



Media only: Melinda Machado (202) 633-3129; machadom@si.edu
Valeska Hilbig (202) 633-3129; hilbigv@si.edu

Nov. 19, 2012

Media website: <http://newsdesk.si.edu>

Beyond Salsa: Latin Flavors Featured in New Smithsonian Food Exhibition ***“FOOD: Transforming the American Table, 1950-2000” Opens Thanksgiving Week***

Seventy years of Latino food history, from a circa 1940 tortilla press to California vineyard tools used by the Robledo family, are featured in “FOOD: Transforming the American Table, 1950-2000,” opening at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of American History Nov. 20. The exhibition draws on the museum’s Bracero farm labor collection as well as highlights new objects collected to show the influence of immigrants and migrants on the American table, including the diffusion of Mexican-inspired food into all corners of the country.

The 3,800-square-foot “FOOD” exhibition explores some of the major social and cultural changes in food and eating in America. Visitors examine the forces and factors that shaped these transformations, including immigrant influences; how new technologies affect food production and preparation, with a case study on commercial lettuce production; and the growth and expansion of the American wine industry.

Among the objects and stories that look at the expansion, commercialization and convenience of Mexican foods and flavors as well as aspects of field labor and production are:

The Sanchez/Bermudez Family Story of Tortilla Making

Born in 1874 in Guanajuato, Mexico, Concepcion “Concha” Sanchez immigrated to the U.S. and, in about 1912, her family opened a grocery store, The Mexican Mercantile, in Fillmore, Calif. Sanchez ground corn using an electric *molino* (corn mill) to make *masa* (dough) for tortillas and tamales. She placed balls of *masa* onto the conveyor belt, hand-cranked them through the rollers of a *tortilladora* (press), then dropped them onto a propane-fired *comal* to cook. The exhibition includes Sanchez’s *molino* and *tortilladora* as well as her blue gingham apron or *delantal*. The “La Rotativa” press dates from about 1923 but was bought and used by the Sanchez family in the 1940s.

SI-501-2012

The Cuellar Family and El Chico Restaurants

Adelaida and Macario Cuellar emigrated from Mexico to Texas in 1892 where Adelaida sold homemade tamales to help support the family. By 1940, two of her sons had opened a café in Dallas using their mother's recipes. The restaurant became known as "El Chico," which expanded into a chain of restaurants, offered franchise opportunities and even marketed its own packaged foods and cookbooks. Continuing with the original Tex-Mex staples such as nachos, enchiladas and tacos, they added regional specialties from New Mexico (*sopapillas*), California (burritos and fish tacos) and Arizona (*chimichangas*) and reached back into Mexico for classic updates on foods, such as mole of Oaxaca. The exhibition's "The Mexican Food Revolution" section includes a number of El Chico menus and food packaging, the *El Chico Cookbook* and a red, green and white embroidered and sequined China poblana-style dress made in Mexico City about 1960, worn by Miss El Chico for promotional and special events at the restaurants.

The Velasquez Family and Azteca Foods Inc.

Art Velasquez and other Mexican American businessmen began Azteca Corn Products Corp. in the Pilsen neighborhood of Chicago in 1969 to bring traditional Mexican foods to consumers outside of their neighborhood. It is one of the early companies that began using food science to preserve corn and flour tortillas so they could be shipped to groceries and have an extended shelf life. The Pillsbury Co. bought the company in 1984; five years later, Velasquez and his wife Joanne bought back the assets and changed the name to Azteca Foods Inc. "The Mexican Food Revolution" section includes Azteca flour tortilla packaging from 1970 and a tortilla shell mold from 1987. The Azteca story illustrates how the tortilla moves from an "ethnic" food to a more popular everyday staple.

Mariano Martinez and the Frozen Margarita Machine

First mixed in bars along the California-Mexico border in the 1940s, the margarita—tequila, lime juice and orange liqueur—became a standard beverage in Mexican American restaurants. Frozen margaritas, blended with ice, became popular in the 1950s and 20 years later the margarita had surpassed the martini as the most popular American cocktail. In 1971, Dallas restaurant owner Mariano Martinez noticed that ordinary blenders did not deliver a consistent mix for frozen margaritas. Inspired by the 7-Eleven Slurpee machine, used since 1965 to make semi-frozen beverages, Martinez and a friend, chemist John Hogan, tinkered with Martinez's dad's recipe and adapted a soft-serve ice-cream machine to make margarita "slush." The novelty was a huge hit at Mariano's Mexican Cuisine restaurant.

The Bracero/Farm Labor Story

The Emergency Farm Labor Program, known as the Bracero Program (1942-1964), recruited two million Mexican nationals to work in the U.S. on short-term labor contracts. The exhibition uses lettuce (iceberg) as a case study to examine how produce was brought from the field to the table in the 1950s and '60s. The lettuce hump, or small square wheelbarrow, in the “Abundant Harvest” section was used in California between 1960 and 1964. The section includes a hat, worn by Bracero Savas Zahvala Castro in the California fields from about 1957, as well as a short-handled hoe (1950s-60s) known as *el cortito*. It required workers to stoop during long hours in the fields and became a symbol of exploitive working conditions. Campaigns by the United Farm Workers helped inform Americans about agricultural labor practices and helped change attitudes about food production. A U.F.W. boycott lettuce poster from the 1970s and other materials are on exhibit in the “Good Food” section.

The Robledo Family and Winemaking

Reynaldo Robledo Sr., now a landholder and winemaker in Napa Valley, Calif., began his career in the industry through the Bracero program, migrating to Napa from Michoacán in the 1960s. Today, the Robledo Winery, which began in the 1990s, is one of only a handful of Mexican/Latino-owned wineries in the state. The exhibition features a stool from the winery’s tasting room that is evocative of a Mexican *hacienda* as well as a budding box and other tools used by family members.

Other Related Objects and Collections

The museum’s collections include Mexican-inspired molds and tools, such as the “Mexican Kitchen,” made by the Nordic Ware company, which shows how diverse manufacturers made products to help the home cook better replicate ethnic foods. While not on view in this particular exhibition, the museum’s Archives Center is home to the The Goya Foods Collection, which documents the history of the company founded by Prudencio and Carolina Unanue, who believed that there was an expanding immigrant market for the ingredients of Spanish cuisine. The collection dates primarily from the 1960s to 2000, though some materials are included from its earliest days in New York in 1936.

To learn more about the exhibition, visit <http://americanhistory.si.edu/food>.

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