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Nestor Valencia

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Institute of Oral History
The University of Texas at El Paso
Chamizal Oral History Project

Name of Person Interviewed:	Nestor Valencia
Name of Interviewer:	Michelle L. Gomilla
Dates of Interview:	March 8, 30, April 20, 1994
Length of Interview:	1 Hour, 20 Minutes
Length of Transcript:	39 Pages

Biographical Synopsis

Former Chief Planner for City of El Paso Planning Department; born in 1934 in Ysleta, Texas; attended Ysleta Grade School; Ysleta High School; graduated from Texas Western College with degrees in Art and Government; began work in City of El Paso Planning Department in 1958 as junior draftsman; illustrator, cartographer, and urban planner for City of El Paso; received Master's degree in Political Science from University of Texas at El Paso; placed in charge of Chamizal settlement under administration of El Paso Mayor Judson F. Williams; part of team that traveled to Mexico City to work with the Inter-Secretarial Commission on Chamizal Affairs; worked with officials in Cd. Juárez to develop master plan for the city during implementation of Chamizal Treaty; published Four Point Program; Director of Planning for City of El Paso, 1969-1971; involved in urban and regional planning in Costa Rica, 1971-1973; served as Executive Assistant to El Paso Mayors Fred Hervey and Don Henderson; headed Federal Grants and Urban Affairs Department; Director of Planning for City of El Paso, 1979-1991; American Institute of Certified Planner by examination; helped Cd. Juárez in developing urban-regional plans; played role in development of Zaragoza Bridge; directed development of Official City Plan of El Paso; teaches graduate level courses at University of Texas at El Paso; Vice President for Planning, El Paso Community Foundation.

Summary of Interview

Sketches professional career from early days as junior draftsman to position as Director of Planning for the City of El Paso; work experience as illustrator and cartographer for City of El Paso; recalls involvement in development of Zaragoza Bridge and Official City Plan for the City of El Paso; reflects on childhood impression of Chamizal issue; describes history of Chamizal issue; origin of words Chamizal and *chamizo*; President John F. Kennedy's visit to El Paso to meet with leadership of community, including Sam Young, President of El Paso National Bank; recapitulates Mexico City meeting of U.S. President John F. Kennedy and Mexican President Adolfo López Mateos; appointment of Joseph F. Friedkin and David Hererra Jordán as Commissioners for the International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC), U.S. and Mexican Sections; discusses responsibilities as photographer, writer, printer, and publisher of documents related to Chamizal settlement; recalls work experience with Jonathan Cunningham, Director of Planning for City of El Paso, Judson F. Williams, Mayor of El Paso, and U.S. IBWC Commissioner Joseph F. Friedkin; recollects cooperation and coordination with Mexican officials during implementation of Chamizal Treaty, including Licenciado Aureliano González Vargas, Mayor of Cd. Juárez, his Assistant, Eugenio Calzada Flores, and Arquitecto Francisco Escalante; trip to Mexico City to work with the Inter-Secretarial Commission on Chamizal Affairs; concern, confusion, and uncertainty of Chamizal residents during settlement; commercial businesses forced to relocate, including Peyton Packing Plant and a molasses company; land use issues; razing of Chamizal structures; subdivision and buildings saved by Mexican government; city dump transferred to Mexico; commercial structures passed intact to Mexico, including Navarro Elementary School and IDC Trucking Company; proposed construction of alien detention facility; recalls highlights of Four Point Program, including request for special legislation to take care of renters and property owners forced to relocate from Chamizal area, construction of Border Highway, construction of a national park to memorialize Chamizal Treaty, relocation of Franklin Canal and railroads, and construction of international bridges; discusses initiation of Mexico's Border Industrialization Program (BIP) and *maquiladora* industry.

Chamizal Oral History Project

Nestor Valencia
By Michelle L. Gomilla

March 8, 1994

This is an interview with Nestor Valencia, former Head of the El Paso City Planning Department. The interview, by Michelle Gomilla, is part of the Chamizal Oral History Project. The interview is being conducted at Mr. Valencia's office in Suite 1616 in the Texas Commerce Bank Building on the corner of Main and Mesa Streets, El Paso, Texas. Today's date is the 8th of March, 1994.

G: Mr. Valencia, before we discuss your involvement in the Chamizal settlement, I'd like to ask you, please, to tell us a bit about your early years here in El Paso. Perhaps I can begin by asking you when and where you were born.

V: I was born in 1934 in El Paso, Texas- in Ysleta, as a matter of fact, twelve miles down the river. My parents are from Sonora, [Mexico]. So we're first generation in the United States.

G: Where did you attend grammar school?

V: Ysleta Grade [School], Ysleta High [School], Texas Western College, the University of Texas at El Paso. And that's where I got my education.

G: Could you tell us a little bit about your professional background?

V: Yes. My life inspiration was to be an artist: a painter, an artist, a cartoonist, an illustrator. And, you know, I have a lot of strengths in that area. But by going to UT El Paso- which was back then Texas Western- I got a B.A. in Art with an undergraduate [degree] in Government. And I had a very likable and visionary boss by the name of Jonathan R. Cunningham who was my supervisor and, actually, my boss in City Planning.

I started [working] in City Planning in [19]58 as a junior draftsman. [I was] going to school and working with the city. And I began to like City Planning because there was a lot of graphics. Actually, I was an illustrator for the city and did a lot of brochures concerning parks and recreation and community facilities and that sort of thing. I did a lot of cartography, a lot of mapping. And eventually, I became involved in urban planning.

By the time I got my first degree from UT El Paso I was so involved in planning that I felt that I ought to go ahead and get fully involved in the field. So I then went back and got a Master's in Political Science, which is a very appropriate degree for urban-regional planning. And I was, also, at the time I graduated from UT El Paso, and through my master's program....I was fully involved in the Chamizal settlement. I spent five or six years of my life directly

involved in the Chamizal.

