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ABOUT THIS ISSUE

This issue contains four articles that showcase the variety of history the South Texas offers. The articles vary from smallpox epidemics in Colonial Mexico, to Texas literature in the early 20th century, to the effects of the Falcon Dam, and finally, to an article about a successful rancher in South Texas not named, King, Kenedy, or Yturria.

This issue also contains a story that trumpets the return of college football to the Valley by giving a brief history of college football in the Rio Grande Valley.

I must, as in every issue, give credit to those who have helped me and without whom this edition of the *Journal of South Texas* would not have come to fruition. Foremost of these is the hard working and diligent Dr. Dean Ferguson who gathers the book reviews—no small task. Kudos also those who review articles for the journal but must remain anonymous for the sake of blind journal reviewing. Again, the help of Dr. Alberto Rodriguez, the former managing editor of the journal has been priceless. Also the help of the chair of the Department of History, Political Science, and Philosophy, Dr. Jeff Glick, continues his unwavering support for the journal. Finally, credit for the cover photo goes to Bailey Smith, Head of Special Collections and Archives, South Texas Archives, Texas A&M University-Kingsville, who took time from her busy schedule to send me a number of options for the cover.

A WOUND TOO DEEP TO SHOW

A Preliminary Study of the Legacy of Falcon International Dam, 1953–2023

MARGARET A. VAVEREK, LORIN M. FLORES,
BEATRIZ IZAGUIRRE FLORES¹

Falcon Dam stretches across the border of Mexico and the United States about 40 miles southeast of Laredo in Zapata and Starr counties in Texas. It was proclaimed one of the largest dams in the world when it was dedicated in October, 1953. The Presidents of both the United States and Mexico presided at the dedication ceremony. The dam was celebrated as a marvel of both modern engineering and international diplomacy.² Falcon Dam was designed to help control the waters of the Río Grande River and, in so doing, provide water to residents on both sides of the border for irrigation and power while lessening the threat of flooding along the river.

The purpose of this preliminary study is to explore the impact of Falcon Dam upon the residents of the towns inundated with the building of the Dam in Zapata County. The passage of time allows for a wide view as presented in primary source documents from the time-period and more recent scholarship relating to the impact of the Dam. This research provides historical background as well as an examination of the legacy of displacement for the people of Zapata County and their descendants. Fortunately, oral histories of residents who experienced the coming of the Dam were collected and are available. New interviews with the next generation, the “children of Falcon Dam” have also helped inform this work. The cost of the Falcon Dam project was estimated at \$47,000,000 in 1953.³ This investigation focuses on the price paid by the people of the small towns which were inundated by the waters of the reservoir. That price cannot be measured in monetary terms. It involves the taking of ancestral lands and a way of life lost to the waters of Falcon Dam. Father

Edward Bastien, Pastor of the Catholic Church in Zapata at the time of the building of the Dam, expressed the cost to his people when he described the impact of the displacement on his flock as a wound . . . “A wound too deep to show.”⁴

As with any narrative, one should always begin at the beginning. The narrative of Falcon Dam and the land and people impacted by it is no different. This story is complex and compelling. It does not, however, begin with the construction of the Dam nor even with the historic water treaty of 1944 which called for its creation.⁵ This story begins over 200 years prior to the Dam’s existence. Likewise, the story does not end with the 1953 dedication of the Dam. The impacts of the Dam continue to influence the lives of residents and former residents and their descendants, even seventy years later.

Land-Grant Families: From Loyal Spanish Subjects to Patriotic American Citizens

Understanding the land and how the residents came to own their ancestral lands is a story going back to the 1700s with colonial land grants from the king of Spain. The King gave grants of land to various subjects as a reward for service to the empire. These individuals were well respected citizens. They were granted lands to help colonize the remote areas of the undeveloped northern region known as Nuevo Santander. The king granted land in parcels, called *porciones*, which were allocated so that each parcel had access to the Río Grande River. This provided access to water for settlers, crops and cattle. That access was essential to survival. The Spanish colonial empire extended to the Nueces River, near present day Corpus Christi, in Texas. The Río Grande did not become the border with the United States until the Mexican Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848.

