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Mining in Mexico
Oral History Project

Robert F. Limón
By W. Noel McAnulty, Jr.

November 6, 1995

M: [This interview is taking place] at the home of Robert Limón. We're going to visit with Mr. Limón about some of the things he remembers about mining in Mexico. Mr. Limón, thanks very much for your time. Could you just tell us briefly something about your professional career, where you were educated, and how you got started in mining here.

L: I was educated here. I went to the [Texas] College of Mines here. In 1942 I started working in Colorado with Colorado Fuel and Iron Corporation, but previously to that I had made a job application with ASARCO here at the El Paso office. And I worked with Colorado Fuel and Iron Corporation's fluorspar mine in Wagon Wheel Gap, Colorado, for six or seven months. And then I transferred over to the Groundhog Mine, ASARCO company and then worked there until early 1944.

M: Now, the Groundhog Mine would be in the Silver City District?

L: In the Silver City District, yes, New Mexico. And about that time I was called to the office here in El Paso, the American Smelting and Refining Company offices, and I was offered a job as mine shift boss at the San Pedro Mine in San Luis Potosí. I was there from 1944 to 1948. San Pedro Mine was located about seventeen or eighteen miles east of San Luis Potosí. And during that four years that I was there we had one flood that flooded out three or four levels and four or five mine

fires, which eventually caused the closure of the mine. It was highly pyritic ore and it was spontaneous combustion.

After 1948 I was transferred after the mine closed. I was transferred to the Parral Prieta Mine, where I stayed from 1948 until 1956 in jobs as shift boss, mine foreman, and mine superintendent. In 1948, early part of 1948, I was transferred to the Taxco unit in Taxco, Guerrero, as assistant general manager.

M: Was this in [19]48 or in [19]58?

L: [19]48.

M: Okay.

L: No, I'm sorry. It was [19]56, but in [19]48 to [19]56 I was in Parral. From [19]56 to [19]60 I was in Taxco.

M: Okay.

L: In that year, in 1960, early part of 1960, I was offered a job and a transfer to the Plomosas unit as manager of the mine. At Plomosas, which is in the state of Chihuahua, between Chihuahua and Ojinaga, out in the boondocks, real desert...120° temperature sometimes in the summer and you got awfully dang cold in the wintertime sometimes. In 1962 I was told to go to Mexico City to replace Mr. Chuck, Charles, Campbell...

M: Chuck?

L: Charles W. Campbell. He was going to go to MIT to get a master's degree. My job there the first few years was dealing with the government on the subsidies for the mines. After that I was given the job as manager of the Northern Division, which comprised the mines of Santa Eulalia, Parral, Florita,

Santa Bárbara, and Plomosas. And I don't recall exactly the year, but then I was transferred to the Southern Division of the mining department, which comprised Taxco, Velardeña, Charcas, San Martín. And on those two positions I finished my career with ASARCO. During those years I visited all these mentioned mines two or three times in the course of the year. And... . What else?

M: So then what year did you retire from ASARCO?

L: Oh, I retired from ASARCO in 1970. I have to figure it out. I don't recall exactly. I'll give it to you a little later.

M: Okay.

L: But I retired when I was going to be sixty years old because I had seen too many of my co-workers retire at sixty-five and last one or two years. But close to retirement I was approached by Hudson Bay, in conjunction with the Mexican government, were planning on opening up a mine in Michoacán, the state of Michoacán, in southern Mexico. There was a copper open pit project in the Gabriel Zamora District at Michoacán. I told them I would work for them one year, which I did, but, unfortunately, that project didn't pan out. And about little after the one year that I was with them they closed. Hudson Bay closed up. And after that I was still living in Mexico City and I did some consulting work for DuPont, which had a fluorspar mine in the state of Coahuila, I guess.

M: Yeah.

L: Coahuila, but by that time my health, rather, my hip...I had arthritis in one hip and I couldn't get around very well, so

I stopped doing any consulting work. I had my hips replaced, both of them...one of them twice. And from that time on I haven't done any mining whatsoever. You were interested in knowing how living conditions and what have you...

M: Yeah, let's talk about some of the living conditions. What were things like at San Pedro, for example, when you first went down there?