And then I became Assistant Director of Planning in [19]69. I did two years of urban and regional planning in Costa Rica [in 19]71 [and] [19]73. I came back and became Executive Assistant to a mayor by the name of Fred Hervey. And then I did the next two years with Don Henderson as Executive Assistant to the mayor. Subsequent to that, I headed a department known as Federal Grants and Urban Affairs.

And in 1979 I became Director of Planning for the city and stayed as Director of Planning until 1991, at which time I had served thirty-three years with the city. And I figured, you know, time's up. I am an AICP- American Institute of Certified Planners- Certified Planner by examination. So I'm very one of the few AICPS's in the Southwest.

I've had a very productive career in urban and regional planning. I have helped Cd. Juárez develop two or three plans on their side of the border, volunteer by the way. There were two or three projects that- when I left the city, among many of the projects that I worked on- that were significant. One is to bring about the development of the Zaragoza Bridge which took me seventeen years to get done. And the other one was towards the last year or two of my career with the city. I directed the development of the comprehensive plan for the city which is now the Official City Plan. That was very satisfying.

In the meantime, I've been teaching at UT El Paso for

twelve years in graduate level [courses]. And we use El Paso and Cd. Juárez as a lab for urban-regional growth patterns and legal bases for planning. We have detail. We have seven field trips and the students enjoy it.

G: Where are the field trips to?

V: Four in Juárez and three in El Paso. And we get involved in zoning and subdivisions and water and sewer, land standards, [and] industrial parks. [This allows the students to] kind of get a feel for the global development patterns and some of the differences between the two cities, both economically and from a political viewpoint. And then we, of course, get heavily involved in neighborhood analysis of how things are done on one side of the border versus the other side. So it's a rather intensive course. And so, this year we're emphasizing housing which is the in thing right now.

G: How about we back up to the Chamizal issue. What was your first reaction when you heard, or when it was announced, that the Chamizal Treaty was passed in 1963?

V: Having been around my parents....My parents never spoke English. They immigrated into the United States in 1929 at Douglas, Arizona. They came to El Paso [in] about 1929 [or] 1930. And my parents were really very nationalistic. They always felt that one of these days they would go back to Mexico. My mother's ninety-five years old. [She's] still alive and she still dreams of going back to her native land. Of course, you know, (chuckles) there's more of fiction than

anything else at this point but she has had a very good life here. My dad also had a very good life.

And throughout my life, because we're very, very Mexico-oriented....I mean, I was born and raised with the environment of politics from Mexico. [I grew up hearing] about nationalism, about *patrotismo*, *la patria*, *los heroes*, and, you know, all of the heros of government in Mexico. And I had always heard around my home since I was three, four, five, ten, fifteen years old the big issue of the Chamizal. So it was not a new thing to me. When I got my hands technically involved in it I had already had a background- [although it was] a very distorted background- of the Chamizal and what it was. But nonetheless, the Chamizal was a very frequent topic in my home. Like my mother and my father, and my family, and my sisters and brothers all knew about the Chamizal. But I think there was exaggeration at home. My parents thought that the Chamizal was a much more extensive area that we owed Mexico. [They believed] that it covered practically all of El Paso and half of the Valley. And so, everything was Chamizal to them.

As you probably know, the Chamizal issue started in 1864. It was taken seriously about the 1890s by both governments. Mexico claimed a piece of land that was left on the U.S. side of the border by a violent flood that moved the [Rio Grande] river. [The river moved] not by attrition, [but] by a swift movement, which in world law [means that] the case of the

matter is that if a river is a boundary and it moves very, very violently and swiftly, of course, that real estate that is left on one side or the other belongs to the country that it came from. And if it is a slow movement over the hundreds or thousands of years, that by attrition the river does, in fact, move the boundary of the two countries that it bisects. In the case of El Paso and Juárez in the United States and Mexico, we know that there was a violent flood. We know that Pedro Nestor García owned this property and that at one time the river was on the north side of his property. Then it shifted to the south side of his property. And he continued to farm the land. [He was] coming back and forth across the river as if it was his land- which he claimed title to- and said, "I'm going to continue to farm my land."

At one time- I don't recall the exact year, let's say 1874, or thereabouts- the United States said, "Hey, you cannot cross the border. You are now on U.S. territory and this doesn't belong to you." That's the big issue. Then he went to the State Department of Mexico and went to Washington, or got it to the attention of people in Washington, and said, you know, "You are actually claiming land that belongs to me."

After a lot of discussion, et cetera, there was an arbitration- I think it was 1911- where the three commissioners or the judges [representing] Mexico, United States, and Canada sat as an arbitration court and heard the facts about the whole thing. The vote was two-to-one in favor

of Mexico. The United States welshed on the issue or did not recognize one or two of three technicalities and said, "Well, the vote was two-to-one. We do not feel that we want to return this land to Mexico."

That was a thorn between the two countries. And it was in many textbooks in Mexico, you know, [in both] elementary and high school. And it was an on-going sore spot between the two countries. A lot of times [it was] greatly exaggerated, as I mentioned to you, as to what the issue was. The fact of the matter is that the acreage is a net 437 acres of land-period- that Mexico claimed as part of the national domain of, you know, patrimony. So between 1911 and 1962, we had this kind of an issue.

[If] you ask several people, "What does the word Chamizal mean?" you're going to get different answers. If you ask twelve persons, you're going to get eight different answers. *Chamizo* is a word that, if you look at it technically, it probably doesn't mean what a lot of people around El Paso and Cd. Juárez or this region call *chamizo*. We are used to calling *chamizo* the tumbleweed that rolls down the road which, by the way, comes from Russia. It's a Russian thistle. And if we are driving in El Paso and we see this large area of tumbleweed we say, "Look at the Chamizal."

