

Interviewee: Rolando Romo

Interview: October 26, 2004

University of Houston
Oral History of Houston Project
Magnolia Hall, Salon Juarez
Mexican American History

Interviewee: Rolando Romo

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Interviewer: Leigh Cutler

Transcriber: Michelle Kokes

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Abstract:

Rolando Romo traces his personal history, upbringing and education and how these factors led to his interest in Houston history and historical organizations, and found his own, the Tejano Association for Historical Preservation, in 1989. Of all the buildings the Tejano Association fought for only the Salon Juarez, now known as Magnolia Hall, was successfully preserved. Rolando discusses the driving forces behind the birth of Salon Juarez and how it was used by the Mexican American community. Romo speaks about the Sociedad Mutualista organization and its role in the community as a support system and goes into detail about the Sociedad's intervention in the Macario Garcia case. Romo mentions women and their roles within the organizations and in the home, and argues that they held more authority than expected. Finishing, Romo discusses a collection of historic photographs and the benefits and importance of historic preservation, using preservationist Randall Davis as an example.

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LC: This is Tape 1 Side a. I'm Leigh Cutler interviewing Rolando Romo for an oral history project on Sociedad Mutualista, Benito Juarez Casino Hall on the East End in Houston, Texas. The interview is taking place on Tuesday, October 26, 2004 in the Texas Room, the Julia Ideson Building of the Houston Public Library in downtown Houston.

RR: Do you have any questions or how does this work?

LC: Yeah first if you can start and just tell me a little bit about you, where you were born, about your parents and maybe how you came to Houston.

RR: Okay. Well my name is Rolando Romo, I was born and raised in Houston.

Actually I was born in the east end in Magnolia Park and my parents are also born here in Houston and all of my grandparents were born in Mexico, different states in Mexico. They came here, both sets of grandparents came here roughly in the 1920s and started their lives here and when they, my grandparents were fairly successful as far as having their business lives and owning their own homes and raising children. They raised children and none of them wound up in jail. They all wound up fairly successful in their own rights. Most of them received educations and many of my mother's family received higher education. I left Houston during my college days and stayed away for a long time until about 1984 and returned. During that time I had to become reacquainted with the history of Houston and missed out on a lot of experiences during the early years of my life. I became active with a lot of organizations and I founded the Tejano Association for Historical Preservation in 1989. What caused that to get started was that I found out that the cemetery that belonged to the Lorenzo DeSavala family had basically washed away

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with the Houston Ship Channel because of erosion and the ships going by had eroded the

land and then the state had control of that property and didn't do anything to maintain it.

Lorenzo DeSavala, he was the first Vice President of the interim Republic of Texas and

he had been a leading official in the Mexican government and his last post was as

ambassador to France. When Santa Anna did away with the Mexican Constitution,

Lorenzo sent a scathing letter criticizing Santa Anna and resigning from his post and he

took refuge in the U.S. and then wound up in the Harris County area. He bought a home

and settled where the San Jacinto River meets Buffalo Bayou, right across from San

Jacinto battleground. He first started the cemetery when a general named Castrillon was

killed in the San Jacinto battle. General Castrillon was one of the leading generals of

Santa Anna and he fought bravely and stood his ground as the Texans' surprised them

and he got shot several times and died there on the battle ground. Later on a few days

later after Santa Anna had been captured and his army defeated, Lorenzo DeSavala came

back from Galveston where he had taken his family for refuge and found the body of

General Catrillon laying on the ground. Castrillon family had been long time friends of

the DeSavala family back in Mexico so he took the body and took it across the Buffalo

Bayou and buried the body with a Christian burial on his property and that was the first

grave of that cemetery. I was angry that the state had not done anything to maintain that

cemetery and that's what created the preservation group. We felt that we needed to fight

and save our own properties and buildings. As a result we made numerous efforts to try

to save a lot of buildings. The only building that I was successful in trying to save was

Magnolia Hall which is formerly known as Salon Juarez. Salon Juarez is at Navigation

Street and not too far from where my parents' raised me and I had heard a lot of stories

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about the Salon Juarez being a place where almost all of the social events of the Mexican