L: San Pedro was a very small mine. There was seven families there and there was two mines there. One was an open pit, Barreno, and San Pedro Mine itself. And when we first arrived there we were given a house, which set right by the Barreno office. And down below- it was a two-story building and we got the upper story- but down below [on] a lower floor was a warehouse, and it had a wooden floor and you could see between the cracks of the wood. And they used to haul the ore in the Barreno Mines on burros, and they had all the burros corralled, the burros at night, right close to the house. My wife was a city girl. And when she got there, why, there wasn't nothing but wood stoves. She couldn't get the dang wood stove going. And Lester Scowson, who was also a Mormon, a very good friend, went out there and helped her to get things started. But that night all the burros started braying and she just about jumped out of her... . (chuckles) But anyway, we had a wonderful time there, also.

M: Well, let me just ask this one question. Then you were married when you first went to Mexico?

L: Oh, yes, yes. Yes, I was married and had a six-year old son.

M: Oh, okay.

L: And we were in San Pedro for four years. Like I said, we had a hell of a time in the mine. It was hotter than all hell. It was hot because the highly pyritic ore was oxidizing and eventually would start a spontaneous combustion. But we used to go out for lunch and I used to take my boots off and pour the perspiration out. And my wife said, "Don't get in the water. Look at you...all wet!" Well, it wasn't... .

But anyway, we made very good friends at the time there. There were seven families. The Scowsons were one of them. And, unfortunately, like I said previously, the mine had to close down because of fire. We just couldn't control it anymore.

M: Now, the fires that you mentioned, were those just in the shafts or they were in stopes?

L: No. In stopes.

M: In the stopes.

L: The last fire that we had was on a Good Friday, on a Good Friday in [19]47. In 1947 we were called. And, of course, in those days in that area of Mexico there was very religious people, so all the Easter holidays were holidays. People didn't work. But, anyway, there was always somebody patrolling the mine. And they found this stope going and they called us. We had, at least in a case- no, they weren't in a case. What were they? They were aluminum oxygen breathing apparatus and weighed about forty pounds.

M: They were the equivalent of a self-rescue unit?

L: Yeah, yeah. You had a bottle of oxygen. It lasted about two hours. And we went down there in the mine, as I recall. My

crew and I went down into this drift. It was all timber. It was very heavy rock there. And it was all timber. We went in with the fire hose, which the water had a four hundred meter head on it. It was really powerful. And we went up to the raise where the stope was and one of my crew tapped me on the shoulder and [said], "Look back." So I looked back. And all the timbers in the drift where we had put out [the fire] were burning again, so we had to start all over again. And we finally went to the bottom of that raise and shooting water up there because it was all timber. It was all burning. And all of a sudden I saw this whole mass coming down. And we were knee-deep in water by that time, so... . Of course, you couldn't talk through the masks we were wearing and it was just pitch black. We couldn't see even though we had electric lamps. We went in feeling the pipeline. Water was in there and...

M: Because of the smoke?

L: Because of the smoke. It was so thick. And so I mentioned to the crew to get back- there was four men in back of me- to drop the hose. And they dropped it. And I turned around and started out when the whole thing came down- of course, it was just hot, burning coals- and hit that water and steam just came up. I was the only casualty. I got the back of my ears burned just like it had, you know, these cracklings, big cracklings. That was the only...but it wasn't anything bad. But we fought that for months and we just couldn't put the fires [out]. We couldn't control it with pumps. And everything else, we just couldn't control it, so the decision

by upper management was to close it down, which it did.

M: Did ASARCO operate the smelter there at San Luis Potosí at that time?

L: Yes. It still does, yeah.

M: I mean, but it was operating?

L: Yes, it was still operating. It was operating at the time. In fact, we didn't have a mill there at San Pedro. We shipped the raw ore to the smelter.

M: Now, this would have been when you started in 1944. These were the last years of the war.

L: That's right.

M: Were there special problems from a supply standpoint related to the war years?

L: No, because explosives were the main thing. And they were local, made in Mexico. And timber...we had a little trouble getting timber for sets, but no, actually, there wasn't too much of a problem. We never had to stop any mining operations on account of any shortage of material.

M: For example, now, the fuel you would have used for your compressors, was that diesel fuel?

L: No. It was electric.

M: Electric?

