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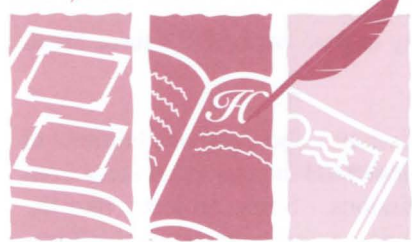
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The Joint Archives *Quarterly*

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Latin Americans United for Progress: Processing the History of Holland's Latino Citizens

By James Richardson

During the summer of 2009, I was employed to assist Professor Jonathan Hagood, of the Hope College Department of History, in his research initiative to learn more about the Latino community in West Michigan, with a special emphasis on Latinos in Holland. This was a rather unique effort for both of us, since it was Professor Hagood's first research project here at Hope, and since I would be helping in the initial planning stages. During the winter and spring of 2008, we met on several occasions to discuss plans for how to handle the initial stages of research. One of the first projects that had to be tackled directly involved the Joint Archives of Holland, since Latin Americans United for Progress (LAUP) had donated a significant volume of records to the archives. LAUP was one of the most important sources for information in Dr. Hagood's research, since it is the primary Latin American civil organization in Holland, and one of the most prominent in West Michigan in general. Any understanding we hoped to gain regarding Latinos in West Michigan would rely heavily on LAUP records and documents.

When I arrived for work at the archives, I discovered that there was a reasonable amount of organized LAUP material, which had been processed by Joint Archives volunteer Lee Witteveen in 2004. However, there were also a number of disorganized boxes of LAUP material, which had been donated to the archives after 2004, and my first task was to assimilate these files into the existing system. This project took a number of weeks, and I won't bother to describe the individual tasks of processing each piece of paper and discarding duplicates. Suffice it to say that my most important duties were to process the papers, create new topic folders, if necessary, and make sure everything was organized. In other words, it was Archiving 101.

Within my processing duties, Dr. Hagood also assigned me to perform peripheral projects. One of these was to compile more detailed finding aids for specific topics related to LAUP, such as the scholarship, Fiesta, and queen contest. For each of these projects, I scoured the LAUP folders (once I had completed the organization of the LAUP archives), found the materials that were most relevant to each particular topic, and created a database of sorts related to those specific topics. I also scanned some pictures and documents that I thought were especially representative of the LAUP materials for each topic, and added those into the database so that interested users could see, at a glance, a sample of what sort of materials they might find in the archives without actually searching through boxes first. For example, with regard to the scholarship, I scanned letters from LAUP to potential donors to the scholarship fund and examples of scholarship assessment rubrics. The idea was that this information would eventually be uploaded to the archives website, and allow those who were interested in major LAUP topics to find specific data more easily. Dr. Hagood, for his part, envisioned the potential utility of such a database for his research, since it would allow him easier access to major LAUP primary sources. Dr. Hagood also foresaw the possibility that future students, if he were to teach a course on Latinos in West Michigan, could have easier access to primary sources, as well, for research papers.

My second peripheral duty was to utilize census data to compile a picture of the historical demographic distribution of Latinos in West Michigan, Michigan in general (by county and by city), and in each state in the Midwest. This task did not directly involve archival sources, but I completed it at the archives. I studied the trends of Latino immigration to West Michigan, the

(continued on page 2)

From the Director



In this issue of the *Quarterly*, you will learn more about one of our collections and the intensive research it underwent during the summer of 2009. The author of the article, Hope College student James Richardson, came to us because Dr. Jonathan Hagood saw some real value in one of his students using primary documents for a summer research project. I believe all of us benefited from Richardson's time with us. Since then, the archives has hosted two more of Dr. Hagood's students, giving them an opportunity to process some of our collections and see historical documents in their rawest form—an experience many students of history may never have. We look forward to hosting more student historians in the future and opening their eyes to the past.

Geoffrey Reynolds

LAUP (continued from page 1)

trends of the growing Latino population in Holland, and the current distribution of Latinos around the state. One of my most interesting discoveries from all this number crunching was the relative magnitude of Holland's Latino population. In fact, Holland has one of the largest Latino populations for *any* Michigan city.

The chart on the back page lists selected cities in Michigan (with an emphasis on West Michigan, although major East Michigan cities are represented, as well), and the percentage of their population that identified itself as "Latino" in the 2000 census. In 2000, Holland's Latinos made up around 22.5% of the city's population. As you can see, this makes Holland one of the most significant Latino communities in the state.