American community were taking place. They had very few places to go to in addition to the Catholic Church which at that time was Our Lady Guadalupe; this was about the only place that they could go to for entertainment and for social events. What they did is they did everything there. They had dances, they had quinceñeras, which are the sweet 15 parties and they also had weddings taking place there and wedding receptions. They also brought movies in from Mexico and showed movies there, Mexican movies. They would also bring in entertainers from Mexico and they would have live performers coming through there. This was a working community in so the Mexican people that were here were real tight-knit because they felt pretty much excluded by everybody else. So the Mexican community that was here depended on one another for moral support and encouragement. One of the organizations that were created by the Mexican community was a group called La Sociedad Mutualista de Benito Juarez in English that means the Mutual Aid Society of Benito Juarez. My grandfather Jose _____ was one of the founders and early leaders of this organization. I believe it was located on Avenue K, I'm not positive, but I think it was Avenue K, right close to my grandfather's house which was the 7300 block of Avenue H. This society office was located on the 7400 block. I understand and I'm not positive but my understanding is that the Sociedad Mutualista are the people that built the Salon Juarez, now called Magnolia Hall. They are the ones that were responsible for maintaining it and paying for it and keeping it up and I understand that there were businesses there as well. There were small businesses from the neighborhood there. My father tells me that my uncle who died way before I was born had a store there and his name was Julian_____ (8:55) Romo and he maintained a

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store there. I have heard that there were other offices there as well and I'm not sure

exactly what they were but...

LC: You mean offices within the casino hall?

RR: Yes it was, it still is, a two story building and one floor they had like a stage or a dance area and then the other was for business and offices and stuff. I'm not really sure exactly which offices were there but the Sociedad Mutualista used it as well as a meeting area for large meetings whenever they had big large public meetings.

LC: Before that they were meeting at the 7400 Avenue K?

RR: Right and they maintained their offices there at 7400. But for larger events where there were going to be a large amount of people they would meet at Salon Juarez. This went on for many years and what I have heard from the community is that some people met their wives there, or their husbands there, at dances and some of them got married there. It was a real strong community focal point for that area. There wasn't a whole lot for them there at the time. So it was important to them as kind of a social gathering place, just like the Catholic Church was at Our Lady of Guadalupe. I understand that Mexicans from the farm lands as far as twenty, thirty miles away would come in, in their wagons and horses and spend the weekend at Our Lady of Guadalupe. They would just camp out there on the church grounds and spend the entire weekend there. So they were real close even though they may be physically far apart from one another and a lot of the people that were older people when I was growing up would know each other very well. So I could go around the neighborhood and see an old timer and they would ask me, "Who are you?" and I would tell them, "Well I'm the grandson of so and so or the grandson of so and so," and they would quickly identify who I was just by knowing who

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my grandparents were. So that was a real strong tradition when I was growing up in the fifties. Everybody knew everybody's families. Salon Juarez though did not take a personal, I did not have any personal experience with it because when I was, just before I turned a teenager my parents moved out to Austin and then I just came back for just two years of high school and then I went back to Austin to go to college and I stayed there until 1984. I never really got an opportunity to do anything or go to anything that was at the Magnolia Hall so I really don't have any personal experiences to relate about it. The only personal experience I had with the building was that roughly about six years ago the building was in very bad shape and it was literally just falling apart. It didn't have a roof anymore and I went by there and I saw a truck and so I immediately parked and went to the building to see if I could find the owner because I had always wondered who the owner was. There was a gentleman in there on the second floor and the floor on the second level was so bad that there were planks that were thrown across these beams and you had to watch your step or you could find yourself on the first floor. You could still see the sky, if you looked up there was no real roof. It was raining and I was getting wet inside the building. So the gentleman turned out to be Lalo, L-A-L-O, Castillo and he told me he was the owner and that he was trying to fix up the building. I talked to him and told him there are several things he can do in terms of historic preservation and I gave him some information on it. He later contacted me and told me that the city, I think it was the housing department or the building services department, was trying to condemn the building and they wanted it torn down and that he was trying to stop them from doing that so he could fix up the building. He was not getting any time from them to try to save the building. So I had a contact in the mayor's office and that contact's name was Gloria

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Cordova, C-O-R-D-O-V-A, is that right? Cordova. So I called Gloria and I told her "Hey

could you help us get this guy some time so that he can go ahead and save this building?

