SABRINA ESCALANTE

LITTLE MEXICO IN THE BLACK HILLS

Mexican Migration and Settlement from 1970 to the 1990s

In the early 1990s, during what historians label as the first large wave of Mexican immigration to the United States, some members of Congress stated that Mexicans shared the brain capacity of pigeons and other "birds of passage," spreading the idea that migrants felt an instinctual need to return to Mexico to "roost."[1] The disparaging remarks were erroneous, as Mexican migrants made the arduous journey, settled in the United States, and began forming vibrant communities.[2] Seeking to escape rural, poverty-stricken communities and find employment to support their families, migrants walked hundreds of miles, with limited water and food, all while facing numerous dangers such as drowning, attacks by wild animals, and hypothermia. By 1990, a Mexican American community centered around the timber industry had been planted in South Dakota's Black Hills. The forests, reminiscent of homelands in the hills of rural Mexico, provided solace and comfort. In the long tradition of South Dakota's immigrant story, a thriving community blossomed in Pennington County as individuals learned English, married local women, started families, encouraged further chain migration, and adapted Mexican culture to the Black Hills.[3]

1. Kelly Lytle-Hernández, *City of Inmates: Justice, Power, and Politics* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), p. 136.

2. My gratitude cannot be expressed enough to the Mexican American community of Pennington County, South Dakota. They answered my questions, shared their stories, and allowed me to convey and place their stories in South Dakota's history.

3. Lori Ann Lahlum, "'Everything was changed and looked strange': Norwegian

Mexican migration has a unique history in the United States.[4] During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the U.S. government tried to control or limit foreign immigration. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, and similar legislation in 1917, urged to keep the American population predominantly white and educated by implementing literacy tests, fees, and hygiene inspections to bar the entrance of prostitutes, inmates, anarchists, epileptics, lunatics, idiots, contract laborers, and potential future convicts. The Act, however, excluded Mexicans from the literacy tests and all entrance fees. Indeed, the United States encouraged Mexican immigration, even building labor recruitment centers in cities along the border, such as Ciudad Juárez. Historian Rafael Alarcón notes that the Chinese immigrant labor force dwindled as Mexico became the primary recruiting country for American employers.[5]

In 1921, the National Origins Quota System (NQQS) established a whites-only immigration system, with quotas based on 2 percent of the U.S. population in 1890.[6] Congress reissued the NQQS from 1924 until 1942. The 1924 iteration created strict quotas for specific countries, such as China and countries in South America, making Europe the only valid root of immigration. Congress appointed the U.S. Border Patrol to enforce the immigration laws. The Act, as before, ex-

Women in South Dakota," *South Dakota History* 35, no. 3 (Fall 2005): 189–216; Rex C. Myers, "An Immigrant Heritage: South Dakota's Foreign Born in the Era of Assimilation," *South Dakota History* 19, no. 2 (Summer 1989): 134–55; Michael M. Smith, "Beyond the Borderlands: Mexican Labor in the Central Plains, 1900–1930," *Great Plains Quarterly* 1, no. 4 (Fall 1981): 239–51.

4. Mexican migrants did not cross an ocean but merely walked across an invented border to enter the United States, making the term "immigrant" feel unjust. Historian Mae M. Ngai suggests using "The Peopling of America" instead of "Immigration history" to encompass Indigenous peoples and remove negative or racist connotations towards minorities. Despite entering the United States undocumented, these migrants gained citizenship or legal residency as they settled and formed families. *See* Mae M. Ngai, "Immigration and Ethnic History," in *American History Now*, ed. Eric Foner and Lisa McGirr (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011), pp. 358–75.

5. Rafael Alarcón, "History of Mexican Immigration to the United States," filmed 16 June 2020 at Central Valley Immigrant Integration Collaborative, Fresno, Calif., video, 90:39, https://cviic.org/history-of-mexican-immigration-to-the-united-states/; Rafael Alarcón, "U.S. Immigration Policy and the Mobility of Mexicans (1882–2005)," *Migraciones Internacionales* 20, vol. 6, no. 1 (2011): 185–218.

6. Lytle-Hernández, *City of Inmates*, p. 146.

empted Mexicans; companies across the Southwest vehemently opposed the NQQS, and western members of Congress demanded that it include a Mexican exception. At the time, immigration authorities annually counted 100,000 Mexicans entering the United States. The Great Depression soon impacted the influx of Mexican immigration, as many Americans called for deportations to preserve jobs for U.S. citizens.

Two subsequent surges of migration would bring Mexicans to South Dakota. During and after World War II, the Bracero program allowed Mexican migrant laborers to sign temporary agriculture and railroad maintenance contracts.[7] The Bracero program placed four hundred Mexican laborers in South Dakota, where they soon exceeded American farmers' work expectations.[8] Mexican laborers and American farmers often resorted to *El Libro De Mano*, a Spanish-English dictionary produced by the South Dakota Extension Service, to help them communicate.[9]

The Bracero program ended in the late 1960s, beginning a period that historians have termed the "Era of Undocumented Migration."[10] During this period, the Black Hills of South Dakota attracted Mexican men with logging experience, holding various work statuses. Oral histories with numerous members of this community recount the story of its founders and its growth over time.[11] This immigrant story places

7. Jim Norris, *North for The Harvest: Mexican Workers, Growers, and the Sugar Beet Industry* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2009).

8. "Sugar Area Asks Labor," *Sioux Falls* [S.Dak.] *Argus Leader*, 3 Mar. 1942; "Railroads To Get Mexican Workers," *Sioux Falls Argus Leader*, 25 July 1944; Ray Antonen, "Farmers Are Amazed Over Willingness," *Sioux Falls Argus Leader*, 5 Sept. 1944; "Music from Down Mexico Way," *Sioux Falls Argus Leader*, 5 Sept. 1944.

9. South Dakota Extension Service, *Handbook: El Libro De Mano* (Brookings: South Dakota State College, 1942).

10. Rafael Alarcón, "History of Mexican Immigration to US Final CVICC Webinar"; Jorge Durand, Douglas S Massey, and Emilio A. Parred, "The New Era of Mexican Migration to the United States," *Journal of American History* 86, no. 2 (Sept. 1999): 519–36.

11. The foundation of this work relied on oral history interviews with Black Hills community members that fueled my thesis: Sabrina Escalante, "Little Mexico in the Black Hills: A Study of Mexican migration and Settlement From 1970-1990s" (University of South Dakota, 2023). Theses, p. 160.

