



THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

Interviewee: Machelle R. Wood
Interviewer: Meredith E. Abarca and Joshua I. Lopez
Project: El Paso Food Voices- Public Kitchen
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Summary: Meredith E. Abarca

Machelle R. Wood is the education and special events coordinator at the Magoffin Home Historical Site in El Paso, Texas. She came to El Paso from Oklahoma in 1980 when she was only nine and a half years old. For her, food is the tastes of home. It did not take long for her and her family to change their familiar “go to” food of hamburgers, hotdogs, and mac and cheese to refried beans, nachos, chilaquiles, and tacos. Once El Paso’s Mexican based food became her culinary home, Machelle speaks of how while traveling all over the United States, she is constantly in search for a taste of home. The closest she has come to El Paso’s Mexican flavors while travelling was in a small restaurant “in the middle of nowhere” in the fields of Arkansas.

She defines the role of food in the context of her museum work as a way of creating “connections between people now to people in the past to make them ‘real.’” By learning what people ate, how they bought food and cooked, the lives of those from our past become palpable through the senses. The Magoffin Home makes this experience possible to the general public by offering cooking demonstrations that follow recipes from the first cookbook compiled by the Ladies Auxiliary for the YMCA. The cookbook was published in 1898; it was also the first YMCA cookbook fund raiser in the United States. One of its sections is titled “Mexican Department.” It lists recipes for chile sauce, chile con huevo, enchiladas, albondigas. The albondiga (meatball) recipe was submitted to the cookbook by Octavia Magoffin. She was an Irish American woman who married Joseph Magoffin, an Irish, Spanish, Mexican American man who was born in Chihuahua, Mexico. Octavia, like Machelle’s family, adopted Mexican based foods as part of their family’s everyday home cooking. The first recipe cook for the Magoffin Home museum cooking classes was Octavia’s albondigas. This same recipe was recreated by students in the Bowie High School Culinary Arts Program, under the leadership of chef Christopher Puga, to host the Texas Association of Museums held in El Paso in 2019. Albondigas, therefore, are a representation of El Paso’s Mexican cuisine. At the core of what food is, Machelle states: a venue to connect with those sharing a meal.

Length of interview 20:05

Length of Transcript n/a