He wants to fix it up but the city building services and housing are saying that it is a

dangerous building and that it is a hazard to the public." So Gloria, because of her

position with the mayor's office, was able to get the mayor to support us and get the city

departments off of Mr. Castillo's back and he was able to restore the building sufficiently

to where they no longer bothered him anymore and they no longer condemned it. That

was about six years ago. I haven't really had a lot of contact with Mr. Castillo since then

but recently I was contacted and told that the building was going to be placed on the

auction block for failure to pay city taxes. Fortunately Mr. Castillo found out about it and

paid the taxes that were due on it. I think it was something like twenty-something

thousand dollars. He said that he did not know that the building was in arrears as far as

taxes that he had turned over the property to his son and that his son was responsible for

it. But he went ahead and paid the taxes. What happened is that generated a lot of news

in the media and Mr. Castillo was open to having assistance from several different

community leaders and community groups that were willing to help paint the exterior of

the building and I was kind of spearheading that. What happened was I went out there

and took a look and basically the building's exterior is in worse shape than I thought it

was and a lot of the exterior planks, especially in the front are warping and it's really not

a good idea to paint the building if it needs major repair on the lumber. So the main issue

is, how are we going to get that lumber repaired or replaced? Because it's still in private

hands and it's still in the Castillo family and it is hard to try to get monies from any

grants or foundations for something like that if it is in private hands. If it was the

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property of a non-profit organization it might be easier to get money but this kind of makes it more difficult for him, so we still haven't resolved that. We still haven't talked to Mr. Castillo and if he wants to figure out what he wants to do. But that is basically the history of that. I tried to get Mr. Castillo to pursue getting a historical marker for the building because it is eligible. I did put him in touch with a gentleman named Barry Moore. Mr. Moore is an architect at the University of Houston, he is an architect but he has taught some classes at the University of Houston and he assigned some students a project on drafting some ideas for the renovation of the building. However, that never happened. Mr. Castillo and the architecture people at U of H were never able to get together on it for some reason or another which I don't know. I suspect a lot of it had to do with the expense that Mr. Castillo wanted to find the easiest, most pain free way to go as far as renovating the building and the architecture people may have had a lot more expensive ideas.

LC: The issue with it being privately owned is there any way, you said it would be easier if a non-profit organization owned it. Is there any way that groups like the Tejano Association or other community groups, would it help for them to gather together as community groups and try to make that happen?

RR: Well, one of the things that I've been thinking of, and Mr. Castillo and I have a very good relationship, he trusts me and he knows that I have tried to help without having any ulterior motives involved or my own personal interest involved. So I think he knows that what I'm thinking of and I have the support of the president, the current president of the Tejano Association is to try to work out some understanding with him to where perhaps the money can be raised by the Tejano Association for that building and perhaps

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the Tejano Association could benefit from it in terms of an office or something I don't

know. So we are going to approach him and see if we can work out some kind of mutually agreeable situation so that he can get the kind of support he needs financially. Because he has already poured a lot of money into the building, not to mention the taxes, and it has been a financial drain to him and I understand that and I appreciate what he has done. There has been some criticism about how did he let the building get to that level, blah, blah, blah. But really my understanding from Mr. Castillo is that he was presented with the ownership of the building from his aunts. He had several aunts that owned the building and they wanted to restore the building and what they did is they removed the roof to replace it and then they never did replace it. When you don't have a roof on a building the building starts to deteriorate immediately. It is the worst thing you can do to a building is take the roof off. He was finally able to get the aunts to turn over the property to him and I don't know the circumstances behind that. But when he took it over it was already falling apart. I credit Mr. Castillo for the work that he has done to keep it going and to keep it from being torn down by the city. I credit Gloria Cordova, who used to be with the mayor's office, for her kind support in getting that building saved. I still want to talk to Mr. Castillo about getting the building historically recognized either locally or state wide or even through the National Register of Historic Places. Because that kind of designation would give it a lot more credence and I think a non-profit foundation, a financial support system could be raised that way if it's got the formal recognition. There's no doubt in my mind that that is the most important building to the Mexican American community that still exists. All the other buildings are gone. There are only two buildings that I know that are historically connected to the Mexican

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American community and that's the headquarters of the Sociedad Mutualista de Benito

Juarez and then there's another Sociedad Mutualista Obrera Mexicana on Canal Street and they own that building and it's in fairly good; I think physically it's still in good shape. I don't know if they still own it or not but they use that as their offices. Both of those organizations are gone. They do not exist actively anymore. There may be one or two people that may still hold title to those buildings but those groups are no longer active and those two buildings I think are the next important buildings historically.

