

**MEET ME AT SANBORNS: LABOR, LEISURE, GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN
TWENTIETH-CENTURY MEXICO**

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Abstract

This dissertation is a cultural history about Sanborns, a Mexican business that began as a drugstore in 1903. It continues into the present as a national chain of restaurants and department stores owned by the Mexican billionaire Carlos Slim. Each chapter explores different topics of analysis: modernity, consumerism, and upper-class leisure culture; revolutionary masculinity and racial politics; food, commodities, and Mexican nationalism; working-class labor struggles and company paternalism, and urban sexuality. The dissertation examines how everyday life created and was created by post-Revolutionary Mexico's changing gender ideologies, evolving nationalist culture, and openness to foreign capital. It argues that the Sanborns chain has been an essential site of contestation and redefinition of gender roles across Mexico. Tracing the development of Sanborns contributes to the discussion of Mexico's national culture during the twentieth-century.

Commercial retailers and spaces of consumption helped shape Mexico's urban landscape and consumer identities. The popularity of Sanborns was shaped by local consumer tastes and global technologies as they developed over time. My work describes the collaboration and conflict between Sanborns and its customers who used the floor space in their own way; the store began as a place of leisure for Mexico's upper-class but evolved into a sexual space shared among classes. Sanborns also became an important intermediary connecting U.S. manufacturers with Mexico's developing consumer culture, and U.S. tourists with folkloric Mexican handicrafts.

The fieldwork conducted for this project took place in Mexico City, Monterrey, and Acapulco. It incorporates the narratives of historical actors from a wide range of class and race positions. Source material for this project included government documents, company ephemera, business licenses, internal business documents, personal letters, advertisements, periodicals, photographs, film, novels, and other print media. The dissertation also incorporated ethnographic research from oral interviews with company employees and Sanborns customers.

To my family,

and

To my mentors:

Mike Torney, Daron Olson, James Garza, and Anne Rubenstein

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Table of Contents

<i>Abstract</i>	ii
<i>Dedication</i>	iii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	iv
<i>Table of Contents</i>	vi
<i>List of Figures</i>	ix
Introduction	1
<i>A Monument of Mexican Progress</i>	1
<i>Sanborns and the Transformative City</i>	5
<i>Historiographical Approaches to Consumerism and Commercialized Spaces</i>	15
<i>Chapter Outline</i>	28
<i>Following the Fragments of Archival Sources</i>	30
<i>Key Terms</i>	35
Chapter I. Selling Modernity in Mexico City: Gender, Class, Leisure, and Consumerism at the American Drugstore, (1903-1946)	38
<i>Sanborns Arrives in Porfirian Mexico City</i>	42
<i>Sanborns and la Casa de los Azulejos</i>	57
<i>The Gendering of Space inside “the Rendezvous of Society,” 1914-1940</i>	73
<i>Conclusion</i>	86
Chapter II. Ice Cream Soda Flavored with the Blood of a Gringo: Sanborns at the Intersection of Race, Gender, and Revolution, (1910-1960)	88
<i>Sanborns and the Mexican Revolution</i>	92
<i>Zapatistas in Sanborns: Contesting a Site of Porfirian Power, 1914</i>	98
<i>Jack Johnson vs. Walter Sanborns: The Fight over Power, Class, and Racial Politics</i>	104
<i>Homo sapiens and Homo Sanborns: Upper-class Leisure and Sociability, 1920-1960</i>	124
<i>Conclusion</i>	131

Chapter III. Reminiscent of Old Mexico: Commercializing Nationalism through Food, Commodities, and Invented Traditions, (1920-1950)	135
<i>José Clemente Orozco's Mural in the House of Tiles, 1925</i>	139
<i>Sanborns Mexican Silver</i>	144
<i>Mexican Art, Antiques, and Curios Department</i>	148
<i>Mexicanizing the Sanborns Waitress Uniforms</i>	154
<i>Fine Dining at Sanborns, 1919-1940</i>	159
<i>Porfirio Díaz's Banana Split at the Sanborns Bar: Invented Traditions and Cultural Authenticity</i>	170
<i>Conclusion</i>	177
Chapter IV. La Gran Familia Sanborns: Working Women, Labor Paternalism, and Union Movement, (1920-1948)	180
<i>Working Women at Sanborns: Gender, Hierarchy, and Labor Conditions</i>	189
<i>Striking Bread Workers Confront Sanborns Paternalism, 1922</i>	197
<i>Sanborns and Mexico's Sports Culture during the 1930s</i>	207
<i>Sanborns Paternalism in Monterrey: The Case of Alejandra Molina, 1944-1945</i>	212
<i>The 1947 Labor Strike at Sanborns Monterrey</i>	227
<i>Conclusion</i>	242
Chapter V. La Catedral de Homosexualidad: Male Bodies and Queered Spaces at Sanborns, (1960-2017)	246
<i>La Catedral de Homosexualidad</i>	252
<i>Cruising and Male Sociability</i>	256
<i>Cruising Inside the Store</i>	262
<i>The Magazine Rack</i>	264
<i>The Men's Bathroom</i>	267
<i>Cruising Outside Sanborns</i>	278
<i>Police Violence, State Surveillance, Regulation and Control</i>	283
<i>Conclusion</i>	292

Conclusion	296
Sources and Bibliography	309

List of Figures

Figure 1: Hermanos Mayo, <i>Sanborns del Paseo de la Reforma</i>	10
Figure 2: Marqués de San Francisco, <i>Sanborns in the House of Tiles</i>	58
Figure 3: Unknown Photographer, <i>The Inauguration of Sanborns in the House of Tiles</i>	64
Figure 4: Hugo Brehme, “ <i>Sanbornsito</i> ”.....	71
Figure 5: Sanborns Souvenir, <i>Salon de Modas Ladies Shop</i>	74
Figure 6: Víctor or Miguel Casasola, <i>Meseras de Sanborns atienden a zapatistas</i>	100
Figure 7: El Universal, <i>El Boxeador negro Johnson se hace server helados en Sanborns</i>	114
Figure 8: El Universal, <i>¡Johnson Fifi!</i>	121
Figure 9: Hermanos Mayo, <i>Cafetería Sanborns de México</i>	126
Figure 10: Novedades, <i>Homo Sanborns</i>	129
Figure 11: Reforma, <i>El Regreso Zapatista</i>	132
Figure 12: José Clemente Orozco, <i>Omnisciencia</i>	140
Figure 13: Unknown photographer, <i>Sanborns waitresses</i>	155
Figure 14: Sanborns Monterrey Mexico, <i>Soda Fountain</i>	215
Figure 15: Frame enlargement, <i>En esta primavera</i>	247
Figure 16: Frame enlargement, <i>En esta primavera</i>	248
Figure 17: Unknown photographer, <i>Sanborns Reforma</i>	265
Figure 18: Miguel Alonso Hernández Victoria, <i>Bathroom sign</i>	275

Introduction

A Monument of Mexican Progress

On October 11, 1919, Walter and Frank Sanborn—two brothers who operated a popular U.S.-style drugstore founded in 1903—inaugurated their new-look department store inside the House of Tiles, one of Mexico City’s most iconic buildings located in the heart of the historic downtown.¹ The U.S. merchants from California had built a formidable reputation for themselves among elite circles in the capital; upper-class customers had regularly gathered at the Sanborns American Drugstore for years. The opening of the new Sanborns was celebrated with much fanfare in Mexico City’s major newspapers. They reported about a store that ushered in a dazzling combination of modernity and luxury found within an attractive social space linked with the powerful memories of Mexico’s colonial past. *Excélsior* remarked how the historic House of Tiles, that was “known by every Mexican”, had been physically “transformed into a first-rate commercial institution” fitted with a pharmacy and refreshment parlor.² *El Heraldo de Mexico* summed up the

¹ La Casa de los Azulejos.

² “La Casa de los Azulejos fue Inaugurada ayer.” *Excélsior*, Domingo 12 de octubre de 1919, 7. “ha sido transformado en un establecimiento comercial de primer orden, sin que por ello haya perdido sus bellezas arquitectónicas...La histórica Casa de los Azulejos, conocida por todos los mexicanos, y donde por muchos años estuvo el “Jockey Club”, es ahora donde los progresistas señores Sanborns han establecido su establecimiento de Droguería y Salón de Refrescos, montado a todo lujo y con el mayor confortamiento.”

magnitude of the spectacle, reporting that the “sumptuous” House of Tiles had turned into a “Fairy Tale Palace,” that brought Mexicans in reach with “the current needs of fashion.”³

A crowd of distinguished upper-class families attended the event, and at one point it was impossible for people to enter through the doors.⁴ Modern paintings, flowers, electric lamps, and fruit tress decorated the interior walls.⁵ Those who visited the ice cream parlor could spend their leisure time listening to an orchestra playing a tune or admire the parquet floor that would eventually become a ballroom. Neatly arranged imported consumer products lined the display cases in the drugstore and a group of young women employees stood ready to attend customers who passed by.⁶ One store department featured a range of Mexican-made articles that included furniture, glassware, and silverware.⁷ In the tea room, working-class waitresses served dining guests ice cream, coffee, strawberries with cream, and chocolate with hot foam.⁸ Sanborns showcased all of the latest trends

³ “La Casa de Los Azulejos Convertida en un Palacio de Cuento de Hadas,” *El Heraldo de México*, 12 de octubre de 1919. “el suntuoso Palacio de los Azulejos, maravillosamente transformado a las necesidades actuales de la moda, dentro de su obra primitiva y espléndida.”

⁴ “El Palacio de los Azulejos abre sus puertas,” *Don Quijote*, 22 de octubre, 1919.

⁵ “La Antigua ‘Casa de los Azulejos,’ Es Desde Ayer Nuevo Local de los Señores Sanborn, *El Demócrata*, 12 octubre de 1919, 6.

⁶ “La Antigua ‘Casa de los Azulejos,’ es Desde Ayer el Nuevo Local de los Señores,” *El Demócrata*, Domingo, 12 de octubre de 1919; “La Casa de los Azulejos fue Inaugurada ayer,” *Excelsior*, Domingo 12 de octubre de 1919, 9.

⁷ “La Antigua ‘Casa de los Azulejos,’ es Desde Ayer el Nuevo Local de los Señores,” *El Demócrata*, Domingo, 12 de octubre de 1919, 6.

⁸ Armando de Maria y Campos, “La Vida en México,” *Mefistófeles*, 13 de octubre de 1919, 13.

in consumption and leisure entertainment that were popular in Europe and the United States. The modern, all-purpose retail store seemingly had everything to offer for the Mexican elites who could afford to go there.

The inauguration of Sanborns in the House of Tiles reaffirmed the existence of a social hierarchy during the waning moments of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920). Newspapers viewed the department store as a monument to progress during a time of great social conflict. During revolutionary times, the opening of Sanborns provided a source of encouragement for some observers who viewed the event as signaling the end of the Revolution. One person recalled that the inauguration gave “a rebirth of optimism in the city,” as other businessmen decided that the “revolutions were over, and money that had been hidden for ten years began to circulate again.”⁹ Newspapers offered praise for the “progressive” Sanborns brothers and highlighted their initiatives as contributing to Mexico’s national progress.¹⁰ It was even hoped that other merchants operating in the country would imitate the modernizing efforts of the Sanborn brothers.¹¹ Sanborns helped bridge Mexico’s Porfirian past and the memories of its colonial period into an emerging modernizing Mexico. The inauguration helped solidify the company’s reputation as a leading commercial establishment operating within Mexico City’s flourishing consumer landscape. The above accounts describing the opening of Sanborns encapsulates some of the major themes and

⁹ Michael Scully, *Pan America’s Crossroads Store*, 10.

¹⁰ “El Palacio de los Azulejos abre sus puertas,” *Don Quijote*, 22 de octubre de 1919, “Reciban los directores de esta progresiva firma el aplauso unánime del pueblo mexicana,”; “La Casa de los Azulejos fue inaugurada ayer,” *Excélsior*, 12 de octubre de 1919. “...los progresistas señores Sanborns.”

¹¹ “The Opening of Sanborn’s,” *Revista Para Todos*, 2 de noviembre de 1919, 20.

categories examined in this dissertation; they contained several keywords that underline the social and cultural meaning of Sanborns within Mexico's twentieth century history.

My dissertation analyzes Sanborns, a business that began as a U.S.-styled drugstore and soda fountain before Mexico's 1910 Revolution. Sanborns has since expanded into a household name easily identifiable to Mexicans and foreigners alike. It continues into the present as a national chain of restaurants, coffee houses, and department stores owned by the Mexican billionaire Carlos Slim. My work describes collaboration and conflict between the Sanborns chain, its workers, and its customers. Sanborns's clientele used its floor space in their own way: local masculine elites gathered there to display their social significance; aspiring middle-class Mexicans went there to experience new forms of modern consumer culture; and men cruised the bathroom looking for sex with other men. During the Revolution, soldiers posed at the Sanborns bar to demonstrate their conquest of an elite stronghold; in later decades, Mexicans dined there ordering from a mixed menu that included European and homestyle American cuisine. Throughout this period, the predominantly female workforce of waitresses, vendors, and cleaners resisted male management by joining unions. Sanborns also became an important intermediary connecting U.S. manufacturers with Mexico's developing consumer culture and U.S. tourists with folkloric Mexican handicrafts. The dissertation examines how everyday life created and was created by post-Revolutionary Mexico's changing gender ideologies and evolving nationalist culture. My thesis argues that the Sanborns chain has been an essential site of contestation and redefinition of gender roles across Mexico. For over a century, generations of Mexicans used Sanborns as a stage to perform their identities and gain various forms of power for themselves.

Each chapter in the dissertation explores a different topic: business history and consumerism, labor history, the history of food, Mexican nationalism, and the history of sexuality. However, all of these topics are approached through the lens of gender. The goal is to produce an integrated narrative history of twentieth-century Mexico through an exploration of a single Mexican commercial institution with gender being the most important explanatory factor. By focusing on a single business, Sanborns, I can integrate these approaches in a way that suggests a history of modern Mexico more continuous with its nineteenth century and colonial past. By doing this as a gender historian, the narrative can encompass historical actors from a wide range of class and race positions.

Sanborns and the Transformative City

Mexico City is the main area of focus for this study mainly because that is where Sanborns started and where most of the Sanborns story unfolds. A brief description of the Sanborns business and its relation to Mexico City's urban development provides a template for understanding the major economic, political, and cultural factors that led to Sanborns developing into a national chain over the twentieth-century. The Sanborns American Pharmacy was established in 1903, during the thirty-five-year presidency and dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz. During the Porfiriato (1876-1910), Mexico City was marked by a rapid shift in demography and large-scale industrialization and modernization projects. In 1876, census figures read that 200,000 inhabitants lived in the capital; that figure jumped to 330,000 by 1895, and to 470,000 in 1910.¹² Rural migrants—many of which

¹² Elisa Speckman Guerra, “De barrios y arrabales: entorno, cultura material y quehacer cotidiano (Ciudad de México, 1890-1910),” in *Historia de la vida cotidiana en México*, Tomo V, Volumen 1: Siglo XX Campo y Ciudad, Aurelio de los Reyes, ed. (México: El Colegio de México/Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2006), 17.

were women—sought jobs and opportunities for themselves on the streets, in the service sector, and in light industries that included cigarette and clothing factories.¹³ Changing gender dynamics and industrialization brought more women into Mexico City’s public sphere. Most migrants eventually moved into crowded tenements located on the eastern districts of the city near the *Zócalo*.¹⁴ Industrial developments spurred by the completion of Mexico’s railway lines connected large swaths of rugged and mountainous terrain with the U.S. border.¹⁵ New laws passed that favored foreign investment and a reduction in tariffs prompting a flurry of European and U.S. economic activity that stimulated Mexico’s national economy and bolstered local and international industries.¹⁶

Mexico City’s *centro*, downtown area, transformed into the showcase of Porfirian modernity, exemplified by its vast commercial landscape.¹⁷ High-end restaurants, coffee houses, drugstores, bathhouses, theatres, and department stores proliferated along the main thoroughfares and catered

¹³ Susie S. Porter, *Working Women in Mexico City: Public Discourses and Material Conditions, 1879-1931* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press).

¹⁴ Ageeth Sluis, *Deco Body, Deco City: Female Spectacle and Modernity in Mexico City, 1900-1939* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016), 4. The *zócalo* is the central square with the cathedral and presidential palace.

¹⁵ Michael Matthews, *The Civilizing Machine: A Cultural History of Mexican Railroads, 1876-1910* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2013), 7-11.

¹⁶ Susie S. Porter, *Working Women in Mexico City: Public Discourses and Material Conditions, 1879-1931* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press), xii; Bunker, *Creating Mexican Consumer Culture in the Age of Porfirio Díaz*, 6.

¹⁷ See John Lear, *Workers, Neighbors, and Citizens: The Revolution in Mexico City* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011), 35.

to upper-class clientele that became identified as the *gente decente* (decent folk).¹⁸ Mexican elites performed their identities as powerful members of the upper-class by flaunting their social power through their consumptive behaviors.¹⁹ These upper-class consumers shopped and dined in commercial institutions that attracted customers with the latest modes of fashion and cuisine from the United States and Europe.²⁰ Downtown streets were paved with asphalt and lined with electric street lamps, telephones, and modern sewer systems.²¹ These physical alterations of the cityscape transformed workplaces and homes alike through largescale public work projects that the Porfirian

¹⁸ See, Steven B. Bunker and Víctor M. Macías-González, “Consumption and Material Culture from Pre-contact through the Porfiriato,” in *A Companion to Mexican History and Culture*, edited by William H. Beezley (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 71. Bathhouses, theatres and especially department stores, or *grandes almacenes* were extremely important commercial spaces that stimulated the rise of Mexico’s consumer culture for the *gente decente*. Sanborns and dozens of other drugstores also operated in the city and were equally important. There were also many coffee houses that operated downtown. One notable coffeehouse that opened at the time was the Café Paris. See, “The Café Paris,” *The Mexican Herald*, November 28, 1900.

¹⁹ Ageeth Sluis, *Deco Body, Deco City*, 4.

²⁰ Steven B. Bunker, *Consumer Culture in the Age of Porfirio Díaz*, 8.

²¹ Víctor Maximino Martínez Ocampo, “Los restaurantes en la ciudad de México en la segunda mitad del siglo XIX, 1869-1910,” (Tesis de Licenciado, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2015), 146; Elisa Speckman Guerra, “De barrios y arrabales: entorno, cultura material y quehacer cotidiano (Ciudad de México, 1890-1910), 17.

government used to centralize their power.²² It is within this transformative period in Mexico City's rapid economic, political, social, and cultural development when Sanborns was born.

Most of my research examines the critical early period of Sanborns ownership (1903-1946) by the partnership of Walter and Frank Sanborn. Aside from their original drugstore they founded in 1903, the brothers opened two additional and short-lived drugstores in downtown Mexico City (1910) and Tampico, Tamaulipas (1913).²³ All three drugstores were closed by the time Sanborns inaugurated what came to be their flagship store in the House of Tiles (1919). Sanborns inaugurated a new branch in the industrial capital city of Monterrey in 1936; this store marked the Sanborn brother's first successful expansion outside of Mexico City, and may have been developed in response to the construction of the Pan-American Highway.²⁴

In 1946, the Sanborns brothers sold their company to the U.S. drugstore chain Walgreen's from Deerfield, Illinois, which marked the company's second phase of business (1946-1985).²⁵ Sanborns was Walgreen's first foreign acquisition that followed in the largescale trend of post-war corporate expansion by U.S. companies in search of larger consumer markets outside the boundaries of the United States. Walgreens left in place many of the business ideas and general strategies created by the original owners. However, the U.S. corporation stimulated Sanborns's expansion into a national chain store, and helped the company become more vertically integrated in its supply chains and manufacturing. For example, in 1951, Sanborns opened their Excélsior chocolate factory.

