paso, the property was located just across an empty lot from the Southern Pacific train depot. By 1883, it housed two Chinese laundry operations and by 1888, it added a restaurant, although it is unclear what kind and who ran it. By the 1890s, there were two hotels on the southern end of the property, both with dining rooms, and Chinese laundries and residences on the northwest portion of the block facing the alley. The businesses on the northwest block that faced the street included at times a saloon, bike shop, restaurant, sleeping rooms, and a cigar & fruit store.

³⁶⁹ Rhoads, “The Chinese in Texas,” 167.

³⁷⁰ Alton King Briggs, “The Archeology of 1882 Labor Camps on the Southern Pacific Railroad, Val Verde County, Texas” (M.A. thesis, University of Texas, 1974).

³⁷¹ Staski, Edward, “The Overseas Chinese in El Paso: Changing Goals, Changing Realities”; Edward Staski et al., *Beneath the Border City: Urban Archaeology in Downtown El Paso*, vol. 2, 2 vols. (Las Cruces, New Mexico: New Mexico State University, 1984).

The Cortez Hotel was the last in a line of several hotels that had also occupied the southwest corner of the block as far back as 1885 when the Hotel Vendome was being built according to Sanborn Fire Maps. An office building owned by a subsidiary of El Paso Electric owns the Cortez Hotel building today and the parking lot that once housed Chinese laundries, restaurants, and residences is home to a Bank of America branch on the northwest side of the block. The northeast corner of the block is now occupied by a non-denominational Christian church. Finally, the southeast corner of the block, which housed the Pacific Hotel in 1893, is now occupied by a United States Post Office branch.

The archaeologists excavated several sites in the northwest corner of the block where the Bank of America stands now where they found twelve significant features that showed the presence of Chinese residents on the block in the late-nineteenth century; including five refuse pits (purposefully dug), six trash concentrations, and a space that housed an outhouse or some other form of bath or wash house.³⁷² Archaeologists collected thousands of fragments from bowls, plates, cups, bottles, and other containers as well as discarded animal bones and other faunal material. In comparison to other sites that have been excavated across the western United States, the Cortez Hotel parking lot site for the most part is similar in material collected to those other sites and consistent with food and ingredients that the Chinese were known to consume.³⁷³ The collected

³⁷² Staski et al., *Beneath the Border City: Urban Archaeology in Downtown El Paso*, 1984.

³⁷³ See the following sources for examples of other archaeological digs in California and Oregon: W. S. Evans, "Food and Fantasy: Material Culture of the Chinese in California and the

material was clearly different from what might be expected from other cultures' foodways in the El Paso area.

Archaeological evidence at other sites has shown an emphasis on seafood (varying types of both animal and plant-based food), fowl, and pork in the Chinese immigrants diet, which stands in stark contrast to non-Chinese archaeological sites and historical data that show a reliance or preference for beef. The Cortez Hotel site showed similar traits with pork making up the majority of the material examined (approximately 25%), while seafood, fowl, and plant-based material showed up in significant amounts. The main difference between the findings in El Paso and findings in places further west is that beef also makes up a significant portion of the material examined coming in just behind pork.³⁷⁴ Edward Staski, the lead archaeologist on the dig suggests that the presence of beef could indicate that the El Paso Chinese population began acculturating into the dominant Anglo society or that seafood, one of their staples, proved difficult to