South Dakota within the larger history of Mexican migration to the Great Plains and the Midwest.[12]

The early 1970s ended a period of economic growth in Mexico that began with World War II. The Mexican government had desperately wanted to build its internal market after the war but prioritized international trade by establishing industrialization programs to encourage export processing. Mexico's urban areas and the northern states of Nuevo Leon and Baja California Sur thrived economically.[13] In contrast, the central states of Michoacán, Guerrero, Oaxaca, Chiapas, and Tabasco developed more slowly in terms of income, infrastructure, education, and quality of life. Men in those states faced a difficult choice: stay in their mother country with their loved ones, in poor living conditions with little job security, or seek opportunity and stability in another country.[14]

South Dakota's Mexican American community has its main roots in Michoacán, a state west of Mexico City and one of the poorest in the country, with many members hailing specifically from Ojos de Agua de Ocampo, a small rural town named for pools of water in the surrounding hills. The Muñoz, Escalante, and Meza families, hailing from Michoacán and neighboring Jalisco, were the first Mexicans to settle in the Black Hills and work in the timber industry.[15] Although

12. *See, for example* Rubén O. Martinez, ed., *Latinos in the Midwest* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2011); Zaragosa Vargas, *Proletarians of the North: A History of Mexican Industrial Workers in Detroit and the Midwest, 1917–1933* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Anna V. Millard and Jorge Chapa, *Apple Pie and Enchiladas: Latino Newcomers in the Rural Midwest* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004); Norris, *North for The Harvest*.

13. Durand, Massey, and Parred, "The New Era of Mexican Migration to the United States," p. 521.

14. Roy Boyd, Maria Eugenia Ibarrarán, and Roberto Vélez-Grajales, *Understanding the Mexican Economy: A Social, Cultural and Political Overview*, (Bingley, U.K.: Emerald Group Publishing, 2018).

15. Juan Escalante, interviewed by Sabrina Escalante, Hill City, S.Dak., 28 Feb. 2022, Interview 14, transcript and recording, author collection; Abraham Romero, interviewed by Sabrina Escalante, Hill City, S.Dak., 27 Feb. 2022, Interview 10, transcript and recording, author collection; Obegario Simental, interviewed by Sabrina Escalante, Hill City, S.Dak., 23 Mar. 2023, Interview 18, transcript, author collection; Maria Socorro Muñoz, interviewed by Sabrina Escalante, Rapid City, S.Dak., 2 Nov. 2022, Interview 1, translated transcript and recording, author collection.

residents of Ojos de Agua de Ocampo loved their "beautiful little ranch on the hills around Zinapecauro," they struggled as rural poverty consumed their little ranches.[16] Men there disdained the Mexican government for failing its citizens.[17] The town lacked running water, indoor plumbing, electricity, and access to national markets. Juan Escalante recalled the hunger he experienced as a child: a family of eight split a piece of bread and soaked it in coffee for breakfast.[18] He and others recalled that at the time, the state's health system offered no help to those who could not afford it, and insurance, if it was available, was unheard of. Many did not know how to apply for health insurance in the 1960s and 1970s. Abraham Romero Barrera migrated to the United States because his mother fell ill, and his family had very little money for her to get medical attention. Many recalled that the hospitals in Mexico "threw out" onto the street people who could not pay for health care.[19]

People in rural Mexico faced an uphill battle to improve their living conditions. Access to education was a significant challenge. Residents of Ojos de Agua de Ocampo attended school in the next city, almost an hour away, not including the twenty-five-minute walk to the bus station. The men enjoyed school and wished they could have graduated, but they all either dropped out to find work to support their families, or their families could not afford the extra expenses of sending their children to school. Jorge Lopez vividly remembers his last assignment. His teacher had given each student a piece of cardboard box with a world map traced onto it and assigned students to label and color each country. The teacher gave the students *sopa de letras*, macaroni alphabet soup letters, to ensure a legible map. Jorge took his map home, eager to show it to his father. When his father arrived home after work, Jorge was distraught to see that mice had eaten the alphabet noodles and started shredding the cardboard. He shared this story with his children to motivate them to put effort into

16. Maria Socorro Muñoz, interviewed by Sabrina Escalante; Boyd, Ibarrarán, and Vélez-Grajales, *Understanding the Mexican Economy*, p. 24.

17. Juan Escalante, interviewed by Sabrina Escalante; Abraham Romero, interviewed by Sabrina Escalante.

18. Juan Escalante, interviewed by Sabrina Escalante.

19. Juan Escalante, interviewed by Sabrina Escalante; Abraham Romero, interviewed by Sabrina Escalante.

One common Mexican immigration route to the United States involved crossing the rugged terrain of the Sonoran Desert. This photo was taken from Kitt Peak in the Quinlan Mountains, near Tucson, Arizona.

their education because, unlike him, they have educational opportunities.[20] Only one person interviewed made it to high school and graduated, and that was a woman. Without an education, these rural Mexican men struggled to find work that would provide them livable wages.

While there was plenty of work available, the pay was meager. For instance, the Escalante, Muñoz, and Romero families relied on their small family-owned sawmills for employment. Boys often began working in the sawmill at age six, helping pick up loose material, and began cutting trees as soon as they were strong enough to carry chainsaws.[21] The men clarified that owning the land and sawmills did not mean their families were wealthy; the local timber industry needed aid from Mexico's federal government to make a living off their prod-

20. Jorge Lopez, interviewed by Sabrina Escalante, Hill City, S.Dak., 20 Dec. 2021, Interview 26, transcript and recording, author collection.

21. Juan Escalante, interviewed by Sabrina Escalante; Abraham Romero, interviewed by Sabrina Escalante.

ucts. Moreover, the money these young men earned went directly to their families. All the men interviewed stated that migrating to the United States or moving to a different state within Mexico, hoping to find decent pay, was their last option to support their families.[22] Some individuals moved to cities to find better jobs, preferring to stay in Mexico.

Others were attracted by jobs and better pay in the United States. Networking played a critical role in their success; many had relatives who had already immigrated. Angel Muñoz, for example, faced financial struggles as a child. After completing fifth grade, he sold small gelatins and bread on the street until he found landscaping jobs with his father. Some of his family members had found work in the United States, which eventually influenced Angel to do the same. Readily available jobs as fruit pickers in California and factory workers in Chicago also drew a Latino population.[23] Another man, Obegario Simental, said that anyone could find work only hours after crossing the border.[24] Networking encouraged migration and provided a sense of security. All the men distinctly remembered reaching the age of seventeen and wanting to migrate to the United States. They each began saving money to make the journey across the border.

Migrants took two common routes to the United States: the Rio Grande and the Sonoran Desert. Each presented risks and dangers. Most migrants relied on "coyotes," individuals who knew the complex desert terrain, and much like a coyote had the ability to adapt and make multiple journeys across the border without getting caught. Similarly, *polleros* (from the slang for the professional title of a handler of chickens) smuggled migrants across the border in vehicles, using fake identification cards. Coyotes camped near the border to be more accessible to migrants, and the cost to hire a coyote during the 1970s averaged $6,997 pesos ($350 U.S. dollars) per person.[25] Migrants to the Black Hills labeled coyotes as relatively "bad people," who led migrants across the border purely for money, without compassion for others. Various accounts recalled coyotes who abandoned migrants

22. Angel Muñoz, interviewed by Sabrina Escalante, Hill City, S.Dak., 2 Oct. 2022, Interview 7, transcript and recording, author collection.