In technical words, the *chamizo* is a grey sagebrush that is native to the area and probably, probably, somewhere along the line, because this was a thicket created by the river,

that there was an area of a *bosque*, instead of a *chamizal*. There's a difference between a *bosque* and a *chamizal*. A *bosque* is native vegetation created by the river. [A *bosque* is made up of] usually salt cedars and tornillo and other plants that are native to the river from northern New Mexico all the way down to Laredo, and so forth, that are very characteristic of the river, [such as the vegetation in the] oxbows that are created. And we have several *bosques*. And somebody thought, "Well, there's a *chamizal*. This is an area so we'll call it that." So there's a technicality there.

My understanding of it is that when Kennedy came to El Paso, he met with the leadership of the community. And he met with a fellow by the name of Sam Young, Senior, who was the owner of this bank that we're sitting (chuckles) in here. [He was] a very wealthy man who ran the affairs of the city, or influenced them if he didn't run them. And so, Kennedy asked Sam Young, "What is it that we can do to make an impact in El Paso and Cd. Juárez and how is it that we can help on border issues?" And Sam Young, Senior, suggested, "Well, why don't you work, Mr. President- if when you become President- on the Chamizal issue?" And then, I think, Kennedy pursued the issue.

And by the way, the Chamizal settlement is a Kennedy initiative. Let's not forget that. A lot of other people may want to take credit for it, but it was [President] John F. Kennedy and [President Adolfo] López Mateos in Mexico who met

in Mexico- I forget the date, as late as maybe November of 1962, [if] I'm not mistaken. And [both Presidents] agreed to request that the two respective Commissioners on each side of the border- in that instant, it was Commissioner Joseph F. Friedkin on the U.S. side and [David] Herrera Jordán on the Mexican [side]- to come up with a workable plan that would fit the needs of the communities of Cd. Juárez and El Paso who were now urbanized, especially in the area of the Chamizal. And [they were asked] to come back with a plan- an agreeable, workable, properly engineered plan that would be technically correct and that would be satisfactory to both sides.

[There was an] understanding that the original Chamizal property that was claimed by Mexico would probably not be returned to Mexico at this point but that there would be a trade-off [and] that some of the land which was Mexico would become U.S. property and some of the land that is U.S. now would go to Mexico to rectify the river and give Mexico the net 437 acres of land which was the original claim, but not necessarily the original property. Knowing the capability, I might say, of Joe Friedkin- which I admire greatly- and his diplomacy, and the ability to solve problems, he got to work and he came up with the draft of the treaty, the [proposed re]location of the river, and said, "Two respective governments were ready to present this for your consideration and adoption so we can get on with the Chamizal Treaty."

Most of the land that was given to Mexico was not the

Chamizal. It involved a sliver of the original Chamizal- some of the land that was never claimed by Mexico towards the Cordova Bridge. The issue was that we would get 193 acres of Mexican land. And so, we would return to Mexico about 600 and some odd acres. But if you subtract the net you ended up with the net 437 [acres], which was the principle of the issue.

So when that was agreed upon, it was understood that there were at least 5,000 people living in the area, that there [was] a considerable amount of industry- including a packing company, Peyton Packing Company- in the area, that there were truck lines, and there were businesses that had to be relocated, not only for the property itself and for the new channel, but for new Ports of Entry facilities that would be necessary. So all that was taken into consideration.

The bottom line at that point was that it would cost the U.S. government \$44.9 million to implement the Chamizal Treaty. That [money appropriated] would be [used] to relocate the bridges [and] to build brand-new bridges. And whatever was left in Mexico, Mexico would keep. We even turned over to Mexico a couple of full neighborhoods [which included] housing- regular post-war American dream housing- and streets, and everything else. Well, Mexico found it more advantageous to level those housing units and say, "We don't want to use them. We'll just build parks and community facilities rather than to try to house people here."

G: How about the commercial buildings that passed over to Mexico?

V: They used a lot of them. For instance, the International Boundary Commission [office is located in what], as I recall, was the IDC Truck Line or some such. There was another building used. Navarro Elementary School is now part of their school system in Juárez. So there were some substantial buildings that went over that were not affected either by the river channel, or the Border Highway, or any of the real estate needed to fully implement the railroad systems. So that what Mexico used, it used well. And the old Immigration and Customs facilities is used by the State Department in Juárez and that sort of thing.

I had the privilege to work under Judson Williams when this all came about. And I was privileged to work under Jonathan Cunningham, who was my mentor and my teacher. And I was put in charge of everything that had to do with Chamizal, at least from the city's viewpoint. I was able to do field work parcel by parcel, practically measure every land used, quantify the extent of the land uses out there- whether it was a molasses company or a Peyton Packing Company- [and] do extensive work on aerial photography and mapping.

I used to have a touring display that I designed myself. [The display consisted] of fourteen or sixteen posters that I would [use to] go around the community and present to schools and organizations, and Chambers of Commerce and Rotary Clubs, and make a presentation on the Chamizal settlement. And I used to carry that stuff around [with] me- ad nauseam- because

(chuckles) I would go through the same spiel over and over again. But it was fun. I did a lot of graphics on where it started, what the lands were involved, who were the players- I had pictures of Pedro Nestor García, I had pictures of Kennedy and López Mateos- and what lands would be affected, how many businesses would be affected, [and] how many people would be affected. And I was kind of like the walking museum of the Chamizal or the road show. And I enjoyed that a lot.

At that time, I was kind of like a jack-of-all-trades. I was a photographer, writer, printer, and publisher of documents related to the Chamizal settlement. At that time we didn't have staff to say, "You do this," and, you know, "You put this into the computer and have it ready for me- typeset [and] copy ready." No, I used to do it on a Veri-Typer- word by [word], letter by letter- and set it up.

But I don't think anyone would have turned down the opportunity to have the rich experience I had from 1963 to 1967, or [19]68, to fully see this whole thing evolved. I was involved in practically every meeting with both governments, both Commissioners, [and] both communities.