L: Electric line. There was an electric line from San Luis. We did have a little problem every once in a while with the electric power, shortage of water, or what have you, from the dams, that were controlled in Michoacán because that power came from Michoacán. And they claimed that Lázaro Cárdenas, who owned most of the state of Michoacán in those days, why,

he had to divert some of the water to water his lands. So that's (laughter) what they claimed. I don't know. You couldn't prove it by me.

M: So then in [19]48 when you moved to Parral, to La Prieta, what were the living conditions there? That was quite a change. Parral was a big city by comparison.

L: Yeah, yeah. There weren't any... . I don't know if there was just one house available or not in the American colony, but we were given a house downtown. And we never moved into it because my wife told me had to clean the doggone place up. It was a pig sty. And she had some men from the mine to clean it out in trucks and what have you, so they gave up on us and gave us a house in the colony. And at that time- no, it wasn't Mark Fowler who was the manager. I couldn't recall exactly. Johnson...Johnson was the manager. Meanwhile we were living at the company hotel there in the bachelors' quarters.

But we moved in. We were very happy. The town itself at that time had, I don't know, twenty-odd houses or so. And there was a lake in front of the houses. We had all the water necessary because we were pumping 2,000 gallons of water from the mine, which was more than could be used. Some of it went to the town and we watered all the lawns and what have you. And the kids had a wonderful time. We had tennis courts, swimming pool, lake with fish, frogs. And the kids, the first thing they'd do when they come back from school... . [Although] they were sent out to the state school, some of them, they did have a company school there for the kids

through the seventh grade.

M: English-speaking school?

L: English school, yeah. And very few went downtown to the Mexican school because most of them were either American or Mexicans who knew English and what have you. But they had a wonderful time. They went horseback riding, hunting, fishing...because they had bass there. Some of the bass there the kids used to get were about, oh, I don't know, a foot or so in size.

M: So at that time were only foreigners living in the colony at La Prieta?

L: No, no. Mostly were foreigners, yes, but that wasn't the policy of the company.

M: What determined who lived in the colony?

L: Beg your pardon?

M: What determined who lived in the colony...the position within the company?

L: The position...the position from shift boss up. And both in the mining, in the metallurgical end, in the warehouse, and what have you. That's what determined... . That was contrary to the Frisco colony. They had two colonies in Frisco: one was strictly for Americans, the other one for Mexicans. And there was some cause of resentment there for quite some years until they integrated the whole thing.

M: Now, tell me about what were the mining conditions like underground. La Prieta mine was a shaft mine.

L: A shaft mine. As you know, the Prieta was a vein mine. And it wasn't very narrow most of the time, but I've seen places

where that vein was over a hundred feet wide. And we used cut and fill.

M: Could you mine it? Did you mine the cut and fill over widths where it was up to a hundred feet?

L: Yeah. It'd hold up. It'd hold up.

M: Gee!

L: It'd hold up. And we'd get the fill from a glory hole on the surface, which was also blasted down in there and the sites. But as the mine went down it went deeper, the ore got a little poorer, and the veins started to narrow down a little bit. By the time we got to the twenty-second level, well, there wasn't much left.

M: How many miners worked underground?

L: Miners that worked underground...I think we had six hundred. Must have been about two hundred and fifty in three shifts. We had three shifts. The third shift was just mostly maintenance. But there was about six hundred workers plus the bosses and what have you.

M: Were these miners on an incentive contract basis?

L: Yes. On contract, yeah.

M: Oh, contract.

L: Contract. Well, they named the contractor and he was the one that got the thirty percent of whatever it was of the liquidation every two weeks and the rest was split among his crew. Every fifteen days the engineering department would go measure all the stopes and figure out the volume of the ore broken. And on that basis they were paid.

M: Now, this would have been a track mine? Is that right?

L: Yes.

M: Where the levels all had...

L: All had track, not manchas, mancha is very small, but electric locomotives- battery locomotives, not electric- which were...
. Later towards the end of the mine a crushing installation was put in down the bottom level to reduce the size of the ore that went out to the mill. That helped the production cost, rather. And what else?

M: Well, you mentioned that you knew Aurelio Torres.

L: Aurelio Torres at that time was working in Parral. And he worked in the engineering department, sort of a draftsman or what have you, but he was a very smart young man. And he and I worked together on designing some of the chutes and what have you, gates and what have you. And to date, every doggone Christmas, why, he gives me a ring. And Manuel Márquez along with him. Manuel Márquez was in Santa Bárbara, but he was a draftsman there. But he was an artist. And I have some pictures of some of the things he drew. I have something he drew for me. And where were we? Aurelio Torres, in fact, I think we attended, yes, one of his son's weddings...what have you. We got to be very good friends. We still are.

