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Latino Baseball History Project

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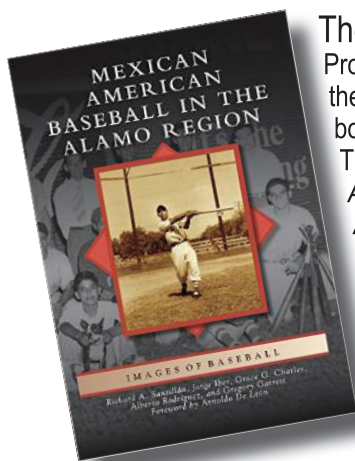
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# LATINO BASEBALL HISTORY PROJECT:

NEWSLETTER



## THE LATINO BASEBALL HISTORY PROJECT ANNOUNCES ITS FIRST TEXAS BOOK: MEXICAN AMERICAN BASEBALL IN THE ALAMO REGION



The Latino Baseball History Project is proud to announce the release of its first Texas book on July 20, 2015.

The book title is *Mexican American Baseball In The Alamo Region*. The study of Mexican Americans in Texas has been a focus of scholars and popular writers for more than 80 years. One area that has not garnered sufficient research has

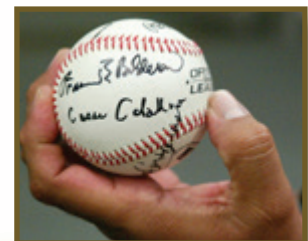
been the role of sport (though that is changing), particularly baseball, as part of individual and communal lives of Spanish-surname persons in the state. Readers will find breath-taking photos and amazing recollections of men and women who played the sport throughout Texas, with emphasis on the San Antonio to Corpus Christi corridor. While it is easy to assume that ball games, especially those on Sundays, served merely a recreational purpose, there was much more to such social gatherings. The photos testify to baseball's power as a mechanism with which to hold onto, and celebrate, cultural identity in the face of great racial difficulties. Success on the diamond was used to challenge stereotypes about the physical and intellectual capabilities of Mexicanos that were all too prevalent among the majority population in years past. For example, the 1949 El Paso Bowie High School team won the state title in baseball while overcoming mistreatment throughout the state because they were of Mexican descent.

In other words, success in baseball, whether in community, scholastic, semi-pro, or professional leagues, showed that Spanish-speakers could compete effectively in a sport that

most white Texans valued. If they were able to accomplish impressive feats in baseball, and later softball, what else were "they" capable of? This book provides but a glimpse of the extensive photographic and anecdotal evidence that shows how significant baseball was, and is, to Mexican American life in Texas.

*Mexican American Baseball in the Alamo Region* celebrates the game as it was played in the Tejano and Tejana communities throughout Texas. This regional focus explores the importance of the game at a time when Spanish-speaking people were demanding cultural acceptance and their political and civil rights in cities like San Antonio, Corpus Christi, New Braunfels, San Diego, Kingsville, and Pleasanton. All had thriving Mexican American communities that found comfort in the game and pride in their abilities on the field. These pages immortalize the historic images and wonderful stories, taking their rightful place in the annuals of the game. Viva Tejas, Viva Beisbol, y Viva Los Peloteros!!

The Alamo book includes a chapter titled "Coast to Coast" that highlights **Continued on Page 5**



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**FOR THE LOVE OF THE GAME:  
MEXICAN AMERICAN WOMEN SOFTBALL AND BASEBALL PLAYERS  
HONORED AT CSU CHANNEL ISLANDS EXHIBITION**

**BY JOSÉ M. ALAMILLO**



***Photo of panel discussion and audience.***

March 2, 2015 was the opening day for an exciting exhibition on Latina softball and baseball players at Broome Library in California State University, Channel Islands, located in Camarillo, Calif. In collaboration



***Photo of panelists, Sandra Uribe and Jose Alamillo***

with the Latino Baseball History Project at Cal State San Bernardino, the Chicana/o Studies Program organized a panel discussion (moderated by Sandra Uribe), a certificate presentation, and a first-pitch ceremony on March 25 to honor these pioneer players for overcoming gender and ethnic barriers in order to play ball. Several players were part of local softball teams such as the Patio Girls, Cotler's Girls, and Merchantes from the city of Oxnard, Las Señoritas from Moorpark, the Sluggerettes from Simi Valley and a Fillmore team composed of young Mexican American girls living on Rancho Sespe. Also in attendance was 92-year-old Marge Villa Cryan who played for the All-