The task of settling on these land grants was physically demanding and dangerous. Constant skirmishes and open warfare with indigenous tribes and the harsh weather conditions of the area provided two of the biggest challenges to the settlers. Isolation from their culture and resources of their homelands meant that those who were given land grants faced a life of hard work and sacrifice. The settlers saw these lands as being entrusted to their care. These *porciones* were not simply “granted” via an official document. Rather, settlers had to occupy and

improve the land over a number of years before the grant was finalized. The Spanish government sent officials to verify that the necessary improvements had been made. There was an elaborate ceremony to solemnize the land grant. This involved walking the land with witnesses and declaring that the land would be cared for and protected by the owner and their descendants.⁶ The flags of six countries have flown over those lands along the Río Grande River over the centuries. The one thing that has remained constant is the families who have occupied this area. Governments and borders have come and gone, but the land and the generations of families who have lived there have endured. They have remained faithful to the promises made to the Spanish King over 250 years ago by keeping ties to their ancestral lands. Most of the property has never been sold on the open market. Porciones have, instead, been divided and inherited among the descendants of the original land grantees, many of whom intermarried with other grantees over the generations. This practice created a situation where distinct property lines were often hard to establish. Old land abstractors who attempted to establish the validity of titles to these lands have been credited with saying “I have traced the title back to the King of Spain, who got it by right of discovery and conquest, and, since he ruled by Divine Right, that takes it back to God Almighty himself, and that is as far as I can go.”⁷ The issues of clear titles and market values for the land would be key factors when the United States Government determined value of property during condemnation proceedings for the lands inundated by Falcon Dam.

Isolation by Circumstance and as Strategy

Isolation is an ongoing theme in the story of the land and the people of Zapata County. As late as 1961 *The Texas Almanac* described Zapata County as “One of the most isolated, least known of the Texas Counties. There is no railroad and there were no paved roads until recently [1940]”⁸ This isolation served to reinforce a seemingly contradictory attitude of strong patriotism toward the United States and an equally strong protective pride in the distinct family pride and culture of the people. The lack of interaction with the more populated areas of the region and their comforts impacted settlers and their descendants for generations. Everything from the architecture of the area to the educa-

tional attainment and social life was influenced by living in a land that most outsiders ignored physically and politically for nearly two centuries. This fact of life fostered a sense of pride, resilience, and determination in the early settlers. Those traits have been passed on to the generations which have followed. It was those traits which enabled the people of Zapata County to persevere in the face of adversity when their homes and lands were taken by the Falcon Dam project.

Life for the residents of Zapata County in the years before the world wars was much the same as it had been for their parents and grandparents and even great grandparents. Many homes had been inherited from earlier generations. These older houses stood alongside newer "Spanish Country" structures in many areas of Zapata County. For example, the first house built in Falcón (then known as Ramireño de Abajo) is said to have been built about 1781.⁹ These older dwellings frequently featured three foot thick rock walls for insulation from heat and cold as well as protection from hostile intruders. These homes had *tronerias*, which were triangular ledges with peep holes leading to the exterior of buildings. These peepholes were designed to shoot guns in defense of land and families from hostile indigenous tribes.¹⁰ The homes also included fortified "safe rooms." Many of these homes also featured detached out-buildings consisting of an exterior kitchen and pantry due to the arid climate. The cookhouses became hazardous places during attacks necessitating a mad dash to the safety of the fortified main house. The Spanish colonial-era architecture was practical and enduring. Because many of these buildings were not destroyed until they were submerged under the waters of the Falcon Dam reservoir, generations of families experienced living in this architecture firsthand up until the 1953 flood. These structures were prized possessions.