²² Claudia Agostoni, *Monuments of Progress: Modernization and Public Health in Mexico City, 1876-1910* (University of Calgary Press, 2003), xiii.

²³ For more information, see chapter's 1 and 2 of this dissertation.

²⁴ Sanborns Monterrey is described in more detail in chapter four.

²⁵ "Walgreen's Goes South," *Time*, Vol. 47 Issue 25, (June, 1946), 90.

Over 280 workers produced a range of Sanborns-brand chocolates and sweets, many of which are still sold today.²⁶ Walgreen's provided managerial advice on the spatial layout of new stores that emphasized merchandise trends and self-service.²⁷ Under the control of Walgreen's, Sanborns opened an additional twenty-six stores.²⁸ Most of the new stores were established in Mexico City, including the Sanborns Café del Prado (1949), Reforma and La Fragua (1954), Durango (1958), Niza (1960), and Insurgentes (1962).²⁹ Other than the House of Tiles, Sanborns Reforma is probably one of the most emblematic Sanborns in Mexico City. The large multi-floor department store rivaled in size other large retailers like Liverpool and Sears. Sanborns Reforma became the model of how the company structured their store departments in many of the stores today.³⁰ These new store branches were concentrated in cosmopolitan middle-class neighborhoods such as La Roma, and Hipódromo Condesa. Some of these stores developed particular notoriety as cruising destinations for middle-class men looking for sex with other men.³¹

²⁶ "Fábrica Excelsior," *Azulejos: Revista Interna Trimestral del Personal de Sanborn Hnos., S.A.*, año XII, núm. 55 (enero-marzo, 1992), 8-9.

²⁷ "Mexico's 'Drug Store' Changes Prescription," *Business Week*, May 15, 1965, pg. 73.

²⁸ "Walgreens Goes International – The Sanborns Story," *Walgreen Alumni Association Newsletter* (Fall 2010), 34.

²⁹ Carla Zarebska, *La Casa de los Azulejos*, 224.

³⁰ Arg. Ángel Eduardo Peralta Rosado, "Mensajes de la Dirección," *Azulejos: Revistas Interna para el Personal de Sanborns y Sanborns Café*, año XXIV, núm. 98 especial 100 años (2003), 9.

³¹ For more information, see Chapter 5 of this dissertation.



Figure 1: Sanborns Lafragua, Mexico City. Hermanos Mayo. *Sanborns del Paseo de la Reforma*. Circa 1955. Hermanos Mayo, Cronológico, sobre 12.768, Fototeca, AGN. Mexico City.

Sanborns's commercial expansion coincided with Mexico's postwar period of economic development that is referred to as the Mexican "Miracle," a period lasting from 1940-1970 that was marked by state-led development known as Import Substitution Industrialization (ISI), and rapid industrialization and expansion. Mexico's official political party, the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI), nourished the development of Mexico's middle-class, viewing them as symbols that reflected economic progress and Mexico's modernity. As Louis Walker argues, Mexico's middle-class identity was influenced by U.S. culture and consumer behaviors that tied material goods with social status. As the middle class represented a symbol of attaining modernity, their lifestyle represented a model for all Mexicans to strive for.³²

³² Louise Walker, *Waking from the Dream: Mexico's Middle Class After 1968* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013).

Walgreen's continued as the major shareholder of Sanborns during Mexico's Economic Crisis (1970-1982), opening their second branch in the coastal city of Acapulco (1973), and acquiring the Denny's restaurant and coffee chain (1976-1979).³³ In 1977, Sanborns opened another store in Mexico City that was inside the historic Casa Böker, a hardware store established by German immigrants during the Porfiriato.³⁴ A year later, Sanborns purchased the House of Tiles from the Yturbe family, further cementing the commercial retailer's place within Mexican memory.³⁵ In 1985, during Mexico's post-Economic Recovery (1982-1988), Walgreen's sold off Sanborns to a group of Mexican investors that included Grupo Carso, the corporate conglomerate owned by the billionaire Carlos Slim Helú. Walgreen's cited the devaluation of Mexico's currency, the peso, as the major factor that influenced their decision to sell the chain.³⁶ By the turn of the century, under the new ownership of Grupo Carso (1985-present), the company had rapidly expanded across the country and operated a total of 105 stores; sixty-two within Mexico City and the surrounding metropolitan

³³ "Sanborns Estrella del Mar," *Sanborns Azulejos*, año V, núm. 34 (Diciembre, 1972), s/p. During 1976-1979, the number of Sanborns stores grew from seven to twenty-six.

³⁴ For more on the Casa Böker, read, Jürgen Buchenau, *Tools of Progress: A German Merchant Family in Mexico City, 1865-Present* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2004; Clementina Díaz y de Ovando, *Los Cafés en México en el siglo XIX* (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2003), 90. Sanborns opened its door on December 15, 1977.

³⁵ Carla Zarebska, *La Casa de los Azulejos*, 237.

³⁶ "Walgreens Goes International – The Sanborns Story," *Walgreen Alumni Association Newsletter* (Fall 2010), 35.

areas, along with dozens more operating in cities that stretched from the northern border in Ciudad Juárez (1988), to provincial cities in Guanajuato (1991), Guadalajara (1992), and Veracruz (1992).³⁷

Sanborns was so inscribed in the popular imagination that Salvador Novo, the respected chronicler of Mexico City, used the store as a metaphor for the growth of the city. He remarked that the capital's rapid industrial expansion paralleled the growth of Sanborns which had, "conquered the city, spreading branches throughout a city that was exploding in every direction."³⁸ The expansion of Sanborns branches in and around Mexico City—and across Mexico—made the store an ubiquitous part of the urban landscape. The large shopping centers and smaller Sanborns Cafés (previously Denny's restaurants) sprouted up along prominent avenues in densely populated cities across Mexico. The stores became points of references that helped Mexicans to identify their locations within their urban surroundings.³⁹ Sanborns has shaped the social and cultural interactions for generations of Mexicans and visiting tourists in Mexico.⁴⁰ For over seventy-five years, the store has

³⁷ Carla Zarebska, *La Casa de los Azulejos*, 237-238; See also, "Nuestra Empresa Sigue Creciendo," *Azulejos: Revista Interna de los Empleados de Sanborn Hnos., S.A.*, año IX, núm 44 (enero, 1989), 5; "Un paseo por...León, Guanajuato," *Azulejos: Revista Interna Trimestral del Personal de Sanborn Hnos., S.A.*, año XII, núm 55 (enero-marzo, 1992), 13.

³⁸ As quoted in Nick Caistor, *Mexico City: A Cultural and Literary Companion* (Interlink Publishing Group, 2000), 209.

³⁹ "Casa a unos pasos de Plaza México y Plaza Bonita (a la vuelta de Sanborns. Col. México). 3 recámaras, baño, sala comedora, Etc. Urgan \$88'000,000 resto \$42'000,000 facilito operación," *El Informador*, Domingo 1 de octubre de 1989, 6-B.

⁴⁰ Myrna Ortega, "Juan Antonio Pérez Simón: Sanborns Un Concepto de Empresa Mexicana Que Se Antoja Exportar," *Revista Hoy: Nueva Época*. No. 12, Año 53, Núm. 2292, 10-14.

appeared in the settings of Mexican novels, films, and even artwork.⁴¹ Going to Sanborns for a meal became a regular part of everyday life for generations of middle-class Mexican families.⁴² People could find almost anything at Sanborns. The stores continue to distribute various consumer products that include confections, electronics, artwork, books, and Band-Aids. Mexicans used Sanborns as a convenient store when looking for a specific item or last-minute gift idea.⁴³ People who shopped at Sanborns said the store felt safe and familiar to them, like, “a place you’ve been to

⁴¹ See, for example, Rodolfo Usigli, *Ensayo de un crimen* (México: Nexos-Sociedad, 2015) [1944]; Carlos Fuentes, *La región más transparente*, 1958 [1996]; Carlos Fuentes, *La Muerte de Artemio Cruz*, (1983) [1962], Carlos Fuentes, *La Cabeza de la hidra* (1998); Rafael Bernal, *El Complot Mongol* (México: Grupo Planeta, 2013) [1969]; Jorge Ibarguengoitia, *La ley de Herodes y otros cuentos* (México: Grupo Planeta, 1997) [1967]; Ángeles Mastretta, *Arráncame la vida* (México: Editorial Planeta Mexicana, S.A., 2012) [1986]; For films, see *5 de chocolate y 1 de fresa*, Carlos Velo. Produced by AM Libra. 1968; *En esta primavera*, Gilberto Martínez Solares. Produced by Rosales Duran Producciones. 1979. For artwork, consult, “Sanborns, 1987,” in the *Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México Escuela Nacional de Artes Plásticas* (México: UNAM, 2004), 411.

⁴² Ricci Camillo, Omar. Interview with the author. Personal interview. Mexico City, August 22, 2016. “por ejemplo el Sanborns de Amberes y Londres en la Zona Rosa que está en una esquina, a ese iban mi mamá y mis abuelos de toda la vida además la Zona Rosa era como el centro de la ciudad hace mucho tiempo en los 60s y 70s, entonces ese Sanborns era como tradicional de la familia.”

⁴³ Ruiz Garibay, Alejandro. Interview with Author. Mexico City. June 30, 2016. Pseudonym. “As a regular store I like that it’s really convenient. You can find almost anything there. For instance, if you have to buy a present you forgot you can go there and find a pair of earrings...yeah like almost everyone does it.” Interview conducted in English.

for a long time; you know the place, you know where to go, you know the waitress [and] the guy who charges you.”⁴⁴

With the proliferation of Sanborns locations throughout Mexico, the Sanborns in the House of Tiles lost its exclusivity and social cachet among the upper-class Mexican elites who frequented there. However, Sanborns became more inclusive to Mexico’s aspiring middle-class and visiting tourists who went to the store to share in the conversation with the powerful elites from generations past. Mexicans incorporated Sanborns into their everyday lives and adopted the social practice of regularly going to Sanborns that became a Mexican tradition established by local elites prior to the 1920s. Sanborns developed into a significant commercial space in Mexico where men and women across classes exercised their power and performed their identities as consumers.

Historiographical Approaches to Consumerism and Commercialized Spaces

Each chapter of my dissertation takes up a different topic that explores the Sanborns business: labor history, business history, the history of tourism, food history, and the history of sexuality. All of these topics are approached through the lens of gender. Though it is considerably

⁴⁴ Ibid. “it kind of feels familiar, you know? It kind of feels like a place you feel comfortable at. It’s some place you’ve been there. It’s a place you’ve been to like, for so long so it feels like you know the place. You know where to go, you know, maybe not the people, but you know the waitress, the guy who charges who is in charge of this and that. So yes, I think I would describe it as familiar, a familiar environment...Like a safe environment, like a place, a familiar place...I guess people like to go to places the [*sic*] feel comfortable at, and places they know.”

difficult to place Sanborns in any particular historiography, the through line connecting all of the dissertation chapters is the relationship between the Sanborns institution and the managers, workers, and customers who interacted in the store. Therefore, the contributions of my study enters conversations with historians that examine how commercial spaces and consumerism more broadly, impacted the everyday lives of citizens in Mexico.

In 1957, historian Emma Cosío Villegas wrote a chapter about “Everyday Life” in Mexico City, in *La Historia moderna de México: La República Restaurada*.⁴⁵ She described a colorful sampling of different sites of socialization in the capital’s built environment during the nineteenth century, that included cafes, restaurants, stores, and dance salons where upper-class men and women gathered to talk, eat, dance, shop, and listen to music. Cosío Villegas was using consumerism and commercial spaces as categories of historical analysis that also showed how ordinary Mexicans participated in the consumer society. Her pioneering descriptions are important because it mapped how everyday life became intricately connected with consumption. New modes of fashion, imported luxury goods, retail shopping, leisure entertainment, high-end dining, and going out to public institutions were all important social functions that mediated the lives of Mexicans to perform their daily rituals.⁴⁶

The historiography of consumption and consumer spaces as categories of analysis in Latin American history is a growing field.⁴⁷ Some of these studies developed in response to economic

⁴⁵ Emma Cosío Villegas, “La Vida Cotidiana,” in *Historia Moderna de México: La República Restaurada Vida Social*, vol. 3. Daniel Cosío Villegas, ed. (México: Editorial Hermes, 1959), 453-525.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 478-493. Quote is from page 453, “Un recorrido por la ciudad de México daría una visión panorámica de sus lugares más típicos.”

⁴⁷ Jeffrey D. Needell examined the formal institutions of the *alto mundo* in the *belle époque* of Brazilian society between 1894-1914. Social clubs, theaters, and salons served as places of distinction and

histories in the 1980s and 1990s that focused on Latin American nations as driven chiefly by their export economies.⁴⁸ These studies are encouraging and significant developments within their

“prestigious forms of consumption.” These sites allowed men to flaunt their wealth and power in an emerging consumer society based on a vision of European culture in the book, *A Tropical Belle Epoque: Elite Culture and Society in turn-of-the-century Rio de Janeiro* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 52-115; See also, Thomas F. O’Brien, *The Revolutionary Mission: American Enterprise in Latin America, 1900-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Maureen O’Dougherty uses consumerism to understand the everyday lives of São Paulo’s middle-class during the economic crisis. Her research shows that shopping shaped middle-class identity in, *Consumption Intensified: The Politics of Middle-Class Daily Life in Brazil* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002); John Sinclair and Anna Cristina Pertierra, eds. *Consumer Culture in Latin America* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), brings together a collection of research from anthropologists, historians, geographers, and cultural studies from across the world. Researchers use consumption on topics that cover tourism, household consumption, environmental impact, and shopping.

⁴⁸ For an analysis on the role of imported goods and patterns of consumption in Latin America’s nineteenth and twentieth century, see, Benjamin Orlove, ed. *The Allure of the Foreign: Imported Goods in Postcolonial Latin America* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997); Fernando Rocchi, *Chimneys in the Desert: Industrialization in Argentina During the Export Boom Years, 1870-1930* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006). See especially Chapter 1, 1-29. Rocchi’s chapter “The Market as an Object of Desire,” examines the expansion of Argentina’s domestic consumption. He notes how scholarship on Argentina has generally neglected consumption as a category of analysis. The chapter sketches the importance of department stores, factories, and advertising in the promotion of a

respected fields. They offer analytical approaches that explore material culture and consumptive behavior across different geographical settings. However, the studies that focus on commercial spaces tend to view these businesses statically through their natural state of progression, as congenial institutions that served powerful individuals, and not as sites where gender and power was contested and shaped by the customers who went there, or the employees who worked there. My work also shows that companies gendered their floor spaces which influenced how people used the store in their own way.

There are only a few Spanish language studies on Mexican consumerism that appeared before the 1990s.⁴⁹ In this decade, however, the Argentine intellectual, anthropologist, and cultural theorists Néstor García Canclini, published studies on consumerism in communication studies.⁵⁰ His influential work is probably best known for *Culturas híbridas*, or Hybrid Cultures, that posited modernity was a mixture of traditional culture and the modern; he uses the example of how popular

consumer society. While significant, the chapter ideas need to be further developed into a larger study that considers themes like labor, gender, race, and class identities.

⁴⁹ The notable exceptions are Emma Cosío Villegas, “La Vida Cotidiana,” mentioned earlier, and Víctor M. Bernal Sahagún’s Marxist and structuralist critique of Mexico’s big advertising industries in, *Anatomía de la Publicidad en México: Monopolios, enajenación y desperdicio* (México: Editorial Nuestro Tiempo, S.A., 1974). Bernal Sahagún sees advertising as a form of nefarious manipulation controlled by “bourgeois imperialists and corporate conglomerates.”

⁵⁰ See for example, Néstor García Canclini, *Culturas híbridas: Estrategias para entrar y salir de la modernidad* (México: Debolsillo, 2013 [1990]); *Consumidores y ciudadanos: conflictos multiculturales de la globalización* (México: Grijalbo, 1995).

arts and industrialization connected these cultural forms to high culture.⁵¹ In *Consumers and Citizens*, García Canclini examines how consumer identities have been altered by large-scale economic, technological, and cultural change, such as globalization. He proposed that sites of consumption are “good for thinking” and “where a good part of economic, sociopolitical, and psychological rationality is organized in all societies.” According to Canclini, the act of consumption is an exercise of citizenship, and therefore an exercise of power.⁵² My work on Sanborns shows commonalities with Canclini’s theories, in that the retailer served as a cultural translator that connected Mexicans to forms of U.S. culture, while also providing visiting U.S. tourists a window to explore Mexican culture. I also see Sanborns as a commercial site where customers exercised their power and identities as consumers.

A few other Spanish-language studies on Mexico describe the country’s everyday life using consumerism as a lens. The most thorough examination is undoubtedly the 6-part volume of the *Historia de la vida cotidiana en México*, directed by Pilar Gonzalbo Aizpuru.⁵³ This impressive scholarship traces everyday life from the Aztec empire to the late twentieth century. Two other books explore consumerism through a visual collection of periodical advertisements and historic

⁵¹ Néstor García Canclini, *Culturas híbridas*, 14-17.

⁵² Néstor García Canclini, Author’s Preface to the English language edition in, *Consumers and Citizens: Globalization and Multicultural Conflicts*, trans. George Yúdice (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 5.

⁵³ Pilar Gonzalbo Aizpuru, dirigida. *Historia de la vida cotidiana en México*, 6 vols. (México: El Colegio de Mexico/Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2006).

photographs, one more effective than the other.⁵⁴ Julieta Ortiz Gaitán compares Porfirian and revolutionary-era ads in illustrated magazines and newspapers. Through an analysis of over 900 advertisements, she shows how ads formed a language that communicated modernity and everyday life through the presence of European and U.S. consumer goods.⁵⁵ Ortiz Gaitán's contextualizes changing iconography in advertisements with modern art. This study shows how changing technologies, forms of advertisement, industrialization, and consumption impacted the wants and needs of certain social groups, and, women in particular.⁵⁶ My work, while less descriptive in analyzing a large sampling of visual iconography of ads, nevertheless compliments Ortiz Gaitán's in showing how Sanborns depended heavily on the dissemination of advertisements that often utilized gender as a category to draw upper-class customers to their stores.

Within the last twenty years, the literature on Mexican consumerism and commercialized spaces that appeared in English-language texts has grown considerably. Recent studies explore consumerism using exciting new approaches that include comparative studies of artwork and poetry, transnational perspectives along the borderlands, and an analysis of the shadow economy.⁵⁷ There

⁵⁴ *México: ¿Quieres tomarte una foto conmigo? Cien años de consumo* (México: Procuraduría Federal del Consumidor: Editorial Casasola, 1996). This book is about consumption and more of a photo collection of Casasola images. For a history of advertising, see, Julieta Ortiz Gaitán, *Imágenes del deseo: Arte y publicidad en la prensa ilustrada mexicana (1894-1939)* Mexico City: UNAM, 2003).

⁵⁵ Elizabeth Fuentes Rojas, prologo, *Imágenes del deseo*, 11.

⁵⁶ Julieta Ortiz Gaitán, 16-18.

⁵⁷ See for example, Alexis McCrossen, ed. *Consumer Culture in the United States-Mexico Borderlands* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009). The edited volume focuses on transnational consumerism with historical and anthropological approaches to tourism, cinema, leisure and labor, retail stores,

have been many illuminating studies that trace Mexican consumption from pre-contact to the twentieth century.⁵⁸ However, my work joins in conversation with a few notable studies that explore the significance of commercial retailers and other public places where people worked and socialized with one another.⁵⁹ In particular, my gendered analysis of Sanborns has been influenced by Susie S. Porter's own gendered analysis of working women in Mexico City's nineteenth and twentieth century, in which she sees a balance between resistance and collaboration between sexes within and smuggling among indigenous peoples, among other studies; Andrew Konove examines illicit trading in Mexico City from the seventeenth to the twentieth century in, *Black Market Capital: Urban Politics and the Shadow Economy in Mexico City* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018); Sergio Delgado Moya, *Delirious Consumption: Aesthetics and Consumer Capitalism in Mexico and Brazil* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017).