23. Juan Escalante, interviewed by Sabrina Escalante.

24. Obegario Simental, interviewed by Sabrina Escalante.

25. Abraham Romero, interviewed by Sabrina Escalante.

to the desert with no resources after receiving the fee. Coyotes even held some migrants for ransom. Abraham Romero stated that coyotes "preferred to steal from people rather than help them."[26] Without a guide, however, crossing the border was deemed impossible.

Juan Escalante began saving money to migrate at the age of seventeen. In 1971, at age twenty-one, with his family's support he hired a coyote to make the journey across the Rio Grande. He remembered how unprepared he was for the cold. Juan primarily traveled during the night with no flashlight. He vividly remembered the fear of drowning and how he had underestimated the river's current. Panic struck him when the man behind him attempted to climb on his back to escape the powerful currents. Juan considered himself fortunate enough to have made it out of the river; on a later journey, the current swept away one of his cousins.

The Sonoran Desert, spanning southern Arizona, southeastern California, Sonora, Baja California, and the Gulf of California islands, held deadly risks for its travelers. Its landscape includes larger mountains, narrow valleys, and rocky slopes.[27] While some see it as a beautiful habitat for native plant and animal species, the desert has become a deadly crossing point for migrants. Abraham Romero saved money from age seventeen to cross the border at twenty-three. He walked in the Sonoran Desert for days without food or much water to reach California. Waiting under a bridge called "La Libertad," he feared rattlesnake bites. Coyotes suggested using garlic oil or cloves around the ankles to repel snakes. The journey took him almost three weeks, and since the U.S. officials deported him a handful of times, Abraham made the journey across the border on several occasions.

For their troubles, the men found a semblance of job security. At the time, Mexican migrants played a central role in California's agricultural industry, earning money in seasonal harvests to return to Mexico during non-producing seasons.[28] Fruit pickers harvested cherries, corn, grapes, and strawberries. Although the men saved some of their earnings to hire a coyote for their return trip across

26. Abraham Romero, interviewed by Sabrina Escalante.

27. "Sonoran Desert Region," Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum, accessed 21 Mar. 2023. Desertmuseum.org/center/research.php.

28. Alan L. Olmstead and Paul W. Rhode, "A History of California Agriculture," *Giannini Foundation Information Series* 17, no. 1 (Dec. 2017).

the border—and some had work permits and tourist visas—the lack of citizenship status always threatened their security. Border Patrol units visited the fields monthly and frequently deported Mexican workers.[29] Deportation agents once detained Angel Muñoz while he picked fruit on a ladder. He soon memorized the green truck that agents drove to avoid being caught again. Fernando Muñoz remembered that during a raid in 1976, he continued his work despite others fleeing from deportation agents. "Immigration wasn't even looking at me," he said. "I see people running like Hell. And I thought what the heck? And pretty soon I saw somebody, and it was Immigration and they already passed me!"[30] He soon realized what was going on and made a run for it. The patrol caught him, but Fernando's composure and dedication to picking fruit made them believe he was a citizen. Those who were detained frequently returned the following week and continued working until the end of the season. In 1973, however, the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service carried out a special operation, resulting in a series of mass raids on farms and ranches and a significant increase in the detention of Mexican nationals. By 1974, 616,630 Mexicans had been detained and questioned, compared to 44,161 in the previous decade.[31] Undeterred, some Mexican migrant workers from California began to stay longer and "follow the fruit" to find year-round employment.[32]

In 1976, after failing to find fruit-picking work in Oregon, Angel Muñoz, his brother Pasqual Muñoz, and their uncle, Roy Escalante, made their way to Cassville, Montana, to pick cherries. Angel soon met and married a local woman named Barb Butts. Born in the United States, she had Mexican ancestry. Angel, Barb, Pasqual, and Roy followed the fruit for the next two years, traveling between Oregon, California, and Montana. In 1978, Barb's uncle, Frank Davidson, offered Angel a job in the timber industry in the Black Hills. Angel invited Pasqual, Roy, and another relative, Raul, to come along. They

29. Kelly Lytle-Hernández, *Migra!: A History of the U.S. Border Patrol* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), p. 179.

30. Fernando Muñoz, interviewed by Sabrina Escalante, Custer, S.Dak., 23 Mar. 2023, Interview 27, transcript and recording, author collection.

31. Lytle-Hernández, *Migra!*, p. 190.

32. Angel Muñoz, interviewed by Sabrina Escalante.

The Black Hills of South Dakota, seen here, reminded migrants of their homelands in rural Mexico.

finished out the cherry season in Montana, then left for South Dakota in their 1972 Gran Torino, despite knowing little about the state.

The Lakotas and other Indigenous peoples traditionally used the Black Hills' timber resources to construct medicine lodges, large camps, and travois.[33] After Lieutenant Colonel George Armstrong Custer confirmed there was gold in the Black Hills in 1874, the U.S. government reneged on the 1868 treaty guaranteeing the Hills as Lakota territory.[34] Soon a gold rush was on, and as migration surged throughout the Black Hills, so did the need for sawmills to provide lumber to help build towns and support the mining infrastructure. Businessmen built the first sawmill in Custer in 1878.[35] Shortly thereafter, sawmills began operating in Hill City; by 1890 Hill City had become a thriving lumber town. Settlers in fact overbuilt the sawmill infrastructure, and many sawmills faced a short production life.[36]

33. Jeffrey Ostler, *The Lakotas and the Black Hills: The Struggle for Sacred Grounds* (New York: Penguin Books, 2010), p. 174.

34. Ibid., p. 89.

35. Martha Linde, *Sawmills of the Black Hills* (Rapid City, S.Dak.: Fenske Printing, 1984), p. 51.

36. Ibid., p. 55.

The number of mills declined from the 1920s through the mid-1930s. By 1968, the modern timber industry sawmills had replaced those of the earlier decades, such as the Warren-Lamb Lumber Company out of Rapid City. One such mill was the Nieman Company, established in 1935 in the Black Hills of Wyoming, which opened its first South Dakota sawmill, Rushmore Forest Products, a few miles west of Hill City. Rushmore Forest Products created a steady work environment for local contractors and self-employed loggers. Many, if not all, of the first wave of Mexican migrants to the Black Hills worked closely with the Rushmore Forest Products sawmill.[37]

In 1971, Frank Davidson opened a lumber and timber contractor business called Davidson and Sons.[38] Born in Stevens, South Dakota, Davidson had settled in Keystone with his wife, Edna, where they raised two sons. He welcomed the first wave of Mexican loggers, to include Angel Muñoz, his nephew by marriage. Davidson's son, Mike, grew up around the industry, learning from his father. He loved the work and taught new Mexican workers how to safely handle machinery. The Davidsons started new workers with more manageable tasks, such as thinning and brushing.[39]

As a contractor, Davidson provided workers for logging on government or privately-owned forest land and delivered the logs to sawmills. The U.S. Forest Service worked with contractors and sawmills in the area to ensure ethical and high-quality products; it also developed regulations to control the size of clear-cuts, protect the environment, and promote reforestation. All Mexican migrants logged on U.S. federal land in the Black Hills at least once in their careers because government programs aimed to control forest fires by thinning, brushing, and clearing trees.[40]

37. Juan Escalante, interviewed by Sabrina Escalante.

38. Mike Davidson, interviewed by Sabrina Escalante, Keystone, S.Dak., 31 Jan. 2023, Interview 19, transcript and recording, author collection.