Government subsidized rural electric projects were not available in Zapata County until the mid-1950's. Many families had no electricity or running water, especially out on the ranches. Even within the town of Zapata, there were no municipal sewer facilities until the new town was established in 1953. It was common to have only partial water service during the day in the surrounding communities. Therefore to supplement unreliable town water, families relied on the barrileros, men riding on huge water filled barrels from the Rio Grande. These barrels were mounted on donkey or mule-drawn carts to sell water to citizens for filling their cisterns.¹¹ Maria Eva Uribe Ramírez, a descendant of the early

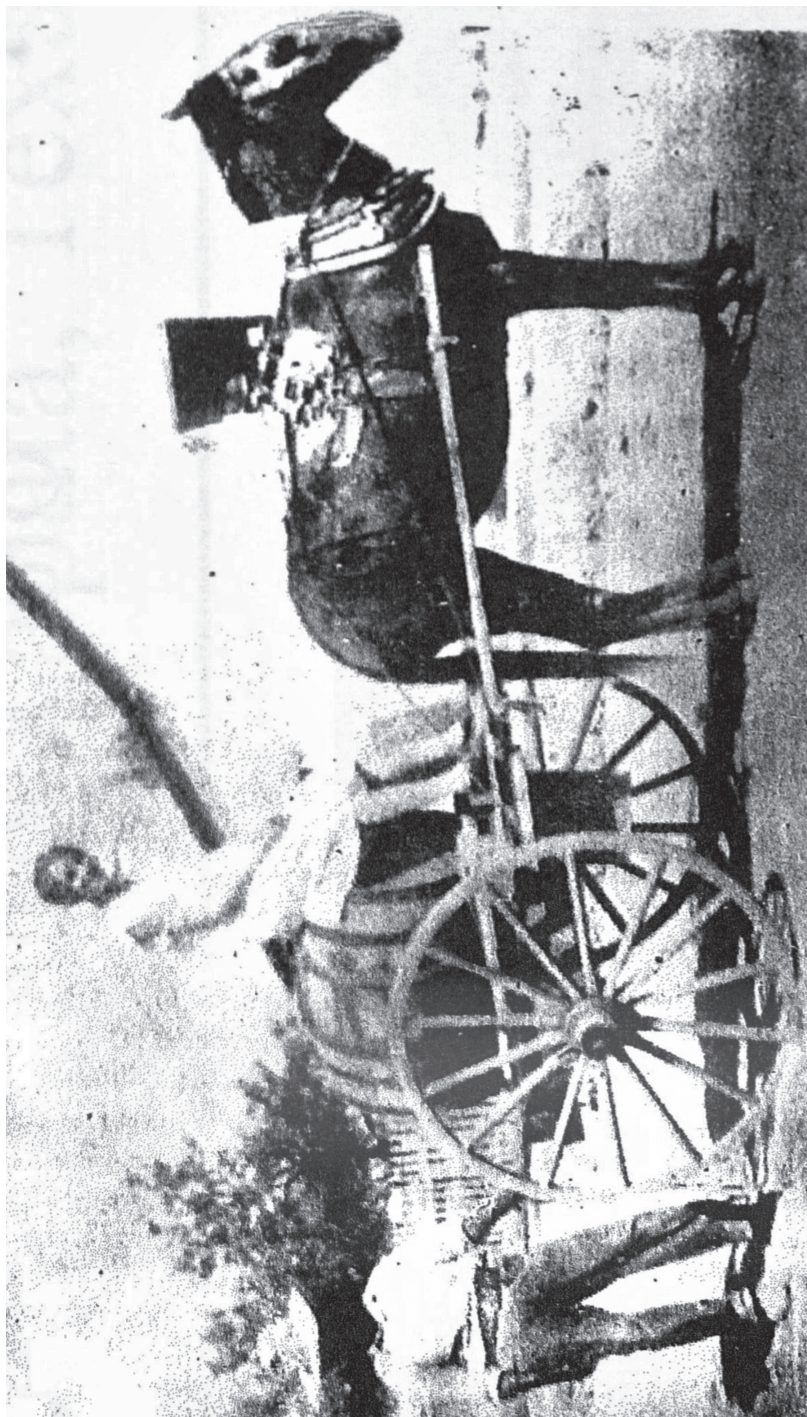


FIG. 1. Barrillero in Zapata ca. 1928 Photo Courtesy Maria Eva Uribe Ramirez.

land grant families, recalls people having to bathe from a water bucket with water provided by barrileros in the early 1950s.¹²

Communications were another challenge imposed by isolation. The first Post Office was established in 1854 when the town of Zapata was known as Carrizo. Mail was carried to and from Zapata and surrounding communities via horseback through the early decades of the 20th century.¹³

H. Cuéllar Mercantile in Zapata was the largest store in the county, it was owned by Hesiquio Cuellar. Mr. Cuellar traced his ancestry in the region back to the year 1747.¹⁴ His store functioned as a gathering place and center for information for the community. During World War II the store had the only phone in the area and was located across from the telegraph office, a major source of war news.