This brings us to the importance of LAUP's work in Holland. During the latter half of the twentieth century, civil associations, especially LAUP, performed three vital functions for Holland's Latinos. First, LAUP improved the social and economic conditions of Latinos in Holland. Second, LAUP strengthened ties between the Latino and Anglo-Dutch communities. Third, LAUP worked to unify and maintain the cultural heritage of Holland's Latino population. To what extent did LAUP succeed in furthering these important goals? What programs have been most effective in these efforts? LAUP programs—from the scholarship to the Fiesta queen contest, Posada to the Fiesta, and basketball leagues to coordination with Holland's public schools—varied in the magnitude of their impact on the Holland community at large, because

they varied in their ability to perform LAUP's three broad goals outlined above.

LAUP's numerous missions and responsibilities to Holland's Latinos complemented the tasks that stem from its three overarching missions. Some projects, like the LAUP scholarship, athletic contests, educational efforts, and monitoring of gang activity were a direct effort to improve the standing of Latinos within the Holland community through investment in Latino youth. This type of project implies a sort of "mainstreaming" of Holland's Latino community in that LAUP was directly engaged in improving the lot of all Latinos by working to raise the socio-economic status of the community as a whole, and attempting to create a new generation of middle and upper middle-class Latino leaders.

Other integration-oriented programs, like the annual Latin American Fiesta, which takes place alongside Holland's Dutch-oriented Tulip Time Festival, and the LAUP queen contest continue to serve as an interface between the two most prominent cultures in Holland, and a way to increase the visibility of the Latino populace and its heritage. The main goal of these ongoing efforts is to "showcase" the Latino community to the Anglo-Dutch community at large, and to improve public relations.

The LAUP scholarship and the Fiesta queen contest are, in my opinion, two excellent examples of LAUP programs which continue to assist Latinos in the process of working into the mainstream of Holland society, and both programs work to create new generations of leaders and role models within the Latino community. Both programs have some themes in common: they require a measure of academic and extracurricular success, and they require knowledge of the Spanish language, as well as Latino culture, for success. LAUP, of course, ran many other programs, and these were very important for Holland's Latinos as well, but given the necessity of limitation, I will focus on the two programs that I feel do the most to improve social and economic conditions for the Latin American community in Holland.

The efforts to bring the Latino community into Holland's cultural mainstream have a longer tradition than do efforts aimed at preserving Latino identity and are, generally speaking, more broad-based than other LAUP programs. The reason for this is simple: at the time of LAUP's foundation, Latinos in Holland were less removed from their cultural heritage than are their children and perhaps grandchildren thirty years later. For example, LAUP conducted its meetings in Spanish, or in a bilingual fashion, more often than not during the first decade of the organization's existence. The LAUP meeting of April 20, 1975, is an excellent example of this, since LAUP's Spanish name, Latinos Unidos Para El Progreso is written

above its English one, and the minutes are recorded in both languages side-by-side. Further, 1975 correspondence between Lupita Reyes of LAUP and Antonio Flores of Hope College listed the most important issues facing contemporary Latinos: "education, housing, health, employment, delinquency..." The need to preserve Latino culture was not particularly dire, and LAUP faced more urgent issues. Conversely, due to this cultural environment, the need to work Latinos into Holland's mainstream society was much greater as a result of their increased closeness to Latino culture.

This necessity generated the need for the scholarship. The LAUP scholarship first arose in 1978, only four years after the foundation of the organization. It was then, and still is to this day, a vehicle for the mainstreaming of Holland's Latino community. The scholarship's goal, beyond the explicit one of simply sending promising Latino youths to college, was to create new, educated, middle-class leaders for the Latino community in Holland. The hope was that scholarship recipients, upon finishing school, would return to work in the Holland area and serve as both leaders and positive role models, creating a cycle of success. A 1998 letter from LAUP to a scholarship winner bluntly stated his importance to the community: "We [LAUP] are confident that you will become a tremendous role model for the Holland Hispanic community." This whole process represented an investment by LAUP in the future of Holland's Latino youth, and it was a significant investment. The scholarship was always one of the organization's most remarkable financial outlays. Its funding came through large-scale corporate sponsorship from the Heinz Corporation, Holland Die Casting & Plating and others, from grants written into wills, such as the Padnos scholarship, and high-volume private donations.

The scholarship program included a rigorous and effective application process. Two of the most important factors in the scholarship were financial circumstances and family background. The process favored less fortunate applicants over those who were well provided for, and the selection committee used family tax returns to measure the need of candidates. Academically, LAUP required applicants to demonstrate a high GPA, strong course load of college-prep classes, and high standardized test scores. Employment and extracurricular activities both played a strong role in the application process and were usually a source of recommendation letters.