⁵⁸ There are too many to number. For an excellent historiographical analysis of the field, see Steven B. Bunker and Víctor M. Macías-González's two book chapters, "Consumption and Material Culture from Pre-Contact through the Porfiriato," and "Consumption and Material Culture in the Twentieth-Century," in *A Companion to Mexican History and Culture*, William H. Beezley, ed. (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2011);

⁵⁹ See, Víctor M. Macías-González, "The Lagartijo at the High Life: Masculine Consumption, Race, Nation, and Homosexuality in Porfirian Mexico," in *The Famous 41: Sexuality and Social Control in Mexico, 1901*, ed. by Robert McKee Irwin *et al.* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Jürgen Buchenau, *Tools of Progress*; Susie S. Porter, *Working Women in Mexico City: Public Discourses and Material Conditions, 1879-1931* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2003); Steven B. Bunker, *Creating Mexican Consumer Culture in the Age of Porfirio Díaz*; Julio Moreno, *Yankee Don't Go Home!: Mexican Nationalism, American Business Culture, and the Shaping of Modern Mexico, 1920-1950* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

working-class urban communities. Porter shows that working-women entered the public sphere through their work, consumption and socialization.⁶⁰

One current debate in the historiography of twentieth-century Mexican consumerism falls between two tracks. One side views Mexican consumerism as largely shaped by U.S. political and corporate power that served as the driving force between U.S.-Mexican relations in the nineteenth and twentieth century.⁶¹ The other side offers a more holistic view that considers the long trajectory of commodity flows and cultural contact that proceeded in the centuries that included French, German, and British investment with the Mexican territory.⁶²

Indeed, U.S. cultural power inevitably replaced largescale European investment, especially after the outbreak of the Mexican Revolution, and the World Wars. However, as my research shows, Sanborns owners continued to offer French-styled cuisine, and sold imported commodities from European and even the Middle Eastern markets well into the 1930s; they also simultaneously imported goods and technologies from the United States. Julio Moreno's book *Yankee Don't Go Home!* examines Sears Roebuck and the J. Walter Thompson company; he argues that Mexican nationalism and social upheaval made U.S. investment too risky in Mexico during the 1920s-1950s.⁶³

⁶⁰ Susie S. Porter, *Working Women in Mexico City*, xv.

⁶¹ John Mason Hart, *Empire and Revolution: The Americans in Mexico since the Civil War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Julio Moreno, *Yankee Don't Go Home!*

⁶² William Schell Jr., *Integral Outsiders: The American Colony in Mexico City, 1876-1911* (Wilmington: SR Books, 2001), x; Jürgen Buchenau, *Tools of Progress; Bunker, Creating Mexican Consumer Culture in the Age of Porfirio Díaz*.

⁶³ Julio Moreno, *Yankee Don't Go Home!: Mexican Nationalism, American Business Culture, and the Shaping of Modern Mexico, 1920-1950* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

Yet, Sanborns provides a useful counterpoint. In the 1920s, Sanborns became one of the largest wholesalers and retailers of U.S. manufactured goods, supplying Mexican consumers with products from nearly thirty U.S. companies.⁶⁴ Furthermore, Walgreen's purchase of Sanborns in 1946 shows that Sears Roebuck was not alone in their successful entrance into Mexico, and in fact, Sanborns rivaled the competitor in its popularity and commercial expansion.⁶⁵ While I disagree with some of Moreno's arguments, my work on Sanborns during the post-Revolutionary period speaks dialogically with the point that U.S. companies that operated in Mexico needed to adopt to local consumer tastes and nationalistic rhetoric in order to maintain profitability.⁶⁶ This concept shares similarities with the work of Victoria de Grazia, who detailed in her synthesis how U.S. consumer influence in Europe required flexibility that depended on local knowledge.⁶⁷

My dissertation answers Steven B. Bunker and Víctor M. Macías-González's call for more historians to analyze how commercial retailers and spaces of consumption shaped Mexico's urban

⁶⁴ For more information, see chapter 1 of this dissertation.

⁶⁵ I disagree with the assessment that Bunker and Macías-González make that Sears stands out as "the greatest retail innovator in the postwar era and represents the waxing of U.S. influence on Mexican retailing models, consumption, and material culture of the European." In fact, Sanborns outpaced Sears's development and relative expansion based on a comparison of store units in the country. See, Bunker and Macías-González "Consumption and Material Culture in the Twentieth-Century," 94.

⁶⁶ Julio Moreno, *Yankee Don't go Home!*, 173.

⁶⁷ Victoria de Grazia, *Irresistible Empire: America's Advance Through 20th-Century Europe* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005)

landscapes.⁶⁸ It also challenges historians to consider analyzing the significant role of drugstores, restaurants, coffee houses, bars, and other important institutions that shaped consumer identities across the nineteenth and twentieth century.⁶⁹ My project is also heavily influenced by three interrelated global histories on department stores.⁷⁰ Michael B. Miller's groundbreaking study of the Parisian *Bon Marché* explores the everyday life of bourgeois culture using paternalism as an analytical

⁶⁸ Steven B. Bunker and Víctor M. Macías-González, "Consumption and Material Culture from Pre-Contact through the Porfiriato," 71.

⁶⁹ I contend that modern drugstores were arguably larger in social significance than department stores and other giant retailers in that these stores catered to a larger consumer audience. Drugstores were found in abundance throughout Mexico City. These stores eventually modernized to become all-purpose stores that carried a range of imported consumer products, modern medicines, tonics, chocolates, creams, and so on. The literature on drugstores is quite limited in Mexico. See for example, Rogelio Trinidad Godínez Reséndiz and Patricia Elena Aceves Pastrana, *Proyectos, realidades y utopías: la transformación de la Farmacia en México (1919-1940)* (México: UAM Xochimilco, 2014); Hermann Hitz, *La moderna droguería mexicana* (México, 1947), found in GD 126 Propiedad Artística y Literaria, caja 804, exp. 2707, Archivo General de la Nación; for coffee houses consult, Clementina Díaz y de Ovando, *Los Cafés en México en el siglo XIX* (México: UNAM, 2003); for restaurants see, "Víctor Maximino Martínez Ocampo, "Los restaurantes en la ciudad de México en la segunda mitad de siglo XIX, 1869-1910," (Tesis de licenciatura, UNAM, 2015).

⁷⁰ Michael B. Miller, *The Bon Marché: Bourgeois Culture and the Department Store, 1869-1920* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981); Susan Porter Benson, *Counter Cultures: Saleswomen, Managers, and Customers in American Department Stores, 1890-1940* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988); Donica Belisle, *Retail Nation: Department Stores and the Making of Modern Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011).

approach. He shifts emphasis away from traditional business histories that focus on economic data to show the social meaning of the business as a reflection of culture.

There are many interesting comparisons with department stores across the North Atlantic world and Sanborns, particularly in how these companies gendered commercial space through a paternal system of management.⁷¹ However, one of Miller's other interesting points was the observation that the architecture of the store itself shaped people's shopping experiences.⁷² Across the twentieth century, Sanborns owners heavily marketed the history of the House of Tiles and its association with Mexican power and masculinity within their promotional material, viewing their store's reputation as embedded within Mexico's national culture.⁷³ My work shows commonalities and important differences with Susie Porter Benson's book *Counter Cultures*. Both of our studies analyze the relationship between workers, managers, and customers, and speak to how managers lured customers through complimentary services, areas of sociability, and consumption.⁷⁴ Yet, unlike Porter Benson's conclusion that found store managers rejected customer self-service and free browsing of store merchandise, the case of Sanborns was quite the opposite. In fact, this is arguably one of Sanborns most compelling features that allured customers into the store and allowed men to use the store to facilitate sex.⁷⁵ Also inspired by Donica Belisle's analysis of workers at Canada's

⁷¹ See Belisle, *Retail Nation*, 9; Miller, *Bon Marché*, 8.

⁷² Michael B. Miller, *The Bon Marché*, 167.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 216.

⁷⁴ Susan Porter Benson, *Counter Cultures*, 4.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

largest retailers, I examine how Sanborns commodified the bodies of Sanborns waitresses to promote their store as an example of Mexican culture.⁷⁶

Finally, this dissertation connects with global queer histories that analyze male sociability and urban sexuality, and consumer spaces.⁷⁷ George Chauncey argues in *Gay New York*, that gay men constructed “spheres of relative cultural autonomy,” in order to navigate within a hostile urban environment.⁷⁸ In Mexico, men constructed their own autonomy by queering the Sanborns bathroom and magazine racks. I found important differences between the tactics, rituals, and coded language used by men to queer Sanborns. My research is not the first historical study that describes how men queered Sanborns, however, no other study analyzes the institution to the same degree and extent as my project.⁷⁹

This dissertation also connects with Víctor Macías-González’s work on Porfirian bathhouses, the physical layout of Sanborns stores helped facilitate male cruising and made possible

⁷⁶ See Belisle, *Retail Nation*, 8.

⁷⁷ Gordon Brent Ingram *et al.*, *Queers in Space: Communities, Public Spaces, Sites of Resistance* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1997),

⁷⁸ George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994).

⁷⁹ See for example, Alvaro Sanchez-Crispin and Alvaro Lopez-Lopez, “Gay Male Places of Mexico City,” in Gordon Brent Ingram *et al.*, *Queers in Space*, 199; Rodrigo Laguarda, *Ser gay en la ciudad de México: Lucha de representaciones y apropiación de una identidad, 1968-1982* (México: CIESAS, 2010); Álvaro López and Anne Marie Van Broeck, *Turismo y sexo en México: Cuerpos masculinos en venta y experiencias homoeróticas* (México: UNAM, 2013; Héctor Carrillo, *Pathways of Desires: The Sexual Migration of Mexican Gay Men* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017)

same-sex interaction.⁸⁰ The way in which men socialized in the Sanborns restaurant is also similar to David Johnson's work on Chicago's Northside neighborhood in the 1920s-1930s. Johnson shows how gay men utilized department stores and cafeterias as cruising sites and areas of sociability. The Wrigley Building, Marshall Fields, and the Thompson's coffee chain gained popularity as rendezvous points for gay men in Chicago. Men were attracted to the well-lit spatial environments provided by the department stores because they were safe, modern, and employed by gay men. These spaces were also located nearby Chicago's gay community. Similar to Johnson's examination of the Thompson's coffeehouse, Sanborns offered affordable menu items and late-night business hours that were attractive consumer features that allowed men to socialize there.⁸¹ These studies of urban

⁸⁰ Víctor M. Macías-González, "The Bathhouse and Male Homosexuality," In *Masculinity and Sexuality in Modern Mexico*, ed. Víctor M. Macías-González and Anne Rubenstein, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2012), 26-38. Macías-González argues that Porfirian bathhouses were recreational spaces that helped solidify a gay community and crystallized what he calls "abstract identities" that helped make possible same-sex behavior. Similar to Sanborns, bathhouses were sites of leisure where men could perform new forms of masculinity that developed in response to social and cultural changes. According to Macías-González, the physical layout of modern bathhouses facilitated gay cruising. Large, well-lit rooms with locking doors replaced the old, noisy galleries from the past. These changes in the interior architecture made cruising at bathhouses possible and more comfortable.

⁸¹ David K. Johnson, "The Kids of Fairytown: Gay Male Culture on Chicago's Near North side in the 1930s," In *Creating a Place for Ourselves: Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Community Histories*, ed. Brett Beemyn (New York: Routledge, 1997), 102-106. Johnson shows that many male employees at Marshall Fields were gay, and the upper levels of the department store were used as cruising spaces

sexuality demonstrate that conception of modernity and their relationship with well-known institutions were contributing factors that enabled men to incorporate these spaces into their own lives. Both studies also point to the significance that geography and architecture influenced how men interacted with these institutions. Men who cruised at Sanborns found the store safe, clean, and a respected social institution. Its physical layout and proximity to Mexico's gay neighborhood, the Zona Rosa, were important factors that contributed to Sanborns's development as a cruising environment and space for queer sociability.

Chapter Outline

Chapter 1 documents the birth of Sanborns in Mexico. It traces the company's early business history by focusing on its major commercial developments between 1903 and 1946. Sanborns transformed from a modest U.S.-styled drugstore into one of Mexico City's most prominent restaurants and social institutions. I argue that Sanborns shaped Mexican consumer culture by appealing directly to local consumer tastes and by selling modern consumer products. It shows that gender, class, consumerism, and technologies shaped how people interacted with Sanborns, especially after the company moved into The House of Tiles in 1919. Company managers molded Sanborns into a place of leisure for elite customers by promoting its retail store as a place that included women. The company gendered its store departments, hired working-class women to run the store's daily operations, and promoted feminine consumer products and complimentary services in its advertising.

for men known as "floor walkers." Johnson also shows that the Thompson coffee chain operated in proximity to Chicago's gay neighborhood and became a staple within Chicago's homosexual world.

Between 1910 and 1960, Sanborns developed into an exclusive rendezvous site where generations of Mexico's most powerful men who performed their identities with other members of the privileged class. Chapter two examines the intersection between power, race, gender, and class at Sanborns in the House of Tiles during the Mexican Revolution and postrevolutionary period. It argues that company owners manipulated conceptions of race and gender to stay in business during the chaotic transformations that occurred in the first half of Mexico's twentieth century. It shows that from Mexico's 1910 Revolution onward, Sanborns served as site of protest for Mexican citizens, revolutionary soldiers, militant political groups, and even the African American boxing champion Jack Johnson. By focusing on moments of resistance, this chapter reveals how people entered Sanborns to empower themselves and openly challenge and contest Mexican state power, U.S. foreign policy, and racial politics.

Chapter 3 focuses on how Sanborns managers capitalized on the intense nationalism that followed the Mexican Revolution to promote their retail store as a symbol of Mexican identity and culture. In the 1920s and 1950s, company owners systematically *Mexicanized* Sanborns stores. They changed interior store designs to include Mexican artwork and motifs, added Mexican corn dishes on their restaurant menus; a redesigned waitress uniform appropriated cultural elements from Mexican indigenous clothing, and added store departments sold Mexican silver, artwork, and handicrafts. It argues that Sanborns increased its customer base beyond local elites by acting as a cultural translator that worked across national, ethnic, racial, and generational lines. It also locates how company owners invented traditions about their store's significant and contributions to Mexican history and culture.

Chapter 4 calls attention to the labor experiences of Mexican working-class women inside Sanborns stores in Mexico City, Monterrey, and Acapulco. It examines the relationship and

interactions between women workers and company managers, visiting customers, and organized labor unions from 1920-1948. I argue that Sanborns, like many American-owned businesses in Latin America, adopted a gendered form of paternalism in managing its workforce. The predominantly female workforce of waitresses, vendors, cleaners, and cooks resisted male management and a gendered paternalism. They navigated around gender, race, and class divisions on an everyday basis; they served as important mediators that connected company directors with upper-class customers, and actively participated in union movement across the country. This chapter also explores how company managers attempted to collectivize its workers under company objectives through a Sanborns-controlled union and through organized sports leagues.

The final chapter explores how beginning in the 1960s, some Sanborns stores developed into cruising spaces for men looking for sex with each other. Sanborns became the preeminent masculine queer space in Mexico. Generations of men collectively transformed Sanborns through habitual practices and coded language that safeguarded their sexual desires. Men queered Sanborns to gain power for themselves. Sanborns responded by using tactics that enforced gendered norms for uses of its floor space, particularly in the men's bathroom. It also shows that during the 1970s-1980s, Mexico City's police targeted, surveilled, and arrested men at Sanborns that they suspected were "homosexuals." Using threats of violence, intimidation, and extortion, the police used their social power and an aggressive form of masculinity to contest queered spaces and gendered behavior at Sanborns.

Following the Fragments of Archival Sources

Researching Mexico's private sector using public archives is not an easy task for investigators. Corporations like Walgreen's and Grupo Carso—the former and current owners of Sanborns, who combined to own the company for the last seventy-two years—generally do not

allow researchers access to company archives that contain sensitive financial information. Over the years, Walgreen went through a series of corporate restructuring. After the company sold off Sanborns in 1985, Walgreen directors found their archival material pertaining to their thirty-nine-year ownership of Sanborns as a closed chapter in their company's past. Unfortunately, the material they may have held related to Sanborns in the Walgreen archive was apparently discarded.⁸² Therefore, the dissertation contains very limited information related to Walgreen's direct involvement and influence over the development of Sanborns.

Writing a long-duration history of Sanborns depended on piecing together fragments of information found in archives and reading rooms across Mexico. This dissertation draws primarily from fieldwork research conducted in Mexico City, Monterrey, and Acapulco between June 2015 and June 2018, totaling about twenty-two months of investigation. However, the majority of the documents collected for this project came from a private archive in Mexico City. With special thanks to Carla Zarebska, in December 2015, I was granted access to consult the private collection known as the *Archivo Sanborn Hermanos* (ASH). The collection was assembled by a Sanborn relative from the United States with a personal interest in his family's business in Mexico.⁸³ The archive contained menus and menu inserts, personal letters, periodical clippings, company ephemera, postcards and

⁸² Special thanks to the Walgreens Historian Donna Lindgren who assisted me with my research.

⁸³ Carla Zarebska was contracted by Grupo Carso and Sanborns to write a corporate history of the company and *The House of Tiles*. Her book, *La Casa de los Azulejos* (México: Sanborns, 1999), provides one of the only other detailed accounts of Sanborns in Mexico. I also consider it as a primary source. It contains oral interviews, advertisements, photographs, and personal letters. Zarebska's book served as a roadmap for locating primary and secondary source material when I began researching this project.

photographs, unpublished manuscripts, advertisements, employee memorabilia, and internal business documents. While consulting the collection in the headquarters of Grupo Carso in Mexico City, a Sanborn director granted me permission to consult forty years (1969-2008) worth of an internal Sanborn magazine for employees called *Azulejos*. Carla Zarebska's book, *La Casa de los Azulejos*, which is published through Sanborns's own publishing house, served as a crucial roadmap for locating critical source material when I began conducting research for this project. Collectively, these sources proved invaluable for this dissertation, especially in linking together material found in state and municipal archives in Mexico City and Monterrey.

An initial search of public records for Sanborns in the Archivo General de la Nación (AGN) in Mexico City led me to a few lawsuits against the company filed in the Tribunal Superior de Justicia del Distrito Federal (TSJDF), but not much. The *Fototeca* in gallery 8 contained a large quantity of photographic material related to Sanborns in the Hermanos Mayo, and Diaz, Delgado and García collections. I noticed that the film negatives were organized according to specific entities, such as *fabricas*, *cafeterias*, *boticas*, and *droguerías*. Understanding that Sanborns was classified under different business categories helped inform my search queries in the archives. The AGN's Department of labor inspector reports and statistical information provided clues about the labor conditions of Sanborns's gendered workforce. The Archivo Histórico de la Ciudad de México (AHCM) contained business licenses, infractions, and reports from government inspectors of restaurants, cafes, drugstores and pharmacies. Another important observation was that Sanborns was commonly misspelled as "Sambors," "Samborns," and "Sanbors," which produced more leads when looking through archival records and in newspaper database searches.

The digital newspaper database in the Hemeroteca Nacional de México (HNDM) led me to thousands of references to Sanborns that appeared in periodicals, articles, advertisements, and

financial reports from across the country. I narrowed my search by focusing on important dates in Mexican history (i.e. The 1910 Revolution), and within the Sanborns business history (i.e. the inauguration of new stores, the opening of new store departments, the hosting of special dinners, dances, events and notable scandals). However, no newspaper collections are ever complete. I spent several months sifting through periodicals and trade journals located in library reading rooms across Mexico City. Valuable material was located in the AGN's Biblioteca, the Biblioteca "Constituyentes de 1917" in the Museo Casa de Carranza, the Hemeroteca Nacional at the UNAM, the Biblioteca Miguel Lerdo de Tejada, the Biblioteca "José Luis Ordóñez", and the Centro de Documentación Turística (CEDOC). The information gathered from these libraries were critically important in weaving together the narratives that formed in this project.