***Marge throwing first pitch***

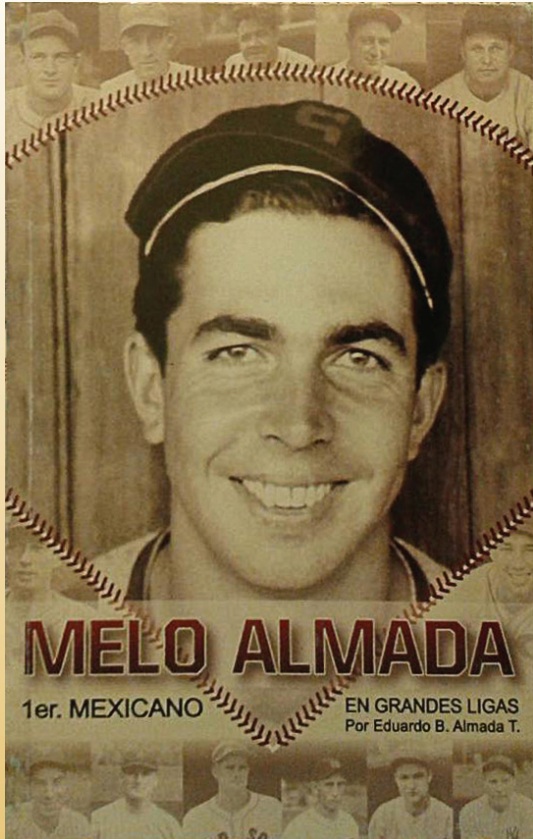
American Girls Professional Baseball League from 1946 to 1950. Marge was one of 11 Latinas who played women's professional baseball who were left out of the 1992 film, *A League of their Own*. Marge talked about her playing years for the Kenosha Comets and the all-star team that traveled throughout Latin America, playing exhibition games against the Cuban all-star team. In 1988, Marge and all the former players of AAGPBL were inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, N.Y. All these women were not only recognized for their athletic achievements but for advancing gender equality in sports and for



***Players signing baseballs for young girls***

making great strides in Chicana and Latina history. A byproduct of this exhibition is a book project titled *Mexican American Baseball in Ventura County*, which will be published next year.

## BOOK SIGNING EVENT ON THE TIMES AND LIFE OF BALDOMERO “MELO” ALMADA



On April 4, 2015, a book-signing event took place at the home of Richard and Teresa Santillan in Alhambra. Nearly 75 people attended the event. One of the special guests was Eduardo B. Almada T., who has written a fascinating book on his father, Melo (also known as Mel), the first Mexican born player in the Major Leagues. Although he was born in Huatabampo, Sonora, Mexico, Melo was raised in Los Angeles. As a pitcher, he took Los Angeles High School to the city championships in 1930 and 1931.

In 1933, he was signed out of the Pacific Coast League to play centerfield for the Boston Red Sox. He made his major league debut with the Red Sox on Sept. 8, 1933, batting .344 in 14 games that season. He became an everyday player in 1935, appearing in 151 games and finishing with a .290 average and 20 stolen bases. Almada was a fine outfielder with strength and accuracy in his throws. Basically a line-drive hitter with outstanding speed, he was a respected leadoff hitter for his great ability to see a significant number of pitches, as well as being able to successfully execute in a bunt situation at any time in the game.

He played in the Major Leagues from 1933 through 1939 for the Red Sox, St. Louis Browns, and the Brooklyn Dodgers. In a seven-season career, Almada posted a .284 batting average with 15 home runs and 197 RBI in 646 games. Almada also had the distinction of having the last official hit off of Babe Ruth. Although most people believe that Ruth stopped pitching after he was traded from the Red Sox to the New

York Yankees, the fact is that Ruth pitched a handful of games as a Yankee, generally the last few games of the season after the Yankees had clinched the pennant. His pitching was basically a publicity stunt that brought out huge crowds. Also, there is strong evidence that Almada had a hit off of the great Walter Johnson during an exhibition game.

Almada returned to the Pacific Coast League for one season with the Sacramento Solons in 1940. He later played and managed in the Mexican League. In 1972, he was inducted to the Mexican Baseball Hall of Fame. Melo Almada died in his hometown of Sonora, Mexico, at age 75.