Over the years, one of the most important criteria for judging scholarship applicants remained their facility with the Spanish language and their knowledge of Spanish culture. The application included a personal interview, which required the applicant to speak extemporaneously in Spanish and tested his/her knowledge and comfort with

Spanish culture. LAUP also took the immigrant status of the applicant into consideration, as the selection committee gave priority to first-generation immigrants over third-generation immigrants in receiving the scholarships.

Overall, the scholarship grew into one of LAUP's most successful measures. To gain a scholarship, an applicant needed an appropriate mixture of academic distinction and Latino heritage, and, as a result, the scholarship ensured that only those youth with strong ties to the local Latino community were eligible. More importantly, and prudently, the scholarship money was not paid out until the recipient provided his/her proof of enrollment at a university or college (including transcripts, class schedule, and financial aid information), giving incentive to the applicant to stay in school.

The program successfully sent Latino students to colleges all over Michigan. For example, in 1983, Raul Alvarez, Jr., enrolled at Michigan State University and majored in chemical engineering; Yvonne Perez attended Davenport College to major in fashion and merchandising; and Ruben Ruiz, a Cuban refugee, attended Hope College to learn computer science. In 1995, Tabitha Mares attended Hope College to major in social work and music; Rachel Molina attended Grand Valley State University to major in Spanish education; and Micaela Vergara enrolled at Saint Mary's College in the hopes of eventually entering medical school. Aside from the schools already mentioned, scholarship winners also attended the University of Michigan, Western Michigan, Ferris State, Northern Michigan, and even private colleges like Calvin College.

The second example of a program which helped create new generations of leaders and role models within the Latino community was the queen contest. During LAUP's annual Fiesta, LAUP traditionally named a "Queen": a young woman who represented LAUP's ideals and was presented as a role model for the youth. It was a major event for young Latino women, who eagerly anticipated the naming of the queen and her court at each Fiesta. The queen contest had many parallels with the scholarship. It was also aimed primarily at the youth and involved a certain level of scholastic and cultural competition. There were differences, as well, in that the queen contest was only open to young women and, unlike the scholarship, was not limited to those about to leave high school. Any high school-aged girl could compete, although it should be noted that one of the contest's requirements was the intent to study in an institution of post-secondary education of some sort in order to be eligible to receive award money. The contest was only a beauty pageant to a small degree, as the "poise/evening gown" section of the evaluation rubric represented only 1 of the 8 topics. The

rest were more cultural or academic in nature. There was an academic project turned in and judged prior to the contest, a "spontaneous question" that required contestants to extemporaneously provide an answer to a question on some topic during the evening gown portion, as well as tests of the contestants' knowledge of current events and their awareness of issues facing the Latino community in Holland.

In this way, the queen contest functioned similarly to the scholarship by forcing its contestants to think about the issues facing their geographic and cultural community. However, it sought to raise awareness of Latino issues among the youth in a way that the scholarship generally did not. At the same time, the queen contest diverged from the scholarship in its emphasis on raising the self-esteem and camaraderie of contestants. While this goal was not always explicitly stated, the contest itself contained a "talent" segment and a "group presentation," in which all the contestants performed together. There were group rehearsals for around two to three months (depending on the year) leading up to the Fiesta itself, and these group rehearsals were meant to increase friendship ties between the participants.

LAUP's queen contest further encouraged the "mainstreaming" or "improvement" of the Latino youth through its own criteria. The competition itself encouraged young Latino women to maintain a high GPA, remain single and childless, graduate from high school, and go on to some form of post-secondary education. Both LAUP and the contestants themselves took the academic standards of the queen contest very seriously: in 1998, there were only three contestants academically eligible to compete. One of those, whose grades did not make the cut, held herself accountable, saying, "It was my responsibility to get my grades up." LAUP, for its part, refused to lower the GPA requirement. These standards required the contestants to focus on their futures in a way they might otherwise not have, and, in doing so, the queen contest served as an investment in the future. However, it was an admittedly different sort of investment than the scholarship, with its aim being more to increase high school graduation and prevent premature pregnancy than to guarantee college education (except in the case of the winners). The standards of the queen contest were meant to improve both the female youth and the overall Latino community by extension.

The queen contest performed one more vital function for LAUP, which both goes beyond and complements its obligations to the contestants themselves. The LAUP queen contest was a highly public event, taking place as one of the main events at its annual Fiesta. The queen herself, after her election, also had many public duties to satisfy. She fulfilled the office of queen for one year, and during that time, she acted as an ambassador of sorts for

LAUP. LAUP queens and their court routinely traveled to the annual Hispanic Leadership meeting in Chicago, and they were responsible for representing LAUP in local functions throughout the year. Beyond simply representing LAUP, the queen's most important duty, in the eyes of LAUP, was to present a model of success for younger members of the Latino community at large to emulate.