In Monterrey, the Archivo General del Estado de Nuevo León (AGENL) held three important arbitration case files related to Sanborns that contained government inspection reports and memorandums, employee records and testimony, financial data, letters, and union decrees. Using newspapers, census data, and government records gleaned from the library at the Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León and the AGN as a supplement, I was able to piece together a story about women workers at Sanborns that became chapter four of this dissertation.

Over the course of my fieldwork research, I conducted ethnographic research by interviewing nine men who shared stories about their sexual encounters with other men at Sanborns.⁸⁴ During one interview, a man told me he discovered Sanborns was a cruising space

⁸⁴ The interviews took place in Mexico City between 2015-2017 and were conducted in Spanish and English using a digital recording device and handwritten notes. Over fifteen hours of interviews were collected in total. The men's ages ranged from 24-72. I connected with these individuals using three different research methods: sheer luck, word of mouth, and through chatting with men online.

through an online forum. He suggested I might find additional information about Sanborns through a web search. In locating the site in question, I posted an open call for men to share their experiences with my investigation to contribute to my dissertation about the cultural history of Sanborns. The replies received were overwhelmingly positive. Some of these men contacted me through direct message and shared their stories. Two formal interviews were produced through this method.

It is important to note, however, that some men voiced concern about my request for information. Some men felt that by sharing details about such a sensitive topic and then having that information published in an academic investigation, it would expose deep secrets about how men constructed their queer environments in the Sanborns bathrooms and ruin these spaces forever. Others saw the value in an academic study that considered the place of queer men in the history of Mexico. As an historian, it was difficult to weigh these mixed sentiments. Sanborns bathrooms, magazine racks, and storefronts in Mexico City (and Acapulco) have been notorious hookup spots for generations of Mexican men looking for sex dating back to at least the 1960s. The detailed accounts men shared with me are not available in archival records. In order to respect their privacy, all interviewees who participated in this investigation had their identity protected by pseudonym, unless otherwise explicitly told not to.

In the first instance, while looking for an apartment to rent in the Mexico City neighborhood of San José Insurgentes, I struck up a conversation with two homeowners about my research. Both men looked dumbfounded when I told them I was writing a dissertation about Sanborns. By pure coincidence, these men had unique experiences cruising at Sanborns between the 1970s-1990s. My impromptu 5-hour interview that day led to several follow up interviews over the next two years. Personal networks with other researchers and word of mouth led me to a few other interviewees.

Queer men and other marginalized groups face serious challenges and discrimination in their daily lives. As a straight white male that grew up in a working-class suburb of Chicago, I recognize my inherent level of privilege, especially when approaching a totally unfamiliar topic like queer sociability and male sexuality in Mexico. In some ways, my perspective as an ignorant outsider lent certain advantage in understanding details pertaining to my investigation that might otherwise had been overlooked. Nevertheless, I approached my investigation with the same curiosity and vigor as any historian trying to find sources pertaining to their research. As a result, I stumbled upon a rich history about sexuality that was totally foreign and interesting. Using these testimonies, along with travel guides, periodicals, and unpublished manuscripts obtained from the Centro Académico de la Memoria de Nuestra América (CAMENA), and the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives (CLGA)⁸⁵, I constructed a chapter detailing the queer history of Sanborns.

Key Terms

When Walter and Frank Sanborn first opened their drugstore in 1903, the company was called Sanborn's with the added apostrophe. The company eventually dropped the apostrophe from its name brand because the symbol is rarely used in the Spanish language. A theory of mine is that the company probably also wanted to improve its local image by dropping an imperialistic foreign symbol during a climate of Anti-Americanism in the early twentieth-century. Whatever the case, this then creates an awkward scenario when writing about the company in the plural form in English. To avoid any confusion, throughout the dissertation, when I describe a Sanborn family member in plural, I use "Sanborn's." When writing about the commercial entity in the plural form, I use "Sanborns's."

⁸⁵ Special thanks to Joshua Mentanko for providing me with these sources.

In the dissertation, I refer to the notion of the “working-class,” “middle-class,” and “upper-class.” These socioeconomic descriptors generalize groups of people based on their identities, social mobility, lifestyle, consumption, jobs, financial success, political background, social advantage and class-consciousness. These terms are obviously subjective and have been explored in detailed historical analysis elsewhere.⁸⁶ In general, when referring to the working-class, the category is used to define unskilled laborers who may start their employment in an entry-level position subordinate to managerial control. People from the working-class may have lived in poverty, in urban tenement housing, and without college or formal education. My work does not explore the lives of Sanborns workers outside of the store due to the limited records available in the archive. However, these are the set of social factors I thought about when I applied this term frequently in chapter four of this dissertation. I borrow from Louise Walker’s idea of the middle-class as referring to a “set of material conditions, a state of mind” influenced by consumer culture, political discourses, and general lifestyle. Within my own study, most of the men I interviewed for identified with the “middle-class” or “upper-middle-class” that basically meant they had access to a car, were college educated, came from a fairly well-off background with supportive parents. The middle-class in this story had access to Sanborns’s retail store and all the leisurely activities attached to the consumptive behavior. The last category, “upper-class,” refers to the managerial class of powerful elites who had access to the largest amount of capital and financial control that allowed them to enjoy the fruits of consumer capitalism. These were the bankers, lawyers, celebrities, merchants, factory owners, intellectuals, and their family members who were considered part of the bourgeois.

⁸⁶ See for example, E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Random House, 1968); Louise Walker, *Waking from the Dream: Mexico’s Middle Class after 1968*; Víctor M Macías-González, “The Lagartijo at the High Life: Masculine Consumption, Race, Nation, and Homosexuality in Porfirian Mexico.”

The last terms refer to consumerism and commercialized spaces. Here, I conveniently borrow from Steven B. Bunker and Víctor M Macías-González who identified consumerism as, “The production, sale, acquisition, accumulation, and use of goods and services...that generates status, a sense of affinity predicated on the use of common objects, and feeds consumer fantasies and anxieties.”⁸⁷ Commercialized spaces, or places of consumption are just about any public institutions where consumerism and leisure activities can be obtained, such as markets, theatres, movie houses, coffeeshops, retail stores, drugstores, pharmacies, social clubs, and so on.

⁸⁷ Steven B. Bunker and Víctor M Macías-González, “Consumption and Material Culture from Pre-Contact through the Porfiriato,” 54.

Chapter I

Selling Modernity in Mexico City: Gender, Class, Leisure, and Consumerism at the American Drugstore, (1903-1946)

This chapter sketches a narrative of the early business history of Sanborns in Mexico City. It traces the commercial development of Sanborns by using business licenses, personal correspondences, advertisements, photographs, novels, company ephemera, and other print material. I argue that Sanborns shaped Mexican consumer culture by creating a unique commercial environment, one that appealed directly to local consumer tastes and the identities of its customers, while selling the allure for a foreign modernity. Gender and class influenced how men and women gathered at Sanborns and how they interacted with new forms of modern consumption and leisure culture. The store catered to the consumer demands of their elite customers by providing them with the latest trends in fashion, medicines, cosmetics, technologies, and foods and refreshments. Sanborns brought Mexicans into contact with a dazzling combination of U.S. and European forms of luxury goods and nightly spectacles that included music and dancing. Complementary store services such as the telephone booths and women's bathroom appealed directly to upper-class

women and their respectability. Areas of socialization and leisure entertainment provided middle-class and upper-class customers a chance to mingle with other men and women of similar elite backgrounds. People who went to Sanborns as customers used the store in different ways to negotiate and navigate power; the store served as platform where people performed their identities with each other. The company galvanized its legacy and social cachet as an elite national institution when Sanborns moved into one of Mexico City's most important and recognizable buildings, the *Casa de los Azulejos*, (House of Tiles), a place Sanborns still occupies today.¹ However, Sanborns often became the target of social criticism during its commercial development. The company's close association with the United States (and U.S. consumer culture more broadly), and its social exclusivity as a place reserved for Mexican elites and foreign visitors of Mexico created certain tensions related to class, gender, and nationalism.

Tracing the commercial rise of Sanborns through its first period in business under the ownership of the Sanborn brothers (1903-1946) reveals several layers of economic, political, social, and cultural change. What began as a modest U.S.-style drugstore founded during the Porfiriato (1876-1911), overcame the political and economic earthquakes caused by the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920) and World War I (1914-1918), emerging as one of Mexico City's foremost social institutions. Analyzing the history of Sanborns during this period helps understand how U.S.

¹ La Casa de los Azulejos is also known as El Palacio de los Azulejos, The House of Tiles, and also Casa Sanborns. See, Marqués de San Francisco, *The House of Tiles (La Casa de los Azulejos)* (Mexico: Bland Brothers Printers, 1922); "El Palacio de los Azulejos abre sus puertas," *Don Quijote*, 22 de octubre de 1919; "Huelga del Personal de la Casa Sanborn's," *El Nacional*, el 24 de octubre de 1948, 3.

affluence shaped Mexican consumer culture during the first half of Mexico's twentieth-century. The institution became an important intermediary connecting U.S. manufacturers with Mexico's markets.

This chapter builds on studies that examine urban consumerism, material culture, and everyday life in modern Mexico. Steven B. Bunker's analysis of Porfirian consumption examines different commercial institutions, "discourses of consumption," and also how individuals and groups "used the goods, practices, and spaces of urban consumer culture to construct meaning and identities" in Mexico.² Using Sanborns as a microcosm allows me to analyze changing developments in consumerism and technology across time and understand their specific relationship to gender, class, leisure and identity within a private commercial space. John Hart's study of U.S. investment in Mexico suggests that U.S. elites developed strategies for penetrating Mexican markets that were used in the American West. He shows that elites extended their power and influence by creating partnerships with local Mexican elites and multinationals.³ However, while U.S. capital and influence undoubtedly shaped Mexican society, businesses like Sanborns also required local knowledge about Mexican cultural and the consumer desires of its customers. As is explained more in depth in chapter three, Sanborns capitalized on the wave of nationalism that followed the Revolution and blended Mexican cultural aesthetics into their business operation.

Néstor García Canclini calls for a reinterpretation of consumption as a site, "that is good for thinking, where a good part of economic, sociopolitical, and psychological rationality is organized in all societies." In *Consumers and Citizens*, he notes that postmodern citizens and consumers have been

² Steven B. Bunker, *Creating Mexican Consumer Culture in the Age of Porfirio Díaz* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2012), 2-3.

³ John Mason Hart, *Empire and Revolution: The Americans in Mexico since the Civil War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002) 3-5.

impacted by economics, technologies, and cultural changes, and that increasingly, men and women perform their roles as citizens through the consumption of commodities.⁴ Inspired by García Canclini's research into globalization and multicultural conflicts in Latin American megacities, this study views Sanborns as a cultural industry, as a commercial site of contact where Mexican elites interacted with modern consumption and gained a sense of belonging and identity with each other.⁵

Sanborns did not operate in a vacuum. It was surrounded by other restaurants, coffee houses, department stores, hotels, pharmacies and drugstores. Though this chapter is primarily a top-bottom approach that helps explain the consumer culture of Mexico's upper-class within a single commercial institution, it tries to elaborate how the popularity of Sanborns and its unique business style also influenced Mexican society and consumer culture outside the store's walls. For example, in the 1920s, the Sanborns trade catalog *El Droguista Moderno* promoted their company as a leading innovator and sales agency that contributed to the modernization of Mexican drugstores.⁶ The Sanborns in-house products and the product lines it carried for over 30 U.S. companies entered other Mexican businesses and eventually the homes of Mexican consumers.⁷ Though it is outside the

⁴ Néstor García Canclini, preface to *Consumers and Citizens: Globalization and Multicultural Conflicts*, trans. George Yúdice (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 5.

⁵ Ibid., 20.

⁶ "Las posibilidades de una Droguería Moderna," *El Droguista Moderno: Revista Mensual de Droguería y Farmacia*, Tomo V, No. 4 (Abril, 1927), 6.

⁷ Sanborns. "Mercancía acreditada que todo droguista puede vender con una buena garantía." Advertisement. *El Droguista Moderno: La Revista Mensual de Droguería y Farmacia*, Tomo V. (Enero, 1927), 25.

range of scope for this study, future research should examine the social importance of drugstores and pharmacies in contributing to Mexico's consumer culture.⁸

Sanborns Arrives in Porfirian Mexico City

In the late 1890s, Walter D. Sanborn (1875-1950) a recent graduate from the University of California at Berkeley departed from his home in Los Angeles and headed to Mexico.⁹ He left behind his traveling sales positions at a china and glassware company and other drug firms to pursue his interest in recreational hunting.¹⁰ Like so many other young men from his generation brought up in the U.S. culture of rugged individualism, Sanborn wanted to prove his masculinity out in the wilderness.¹¹ These men may have followed the example set by President Theodore Roosevelt who

⁸ Drugstores and pharmacies were more accessible to the Mexican public than single department stores or exclusive retail stores like Sanborns. With numerous locations throughout major cities across Mexico, modern drugstores gave Mexicans access to a range of consumer goods and modern medicines.

⁹ Sanborn, Francis Hill. "Sanborn in Mexico." Sanborns Hermanos Scrapbook, 1960, 1. Archivo Sanborn Hermanos (hereafter ASH), Mexico City, Mexico. The letter indicates he graduated as a "pharmacist."

¹⁰ "Sanborn's – The Hub for Americans in Mexico City," *El Porvenir*, December, 15, 1935, 1.

¹¹ Donald A. Sanborn, Walter D. Sanborn Jr., and Dorothy Sanborn Walkup. "Sanborns in Mexico," unprinted manuscript. 1970s? Sanborn Scrapbook. ASH.

at the turn of the century promoted big game hunting with his Boone and Crockett Club.¹² Driven by the prospect of big game hunting and personal adventure in Mexico, Sanborn arrived in the city of Guadalajara in the state of Jalisco.¹³ He liked hunting in Mexico so much that he sought employment in a few German-owned drugstores just to support his hobby.¹⁴

By the time Sanborn relocated to Mexico City in the early 1900s, the economic conditions within the drug market experienced a dramatic change. In the nineteenth century, German merchants controlled a large share of Mexico's drug trade.¹⁵ Germans operated a number of drugstores and pharmacies in the capital city.¹⁶ However, by 1901, A Mexican journalist reported that commercial drugs and medicines exported from the United States had increased by six-hundred percent and were quickly replacing European imports.¹⁷ In fact, by the turn of the century, two-

¹² Michael S. Kimmel, *The History of Men: Essays on the History of American and British Masculinities*, (New York: State University of New York Press, 2005), 54.

¹³ Walter D. Sanborn Jr. to Donald Sanborn, April 1, 1979, ASH, Mexico City, Mexico.

¹⁴ Ibid; "Sanborn's – The Hub for Americans in Mexico City," 1.

¹⁵ Jürgen Buchenau, *Tools of Progress: A German Merchant Family in Mexico City, 1865-Present* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2004), 3.

¹⁶ Legajo de Revalidación de Licencias por Boticas durante el año 1922." Ayuntamiento de Gobierno del Distrito Federal. Licencias: Boticas y Droguerías. Vol. 3156. Archivo Histórico de la Ciudad de México (hereafter AHCM). The volume contains 131 files of companies that renewed their licenses during the year 1922. A few names listed as business owners are noticeably German, such as "Chemisch Pharmaceutische Fabrik," "Esther Troussrlad Vda de Heinze," to name just a few. The vast majority have common Mexican surnames.

¹⁷ "Varios Asuntos," *La Tierra de Mexico*, primera de octubre de 1901, 56.

thirds of all Mexican imports came from the United States.¹⁸ Sanborn capitalized on these developments and partnered with a druggist named Schmitz, who owned and operated a pharmacy called la Botica del Hospital Real.¹⁹ The men decided to open a drugstore together. In January 1902, The Secretary of the Government of the Federal District granted them a pharmaceutical license to operate La Botica Americana (The American Drugstore).²⁰ Located at 13 San Francisco Street (now Madero) near the Alameda central park in downtown Mexico City, the drugstore offered a line of patent medicines, chemicals, sundries, perfumes, toiletry items, and prescription service for customers.²¹

Some of the earliest advertisements for The American Drugstore appeared in the English section of *The Mexican Herald*. One ad asked readers to help “patronize the only American Drug Store in Mexico.”²² The ads tried reaching customers looking for the comfort and familiarity of U.S. drugstores. They advertised specifically to U.S. citizens living in Mexico and called for “every man, woman, boy and girl in town” to visit and find all “the accommodation of an up-to-date Drug Store

¹⁸ Buchenau, *Tools of Progress*, 52.

¹⁹ “The American Drug Store,” *The Mexican Herald*, June 19, 1903, 17.

²⁰ Fondo Ayuntamiento y Gobierno del Distrito, Boticas, vol. 1349, exp. 46, Tomo 1, Archivo Histórico de la Ciudad de México, (hereafter AHCM).

²¹ The American Drug Store. “The American Drug Store.” Advertisement. *The Mexican Herald*, April 13, 1903, 4.

²² The American Drug Store. “The American Drug Store.” Advertisement. *The Mexican Herald*, April 2, 1902, 4.

at home.”²³ Advertisements also emphasized the quality of freshly stocked drugs and assured readers that, “no better service or purer drugs than ours can be had at any price.”²⁴ In Mexico, ads for drugstores often boasted they were hygienic and pure. Another advertisement told readers to drop off their prescription with The American Drugstore because “This is the place to be sure of.”²⁵

In 1903, the relationship between Walter Sanborn and his business partner soured. After a year in business, the two owners made offers for the other’s share of the company. Sanborn apparently offered the highest bid, but he needed to borrow \$2,000 from his aunt in California to complete the buyout.²⁶ This was a fairly large sum of money at the time. A 1903 advertisement for a Mexican construction financing company offered customers new homes starting at \$1,000 pesos.²⁷ It is unclear whether Sanborn kept the business operating or sold his share to another associate, but by March, *The Mexican Herald* reported Sanborn was no longer associated with the drugstore.²⁸ Walter Sanborn still believed the moment was favorable for the establishment of American-style drugstore in Mexico. He wrote his brother Frank in California about it. Frank then spent the summer in

²³ The American Drug Store. “The American Drug Store.” Advertisement. *The Mexican Herald*, January 26, 1902, 4; The American Drug Store. “The American Drug Store.” Advertisement. *The Mexican Herald*, February 1, 1902, 2.

²⁴ The American Drug Store. “The American Drug Store.” Advertisement. *The Mexican Herald*, April 13, 1903, 4.

²⁵ The American Drug Store. “The American Drug Store.” Advertisement. *The Mexican Herald*, March 5, 1902, 5.

²⁶ Walter D. Sanborn Jr. to Donald Sanborn, April 1, 1979, ASH, Mexico City, Mexico. ASH.

²⁷ “Quiere ud. Casa o dinero barato?” Advertisement. *La Voz de México*, 23 de enero de 1903, 3.

²⁸ *The Mexican Herald*, Monday, March 16, 1903, 5.

Mexico City at which time the two agreed to become business partners.²⁹ In August 1903, the Sanborn brothers wrote the Government of the Federal District asking for a pharmaceutical license at 6 San Francisco Street, not far from his previous store. In September, the government approved the license and the Sanborns American Pharmacy opened for business.³⁰

The Sanborn brothers modeled their drugstore to appeal to Mexico's emerging consumer class and integrated themselves within Mexico City's bourgeois.³¹ Their store became a fixture within the urban landscape of Mexico City. The brothers involved themselves in local community affairs, playing an active role within the American Colony.³² William Schell Jr. described the group of U.S. expatriates living in Mexico as "integral outsiders" who formed an important economic relationship with the government of Porfirio Díaz (1876-1911).³³ For example, on November 28, 1903, the American Colony hosted an event called The Great Charity Ball. The elegant affair featured a colorful display of decorations illuminated by hundreds of incandescent lights. Flags from the United States, France, and Mexico draped from the ceiling. A color guard of 40 men displayed a flag

²⁹ Sanborn, Francis Hill. "Sanborn in Mexico." Sanborns Hermanos Scrapbook, 1960, 1. ASH.