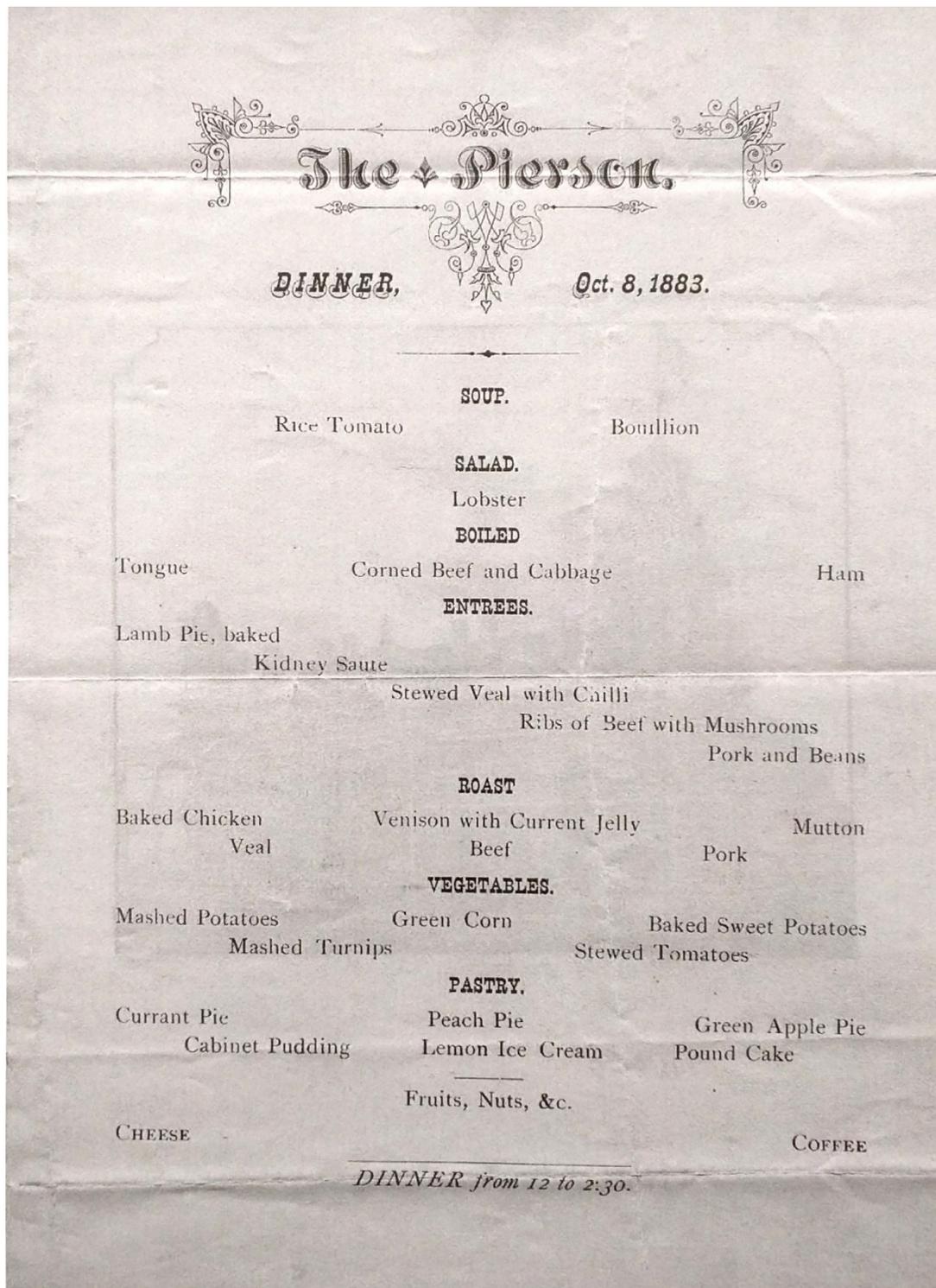
West circa 1850-1900," in *Archaeological Perspectives on Ethnicity in America: Afro-American and Asian American Culture History*, ed. R. L. Schuyler (Amityville, New York: Baywood, 1980), 89–96; J. M. LaLande, "'Celestials' in the Oregon Siskiyou: Diet, Dress, and Drug Use of the Chinese Miners in Jackson County, Ca. 1860-1900," *Northwest Anthropological Research Notes* 16, no. 1 (1982): 1–61; P. E. Langenwaller, "The Archaeology of 19th Century Chinese Subsistence at the Lower China Store, Madera County, California," in *Archaeological Perspectives on Ethnicity in America: Afro-American and Asian American Culture History*, ed. R. L. Schuyler (Amityville, New York: Baywood, 1980), 102–12.