G: Did you have a counterpart in Juárez that was doing the same thing there as you were doing here?

V: The Boundary Commissioner in Juárez was involved. What was interesting is that on the U.S. side the Planning Department of the City was heavily involved with the Boundary Commission of the U.S. Section. On the Mexican side I worked extensively

with Licenciado Aureliano González Vargas, who was then Mayor of Juárez, and his Assistant, Eugenio Calzada Flores, who was the Mayor Pro Tem[pore] back there. And so, we worked very hard. We traveled to Mexico as a team to go work with the Inter-Secretarial Commission on Chamizal affairs. There was a commission of about twelve [or] thirteen people appointed by the President of Mexico to resolve issues of railroads, and uses, and parks, and all that sort of thing. At one time we worked eleven days, practically day and night, with the commission to come up with solutions. And it was quite a learning experience [and] quite a privilege.

And I feel very comfortable. I've always felt very comfortable working with Mexico because I'm completely bilingual. And it gave me my teaching process because I've continued to work across the border. And I'm now working along the entire border between San Diego and Brownsville in environmental issues here at the [El Paso] Community Foundation. So that has helped me a lot.

There were a lot of things that were proposed. What we did do was we published and took to Washington, and won, what we called the Four Point Program. And that was one of my creations. Of course, I didn't do it alone. Policy was coming from Judson Williams, and Jonathan Cunningham, and Joe Friedkin who developed one strong team in the interest of the public. And they were just the right players. And so I happened to be a technical staff person who was totally

immersed in this. As a matter of fact, I have a full file of Chamizal work papers and sketches and inventories that I did that are still intact in City Planning right now.

G: Perhaps you can share them with us later.

V: Yes. But what I'd like to do for our next meeting is to bring one of the reports because we're going to be talking about why was that report done, what did we ask for, what was our purpose in asking for a new Bowie High School, a Chamizal National Memorial, a Border Highway, relocation of the irrigation canal, [and] special legislation for people so that people in the area would be more than compensated for being uprooted, for leaving their home, for selling their home [and] their property, and going elsewhere. We felt as a team, more than anything else, that this was not your ordinary highway relocation. This was not your ordinary fire department station relocation and that, through imminent domain, these people were being uprooted from their neighborhood and that they should be more than compensated.

So special legislation was written and passed to deal with two issues- one, the renter and the property owner- because you only had two flavors. You either rented in the area- you had lived in a tenement or a rented home- or you were paying a 30-year FHA [or] VA conventional loan. And some of the people already owned their property. They didn't have a mortgage but their homes were rather modest. So if you looked in the market in El Paso, where would you find

something comparable and not have to pay the difference and have to be saddled with a mortgage that you didn't want or ask for in the first place?

G: Did most of the homeowners have clear title to their properties?

V: Yes, those that were in the old neighborhood. But we had a couple, or three, subdivisions that were brand-new tract housing as you and I know it. [These subdivisions, which were built] post-War, [housed residents] that were paying for their home. They were probably almost through with the payment or halfway through with it. Rio Linda was one of the subdivisions. I'll have to look at my notes. But, you know, those were probably the mortgaged thirty-year loan, four percent, \$145 a month [or] that sort of thing which is now the fashion to buy in housing. So [for] those [homes] that were not paid up, the Boundary Commission would, of course, buy and pay up. And then the Boundary Commission would pay the difference between your old home and your new home so you would not be saddled with a mortgage. We used to chase people [and] families because...

G: Literally?

v: Literally. Because a lot of the renters would pack up their stuff and, you know, move four blocks or eight blocks north. And they were, you know, authorized or they were entitled to get money. But they didn't bother. So we would chase people around and [we'd] say, "Do you know where this lady [is] that

lived here that moved three weeks ago? Where did she go? What are....?" [They would say], "Well, I don't know. She just went down the street. I think she lives on Fourth and Paisano or somewhere up there." So we had people investigating and [when they located that person they would] say, "Ma'am, here's money that you're entitled to. You lost so many days of work," or....Because the help was there to call up a moving and storage [company] and to get compensated to the extent possible being a renter. There was money [available for renters and homeowners] to relocate, but a lot of people didn't understand it.

G: How did they first hear about the relocation project...

V: Radio.

G: ...itself?

V: Radio and community meetings. I mean, they were extensive.

G: Held in Spanish?

V: Well, of course. I'm sure there were a lot of people that could speak English, you know, but if you had a meeting in the neighborhood you automatically have it in Spanish, yes.

G: What do you think the initial reaction was by the people that lived in the Chamizal...

End of Tape One

Side A

Beginning of Tape One

Side B

G: This is a continuation of the interview with Nestor Valencia. Today's date is the 30th of March, 1994. We are located in Mr. Valencia's offices in the Texas Commerce Bank Building, Suite 1616, El Paso, Texas.

V: [There was] considerable concern and confusion as to what really was involved in the Chamizal. As I told you, what was returned to Mexico and what was the original piece of property that the Chamizal disputed land encompassed were two different things. You have those maps, don't you...

G: Yes.

V: ...where you have the 1864 channel? You have the [map that shows the disputed land] prior to 1864. You have [the map that shows] the 1864 [boundary delineations]. And you have [the map that shows] the 1963 alignment. As I mentioned to you, in the Chamizal issue in Mexico by....Mexican citizens and, perhaps, the Hispanics in El Paso in the United States, had a distorted view of the total amount of land involved. I think the only people that really knew what the Chamizal properties involved looked like and where it physically laid out between the two communities were the families and friends and neighbors of the people who lost the land to the United States as a result of the change of the river. What I'm trying to say is that as time went by and the Chamizal issue

became an international thorn between the two governments, people distorted the amount of land that was involved and even the location of it so that, in fact, if you look at it in a pretty exact map it tells you almost to the inch what was involved back then and what was finally settled so that we could exchange land and settle the dispute.