M: Now, Mr. Torres eventually did a lot of engineering work for ASARCO, didn't he?

L: Not too much.

M: Oh, he didn't?

L: No. Well, maybe the latter years, I don't know, but not while I was working for the company. Why I don't know. He did, a bit, yes, but not very much. Designing, that's his main

forte...designing equipment and what have you, but... . I don't know why, maybe it was the policy of the company or what have you, but he didn't.

M: Then later when you went to Taxco...

L: And, like I said, in 1956 I was transferred to Taxco as assistant manager there. It was a little different from the Prieta mine because it consisted of four mines spread all over the district, which eventually... . Nowadays, they are all connected underground. But we had different shafts, different crews, different people running these four different mines. And it was nice working there, too. The living conditions there were a little different from what we had been used to all these years we'd been working for ASARCO because there was no colony. Everybody lived in town. And, as you know, it was a tourist town. And a lot of people, unfortunately, they got tied up with tourists and what have you and, frankly, I personally had to fire a couple of people that didn't show up to work. They had been on an all night drunk and wrecked up some of the company cars and what have you, but outside of that the climate was a lot different. And, of course, the only problem was water at that time.

M: Too much water?

L: Not enough.

M: Not enough (chuckles) water.

L: There wasn't any water, period. Sometimes during the dry season, especially in the town- we had a very beautiful home, house, rather, on the side of the mesa and we had tanks, like all these houses have- but we'd get water through a half inch

pipe once a week for forty-five minutes. That was supposed to last for a week. And, fortunately, as far as I was concerned, I sent a tank truck to one of the mines that had water and fill it up and had them take it over to my house and fill up the tanks and the manager's house and a couple of other houses. But that was the main problem. And, of course, there was just open sewerage. And that was pretty doggone smelly at times there at those barrancas. But outside of that, we enjoyed it very much.

End of Tape One

Side A

Beginning of Tape One

Side B

M: ...Robert Limón about what he remembers of his experiences of mining in Mexico. You were just telling me about your working experience in Taxco. Now, the early work that you had at San Pedro and at La Prieta and at Taxco were all prior to the Mexicanization law in Mexico.

L: That is correct.

M: Were there any reasons for ASARCO and other foreign companies to think that Mexicanization was eminent? Were there...

L: There was talk of it. There was talk, but nothing had really been done about it until back in- what the heck was the year? Nineteen...must have been around 1960. What year was the

Mexicanization? Well, whatever.

M: In [19]61, I think, was the Mexicanization.

L: More or less, yeah, right before I went to Mexico City. I was transferred to Mexico City. No, there was no inkling of what could have been, but the law was the law and it had to be Mexicanized.

M: What were the special technical problems and tax problems in the [19]50s leading up to the Mexicanization?

L: Well the tax problems...they were heavily taxed, for one thing. And most of the mines had to get subsidies from the government. And these subsidies were the return of taxes.

M: What were those subsidies based on?

L: Well, on the needs of the mines.

M: Okay.

L: See, like Santa Eulalia, which pumped a tremendous amount of water to keep the mine dry. If it didn't have any subsidy it'd have to close down because the cost of the pumping was just too high.

M: So, basically, these would be more rebates on taxes that you paid?

L: Rebates on taxes, but you really had to work at it to be able to get the government bureaucrats to give you back...that was my job for a couple of years.

M: Your job when you first went to Mexico City was basically dealing with these?

L: Yeah.

M: Now, how did that operate as far as getting these subsidies or rebates from the government? Was it based strictly on

technical merit or was there politics involved in that?

L: Well, like everything else. There was a little politics involved there, too. You had to treat these guys real nice, take them out to lunch, dinner, all-expense paid trips to Taxco, or what have you. And that would help with the fellow in charge there. I know we took him to Taxco one time, he and his wife, and put them up in the best hotel. My wife and I took them down there. And they took him underground and just laid out the red carpet for him.

M: The government people that you were dealing with, were they technical people?

