



Notes from the Archive

Seaver Center for Western History Research

Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County

May 2020

Welcome to Notes from the Archive, a publication of the Seaver Center for Western History Research, a section of the History Department. If you are informed by what you read here, please share it with a friend or colleague.

THE HISTORY COLLECTION ISSUE featuring the LA ESPERANZA BAKERY

Ezequiel Moreno, along with his wife Cruz "Crucita" Moreno operated one of the city's earliest Mexican bakery-restaurant chains, La Esperanza Bakery. Founded in 1918, La Esperanza had three locations in the city with its main location in the historic Plaza area of Downtown until closing in 1973. Cruz recently passed away on March 28 at age 107 at Santa Teresita nursing home in the City of Duarte. Through the years the Moreno family provided the museum with significant donations pertaining to their iconic bakery & restaurant.

The Moreno family donations are maintained by the History Department, and both the Seaver Center's flat, two-dimensional and Material Culture's three-dimensioned collections are great examples for how the two individual research centers support similar subject areas - the documents, manuscripts, and photographs provide context for the objects.

THE COLLECTIONS

La Esperanza Bakery Sign

A two-sided, neon business sign, a long-time beacon of the Plaza bakery at 507 No. Main Street, came to the museum in 1997, through one of the granddaughters, Beverly Moreno-Bonney. Not only did the sign draw hungry customers, but every sector of the community, from Hollywood movie stars, politicians, judges, mobsters, white and blue collar workers and immigrants converged there during the restaurant's 50-year span.

The care and management of the sign became the responsibility of Material Culture Collections Manager, Beth Werling. Nearly nine feet high and five feet across, the hollow metal sign was once considered for inclusion in the museum's exhibition, "Becoming Los Angeles." It was given a new purpose across the country in Washington, D.C., featured as one of 90 loaned objects in a long-term exhibit at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History. "Many Voices, One Nation" exploring the role of immigration in the larger story of the nation opened June 28, 2017. Over 30 members of Cruz' family attended its opening along with Dr. Estrada who contributed to the narrative of the permanent exhibition. Dr. Estrada also conducted several interviews with Crucita and other Moreno family members, and the story of the famous bakery is featured in a chapter in his 2008 book *The Los Angeles Plaza: Sacred and Contested Space*, University of Texas Press.



L to R: Sign after overall restoration in 2009; sign test lighting after neon repair. (Images courtesy of the Natural History Museum, Conservation Department)

"Many Voices, One Nation" is described as a chronological journey of the cultural geography of the country. The La Esperanza Bakery sign grabs visitor attention while telling one of the stories in the section [Creating Community, Chicago and Los Angeles](#).

La Esperanza Bakery Menu and Photographs

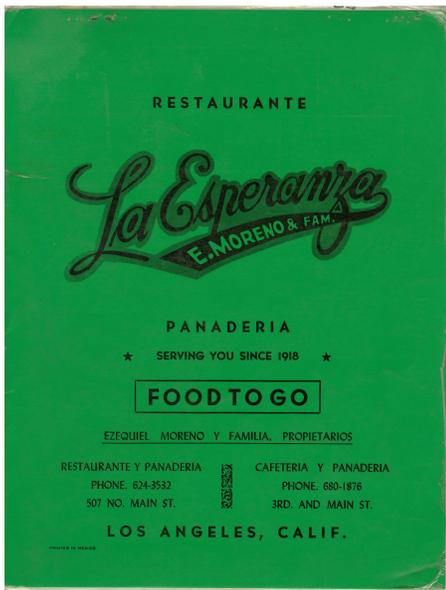
The National Museum of American History included three additional items to convey the Moreno story - a restaurant menu and two photographs were reproduced for exhibition. The originals are now housed in the Seaver Center after the same donor delivered them in 2014.



Ezequiel Moreno pictured (GC-1350-12)



(GC-1350-6)



Laminated four-page menu, ca. 1945-1950 (GC-1350-2)

THE DONOR FAMILY:

The American roots of the **Moreno Family** were planted in 1916 by Ezequiel Moreno, a 20-year old from Zacatecas, Mexico. He, along with wife and children, settled in East Los Angeles, having escaped instabilities brought on by the Mexican Revolution. A baker by trade, he began delivering his goods by horse-drawn carts in nearby neighborhoods. Soon he added motorized vehicles to his expanded operation, and by the 1920s opened his first brick and mortar bakery. Later four more restaurants were established in the city and one in Santa Ana. Ezequiel died in 1976, three years following the closure of his original, flagship store. He was survived by his second wife, Cruz Moreno.



Cruz Moreno at her 107th birthday celebration in May 2019

According to Collections Manager Kim Walters, during the 1980s through the early 1990s Cruz worked part-time at the Southwest Museum's Casa de Adobe, situated in Highland Park. She was the Casa's hostess, greeting guests, and leading tours, and it was also where she taught cooking classes.

YOUR STORY MATTERS

The History Department has rolled out a community campaign to collect stories from those living in the Los Angeles and southern California region for their thoughts and experiences in coping with the pandemic crisis.

The museum has been collecting history since 1913. Stories are sought to be archived - allowing for future generations to learn from history happening at the moment - by visiting <https://nhmlac.org/your-story-matters> to fill out an online set of questions. Digital images, along with audio and video clips, are welcomed. Members of the public who are interested in donating hard copy photographs, journals, artwork, object and artifacts related to the crisis can provide their contact information, and staff can later respond after they assess the pertinence and appropriateness of the items.

Here are some early photos received and lent for use in this publication:

March 20



(Photo courtesy of Gary Leonard)

March 23



(Photo courtesy of Gary Leonard)

March 30



View of south side of the 17500 block of Lassen Street, Northridge
(Photo courtesy of Bryn Barabas Potter)

April 1



(Photo courtesy of Gary Leonard)

April 10



(Photo courtesy of Gary Leonard)



(Photo courtesy of Gary Leonard)



Plan your research visit

Call 213.763.3359 or

Email seavercenter@nhm.org

Currently closed until further notice

The Collections

[Search the Online Archive of California](#)

Over 370 general collections
Over 290 photographic collections

Digitized Collections

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The collections are a part of the History Department of the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County.
The Seaver Center opened in 1986 through a generous grant from the Seaver Institute.



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