A lot of people felt, in my opinion, in El Paso and Cd. Juárez, uncertainty as to where the new line would be, you know, established, [and] whether their home would be affected or not. One of the maps that was originally published in the paper- or the ones that I saw- were in the treaty itself, which I think you have a full copy of it. If I'm not mistaken, there's an engineering drawing there that shows where the new boundary that was being proposed and finally executed by both governments and was proposed by both boundary Commissioners. [The map in the newspaper] showed exactly where the new Chamizal river channel would be. What it didn't show was the lands that would be taken to accommodate such things as relocated railroad systems, border highways, [and] immigration and customs needs beyond the treaty agreement on the U.S. side of the border. In other words, more land was acquired by the government than is shown in the treaty. We were, obviously, to accommodate Ports of Entry and that sort of thing [such as] public right-of-way. I think the biggest concern was, "Will I be moved out? Am I affected by the treaty? Will we lose our house?"

I don't think that there was ever any concern about people who lived in the Chamizal area, or the final area that the federal government would acquire, that the people there would remain in the United States. I think it's ludicrous to even think that their, you know, immigration, or legal residency, [or] citizenship would be ever questioned. As to whether, you know, [Chamizal residents were told], "You're going back to Mexico with the land," or that sort of thing- I don't think that was a big concern of anyone. I think that would be even a mistake to think that anybody had even any doubts as to what their status would be if they were purchased out, or moved out, or [their property] acquired by the government.

I think the big question was in the south [of] El Paso and in the Hammett Street area [and] Delta Street area, "I want to know whether I'm affected or not." And I think the Boundary Commission, jointly with the City of El Paso, made a very strong- and I think adequate- effort to accommodate all the questions to the extent that they were known at the time that this was going on. For example, if you see the Port of Entry on Stanton Street, the new international line is probably at least three blocks away from the edge of the Ports of Entries facilities. The new land that had to be acquired, of course, moved tenements, moved businesses, [and] moved residences out of that area to make way for what was necessary. And that property- quote- "was not part of the

Chamizal transfer." It was part of making new Ports of Entry available to accommodate the relocated river channel.

But, by and large, the treaty was pulled off rather smoothly [and] rather professionally. There were no major demonstrations or, you know, outraged (chuckles) citizens that would come in to City Hall or the federal government Boundary Commission headquarters on either side of the border, of course, principally because on the Mexican side no one was really affected, no one. In other words, there were no residents moved. There were no businesses lost. Mexico acquired new land but was undisturbed by implementing the Chamizal Treaty.

G: Well, the acreage that was given to the United States....What you're saying is that it was vacant...

V: Vacant.

G: ...land?

V: Yes, it had two or three adobes but nothing of any consequence. It was vacant land sometimes used for agricultural purposes, but usually just desolate land, as I recall. There wasn't very much growing on it.

What was affected here was packing plants, residential development, [and] a molasses storage area I remember very well. That was a lot of molasses (chuckles) that had to be moved out. It was like a, you know, gasoline storage tank but instead of being full of gasoline it was full of molasses. It was a central distribution point.

So by and large, I think, the federal government under the direction of Joe Friedkin and a very able staff which....Bob Ybarra is going to remember the names of the gentleman that was brought here and a young lady that was brought here to work with the city and, you know, implement the Chamizal Treaty.

I think people were generally satisfied with the way it was handled. I don't recall irate citizens. I don't recall people that were....Maybe, you know, I'm looking at it from a different window but I think, by and large, everybody was satisfied. Some of the Hispanic community leadership felt that by dislocating and relocating these people to other neighborhoods [and] scattering [them] about the whole city was a bad action. [Some felt] that the people who owned property here should not be subjected to going to, for instance, Ascarate area, or central El Paso, or northeast El Paso, or wherever they landed.

On the other hand, if you look at the record- and again, the only study that was ever made was the Dr. [Ellwyn R.] Stoddard analysis that I can remember. But the Boundary Commission said, "Go forth. Find yourself a place. If you need help we'll help you find a place. You're not alone. And we will help you negotiate. And we will help you find a house suitable to your needs. And when you find something then we will"- you know- "take care of you." Which was the beauty of this project.

You might consider talking to some of these families and say, "You know, you were moved twenty years ago"- was it twenty or thirty...[19]64, [19]74, [19]84... thirty years ago- "You bought this house on Cadwallader Street," for example. "Was it a mistake? Are your children better off or worse off? Do you like your environment, your school? What do you remember?" I'm sure you're going to find a lot of these people still [living in the area] where they were relocated. But I can't remember. It's [been] thirty years. (chuckles) It's a long time.

G: It's a long time ago.

V: Yes. And then we had to chase, like I told you before, had to chase those people that relocated themselves out of tenements that we would wipe out and tell them of their rights and their benefits that they were entitled to. I think [they were given] a very fair and equitable treatment of saying, "You're a renter here. We will help you find a new rental unit. We will help you move [or] whatever it takes. If it takes, you know, a moving and storage truck, labor, [or] whatever it takes, we will move you out regardless of the size of your household. And you will be paid for time lost at work," et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. And some took advantage of it. Others did not. Probably what might have helped a little bit more is to have at that time- and [I'm] thinking hindsight here. There should have, [or] might have, been a Chamizal Homeowners Association [in existence] so they could congregate

and exchange information and that sort of thing. And then have that group call on the city and the federal government [and] say, you know, "We're going to assemble next week at such and such a place. We want you to come over." Of course, we had hearings in the area but there was no [spokesperson], other than [Feliciano] Hinojosa. There was not a cohesive group. There was no cohesive group for the renters. And at that time, I don't recall a strong advocacy group in the neighborhood association of people who would, you know, look for, you know, over the interest of the dwellers. There was not the type of militancy that we saw in later years in [19]68, [19]69, [19]70, [19]71. There wasn't anything of that nature. I know we have a fairly accurate number of single family rental units, industry- by name- and the location of all this laid out as to what was really affected, [such as] property ownership. The University of Texas at El Paso- the UT System- had property [that included] large holdings [such as] Cotton Memorial that had to be negotiated and paid [for]. [They were located] adjacent to Bowie High School.