39. Angel Muñoz, interviewed by Sabrina Escalante. Thinning cuts down trees or brush to create spaces between trees to promote healthy growth and slow the spread of wildfires. Brushing requires loggers to remove or prune selected limbs from trees and break them into pieces smaller than eighteen inches.

40. The Organic Act of 1897 established the Forest Management Act, which created the National Forest Reserve to protect and improve forested areas while ensuring a continuous timber supply. Congress passed the National Forest Manage-

At first, the loggers felt overwhelmed by too many regulations. For example, it was hard to know which trees could be cut because the colors and markings often changed depending on the contract. Cutting the wrong tree, a mistake everyone made at least once, was "a big deal" only if one hid it or did not inform their contractor. Similarly, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) mandated that loggers always have shovels and fire extinguishers on hand. Each person needed two extinguishers, one for their truck and one kept with them at all times, and OSHA required that loggers remain on a site for at least thirty minutes after completion of work in case of a fire.[41] The loggers recognized the equipment's importance but struggled to carry it along with their tools and personal belongings, such as a lunch box and water jug. Surprise inspections enforced the regulations, and both OSHA and the Forest Service could fine violators.[42] Mexican loggers reported minimal issues with the Forest Service if they were honest and paid attention to contract details. The loggers got along well with Forest Service workers and appreciated their goals of protecting the environment and animals, as well as OSHA's safety regulations.

Until they learned English, Mexican migrants had no translators to teach them the regulations and guidelines, so they learned by observing. Winter work was the hardest for men who had never seen snow before, but they endured the cold and even grew to enjoy winter. Angel, Roy, Pasqual, and Raul picked up logging quickly and became efficient at it, impressing Mike Davidson. The new Mexican loggers enjoyed the work and wanted to learn more about the business and the Forest Service regulations.

ment Act (NFMA) in 1976 to protect national forests from excessive logging. *See* John F. Freeman, *Black Hills Forestry: A History* (Boulder University Press of Colorado, 2015), p. 33. The Forest Service's extensive protection ensured the well-being of the entire land, not just the trees. Further, loggers understood that a contract was required for a timber harvest supervised by the U.S. Forest Service. It must include details such as the area harvested, sale price, deadlines, payment method, and regulations. Contractors communicate with the Forest Service to ensure compliance. The Forest Service marks each tree, and loggers cut only approved trees. Contractors must communicate with loggers to avoid harm to healthy trees.

41. Abraham Romero, interviewed by Sabrina Escalante.

42. Obegario Simental, interviewed by Sabrina Escalante.

Early migrants continued to work with Frank Davidson for two years, until Davidson and Sons abruptly closed in 1980. Frank Davidson sold his equipment to another local contractor, Paul Davidson (no relation). Angel and the others found work with other local contractors. The Forest Service suggested that Angel and Roy join the Section 8(a) program of the Small Business Administration, designed to help "firms owned and controlled by socially and economically disadvantaged individuals."[43] Barb did most of the research and paperwork required for approval; Angel was not eligible, because although he was a legal resident, he was not a citizen (a requirement for the program, along with having at least 50 percent minority ownership). To qualify, Barb and Angel requested that the file be changed to only Barb's name. The program offered business development assistance, mentorship, federal surplus property, free management training, technical assistance programs, and connections to procurement and compliance experts. By 1981, the Muñoz family became business partners with Roy Escalante, just ten years after migrating to the United States, "following the fruit," and logging in the Black Hills for three years.

With the support of American workers teaching them regulations, the first Mexicans had settled into the Black Hills timber industry rather easily. The relationships that several formed with American women opened many doors and made assimilating to American culture easier. Like Angel Muñoz, Roy Escalante married a Mexican American woman who did not speak Spanish. Dating women who only spoke English created a bonding experience because both people necessarily learned a new language to communicate. Learning English seemed like a natural transition for first-wave Mexicans. Angel stated that the family he made in the United States made it work, conforming to American culture and settling in the Black Hills. After the birth of their children, the first wave of Mexicans never longed to return to Mexico but continued networking with their loved ones and hoped to return to visit.

Into the mid-1980s, new migrants, often the nephews of the earlier arrivals, such as Abraham Romero and Juan Escalante, also crossed

43. "8(a) Business Development Program," U.S. Small Business Administration, accessed 12 Apr. 2023, https://www.aba.gov/federal-contracting/contracting-assistance-programs/8abusiness-development-program.

A U.S. Forest Service ranger measures a tree for cutting in this photo by C. E. Ferweda, ca. 1976.

the U.S.-Mexico border. Most also came from Ojos de Agua de Ocampo. While many continued to migrate to California, they stayed there for less than a couple of weeks, until their uncles picked them up. According to community stories, some men hid in trunks until they were dropped off near South Dakota. The new migrants, bringing the same logging skills, migrated for the same reasons. They felt right at home in the Black Hills and were eager to begin working with their uncles.

Angel and Roy tasked the newcomers with thinning and brushing. Juan and Abraham already knew how to handle chainsaws but were excited to learn how to operate the new machinery, such as Caterpillar crawlers, skidders, hauling trucks, and hydraulic log loaders. Chainsaws were essential, costing around $400 each, not counting the chains ($30 each) and bars ($80 each) that must be regularly replaced.[44] Tree cutters needed to own two to three chainsaws at a time due to wear and tear. Chains usually lasted a week; bars lasted about a month. Dull chains could be dangerous, as they

44. Juan Escalante, interviewed by Sabrina Escalante.

might snap back at the operator. The contractor provided the other logging machinery.

The heavier machinery could be daunting. Cristian Salinas, a third-generation migrant, feared operating the skidder. Once, while going downhill, Cristian incorrectly positioned the skidder's crane, which caused the skidder to lean forward because the weight was too far forward. He said he felt the skidder tumble between the front and back tires until he reached the bottom. After that occasion, he never operated the skidder. Nor was he asked to do so.[45] In any case, the men soon mastered the machinery. Spending much of their week working allowed them to gain and expand their skillset as loggers.

Mexican loggers from the first and second generations lived in Pigley's Court trailer court on the edge of Hill City. From Monday through Saturday, the loggers woke up by five in the morning, prepared their lunches, and left home to carpool to the jobsite by six. They were self-employed and set their own schedules, but sticking to this timetable was convenient. Angel Muñoz, now operating his new contracting business, placed the new loggers on a "pay by production" system. The loggers marked the trees they cut by spray painting their initials on the logs so contractors knew what to pay them when the sawmill weighed the trees. Through the 1980s and 1990s, Juan and Abraham cut an average of fifty tons of trees daily for eight to nine hours a day, weather permitting. Loggers worked shorter shifts during the winter and until around six or seven in the evening in the summertime.