Finally, as a last "side-effect" of the queen contest, the contest provided much-needed publicity for both LAUP as an organization, and for the Latino community as a whole. The contest itself was well publicized in the *Holland Sentinel* (the local, English-language paper) during most years, and many of the Spanish-language periodicals in the West Michigan area also covered the contest and its results. LAUP brochures from the Fiesta itself usually offered short biographies of each of the contestants, along with a statement or essay from the previous year's exiting queen. It was one of the main attractions of the Fiesta each year. For example, during the 1986 Fiesta, the queen contest occupied the entirety of the morning's entertainment—from 9:30 to 12:30.

In conclusion, the scholarship and the queen contest were both critical issues for LAUP in increasing the opportunities available for Latino youths in Holland. The scholarship not only provided the financial means for bright Latino students to attend college, it also gave those same Latino students encouragement by placing the force of a whole community organization behind their college aspirations, which was a particularly important consideration given the LAUP scholarship's preferential treatment for first-generation immigrants and first-generation college students. Furthermore, the scholarship succeeded because it was an inherently self-sustaining project. The scholarship aimed specifically to increase the ranks of the Latino middle-class in Holland, since it was this group that provided the lion's share of LAUP's leadership. By sending promising Latino students to college, LAUP invested in its own future, as well as that of the Latino community at large. The conceptual brilliance of the scholarship was that its success generated a larger Latino middle class, which, in turn, perpetuated LAUP and the scholarship. The queen contest, meanwhile, required contestants to be able to demonstrate knowledge of issues facing the Latino community and Latino heritage. These requirements were very high-visibility, thanks to the prominence of the queen contest at the Fiesta and the importance of the queen herself within the Latino youth community. Further, since the implied purpose of the queen contest was to develop female role models for the Latino community, it was important that the queen demonstrate knowledge of Latino culture, and thus encourage the retention of Latino traditions.

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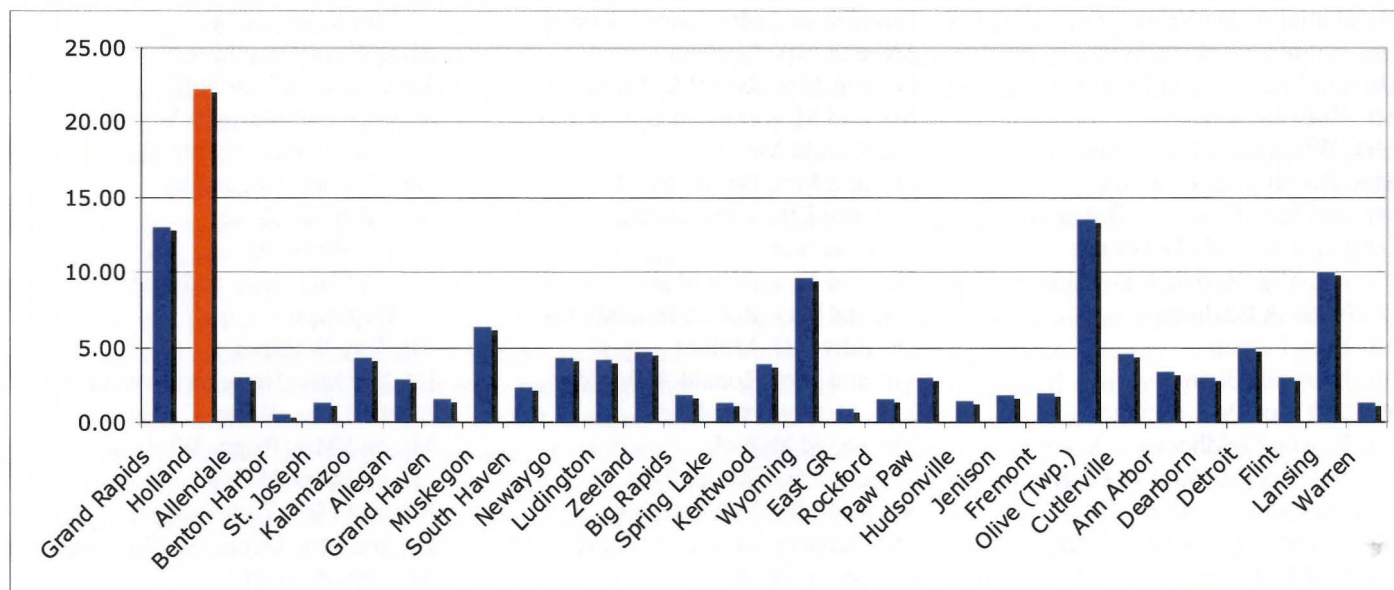


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Percentage of population that identified itself as "Latino" in the 2000 census