Guide to the El Chico Restaurants Collection

NMAH.AC.1246
Anne Jones
2012
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### Collection Overview

**Repository:** Archives Center, National Museum of American History  
**Title:** El Chico Restaurants Collection  
**Identifier:** NMAH.AC.1246  
**Date:** 1908 - 1990  
**Extent:** 0.75 Cubic feet  
**Creator:** El Chico Restaurants  
**Language:** English  
Collection is in English.  
Some materials in Spanish.  
**Summary:** The materials relate to the creation and operation of El Chico Corporation.

### Administrative Information

#### Acquisition Information

The collection was donated by Fifi Caballero Benson, John A. Cuellar, and Carmen Summers in 2011 and 2012.

#### Related Materials

**Materials in the Archives Center**

- Frito Company Records, circa 1892-2009 (AC1263)
- Coon Chicken Inn Collection, circa 1913-1960s (AC1153)
- Warshaw Collection of Business Americana, 1724-1965 (AC0060)
- Virginia Mericle Menu Collection, 1960-1990 (AC1212)
- Byron Fogel Placemat Collection, circa 1930-1981 (AC0419)

#### Processing Information

Processed by Anne Jones, 2012.

#### Preferred Citation

Restrictions

Collection is open for research.

Conditions Governing Use

Collection items available for reproduction, but the Archives Center makes no guarantees concerning copyright restrictions. Other intellectual property rights may apply. Archives Center cost-recovery and use fees may apply when requesting reproductions.

Biographical / Historical

Adelina Cuellar was born in Mexico in 1871. She and her husband Macario migrated to Texas in 1892 and were married in Laredo, eventually becoming sharecroppers in Kaufman, Texas. In 1926, Mrs. Cuellar began making tamales to sell at the Kaufman fair, assisted by her twelve children. This venture became so successful that two of her sons opened a café in Kaufman with Mama Cuellar as the cook. The café failed during the Depression, as did several others opened by the Cuellar family in Texas, Oklahoma, and Louisiana.

In 1940, Adelina’s sons Macario and Gilbert opened a restaurant, El Charro, in Dallas featuring their mother’s recipes. They hired their friend Jose Valdez Caballero to manage the restaurant; he had grown up in his family’s restaurant in Temple, Texas. El Charro became profitable, and the family began to expand its operations into Houston and Fort Worth. The restaurant chain became El Chico, and most of the family moved to Dallas to work in the business.

The Cuellar brothers diversified their business into frozen and canned foods, franchising, and numerous other enterprises that became the El Chico Corporation. Jose Caballero continued to work for the company as an executive until his retirement. He is credited with the development of popular recipes and with the invention of the hard shell taco. Adelina Cuellar lived to the age of 98 and saw her tamale stand grow into a Tex-Mex empire. Today, there are one hundred El Chico restaurants in the United States and world-wide.

Scope and Contents

The collection consists of material related to the El Chico Corporation and to the two families involved in its creation and management. The business materials consist primarily of financial reports and studies, annual reports, articles and clippings and investment information. Advertising, menus, labels and packaging are also included among these materials. In addition, there are photographs and articles relating to the Cuellar and Caballero families.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged into three series.

Series 1, El Chico Corporation Business Records, 1950-1990; undated

Series 2, Cuellar Family Papers, 1920s-2006
Container Listing

This series consists of business materials relating to El Chico, its competitors and other companies. The materials are arranged in chronological order and include reports, studies, articles and news clippings, food packages and labels, advertising, and menus.

Box 1, Folder 2  El Chico annual reports, 1966-1976
Box 1, Folder 3  Articles and clippings, 1970, 1972-1973
Box 1, Folder 4  El Chico annual reports, 1970, 1978
  Image(s)
Box 1, Folder 5  El Chico Restaurants financial reports, 1970s
Box 1, Folder 16  Competitor's menus, circa, 1971 July 16, page 3
Box 1, Folder 20  Article, "Hot in More Than Just Flavor," Financial Trend, 1971-1974
Box 2, Folder 1  Comparative study of restaurants, 1973; undated
Box 1, Folder 6  El Chico menus and place mats, 1973
  Image(s)
Box 2, Folder 2  Investment bank client review, 1974
Box 1, Folder 7  Investment report, Steak and Ale Restaurants, 974
Box 1, Folder 8  Focus group study, 1974
Box 1, Folder 9  SEC annual report for Royal Crown Cola, 1975
Box 1, Folder 10  Financial reports for Tia Maria, Incorporated, 1975-1978
Box 1, Folder 11  Notes on El Chico Restaurant operations, 1975-1999; undated
Box 1, Folder 17  News and articles relating to restaurant business, 1977; undated
Box 1, Folder 18  El Chico advertising and promotion, 1977
Box 1, Folder 12  El Chico employee information, 1977
Box 1, Folder 13  Earnings report, Marriott Corporation, 1977
Box 1, Folder 14  Zantiago Restaurant proposal, 1977-1978
Box 1, Folder 15  Restaurant business news and articles, 1979-1980
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<th>Box 2, Folder 3</th>
<th>El Chico correspondence, undated</th>
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<td>Box 1, Folder 19</td>
<td>List of Mexican restaurants by state, 1984-1986</td>
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<td>Box 1, Folder 19</td>
<td>El Chico annual reports, 1987-1990</td>
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<td>Box 1, Folder 21</td>
<td>El Chico annual reports, undated</td>
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<td>Box 1, Folder 22</td>
<td>El Chico canned food labels, undated</td>
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<td>Box 1, Folder 23</td>
<td>El Chico canned food labels, undated</td>
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<td>El Chico frozen food packaging, undated</td>
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<td>Box 2, Folder 4</td>
<td>El Chico logo, large decal, undated</td>
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<td>Box 2, Folder 4</td>
<td>Competitors menus, 1920s-2006</td>
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Series 2: Cuellar Family Papers, 1920s-1960s

*Box 2, Folder 5*

This series consists of background information and articles relating to the family. There are some photographs dating back to the early twentieth century and most are identified. In addition, there is a portrait of the Cuellar family. The materials are arranged in chronological order.

- Background information and photographs, 1950 August 31
- Box 1, Folder 26 Article, Todo, 1962 July
- Box 2, Folder 6 Article, Macario and Adelina Cuellar 70th wedding anniversary; Reflejeos de America, 1970 February 15
- Box 1, Folder 27 Article, "The Brothers Cuellar--A Place in the Country," Dallas Times Herald Sunday Magazine, 2006 September 16
- Box 2, Folder 7 Article, "She Cooked up a Tex-Mex Legacy," Dallas Morning News, 2000s
- Box 2, Folder 8 Family portrait in El Chico restaurant, 1908-1989

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Series 3: Caballero Family Papers, circa 1908-1960s

*Box 2, Folder 9*

This series includes photographs dating from the beginning of the century until the 1960s. There are also some articles and obituaries relating to Jose Valdez Caballero.

Photographs, circa 1960s-1989

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