Despite the hazards of the profession, migrant men believed their work was not risky and never feared the machinery or environment. Still, dealing with dangerous machinery and heavy equipment meant sometimes there were severe accidents. A few Mexican loggers died. Springtime was the most dangerous season, due to the unstable soil and higher number of accidents. Minor accidents were more common; many have scars from snapped chainsaw blades. Others suffered concussions from broken tree limbs falling on them, which could result in a potentially fatal brain bleed.[46] Abraham remembered

45. Cristian Salinas, interviewed by Sabrina Escalante, Hill City, S.Dak., 7 Dec. 2022, Interview 03, transcript and recording, author collection.

46. Juan Escalante, interviewed by Sabrina Escalante.

a friend dying in a logging accident, just moments after they had eaten lunch together. Another man, with a massive scar across his face, almost lost his eyesight because of a chainsaw chain flying off.[47]

Mexican loggers enjoyed seeing wildlife and never feared the animals. They sometimes came across coyotes, deer, and mountain lions, but never experienced any dangerous animal encounters. Abraham and his son stumbled across a mountain lion cub one day and managed to pet it before spotting its mother. They quickly jumped into their trucks and watched as she collected her cub and left.

While the early arrivals tended to be busy raising families, those who migrated in the 1980s formed friendships and romantic relationships by spending Saturday nights at local bars and dating local women, despite the language barrier. Abraham Romero met his future wife, Sherry, at a bar. Although Abraham picked up English quickly, early on they communicated through hand gestures, such as asking "are you thirsty?" by holding a cup and bringing it to the mouth. Sherry said, "Abraham didn't really know anything other than hi, or bye."[48] Abraham stated, "I don't know how we did it, but we found a way. To this day, I don't speak English very well, but she understands me, and I understand her."[49]

As the relationships flourished, the second wave of men began to think about settling down to start their own families and gain citizenship or secure legal residency status. They received much help from women they dated, as well as from the first wave of men, who showed them how to send money to their loved ones still struggling with poverty in Mexico. All of the men, such as Juan, sent up to half their paychecks every two weeks. Abraham sent money to his parents and son, and Juan sent money to his younger siblings.

The money made an impression, and by 1990, a new and final wave of young Mexican men began to migrate to the South Dakota and enter the timber industry. Like the second wave, they often migrated to California and waited for relatives to pick them up and take them to work in the Black Hills. They were excited to work and earn money. Al-

47. Angel Muñoz, interviewed by Sabrina Escalante.

48. Sherry Romero, interviewed by Sabrina Escalante, Hill City, S.Dak., 27 Feb. 2022, Interview 12, transcript and recording, author collection.

49. Abraham Romero, interviewed by Sabrina Escalante.

ready boasting much chainsaw experience, they quickly learned how to operate logging machinery. These men enjoyed their craft, which became part of their identity. They began nicknaming one another according to their work ethic, such as *El León*, The Lion. Community members agree that the post-1990 migrants produced the strongest loggers, in part because they learned from the pre-1990 migrants and thus had a smaller learning curve.

The new migrants also began to find work with other contractors besides Angel and Roy, who recognized their work ethic and offered them jobs. Angel Muñoz sent Juan Escalante and his younger brother, Hugo, to help Roy Shaffer, an experienced and well-known local contractor who was short on labor. Shaffer, impressed by the brothers, offered them permanent positions. They jumped at the opportunity, and Shaffer soon hired their uncle Abraham as well.[50]

Unlike the pre-1990 migrants, the post-1990 generation longed for Mexico and often returned there during the spring break. Juan Escalante's younger brothers and cousins started long-distance relationships with women in Michoacán. They were also slower to learn English, making settling in the Black Hills and practicing their Catholic religion difficult.[51] They began thinking of permanently moving to the Black Hills, but only if their partners in Mexico were willing to make the journey. Once migrants had started families in the United States, they became increasingly afraid and paranoid about the possibility of being deported.[52] During the 1980s, many Mexicans residing in the Black Hills began to seek U.S. citizenship.[53] Those of the post-1990 generation did not fear deportation, in part because they did not have families in the United States to worry about—until their partners began moving to the Black Hills as well. When that happened, they needed to get Alien Residency cards.

One option to obtain citizenship was to seek naturalization in a court with the authority to grant it. Children born in Mexico could

50. Juan Escalante, interviewed by Sabrina Escalante.

51. Rene Escalante, interviewed by Sabrina Escalante, Hill City, S.Dak., 29 Oct. 2023, Interview 16, transcript, author collection.

52. Abraham Romero, interviewed by Sabrina Escalante.

53. *IMMIGRATION Marriage Fraud: Controls in Most Countries Surveyed Stronger Than in the U.S.: Briefing Report to the Honorable Paul Simon* (Washington D.C.: General Accounting Office, 1986), p. 25.

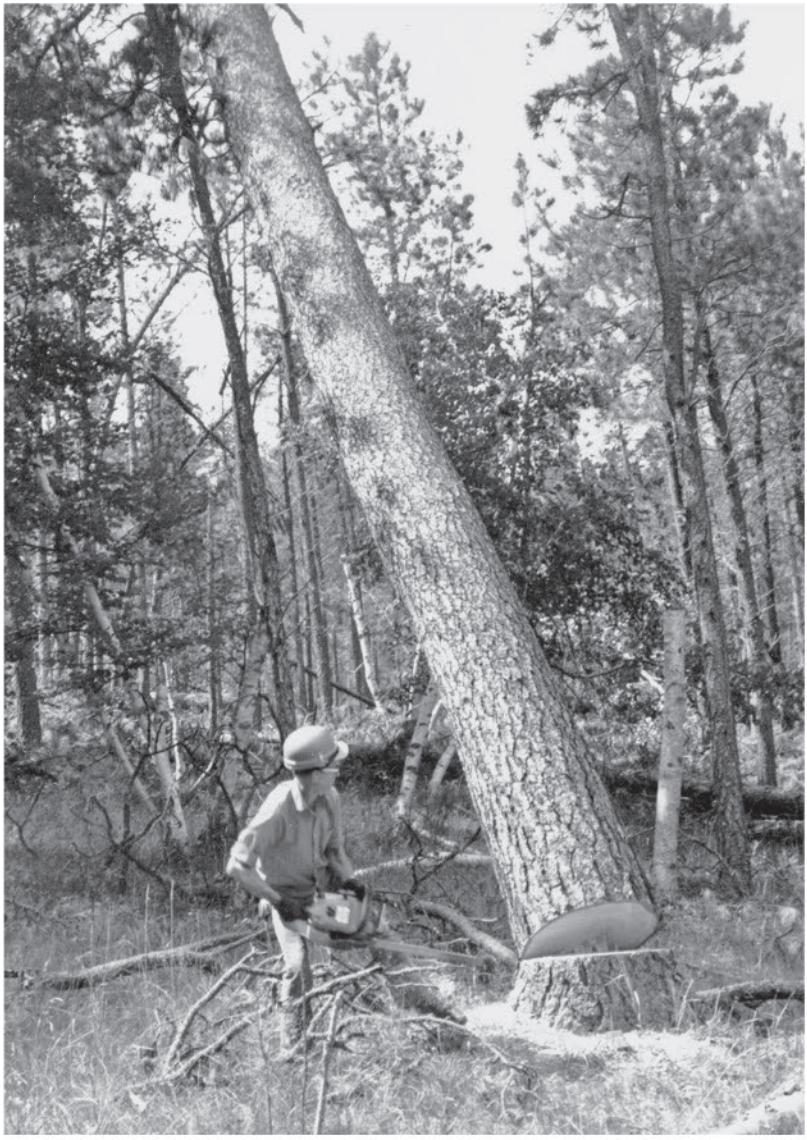
become citizens if their parents naturalized while they were minors. Other migrants had children who became citizens at birth. To petition for naturalization, the men had to renounce their former citizenship. Earlier migrants had no objection to doing so, while later migrants preferred maintaining their status in Mexico and instead applied for Permanent Resident Cards and immigrant visas. Wives and girlfriends guided them through the applications. They stayed informed about updates to secure their partners' rights to stay in the United States.

