The Maria Rodriguez Story

Madrigial “Maria” Patricia Alonzo Rodriguez was born in Mexico and married Esiquio Rodriguez in 1909. They immigrated to Kansas where Esiquio found work. In 1976 she was interviewed for the Garden City Telegram. This is the article from the newspaper.

Maria Rodriguez, 91, Recalls Life on Wild Western Prairie

Maria Rodriguez sits in a sunny bedroom at her home on East Santa Fe. It has been 67 years since she came to Garden City as a 24-year old newlywed....

Mrs. Rodriguez came to Garden City in May, 1909 from Central Mexico—leaving behind the life of her youth for the uncertainty of the sparsely settled western Kansas prairie. Tales of the United States she had heard from her mother, who had left Mexico in 1905 to work as a cook for a counsel in Los Angeles. [Her] mother told her children that she had heard of railroad agents who were needing recruits in Kansas “where life is plain and simple.” This attracted Esiquio Rodriguez, a friend of the family....

[Esiquio] Rodriguez left in 1905 and returned to Mexico several times. In 1909 he married Maria, and brought her back to Kansas with him.... [T]he Rodriguezes did not like the government in Mexico and its restricted educational opportunities.... Agricultural wages in Mexico were low, and the couple thought they couldn’t do much worse in Kansas. Thus, they came here with high hopes for a new life.

It wasn’t easy keeping those hopes alive, though. Life on the untamed prairie was hard. No housing was available. There was little money, and the railroad officials allowed their workers no time off to be building homes. For two years, the couple lived in a tent that was moved between Garden [City] and Dodge City.... Mrs. Rodriguez bore two children who fell victims to the harsh surroundings within a few weeks of their birth.

Esiquio and Maria Rodriguez spent their first years in Kansas living in a tent.
After two years the Mexican recruits began building small houses near the railroad. . . . The Rodriguez family built a small two-room house [in Garden City]. It had a kitchen and a bedroom. Railroad officials wanted the workers to build near the tracks, said Mrs. Rodriguez. Laborers she said, were pulled out to work in all sorts of weather and at all times of night. During snow storms the men would likely be routed out of bed to dig out a train that had become stuck in a drift . . .

Railroad duties would often take Esiquio away from his family. Many times he would have to walk the distance between Garden [City], Cimarron, and Dodge [City] to help mend the tracks . . .

After laboring for the railroad for some time, Rodriguez worked on city street crews, then turned to agriculture. When he worked in the sugar fields, his family would lock the home by the railroad and spend harvest seasons at the farm. Agricultural life wasn’t too much easier than railroading . . . Mrs. Rodriguez and several other women would do the cooking for the large harvest crew. Children had to leave classes during harvesting [in] order to help with farm duties.

The Rodriguez family and many like them were hard workers . . .

Harvest time brought a lot of single men here from Mexico . . .

Life was hard in many ways, but there were good times, too.

Mrs. Rodriguez described Garden City as a pretty town, where many folks had a good income and took pride in their attire. She admired that. She enjoyed going to restaurants and public places, dressing up. Mrs. Rodriguez said that in many ways there was a friendly atmosphere here. Here her children—seven daughters and one son—were able to get a good free public education . . .

Through it all, what Maria Rodriguez has wanted for her family has been a simple, Christian life. She wanted her children to become a part of the American culture and yet not to forget their Mexican heritage . . .

Four of the eight Rodriguez children pose for a studio portrait, circa 1920.