G: I was unaware of that.

V: Yes. And so the State [of Texas] negotiated, you know, for some estates that the school- UT El Paso- had received by donors for the use and benefit of the school. I think it was the Cotton Memorial property behind the old Bowie High School, which is now Guillen. I don't know if you knew that but Guillen used to be Bowie School. Now it's- what do you call

it- [Guillen] Middle School or Elementary School.

G: Which government razed the buildings? I know many of them were condemned.

V: We did. The U.S. federal government had an obligation to comply with Mexico's request to say, "This one is razed. This one I want. This one is razed. This one is razed. This one I want. So that when you transfer all this to me, this is what we'll get." Okay? Which was very interesting because one of the things that the federal government of Mexico saved was a subdivision or housing [of] post-War tract housing. [It was a] FHA [or] VA type of thing.

G: Was that the Loma Linda or Loma Vista Subdivision?

V: No...Rio Linda...no. That's another issue. You need to see....This was towards the....All of the housing between Santa Fe Street and Cordova and all of the buildings and everything else....None of that reverted to Mexico. Everything that was given to Mexico, or transferred to Mexico intact, was east of Cordova which entailed a whole subdivision. Now, you're getting to a land use issue and that will require us to go through files and say, "This is what it was. This is what was razed, bulldozed, [and] leveled. And this was what was transferred to Mexico." And for some unknown reason- well, actually I do know why- the federal government of Mexico decided to [level the housing]. After they got the subdivision on their side with some very substantial housing- rather attractive housing [that was]

single-family detached housing- [the Mexican government] decided to level the housing themselves on the Mexican side rather than keep the system. It may have had to do something with the underground water network and the sewer system, the inability of Mexico to hook this appendage or neighborhood to the whole city, [or] the impracticality of this isolated neighborhood to become a viable neighborhood. There was a reason for it which I'm not too sure I understand. They did manage to keep a large number of major buildings including an elementary school, which was Navarro Elementary School, major truck distribution centers, warehousing, and so forth, which are now still being used in Juárez as useful buildings.

G: Did the Mexican government pay the U.S. government for those buildings?

V: No. I don't recall the Mexican government paying for that. The American government paid whoever owned them, but I think there was agreement that the Mexican government would help pay for the new concrete-lined channel, half of the new bridges up to the international line, and anything incidental to establishing the new Ports of Entry in Mexico. But I don't recall there was any money exchanged for physical buildings that were lost. The United States paid for them through the owners whether it was a school system, or a company, or an individual. Everybody was pretty much satisfied with the settlement. But I don't think Mexico was ever asked. They were asked, "Which ones do you want to get?" But they were

never asked [to pay for the buildings transferred to Mexico from the United States and told], "Here's a bill. I want you to pay for these buildings that you received." I think if you would have done that, I think Mexico would have said, "Don't give me any buildings. Give me clear title."

One of the interesting aspects of the Chamizal was that we, in fact, transferred to Mexico an old city dump, which I may have mentioned. A city dump that was buried and closed. And for many years that was the...

G: Where was it located, Mr. Valencia?

V: At the Cordova area. And when they were bulldozing for the new channel they actually found newspapers that were totally intact dating back to the [19]20s and [19]30s that you could pick up and read and that sort of thing. That was an interesting....But the negative part of it is that Mexico can not build anything on top of that because there's no....You can't build on top of a city dump. So they built parks and they built sports arenas and that sort of thing, but no buildings. A lot of that area, if you see it visually, it's full of glass, it's full of....You know, you can tell it's an old dump. So, there you have it. Now we need to go to these others.

G: Okay. So perhaps we'll save it for the next interview.

V: Yes. I think you might want to explore, in the files, what Plácido Cano, [Chief of Graphics, City of El Paso], may help you find on existing land use. It's a land use map. And when

you say land use over there, they'll know exactly what you're talking about, which would be a survey of color and property lines that tell you, [for example], this is single-family, this is an apartment, this is, you know, a school and that sort of thing.

G: It may help bring everything into perspective.

V: Oh, yes, yes. I think an existing land use [map] would be very, very helpful because you have several things.

End of Tape One

Side B

Beginning of Tape Two

Side A

G: This is a continuation of the interview with Nestor Valencia. Today's date is the 20th of April, 1994. We are located in Mr. Valencia's offices in the Texas Commerce Bank Building, Suite 1616, El Paso, Texas.

V: You ask the questions. I'll answer the questions.

G: Okay. The last time we had begun a discussion on existing land usage in El Paso and Juárez. I'd like for you to elaborate on the existing land usage at the time that the treaty was ratified by both countries.

V: Well, as you know, since the change of the river channel itself- although there was a cloud on the properties resulting

from the Chamizal dispute- there was a considerable amount of development. What happened in the Chamizal disputed land, as well as the fringe areas or the adjacent areas of the border that were not affected by the Chamizal dispute that dates back to 1864....However, in order to implement the Chamizal Treaty, it was necessary to undertake a land use analysis of what was going to be affected by the location of the channel, by the establishment of the new Ports of Entry facilities, by the new bridges, by the relocated canals, and railroad systems, and new arterials that had to be either relocated or created new in order to take care of the implementation of the treaty and, at the same time, leave El Paso as a community that would continue to function adjacent to the river.