³⁰ "Sanborn Bros, botica 1^a San Francisco n^o 6." Ayuntamiento del Gobierno de Distrito Federal, Boticas, Vol. 1349, exp. 46 Tomo 1, Años 1901-1903. AHCM.

³¹ Buchenau, *Tools of Progress*, 4.

³² Sanborn Bros. "127th Celebration of the Glorious Fourth of July by the American Colony," *The Mexican Herald*, June 29, 1904. The Sanborn brothers sold tickets at their store for the celebration. Expatriate U.S. citizens living in Mexico identified themselves as belonging to the "American Colony."

³³ William Schell Jr., *Integral Outsiders: The American Colony in Mexico City, 1876-1911* (Wilmington: SR Books Inc., 2001), x.

while a band played Mexico's national hymn. Later in the evening, the guest of honor arrived, President Porfirio Díaz. Guests in attendance included Walter Sanborn, Mexican government administrators, foreign dignitaries, military leaders, a military attaché from the American Embassy, and a delegation from Germany.³⁴ It was during the Porfiriato that the name Sanborn became associated with power and privilege among Mexico City's elites.³⁵

The Sanborns American Drugstore developed into a popular rendezvous for Mexico's upper class.³⁶ The drugstore competed successfully with over a hundred drugstores and pharmacies operating within the capital city. Sanborns offered customers a U.S.-style variation on the typical *boticas* and *droguerías* operating in the city.³⁷ Having their business established on a prominent thoroughfare in the heart of downtown Mexico City helped lure passing customers. Storefront window decorations displayed imported commodities to generate a public spectacle. Sanborns enticed customers by appealing to a foreign modernity based on imported technologies and

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ For further analysis, see chapter 2 of this dissertation.

³⁶ Letter from Frank Sanborn to his brother Walter Sanborn, July 8, 1914. Quoted from Carla Zarebska, *La Casa de los Azulejos* (México: Sanborns, 1999), 117. In the letter, Sanborn refers to his customers as "wealthy natives."

³⁷ See H.C. Collins, "Drug Stores in Mexico: Their Distinguishing Features and Methods of Doing Business," *Drug Trade Weekly*, Vol. 3 (January, 1920), 7. According to the article, boticas were typically smaller stores that sold retail drugs and compound prescriptions. They offered a small stock of merchandise. The exception was in small towns that might offer customers hardware, groceries, and dry goods. Boticas were less likely to have soda fountains. Droguerías are generally larger entities that offered both a wholesale and resale business.

consumer products from the United States and Europe.³⁸ This included U.S. pharmaceutical and household products that Sanborns sold at prices that undercut German vendors.³⁹ The company also incorporated a bicycle delivery service that saved time for customers who normally had to wait for the druggist to mix and prepare their medicines.⁴⁰

The Sanborn brothers designed their store to suit changing consumer tastes which local Mexican businesses had helped create. In the late 19th century, restaurants and coffeehouses proliferated along the downtown streets of Mexico City.⁴¹ Off of Plateros-San Francisco Street (now Madero), stood “El Globo” bakery, “La Europea” restaurant-candy shop- restaurant, and the French-styled Café Paris.⁴² Inaugurated across the street from the House of Tiles in 1900, Café Paris operated an ice cream parlor, soda fountain, confectionary department, and American-styled bar. “Attentive, and neatly dressed lady-waitresses,” offered customers pastries, ice creams, and fruit-syrups imported from the United States and Europe.⁴³ In order to appeal to Mexican consumer

³⁸ “Passing Day,” *The Mexican Herald*, May 1, 1904, 8. The Sanborn brothers routinely bought goods from cities outside of Mexico; Albert Avigdor, “Sanborn Hermanos: An American Drug Store in a Mexican Palace,” *Druggist’s Circular*, Vol. 83, Issue 12 (December, 1939), 19.

³⁹ Carle Hodge, “Mexico’s Mecca for Tourist Trade,” *Coronet*, Vol. 30 (August 1951), 148.

⁴⁰ “Bolsa de Trabajo,” *El Pais*, Domingo 18 de Junio de 1911, 4. “Se Solicita muchacho con bicicleta para repartidor, Ave. San Francisco 12. Farmacia Sanborn.”

⁴¹ Rangel, *La Casa de los Azulejos*, 102.

⁴² “El Restaurant de las Familias,” *El Democrata*, 14 de Octubre de 1919, 2.

⁴³ “The Café ‘Paris,’” *The Mexican Herald*, Wednesday November 28, 1900, 5. Incidentally, it is worth wondering if the Café Paris might have been a source of inspiration for how Walter and Frank Sanborn designed their own store, which featured similar interior decorating and store departments.

tastes, Sanborns needed to adopt local knowledge into their business model and adapt to the trends established by other businesses that were near them.

Sanborns owners also kept up with the trends established by U.S. drugstores.⁴⁴ In the early twentieth century, soda fountains in drugstores developed into important places of socialization across U.S. society.⁴⁵ In April 1910, the Sanborns business followed with these trends and imported from the United States a soda fountain of their own. The counter service and soda fountain became widely popular. The new department required fresh milk for ice cream that the company bought from local producers in large quantities. They then placed the dairy through a milk separator before they eventually streamlined production and purchased their own herd of Jersey cows to vertically integrate their supply chains.⁴⁶ Company owners emphasized this business strategy was a means to insure cleanliness, quality and taste in its products. With cakes, pastries, coffee, ice cream and fresh

The Café Paris was located at Plateros street No. 3 (now Madero Avenue) across the street from the Casa de los Azulejos.

⁴⁴ For the adoption of U.S. drugstore trends see, Avigdor, “Sanborn Hermanos,” 19; Rangel, *La Casa de los Azulejos*, 102.

⁴⁵ “A Chain Plus Personality,” 77; Mary Monk-Tutor, “On the First Day of My Sabbatical, I Woke Up in a Parking Lot...or, How I came to Write a Book about Drug Store Soda Fountains,” *Pharmacy in History*, Vol. 51, No. 3, Recent Trends in American Pharmacy (2009), 143-146.

⁴⁶ “Sanborns.” Company pamphlet. 1938? ASH.

milk from their own dairy farm, Sanborns stressed quality-controlled foods made on site for the Mexican residents and visiting tourists who frequented their stores.⁴⁷

The addition of the soda fountain established an area for socialization and a place for Mexicans to try American-styled foods and refreshments.⁴⁸ Salvador Novo wrote in one of his chronicles of Mexico City that, “the old Mexican custom of having an afternoon snack away from home would find an attractive appeal in the new coffee shops enriched with soda fountains where we learned to eat at the counter.”⁴⁹ Customers waiting on the druggist to make their medicines could mingle at the soda fountain and ask the soda jerk to pour them a cold carbonated beverage, soothing tonic, or ice-cream soda. The owners of Sanborns placed their soda fountain in the center of their store. The choice of location meant that customers drawn to the prescription department first had to pass the tempting drinks and sandwiches available at the lunch counter. Conversely, clients who went to Sanborns specifically for refreshments might wander around the store and purchase household goods or toiletry items stocked on the shelves.⁵⁰ An advertisement for Sanborns in *The Mexican Herald* on April 3, 1910 exemplified the company’s strategy for promoting the store’s

⁴⁷ Personal Letter from Francis Hill Sanborn to Donald A. Sanborn, “Sanborns in Mexico,” 1960. ASH.

⁴⁸ For a detailed analysis of Sanborns cuisine, see chapter 3.

⁴⁹ As quoted in Magdalena Escobosa de Rangel, *La Casa de los Azulejos: Reseña histórica del Palacio de los Condes del Valle de Orizaba* (México: San Ángel Ediciones, S.A., 1986), 108. “La vieja costumbre mexicana de merendar fuera de casa, hallaría atractiva, novedosa satisfacción en los nuevos cafés enriquecidos con fuentes de soda en que aprendemos a comer en mostrador...”

⁵⁰ Avigdor, “Sanborn Hermanos,” 20; “Ice Cream Soda at Sanborn’s,” *The Mexican Herald*, April 19, 1910, 7.

multiple departments. The ad for “Sanborn’s Positive Prescription Accuracy,” pictured a copper chafing dish available for sale. The company slogan, “Meet Me at the Fountain” appeared underneath the store location and telephone.⁵¹ Sanborns marketed their soda fountain as possessing “all the attractive features of the complete affair found in the States.” Their soda fountain was authentic and not to be confused with “the imitation schemes” found elsewhere.⁵² Sanborns appealed directly to customer desires for the authenticity of modern U.S. technology.

By December 1910, a month after the start of the Mexican Revolution, Sanborns opened their second location in downtown Mexico City, at 16 de Septiembre Avenue #12.⁵³ The new location also featured a soda fountain.⁵⁴ In January 1913, Sanborns opened a new branch in the port city of Tampico, Tamaulipas.⁵⁵ The following year, company owners sought additional floor space for its soda fountain department at the first Sanborns, at 12 San Francisco, annexing an adjoining building.⁵⁶ The additional space afforded room to establish a tearoom and *dulcería* (sweets shop) that served breakfasts, lunches, coffees, teas, chocolates, and ice cream.⁵⁷

⁵¹ “Sanborn’s Positive Prescription Accuracy,” *The Mexican Herald*, April 3, 1910, 2.

⁵² “Ice Cream Soda at Sanborn’s,” *The Mexican Herald*, April 19, 1910, 7.

⁵³ “Sanborns Hermanos.” Gobierno del Distrito: Boticas, vol. 1353, exp. 257. Año 1909-1911. AHCM.

⁵⁴ Letter from Francis Hill Sanborn to Donald A. Sanborn, “Sanborns in Mexico,” 1960. ASH; “Sanborns’ Mexico’s Foremost Pharmacies,” *The Mexican Herald*, Thursday, December 22, 1910, 2.

⁵⁵ Carla Zarebska, *La Casa de los Azulejos*, 116.

⁵⁶ “Sanborns’ Annex is Proving Popular,” *The Mexican Herald*, January 21, 1914, 3.

⁵⁷ “Society,” *The Mexican Herald*, April 5, 1914, 8; “A Business that Became a Social Institution,” *The American Exporter*, Vol 95. (September 1924), 35.

At Sanborns, customers filled their prescriptions and browsed for the latest innovations in consumer products that included Vaseline, perfumes, chocolates, pipes for smokers, patent medicines and other household remedies.⁵⁸ Company owners publicized their store as among the most important pharmacies operating in Mexico. More than anything else, Sanborns was a place where people socialized with others who shared similar tastes and class backgrounds. The company kept their motto of “Meet Me at the Fountain” until at least 1920.⁵⁹ During the Mexican Revolution, Sanborns continued publicizing their growing refreshments and soda fountain department that had evolved into a popular area of socialization.

The owners used local print media to circulate advertisements and favorable press coverage about their company. Representatives from Sanborns told journalists that the addition of their soda fountain department was largely responsible for the early profitability and popularity of their drugstore.⁶⁰ On January 21, 1914, after inaugurating their refreshment parlor, *The Mexican Herald* ran an article that sounded as though Sanborns publicists might have written it. The article boasted that the newly furnished parlor housed “the largest soda fountain in the republic,” with exactly fifty-one feet of space available. Customers could spend their leisure time either at a bar fixed with marble countertops or at the parlor tables with matching chairs.⁶¹ Sanborns owners placed a strong

⁵⁸ Vaseline Fenicada,” *El Pueblo*, 12 de Octubre de 1914; “Sanborns Mexico,” *El Pueblo*, 26 de Octubre de 1916, 4; “Sanborns Hermanos,” *El Pueblo*, el 8 de Diciembre de 1916, 4. “Electropodes: A New Electric Treatment,” *El Heraldo Mexicano*, 1º de enero de 1911, 6.

⁵⁹ “Meet me at the Fountain,” *The Mexican Herald*, Dec. 22, 1920, 2.

⁶⁰ “A Business that Became a Social Institution,” 35.

⁶¹ “Sanborns’ Annex is Proving Popular,” *The Mexican Herald*, 21 de enero de 1914, 3.

emphasis on the hygiene, modernity, comfort, attractiveness, and popularity of the store.⁶² By March, 1914, The Sanborns American Pharmacy was considered one of the top commercial houses in the capital.⁶³

Sanborns responded to changing economic conditions caused by the Mexican Revolution and World War I. Both events caused major disruptions in European supply chains heading to Mexico. The cancelation of European shipments as the result of World War I gave space for U.S. manufacturers to fill the void left by European manufacturers. Sanborns expanded their wholesale market of imported quantities of drugs, medicines, patent medicines and tonics exported from the United States.⁶⁴ The brothers developed their own trade networks with local producers in Mexico and U.S. manufacturers. In September 1914, Frank Sanborn wrote his brother Walter to report,

I do appreciate what the European war is doing to merchandise and we are not trying to sell what we have on hand. In fact we are trying to buy more locally when it can be had at fair prices. Have I told you I bought heavily of Bayers [*sic*] products, 5000 tubes of aspirin tablets being the main thing? Have also bought quinine, iodine, codeine, cocaine, morphine, cream tartar, soda, citric acid, etc. To say nothing of some thousand pounds of Westphalia ham for use in sandwiches...I try to buy some good merchandise and so make the value of the money safe. Many days I have tramped the town all day hunting for things I could buy with

⁶² Ibid; “Las Sodas con Helado de Sanborn Son Deliciosas,” *The Mexican Herald*, 4 de Mayo de 1915, 2. “El nombre de Sanborn es la mejor garantía de limpieza, cuidado y calidad. Tome sus refrescos en nuestra fuente Sanborn.”

⁶³ “El Concurso de Aparadores del ‘El Diario’ Se Abrira el Proximo Sábado de Gloria,” *El Diario*, 28 de Marzo de 1914, 4.

⁶⁴ Carla Zarebska, 145.

the money I wanted to spend...I would go to the Monte de Piedad and put it into diamonds to buy and have something.⁶⁵

The letter reveals Sanborns responded to the shortages of medical products and other supplies caused by the Mexican Revolution and World War I. The instability of Mexico's currency forced merchants to hedge their wealth by diversifying it in diamonds, gold and other precious metals. Sanborns reacted to trade disruptions by developing business relationships with local producers to augment their own shortages. The company made efforts to locate and stockpile Bayer products still available in Mexico City. The name brand recognition had developed to the extent that customers sought out Aspirin tablets.⁶⁶

Sanborns faced some criticism as it rose to prominence. In April 1916, two editorials appeared in *El Pueblo* and *Acción Mundial*. Both articles shared similar descriptions of the store, its customers and products, and brought attention to the elevated prices at the drugstore. Writing under the pseudonym Zig-Zag for *El Pueblo*, the author described Sanborns as a place “where you can buy an ice cream alongside a laxative, since most of the time after consuming the first you have to resort to the second if you do not want to enter the ring of fire.”⁶⁷ The author found it “impossible to

⁶⁵ Letter from Frank Sanborn to his brother Walter Sanborn, September 14, 1914, in Carla Zarebska, *La Casa de los Azulejos* (México: Sanborn Hermanos, 1999), 117.

⁶⁶ Bayer advertisements appeared frequently in Mexican newspapers. See for example, “Trancazo,” Bayer advertisement. *El Universal*, domingo 20 de abril de 1919.

⁶⁷ Zig-Zag, “La Casa Sanborn,” *El Pueblo*, 8 de abril de 1916, 3. “donde lo mismo puede adquirirse un helado que un purgante, cosa, por demás, muy explicable, ya que la mayoría de las veces después de consumir el primero hay que recurrir a la mayor brevedad al segundo, no quiere entrar por el aro.”

think there are humans in Mexico who dare to enter,” a place “with music, completely American manners, bad food, and absolutely no change” returned from purchased merchandise.⁶⁸ After criticizing the size of the pancakes and the \$3.00 “castor oil” coffee served in silver cups, the author concluded that it was the fault of the consumers for their continued loyalty to Sanborns that allowed certain “abuses” to continue there. According to the author, people kept going to the drugstore-restaurant-perfume store because, “the good public does not know how to defend themselves [and] go there en masse, fostering with their presence the avarice of the aforementioned commercial house.”⁶⁹ This criticism against Sanborns brought attention to some of the ways the company brought Mexicans in contact with high culture from the United States. It testified to the exclusivity and popularity of Sanborns among upper-class patrons who, despite the ongoing Revolution, used the store as a space of leisure.

Acción Mundial featured an article titled, “The foreign pharmacists want to rob us up until our language,” that criticized Sanborns, its expensive prices, and their customers. It stated that a reader wrote the editors claiming that he went to Sanborns to buy something that used to cost \$.75 but now cost \$18.00. However, when another Mexican merchant entered resembling, “one of the typical *fifis* of the establishment,” and asked for the same product in English, the company sold it to him for \$12.25.⁷⁰ The journalist recommended that unless the readers spoke English, they should not go to

⁶⁸ Ibid., “Los precios que allí se cobran son tan elevados, tanto, que parece imposible que haya en Mexico seres humanos que se atrevan a introducirse en el desplumadero con música, modales completamente americanos, comestibles malos y falta absoluta de cambio...”

⁶⁹ Ibid., “...que el buen público, que no sabe defenderse, concurre allí en masa, fomentando con su presencia la avaricia de la casa citada.”

⁷⁰ *Fifí* was a phrase used to describe an effeminate upper-class man.

Sanborns. This anecdote implied that the store gave preferential pricing to upper class Mexicans and English speakers. *Acción Mundial* suggested that people should visit La Droguería Azul instead, but that they might have to speak German! The article claimed that since its foundation, Sanborns has committed several “abuses” they considered harmful to Mexican society. It stated that Sanborns customers usually paid in dollars on sales items with non-negotiable prices. The journalist concluded that “this is to the detriment of our people who cannot pay the exaggerated prices.” They implored the Mexican government to intervene and regulate market prices to ensure that *el pueblo* “no longer suffers from weak stomachs, pains in the language, or from other worse things.”⁷¹ A month later, *El Demócrata* reported that Mexico City’s government had fined Sanborns \$50 pesos for “the unspeakable abuse of selling its drugs and articles at scandalously exaggerated prices.”⁷²

These editorials reveal that class tension and nationalism—which was very keenly felt across Mexico during and immediately after the Revolution—played a part in everyday interactions in Sanborns, just as it did everywhere else in society. Furthermore, Sanborns may have been an easy target for these class frustrations because it was so closely associated with the United States. The exclusivity of Sanborns meant that only a privileged few could access the range of imported consumer products made available in the commercial space.

⁷¹ “La Droguería Sanborns,” *Acción Mundial*, 28 de abril de 1916, 2. “llego otro marchante, mexicano, uno de tantos fifís muy de la casa, y simplemente porque pidió el artículo mismo en inglés, se lo dieron en \$12.25...esto redundo en perjuicio de nuestro pueblo que no puede pagar los precios exagerados de la citada casa...pues si el pueblo ya no sufre tanto de flaqueza de estómago, si sufre de dolores en el idioma, o de otras cosas peores.”

⁷² “Fue multada una empresa de teléfonos,” *El Demócrata*, 23 de mayo de 1916, 5. “Pues por el abuso incalificable de vender sus drogas y artículos escandalosamente exagerados.”

Sanborns and la Casa de los Azulejos

As Sanborns continued their commercial expansion and rise in popularity, they would eventually move into their flagship location that they still occupy today in the House of Tiles. Moving into the House of Tiles cemented their legacy as one of Mexico City's most prestigious rendezvous for Mexico's high society. Situated on the corner of the Callejón de la Condesa and Madero Avenue, the House of Tiles stands as one of Mexico City's most important and recognizable historical landmarks. The building is located along a central thoroughfare that connects the historic downtown's main commercial and business district between el Zócalo and what is now Eje Central.