The local educational system functioned in a distinctive South Texas pattern, also a product of isolationism. It was very common for young children to enroll in “Escuelitas” or private rural schools. The teachers were older women from the community. The schools were based in private houses or buildings. These schools provided a foundation in reading and writing in Spanish.¹⁵ Tuition was paid to finance the school. Poorer students were often subsidized by more well-to-do parents. Emma Eva Izaguirre Uribe attended an “Escuelita” in her youth. She later recalled that in Falcón and, in the surrounding area, children attended school from the first to six grades in a one room schoolhouse. Transition to English language instruction occurred for sixth and seventh grades.¹⁶ Students then had to enroll in schools in either Laredo or Rio Grande Valley cities to attend High School. This required boarding at the school or in private homes. The Izaguirre siblings sometimes used the mail truck as a conveyance to go to boarding school twice a year.¹⁷

Twin Cities Separated by a Border: Zapata and Guerrero

The border crossing at Zapata in the years before the Dam facilitated a way of life characterized by surprising fluidity and movement between the cities of Zapata Texas and Guerrero Mexico because the cities faced each other across the International Bridge. This seems nearly incomprehensible from a 21st century standpoint. This is the reason residents of Zapata and Guerrero shared cultural, social, and familial bonds deeper

than the arbitrary border represented by the Río Grande River could sever. This cross-border reciprocity had its origins in the 18th century at the start of the Spanish colonization project. The town of Revilla (which eventually became Guerrero) was founded in 1750. Many residents moved north across the river to found ranches in the area that became Zapata County. Capitan Jose de Cuéllar, the founder of Guerrero and progenitor of the Cuéllar family profiled in this work, came to the Zapata area in this way.

The interdependence between Zapata and Guerrero extended even to routine life events. The town of Guerrero had a far more developed social services infrastructure such as medical care. The town of Zapata had American goods which were both scarce and in high demand in Mexico. Zapata residents thought nothing of commuting to Guerrero for healthcare and other services that were not available to them in Zapata, and residents of Guerrero thought nothing of commuting to Zapata to buy staple household supplies.

Beatriz Izaguirre Flores recounts-

“Since customs agents lived in Zapata, they were friends and neighbors of the American populace. There was no need for a passport to cross the border if you were an American citizen. Customs agents simply asked your name and your citizenship.”¹⁸

Mexican citizens from Guerrero joined the bustling traffic across the International Bridge at Zapata in search of goods they could only obtain in the United States.¹⁹ The H. Cuéllar store faced the international bridge and was a popular destination for Guerrero residents.²⁰ Occasionally bureaucratic complications occurred when family members were born in Mexico due to a lack of access to healthcare on the U.S. side of the border. For example, even though Maximiano Yzaguirre’s family had lived on the same ranch north of the Rio Grande since 1753, he spent his entire life in Falcón Texas as a Mexican citizen. He was legally classified as a resident alien in the United States due to the fact that he was born in Mexico because there were no midwives or doctors in Falcón.

World War II and the Coming of Falcon Dam

Isolationism became a thing of the past and change came quickly to Zapata County during World War II and the postwar period.

Thousands of Zapata County residents registered for the draft. Many of these brave soldiers returned home to their families and ancestral lands, having served their country with distinction in all phases of the conflict. The experiences of these men were a far cry from their isolated lives at home. Members of the Yzaguirre family including Tomás Luis Yzaguirre and his brother Mario Yzaguirre, went to war.²¹ Their wartime experiences serve to illustrate the enormous differences between life in Zapata County and the vastness of the larger world which many of their friends and family also experienced during the war years. Tomás Luis served in the European Theatre. He was stationed in London and Cheltenham in General Dwight Eisenhower's forces. He did logistics work while taking part in preparations for D-Day. Mario served aboard a hospital ship as its lead pharmacist. Both brothers served their country honorably and returned home to Zapata County and their families there.