³⁷⁴ Staski, Edward, "The Overseas Chinese in El Paso: Changing Goals, Changing Realities," 181–82.

obtain in El Paso. I think there are too many questions about the inhabitants of the property during the period to make those claims definitively (and Staski would likely agree), but it is definitely the case that the Chinese in El Paso maintained trade networks with goods suppliers back home in China possibly through San Francisco.

So, what of the beef? Two hotels with dining rooms occupied the southern part of the block. Their typical menu would look something like The Pierson Hotel's menu included below as figure 4.4. The Pierson occupied a block just east of the space in question and adjacent to the Southern Pacific depot. Both the Hotel Vendome and the Pacific Hotel would have served similar menus daily. In addition, saloons and other unnamed restaurants occupied space on the block at times likely serving cheaper, American-chophouse fare – a more meat, potatoes, and stewed vegetables type of menu. Even if we could conclusively say that these other places were not sharing the Chinese trash pits, there is still the possibility that the Chinese residents were serving food to customers out of their homes or the laundry itself.³⁷⁵ Most of the Chinese restaurants across the west were serving chophouse-style food at least in addition to their traditional

³⁷⁵ I noticed in comparing some of the maps with the directories that numerous restaurants not listed in the directory showed up on the maps, although there is no way to tell the type of cuisine or the proprietor. In some cases, I found individual Chinese men listed as running a restaurant from addresses that corresponded with residences and/or laundries. See *C. A. Gould & Co., General Directory of the City of El Paso for 1886-1887*; "El Paso, Texas [map]," 1885; *Directory of the City of El Paso 1888*; "El Paso, Texas [map]," 1888.



The Pierson
DINNER, **Oct. 8, 1883.**

SOUP.

Rice Tomato Boullion

SALAD.

Lobster

BOILED

Tongue Corned Beef and Cabbage Ham

ENTREES.

Lamb Pie, baked
 Kidney Saute Stewed Veal with Chilli
Ribs of Beef with Mushrooms
Pork and Beans

ROAST

Baked Chicken Venison with Current Jelly Mutton
 Veal Beef Pork

VEGETABLES.

Mashed Potatoes Green Corn Baked Sweet Potatoes
 Mashed Turnips Stewed Tomatoes

PASTRY.

Currant Pie Peach Pie Green Apple Pie
 Cabinet Pudding Lemon Ice Cream Pound Cake

Fruits, Nuts, &c.

CHEESE COFFEE

DINNER from 12 to 2.30.

Figure 4.4: Dinner (lunch) menu for The Pierson hotel, October 8, 1883.

dishes if not completely replacing them in order to cater to American appetites.³⁷⁶ All could explain why heavier concentrations of beef appear in Chinese refuse pits.

The movement from Chinese restaurants serving traditional foods to Chinese chopouses is key to the story of respatialization in early El Paso. With a few exceptions (see figure 4.5 below), the citizens of El Paso had no problem frequenting Chinese restaurants or hiring Chinese cooks and proprietors to run restaurants that were Anglo-owned. The advertisement in figure 4.5 below was probably referencing the prevalence of Chinese cooks in hotel kitchens by 1888. In that year's directory, at least six Chinese cooks are listed as working in hotel kitchens including the Windsor Hotel and the Grand Central Hotel, both located on El Paso Street, the high-traffic artery of the period.³⁷⁷ By the middle of the 1890s, Chinese cooks had taken over hotel restaurants as proprietors, including Woo Moo Sing who ran the Hotel Vendome dining room on the property of the archaeological investigation noted above.

³⁷⁶ Andrew Coe, *Chop Suey: A Cultural History of Chinese Food in the United States* (Oxford University Press, 2009), 137–38; Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat*, 102–03.

³⁷⁷ *Evans & Worley's Directory of the City of El Paso, Texas, 1896-97* (Evans & Worley, 1896).



Figure 4.5: No Chinese Cookery.
“Advertisement: American Hotel, El Paso, Texas,” El Paso Herald, December 30, 1888, Sunday edition.