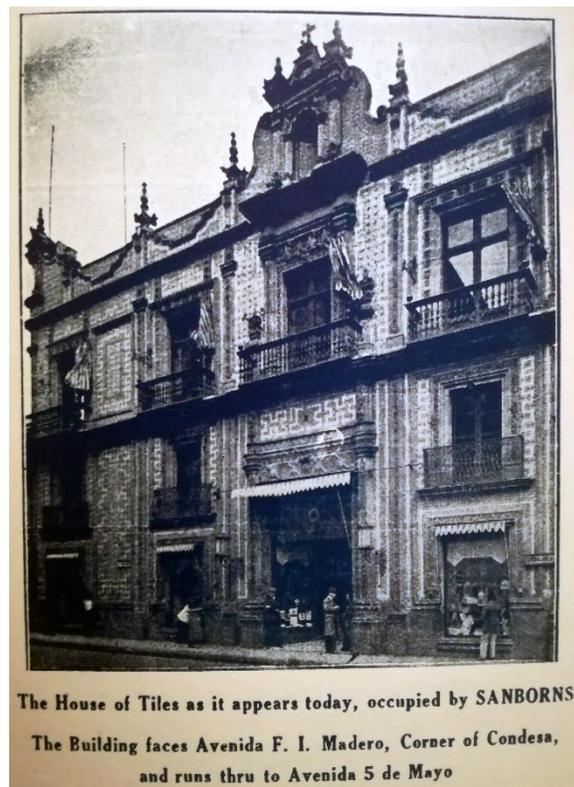


Figure 2: Sanborns in The House of Tiles as it appeared in 1936. Marqués de San Francisco, *The House of Tiles (La Casa de los Azulejos)* (Mexico: Bland Brothers Printers, 1936), 3.

According to Ageeth Sluis, during the Porfiriato (1876-1911), Madero Street “functioned as a stage where the elite performed their identity as *gente decente*.” The wealthy flaunted their respectability through consumerism and shopped at modern department stores, dined in restaurants,

and wore the latest fashion trends.⁷³ As Steven H. Bunker shows, Porfirian Mexico embraced the “allure of the foreign” culture emanating from Western Europe and the United States. The consumer tastes of wealthy Mexicans were shaped in part by imported technologies, arts, and entertainment.⁷⁴ These trends continued into the twentieth century. Downtown Mexico City also featured amenities such as telephones, street lamps, and modern plumbing that made leisure activities all the more comfortable.⁷⁵

The House of Tiles symbolized the capital city’s colonial foundation and represents a synecdoche for Mexico’s long history as a middle ground for global commodity flows.⁷⁶ The 16th century Baroque architecture stands decorated with beautiful blue, white, and yellow glazed tiles.⁷⁷ According to Marqués de San Francisco, the tiles on the building were most likely manufactured in

⁷³ Ageeth Sluis, *Deco Body, Deco City: Female Spectacle & Modernity in Mexico City, 1900-1939* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016), 5.

⁷⁴ Steven H. Bunker, *Creating Mexican Consumer Culture in the Age of Porfirio Díaz* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2014), 8.

⁷⁵ Víctor Maximino Martínez Ocampo, “Los restaurantes en la ciudad de México en la segunda mitad del siglo XIX, 1869-1910,” (Tesis de Licenciado, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2015), 146.

⁷⁶ Marqués de San Francisco, *The House of Tiles (La Casa de Los Azulejos)*, 22-27; Magdalena Escobosa de Rangel, *La Casa de los Azulejos*, 72-74.

⁷⁷ For a detailed history of the House of Tiles see, Escobosa de Rangel, *La Casa de los Azulejos*; and Marques de San Francisco, *The House of Tiles (La Casa de Los Azulejos)* (México: Bland Brothers, 1936); Carla Zarebska, *La Casa de los Azulejos* (México: Sanborn Hermanos, S.A., 1999).

Puebla.⁷⁸ Dominican friars brought pottery over from Talavera de la Reina and established industries in the Mexican state that produced cups and dishes. In 1653, with the industry booming, manufacturers began producing decorative glazed tiles. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, large quantities of Chinese articles imported into Mexico challenged Spanish manufacturers. The Moors introduced the *azulejos*, or glazed tiles into Spain. As de San Francisco notes, the Casa de los Azulejos resembles a *mujedar* building, which was a “system of ornamentation that sprung from the mixture of northern and Mohammedan motifs [*sic*], and which was greatly in vogue among converted Moors.”⁷⁹

The House of Tiles represents the legacy of Mexico City’s elite power structure. Sanborns promotional material stressed the significance of occupying a building once inhabited by a series of aristocrats that included the Counts of the Valley of Orizaba, Don Rafael de la Torre, and Don Sebastián de Mier.⁸⁰ In the early 1890s, The House of Tiles housed the headquarters of the Jockey Club, a society composed of distinguished members from Mexico City’s upper echelon that William H. Beezley called “the center of Mexican gentlemanly activity.”⁸¹ This male-only space represented a

⁷⁸ The historian Marqués de San Francisco authored a short history of The House of Tiles that was translated into English and printed in pamphlet form. Originally published in 1921, *The House of Tiles* had at least 11 editions.

⁷⁹ Marqués de San Francisco, *The House of Tiles (La Casa de Los Azulejos)* (México: Bland Brothers, 1936), 24-25.

⁸⁰ “La Casa de los Azulejos,” Sanborns company brochure. 2015? Today, company brochures are still available inside the Sanborns at the House of Tiles in Mexico City.

⁸¹ William H. Beezley, *Judas at the Jockey Club and Other Episodes of Porfirian Mexico* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987), 30.

symbol of modern splendor during the Porfiriato. Salvador Novo described the club as reserved for “a tight-knit group of Porfirian *científicos*.” The House of Tiles stands on “the endpoint of the elegant promenade” that connected “from the doors of La Sorpresa to the corner of the Jockey Club.”⁸² Novo was quoting a famous line written by the Mexican poet Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera, who went by the pseudonym “El Duque Job,” no doubt a play on words for the upper-class club he regularly frequented. This highly privileged place of homosocial leisure was where Mexican elites gathered and drank bottles of burgundy, smoked, played cards, bowled, bathed, and lounged in cushioned armchairs padded with Russian leather.⁸³ In locating their headquarters within the House of Tiles, the Jockey Club had established a link between the social and political hierarchy that was long associated with the existing architecture.⁸⁴

The Jockey Club abandoned the House of Tiles during the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920). The building stood vacant for a few years. In the fall of 1915, leaders from the *Casa de Obrero Mundial* (House of the World Worker), an anarcho-syndicalist group that promoted the rights of workers,

⁸² Salvador Novo, *Nueva Grandeza Mexicana: Ensayo sobre la Ciudad de México y sus Alrededores* (México: Populibros La Prensa, 1956), 16. “...Y antes de ser lo que es, alojó a un *Jockey Club* de los “apretados” científicos que era el punta final del ‘flaneo’ elegante de un Duque Job que lucía su flor y su puro ‘desde las puertas de La Sorpresa, hasta la esquina del Jockey Club’.”

⁸³ Escobosa de Rangel, *La Casa de los Azulejos*, 95-96; Luis Correa Sarabia, “Homo Sanborns,” *Novedades*, 27 de Mayo de 1956.

⁸⁴ Gerard Rey A. Lico, “Architecture and Sexuality: The Politics of Gendered Space,” *Humanities Diliman* (January-June, 2001) 2:1, 30.

occupied the House of Tiles.⁸⁵ Venustiano Carranza allied with the radical party and ceded the use of the building that briefly served as their party headquarters and a workplace for various tailors, shoemakers, and masons.⁸⁶ The group disappeared from the political scene in 1916.⁸⁷ Once again, the House of Tiles lay vacant and in disrepair until the Sanborn brothers sensed a business opportunity to expand the floor space of their drugstore. In 1917, the Sanborn brothers signed a twenty-year lease with the owner of the building, the Iturbide family.⁸⁸ The new headquarters provided the Sanborn owners with room for considerable expansion.

The Sanborn brothers needed permission from Mexico City's Department of Public Works to modify the building's architecture for their drugstore. They hoped to cover the patio with a glass ceiling, lower the windowsills to fit their displays, and convert a window on the existing façade into an entrance on 5 de Mayo Avenue.⁸⁹ However, the proposed modifications were met by public resistance. The strongest criticism came from The Association of Engineers and Architects. They raised alarm about the "destructive work" planned for the House of Tiles, "that in a few days, it is feared that one of the most interesting, typical, and valuable building in the city... will disappear

⁸⁵ John Lear, *Workers, Neighbors, and Citizens: The Revolution in Mexico City* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), 233.

⁸⁶ Agustín Barrios Gómez, "La Casa de los Azulejos," *El Informador*, Domingo el 28 de Agosto de 1994, 5-A.

⁸⁷ Escobosa de Rangel, *Casa de los Azulejos*, 102.

⁸⁸ H.C. Collins, "Drug Stores in Mexico: Their Distinguishing Features and Methods of Doing Business," *Drug Trade Weekly*, Vol. 3 (January, 1920), 8; Carla Zarebska, *La Casa de los Azulejos*, 122.

⁸⁹ Rangel, *Casa de los Azulejos*, 103.

forever.”⁹⁰ They argued that the love of one’s country was based on history and past traditions, and that colonial monuments represented “the highest manifestations of beauty” and the “national soul,” which were being made victims of mutilation “for the sake of profit and a false notion of beauty.”⁹¹ Public complaints received by the Director of Historical Monuments proposed that instead, the government should acquire the building and turn it into a colonial museum, or use it as the offices for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “thus saving it from the opprobrium of being a commercial establishment.”⁹² The pushback shows that certain tensions existed about U.S. citizens occupying a building that represented a part of Mexico’s identity. Despite this protest, the Sanborn brothers received their necessary approval. On October 25, 1918, following a year-long period of interior decorating and remodeling, the company formally requested a business license from Mexico City’s municipal government to operate an ice cream parlor, café, and restaurant on the bottom floor of the House of Tiles.⁹³

As described in the introductory chapter, Sanborns held their formal inauguration inside the House of Tiles on October 11, 1919. The company owners personally invited groups of

⁹⁰ Quote from Rangel, *Casa de los Azulejos*, 103. “obra destructora del Palacio de los Azulejos, la cual es de tal intensidad, que en unos cuantos días se teme haya desaparecido para siempre uno de los edificios más interesantes, típicos y valiosos...con que cuenta la ciudad.”

⁹¹ Ibid. “porque son las más elevadas manifestaciones de la belleza...en fin, son el alma nacional...El mal de la fiebre demoledora ha cundido por afán de lucro y una falsa noción de la belleza.”

⁹² Ibid., “

⁹³ “S. Hermanos Restaurant y desea agregar a su giro nevería y café.” Ayuntamiento y Gobierno del Distrito. Licencias. Vol. 3141. Exp. 15322, 1918. AHCM.

distinguished families to dine in the restaurant.⁹⁴ *Don Quijote* reported that a crowd of the capital's high society, "that always gather in comfortable and elegant places could not wait to enter," and that at one moment it was impossible to go through the doors.⁹⁵ One estimate suggested over 6,000 people visited the store in a single day.⁹⁶ Reporters noticed how the historic patio now served as the Sanborns dining salon.



Figure 3: Photo taken during the inauguration of Sanborns in the House of Tiles on October 11, 1919. Unknown photographer. Archivo Sanborn Hermanos.

⁹⁴ "La Casa de Los Azulejos Convertida en un Palacio de Cuento de Hadas," *El Heraldo de México*, 12 de octubre de 1919.

⁹⁵ "El Palacio de los Azulejos abre sus puertas," *Don Quijote*, 22 de Octubre, 1919. "...y ya sociedad capitalina que siempre se dá cita en los sitios donde se ofrece confort y elegancia no se hizo esperar y fue aquello un desborde de concurrencia."

⁹⁶ "La Casa de Los Azulejos Convertida en un Palacio de Cuento de Hadas," *El Heraldo de México*, 12 de Octubre de 1919.

Sanborns also planned to renovate the second floor of the House of Tiles to include an elegant tea salon and ballroom that could facilitate 200 couples.⁹⁷ Sanborns provided customers with a clean, hygienic, well-lit, and modern interior space for their shopping and entertainment needs.⁹⁸

Armando de Maria y Campos, the Mexican writer of theater and popular culture penned a satirical article about the inauguration for *Mefistófeles*. It offered a critique of the event's social significance and its cultural meaning. He described the seduction Sanborns provided as a "lordly mansion" that sold, "charming expensive nonsense that the woman cannot deprive of, like perfume bottles with beaded glass, and boxes of candies gushing with blue and pink ribbons."⁹⁹ He depicted what the salon looked like at six o'clock, a "time when it seems that the rainbow stops in the patio of a site so worldly and distinguished, with women dressed with their seven nuances."¹⁰⁰ Men and women of distinction sat packed together around the cloth-lined tables set in between Churrigueresque-styled columns. The most distinguished of guests sat in the booths aligning the

⁹⁷ "The Opening of Sanborn's," *Revista para todos*, 2 de noviembre de 1919, 29; "La Casa de los Azulejos fue Inaugurada ayer." *Excelsior*, Domingo 12 de octubre de 1919, 7.

⁹⁸ "Apertura de la Casa Sanborn," newspaper clipping. 1919? ASH.

⁹⁹ Armando de Maria y Campos, "La Vida en México," *Mefistófeles*, 13. Octubre 30 de 1919, 13. "En el vestíbulo de la señorial mansión [sic] se halla una sala donde se venden las encantadoras tonterías caras de que [sic] no pueden privarse las mujeres. Es decir, perfumes collares de vidrios y cajitas de golosinas chorreando listones azules o rosas."

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. "...la impresión pictórica de lo que es la Casa Sanborn's [sic] a las [sic] a las seis de la tarde, hora en que parece que el arco iris se detiene en el patio del sitio este tan mundano y tan distinguido, para vestir a las mujeres con sus siete matices."

exterior walls and were served by young Sanborns waitresses.¹⁰¹ De Maria y Campos described the uniforms worn by the Sanborns waitresses. “In the midst of the atmosphere of originality and good taste, it is shocking that the lady waitresses are uniformed with those insipid and discolored gowns,” he said. He proposed that the management uniform them instead like *pajecillos* (servants for the king), “with stockings striped with red or white, gold or green, and colorful wigs.”¹⁰² The comment criticized the stark class distinctions between the aristocratic guests dining there and the working-class women who were serving them.

Some critics were displeased Sanborns occupied the former headquarters of the Jockey Club. What was once a space reserved only by Porfirian gentlemen had been transformed into a rendezvous place that included people of both sexes. *El Herald de Mexico* ran a front-page article the day after the inauguration that said, “under the colonial coffered ceilings in which modernism already puts its invading note, all of the arrogant aristocratic women want the Jockey Club from now on to be the rendezvous of the metropolitan society.”¹⁰³ In 1924, Salvador Novo lamented his displeasure in *El Universal Ilustrado*:

Oh, the end of The Duque Job! Marqués de San Francisco, you who knows when and why they turned the house of other marquises in the Jockey Club into a soap store! I also deplore the [paintings of] peacocks and the wet nurse uniforms of those who serve us the medicinal

¹⁰¹ Armando de Maria y Campos, “La Vida en México,” *Mefistófeles*, 13. octubre 30 de 1919,13.

¹⁰² Ibid. “En medio del ambiente de originalidad y de buen gusto, choca que las señoritas meseras estén uniformadas con esas batas insípidas y descoloridas. Nosotros propondríamos que la Gerencia las uniformara de pajecillos, con los mallones listados a rojo y blanco, a oro y verde, y con las pelucas a colores.”

¹⁰³ “La Casa de Los Azulejos Convertida en un Palacio de Cuento de Hadas,” *El Herald de México*

ice creams. I wish there wasn't this glass ceiling or that chessboard floor... However, you are accused, Marqués, of talking there on the telephone, buying Gillette's, and greeting those who block the door and then sipping tea on the uncarved tables.¹⁰⁴

These forms of social criticisms linked the presence and physical appearance of upper-class women patrons and working-class female employees as part of the modernist transformation of the House of Tiles. Gender and modernity worked together to alter the building's social and historical meaning. Sanborns commodified the bodies of their female employees to give its customers the perception that the store belonged to Mexico's pre-revolutionary past.¹⁰⁵ These social critiques have shown that the uniforms worn by Sanborns waitresses became identifiable symbols that represented the company.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ "Sanborn's," Salvador Novo, *El Universal Ilustrado*, 3 de julio de 1924, 33. Reprinted in Jorge Cuesta, Salvador Novo, Jaime Torres Bodet, Xavier Villaurrutia, *Los Contemporáneos en El Universal* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2016), 222. "¡Oh, término del Duque Job! ¡Marqués de San Francisco, vos que sabéis cuándo y por qué se tornó de casa de otros marqueses en Jockey Club y luego en tienda de jabones! Yo también deploro los pavos reales y el traje de nodriza de quien nos sirve los helados medicinales. Quisiera que no hubiera este techo de vidrios ni ese piso de ajedrez... Sin embargo, se os acusa, marqués, de hablar allí por el teléfono, de comprar Gillettes, de saludar a quienes obstruyen la puerta y de sorber después el té en una mesa no tallada..."

¹⁰⁵ For a more in-depth analysis of the Sanborns waitress uniforms, see chapter 3 of this dissertation.

¹⁰⁶ This observation was inspired by Donica Belisle, *Retail Nation: Department Stores and the Making of Modern Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011), 109-124. Belisle shows how Canadian department stores commodified their workers by turning them into advertisements.

By relocating into the House of Tiles, Sanborns had inherited a space of power and masculinity that held deep social and cultural meaning. The store helped bridge Mexico's Porfirian past and the memories of its colonial foundation into an emerging modernizing Mexico. One observer noted that when Sanborns opened in the House of Tiles, they attached their company to the memories of a colonial landmark, "already famous for the fragments of Mexican history which it evoked."¹⁰⁷ The company marketed the history of the House of Tiles extensively within their advertisements in Mexico's print media.¹⁰⁸

Moving into the House of Tiles provided Sanborns an opportunity to showcase the latest global trends in art, food, music, and leisure entertainment available in their modern all-purpose retail store. The company maintained at its core a U.S.-style drugstore that held an important commercial position in Mexico City. Sanborns carried medical and beautifying products along with wholesale merchandise it distributed on behalf of over thirty U.S. companies.¹⁰⁹ Brands such as

¹⁰⁷ "A Business that became a Social Institution," 35.

¹⁰⁸ See for example, "Palacio de los Azulejos." Sanborns advertisement. *Revista de Revistas*, Año X. Núm. 484. (Agosto, 1919); Marqués de San Francisco, *La Casa de los Azulejos* (México: Bland Brothers Printers, 1922); "La Casa de los Azulejos (The House of Tiles)." Sanborns company brochure. 2015?

¹⁰⁹ Sanborns. "Mercancía acreditada que todo droguista puede vender con una buena garantía." Advertisement. *El Droguista Moderno: La Revista Mensual de Droguería y Farmacia*, Tomo V. (enero, 1927), 25; "Solicitud de los Sres. Sanborns Bros S.A. para establecer en la Casa No. 4 de la Av. Francisco I Madero un The Danzan." *Diversiones públicas*, vol. 808, exp. 1412, 1921. Archivo Histórico de la Ciudad de México. The letterhead used by Sanborns included the names of the different companies it distributed for that included: Auto Strop Safety Razor Company, Lederle

Colgate, Maybelline, Gillette, and Lydia E. Pinkham vegetable composites lined the store shelves. Sanborns exploited the relationship it held with U.S. pharmaceutical and manufacturing companies in order to promote the expansion of their wholesaling and manufacturing business. By the mid-1920s, Sanborns produced their own line of household products that included cough drops, perfumes, beauty creams, and aromatic oils.¹¹⁰ Writing about his company's ambitious goals, Frank Sanborn wanted, "every drugstore in the Republic to have in their inventory every article that we represent." The company reportedly called each of their vendors to explain the properties contained within each of their products; they offered advice on how to arrange and advertise their merchandise, and even guaranteed them sales.¹¹¹ Company owners envisioned their store becoming a national distributor of their wholesaling and retailing line. They promoted their company as a leading innovator and sales agency that contributed to the modernization of Mexican drugstores. Their advertisements reached across a variety of Mexico's print media outlets to reach a larger and

Antioxin Laboratories, Chesbrough manufacturing Company, Lydia E. Pinkham Medicine Company, American Chicle Company, Lambert Pharmacal Co., Horlick's Malted Milk Co., The Peruna Company, Maybell Laboratories and many others.

