



## PAN AMERICAN ROUND TABLE I BROWNSVILLE

### History

Early historical details include excerpts from *The Pan American Round Table*, Lois Terry Marchbanks, Avon Behren Press, 1983, (pp. 111-112). That material was compiled and submitted by Mrs. George R. Lipe, Immediate Past Director and daughter of Charter Member, Mrs. J.W. Worthington. In March, 2010, updates were provided by Isabel Vezzetti, Associate Director, PART Brownsville I.

"A group of interested Brownsville women assembled Friday at a one o'clock luncheon in the El Jardin Hotel for the purpose of organizing a Pan American Round Table and electing officers." *The Brownsville Herald* - Sept. 1932

Mrs. Volney Taylor presided as temporary chairman. Elections named Mrs. G.W. Johnson, Sr. (already an honorary member of the Mexico City Table) as Founding Director and Mrs. Taylor as First Assistant Director. The new Table's twenty Charter members and three Associates received their "Certificate of Membership" in the Pan American Round Tables of Texas at their first program meeting in November 1932. Fifty years later, the membership roster lists eighty (associate, active, sustaining, etc.) plus thirty-five "In Memoriam". Honorary members include the U.S. and Mexican consuls, commanders of military establishments and their wives.

Members have, since the beginning, represented each of the twenty-one republics of the Pan American Union, plus Canada. Programs rotate alphabetically by country and are presented at six regular meetings. Additionally, in November there is a birthday celebration with a dinner party or tea, usually including friends and husbands. Pan American Day is always observed in April - originally a social event with men folk and all, but for many years now a merienda honoring high school Spanish scholars.

As the Table became organized, each member tried to acquire a costume (authentic or a copy) from her country. Because they frequently wore costumes for social functions, members began to collect more and more of them. Many costumes were also given to the Table. The study of the garments has become a fascination with most of the members. They learn about the places and people from which they come - their climate, housing, work, recreation, arts, crafts, history, legends, religion, transportation - their culture in general. The Table and its members now own by far the largest collection of authentic South, Central and North American costumes in the world and they take great pleasure in sharing them with others. On two occasions the U.S. State Department has photographed them to be used in public relations throughout the Americas,

In 1938 Brownsville began its pre-Lenten Charro Days, and Table members played a leading role in promoting wearing of costumes for the three day fiesta. The first year members set up an imitation Mexico market place in a downtown store building, with booths serving varieties of native foods and treats. For many Charro Days, members decorated downtown storefront windows with displays of Latin American handcrafts and art works. The national Geographic Magazine covered the momentous event and published an article on Charro Days in its January 1939 issue. The article contained various scenes highlighting the Activities and depicted some of the Table members and their family in costume, including the children.

The first P.A.R.T. Charro Days Merienda was held in 1939, with members in costumes acting as hostesses to winter visitors at the Chamber of Commerce building. Through succeeding years the Merienda grew to include a formal showing of a hundred or more distinct regional and national costumes with a narration telling about them. It became the opening event of Charro Days to the general public and was featured as one of the highlights of the Charro Days celebration until 2004 when the Table transferred ownership of its costumes to the Costumes of the Americas Museum.

On May 6, 2005 the costumes of the Americas Museum opened its doors to the public. It now houses the Costumes Collection of the Pan American Round Table I.

However, the Table continues to perform costume reviews year round for conventions, Clubs, schools and various meetings, both locally and over the Valley - and some even across the state. Donations for these shows finance the Bessie K. Johnson college scholarships which the Table has awarded each year since 1956.

From 1942 to 1972 the Table sponsored an annual Essay Contest in the high school and gave cash prizes for the winning essays which were read at the Pan American Day meeting. Many books pertaining to Latin American subjects have been placed in our college library in memory of members and their family loved ones.

The State organization has honored Brownsville Table I by electing four of our members as State Directors - Mrs. J.W. Worthington, 1938; Mrs. W.W. Ely, 1949-51; Mrs. Albert Fernandez, 1967-69; and Mrs. Sherrill B. Oakes, 1979-81. The highest honor the State can bestow, the Florence Terry Griswold Award, has been given to both Mrs. Ely and Mrs. Fernandez.

Brownsville PART I was the fifth Table organized. Through the years its members have founded or helped organize many other Tables both in Texas and throughout the Americas. Brownsville I shares annual social functions with all Valley Tables on both sides of the river, and is particularly close to its sister Table in Matamoros which Mrs. Ely founded some twenty five years ago.

It has been Brownsville I's pleasure and privilege to serve as hostess Table to the State Conventions in 1934, 1959, 1983, and 2009, when it joined Table II and San Benito in hosting the 54<sup>th</sup> State Convention.

[Return to Brownsville I Homepage....](#)

[Return to PARTT Homepage....](#)