

Done

Interview with Mayor Manuel Castorena

Date of Interview: June, 1996

Interviewer: Natalie Vermilyea

Transcriber: Denice Sande

NV: Carlsbad has annexed quite a bit of surrounding property in the last few years. I believe they annexed Leo Carrillo's ranch. Did you know Mr. Carrillo?

Castorena: Yes, I did. As a matter of fact, when I took Jarvis to see Mr. Exton, the owner of the Exton and Nichol's Drug Store in Oceanside directly across the street was a dentist office. The dentist was Leo's brother. We became good friends and Dr. Carrillo liked to go fishing, "a country town doctor," so to speak because when he got the urge to go fishing, he would hang out a sign "gone fishing," and he would be out on the pier fishing.

It was through him that I met Leo and Leo was starting to become an actor, but he was not the actor that he was later on.

NV: Did he buy property in the area or did he buy the ranch later?

Castorena: Not at that time. Dr. Carrillo owned property over there but not Leo. I don't know exactly when Leo acquired this property here. At that time, Leo used to go around the service clubs giving after dinner talks. He liked to mimic, and he used to be a master at mimicking Chinese and Italian. He could say more with his hands than he could with his mouth. Later on, he became a character actor and a star in his own right.

NV: He spent quite a bit of time here in Carlsbad, didn't he?

Castorena: Yes, then he acquired his ranch. After he became an actor, I had my Oceanside store. Whenever he came from Hollywood, he used to come buy and pick up some things and go right on. Mr. Delpy was always with him.

NV: From Delpy Corners?

Castorena: Yes, they were inseparable when they were here, and of course, Mr. Delpy's son later married Mr. Carrillo's daughter. The one that has the ranch now. Later on when I brought Mr. Rochin's market on Roosevelt Street, as I said before, I came over to sell him a refrigerator and he sold me the market. Then, Mr. Carrillo used to stop by again because he baptized one of Mr. Rochin's daughters.

NV: So they became compadres:

Castorena: Yes, they became compadres. The market was on one side of the building corner of Walnut and Roosevelt Street. Right next to the market, they had a restaurant and Mr. Rochin was running this restaurant. Leo used to like to come in there and have some of Juanita's chili con carne. She would cook it according to his recipe and then later on, he gave her the recipe. Later on, they specialized in it when they owned the Acapulco Gardens.

At this time, Leo would always call me ahead of time when he was coming so that I would hang the meat so that it would cure properly, and that it would be ready for the barbecue that he would have at his ranch.

NV: A whole beef?

Castorena: No, a side of beef. That was about all they could consume (laughter). He was a frequent visitor here.

NV: Was the ranch house on the property when he brought it or did he build the house?

Castorena: I really do not know too much of the history about the house, but I think he built it and the furniture inside was handmade. The same as the wealthy people do in Mexico, they build the house then build the furniture inside the house. I think it was built along those lines.

NV: Mr. Rochin, who you state was a neighbor of yours, did they have a restaurant first in Carlsbad?

Castorena: In fact, they had three. They had a restaurant right next to the market, then they moved this restaurant to right across from the Twin Inns. Then, of course, the war came about and everything just changed. Right after the war, he built the Acapulco Gardens.

NV: It was very much a social center in its day.

Castorena: Very much so. It was quite a show place, particularly, that the signing and decorating in the main dining room was very much as places you would see in Acapulco, waterfalls in the fountain, murals all around. There were murals that were suppose to depict scenes from Acapulco.

NV:: Which Acapulco was drawing at that time and becoming a major resort. So, we had our own "little Acapulco."

Castorena: And, of course, Juanita was always his wife and she was in charge of the kitchen. She was an excellent cook. They did very well. The service clubs were a popular place for everyone.

When the restaurant went under, we were quite disappointed. Mr. Rochin and I had quite a few dealings together. Right after I brought his market, I needed a house, so he had a house over there on Tyler Street and I brought it. And then, I brought another house, on Chestnut Street, the house that I am in now.

NV: At some point, you went into business in the Gem and Mineral Shop on State Street with Bill Thorpe, who is better known as "Rock Hound Bill."

Castorena: This is part of my history when I became interested in gems. Right after we visited the Fair, I purchased many books on the subject. One day, my stationery store, here in Carlsbad, (right next to the post office on Grand), I was sweeping the sidewalk and a jeep stopped in front of the store. On the panels of the jeep, he had a Mickey Mouse character sawing a petrified log, of all things! Then right above it, it said, "Rock Hound Bill." I got the idea that I wanted to talk to this guy.