L: Some of them were technical, some of them were lawyers, some of them were just plain bureaucrats. And the technical people, mining engineers, which they did have...of course, they were mostly young people. Unfortunately, they were also on the take. They'd go down to the mines to see how things were going so that we wouldn't be telling them that something happened or it didn't happen and they'd have to check on it. And just look around. Or sometimes they just went down for a good time but, still, we had to grease their hands a little bit.

M: How large a staff did ASARCO have in Mexico City?

L: Oh, Mexico City, they had the two departments: the smelting and the mining department. The mining department with the general manager, to start with, of the company in Mexico. And under him was the mining and the smelting department. The mining, you had the general manager. Then the mining South and Northern Divisions, two managers there. Then there was

the general engineering department with a chief engineer. It was staffed by six people. And, of course, the mining department, we all had secretaries and what have you, so that took up, I don't recall, exactly, the number of people. And the smelting department was the same way, the same structure, and the same way.

M: Did the ASARCO employees just live in Mexico City when there was no provision made?

L: There were no provisions. When I first went there, it was about the time I went there, the company used to loan money to their upper echelon employees to buy a house at a very, very low rate of interest. They discontinued that more or less about the time I got there in 1962. But I know a good friend of ours, who was my boss, had been also been my boss in Parral, Bill Yeager. He did build a beautiful home there with company money and he paid it every month out of his salary. But he did build a beautiful home. My wife and I, we bought a home in Mexico City, a very, very nice place and a very nice location. And I was there sixteen years. Got it paid off right quick.

M: So you lived in Mexico City for sixteen years?

L: Yeah.

M: Was it a pleasant place to live in those days?

L: It was to a certain extent. Of course, there was a lot of mining people. We knew a lot of people there. And it was just a, you could say, a merry-go-round. There was always something doing socially. Besides, the men going out of town, in mines, and what have you, but we did enjoy and we still

have very many good friends there in Mexico City.

M: What responsibilities were involved when you were manager of the Northern Division and then later the Southern Division of Mines?

L: Well, just to check on the conditions of the mine as far as operations, the metallurgical end, as far as the mill was concerned, and milling, the financial, of course, also, and every visit to the mines, was... . Of course, we were the boss and they always had one or two parties there, so it was partying in the evening and get up early in the morning to get underground and so it was a little strenuous. And at the beginning we did the driving. We didn't have any other mode of transportation, so we were gone for two or three weeks. We'd drive from one mine to another, stop in there for two or three days, and then to the other. Later on the company bought an airplane and then, later on, it was a larger plane, you know, so it could our traveling time to a few hours instead of a few days.

M: So then you were working in the ASARCO office in Mexico City during the years that the Mexicanization took place?

L: Yes, right.

M: What do you remember about the comings and goings or how the Mexicanization took place as it affected ASARCO?

L: Well, I don't think it affected, let's say, ASARCO itself. Cut it off a little bit... (taping stopped and started again) The Mexicanization as a whole didn't seem to bother the mining industry in Mexico too much as far as... . Taxes were a little lower. It helped, but some of the companies began to

get bureaucratic like the government. And, I know, as far as the Industria Minera Mexico, which was the name of the company after it was Mexicanized from ASARCO, a lot of the people were out there to see how much they could get for themselves and not for the company. Previously, all of us had the interest of the company ahead of anything else.

And, also, a lot of politics started coming in amongst- I won't say the government politicians, but politics in the company because some of the people that Mexicanized, their companies were not, I don't say all of the companies, I'm referring to only one, were not miners. And they were used to doing work like with politicians and what have you and it would just start that way.

A few years back I met a lady from Parral who had or maybe still does...they used to do retreading of the tires for the company vehicles of all types. And she told me, she said, "Boy, things have really changed. I had the contract for this mine and that mine there in the Parral district. And one time the purchasing agent said, 'Well, where's my cut?' And I said, 'I'm not giving you no cut.'" She said, "Well, I lost that business," which was unheard of before the Mexicanization. And some people that were brought in, were more politicians than technical people.

M: Well then, the top people at ASARCO or IMMSA at that [time] were Mexican nationals.

L: Yeah.

M: But several foreigners, like yourself, stayed on for a number of years?

L: At that time I was a Mexican national because I was born in Chihuahua. And I am an American citizen now, after we moved back here. But I was a Mexican national even though, I think, I wasn't considered too much of a Mexican because I could talk English. But that's beside the point. And what else?