Melo had an older brother, Louie, who also was born in Mexico and raised in Los Angeles. His pitching took Los Angeles High School to the city championships in 1925 and 1926. Louie was invited to the New York Giants spring training camp in 1927 but failed to win a spot on the roster. Louie switched to the outfield and became a popular player in the Pacific Coast League for the Seattle Indians and San Francisco Mission Reds from 1929 to 1937.

Another special guest at the event was Jim Gonzales, son of Freddie Gonzales, who played in the Pacific Coast League and the Mexican Leagues. Jim's uncle, Joe, played for the Boston Red Sox, and later became the first Mexican American to officiate in the National Football League. In our next newsletter, we will have an extended article on the Gonzales family.

Both Jim and Eduardo shared with everyone wonderful stories about their fathers and uncles.

# The History of Neighborhood House in Logan Heights: Americanization through Baseball

By Maria E. Garcia



## Original Neighborhood House baseball team, The Veterans, 1922.

Settlement Houses across the United States, including Neighborhood House, located at 1809 National Ave., in San Diego, Calif., stated that the Americanization of immigrant residents was one of their goals. Books and news articles from the 1920s through the 1940s allude to the fact that baseball games and baseball teams were methods used in that Americanization.

Neighborhood House, the various canneries, and some employers, formed baseball teams for their employees. This was done not only to Americanize them but to maintain loyalty to a particular employer.



**Philip "Chino" Estrada**

In 1922 Neighborhood House formed its first male baseball team under the direction of Coach Bill Breitenstein. The team was called the Veterans. The team consisted of the following members: Jesus Salgado, Philip "Chino" Estrada, Alfonso Vida, Angel Salazar, Bog Killen, Alfred Vital Robert Allen, Eddie Springer, and Manuel Castro. Chino was quite the baseball

player and played catcher for the Neighborhood House Veterans. The general agreement was that his skills were so good that he should have been on a pro team. His daughter-in-law Concha Estrada, is sure he experienced discrimination because he was not light skinned.

Dr. John Bareño had been promised a scholarship to Berkley by his coach at San Diego High School. The powers that be did not grant him a scholarship, even though he was seen as an excellent player. Dr. Bareño played in the Negro League. Many of the players from Mexico or other Latin countries also played in the Negro League. The Negro League accepted them for their skill and they did not face the discrimination they would have had to face if they had been accepted in white baseball leagues.

William "Babe" Cesena had signed a job offer from a minor league team. After a long train ride to begin



**William "Babe" Cesena**

his baseball career, he was denied a contract. When he arrived at his destination and they realized he was a Mexican American, he was told to return to San Diego.

Discrimination was evident in many ways, yet these boys continued to see a future in baseball as part of their life story. In the period between 1900 and 1930 doors began to open for Latino players in the Major League.

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## JULIAN BARRY AGUIRRE (center)

7-19-1937 TO 8-10-2014

Julian Barry Aguirre was born on July 19, 1937, in a small house located in the city of Pico Rivera, Calif. His parents were Telesfor John Aguirre and Madeline Lucy Barry. He was the youngest of five children after Josephine, Julia, Telesfor, and Bernard. Julian had a very interesting background and heritage that included Native American, Spanish, Mexican, and Irish ancestry. In 1951, he played baseball for the Pico Rivera Little League Pirates with childhood friends Bob Lagunas and Art Lagunas. They were featured in the local newspaper in Pico Rivera along with a photograph of the entire baseball team.

On Dec. 31, 1961, Julian was married to Lucille Marie Henninger; their marriage lasted more than 50 years. They had four children named Danny, James, Brian and, Jannine. He worked in the construction industry like his two older brothers, Telesfor and Bernard, for more than 50 years until the ripe old age of 70. The most important things in his life were his wife, four children, and six grandchildren.

The two major passions that would influence the life of Julian were his interest in photography and his interest in family history. He was also very proud and honored to be part of the book *Mexican American Baseball In The Central Coast*. He would always show the book to his family members and friends because he was so proud of his family history in baseball. Through thick and thin, Julian always had a positive attitude and made friends with every person that he came into contact with. Now he is throwing out the first pitch in the "Field of Dreams" known as the "Big Diamond" in the sky. He is waiting for all of us to join him someday so he can add us to his "All Star" family roster. He will always be in our hearts and souls until we meet again in the "World Series" of heaven.