Another option was to obtain citizenship through marriage, though getting married did not automatically grant citizenship. Couples had to meet specific criteria, such as providing proof of a civil marriage, living together for at least three years after the marriage, sharing a common language, and consummating the marriage.[54] Some migrants already had partners in Mexico and eventually separated from their partners by not returning there. A few Mexican men even attempted to arrange marriages with American women for the sole purpose of obtaining citizenship. Such arranged marriages were not common in the Black Hills Mexican community, however. Only three men attempted it during the pre-1990 period, and at least one failed. Two women were promised payment, but one backed out. The lengthy process of gaining citizenship by marriage was not worth the trouble, and there was the potential complication of the women developing romantic feelings for their husbands, especially if the migrant men cared little for their wives and any children from the marriage.[55] Migrants' attempts to marry into United States citizenship became cautionary tales for American women to avoid marrying "illegals" and for future migrants to gain citizenship another way. For the most part, the earliest arrivals married women they loved and remained with them for decades.

Members of the community also took advantage of the 1980 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), which implemented new

54. *Basic Guide to Naturalization* (Washington D.C: U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, 1980), p. 20.

55. Juan Escalante, interviewed by Sabrina Escalante; Sherry Romero, interviewed by Sabrina Escalante; Fran M., interviewed by Sabrina Escalante, Custer, S.Dak., 20 Mar. 2023, Interview 25, transcript and recording, author collection.



Migrant men, especially those of the later generations, arrived already boasting logging skills, such as wielding a chainsaw. This photo was taken in the Hazelrodt area of the Custer logging district, ca. 1979.

penalties for employers who hired unauthorized workers.[56] Congress hoped to secure American jobs for those with legal residency. But because the U.S. economy relied on immigrant labor, the act also established a new pathway to citizenship for migrants who had continuously lived in the U.S. before 1 January 1982. Additionally, the IRCA implemented new provisions, including funding to strengthen border enforcement. Many migrants, such as Abraham Romero, Juan Escalante, Fernando Muñoz, and Obegario Simental, applied to become U.S.-legalized permanent residents. Although the IRCA required employers to inspect documentation from each newly hired employee to confirm his eligibility to work in the United States, many migrant loggers remained employed year-round before gaining citizenship or legal residency. It was not until 1996 that E-Verify aided employers in affirming the eligibility of their employees to work in the United States, and cases of undocumented men and women working in the Black Hills persisted into the mid-2000s.

Sherry Romero helped Abraham with his application as soon as she learned about the IRCA. Not having had the privilege of completing elementary school in Mexico, he spent much of his free time preparing for the one-hundred-question exam covering U.S. history and civics. If applicants missed more than seven exam questions on their second attempt, they did not qualify and had to endure the lengthy process of reapplying. With Sherry's help, Abraham learned to read and write in English. Their dedication paid off when he gained legal status. Abraham suggested that without Sherry, he would not have tried to gain residency.

Many men obtained green cards first and applied for citizenship later. Fernando Muñoz obtained residency by applying for a green card in 1987, which also required that he pass an exam. Fernando stated that it was challenging to study the material because he also had to learn how to speak, read, and write in English. His partner, Elizabeth, helped him study. To prove that he lived in the United States and had no criminal record, he provided multiple documents, such as electric bills and bank statements filed under his name. He

56. Frank D. Bean and Thoa V. Khun, "The Causes and Consequences of the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA)," *UCI Center for Population Inequality, and Policy* 20207, no. 1 (Oct. 2020): 7.

and Elizabeth had to travel to Bloomington, Minnesota, to complete the process. Immigration agents questioned him and placed them both into a room. Fernando began to panic. To test his English skills, they required him to read "I have a red car" out loud. During the written exam, Fernando wanted to ask his wife for help, but she was too nervous to assist him; she had heard that agents watched the surveillance cameras to catch cheating applicants. Ironically, as Fernando filled out the exam, the agent looking over his shoulder mumbled, "uh-uh-uh" whenever Fernando was about to fill out the wrong answer. When he selected the correct answer, the agent said "uh-huh." The agent helped Fernando get a green card.

The early migrants' hard work, dedication, and assimilation with Americans laid the foundation for a Mexican American community in the Black Hills. The community really took off when women from Michoacán began to migrate to South Dakota. The first Mexican woman migrated in the 1980s. More followed in the 1990s. By the time they began arriving in the Black Hills, most of the growing community's men had relocated to Hill City, which then had a population of 747. Matkins Trailer Court, where many moved as the families grew, became known as "Little Mexico."[57] The town's small size, and the heavily forested hills surrounding it, made the transition easy for the women, as it was similar to their hometowns in Mexico.

The women played a significant role in reinforcing the cultural identity of the Black Hills community. Whereas migrants of the earliest generations "Americanized," risking losing part of their cultures, later migrants, both men and women, continued to practice their cultural values and traditions while living in the Black Hills, thereby preserving these for the entire community. The women also played a pivotal role in navigating new opportunities and stabilizing the community's growth. Women migrated not just because their partners asked them, but because they too wished to provide better lives for their families.[58]

Mexican women underwent a quick progression in how they con-

57. Cris Matkins, interviewed by Sabrina Escalante, Hill City, S.Dak., 11 Nov. 2022, Interview 22, transcript and recording, author collection.