NV: To see if you could get material for your product?

Castorena: I waited until he came out of the post office and I approached him. Lo and behold, he was a dealer on this stuff, sort of a traveling dealer, buy and sell equipment and this type of thing.

Once I found that out, I brought everything I could from him. I also found out that he was a mineralogist and quite an accomplished one. We became very good friends. He give me my first instruction on cutting and so on. Then I went on to join the San Diego Mineral and Gem Society. The main reason I joined it was because it had a school at Balboa Park in the Spanish village. They had a school there on lapidary work. So I joined so that I could take advantage of the school. I used to go down there twice a week in the evenings.

NV: That must have settled him down, and he also got his traveling rock shop.

Castorena: No, he was living here in Carlsbad. So in 1958, I sold my stationery store to Howard and Jane Oldham. I still wanted to keep my hands on something, because a short time after that, I lost my wife, and everything else. I was kind of floating around. Then I said to Bill, why don't we open up a rock shop? We talked about it and to make a long story short, he liked the idea. He said "Where would we go?" I said that there is a storeroom vacant in the building owned by Pete Aguilar and Peter is a good friend of mine. I'll talk to him and see if we can rent it from him, and Pete said "sure, \$40 a month"), so we went into business.

But I told Bill "Look, I want to remain a free agent so that if I want to take off on anything then I can. Under those circumstances, we went into business together. It was a good thing because in 1959, I was appointed district governor of Rotary district 534, which covers San Diego, Imperial and Riverside counties.. For the next two years, I had to do quite a bit of traveling.

NA: And that was a period when you were actually out of town.

Castorena: A good deal. When I completed my tour of duty on July 1, 1960, I knew that I could just not lay around.

NV: I have always been fascinated by the amount of energy you have and how much you accomplish in a day. How many hours do you sleep?

Castorena: About four hours a night.

NV: No wonder you accomplish more than the rest of us do.

Castorena: I have never required too much sleep.

NV: Well that certainly is not too much!

Mayor: When I completed my tour as governor, Bill said, look why don't you start teaching, teaching what you know. At this time, I decided to take a course at a gemological school, but I still taught courses in the evenings. I told Bill, "Well, why not. It will keep me busy, and as far as the money goes, I don't care. As a matter of fact, if people come in, I will pay them."

I started with one student from Fallbrook and he used to come every night to take his lessons. I thought my teaching would only last a couple of months, instead it lasted 18 years.

Inter: It became a real labor of love.

Castorena: When I first started teaching, I was teaching every day of the week. From 10 to 12, I had one class; from 2 to 4 another class, and from 7 to 10 in the evenings, another class. This lasted for four years.

NV: No wonder you had to stay up half the night to accomplish those other things. What activities are you into now. I know that you are still teaching.

Mayor: I teach gemology , lapidary work and silver and gold smithing.

NV: You were active getting a senior citizen's group organized here in Carlsbad.

Castorena: Not really, this is true (interviewer intercedes).

NV:: Your name was mentioned in connection with it.

Castorena:: This is true, but the group, rather Mayor Dunne, was the one that appointed a committee to see what could be done towards helping the senior citizens, and he appointed a committee and I came into the picture after the committee had already been appointed. The ones that really deserve the credit are Avida Magan, Martha Ganoe, Leah Shaw and Dr. Monell. There were others and I am sorry if I do not remember their names but I should. Then, I received a letter from Mayor Dunne if I would accept joining them. It is really not a commission but a committee. So I did join, and we got it started but Mrs. Ginn already started the program. Right after the cards were issued, I held #6 and Mr. Monell #1.

We were in operation about a year when the Carlsbad Rotary Club donated a certain amount of money towards expanding the senior citizen's program. They donated \$2,000

with the specific purpose of organizing a senior citizen's association. The money to be used in order to hire a part-time coordinator.

NV: And, at that time, they had no building.

Castorena: We were a county subsidized program . A luncheon was given everyday at the Jefferson Street School for seniors. We also had other services going, such as a legal services program and a dental program. We had a dentist right here in the Carlsbad Shopping Center. We also had the services available of an oculist who was located on Carlsbad Blvd. Seniors, at the present time, even non-seniors, could get a card and get a complete dental examination (including x-rays) for \$1.50, and a complete eye examination for \$1.00.

We also had a recreation program that was going on by Carlsbad by the Sea right across the street where they would play cards, etc. We have a Spanish program and Ray Ede and I are teaching it. It grew to such an extent that's Ray had to hold his classes at the Episcopal Church and I held my classes at the Center.