The postwar period saw huge changes come to Zapata County under the guise of progress. In 1944 the U.S. government's attention turned to the very real problem of water supply for both Texas and Mexico along the Río Grande. In February, 1944 the United States and Mexico signed a treaty to regulate the utilization of waters of the Río Grande River.²² The treaty called for the building of a series of dams along the River, including a dam which would inundate most of Zapata County. The town of Zapata, the county seat, as well as the smaller communities of Lopeño, Falcón, Ramireño, and Uribeño were ultimately submerged by the waters of the reservoir. The International Boundary and Water Commission (I.B.W.C.) was responsible for applying the boundary and water treaties between the United States and Mexico. This Federal agency was also tasked with addressing any disputes that arose in relation to those agreements.²³

The patriotism of the people who lost their land and homes to the waters of Falcón Dam cannot be questioned. Many accepted the fact that in order to benefit the many, sacrifices had to be made and loss was unavoidable for the people of Zapata County. One Zapata resident told a *San Antonio Express* newspaper reporter in May 1953 "These people are being uprooted for the public good. We [Zapatans] have no quarrel with that . . . What we are complaining about is . . . we are not being treated fairly; we are not being recompensed to the point where we can replace

what we are losing.”²⁴ The people of Zapata would have to fight to survive, as had their pioneer ancestors.

The new town site for Zapata, provided by the Government, was located about 4 miles east of the old town. The site had no means of irrigation for crops and trade with Mexico was eliminated as well once the International Bridge was under water. A key point of contention was the valuation of properties. The government [under the auspices of the I.B.W.C, which some Zapatans said stood for “I Bully Women and Children”²⁵] offered “fair market value” which they defined as the amount a willing seller would pay a willing buyer. Another 20% of the value was subtracted for depreciation and still another 20% for obsolescence. As noted earlier, most properties had never sold on the open market. The question of what “fair market value” meant when applied to properties that would soon be under 40 feet of water was also an issue. This left most residents without adequate funds to replace their homes and businesses in the new town of Zapata.²⁶

Rehoming the Dead, Relocating the Living

In perhaps the greatest irony of the entire relocation saga, it was the mortal remains of those early pioneers, the founders of Zapata County, who were provided for most equitably by the U.S. government. A large cemetery was established in the new town of Zapata and human remains were relocated at personal and some government expense. This process was traumatic for the living and is one of the most poignant aspects of the relocations. Since the government did not make provision for a separate cemetery for the people of Falcón, the relocation of their dead was done at personal expense by family. The Izaguirre family helped provide for the rehoming of their dead physically. Land was donated by a citizen of Falcón to serve as the New Falcón cemetery with the stipulation that the cemetery was open to only Falcón residents. Beatriz Izaguirre Flores, who was five years old at the time of the exhumations, remembers vividly witnessing the removal of the bodies of her four deceased infant aunts and uncles from their graves in the old Falcón Cemetery. She witnessed her father and grandmother exhume the babies. She was distressed at the sight of exposed bones of the dead babies and disturbed at how upset her father and grandmother appeared.²⁷



FIG. 2. Example of a remains being reinterred in New Zapata Cemetery. October, 1952. IBWC photo.

The Fighting Padre of Zapata

Father Edouard “Edward” Bastien was the Catholic Priest in Zapata. He was assigned as Pastor to Our Lady of Lourdes in May of 1946. He remained there until being transferred to Big Spring in October, 1954. Father Bastien was highly involved in the lives of his parishioners. He was just as likely to be found ministering to the temporal needs of his flock as to their spiritual needs.

