

PAN AMERICAN ROUND TABLE OF EL PASO, TEXAS HISTORICAL SKETCH

Presented on January 18, 2011

Founded in 1921 by Eugenia Schuster, Mrs. M.P. Schuster (1865-1946), the Pan American Round Table of El Paso is a nonprofit women's organization which promotes "mutual knowledge, understanding and friendship among the peoples of the western hemisphere" through educational forums and lectures, social gatherings, study groups, community involvement and activities, and the annual celebration of Pan American Day on April 14th. The organization's goals include improving international relations by knowledge about the Pan American nations with a focus on women's concerns and issues. For ninety years, members of the El Paso Table have learned about the culture, geography, society, economy, politics, and history of the Pan American nations, and met with members of other Round Tables in North, Central and South American during state and international Round Table conventions and other activities. The El Paso Round Table is unique as it is the only Round Table with members from two different countries: El Paso, Texas, U.S.A. and Cd. Juarez, Chihuahua, Mexico.

The origins of Pan Americanism date from April 14, 1890, when representatives of twenty-five American nations met and formed the Commercial Bureau of the American Republics, later changed to the Pan American Union in 1910. In the United States, Florence Terry Griswold of San Antonio, Texas became interested in Pan Americanism and "believed that goals of the Pan American Union could be advanced by the women of the Americans." In 1916, Mrs. Griswold founded the Pan American Round Table Movement and established the first Round Table in San Antonio, Texas. During this time Eugenia Schuster, along with Mrs. Alberto Matero, became involved with "*Amigos Listos*" to render aid to Mexican citizens fleeing Mexico during the Mexican Revolution. Mrs. Schuster became aware of the need for better understanding of international matters and border issues, and decided to found her own Round Table chapter in El Paso in 1921, and served as its first Director.

The El Paso Round Table's first meeting was held on November 6, 1921 in Schuster's home. In addition to the director, twenty-five vice-presidents (to represent each of the original twenty-five Pan American nations) were elected. Early committees included: Courtesy, Luncheon, Music, Rules and Regulations, Finance, Membership, Press, Publicity, Reservations, Decorations and Table. Since the 1920s, luncheons, meriendas and teas often featured guest speakers, who addressed culture, diplomacy, history, art displays and music. Meetings were held in both El Paso and Cd. Juarez, and usually featured a Pan American Union country as its theme. The Table also created study groups, and met to study the literature of the Pan American nations. Today, the

Latin American Study Group of the El Paso Table continues to meet from October to May. In 1946, a junior Pan American Round Table was established at the Texas College of Mines, today the University of Texas at El Paso. In 1947, the Table commissioned El Paso artist Tom Lea to paint a portrait of Mexican President Benito Juarez, which was presented to the U.S. Department of State for display in the Blair-Lee House in 1949. During the 1950s and 1960s, diplomats and guest speakers lectured on such topics as stopping the spread of Communism to Latin America, feminism and encouraging economic development.

The Table also became involved in civic affairs by sponsoring cultural and educational events, funding scholarships to Texas Western College, later the University of Texas at El Paso, participating in the El Paso Sun Carnival by sponsoring a duchess or princess, celebrating Founder's Day in January and Pan American Day in April. Pan American Day typically included a presentation of flags of the Pan American countries, official representatives of Cd. Juarez and Fort Bliss, Texas and other diplomatic and government officials. In 1922, the Table also participated in creating the state organization, the Pan American Round Tables of Texas; and became a member of the international organization, the Alliance of Pan American Round Tables, founded in Mexico City in 1944. By the 1970s, the El Paso Table consisted of 150 active members and 108 sustaining members, many of them daughters and granddaughters of the original members, including Eugenia Schuster's family. In 1982, the El Paso Table hosted the Alliance's biennial convention, and in 1988, El Pasoan Grace Lake was named Pan American Woman of the Year by the Alliance. The El Paso Table continues to be active in the El Paso and Cd. Juarez communities, and the state and international Round Table organizations.