[We were] using the best planning processes to ensure that we did not leave a kind of a patchwork there, but to have a continuity of the community after the implementation of the program so that it would blend in and it would be compatible with the rest of the community. As you know, and our reports indicate, we had a good amount of private development- residential, commercial, industrial development- such as warehousing, subdivisions, [and] industrial parks. We had a meat packing plant, [Peyton Packing Plant], in the area. We had railroad systems that were already in place serving Mexico. All of that had to be changed. [And it] had to be either compensated for or relocated to the satisfaction to the person or company that was within the area that was going to

be transferred to Mexico or used to implement the Chamizal.

Not all of the land that was changed went to Mexico. Obviously we needed some land that needed to be reused or reshaped to take care of the implementation. We had street systems down there. We had parks. We had drainage structures to take care of flood control in El Paso, which is a major development down there. We had water utilities, we had gas lines, sewer, water, [and] electrical systems. All of that had to be changed- either terminated, relocated, or built new. So all of that was part of the city's concern that all of that would be done adequately, you know, through a planning process so that everything would be, when the surgery would occur on the land that was going to be affected, that everything would function once we did the modifications to take care of everything that was going to be relocated, rebuilt, or modified. We had systems down there that had been in operation for thirty, forty, fifty years, or longer. We also had fairly new housing developments that needed to be relocated.

So once the City of El Paso was notified that there was going to be a Chamizal Treaty between the United States and Mexico and that both governments were going to, you know, implement it to its fullest degree, the local government decided that in order for the city and the citizens of El Paso not to be shortchanged as a result of this massive federal program that would impact the lives of the taxpayers and

citizens of El Paso, and both from the area where they were going to be relocated and also from the community at large, that there had to be some trade-offs. And the trade-offs were anticipated early on. As a matter of fact, we developed a Four Point Program internally within the City Government of El Paso as to what would be our cards that we would go to Washington and place before the federal government and say, "These are things that are important in order for you as a federal government to carry out the federal program- the Chamizal Treaty- and, at the same time, develop a partnership wherein everybody would win or everybody would be satisfied."

It was late [19]63 and early [19]64 that an intensive planning effort was made, principally at the direction of Mayor Judson Williams. [It was he] who orchestrated all of the city departments and players to develop a program that we would be satisfied with and that it would be to the interest of the citizens of El Paso. In that particular program, I was Chief Planner for the project within the city government under the direction of Jonathan Cunningham, who was Director of Planning. And [I was] under the direction of Mayor Judson Williams. And we had to start from scratch.

So we analyzed physically on the ground and [began] measuring all of the properties [to give us an idea] as to what was actually down there. We tried to establish some kind of value to all of these public facilities and private lands to [help us] come up with an inventory of land usage, both

public and private. Take into consideration that we would also need additional lands not affected by the Chamizal, you know, to be transferred to Mexico. And I make that point because there was a lot more land than the 630 acres involved initially that we had to acquire, we had to reserve, and ask the federal government to incorporate into the program.

One of the things we did early on was to identify what would be some points that the City of El Paso would place before the federal government for consideration as the community's interest in order to achieve the end results. And we developed what was known as the Four Point Program. This project, which yours truly did (chuckles) from the field work, the photography, the printing, and....Because that's the way that things worked back then.

G: You were still the walking museum of the Chamizal like you said.

V: We had to do everything. I mean, we didn't have....We had very scarce resources, we had very scarce budgeting, and yet we had to produce something, you know, worthwhile. And so we developed what was known as the Four Point Program. And we presented it first in a large brochure and, subsequently, into a better, more slick brochure that went to Washington. And the point was that we were very concerned that the owners of property and the renters of property that were already in there that, you know, [were] either living there as a resident or as a business, should be adequately compensated beyond the

normal compensation systems in place by the federal government at that time. We felt that this was a special program involving two countries and the people that would be affected were not really party to it in that this happened. And it happened. And both countries had agreed to carry out the terms of the treaty. And it would affect a large number of businesses and, certainly, 5,000 lives that lived in the area. So the first thing we asked [for]- and we got- through Congress was very special and very liberal legislation that became, of course, appropriations by Congress to take care of the people that lived and worked in there. So that was our point number one.

[In point] number two [we asked] that in order to make this a meaningful and a more attractive and a more functional system, that we ought to have a Border Highway adjacent to the newly relocated international river. That Border Highway has proven to be one of the most valuable assets that we have in the city in that the Border Highway was the beginning of the outer loop of El Paso going to the Border Highway, Loop 375, through the Army area at Fort Bliss, across the mountain- which is Trans Mountain Road- back to the freeway, down to Doniphan, making a major loop around the city. And, in time, we will have a loop around the entire city that you can drive without one single stop. So it's about 97 percent complete.

G: Nearly there.

Y: We're almost there. We told the federal government that the

lasting, permanent, and beneficial use of the area around the Chamizal or the Cordova Bridge that would be transferred from Mexico to the United States as vacant land should be used for a national park. [We felt] that this treaty was important enough to memorialize and to make this into an attractive public facility, rather than to have land uses in there such as housing and commercial development- or even alien detention facilities- that would be detrimental to the treaty. And, certainly, [it was] not in the best interest of the public to have these land uses in there. So we fought very hard to make sure that the [Chamizal] Memorial Park was there, that it would be an area where the public would benefit from it and enjoy for many years to come, and have, in perpetuity, two very urban parks in the heart of both cities that would function as lasting memorials to the accord [and] to the achievement that lasted as a dispute for a hundred years. So that occurred. Thanks to everybody that worked on it from the State Department to the congressmen and congress itself, mayors and county judges, and everybody else, we were able to change the course of the fifty-four acres that are now the Memorial Park from an alien detention facility to a national park. The alien detention facility that was built at that time that was destined to be here is now at the airport.