About the only other building that is historically significant that far back is Our Lady of Guadalupe Church and the Tejano Association, when I was president, was able to get a state marker designation for Our Lady Guadalupe Catholic Church and those are the only four buildings that I know of that are still around that are historically significant.

Everything else has been lost. You know we tried to save the buildings of

_____ which was the downtown business community for the Mexican American people during the twenties, thirties and forties but all of those buildings were torn down as recently as the nineties.

LC: Obviously this building is worth preserving you would say and how do you think the community that is there now would be affected? Is there enough support from the Mexican American community and what it means for their history and heritage?

RR: Well when you ask that there are different ways to answer that because one, the community has changed a great deal and I think there is support for the building from people like Dorothy Karam and Felix Fraga and other people like them who are community activists, community leaders who know the history and had some personal contacts there with that building. Those people can respect and understand and value the

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historical significance of that building. But when you look at the current community that

is living there, a lot of those people are newcomers. Many of those people are more recent immigrants from Mexico. They don't know the history of the building. They've never heard of the building; they have maybe not even noticed the building before because it hasn't been an active community in probably 30, 40 years. So they are not really connected to the building and don't care about it because they really don't understand it. I think many of the older people that live there are familiar with its history and would value it but it is the old timers and it's the community leaders that would know that. So there is a mixed response when you bring it up.

LC: Right. Going back to some of the history that you were talking about I had read that the hall was built in 1928, do you know if the Sociedad Mutualista did they build it themselves or was it a community project?

RR: My understanding is that it was a project of the Sociedad Mutualista and I'm not completely certain of that but that's what I've heard. I have to go by hearsay and I believe that that is the case.

LC: Do you know, I also read that in 1932 they lost, they lost the hall as their own because they couldn't pay the dues; do you know what happened then or what was it used for?

RR: No I'm not really sure. But I know they went through some financial hard times. I'm not really sure what the specifics are with regard to the building and who actually took it over.

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LC: In terms of just generally, as a mutual aid society at the time, and as they developed with Mexicans moving into the area, what can you tell me about the society as to why they formed and what they meant?

RR: Most of the people that were here at that time came here for a combined number of reasons. The first one was the Mexican Revolution and many of these people felt that their lives were threatened. Basically regardless of what side you were on, as far as the politics, if the opposing army came into your town and you had a relative that was active in the war for the other side and the opposing army knew it, they would line up everybody that was related and shoot them. They would just slaughter anyone that they thought was related to any of their enemies. My grandfather decided that he was raising a family, he had a young wife, he had, I believe, a young son and daughter and he just decided it wasn't a healthy place for them to be. He had gotten pretty much disillusioned with politics in Mexico. He just decided that it was safer for them to come to the United States and they got their papers in order. They really didn't have papers officially allowing them into the country and I think that is highly unusual but they did have the proper documentation and came into the U.S. One of the reasons was the Mexican Revolution and the second one was economic opportunities. They thought they would have a better chance of succeeding over here. My grandfather and his older brother had run a store in Monterrey, Mexico and had been very successful at it. But I think because of the times and the civil war, the revolution, things just fell apart and he decided to move to the U.S.. He went to several places before he finally settled in Houston stayed in Houston.

LC: So the Sociedad Mutualista was...

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RR: Right, I forgot the second part of the question. What happened was; when a lot of Mexican people came here they found that the place was very different from their culture. The language was different, they were looked down upon by a lot of the people for not being able to speak English and they were considered uneducated because they didn't speak the language. They felt they needed support from one another, they didn't have a whole lot of money individually for the most part. They were very frugal and hard working and everybody did whatever they could to survive in terms of the members of the family. What they did is they created these patriotic organizations like the

_____ and the Sociedad Mutualista de Benito Juarez and it was really like what they did with the mutual aid society was one it was a gathering place for people who had common experiences even though they were coming from...