Rest In Peace!

(James Henninger Aguirre)

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### MEXICAN AMERICAN BASEBALL IN THE ALAMO REGION

Continued from Page 1

baseball and softball outside of Texas, especially California (Stockton and Los Angeles), and the Rocky Mountain states of Wyoming, Colorado, Montana, and Nebraska.

Two future books on Texas baseball are under way, including *Mexican American Baseball in South Texas* for 2016, and *Mexican American Baseball in the Houston Region* in 2017. The Project urges all of its readers to contact us regarding your vintage Texas photos and stories. There are many Tejanos living in California who have photos to share with us.

The authors for the Alamo book are Richard A. Santillan, professor emeritus of ethnic and women's studies at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona; Jorge Iber, associate dean of the Colleges of Arts and Sciences and professor of history, Texas Tech University; Grace G. Charles, archivist, Texas A&M University, Corpus Christi; Alberto Rodriguez, assistant professor of history, Texas A&M University, Kingsville; and Gregory Garrett, educational specialist, Institute of Texan Cultures, University of Texas, San Antonio.

# Sugar Beet Fields to Fields of Dreams

By Jody and Gabriel Lopez

Our mission statement: "To explore, present, and preserve the communities' history and memories by highlighting the Hispanic/Mexicans' contributions historically through their lives."

We were born and raised in Cheyenne, Wyo, and now reside in Greeley, Colo. We began our work with a plan to research Gabriel's family. Peggy Ford Waldo, who coordinates research for the Greeley Museums/Archives, realized the need to document the information gathered from our relatives, and she offered to help by conducting oral history interviews. The interviews became part of the collections of the Greeley Museums and the National Baseball Hall of Fame.

We have documented and collected: oral histories (video and audio), hundreds of photos, newspapers, archives, and published reports. The idea of organizing the stories in book form began to gather momentum when we visited libraries and archives around the region, looking for documents that would provide a visual dimension to the verbal accounts.

We delved into our subject as dedicated historians. We knew we were meeting a need. Few published resources exist to tell the stories of the struggles and accomplishments of early Mexican farm workers. This is an ongoing research project.

On Oct. 9, 2012, we were honored to have our two books (*White Gold Laborers* and *From Sugar to Diamond*), research materials, and photos added to the National Baseball Hall of Fame Library and Archives in Cooperstown, N.Y.

We also have created an extensive traveling exhibit of the Sugar Beet Baseball League that came from this and other colonias. The exhibit will be shown in the National Baseball Hall of Fame Museum in 2016.

This exhibit has already been shown in more than 10 locations, from universities to civic centers and museums. Families and schools have seen it; some professors gave their students assignments to view the exhibit, then design their own. We presented this history when we were invited to participate in the 25th Annual Cooperstown Symposium in 2013.

Work in the beet fields was arduous, and the

men and boys of las colonias found recreation and relief from work in baseball. Local teams were soon formed, and they traveled to neighboring towns and colonias to play. The teams got together to form an organization that later became the Rocky Mountain League of the National Semi-Pro Baseball Congress.

The teams' reputations for consistently high caliber players and great ball games brought them to the attention of envious players from outside las colonias. Soon, friendships were established among players in the various colonias and other towns, many lasting a lifetime. Race was never an issue and no "color lines" had to be crossed. The integrated Sugar Beet League was unique and ahead of its time.

*White Gold Laborers* is a social and cultural history of the men, women, and children who, as sugar beet tenders were offered opportunity for permanent residency in northern Colorado, in company-sponsored colonies. Thousands living today in different parts of our country can vividly and intimately relate to the history presented here. While the events described occurred in northeastern Colorado, the individual and collective memories are reminiscent of the Hispanic experiences in America from the 1920s through the 1950s.