We also asked that we would have money from the federal government- [or] that we were paid money- to relocate the Franklin Canal from Sixth Street and put it adjacent to the

river. The reason we did that, of course, is very obvious. We were losing a lot of children through the highest density neighborhood, which is South El Paso. Every summer people would drown there. Many lives were lost. And we felt that now was the time to ask that the canal that had been there for many, many years be relocated and parallel the river channel, concrete-line it, [and] protect it with necessary fencing.

And later on, about 1969, we used the old canal channel and converted it into a very nice urban park for the neighborhood. [We] buried it, put [in] some nice trees, and made it into a pedestrian mall- [all of this] resulting from the Chamizal Treaty that, in fact, agreed to move the canal along the river.

I think [if we take into consideration] the relocation of industry and the railroads and understanding everybody's concerns, I think everything was, more or less, satisfactorily undertaken. We were able to separate rail systems from traffic so that, at no point, would you have the conflicting crossing of railroad freight trains that would block traffic. That was a very important issue. Prior to the Chamizal, if you went to Juárez and you got there on the wrong time, sometimes a train would be crossing the international bridges and you would have to wait until the train went by. It was very dangerous, by the way. So we were able to do a lot of railroad systems' relocating and satisfy both the Southern Pacific and the Santa Fe system.

G: Is that why the international bridges were built higher [in order] to accommodate the...

V: That is the only reason. The only reason is that it would accommodate the railway and it would accommodate the eighteen-wheelers that would be on the Border Highway which, as you know, there are height limitations or height requirements by the federal government above and beyond a truck. If we would have left the bridges at grade, then we would have tremendous amount of conflict between north and south and east and west traffic. We would certainly have railroad systems cross the international bridge lines. There would be no way to escape that. So that by raising the bridges enough, you would have the grade necessary to clear all of the Border Highway systems on the U.S. side, as well as the Mexican side. A lot of people have a problem because of the height of the bridges. [Some say] that, "It was a monument to concrete." [Others say] that, "It's too high," et cetera, et cetera. But the fact remains that, you know, you have to pay a little to get what you want. And [in this case], that was the grade separation of these bridges [which], when you get down to the mathematics, are about as low or as high as you have to go to meet the law. So therein lies the reason why we have to walk up the bridge and down the bridge. That's about it.

G: Okay. I'd like to ask you one final question, Mr. Valencia. And this pertains to U.S.-Mexican relations during the implementation of the treaty. Do you think, back then, that

the mutual cooperation and understanding that existed between the twin cities of El Paso and Juárez helped to oil the machinery of the treaty's implementation?

V: Well, during the period prior to the announcement of the treaty and prior to implementing the treaty, we were working with Cd. Juárez in developing a master plan for the city planners. At that time, we had the Director of Planning in Juárez was a person by the name of Arquitecto Francisco Escalante from Mexico City who had been sent to Juárez to develop a master plan for the community. We had been working extensively with Francisco Escalante immediately prior to the Chamizal Treaty. And we had developed excellent rapport with Mexico at the state and national level pertaining to planning and coordination and cooperation. And so, we had already established that. Couple that with the federal government's cooperative and diplomacy in which to carry out the treaty, and the fact that the treaty was not an American [product]....The design to relocate the river and to settle this dispute was not an American product. It was a product of two Boundary Commissioners- the U.S. Boundary Commissioner and the Mexican Boundary Commissioner- who had to work very hard to come up with an agreeable plan that both sides would agree [on]. And that was Commissioner [David Herrera] Jordán and Commissioner [Joseph F.] Friedkin who had worked intensively months before this was announced and both governments agreed to accept the work of the two Commissioners. They're the ones

that actually oiled the system more than anybody else. They were able to come up with a plan that was satisfactory. And Mexico was very satisfied with it. And the United States certainly was willing to do it. So we had an excellent period of cooperation and coordination.

As you probably know, in 1964, at the time we were implementing the Chamizal Treaty, Mexico announced it's Border Industrialization Program [BIP], which led to the development of the *maquila* system in Mexico. That was announced in [19]64. I'm not saying that the Chamizal had anything to do with it, but at that time Mexico was getting to become a friendlier trading country and they were looking for ways to coalesce with the United States [and] to develop a more businesslike (chuckles) association with the United States. It took from 1964 to 1970 to begin to see the [19]64 law of Mexico develop into some kind of product. So it took about six years of intensive Mexican promotion to say to industry, "The door's open. Come in and we'll work with you so that you can produce products at a cheaper rate. You will provide employment to us. And don't be afraid." So to give you an example, in Juárez in 1969 we had eleven very small *maquilas*. In 1994 we have something like 340 massive *maquilas*. So the program has worked. But the relations between the United States and Mexico and El Paso and Cd. Juárez were very good.

G: Okay. Would you care to make any closing comments, Mr. Valencia?

V: I think the timing of the Chamizal with the right Presidents, the right diplomats, the right Boundary Commissioners, [and] the right attitudes of the two cities made it possible. And if you look at it, you will find that the implementation of the Chamizal from [19]63 to about 1968- give or take- was a very successful program. Anybody that got hurt by it, [such as] individuals or families that were not fully, you know, that may have had a problem with the treaty....[This] was not intentional, let me tell you. The Boundary Commission worked very hard to make sure that everybody was fairly compensated, was treated with tremendous amount of respect and...(phone rings, taping stopped and started again)

G: Anything else to say again, Mr. Valencia?

V: Well, you know, I think it's an important....The work that you're doing and the recording of this is an important element in the history of El Paso and Juárez and both countries. Certainly, when all of the participants are gone and, you know, a new era comes to El Paso and Juárez and the two countries, you have interviewed some very valuable people that have played a role in this that you really don't get out of text books and you don't get them out of reports. There's something beyond that that tells you things that you would otherwise research but not find between the lines.

G: Okay. Well, I'd like to thank you for the time that you've spent with me. I'm very appreciative.

V: Thank you for giving me the opportunity.

G: Okay. This is the end of the interview.

End of Interview