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RR: They didn't have a lot of money for when someone got sick or when someone had to be buried so the Mutual Aid Society did that for you. If you were a member of the aid society and one of your relatives died, one of your family members died, that would pay for your expenses for your funeral that you had to take care of. If someone had to go to the doctor and have an operation or be hospitalized, they would pay for that. A story that my uncle Alfonso Vasquez told me, he married into the family, he married one of my grandfather's daughters or my aunt. That was when Macario Garcia came back from World War II and was made a hero because he had gotten the Congressional Medal of Honor, he got into some _____ he was not allowed into a bar, he was mistreated at a bar because he was Mexican American and so he caused a big scene and a fight and so he was arrested and he was going to be tried. So the Mutual Aid Society came up with

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money to support his legal defense and when, I think the charges were dropped or the case was closed or something, but basically whoever was after him let him go. So they had all this money they had raised for the defense of Macario Garcia, my uncle Alfonso Vasquez, he told me that he had been attending the meeting and he didn't know my grandfather at that time because he wasn't dating his daughter, but he heard Jose Guillien which was my grandfather, suggest to them, "Well he's a young man and he shouldn't be given that money because he will just waste it and throw it away. What we should do is consider buying a home for his parents. That way his parents have a home of their own."

A vote was taken and the Mutual Aid Society members decided that that was what they were going to do with the money that they had raised for Macario Garcia was to buy his parents a home. My grandfather never did tell me that. I heard it from my uncle Alfonso Vasquez. So said that was to become my father in law. They did things like that. They closed ranks and helped one another out whenever there was some kind of trouble. I also heard stories from my family that the Magnolia Park area where Magnolia Hall or Salon Juarez was located used to be an independent city called Magnolia Park. There is still the original City Hall and the one cell prison building where they held prisoners and that the sheriff of that area was really biased and that he would spend his weekends going to all the cantinas and arresting every Mexican American he could for drunkenness and put them in the jail house until it was full. So there was a lot of discrimination and a lot of abuse that was going on. The Catholic Church organized the Our Lady Guadalupe Church for Mexicans because they didn't want Mexicans attending their own churches so they wanted them to go to their own church. The Mexicans that were here at that time were quite content with that. They didn't really care to go to church and attend services

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in another language. They preferred to have their own priest speaking to them in Spanish if possible and be able to conduct services in their language which they were familiar with. They stuck together. It was a different time.

LC: Yeah they weren't really interested in assimilation into...

RR: They just wanted opportunities, equal opportunities for jobs and equal pay if they could and equal rights so they wouldn't be abused.

LC: Were women involved?

RR: Women were involved, not formally because these organizations were men's organizations but the women were always there. They may not be seen or heard but they were very, they had a very big impact. The women were the ones that organized the dances and did all the behind the scenes work. They are the ones that provided the food, that cooked the food and prepared it and brought it and they did all that. One lady who eventually, she was a young lady at the time, she told me she was going to the Our Lady of Guadalupe School and that if the walls could talk, they were made by tamales. What they did was they would make tamales and they would sell them and raise money for the church and I think the society groups did the same thing. All their fundraisers and stuff that they did, the women were there involved and supporting. I found out late, much later in life that in the Mexican society, the men are the ones that always have the voice and always, they are the cocks, they are walking around crowing about everything. But really a lot of the women make the decisions in the family. They are the ones that control the money and my grandfather was the same way. He was the one that always did the talking and was always visible but really, when they were home, my grandmother was the one that ran things. She would tell him, "I need you go to the store and get this and this and

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this and here's the money, go get it." Then he'd come back and he'd forget something and she'd chew him out. "You forgot the milk. What are you thinking? Go back and get the milk." But really it was a very equitable partnership even though it may not appear like that in public. But the women really did have a lot of say in things and they still do in Mexican society.

LC: In terms of the members of the Sociedad Mutualista do you know how many were typically a part of it; how many members there would be and were there dues that would restrict any part of the community from being a part of it?

RR: I think there were quite a few. I can't tell you how many that where there. There were probably in its heyday probably about one hundred, one hundred and twenty members. Like any organization it's always a handful or a dozen-ful that really run the place and that are there all the time. I think that is probably true of these societies that had over a dozen people. I have a photo of that time frame that has a lot of the community leaders and many of these people were members of the Sociedad Mutualista. It's another organization but I'll be glad to show it to you after our interview so you can see some of these people. The ones that took the leadership roles in these organizations were usually the men that had the money that had the successful businesses. I know that Manuel _____ who was the founder of the _____ Funeral Home was one of those people. Felix Morales of Morales Funeral Home was also, he was also the owner of the, I can't think of the name of the radio station but he had the first Spanish language radio station, KLVL.

LC: Oh yeah.

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RR: He started both of those things. Then he got his wife in as the funeral director.