"*White Gold Laborers* demonstrates that it is not the color of one's skin, but rather one's values that determine the course of a life... This book is especially important now as communities across the United States continue struggling with the integration of different cultures, languages, and peoples. What this book illustrates is that it is possible to live with dignity despite hardship and to maintain heritage while also contributing to the larger community." - Allen M. Huang, Ed.D., Provost & Vice President for Academic Affairs, University of Northern Colorado

Mexican Americans became a minority in the United States not by immigrating but by being conquered during the Mexican War. They left their homes in New Mexico, Southern Colorado, Texas, Arizona, and Mexico for the promise of work. They encountered harsh realities as stoop laborers, and were often treated as outcasts, not equals. Despite hardships they stayed, because their survival depended on it. "We worked hard; we had to, or we starved," relates Moses Espinosa. The Hispanic beet workers learned to be content with giving the best they had to offer. "When I was ten, I used to cry every time we had to work in the field. But once

**"Work in the beet fields was arduous, and the men and boys of "la colonias" found recreation and relief from beet work in baseball." "**

*Sugar Beet Fields continued on page 7*

## Community News



**Co-directors Terry Cannon (left), and Professor Joseph Price (center), lead the grand opening of the Institute for Baseball Studies, located on the third floor of Mendenhall at Whittier College on Friday Jan. 16, 2015. The institute containing books, documents, and artifacts will be open to students and the public .**

(Photo by Keith Durlfinger/*Whittier Daily News*)

to get current information on hours or to make an appointment. To follow news on the Institute of Baseball Studies, "like" the institute on Facebook.

### **Institute for Baseball Studies opens at Whittier College**

Baseball has been America's game for over a century. It's been an essential part of our culture but, maybe because it is a game, it has been dismissed by scholars. In the last decade that has changed. Scholars are beginning to study baseball as a part of our culture and as a window into the culture of our nation.

On Jan. 16, at Whittier College in Whittier, Calif., the nation's first research institute to focus on the study of baseball opened its doors. The Institute for Baseball Studies is founded on a partnership between Whittier College and the Baseball Reliquary whose collection provided the seeds for the new institute's collection. Here scholars will study baseball and its place in America's culture.

The co-directors are Whittier College's professor of Religious Studies, Joseph L. Price, and the executive director of the Baseball Reliquary, Terry Cannon. Cannon also serves on the board of the Latino Baseball History Project. If you are interested in conducting research on baseball, call (562)907-4803

### *Have you seen:* **Baseball in San Diego: From the Plaza to the Padres** by Bill Swank and the San Diego Historical Society

This book takes readers from San Diego's first baseball game at Horton Plaza in 1871 through the three Class D teams San Diego fielded by 1936. Author Bill Swank is a retired probation officer. His passion is the history of baseball in San Diego. For this book he delved into the archives of the San Diego Historical Society and interviewed the few remaining players from the 1920s and 1930s. Fans of baseball, of history, and of California will love this book.

**Clemente: The Passion and the Grace of Baseball's Last Hero** by David Maraniss  
Roberto Clemente was inducted into the Hall of Fame in 1973, the year after he died at sea while trying to airlift food and medical supplies to earthquake survivors in Nicaragua. He is known as baseball's first Latino superstar. He was born in Puerto Rico in 1934, and signed by the Brooklyn Dodgers as a free agent in 1954. He coped with the pervasive racism of his time, not only standing his ground but also speaking in defense of others on a variety of social issues. He was a hero in every sense of the word. This book chronicles his struggles, celebrates his successes, and brings to light some revealing facts about Clemente's death.

### **Sugar Beet Fields continued**

there, we did our best to finish the day," recalls Kate Espinosa Lopez Cassel. Their hard work in agriculture helped Greeley's economy grow, although, as Tito Garcia, Jr. remembers, "We were poor, but we didn't know that. We were happy."

To purchase autographed copies of *White Gold Laborers* (\$25) and *From Sugar to Diamond* (\$35) send a check or money order to Jody Lopez, 4708 W. 1st St., Greeley, CO. 80634. Prices include shipping and handling. Any questions, call 970-576-2605.  
Thank you!



John M. Pfau Library  
Cal State San Bernardino  
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San Bernardino, CA 92407

Mark Your Calendars - the LBHP has a full schedule  
this season!

**UPCOMING EVENTS:**

Book signing on Catalina Island Saturday May 16 Metropole Hotel 1-4pm

Presentation and book signing on the life of Melo Almada, the first Mexican to play ball  
in the major leagues, Plaza de la Raza, Sunday, Aug. 2, 2015 1-4 pm.

Exhibit "Mexican American Baseball and Softball In The High Desert"  
California State University San Bernardino, John Phau Library,

Oct. 1- Dec. 1

Exhibit, "Mexican American Baseball and Softball In The High Desert" Victorville Com-  
munity College, Campus Library, Spring 2016.



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Latino Baseball