M: But the top management within IMMSA were newcomers in the sense they were people who had bought the interest, the fifty-one percent interest, and then had taken over management of the company?

L: Yeah.

M: Now, did that change go reasonably smoothly within ASARCO?

L: Yes, it did. It was relatively smoothly, relatively smoothly, even though the management of ASARCO in New York did not believe or didn't see what was going on. In fact, maybe I'm talking out of turn or what have you, but Towne Mines, which owned part of Santa Bárbara...

M: Would this be the Robert Towne interests from way back?

L: Yes. They were forced, or rather tricked, into selling to Industria Minera México all their interests without getting a penny for it.

M: This would have been the Hoffman family, right?

L: Hoffman. Robert, Bob, Hoffman.

M: Right.

L: We got to be good friends [with] Bob Hoffman, Bob Hoffman, the old guy. And he said he wouldn't mention Mr. Larea [Jorge Larea, Director General of IMMSA] "with nothing under that SOB." Because the way they worked it, ASARCO worked it, Towne Mines had a few shares of ASARCO. And to be Mexicanized, you

had to be fifty-one percent Mexican. And so Towne Mines had a little piece of ASARCO and they threatened them to go to the government and tell them that all these subsidies they had been getting from years and years back, they were going to have to be paid back to the government, which was broke.

So instead of that they made the deal where IMMSA would take over the mines and they would pay Hoffman through Towne Mines with earnings from the mines. So IMMSA in Parral... . And the Hoffmans didn't get very much. And Bob Hoffman was trying to Mexicanize the Towne Mines so that Larea couldn't get hold of it, but it didn't come through.

M: The changes after Mexicanization at an operating level at the mines themselves, what were the principle changes there?

L: Well, after the- I'm talking just about IMMSA, right?

M: Right.

L: They brought in people. And like I said, they're more politicians than technical people. [They told us], "Oh, yes, we're going to mechanize all the mines." And a lot of money was spent getting all types of modern equipment and what have you and the production probably increased to some extent, but what had been broken was not only ore, but a lot of the gangue material to bring up the production. So when all this money was spent you were still producing the same amount or less metals that were being produced before all this Mexicanization.

M: Production went up, but grades went down?

L: Yeah, yeah. Production went way the hell up, but the grade went down. And, of course, the grade goes down the final

product goes down, too.

M: Many of the foreigners that had occupied some of the upper management at the mines, the shift boss and the superintendents and so forth, were gradually replaced by nationals.

L: They were given...well, they weren't told to leave, but things got a little tough for them. They had to resign and leave or be transferred to...some of them transferred to ASARCO here in the states.

M: Was it difficult for ASARCO and other companies to find adequate numbers of well-trained engineers to...

L: I would say to a certain extent, yes, because...

M: Did they rely through a large part on engineers or people that had worked for ASARCO before?

L: Well, there were a lot. I would say ninety percent toward the end before the Mexicanization. Eighty-five or ninety percent of the people working for the mining companies in Mexico were Mexican nationals to start with, so that wasn't that much. There were a lot of competent Mexican nationals working in the mines. In fact, one of my jobs in Mexico City...while I was there I used to go every year down to Guanajuato to the School of Mines to recruit the young engineers. And then we put them through their training phases. And some of them turned out damn good. Some of them were like anywhere else. And some of them left, some of them stayed, some of them transferred to companies, but most of the companies there in Mexico, like I said, were Mexican nationals to a great extent. I wouldn't say the top echelon, though. I think I would be about the

only Mexican national that held a job that I did for some time. After Mexicanization things changed, of course.

M: What do you think of some of the more recent changes that have gone on in investment laws in Mexico that allow foreigners now to own a hundred percent of mining in Mexico? Is that, in your opinion, something that will be good for the mining industry of Mexico?

L: Yes, I believe it will be. I think it will be because to start a mine you need another mine. And there isn't that much capital available in Mexico to start up a mine. And it's a risk capital for any mine. And Mexican capitalists aren't going to risk a few million dollars if they can put in the bank and get good interest on it continually instead of risking in a mining investment.

M: Let me change the subject a bit and go back to some of your earlier history. You mentioned you were born in Chihuahua City.

L: Yeah.

M: How did you end up at school at Texas College of Mines?