By the mid-1890s, it is clear that the Chinese had forged a major presence in the El Paso restaurant industry. Of the twenty two restaurants listed in the 1896-97 directory, nine listed Chinese proprietors, including the American Kitchen, Delmonico, the English Kitchen, the National Dining Hall, and the Union Kitchen.³⁷⁸ In addition, in each of the directories after 1889, the number of Chinese immigrants working in the restaurant industry is consistently around 100 cooks, servers, or proprietors depending on the year – that figures to approximately four Chinese workers per restaurant if we only use numbers from the directories, but it is likely that additional restaurants and additional workers did not show up in the publications.

The English Kitchen became a popular fixture for Anglo diners. Although it changed hands each time an owner returned home to their families in China, it remained a popular business run by various members of the Chinese community. In a 1973 oral history interview, Leigh White Osborn recalled how her family and friends dined at the English Kitchen on special occasions. It was the spot to eat after taking in a performance

³⁷⁸ Ibid. Chinese restaurant owners commonly chose names that indicated western-friendly menus, like the San Francisco Kitchen or the El Paso Restaurant. Delmonico in El Paso in an interesting case. It first shows up on the 1889 directory at 320 El Paso Street with a G. Lemaire as proprietor, but in subsequent directories is listed at 304 San Antonio (Tong Sing, proprietor) and 107 San Francisco (Connors & Hawk, proprietors). It is unclear if the same owner is moving the restaurant around and hiring different proprietors (including Chinese) during this period, or if new owners are stealing the name when a location closes.

at the Myar's Opera House, according to Osborn.³⁷⁹ The popularity and continuing growth of Chinese-owned restaurants in El Paso mitigated the respatialization that Chinese launderers experienced. From 1883 to 1906 most Chinese restaurants listed in directories are located in high-traffic areas along San Antonio and El Paso Streets. No Chinese restaurants were forced to move to the area along Oregon Street between Overland Street and Second Avenue, the area that most considered Chinatown in the early-twentieth century.

CONCLUSION

Even more so than San Antonio, the railroad significantly affected the demographic, population size, and geographic organization of El Paso. While El Paso had always been a crossroads and stopover for travelers, the railroad accentuated this aspect of the region. Many of the Chinese railroad workers who built the Southern Pacific Railroad into the city in 1881, initially settled into areas near the railroad depot forming a small community that would grow slightly over the ensuing decade. The Chinese immediately staked their claim in the laundry business and soon dominated the market by opening their businesses near the railroad depot and hotels nearby. By the middle of the 1880s, Chinese restaurateurs began opening establishments in and around high-traffic

³⁷⁹ Leigh White Osborn, Interview 81, transcript, interview by J. A. Hovious, April 3, 1973, Oral History Collection, Special Collections, The University of Texas at El Paso Library.

areas also near the railroad line, hotels, and downtown shops and saloons along El Paso Street.

The earliest Chinese immigrants into the San Francisco area during the Gold Rush also opened restaurants, at first for their fellow countrymen but then later serving customers from the United States and other countries. While the reception to their food by western customers was initially one of mild acceptance – some liked it and some did not – growing anti-Chinese sentiment largely caused by labor issues forced Chinese cuisine back into their own communities. Anti-Chinese activists used Chinese food as a symbol of inferiority and uncleanness, which helped build support for the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882.

Chinese restaurateurs across the West adapted to this highly racist, discriminatory environment by cooking and serving mostly western fare in American-style chopouses. Rather than serve Chinese food to customers, proprietors served beef and other meats, potatoes, and stewed vegetables. Contrary to stereotypes pushed by anti-Chinese factions, customers praised these Chinese-owned, American Chopouses and clean and efficiently run. They were typically cheaper than their American counterparts and became popular across the West. By the time Chinese immigrants began opening restaurants in El Paso, the chophouse was the primary style they chose in order to cater to the mostly Anglo customers moving to or passing through the city.

Similar to the elimination of public space that made it difficult and ultimately impossible for chili stands to operate in San Antonio, the Chinese also underwent a geographical shift that forced their businesses and homes from prime space to space

located outside of pedestrian traffic zones. Shortly after the federal government passed the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the El Paso business community and city leaders, mostly through land speculation, city development, and law enforcement pressure managed to push the Chinese community south to a section of the city that housed stables and the Red Light District. By 1895, most Chinese laundries, opium dens, residences, and other businesses were located in a two block strip of Oregon Street between Overland Street and Second Street.