NV: We are all fortunate that you grew up to qualify for the senior citizens position at just the right age when the community needed that.

Castorena: Well I think I'am a little over-aged now. I was 76 in July.

NV: Really, I came to think of you at a fixed age when I first knew you.

Castorena: No, I am 76 on July 1.

NV: Well, it is almost exhausting to hear you talk about all the things that you do.

Castorena: Not really it isn't. It just sounds like you are doing a lot but you are not.

NV: Well, you manage to do it all very calmly and pleasantly and effectively. It is a pleasure to spend time with you.

Castorena:: You know that we have tried to see that my family accepted my two cousins. One of whom you met the other day in Oceanside. The only family that I have here is in Tijuana, my daughter and my two granddaughters and 2 great grand daughters and one great grandson in Tijuana. My son is in New York.

My wife's family is in Tijuana. See, my wife is Canary. I call here my "little Canary." The whole family is from the Canary Islands. We have threatened to move south, not to Tijuana, but to Chula Vista or San Ysidro, and we have gone weekends and looked around. Well, we have not found anything that we like.

NV: I am glad. I always hold my breath when I hear that you are down there, looking around.

Castorena: At the present time, we pretty much have decided we are going to stay here.

NV:: Good, I think Carlsbad needs you here.

Castorena: Well, I need Carlsbad. At the present time, we have about 3000 seniors registered at the Center however, my estimate is that at the present time, Carlsbad must have between 4500 and 5000 seniors. I don't think I am mistaken, but maybe I am. I don't know. Anyway I do know that we have 3000 registered at the Center. Now we know that in the biggest majority of these people, the problem is not economics. A good many people, not all of them, but a good many of them, economics is not the necessity. What they need is companionship.

NV: What they need is the association.

Castorena: Companionship, association, occupation, something to keep them busy.

NV: Something to become involved in.

Castorena: That's right. This is the most necessary thing. I thought of this and if I go to a new community, I am lost. Here, I am already involved.

NV: That is true, here you are already involved.

Castorena: Well our friends are here, people I work with, people I enjoy being with, and, of course, Lola. Even if she does not speak English, and I am glad that she doesn't because there is nobody in the world that can say as many 4-letter words as she can, and the Spanish Castilian accent, "Oh Brother."

NV: She can even burn the ears of the Mexicans. Can't she? Canary Island, 4-letter words.

Castorena: No not the Canary Island 4-letter words, no English.

NV: Oh, I have never heard her speak swear words.

Castorena: No, she doesn't.

NV: You mean, she kept that for your private enjoyment?

Castorena:: No, she doesn't. She absolutely cannot pronounce many of the letters. As long as I have been speaking English, I know that I have an accent, but you should hear her accent. Now there are certain letters that she absolutely cannot pronounce, like "C" for example, it is not in the picture at all. The "T" becomes a "C" and the "D" is never used and the "S" is hardly ever used.

NV: So it becomes a matter of decoding.

Castorena: Yes, so when she wants to say certain words in English, they do not come out.

NV: Carlsbad is a difficult word to pronounce.

Castorena: She can't. Chestnut, she can call it different names but not Alution Chestnut. Yes, Carlsbad is very difficult for her to pronounce, and she is strictly a Canary Island native.

NV: She is a delightful person and I would not want to change her one bit.

Castorena: One thing about her, she is not backward about it.

NV: And, she can make herself totally understood in whose company she is in.

Castorena: She is never lonesome. She can be amongst hundreds of people that do not speak her language, she could care less, and she talks to everybody.

NV: That one story about a Rotary meeting in Los Angeles where she got on a bus and made her way from one part of the town to another.

Castorena: She traveled all over the city, without any money, pass, badge, without anything, and she wound up where she was suppose to be.

NV: Exactly, after a merry adventure. Well I hope that you stay here in Carlsbad.

Castorena: I think we will, particularly at the cost of houses now.

NV: If you have a home, you are better off to stay with it and reside in it.

NV: Thank you very much. It is always a pleasure to talk with you.

Castorena: Well, I probably just rambled on and on and did not say a darn thing.

NV: In any case it is there for posterity.

Castorena: Well it was particularly enjoyable and particularly pleasing and I am “tickled pink,” that you were the one that I was going to be talking with.

NV: I’m happy to do it. You have been a very important part of my life in Carlsbad. You were one of the first person’s I met here.

Castorena: You have a daughter that I claim also you know.

NV: Yes, I know, she is a good part of yours and you really have contributed so much to her life.

Castorena: She is a wonderful girl and a good craftsman by the way.

NV: Thank you.