¹¹⁰ Sanborns. "Sanborn Hnos., S.A." Advertisement. *El Droguista Moderno: La Revista Mensual de Droguería y Farmacia*, Tomo II (Julio, 1925), 1.

¹¹¹ As quoted in, Carla Zarebska, *La Casa de los Azulejos*, 148. "Queremos que cada droguería de la república tenga en su inventario cada artículo que representamos. Por eso llamamos a cada uno de nuestros vendedores, les explicamos las propiedades de cada producto, les enseñamos a arreglar sus vitrinas, les colgamos sus anuncios y les garantizamos la venta de cada mercancía comprada a nosotros."

diverse group of readers and business owners.¹¹² Sanborns helped U.S. manufacturers access Mexico's consumer culture by establishing a commercial link that connected them with Mexican customers.

Some Mexican merchants exploited the name brand recognition of Sanborns and displayed the company's name on their signs and advertisements to draw in customers of their own. A 1920s photograph attributed to Hugo Brehme depicted a cigarette and ice cream stand called *Sanbornsito* (little Sanborns) in the colonia Santa María la Ribera in Mexico City.¹¹³ Tobacco products and ice cream were two popular commodities Sanborns offered customers at the House of Tiles.¹¹⁴

¹¹² See for Example, *Revista de Revistas: El Semanario Nacional*, Año XII, Núm. 562 (13 de Febrero de 1921). The colorful artwork Sanborns used for its catalog shows similarities with the work of García Cabral who drew the covers for *Revista de Revistas*. See also, Sanborns Mexico. "Crema Favorita 'Adorable'," advertisement. *Revista de Revistas*, Domingo, 21 de Marzo de 1920; The Peruna Company. "Peruna," advertisement. *Revista de Revistas*, 1° de Agosto de 1920, 21.

¹¹³ Carla Zarebska, *La Casa de los Azulejos*, 136.

¹¹⁴ For more on ice cream, see chapter 3 of this dissertation.



Figure 4: A woman is shown walking past a merchant working in a business stall called “Sanbornsito.” Hugo Brehme. 1920s? Colección Lucila de Casasola. Reprinted in Carla Zarebska, *La Casa de los Azulejos*, 136.

In fact, during the 1920s-1930s, a man with dwarfism named “Panchito” dressed in a sombrero and charro outfit sold cigarettes to dining customers in the tea room.¹¹⁵ His presence in the restaurant became so iconic that images of him appeared in Sanborns postcards, menus, and other advertising material.¹¹⁶ A small independently-owned restaurant alongside a coastal waterfront in Mexico advertised their locale called “Samborns.” An undated photograph of the place appeared in the Sanborns company archive. A painted white sign hung underneath a metal-sheeted roofed restaurant that read, “Samborns, The best restaurant that sells the cheapest food. It’s the most ventilated and

¹¹⁵ See Rangel, *La Casa de los Azulejos*, 107;

¹¹⁶ “Sanborns Thanksgiving Dinner.” Sanborns Restaurant Menu. Mexico City, November 28, 1929. ASH; “Sanborn Hnos. Scrapbook.” Unpublished material compiled by Donald A. Sanborn. 1988. ASH; “Sanborns Souvenir,” Company booklet. 1939. ASH; “Post Card.” Propiedad Artística de Hugo Brehme, *Fotógrafo Av. 5 de Mayo 27.* 1920s? ASH. Postcard.

has the best service. Property of Che Zamudio.”¹¹⁷ The low-quality of the image suggests that whoever photographed the locale specifically wanted to document the restaurant imitating the Sanborns name. In another instance, a 1944 Jalisco edition of *El Informador* featured an advertisement for *Club Deportivo Jalisciense*, an establishment in downtown Guadalajara. This modern upper-class café and restaurant provided a “Sanborns of Mexico styled breakfasts.” The club marketed their “beautiful place of distinction for women and gentlemen,” as a place where people could play pool, eat at a Hollywood-style bar, and rest before watching a film.¹¹⁸ These economically and geographically distinct businesses: a working-class street stand in Mexico city; an independently-owned restaurant in a coastal city, and an upper-class club in Guadalajara; collectively demonstrate how the commercial notoriety of Sanborns was nationally known. Its brand name became synonymous with excellence and quality. These businesses provided the illusion of having Sanborns-style quality of their own for customers who could not necessarily experience or get close to the real Sanborns of Mexico City.

¹¹⁷ “Sanborn Hnos. Scrapbook.” Unpublished material compiled by Donald A. Sanborn. 1988. ASH. The caption under the photograph reads, “Veracruz? Tampico? A Sanborns store ‘ripoff’ [.] The Sign reads: SAMBORNS 1a casa que vende mas [*sic*] baratos sus comidas/La mas [*sic*] ventilada y mejor atendida Prop. Che Zamudio. (Definitely not a part of Sanborns Hnos!).”

¹¹⁸ “Club Deportivo Jalisciense.” Advertisement. *El Informador*, Domingo 11 de Agosto de 1944, 4. “Bello Lugar de distinción para damas y caballeros. Café y restaurant. Desayunos estilo Sanborns de México.”

The Gendering of Space inside “the Rendezvous of Society,” 1914-1940

Sanborns owners marketed their store as a gathering place for men and women. However, evidence shows that the business placed a stronger emphasis promoting their store as a comfortable place for female customers. One of the ways store owners drew in customers was by publicizing their store as benefiting the entire public.¹¹⁹ Over the years, the company hosted several charitable events and organized special luncheons and conferences that benefited groups such as The ladies of the Red Cross Society, The American Chamber of Commerce, and the American Colony.¹²⁰ The Sanborn brothers also donated to charities that created institutions for underprivileged children.¹²¹ Similar to other department stores found across the industrialized world, these public events bolstered the reputation of commercial spaces as places that gave back to the local community and signaled how retailers used paternalism to manage their businesses.¹²²

Throughout the 1910s and 1940s, gender and class worked together in defining spaces of socialization within Sanborns in Mexico City. The store had identifiable spaces that were gendered. Men and women comingled in the restaurant, pharmacy, and refreshment salon, whereas other store departments were marked specifically by gender. Sanborns also hired a predominately female

¹¹⁹ “Sanborns.” Sanborns advertisement. *El Demócrata: El Constitucionalista diario*, 31 de Agosto de 1919, 8. “Sanborns no omitirá nunca. Sacrificios en beneficio del público para el despacho exacto y escrupuloso de las recetas que se le confían.”

¹²⁰ “Society,” *The Mexican Herald*, Sunday, April 5, 1914, 8; “Anglo-American Notes,” *El Universal*, 20 de Junio de 1922, 8; “New Chiefs at Chamber Lunch,” *Excelsior*, August 11, 1921. ASH.

¹²¹ “Para el ‘Hogar-Escuela de Niños Desvalidos,” *El Nacional*, 27 de diciembre de 1918, 3.

¹²² Donica Belisle, *Retail Nation: Department Stores and the Making of Modern Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011). See chapter 3.

workforce who filled all sorts of service and managerial positions (chapter 4). The presence of working and upper-class women all over the store showed that Sanborns feminized their retail space to draw in Mexican customers.¹²³



Figure 5: Women photographed in front of the Sanborns Ladies Shop in the House of Tiles. “Sanborns Souvenir.” Company booklet, 1938. Archivo Sanborn Hermanos.

Sanborns promoted their store as an area of socialization specifically for women, and they encouraged customers to use their free telephone service. An advertisement from 1914 announced that, “Every Day is Ladies Day at Sanborns.” The owners hoped that women would use their store as a “meeting place when down town shopping,” and encouraged women to “Use our phones. Meet

¹²³ Donica Belisle, *Retail Nation: Department Stores and the Making of Modern Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011). Belisle argues that Canadian department stores influenced the “feminization of retail labor” and that female employees were essential for why Canadian women became customers.

your friends here.”¹²⁴ By the turn of the century, La Compañía Telefónica Mexicana operated the largest telephone system in Mexico City, and their phone directories included businesses such as el Banco Nacional de Londres y México, Roberto Boker y Compañía and El Puerto de Liverpool.¹²⁵ Having a telephone subscription placed Sanborns alongside other elite merchants operating in the capital.

Telephones became essential services for businesses in Mexico. In 1923, Sanborns launched a monthly illustrated magazine called *El Droguista Moderno* (The Modern Druggist), that targeted an audience of pharmacists and druggists operating throughout Mexico.¹²⁶ The trade catalog featured articles and editorials designed to help drugstore owners modernize their business practices. Readers learned about modern sales techniques, how to manage relationships between bosses and employees, the ways to effectively advertise their store merchandise in their display cabinets. In an article describing the possibilities of a modern drugstore, the catalog suggested drugstores could serve as “commercial centers” for passing customers.¹²⁷ From inexpensive jewelry and clocks to metal cleaners and cosmetics, the corner drugstore could serve as everyday retail stores offering a variety

¹²⁴ “Everyday is Ladies Day at Sanborns,” *The Mexican Herald*, February 4, 1914.

¹²⁵ José Mario Contreras Valdez, Pablo Serrano Alvarez, *Actividades, espacios e instituciones económicas durante la Revolución Mexicana*. (México: DGAPA/UNAM, 2004), 66-67. I want to thank Susie Porter for her leading me to this source.

¹²⁶ “El Droguista Moderno,” *El Droguista Moderno*, Tomo IV. No. 5 (Mayo, 1926), 38. “Revista Ilustrada, está dedicada al fomento de los negocios de Droguería y Farmacia. Se publica mensualmente por Sanborn Hnos., S.A., F. I. Madero No. 4, México.”

¹²⁷ “Las posibilidades de una Droguería Moderna,” *El Droguista Moderno: Revista Mensual de Droguería y Farmacia*, Tomo V, No. 4 (Abril, 1927), 6.

of consumer products apart from regular prescription medicines. Articles suggested drugstore owners provide customers with a public telephone and other amenities.¹²⁸ As Néstor García Canclini notes, telephones became parts of the daily comforts in a modern life. Having a telephone made Latin Americans “feel like privileged inhabitants of modernity.”¹²⁹ Sanborns provided customers access to a complementary telephone which gave people another reason to enter their store. It is less known whether other merchants in Mexico City provided free telephones for customer use. However, evidence shows that elite customers went to Sanborns specifically to use their telephone.¹³⁰ Having a free public telephone for customers helped Sanborns brand their store as the home away from home for their elite clientele.

Sanborns promotional material described the different store departments that were dedicated to women. In the 1920s, Sanborns opened their “Ladies Ready to Wear” department and a powder room.¹³¹ An American woman named Ann Scrivner managed the department for over a decade. She traveled on behalf of the company to buy the latest fashion trends for “the socially elite of Mexico.”¹³² A colorful advertisement that appeared in a 1929 edition of *Mexican Life* labeled the

¹²⁸ “Lo Que el Hombre Común Cree Acerca de la Droguería Moderna,” *El Droguista Moderno: La Revista Mensual de Droguería y Farmacia*,

¹²⁹ Néstor García Canclini, *Consumers and Citizens*, 16.

¹³⁰ “Sanborn’s,” Salvador Novo, *El Universal Ilustrado*, 3 de julio de 1924, 33. Reprinted in Jorge Cuesta, et al. *Los Contemporáneos en El Universal*, 222. “Sin embargo, se os acusa, marqués, de hablar allí por el teléfono, de comprar Gillettes, de saludar a quienes obstruyen la puerta y de sorber después el té en una mesa no tallada...”

¹³¹ “The Historic ‘House of Tiles,’ Mexico City.” Company brochure dated to the 1920s. ASH.

¹³² “Sanborns Souvenir.” Sanborns company booklet. 1939. ASH.

ladies shop as “Mexico’s New Fashion Center.” It featured an “alluring selection” of feminine fashion from Paris and New York that included frocks, velvet dresses, crêpes, lace gowns, lingerie, hosiery, and furs.¹³³ The company also stocked an abundance of feminine beautifying products, such as perfumes, cosmetics, tonics, medicines, creams, handbags, and other accessories.¹³⁴ Women could mingle inside a furnished entrance hall that provided services that included a manicurist, hairstylist, stenographer and typist all free of charge.¹³⁵ The men’s department on the upper floor also provided female typists and stenographers ready to assist passing customers.

The Sanborns bathroom provided another important complementary service that attracted women who entered Mexico City’s downtown area. As Ericka Rappaport shows in her study of 19th Century London’s West End, upper class women who went into the public sphere may have experienced difficulties locating facilities away from home.¹³⁶ In downtown Mexico City, there were

¹³³ Reprinted in Carla Zarebska, *La Casa de los Azulejos*, 130. The colorful artwork Sanborns used for its trade catalog and advertisements shows similarities with the work of García Cabral who drew the covers for *Revista de Revistas*. Crapes or crêpes are a type of woven fabric.

¹³⁴ “Piense Ud. En El Cabello Lustroso, Sedoso,” Sanborns advertisement, *Revista de Revistas*, 20 de Febrero de 1921, 9. See also, “Rhodine,” advertisement, *Revista de Revista*, 20 de Febrero de 1921, 16. See also, “Lash-Brow-Ine,” advertisement, *Revista de Revistas*, Año XIII. Núm. 653 (Noviembre 1922), 4.

¹³⁵ “La Casa de los Azulejos fue Inaugurada ayer.” *Excélsior*, Domingo 12 de octubre de 1919, 7; “La Casa de Los Azulejos Convertida en un Palacio de Cuento de Hadas,” *El Heraldo de Mexico*, 12 de Octubre de 1919.

¹³⁶ Ericka Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure: Women in the Making of London’s West End* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 79-80.

several hotels, restaurants, and department stores where women could access a facility to relieve themselves. However, Sanborns marketed the ladies' restroom as a complementary service to entice women to come into their store. The company considered the women's bathroom as one of their main store departments.¹³⁷ A company booklet from 1936 pictured the entrance of the women's restroom on the mezzanine featuring a set of plated mirrors, decorative rugs, a wooden desk, reading lamp, and various chairs to lounge in.¹³⁸ The photograph resembled the setting of a wealthy person's home and showcased the highest level of luxury and comfort that was available at Sanborns for passing customers. According to *El Demócrata*, the women's bathroom contained:

Many white marble sinks like wedding gowns, wide, well-cut, polished and stunning. They shined along the walls of the large room. They offered silver-plated faucets to cool their crystal-clear blood; a few little desks for women that showed the daintiness of their size and the delicacy of their making. And across from the sinks, enormous and magnificent mirrors copied the untainted reflections of the beautiful faces and the elegant bodies of the numerous women that yearned to use them. The women used them to quickly retouch their hairstyles.¹³⁹

¹³⁷ Marques de San Francisco, *The House of Tiles* (Mexico: Bland Brothers Printers, 1936), 36. In a list of the "Various Departments at Sanborns," included "The Ladies' Rest Room, mezzanine," and the "Ladies Ready to Wear and Fur Departments."

¹³⁸ Marques de San Francisco, *The House of Tiles* (Mexico: Bland Brothers Printers, 1936), 23.

¹³⁹ "La Antigua 'Casa de los Azulejos', es Desde Ayer el Nuevo Local de los Señores," *El Demócrata*, Domingo, 12 de Octubre de 1919, 6. "Amplios lavamos de mármol, blancos como tocas de novias, amplios y bien cortados, y pulidos, lucían a lo largo de las paredes de la estancia, ofreciendo sus plateados grifos el frescor de su sangre cristalina; algunos pequeños pupitres para damas, mostraban

The flowery language describing the women's bathroom emphasized a connection between the whiteness of the wealthy elite female customers visiting Sanborns and the modern luxuries the store provided.

Sanborns owners promoted a commercial environment that encouraged women to socialize in public and access Mexico's consumer culture. They publicized their high-end store as a place where affluent customers could spend hours mingling with others in the restaurant.¹⁴⁰ Salvador Novo's 1930 novel *El Joven* referenced "los grupos bobos" (the group of unrefined or stupid people) who gathered at Sanborns, where "ladies who shopped during the afternoon hurried out of the shops without buying anything."¹⁴¹ Novo's comment implied certain class connotations. Women from different social classes who entered the public sphere may have frequented Sanborns specifically to use the store's complementary services and to socialize with other women.

A 1924 trade publication called *The American Exporter* mentioned that since the Sanborns tea-room did not serve alcoholic drinks and closed promptly at 10:00 pm, "ladies, including young girls,

la delicadeza de su talla y lo delicado de factura, e inmediatamente de los lavabos, enormes y magníficos espejos copiaban en sus impolutas entrañas los bellos rostros y los elegantes cuerpos de numerosas damas que, anhelantes de usarlos, las primeras, retocaban sus peinados rápidamente."

¹⁴⁰ "Sanborns Mexico," *Nuestra Ciudad*, Tomo 1, No. 2 (Mayo, 1930), 75.

¹⁴¹ Salvador Novo, *Viajes y Ensayos, II. Crónicas y artículos periodísticos*: (University of Texas: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1996), 45. "los 'grupos bobos' de que habla con tan asombrosa propiedad Armando de Maria, etc. Las señoras, de compras durante la tarde, saldrán presurosas de las tiendas sin haber comprado nada."

may go there for lunch or tea without male escort, and feel entirely at home.”¹⁴² The article suggested that most of the shoppers who frequented the pharmacy, novelty, and gift departments were women. However, the author stated, “it would be misleading to give the impression that the clientele is chiefly feminine, for Sanborn’s is as much a business meeting place as it is social.”¹⁴³ Other evidence shows that the people who spent their leisure time in the Sanborns tea-room were members of the “Mexican society” that included “carefully groomed, self-conscious women.”¹⁴⁴ A 1936 advertisement printed in *Social* showed that the company continued promoting itself as the place where Mexico’s upper class regularly spent their leisure time. The ad pictured three photographs showing elegantly dressed men and women sitting around tables in the middle of the crowded patio. The accompanied text described how “the ladies of Mexican society and the foreign colonies spend a pleasant moment in front of a cup of tea.” The company asserted what it believed were the keys to their business success, claiming that “Distinction, exclusivity, [and] social quality are the reasons that have linked the Sanborns institution along with the ‘elegant houses’ of Mexico.”¹⁴⁵ Both women and men mingled together at Sanborns in the House of Tiles but may have used the store spaces in different ways. Company designers encoded gender into certain store departments

¹⁴² “A Business that Became a Social Institution,” *The American Explorer*, Vol. 95, (September, 1924), 37.

¹⁴³ “A Business that Became a Social Institution,” *The American Exporter*, Vol. 95, 1924, 37.

¹⁴⁴ Albert Avigdor, “Sanborn Hermanos: An American Drug Store in a Mexican Palace, *Druggists’ Circular* Vol. 83, No. 12 (December, 1939), 48.

¹⁴⁵ “Los Thes de Samborns,” *Social*, Noviembre, 1936, 23. “Sanborn’s es lo ha sido siempre—el sitio elegante que congrega tarde a tarde, a las damas de la sociedad de Mexico y de las colonias extranjeras en ese grato momento frente a la taza de the [*sic*]. Distinción, exclusividad, calidad social, he aquí los motivos que han vinculado a la casa Sanborn’s con las ‘casas elegantes’ de Mexico.”

that enticed female customers to use their store. These gender dynamics influenced how people navigated around the floor space.