Chinese restaurateurs did not face this same fate and managed to maintain businesses in different, mostly high-traffic areas of the city. In opening restaurants that were familiar to mainly Anglo eaters, the Chinese restaurateurs managed to keep their businesses in areas very close to hotels, the railroad depot, and shopping areas along El Paso Street. While the El Paso Chinese Chophouses did not gain the same level of notoriety as San Antonio's chili stands, they were popular. By the middle of the decade in the 1890s, the Chinese had already made a significant impression on the El Paso restaurant industry. For the next few decades, Chinese restaurateurs dominated El Paso's restaurant industry consistently owning more than half of the restaurants in town.

Conclusion

On the morning of September 18, 2012, the Houston City Council held a hearing to discuss regulatory changes to allow food trucks, or mobile food units (MFUs) to operate in the downtown area. The main issues at hand were the strict rules limiting the use of propane by mobile food units in the downtown area, the restriction on seating outside MFUs, and the requirement that a MFU not sell food within sixty feet of other unites. The city's sustainability director, Laura Spanjian proposed three main changes to regulations imposed upon food trucks operating in Houston – she argued that the city should allow MFUs with propane tanks at forty pounds and under into downtown areas, allow limited seating nearby or between MFUs, and eliminate the proximity restriction for MFUs as long as a fire safety officer was available for every four closely-situated units.³⁸⁰

While the safety of using propane gas tanks in densely populated sections of a city is certainly a reasonable discussion for a city council to undertake, many meeting

³⁸⁰ Katharine Shilcutt, "Terrorist Attacks, Drugs and Danger: Why City Council Doesn't Want Food Trucks Downtown," *Houston Press*, September 20, 2012, <http://www.houstonpress.com/restaurants/terrorist-attacks-drugs-and-danger-why-city-council-doesnt-want-food-trucks-downtown-6415360>; See also, Renee Lee, "Food Truck Fight Hits Speed Bump," *Houston Chronicle*, September 19, 2012, <http://www.chron.com/news/houston-texas/article/Food-truck-fight-hits-speed-bump-3875607.php>; Sarah Rufca, "Food Trucks as Terrorist Weapons? Debate over Rule Changes Attract Bun B, Restaurant Defenders & Strange Logic," *CultureMap Houston*, September 18, 2012, <http://houston.culturemap.com/news/restaurants-bars/09-18-12-food-trucks-as-terrorist-weapons-intense-debate-over-rule-changes-attracts-bun-b-restaurant-defenders-strange-log/>, for other perspectives on the conflict.

attendees were surprised at some of the city council members' statements against the deregulation of downtown mobile food units. Much of the public discussion leading up to the meeting contained an undercurrent of a contest between a strong, established, brick-and-mortar-restaurant lobby backed by the Greater Houston Restaurant Association and a small but vocal and influential set of chef-driven, food truck owners represented by Mobile Food Unit Houston, a collection of about forty prominent MFUs out of the over 900 operating in Houston.³⁸¹ While the MFU owners sought to tap into a new market with a readily available clientele during the day, advocates on the side of the brick-and-mortar restaurants worried that the MFUs would create more competition in the downtown area than the market could sustain. The City Council, however, took the discussion in several new directions.

In addition to potential fire-safety issues and the increased competition that brick-and-mortar restaurants would endure, council members speculated that the MFUs might be selling illegal items including illegal drugs in addition to the food found on their

³⁸¹ See Reggie Coachman, "Let's Keep the Regulations on Food Trucks in the City," *Houston Chronicle*, September 20, 2012, sec. Opinion, <http://www.chron.com/opinion/outlook/article/Let-s-keep-the-regulations-on-food-trucks-in-the-3878736.php>; Charles Kuffner, "The Case against the Food Trucks," *Houston Chronicle*, September 27, 2012, sec. Kuff's World, <http://blog.chron.com/kuffsworld/2012/09/the-case-against-the-food-trucks/>. Also see the websites for both the Restaurant Association and Mobile Food Unit Houston for a little background on the conflict, "GHRA | Greater Houston Restaurant Association," accessed August 4, 2015, <http://ghra.com/>; "Mobile Food Unit Houston," accessed August 4, 2015, <http://www.mfuhouston.com/>.