Father Bastien had a “front row seat” and a key role to play in the drama surrounding the inundation of Zapata and the move to the new town.²⁸ Bureaucratic “red tape” engulfed the people of Zapata County before the waters even began to rise on their homelands. The I.B.W.C. insisted that they could legally assess property only at fair market value. Even the Catholic Church faced the injustice of the property evaluations. The church in Zapata was appraised at \$12,000. Replacement value was estimated at around \$21,000.²⁹ In an effort to help his people, Father Bastien alerted area newspapers and conducted an extensive letter writing campaign with many government officials which lasted for years. He worked tirelessly to secure just compensation for his flock. He became known as “The Fighting Padre of Zapata” because he gave his all to the cause of justice. The priest wrote to state and local officials as well as politicians at the national level including Representative Lloyd Bentsen of McAllen, Texas Congressman Lyndon Baines Johnson, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, and Presidents Harry S. Truman and Dwight D. Eisenhower as he fought to give his people a voice that would be heard by government officials. His goal was to find solutions to the many problems caused for the people of Zapata County by the bureaucratic miscarriage of justice he saw all around him.

Moving and the Coming of Rain

Although Lopeño and Falcón residents were supposed to have relocated by June 1, 1953 and Zapata residents’ deadline to move was November 1st of that year, nobody seriously believed that a flood would happen anytime soon according to María Eva Uribe Ramírez who recalls:

[Some houses were] ”already condemned by the International Boundary and Water Commission . . . but they [local residents]

didn't believe they were going under water. So they never ever made any plans or anything, they just didn't believe it . . .”

The Falcon Dam reservoir is forty miles long and covers 55,000 acres of land in the U.S.³⁰ Given that the projected land area that would soon be underwater seemed so large and that the area was in a serious drought lasting several years, it is no wonder that some Zapata County residents doubted the lake would ever reach capacity. The ongoing resentment at the meager remuneration offered for property and the fact that most people were forced to move before the government had paid them fueled this attitude of disbelief. In fact, it would be over a decade after the Dam was dedicated before the last of the property payments were made by the U.S. Government.³¹

Unforeseen heavy rains began in the area on August 24, 1954. Within just 48 hours Lopeño was submerged. Within the next few days 72 families from Lopeño, Falcón, and surrounding ranches were living in tents furnished by the Red Cross. Both towns had been inundated by the waters of the Falcon Reservoir. This was two months before the official opening of Falcon Dam. Tragic, traumatic scenes of unprepared residents evacuating with little more than the clothes on their backs repeated themselves throughout Zapata County as the waters rose quickly in the weeks that followed. Citizens attempted to salvage as much as they could from what was left of their homes in the heavy rain. María Eva Uribe Ramírez witnessed her grandparents, parents, and other family members frantically moving household goods from the historic Yzaguirre family home in Falcón while she waited huddled in the car under a quilt weeping with terror at the age of ten.³² Beatriz Cuellar Izaguirre recalled that during this period she and her husband Tomás Luis Izaguirre Sr. drove from their home in Rio Grande City to assist with evacuations every day.³³

The Yzaguirre home in Falcón, built in 1781, and many other historic structures were consumed by the mighty reservoir. Maximiano and Ángela Zapata Yzaguirre were forced to purchase and live in an Army barracks which was later retrofitted for their home. This was, of course, a better circumstance than those families who found themselves with no money living in Red Cross tents for several years. These accommodations were a far cry from the comforts of their treasured ancestral homes.

Two weeks after the rains began, a dire warning of impending flooding coming to Zapata triggered a mass exodus of residents³⁴ Beatriz Izaguirre Flores recalls that her grandfather, Hesiquio Cuellar, moved the second floor of his beloved mercantile, which contained the family living quarters, from Old Zapata to New Zapata at considerable personal expense. Hesiquio Cuellar's grandson, Larry Graves, recalled seeing the railroad ties attached to the house which had enabled it to be moved.³⁵ H. Cuellar's photo inside the soon to be vacated first floor of the store appeared in the *Houston Chronicle* on December 11, 1952. In the article he was quoted as stating that he hoped his children would continue the store, but that he didn't think he would.³⁶

With business disrupted by displacement and the lack of a border crossing at the new town, Hesiquio Cuellar settled into a genteel retirement typical of a gentleman rancher. Old stock from the store remained in the Cuellar house for many years after the move. The remnants of the store were kept in a large room in the house which had previously served as a ballroom for family and civic functions in the old town. This old stock included a child's coffin. This fact was noted by both Larry Graves, grandson of H. Cuellar, and is also the source of a terrifying memory for Cuellar's great granddaughter, co-author Lorin Flores, when she visited as a young girl in the 1980s during unauthorized explorations of the house. The historic house exists no longer. The structure was demolished in 2007.