58. *See, for example* Larisa L. Veloz, *Even the Women Are Leaving: Migrants Making Mexican America, 1890–1965* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2023); Luz Maria Gordillo, *Mexican Women and the Other Side of Immigration: Engendering*

ceived of their roles in the Black Hills Mexican community. In rural Mexico, they had demonstrated remarkable resilience. They primarily engaged in house chores and domestic labor, often accepting a future of catering to their working husbands and caring for their children. While the women found fulfillment in their roles as homemakers, they also harbored a desire for financial independence. They recognized that the path to well-paid jobs as women was through high school and college education, which most of them could not afford. Maria Socorro Muñoz enjoyed the discipline of education and wanted to attend college because she knew her other options were to become a housewife or continue living with her family and help with house chores. Although Maria felt there was nothing wrong with women adhering to traditional values, she yearned for a different path. She graduated from Zinapecauro High School, the only migrant interviewed who made it past middle school. Her teachers advised her to pursue a career in nursing. Maria's mother, though suffering from cancer, took her to Morelia, the capital of Michoacán, to help Maria search for a nursing program. Unfortunately, Maria never attended college because her parents passed away before they could save enough money for her to enroll.

Maria's parents' support was a rarity. According to the women interviewed, in the 1970s and 1980s the traditional conservative ideology in rural Mexico, rooted in a strong patriarchal culture, *la cultura machista*, meant that families invested more resources in their sons because they expected their daughters to get married and dedicate their lives to their families. Maria's parents, however, wanted more for their daughter.

Indeed, the concept of *machismo*—a man's aggressive pride in his masculinity—had a profound impact on all the women who lived in Mexico. It manifested in various forms, such as domestic abuse or a stunted sense of self-worth among women.[59] Definitions of *ma-*

Transnational Ties (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010); Rita J. Simon, *Immigrant Women* (Milton Park: Taylor & Francis, 2018).

59. Josué Ramirez, *Against Machismo: Young Adult Voices in Mexico City* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008), p. 2. Ramirez cites the work of Constance Sullivan, a feminist literary scholar, in his work. Sullivan defined *machismo* as an "interlocking structure of values attitudes, and patterns of behavior that ultimately have destructive effects for males and females."

chismo vary depending on social class, region, generation, and ethnicity. In practice, *machismo* meant that men controlled women in public spaces through sexual harassment, rape, and femicide. Women refrained from entering larger cities without the protection of their male relatives. Men also dominated private spheres through the management of wives.[60] The women interviewed identified *machismo* strictly with an enforced private and public patriarchal lifestyle. Rural women fell victim to *machismo*, and the culture of *machismo* showed in many of the marriages within the Black Hills community.

La cultura machista dismissed the destructive actions of men, even in extreme cases of physical abuse and abduction. Some of the women interviewed seemed unfazed by the actions of their partners. When Maria, for example, entered into an abusive relationship, no one did anything to help her. Similarly, Sofia Durango and Julieta Muñoz were kidnapped by their partners and forced into marriages. Sofia married her captor, Luis, when she was twenty; they immigrated to the United States from Jalisco in the late 1990s.[61] While in Mexico, Luis grew impatient and took her to his house without her consent. Sofia stayed at his house for several days and tried to escape multiple times before agreeing to marry him. Similar accounts from other women suggest that such abductions were common in rural Mexico. Families sometimes did not prevent their daughters from abduction, coerced marriage agreements, or attempt to locate them after they failed to come home. Julieta Muñoz's husband, Mario, kidnapped her while he was intoxicated. Mario and Julieta planned on meeting one day to enjoy the afternoon together. Mario took her to his truck and drove off. He kept Julieta at his house for a few days, until Julieta caved in and agreed to marry him. A couple days later, Mario returned Julieta to her home because he had a change of heart and wanted to ask for her hand more formally. Mario and Julieta's father chatted and agreed that she would marry him. They migrated to South Dakota after Mario secured a Black Hills timber industry job. To this day, he jokes about kidnapping the wrong woman.[62]

60. Ramirez, *Against Machismo*, p. 3.

61. Sofia Durango, interviewed by Sabrina Escalante, Custer, S.Dak., 1 Nov. 2022, Interview 4, translated transcript and recording, author collection.

62. Cristian Salinas, interviewed by Sabrina Escalante.

In addition to the inherent environmental perils, the dangers posed by *machismo*—rape, murder, and abduction by coyotes—impacted how migrant women crossed the U.S.-Mexico border. Mexican men did not leave women alone with coyotes, who often tried to separate women and children from men, sometimes to hold people for ransom, as happened to Sofia Durango. A *pollero*, hired by Sofia and her brother, separated Sofia from her family and daughter during the journey. Sofia's sister hid under the car, where she had difficulty breathing through the dust and debris. Sofia, who was white-passing, used a fake I.D. After crossing the border, the *pollero* ordered Sofia's sister to enter a different vehicle with her brother and niece and held Sofia hostage until her brother paid the ransom. Eventually, Sofia and her family entered the United States successfully, albeit with a traumatic experience.[63]

During the 1960s, Mexico's Border Industrialization Program had led to a surge of female workers in border cities, particularly Juárez, where women comprised almost 80 percent of the workforce.[64] The increase in female employment and empowerment, however, was met with resentment and hostility from Mexican men, resulting in a rise in violence against women that peaked during the early 1990s in major border cities, such as Juárez-El Paso, making it even more dangerous for women to cross the border alone.[65] The men well knew these dangers, and husbands in the Black Hills either went back to Mexico to escort the women across the border, or entrusted someone in their family to accompany them. Communication between partners was essential to determine the right time for the women to make the journey. Traveling with a woman increased both partners' chances of being targeted for abduction, theft, and sexual violence. Isabella Muñoz was robbed at gunpoint during her first border crossing with her husband; the robbers attempted to separate them, but he gave them everything the two had to offer to keep Isabella safe.

63. Sofia Durango, interviewed by Sabrina Escalante.

64. Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2006), p. 12.

65. Kathleen Staudt, *Human Rights along the U.S.-Mexico Border: Gendered Violence and Insecurity* (Tuscon: University of Arizona Press, 2022), p. 114. Susan Faludi explored this issue in her book *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women*.

Many migrants had to learn to use heavy machinery, including log skidders such as the one seen here in 1976.

Though they shared a common thread of resilience, the men and women of the Black Hills Mexican community tended to remember different aspects of their journeys. Men remembered the physical demands of entering the United States, while women emphasized the emotional stress they experienced from witnessing a lack of human empathy. Alexandra Muñoz, born in Santa Clara, Michoacán, vividly remembered the fear of being left behind when she crossed the border at age twenty-four, while she was pregnant.[66] She traveled with a group of people, including her husband, and moved at a slower pace than the others. Migrants knew that coyotes would abandon members who slowed the group down. A much older woman traveling with her grandson, who could not have been older than eight, struggled to keep up with the group. Alexandra felt terrible for the young boy, who tried his best to help his grandmother keep up and encouraged her to keep walking. At Alexandra's prompting, her husband stayed back with the older woman to ensure she was not abandoned. The coyote told Alexandra's husband to leave her, but he

66. Alexandra Muñoz, interviewed by Sabrina Escalante, Hill City, S.Dak., 7 Oct. 2022, Interview 21, translated transcript and recording, author collection.

refused and managed to help the older woman move faster. They all made it across the border.