Mrs. Morales' angle of attack or sales pitch was: "You don't want your deceased's wife's body touched by a man so bring your loved one to me." That was a big selling thing at that time. Because almost all the funeral directors were men and she was the only woman at the time. Felix Tijerina was another major leader and all of these people were very active. There were a lot of attorneys that were successful at that time and they tended to be the leaders.

LC: You may have mentioned this before but when you were growing up over there in the fifties before you moved to Austin was the building active with anything do you remember or was it just abandoned already?

RR: I think it was active I just don't remember, I was too young to remember anything going on there. I may or may not have attended some functions there I just don't remember because I was too small.

LC: Okay but it was still part of the Mexican American community there?

RR: Right. I don't think it started to lose its heyday until the sixties when I was leaving, I was already gone.

LC: Okay. I heard that in trying to, in some of the efforts that have been done to preserve the building or find someone to buy or lease it from the current owner that there have been these issues as to, who is going to want to use the building? Issues about surrounding neighborhoods and who will be attracted to that or issues of even parking; this obviously poses a problem, what do you think about that?

RR: I don't think it is a real problem. Actually I have the opposite opinion that it has commercial value; it has definitely historic value to the community. The priests that are

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out there in that area now and some of the more younger leadership may not be aware of

it but surely through their work some of them have heard of the importance of the building historically. But commercially it is also important. I had a lady contact me not too long ago that wanted to consider leasing the building. She said that she felt that it had commercial value and that it could be used for either housing or for office space and she was interested in talking to Mr. Castillo about it. So I think it has some value. The community in that area has become more populated. They have built a lot of town homes and apartment complexes off of the Harrisburg area and I think that's going to continue not just in some parts of the town but also in the east end and I think that you are going to see more and more people in that community so space is going to become more important.

LC: If it does become commercially used how do you think the history could be presented there so that people still know what the building was and how important it was?

RR: Well it's important to have a photographic documentation of the building. One of the things that I'd like to do but I haven't had the time is to help identify, like you are doing, some people who have had some history with the building and hopefully some of these people have taken photos or kept photos of the building and I would like to be in contact with them and ask them to come in and have their photographs copied by our photographer and give him his permission to have the public come in and make copies upon demand. In other words if we can have photos, we'll be glad to make a copy for ourselves and maintain the negative here and then if somebody wants to they can come in and see if they want to make a reproduction of them or not. We don't really profit from

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it, we charge just enough to recoup our expenses in making these reproductions. Many of our photos that we have here are used in a lot of historic research. We have a lot of our photographs used for film documentaries, magazine publications, and book publications. We get a lot of use out of our photos and we have over 3.5 million images here. So we have a lot of material but we still need a lot more. For example, there was a building that was called the _____ Theater it was the first successful Mexican American theater and the El Centro business district downtown. I tried to save that building but there was a fire and it was destroyed. I have only found an interior photo that was used in Tom _____ book on Mexican American Pictorial History and that photo is in there of the interior but I have never been able to get a photo of the exterior when it was in operation. I have some photos of it after it had been shut down but not while it was operating as a theater and I'd love to be able to get one and I know somewhere someone has it, but I haven't been able to find one. So I'd like to be able to piece together as many photos of the various different Hispanic communities that existed at that time and be able to preserve as much history as possible. I think that what you are doing with the oral histories is very important because there aren't too many people left that had personal experiences at Magnolia Hall or Salon Juarez and it is really important that we try and record these oral histories.

LC: One thing I read that the Sociedad Mutualista there motto if you will was

_____ and I thought that was kind of interesting and ironic especially for this building that it is a union in progress you would think that this original group was still around there would be something that a preservation issue like this would be right up their alley.

