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National Museum of American History Kenneth E. Behring Center

Guide to the El Chico Restaurants Collection

NMAH.AC.1246

Anne Jones

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Archives Center, National Museum of American History
P.O. Box 37012
Suite 1100, MRC 601
Washington, D.C. 20013-7012
Business Number: Phone: 202-633-3270
Fax Number: Fax: 202-786-2453
archivescenter@si.edu
<https://americanhistory.si.edu/archives>

Table of Contents

Collection Overview	
Administrative Information	1
Biographical / Historical	2
Scope and Contents	2
Arrangement	2
Container Listing	
Series 1: El Chico Corporation Business Records, 1950-1990; undated	3
Series 2: Cuellar Family Papers, 1920s-1960s	5
Series 3: Caballero Family Papers, circa 1908-1960s	6

Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives Center, National Museum of American History
Title:	El Chico Restaurants Collection
Date:	1908 - 1990
Identifier:	NMAH.AC.1246
Creator:	El Chico Restaurants (Creator)
Extent:	0.75 Cubic feet
Language:	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

El Chico Restaurants Collection, 1908-1990, Archives Center, National Museum of American History.

Restrictions

Collection is open for research.

Conditions Governing Use

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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

Series 3, Caballero Family Papers, 1908-1989

Container Listing

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

Scope and Contents: 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
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
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
Box 2, Folder 3	El Chico correspondence, undated
Box 1, Folder 19	List of Mexican restaurants by state, 1984-1986
Box 1, Folder 19	El Chico annual reports, 1987-1990
Box 1, Folder 21	El Chico annual reports, undated
Box 1, Folder 22	El Chico canned food labels, undated
Box 1, Folder 23	El Chico canned food labels, undated
Box 1, Folder 24	El Chico recipe folder, undated
Box 1, Folder 24	El Chico frozen food packaging, undated
Box 1, Folder 25	El Chico menus
Box 2, Folder 4	El Chico logo, large decal, undated
Box 2, Folder 4	Competitors menus, 1920s-2006

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 2: Cuellar Family Papers, 1920s-1960s

Box 2, Folder 5

Scope and Contents: 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; Reflejos 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

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

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

Box 2, Folder 9

Scope and Contents: 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

[Return to Table of Contents](#)