As the women settled into the Black Hills, it took them time to realize the new independence, opportunities, and resources available to them. Maria Socorro Muñoz loved being a mother and wife, but when she could not read notes sent to her by her children's school, she realized it was time to learn English. She contacted the local Catholic church, and they directed her to a small English as a Second Language (ESL) program. Maria, pregnant at the time, enrolled in this program but found that the Literacy Council of the Black Hills was better suited to her needs. She received one-on-one help and learned to speak, read, and write in English while the organization provided childcare for her newborn. The Council also helped her to recognize her husband's abuse. Maria's divorce gave her the independence and freedom that she believed she would not have had in Mexico. As a single mother, she focused on finding a job to secure her financial stability. Maria truly believed there were "a lot more opportunities in different aspects: social, economic," in the United States.[67] She encouraged other migrant women in the Black Hills to make the most of the possibilities.

The thriving Black Hills tourism industry not only boosted the local economy but also opened unexpected doors for Mexican women. The demand for housekeepers at tourist attractions provided a unique employment opportunity, even for those with fake or nonexistent Social Security numbers. With tourist season typically lasting from early May until the end of October, the women could perform what they considered easy labor, for high pay, and be done with work by three in the afternoon, giving them time to fulfill their responsibilities at home. The main barrier to sustaining long-term employment was learning to drive; in Mexico few families had been able to afford cars and relied on walking to the nearest bus station to get around.[68] Providing financial support for their growing families gave Mexican women a new perspective of themselves and allowed them to practice a new responsibility they believed they would never have had in Mexico.

67. Maria Socorro Muñoz, interviewed by Sabrina Escalante.

68. Alondra Salinas, interviewed by Sabrina Escalante, Hill City, S.Dak., 28 Feb. 2023, Interview 20, translated transcript and recording, author collection.

By the mid-1990s, Pennington County had begun offering programs to help migrants settle into the area, such as ESL classes and the Even Start program.[69] As a migrant specialist with Even Start, Marianne Francis Fridell helped Mexican women gain a better footing in the Black Hills community. A native of Indiana, she became fluent in Spanish by conversing with Mexican women in the community, after being introduced to them by Caroline Hatten, a retired teacher from Custer who taught ESL. Fridell also worked in ESL classes and helped provide child development information from pregnancy through five years of age. Local women, such as Rocio Escalante and Maria Lopez, welcomed Fridell and appreciated her help. Marianne recalled, "There was much interest among the women and their families in immigration. Applying for citizenship was easier at that point because of the amnesty provided by Reagan's administration."[70] The process took two years, but Fridell found it a rewarding part of her job. Beyond her work, Fridell assisted migrants as an interpreter. She accompanied Mexican men and women to medical appointments and was deeply honored to participate in extraordinary events, even being asked by a pregnant Mexican woman to be present during her labor.

Fridell observed that Mexican women, as keepers of the home, played significant roles as mediators in their community by keeping traditions alive and communicating with their families in Mexico. Their culture formed their identity wherever they lived. Most men attended mass, but women ensured the community heard mass in Spanish at the Blessed Sacrament Church in Rapid City. By 1995, the population of Mexicans in the Black Hills had grown, and the deacon asked Maria Muñoz for advice on creating a more inviting environment for Spanish-speakers.[71] The Blessed Sacrament Church soon provided Spanish mass to the small Catholic Church of Hill City, Saint Rose of Lima. Hill City Mexicans became more involved in church services, and local Mexicans performed live Mexican music.

Soon, churches in Hill City, Custer, and Rapid City began including the Feast for La Virgen de Guadalupe on 12 December—next to

69. Marianne Fridell, interviewed by Sabrina Escalante, Custer, S.Dak., 28 Feb. 2023, Interview 24, translated transcript, author collection.

70. Maria Socorro Muñoz, interviewed by Sabrina Escalante.

71. Ibid.

Mexican migrants concentrated in Hill City in Pennington County. Residents of Hill City gathered for Logger's Day in 1976, as photographed by C. E. Ferweda.

Christmas, the most meaningful Catholic celebration for Black Hills Mexicans. Women sewed children's costumes, made dresses for their daughters and tilmas, a type of cloak, for their sons, or purchased costumes from Chicago for the annual mass. They built small shrines within their homes and asked for the intercession of this patron saint of Mexico. Another important tradition was the Bendición de Tres Años, marking a child's third birthday. The child is presented to God and the Virgin Mary, followed by a modest feast. In the Black Hills, the benedición was celebrated with grandeur, featuring music, food, dancing, and activities like a piñata or *rollo*.[72]

72. Alondra Salinas, interviewed by Sabrina Escalante.

The financial stability that families enjoyed in the Black Hills enabled them to uphold and cherish other cultural traditions, such as the quinceañera, the coming of age ceremony for Mexican Catholic women.[73] None of the women had celebrated their own quinceañeras because their families in Mexico could not afford it. Parents in the Black Hills community often gave girls the choice of receiving a car or having a quinceañera for their fifteenth birthday; the girls usually preferred the former, while their mothers pushed them toward the latter. Camilla, the daughter of Sofia Durango, chose the car but also had a quinceañera, a memorable experience for both mother and daughter. Quinceañeras were meticulously planned events that brought the Black Hills Mexican community together.

Generally, Mexican women in the Black Hills struggled to cook authentic dishes due to the limited availability of ingredients. Maria remembered that they had to travel forty minutes to Rapid City to buy tortillas, a staple of Mexican cuisine, which were often sold out anyway. Tortillas could be homemade, but Mexican women also struggled to source necessary ingredients such as masa, cactus, chilis, dried chilies, avocados, and spices. Fresh peppers such as jalapeño, poblano, and serrano were readily available, but dried-out peppers were rare. Without them, it was difficult to prepare traditional Mexican dishes such as pozole, menudo, or tamales for holidays. Fortunately, by the early 2000s, the ingredients had become more readily accessible.[74]

The Black Hills Mexican community, reliant on the timber industry, has demonstrated remarkable resilience and adaptability. The men's hard work, eagerness to learn the timber industry and Forest Service regulations, and commitment to assimilate into the Black Hills community planted the seeds of a community. The earliest male migrants formed relationships with Mexican American women. Continued chain migration by younger relatives and women helped the community to grow. Mexican women found independence and

73. Black Hills quinceañeras reinforce baptismal oaths. Young women make an unbreakable commitment to the Virgin Mary and God, similar to the ceremonies in Mexico, which required young women to live their lives guided by Christ's teachings and not stray from the church.

74. Sherry Romero, interviewed by Sabrina Escalante, Hill City, S.Dak., 21 Mar. 2023, Interview 13, transcript and recording, author collection.

new responsibilities and ensured that while they learned English and adapted, the community would retain its cultural traditions and connections with Michoacán and nearby states in Mexico. Though not intended to be a permanent relocation, the migrants found a sense of belonging and pride, and the Black Hills became their new home.

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On the cover: On 13 September 1931, a fire swept through the Warren-Lamb lumber yard and destroyed $130,000 of lumber. Some suspected arson by disgruntled workers.