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RR: I agree and I've thought about that many times about why organizations come and go. There was Mexico _____ which was a social organization, primarily women running that. The Azalea Club another big women's group in those time frames, they have come and gone. The societies have gone and they were replaced by groups like the American GI Forum and the LULAC and my dad has been an active member of the American GI Forum and not an active member but he has been a member of LULAC. The American GI Forum is virtually gone now. There aren't that many members left, there aren't very large numbers of members of people in them and they are not very active. Some say that LULAC is not as powerful or as big as it used to be. I have not been able to understand the dynamics in terms of why organizations come and go. The Tejano Association for Historical Preservation and the Hispanic Genealogical Society and the Hispanic Forum are organizations of today but whether they will be around ten years from now I don't know. The Tejano Association I am pleased to say was founded in 1989 and is still going pretty well but since I have founded it we have had five presidents now and its for the first time being run by a female Linda _____ a school teacher and the Houston Hispanic Genealogical Society is still going pretty strong. They were founded a little earlier than 1989 I don't remember exactly when but they are going very strong. They aren't very large; their membership fluctuates back and forth. I think the Tejanos when I was president had a little more than a hundred members and now it's probably twenty or so at the most. They are more visible now because of their parades that they have for Cesar Chavez, that's a biggie for them. Things changed, the leadership changed and the mood of the people changed as to what is important and I'll never be able to understand it I just know that it happens.

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LC: Well one more thing there was an article in the Chronicle last month you may have read it.

RR: I missed it.

LC: The subtitle is that “Houstonians Do Not Necessarily Cherish Their Buildings, But We Share an Abiding Affection for our Communities and Their Traditions.” I thought that was interesting especially for this building because the building is so much about the community and is about the community and it seems like you need to cherish the building in order to have the affection for the community. I just kind of wanted to hear what you thought about that.

RR: Well Houston has one of the worst records as far as preserving its buildings. I sat on the Houston Archeological and Historical Commission for six years as a Vice Chairman and I only got off when I came to work for the city and I was asked by the director not to continue because of the politics, the conflict. Although the legal department said there was no conflict. The legal department said there is no conflict but you need permission from your director to continue and she would not give it. But in my six years there, we were working with a preservation ordinance that was created by Mayor Bob Lanier and Mayor Bob Lanier is a developer and he is a real strong pro advocate developer and they don’t want to have their hands tied by any ordinance of any kind. So if you look at the city’s ordinance it basically allows you to disagree with the city, the city may tell you, “No I’m not going to give you a permit to do what you want,” but after so many weeks if they still want to go ahead and do what you want you can and it’s just a lot that is really like a paper tiger it really means nothing. The developers know that so they can get away with murder. The large restaurant-ier in town tore down a

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historic building knowing it was a historic building, knowing it was breaking the law and then said, "Oops sorry about that." He was fined a few hundred dollars for it. He didn't mind paying a few hundred dollars for it. He was going to realize a huge profit by turning the land over for something else. It was going to probably make him thousands of dollars. There is no incentive for people to obey the laws here on preservation. Most developers would rather just tear down something than to preserve something. There is only one guy who has been in my opinion a successful developer who has also been a preservationist and that is a guy named Randall Davis. Randall Davis bought the Pappa's Building he bought the old Lewis and Clark printing company building which is by Allen Parkway and he has bought what is now known as the Dakota Lofts which is a warehouse and he has converted these into town homes and has successfully sold them. He has made millions of dollars and now he is building a lot of new buildings all over town. But he started out with buying historical buildings and restoring them and making money off of them. He did the same thing in Galveston. He saved a warehouse in The Strand and another building over there that he successfully turned into a commercial venture. So I believe you can get a building that is historical and renovate it and still make money off of it. I think that Salon Juarez is such a building. Yeah you might not make millions off of it but I think you can still make it profitable and at the same time preserve the history of the community and it's just not being done. I think it is the mindset that people in Houston have. San Antonio to the west of us is preserving their beautiful buildings and homes, their neighborhoods around the downtown area. New Orleans has saved a lot of beautiful areas of their older city. There is a town just north of us called Montgomery and Montgomery is just a small town but if you go through that time you will find a lot of

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beautiful old buildings from the 1800s that have been preserved. They have a lot of historical markers in that little town and little Victorian homes and early homes that were built by early Texans, many that were signers of the Texas Declaration. But it can be done. I think you can make your city not only more attractive and not only more appealing to visitors and tourists but profitable. San Antonio profits from their tourists. New Orleans profits from their tourists. Montgomery may not make a lot of money off of tourists but there is a big pride in their citizens on how beautiful their town looks and how historic it looks. Bastrop, Texas has a lot of beautiful buildings that are left over from their old downtown area, probably just as many as we have here and they are a lot smaller. It is just the attitude of the people and I think it is education; informing that things that are historic have a value and a place for us.

LC: Well okay do you have anything else to add, anything we left out? That's all the questions I have.

RR: No I think that's pretty much it.

LC: Okay thank you.

End of Interview.