San Ygnacio- the Lone Survivor

This preliminary study of the history and legacy of the Falcon Dam project would be incomplete without some mention of the town of San Ygnacio, located about 50 miles from the center of Falcon Dam. It is not nearly as old as the settlements of Falcón and Zapata, which were established in the mid-1700s. San Ygnacio was founded in 1830, but it is now the oldest surviving town in Zapata County. San Ygnacio had been slated for inundation in the early days of planning for the construction of the Dam. The residents petitioned the government in 1951 to have their town excluded from condemnation proceedings. They claimed the town site was high enough above the maximum surface line of the Falcon Reservoir and not a flood risk.³⁷ Their petition was granted. In

sharp contrast to their Zapata County neighbors, where the waters of the Falcon Dam entombed many historic buildings, the people of San Ygnacio have been able to preserve their landmarks and historic architecture. It is possible to walk the streets of this historic place and still be surrounded by the architecture, history, and culture of a bygone era. The United States government has recognized this fact and placed most of the town on the *National Register of Historic Places* as the “San Ygnacio Historic District.” First designated in 1973, it enables current and future generations to see and feel and touch the past in a way that became impossible elsewhere in Zapata County once the waters of the Falcon Dam inundated the historic buildings and places within the other towns.

Voices of the Second Generation

The dedication of the Falcon Dam was a huge international event. There were many reporters and film crews at the ceremony. However, some of the most interested and invested members of the audience that day were the families who had sacrificed so much to bring the Dam into existence. Even the “Children of Falcon Dam” who were young at the time remember the event. Tomás Izaguirre Jr., who was three years old at the time of the dedication, recalled during conversation that the very first thing he remembered was that it had been raining a lot. He also recalled his dad and mom putting him in the car with them. He was looking out the car window. The water was torrential and he felt like the water was going to come in up over the tires. He stated, “That was my first real memory of the flood. Then, I vaguely remember the dedication ceremony and President Eisenhower coming down to Falcon Dam. But really, I was young. I was like three years old, and I don’t really recall the occasion clearly.” Tomás’ older sister Beatriz Izaguirre Flores age 5, at the time of the dedication recalls,

“I remember very clearly, when President Eisenhower came to the dedication. There was a large motorcade. It was amazing that there was no protective bubble on the President’s car. We could see all of the dignitaries quite clearly. Later at the Falcon Dam site the President of Mexico joined President Eisenhower for the official dedication ceremony.”



FIG. 3. Top story of H. Cuellar mercantile being moved to New Zapata. Photo by Wilfrid C. Bailey, ca. 1953. Courtesy, L. Tom Perry, special collections, Harold B Lee Library, Brigham Young University.

In their grandson Tomás Luis Jr.'s estimation, his paternal grandparents Maximiano and Ángela Zapata Yzaguirre were able to weather the transition because they were able to continue their agrarian and ranching based lifestyle much as they had done before the building of Falcon Dam.

Larry Graves was born in 1956 after the dam was built. However, his family archives hold films, photographs, and ephemera collected by his parents over the years that he inherited upon their passing. Larry Graves recalls being told several stories about the move to new Zapata. According to one story, the water tower was moved to New Zapata upright and in one piece. He also recalls a humorous incident from another story—

“The story told was that someone took a boat ride to the courthouse and had picnic on the second floor. As they enjoyed their lunch the boat got loose and floated away, leaving them stranded. I don’t know how they retrieved the boat or were rescued, but that prompted the Army Corps of Engineers to blow up the court house.”

The story that had the most impact on Graves was the story of the relocation of the second floor of the his grandparents' home to new Zapata and seeing the railroad ties used in the move still attached to the house's exterior years afterwards.

Was Building Falcon Dam worth it in the end?