menus. Council Member Andrew Burks worried about the potential for terrorists to use food trucks as weapons on downtown populations when he commented, "...in the times in which we live in, I think this is totally outrageous. I'm outraged by that. Because...in these times when people get bombed in embassy attacks and we put this type of bomb directly here in front of us and we know we could be causing trouble." He continues with equally confusing phrasing,

We're talking about competition here -- there's no competition here. There's danger here. If it were competition and only competition, it wouldn't be dangerous. So what I'm saying is that I don't like this at all. I'll be outright with you: I'm not going to vote for it. I went to Washington D.C. in March this year and saw food trucks lined up and hundreds of people were lined up inside the park buying their food. And the trucks were not even the same. It looked like one raggedy truck and one nice truck and another raggedy, small truck. Is this what we want in downtown Houston? Is this the way we want our city to look?³⁸²

The councilman's comments, while not particularly clear, in the very least pit a new and threatening mobile way of operating a restaurant against the established idea of the downtown static restaurant. The undercurrent is certainly classist with his description of the "raggedy" trucks mucking up the downtown scenery and likely racist if placed in

³⁸² Quoted in Shilcutt, "Terrorist Attacks, Drugs and Danger: Why City Council Doesn't Want Food Trucks Downtown."

the context of late-twentieth-century sentiment toward a more common type of food truck that catered to the working classes and was very commonly operated by new immigrants.

One reporter keenly theorized that the city council was operating with the image of this working-class, post-World-War-II version of the food truck commonly and derogatorily referred to as a “roach coach” and also frequently a “taco truck.”³⁸³ A more accurate term for the MFU might be “catering truck,” since they are largely used to transport previously prepared food to locations for customer purchase.

The reporter is likely correct in her assessment of the city-council members and their understanding of the mobile food units that were under debate, but she herself goes on to clearly make a distinction between unsavory “roach coaches” and the supposedly clean, modern, chef-driven food trucks at issue and so popular in foodie culture. The main point of distinction in this dichotomy is not the quality of the food, although that subjective measure might hold more water for many; it is the potential for food poisoning stemming from perceived unsafe food handling and/or the uncleanliness of the MFU. It is probable that a majority of the population would make the same distinction in this case, but the fact is this belief rests primarily upon urban legend. Certainly catering trucks fail inspections, but so do the MFUs discussed by the city council, and the brick-and-mortar restaurants that pushed for restrictions. What degree do pre-conceived notions of race and class proliferate these beliefs about catering trucks? Forms of this question were considered regularly throughout this dissertation. The MFU controversy in Houston is

³⁸³ Ibid.

reminiscent of the final removal of the chili stands from San Antonio's plazas due to the imagined public health issues in 1930s, as well as the narratives of uncleanness that Chinese restaurateurs had to navigate during the late-19th century.

A couple of hours west of Houston in Austin, the movement of middle and upper-middle class households into historically Latino and Black neighborhoods has been the subject of recent controversy and debate. The word "gentrification" is employed regularly in this debate over space.³⁸⁴ British sociologist, Ruth Glass, first used the word "gentrification" to describe middle-class Londoners moving into residential areas previously occupied by the working class in the early 1960s.³⁸⁵ Since then the term and the economic, sociological, and cultural processes it describes have been hotly debated in academic circles.³⁸⁶ By the late 1990s, the term's original usage that largely described demographic changes in residential areas had shifted to include changes in commercial and business services offered in specific areas as well as the types of urban planning and

³⁸⁴ "Best Gentrification in Austin, TX," *Yelp*, accessed August 13, 2015, http://www.yelp.com/search?find_desc=gentrification&find_loc=Austin%2C+TX; "Cost of East Austin Transformation into a Hip Neighborhood," *MyFoxAustin*, accessed August 13, 2015, <http://www.myfoxaustin.com/story/22212259/cost-of-east-austin-transformation-into-a-hip-neighborhood>; "Community Land Trusts and the Fight Against Gentrification," *The Atlantic*, accessed August 13, 2015, <http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2015/07/affordable-housing-always/397637/>.