“ONE FOR ALL AND ALL FOR ONE”

“UNA PARA TODAS Y TODAS PARA UNA”

“AN UNBROKEN CHAIN OF FRIENDSHIP REACHING THE LENGTH OF THE AMERICAS”

Florence Terry Griswold was born near Eagle Pass, Texas in 1875, and learned to speak Spanish before she learned English. Living so close to Mexico, she learned to appreciate the Mexican culture and character. Mrs. Griswold eventually married and made her home in San Antonio, Texas. It was during the 1910 Mexican Revolution that many Mexican women and children made their way to San Antonio to escape the perils of the political upheaval in Mexico only to find themselves as helpless refugees. This situation greatly troubled Mrs. Griswold and she opened her home to many. These difficult experiences motivated Mrs. Griswold to action: the creation of the Pan American Round Table which would be modeled after the Medieval Round Table where everyone is an equal.

In 1916, Mrs. Griswold called on twenty-one of her friends to join her and they formed the Pan American Round Table of San Antonio, Texas. She modeled her group closely after the Pan American Union which at that time had 21 member nations. Thus, the San Antonio Table and any future Tables would have a minimum of 21 members, each representing one of the Pan American nations. As their insignia they adopted a circle with no beginning and no end, a symbol of unity. At the base of the circle would be the flags of the different Western Hemisphere nations. As their motto, they took the Alexander Dumas quotation: “One for All and All for One; Una para Todas y Todas para Una.”

In her own words, Mrs. Griswold wrote in 1930, “The Pan American Round Table of San Antonio, Texas was organized October 16, 1916, having for its object the bringing together of women of the Western Hemisphere in a mutual understanding, believing that when women understand each other man can no longer misunderstand.”

The movement grew from San Antonio with Tables forming in El Paso and Laredo in 1921 and Austin in 1922. The first Table outside the U.S.A. was formed in Mexico City in 1928; and outside of Texas, in Las Cruces, New Mexico in 1931.

Today, Florence Terry Griswold’s vision of an international organization is a reality with over 200 Pan American Round Tables in 17 countries throughout the Americas and Puerto Rico.

Additionally, in 2001, the Alliance of Pan American Round Tables became a recognized and registered civil society of the Organization of American States (OAS).

TRIBUTE

Eugenia Schuster founded the Pan American Round Table of El Paso as a result of her affiliation with "Amigos Listos" a group formed in El Paso to respond to the countless refugees of the Mexican Revolution who were fleeing to El Paso. Mrs. Schuster had become aware of the formation of the San Antonio Table by Mrs. Griswold. Mrs. Schuster and Mrs. Griswold both shared a desire to help the woman and children who were fleeing the terror of war only to find themselves in dire circumstances as refugees. But, out of that altruistic wish, was born an organization that would prove to go well beyond responding to an immediate need. Indeed, Mrs. Schuster's sense of civic duty and of mutual respect and understanding gave El Paso not only a legacy of responsibility for our fellow citizens, but an avenue for women of El Paso and Cd. Juarez to bond together.

Today, in 2011, we face a similar crisis in El Paso and Cd. Juarez. Again, our sister city is faced with violence, insecurity and fear. The basic principals of Pan Americanism are truly needed today. The El Paso Table is not able to hold meetings in Cd. Juarez because of security issues, and our sisters, who reside in Cd. Juarez, depend on us for support more than ever. Just as Mrs. Schuster and Mrs. Griswold opened their hearts to the plight of immigrants of 1910 to 1916, so we must keep their words and their commitments in mind as we deal with our crisis today in 2011. Our organization, the Pan American Round Tables, is dedicated to fostering mutual knowledge, understanding and friendship among the women of the Western Hemisphere. We, again, have the opportunity and the challenge of living up to our motto of "One for All and All for One."

As we honor our Founder, Eugenia Schuster, and our Past Directors this January 18, 2011, let us remind ourselves of how Mrs. Schuster would respond to the situation in our community. Surely, she would urge us to be mindful of our own good fortune to live in safety and security. Mrs. Schuster might remind us that to truly practice mutual respect, understanding and friendship, we must imagine how it would feel to walk in our neighbor's shoes. By being seriously empathetic, we will continue the legacy of our Founder and the leaders who followed her of mutual knowledge, understanding and friendship among the women, indeed all peoples, of the Western Hemisphere.

Josefina G. Heller-Kaim
Past Director

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