Opinions of the second generation are mixed when queried about the positive impacts of the dam's construction and the resulting relocation of the residents who were in the path of that project. Despite the promises, periodic droughts still came in the 1960s, and again in the late 1980s and even 1990s. Beatriz Izaguirre Flores recalls a very dry spell in the early 1960s that exposed the previously flooded city of Old Zapata: "Later on, I think, as we were teenagers there was another very, very dry spell. The water in the dam went down, so that the old town of Zapata, and the old town of Guerrero, were exposed. There were very few things that remained that you could see. Falcón was also exposed, but Falcón is closer to the actual dam, almost in the middle of the lake. We were able to see artifacts and some old cisterns that were below ground. We were very careful while walking on the exposed Falcón site because of the danger of falling into a sinkhole or into an old well. We saw the church come back up from the ground in Guerrero. We saw different places in old Zapata that came up out of the lake. I didn't recognize them. But of course my mother did. And my father did."

Both Tomás Luis Izaguirre Jr. and María Eva Uribe Ramírez noted the current 21st century droughts and water issues that continue to plague the area. This despite the initial rationale for building Falcon dam as a lasting, permanent solution for the area's water issues. Although the beneficial effects of the dam as a mechanism for ensuring a regular water supply is acknowledged, the current serious state of drought remains an issue. Ironically, the huge lake adjacent to the relocated town of Zapata ran out of water in 2022. The streets and building foundations of old Zapata are again visible.

The ultimate long-term benefits of Falcon dam weighed against the human toll of forced relocation remain unclear. Wilfrid Bailey reported on the economic crisis facing newly relocated residents of Zapata and the surrounding area due to the loss of their arable farms, ranches, and

businesses with few landowners having received compensation from the government in the immediate aftermath of the Dam's construction.³⁸ Although the reservoir brought tourism related to boating and fishing, incidents related to criminal activity along the US-Mexican border on the Mexican side in recent years and the continuing droughts reducing the lake volume has taken its toll. Tomás Luis Izaguirre, Jr., observed- "I don't think we've ever gotten over it. I know that as time goes on, less people are around to feel the bitterness of losing their homes. As time goes on, I guess, people have had to make do." His sister, Beatriz Izaguirre Flores adds- "What really hurts is that our historic stone homes that were built circa the time of the American Revolution were destroyed."

Ultimately, an important physical component of the Texas "Wild West" has been lost. At the time that Falcon Dam was built, both the Federal and State governments failed to grasp the historic significance of the area. It is extremely poignant to visit San Ygnacio, the town that was saved from the inundation because it was just outside the confines of the reservoir. There, you will see homes and an old fort that are representative of the architecture of a bygone era. The owners of these historic buildings are extremely proud of their homes. They have been occupied across the centuries. The people of Zapata County treasure their history. Beatriz Izaguirre Flores summed up the legacy of Falcon Dam in a 2023 interview saying:

"It is true that as time passes, the older generation still harbors resentment over the loss of their heritage. The younger citizens cannot miss what they have never known. My own children who are in their forties were flabbergasted by the beauty of "Old Town historic San Ygnacio." Although they had visited the sites at various times during their youth, it was not until the last visit in 2023 that the sights and sounds of the "Old West" reverberated through their minds and rekindled pride and awe for their ancestral forbearers, their strength, their passion, pride and patriotism."

As these accounts illustrate, the impact of the Falcon Dam project continues for current and former residents of Zapata County and their descendants. The long-term effects of all that came with the building of Falcon Dam remain an ever-present part of family histories and cher-

ished memories. Even after seventy years, wounds remain for the descendants of those people displaced by the waters of the Falcon Dam. These wounds are still deep, too deep to show.

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Notes

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16. Emma Eva Izaguirre, Interview by Robert W. Fish, 1988, Footprints in the Sands of Zapata Collection, University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, Edinburg, TX.
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18. Beatriz Izaguirre Flores Interviewed by Lorin M. Flores February 21, 2023.
19. Wilfred C. Bailey. "Problems in Relocating the People of Zapata, Texas," *Texas Journal of Science* 7, no 1 (March 1955), p. 21.
20. Larry Graves, March 15, 2023, E-mail to Lorin M. Flores.
21. The name Yzaguirre can be spelled with a Y or an I, the pronunciation remains the same. Mario retained the original spelling while Tomás chose to spell his name with an I, due to the position of the name in the alphabet. Other family members also adopted that spelling.
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