L: Well, my father was a revolutionary. He was born in Puebla, Mexico, and raised around Mexico City. And as a young man during the Porfirio Díaz era he was one of the revolutionaries that were trying to get Porfirio Díaz out of there. They found him out and he headed south, but he couldn't make it so he headed north up to Chihuahua and this area and he joined up with Pancho Villa. And he went, well, as a plain soldier and later on as a... . He came here to El Paso to buy munitions and he worked at anything he could here in El Paso. And,

finally, when the Revolution came on...he was with the Villa forces until Villa was defeated. And at that time, the time that Villa was defeated, my father was- what would you call it- the garrison commander in Chihuahua. And by that time he had just married and I was born. And he was told by Villa to surrender the town of Chihuahua and then come to Juárez and surrender Juárez to the Carrincista forces.

And then he crossed over with his family: my grandmother, my uncle, and a few other people that he brought along with him, and as I recall...I don't recall, but as I remember, then they moved over to California. And about that time Pancho Villa attacked Columbus. So all the revolutionaries, all the Villistas, including my father, was told to get out of the country. He said, "Alright, I'll go to Cuba." You know, they only gave you a passport to Cuba or to South America, so we ended up in Argentina for four or five years. They had a hard time down there, of course. My uncle was a very good photographer. He was my father's brother. And he went into photography over there. And things more or less settled here in Mexico.

And [José] Vasconcelos, who at that time was the Minister of Education here in Mexico, made a trip to South America. And as my father and my uncle lived close to Buenos Aires, they went to say hello to him. So they did. And he said, "Well, what the heck are you guys doing here? Mexico needs you! Get back down to Mexico!" [My father], he said, "But, well, what are we going to do?" And he said, "Well, when you get there just call me and I'll help you."

So they sold every damned thing they could, got on a ship, came back to Mexico. After they got to Mexico City they waited a bit. They went to see him. And he saw them. He asked them, "You guys are teachers, aren't you?" And they said, "We're not teachers." He said, "Well, I can't help you." That was [the end of that].

My father was a revolutionary, or had been. He was being watched by the government. I know he couldn't get out of the house, oh, I don't know, for a month or so. And at that time things were getting a little hot in Mexico. And he went to see [Victoriano] de la Huerta. And, of course, that just caused all kinds of problems. And one of his friends told him, "You'd better get out. They're going to get you." [My father said], "What? I went to see de la Huerta. I didn't even say hello to him." Well, whatever... .

So he joined up with General Angel Flores, who was also running for the presidency. Flores was from Sinaloa. And they left Mexico City in two groups. My dad, Flores, and another man rode horseback out of Mexico City. Another group left by car. Outside of Mexico City the ones in the car were ambushed and were all killed. Flores and my father and that group that was with them, got, I don't know, to some station and got on a train. And they had to fight their way all the way to Sinaloa. And he was there... .

Meanwhile, my mother and my sister and I were in Mexico City. And my mother's from Chihuahua, or was from Chihuahua. I had uncles there, so she decided we would go to Chihuahua, and we did. We stayed with my uncle there for awhile. And

one night my father showed up. And things were getting hot, and there was definitely going to be another revolution or what have you, and he was rounding up all these companions from the Villa days. And while he was there in Chihuahua we got word that Flores had been poisoned, so we ended up here. And we lived here for a few years. I went to school here. I went to the College of Mines.

M: So you went to high school here in El Paso?

L: Yeah, I went to Cathedral High here.

M: Oh, yeah?

L: And, yeah, I was about eight or nine years old when I first started learning English, and which I learned not very well. So that's how I ended up here. And...

M: Well, when you worked, then, in Mexico all those years that was kind of a special position you were in as a Mexican national, Mexican citizen, but an English speaker, as you mentioned.

L: Yeah.

M: Educated in the states. Did that present some special problems for you as to what group you really (chuckles) belonged to?

L: Not really. I don't know. Not that I know of, not personally, but I was told one time that when, before I was offered the job to go to Mexico City to manage, Yeager, Bill Yeager, recommended me to be the fellow to go up there and he went to Nock, Walter Nock, and told him that he recommended me and he said, "But he's Mexican!" I got sent up there. That was the only time, ever, that I had anything of any

privileged, or unprivileged, treatment.

**End of Tape One
Side B**

Beginning of Tape Two

Side A

M: Mr. Limón, how did you come to live in El Paso? I mean, again, you had lived here as a child and then chose to come back here and retire.