³⁸⁵ Ruth Glass, *London: Aspects of Change* (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1964).

³⁸⁶ Japonica Brown-Saracino, ed., *The Gentrification Debates: A Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2013); Neil Smith and Peter Williams, eds., *Gentrification of the City* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

development conducted by governments.³⁸⁷ However, the main consequence of the processes remained the same; ultimately, the middle and upper class, usually Anglos, displaced a minority working class (usually from an urban area) thereby disconnecting their cultural and social practices from the space in which they had been performed.

Walk through East Austin today and you can easily see gentrification at work. New, modern homes are going up regularly in the place of smaller homes that have been in some of the neighborhoods for nearly a century. Lots covered with food trucks and trailers, and chef-driven restaurants appear monthly in the neighborhoods. The middle class is moving in and it has caused friction. Recent clashes over space display hints of the methods employed by city leaders in both San Antonio and El Paso at the end of the nineteenth century. In February of 2015, in advance of Austin's annual SXSW conference, one landlord demolished a piñata store to the surprise of the tenants who had just paid their rent.³⁸⁸ The backlash from the East Austin community was immediate,

³⁸⁷ Neil Smith, *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City* (New York: Routledge, 2005); Lance Freeman, *There Goes the Hood: Views of Gentrification from the Ground Up* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006); David Ley, *The New Middle Class and the Remaking of the Central City* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

³⁸⁸ Shelley Seale, "Conflicting Stories Surround Demolition of East Austin Piñata Store," *CultureMap Austin*, February 15, 2015, <http://austin.culturemap.com/news/city-life/02-15-15-east-austin-pinata-store-jumpolin-demolition-property-owner/>; Roque Planas, "Destroying A Family-Owned Piñata Shop Totally Backfired Against This Company," *Huffington Post: Latino Voices*, March 20, 2015, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/03/20/pinata-shop-austin_n_6905968.html; M. L. Nestel, "Austin Moguls Bulldozed Mom & Pop Pinata Shop," *The Daily Beast*, March 20, 2015, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/03/20/sxsw-moguls-bulldozed-mom-pop-pinata-shop.html>.

forcing the landlord to publicly defend their actions. In describing the steps the landlord took to try to evict the tenants and ultimately file for a permit to demolish, the landlord painted the tenants as drug dealers, hinting that they were selling more than piñatas. He later described the situation to one publication as follows: “Say you have a house that was infested by roaches... You have to clean that up.”³⁸⁹ His sentiment is very similar to that used by El Paso city leaders to describe Chinese communities in the city.

While the processes of private enterprise and public policy working together to displace the working class did not become known as gentrification until the post-World War II landscape of London experienced its effects, elements of those processes have shown up in past periods of urban development in the United States and other areas around the world. The word “gentrification” did not show up in the late-nineteenth-century American vocabulary, but similar forces were at work in moving the Chinese into an El Paso Chinatown and the San Antonio chili stands out of the plazas. Today, in similar fashion, Austin and Houston are selling images that exclude some folks from participation in local economies, much like city leaders did in the growing cities of late nineteenth-century Texas.

Both San Antonio and El Paso grappled with major changes brought on by the railroad and heightened westward migration from the East Coast. The railroad brought spatial changes to both communities in shifting uses of space, higher property values, and growth. It created new social realities focused on rapid development and tourism, forcing

³⁸⁹ Seale, “Conflicting Stories Surround Demolition of East Austin Piñata Store.”

residents to create new strategies to negotiate these new realities. In order to take advantage of the opportunities presented by modern processes of economic development, Mexican food vendors moved into San Antonio's plazas in force, selling all manner of foods, gaining national attention, and spawning the myth of the "chili queen." In addition, Chinese restaurateurs opened restaurants near the El Paso Southern Pacific Railroad train depot and other densely used sectors of the city, dominated the laundry business, and endured public campaigns to move them out of the business district in downtown El Paso.

Both groups used foodways to attach value to the spaces they inhabited and moved through. In San Antonio the arrival of the railroad brought mobs of tourists and immigrants from the Northeast and the South, and Mexican chili-stand vendors transformed Military Plaza into their own restaurant space in order to serve the new populations. The plazas became gathering spots those interested in what they perceived as the exotic experience of the chili stands. The al fresco restaurateurs, as one booster described, cooked and served their food usually as family units who staked out a small space in the plaza and organized it into a makeshift restaurant complete with open flame, full place settings, lanterns, and a family-style table configuration.³⁹⁰

Unfortunately, within a decade of the railroad's arrival and regardless of the popularity of the chili stands, city leaders appropriated Military Plaza for a new city hall

³⁹⁰ William Corner, ed., *San Antonio de Bexar: A Guide and History* (San Antonio, Texas: Bainbridge & Corner, 1890).

in their quest to transform San Antonio from a Spanish colonial town to a modern American city. The new building forced the chili stands into other plazas further west of the downtown area – places traditionally occupied by Mexican and Mexican American households. Chili-stand vendors would later appropriate their own space on Alamo Plaza the new center of commerce in the city and the home of the Anglo symbol for a mythologized past, the Alamo.³⁹¹ However, chili-stand vendors did not conform to dominant narratives about American food or restaurant space and thus their food space in the plazas was continually threatened and the chili stand and its vendors marginalized. Following a new round of attacks by the public health department and the creation of health codes in the 1920s and 30s (predating the similar debates at the Houston city council described above), chili stands were outlawed in the plazas. Chili stands ceased to exist as part of the quest by Anglo-residents of San Antonio to eliminate a racialized present while creating a romantic fantasy past.³⁹²

San Antonio chili-stand vendors navigated the prevailing narrative definition of the restaurant by performing with success another version of the restaurant outside of that

³⁹¹ Richard Flores, *Remembering the Alamo: Memory, Modernity, and the Master Symbol* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002).

³⁹² Jeffrey M. Pilcher, “Who Chased Out the Chili Queens? Gender, Race, and Urban Reform in San Antonio, Texas, 1880-1943,” *Food and Foodways* 16, no. 3 (2008): 173–200; Donna R. Gabaccia and Jeffrey M. Pilcher, “‘Chili Queens’ and Checkered Tablecloths: Public Dining Cultures of Italians in New York City and Mexicans in San Antonio, Texas, 1870-1940s,” *Radical History Review* Spring 2011, no. 110 (2011): 109–26; Flores, *Remembering the Alamo*; Daniel Arreola, *Tejano South Texas: A Mexican American Cultural Province* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002).

narrative. They created open-air restaurants in the plazas that proved successful, but they ultimately lost their chili stands because they did not conform to dominant ideas regarding the definition of the restaurant, nor did they fit the narrative that San Antonio leaders wanted to tell about the city's past.

In El Paso, Chinese workers who had built the first transcontinental line across the middle of the country also labored on the second as it passed through El Paso before meeting the Texas and Pacific in Sierra Blanca, Texas. After the completion of the work, over 300 of the workers stayed in El Paso, living primarily in the downtown area. By the mid-1880s, they dominated the laundry and by the 1890s they made a major dent in the restaurant industry as well owning over half the restaurants in the city in the early twentieth century.

Chinese restaurant owners attached value to their spaces by adapting their foodways to the tastes of their customers. While chili stands progressively lost their public space to dominant groups, Chinese restaurant owners continued to dominate that industry in El Paso into the 1930s. Chinese restaurant owners countered stories about their uncleanliness and vice by adopting that same prevailing narrative definition of the restaurant that ultimately made Harvey Houses so popular. They served recognizable, comfortable food, maintained a clean space, and practiced exceptional service. They avoided marginalization for the most part due to their adaptability in conforming to predictable "American" food in recognizable "American" spaces. The chili-stand al fresco restaurateurs in San Antonio and the Chinese restaurant owners in El Paso both

occupied and/or utilized complex, contested, food spaces within their landscapes. Yet, both groups, in different ways, capitalized upon their positions.

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