L: Yes. When we were in Mexico City we had a son, who studied here. He studied in Mexico in the English schools the company had, then he came to high school here. He went to Cathedral for one year and then to Price College in Amarillo to finish his high school studies. Then he started going to Texas Western, which is now UTEP, and was previously Texas College of Mines. And, like most kids, he knew it all so he decided he was not going to finish school and he was going to get a job. He worked for the city, in the engineering department for a year or so. And he had a fairly good job, but then he saw he wasn't getting anywhere unless he had a finished education.

One day he called us in Mexico City [and told us] that he had decided that he was going to go back to school. And I told him, "Well, great. We'll give you all the help we've given you before." He did. He went back to school. He finished school and he got married soon after that. He was twenty years old by that time. And he went to work for ASARCO

at Tucson at the open pit mines. Then he got a job in with the fluorspar at Carlsbad, not fluorspar, but...

M: Potash.

L: Potash mines. And one day- we were still in Mexico City- on November 1, Dia de los Muertos, we got a call that he had been in a very, very serious accident in Carlsbad. There had been a, not a premature explosion, but an explosion there that set off... . He and two others were... . He died immediately and two others were very, very... . Another one died and the other one was seriously hurt. And by that time he had two children: a boy who was at that time four years old and a little girl who was one year old. And so we came up to take care of the burial and what have you and we decided we'd come back up here to be close to the grandchildren. His wife came back to live in El Paso. She was from El Paso.

My grandchildren now are grown. My grandson is a lawyer in Los Angeles and my granddaughter is in her third year of law school at Northwestern University in Chicago. So I'm going to have a couple of lawyers there in the family. That is the reason we are back in El Paso. Otherwise, I think we would have stayed in, not Mexico City, no, no, but in probably Chihuahua or Guadalajara or someplace, but we hadn't planned to come back to El Paso. Not to El Paso, but, unfortunately, that's what brought us here.

M: You mentioned earlier that the excitement you had of fighting the mine fire at San Pedro as one of your first jobs that... . Are there some other particular adventures [that] stick in your mind from all your mining days in Mexico?

L: Yeah, the doggone fire kept following me. When I got to Parral there was fire also. And, also, a little later on there was another fire there in Parral.

M: These would be mine fires?

M: Mine fires, yeah, underground. Only one man there in Parral lost his life and that was, say, a week or ten days after the fire. And this monoxide, it creeped up almost to the surface. And he was in an adit way up some place up, not close even to the shaft. I mean, he went in there and didn't come out. And then we had another. I went to the Santa María del Oro fire which...they asked for help. The shaft caught on fire. And I took a crew up there. Fortunately, nobody was hurt. There were some burnt pretty bad, but nobody lost their lives. After that Angangueo Mine had a fire.

M: This was also in the Parral area?

L: No, in Michoacán.

M: Michoacán. Okay.

L: And we took a crew out there. And I think I was there over three months fighting that doggone fire. It's nothing you want to get into, that's for sure, not those mine fires because you don't know what... . You're able to put a mask with a breathing apparatus and... . Because that monoxide will get you. Those are my main- you could say, that stick to my mind- events in my mining career. Those are the main things.

And in Angangueo there, I remember that we lost twenty-eight men in there. And we were down trying to get them out and you could smell the...and in the water little bits of

flesh coming through there, and the man would say, "Well, what's that, engineer? What's that?" [I would say], "Oh, that's just some stuff that forms from things...in the water too long." And we got everybody but one out...all the bodies.

M: Well, you must have also, though, had many pleasant times in your years in Mexico.

L: Oh, wonderful times, wonderful times. Like I said, we worked hard, but we partied hard, yeah, in Parral, for instance, with Santa Bárbara, with Esmeralda...in Parral, in Frisco, four mines there. We were bowling two or three times a week. On weekends there was always a party at one place or another, so it's a good thing we were young in those days. We couldn't have taken it (chuckles) otherwise. Yeah, we were on the go continuously. And for the kids it was a wonderful life, like I said, in Parral. It's a wonderful life.

M: Mr. Limón, thanks very much for your time.

L: Well, I certainly thank you for having listened to me all this time and I hope if I gave you anything that you might use, why, very glad to do it.

End of Interview