Following with global trends in leisure culture established by major cities in Europe and the United States, cabarets and dance halls opened in Mexico during beginning of the twentieth century.¹⁴⁶ As Sophia Koutsoyannis shows, these “venues served as showcases of popular music, with dance floors functioning as platforms from which urban dwellers performed modernity through their mastery of local and foreign dances.”¹⁴⁷ Dancing in public allowed women to express their gender identities and behavior in new ways.¹⁴⁸ On August 11, 1921, Sanborns opened their new banquet hall located on the second floor of the House of Tiles. Government inspector reports said the salon could safely accompany up to 350 people.¹⁴⁹ The new salon became a popular site of entertainment for Mexican elites who attended banquets, parties, receptions, dances, and other special events. Sanborns Te Dansants became one of the company’s most popular social attractions.

¹⁴⁶ Sophia Koutsoyannis, “Immoral But Profitable: The Social and Cultural History of Cabarets in Mexico City (1920-1965),” (Ph.D. Dissertation, York University, 2010), 3.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 59.

¹⁴⁸ Ageeth Sluis, 2. Sluis states that government officials “feared the spectacle of ‘public women,’ including prostitutes, actresses, *chicas modernas* (modern girls), and working-class women. These figures, as women and archetypes, all occupied visible positions in social movements of the day that were seen as undermining revolutionary efforts to strengthen nuclear families and socialize women to embrace their ‘proper roles’ as mothers and wives.”

¹⁴⁹ Fondo Ayuntamiento y Gobierno del Distrito, *Diversiones públicas*, vol. 808, exp. 1412, 1921. AHCM.

By 1922, Sanborns was already considered one of Mexico City's largest and most important restaurants and won special recognition among other businesses in the capital as "the preferred Te Dansant for high society."¹⁵⁰ Customers who attended the dansants enjoyed meals and danced to music performed by the Sanborns jazz orchestra. A 1920s company brochure promoting Sanborns Te danzants included imagery of an elegant female dance performer in a large sequenced dress. The woman is shown balancing on one leg while displaying an opened hand fan. Her other arm draped over head reveals her holding a cigarette. This image appeared behind a listed musical repertoire featuring seventy songs available for customers to choose from. The musical list included Mexican and American songs that were widely popular at the time, such as Alfonso Esparza Oteo's "Mi Viejo amor," Con Conrad's "You've Got to See Mama Every Night." Guests could dance the foxtrot, tango, and waltz to songs like, Donaldson's "Sweet Indiana Home," Ivain's "La Luna Indiscreta," and Arreaga's "Victorina Blues." The musical performances and dances took place each night at the House of Tiles inside "Mexico's most unique and beautiful ballroom—Where the New and Old Worlds Blend in a Cosmopolitan Atmosphere."¹⁵¹ The brochure promoted Sanborns as a place where women could dance to a variety of modern music. Cabarets and dance halls provided

¹⁵⁰ "Los Mejores Restaurantes en La Capital," *El Universal*, Junio 2, 1922, Tomo 1. Suplemento de arte e información. "La Casa de los Azulejos, Elegante Te Danzant." See also, "Gran Concurso Nacional de Comerciantes, Industriales y Profesionistas Resultado Final 1922," *El Universal*, Jueves 8 de Junio de 1922, Primera Sección, p. 7. "Qué casa de Te es la preferida por la alta sociedad? Sanborn's Hnos., S.A., (Casa de los Azulejos). Av. F.I. Madero, 4."

¹⁵¹ Programa Musical Carteto Sanborn, Repertorio Popular "Sanborns Mexico," Mexico City, Agosto 1924? ASH. The quote appeared in English.

additional spaces for women to socialize and mingle with men in public.¹⁵² Advertisements for the dansants at Sanborns stressed their popularity and exclusivity, especially among young people. The company encouraged customers to reserve their seats in advance and that “only the best people” were admitted inside.¹⁵³

The presence of young women mingling and dancing at Sanborns drew public scrutiny in the Mexican press. In September 1922, *El Mundo* published an article that brought attention to different cabarets and cantinas in Mexico City it said were operating with “absolute impunity.”¹⁵⁴ The article focused its criticism on the “famous ‘cabaret’ Sanborn.” The institution was listed first in a “black list” of twenty other institutions described as “centers of vice and crapulence” in the capital that “constituted a social cancer.” Despite its “decent and aristocratic appearance,” Sanborns corrupted young girls through the “refinements” it offered in the form of jazz music and the shimmy. The article referred to Sanborns’s famous patented tonics, which were “composed of aphrodisiacs and stimulants” that enabled the “affectionate libertines” to act out in presumably undesirable ways. The author exclaimed, “And this is called the center of entertainment for ‘chic’

¹⁵² Sophia Koutsoyannis, “Immoral But Profitable: The Social and Cultural History of Cabarets in Mexico City (1920-1965),” (Ph.D. Diss., York University, 2010), 39.

¹⁵³ A. Granville Patton, “Sanborn’s Wednesday Evenings,” *El Universal*, Sábado 10 de junio de 1922, 10.

¹⁵⁴ “Los Cabarets Siguen Disfrutando de la Mas Absoluta Impunidad,” *El Mundo Al Dia*, martes, 5 de septiembre de 1922, 2.

people and our golden youth!”¹⁵⁵ The article went on to describe other establishments in the city and the vices supposedly found there.

This author was reacting to the 1920s campaign by Mexico City’s government to regulate urban spaces where music and dancing took place. Dance halls and cabarets came under scrutiny by moral reformists and government officials who feared the large presence of women in public spaces of leisure. Cabarets and dance halls became associated with centers of vice and prostitution. Some sex workers used these venues as secure locales when looking for clients as they blended into the crowds.¹⁵⁶ Mexican government officials responded by attempting to regulate dance halls, cabarets, and other places where men and women danced together.¹⁵⁷

The article criticizing Sanborns used the social prominence of the store to critique the policing of working-class spaces in Mexico City. It suggested that Sanborns and other upper-class cabarets in Mexico City were also centers of vice and prostitution and should be regulated just like other working-class dance halls and cabarets. In concluding the article, the author stated:

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., “En el famoso ‘cabaret’ Sanborn por ejemplo, a pesar de su apariencia decente y aristocrática, se inicia la corrupción de jovencitas que, en brazos de libertinos afectos a lo que ellos llaman ‘refinamientos’, se entregan al shimmy y el jazz...el famoso cabaret Sanborn tiene ‘patentados’ unos famosos tónicos que llevan el mismo nombre, los cuales tónicos están compuestos de afrodisiacos y excitantes, de modo que los efectos del tónico hacen la mitad y los manejos de los libertinos la otra mitad. ¡Y a esto le llaman centro de gente ‘chic’ y esparcimiento de nuestra juventud dorada!”

¹⁵⁶ Sophia Koutsoyannis, “Immoral But Profitable: The Social and Cultural History of Cabarets in Mexico City (1920-1965),” (Ph.D. diss., York University, 2010), 51-53.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

If prostitution is a necessary evil, an escape valve for the bestial impulses of society, then it is welcomed. But, the exploiters of vice should be sent out of downtown. Even if they are called Sanborn or Perico de los Pelotes, the owners of cabarets and cantinas with waitresses should be forced to establish their businesses in the outskirts of town so they can drag the good people with their lure.¹⁵⁸

Sanborns may have been targeted among the listed venues because it was easier to attack a U.S.-owned business. The company's cultural ties with the United States made it a gateway for upper-class Mexicans to access new forms of modernity. This included dances like the fox trot, the shimmy, the tango, and jazz music. All of these new trends in leisure entertainment were made available in the Sanborns banquet hall each night of the week.¹⁵⁹ From the 1920s-1930s, upper-class Mexicans spent their evenings at Sanborns, where they danced, ate, listened to music and socialized

¹⁵⁸ “Los Cabarets Siguen Disfrutando de la Mas Absoluta Impunidad,” *El Mundo Al Dia*, martes, 5 de septiembre de 1922, 2. “Si la prostitución es un mal necesario, una válvula de escape a los instintos bestiales de la sociedad, que en buena hora exista. Pero que se deje del centro de la ciudad a toda en caterva de explotadores del vicio. Que se obligue a los dueños de cabarets y cantinas de meseras, así se llamen Sanborn o Perico de los Pelotes, a establecer sus negocios en las afueras de la población, para que se arrastren con su señuelo a la gente de bien.”

¹⁵⁹ “Programa Musical Cuarteto Sanborn,” Sanborns ephemera. 1924? Archivo Sanborn Hermanos. Part of the brochure read, “The Famous Palace of Tiles Orchestra plays nightly in La Casa de los Azulejos. Mexico's most unique and beautiful ball room, Where the New and Old World Blends in a Cosmopolitan Atmosphere.”

with other powerful people from elite backgrounds.¹⁶⁰ The presence of free women mingling and dancing at Sanborns may have brought certain anxieties about the changing gender dynamics in post-Revolutionary Mexico. As Sanborns continued its rise in business, it became a beacon of attention about the ways in which the company influenced how upper-class Mexicans spent their leisure time. Men and women who visited Sanborns as customers used the commercial space to access modern amenities and to perform their social identities.

Conclusion

This chapter has traced the commercial rise of Sanborns in Mexico City during its first period of ownership under the Sanborn brothers from California. It focused on some of the major developments in the company's history, and the different strategies the owners implemented to succeed in appealing to the consumer tastes of their customers. Since 1903, Sanborns became a popular destination for Mexican elites and visiting foreigners living in Mexico. No other event highlighted the dazzling appeal of Sanborns more than its inauguration in the House of Tiles. When Sanborns moved into the famous landmark building and showcased their new modern store to the public, they cemented their legacy as an elite institution connected with powerful memories of Mexico's past. The store became a focal point for criticism during its rise in prominence, which revealed tensions concerning its close association with U.S. capitalism and its exclusive appeal among Mexican elites. Analyzing Sanborns spotlights changing ideas related to class, and Mexican identity. The store provided customers with a unique commercial environment that combined shopping with food and leisure. Sanborns continued to draw on its extensive use of advertisements across Mexico's print media to emphasize its different store departments. Imported consumer

¹⁶⁰ Albert Avigdor, "Sanborn Hermanos: An American Drug Store in a Mexican Palace," *Druggists Circular*, Vol. 83, No. 12 (December 1939), 18-19.

products and luxury goods from the United States and Europe lined the store shelves. Sanborns showcased modern trends in fashion, technology, and entertainment. Women and men took advantage of complimentary services like the telephone and women's bathroom, that provided customers with added incentive to enter Sanborns. Gender and class influenced how men and women navigated around different store departments. As this chapter has shown, Sanborns shaped Mexican consumer culture. Generations of male and female customers entered Sanborns and used the commercial environment to perform their identities and gain power for themselves. The next chapter turns attention on Sanborns during the Mexican Revolution to understand how people used Sanborns as a stage to contest power and company policies.

Chapter II

Ice Cream Soda Flavored with the Blood of a Gringo: Sanborns at the Intersection of Race, Gender, and Revolution, (1910-1960)

Coffeeshouses provided important spaces for social interaction and everyday life in Mexico City. They served as meeting places and sites of reunion for Mexico's powerful social and political figures. Since the early nineteenth century, cafeterias were found in abundance along the prominent streets that connected to the Zócalo. Luis González Obregón wrote about the cafes located in the capital of New Spain in *La Vida en México en 1810*. He described them as “meeting centers for writers, military officials, clergymen, and in general the idle people who went there to drink the black liquid and eat sweets and custards.” Politicians went there too and used them as places to “compose the world” where they read out loud the stories from the daily newspapers and gazettes and conversed with others their thoughts of independence.¹

In the first half of the twentieth century, some political leaders used cafeterias and restaurants as relatively clandestine sites to conduct their meetings. On February 18, 1913, Victoriano Huerta ordered the assassination of President Francisco Madero, Vice-President José María Pino Suarez, and his own brother during a meeting held inside the Gambrinus restaurant.² Ernesto “Che” Guevara and Fidel Castro supposedly plotted their rebellion against the Cuban

¹ Luis González Obregón, *La Vida de México en 1810* (México: Editorial Stylo, 1943), 34. “Centros de reunión de escritores, de militares, de clérigos, y en general de gente ociosa que iba a ellos, para beber el negro líquido, tomar dulces o natillas...y los políticos, a componer el mundo, leyendo y comentando diarios y gacetas, en voz alta, a veces en tono destemplado, cuando los criollos imprudentes defendían ideas nuevas, ideas de independencia que ya no se ocultaban.”

² René Rabell Jara, *La Cocina Mexicana a Través de los Siglos* (México: Fundación Herdez, A.C., 1996), 26.

regime of Fulgencio Batista in the Café La Habana located on the corner of Bucareli and Morelos.³ Clementina Díaz y de Ovando described coffeehouses as “spaces of reunion, places of political conspiracy, places to read newspapers, and spaces for literary clubs.”⁴

Some cafes and restaurants had considerable prestige and respectability. Places like Sanborns catered to their customers by providing them with a certain kind of luxury that appealed specifically to their upper-class tastes. This chapter asks how Sanborns became a popular rendezvous for local elites in Mexico City. It traces the development and evolution of the company as a place of sociability by examining how some of its customers interacted with the store and the company’s owners. Sanborns transitioned from a place associated with Porfirian power before the Revolution; it then evolved into a social institution frequented by revolutionary elites, and finally, into a chain store marketed towards middle-class customers in post-revolutionary Mexico. Sanborns owners developed business strategies that responded to the intense processes of chaotic transformation that occurred in Mexico between 1910 and the 1960s; they were able to stay in business by manipulating conceptions of race and gender. Company owners transformed Sanborns into a place where businessmen, members of the intelligentsia, political leaders, revolutionary soldiers, and even their

³ Francisco Masse, “Fidel Castro, el Café La Habana y la torta cubana,” *Milenio*, 26 de Noviembre de 2016. [http://www.milenio.com/cultura/fidel_castro-cafe_la_habana-torta_cubana-milenio_0_854914640.html] (accessed 12/4/2017)

⁴ Clementina Díaz y de Ovando, *Los cafés en México en el siglo XIX* (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2003), 13. “Los cafés en México fueron, desde sus inicios, espacios de reunión, de conspiraciones políticas, de lectura de periódicos y peñas literarias.”

families went to spend their leisure time.⁵ Sanborns was an exclusive place that powerful men used to perform their identity for each other.

Sanborns became synonymous with the elite sociability of Mexican elites, and U.S.-styled capitalism more broadly. However, the retail store also served as a stage that people used to publicly contest state power, company-imposed policies, and U.S. foreign policy. At times, the store became a destination for social protest. From Mexico's 1910 Revolution onward, revolutionary soldiers, striking workers, militant political groups, and ordinary citizens have entered Sanborns in order to appropriate the space for themselves and challenge conceptions of race, gender, and class.⁶ It was even rumored that revolutionaries used to visit Sanborns asking for an "ice cream soda flavored with the blood of a gringo."⁷

Focusing on the interactions of groups of customers and citizens within Sanborns contributes to understanding the politics behind social spaces where food and drinks are available. Sanborns provided a space that highlighted the triumphs and shortcomings of the Mexican Revolution. This chapter explores how company owners at Sanborns reacted to the occasions when customers and revolutionary soldiers used their store as a stage for their performances. It also looks at how the company kept their business afloat during the outbreaks of violence and period of nationalist protest directed against U.S. businesses.

⁵ Michael Scully, "Pan America's Crossroads Store," *Pan American*, Vol. 2, (January, 1942), 10.

⁶ For more information about striking workers in Sanborns, see chapter four. Chapter five analyzes how generations of men queered Sanborns to empower themselves.

⁷ "A Chain Plus Personality," *Business Week*, Aug. 1, 1953, 77.

For generations, Mexicans entered Sanborns to eat or drink coffee performing their identities as powerful members of Mexico's privileged class. When Sanborns began their soda fountain and restaurant departments in the early part of the twentieth century, company owners marketed their store as providing customers with products and amenities that were found internationally.⁸ The store dispensed all sorts of imported items and miscellaneous household gadgets that ranged from chewing gums to patent medicines.⁹ The drugstore evolved during the Mexican Revolution by incorporating a restaurant and beverage department. These additions contributed to the development of Sanborns as a premiere social institution that catered exclusively for Mexico City's elites and served as a rendezvous view point for their leisurely activities. As the store evolved over time, going to Sanborns became an important social ritual for upper-class Mexicans. The Mexican journalist Agustín Barrios Gómez observed, "There was no important man in Mexico who had not had coffee in Sanborns."¹⁰ Sanborns held a public reputation as being a place associated with Mexico's social and political power. The company owners had successfully

⁸ "Ice Cream Soda at Sanborn's," *The Mexican Herald*, April 19, 1910, 7.

⁹ See for example, "Chicle Adams," *Revista de Revistas: El Semanario Nacional*, Domingo 16 de enero de 1921, 33; "Intestinos al Corriente Cada 24 Horas," *Revista de Revistas: El Semanario Nacional*, Domingo, el 23 de enero de 1919, 26; "La Familia Protegida por la Maravillosa PE-RU-NA No Teme el Catarro," *Revista de Revistas*, Domingo 9 de enero de 1921, 5.

¹⁰ Agustín Barrios Gómez, "La Casa de los Azulejos," *El Informador*, Domingo 28 de Agosto de 1994, 5. "No había hombre importante en México que no hubiera tomado café en Sanborns."

made their retail store into what Steven H. Bunker called a “site of commercialized leisure,” a “privately owned space of public sociability” that customers had incorporated into their daily lives.¹¹

Sanborns and the Mexican Revolution, 1910-1920

When established during the Porfiriato, Sanborns held a reputation as a privileged space deeply connected with the leisure activities of Porfirian elites in Mexico City.¹² During the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920), many foreign businesses collapsed due to the outbreak of violence and insecurity, and the growing wave of nationalist rhetoric and fervent anti-Americanism. As John Hart shows, between the years 1910-1914, Mexicans lashed out and targeted Americans as social expressions of national repudiation of foreign capitalists, the political elites in Mexico City, and the large estate owners.¹³ Despite these events, the owners at Sanborns were not discouraged. The company weathered these political uncertainties, maintained their popularity, and even expanded their business operations during the Revolution. Their prosperity resulted from changes in consumer

¹¹ Steven B. Bunker, *Creating Mexican Consumer Culture in the Age of Porfirio Díaz* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2012), 68.

¹² Letter from Frank Sanborn to his brother Walter Sanborn, July 8, 1914, reprinted in Carla Zarebska, *La Casa de los Azulejos* (México: Sanborns, 1999), 117. Frank states that Sanborns customers prior to the Revolution “belonged to the Científico [*sic*] party.” Company owners also romanticized this time period by inventing certain myths and traditions about the significance of their store within Mexican society. Sanborns lore suggests that Porfirio Díaz and his wife were frequent Sanborns customers who shared banana splits at the soda fountain. For my analysis on these invented traditions, see chapter 3.

¹³ John Mason Hart, *Empire and Revolution: The Americans in Mexico since the Civil War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 273-305.

tastes and the company's addition of global technologies.¹⁴ From 1910-1919, the company opened new branch stores in downtown Mexico City and in Tampico, Tamaulipas.

The U.S. invaded Mexico on April 21, 1914 prompting largescale demonstrations. The Sanborns drugstore in Mexico City was one of a number of establishments that had their storefronts smashed by angry protestors.¹⁵ Company owners and their employees temporarily evacuated the store. The story of the incident in Mexico City became part of Sanborns lore, repeated by journalists forty years later.¹⁶ Less than a year after its inauguration, the Sanborns branch in Tampico, Tamaulipas also came under attack by Mexicans following the U.S. invasion of Veracruz. A large group of enraged citizens smashed the storefront windows, sacked the place, and used the building to fire shots at U.S. citizens seeking shelter in the Southern Hotel located on the corner.¹⁷ By April 1919, the Sanborn brothers sold off their Tampico store to a group of local businessmen.¹⁸ Mexicans targeted the Sanborns drugstores in Mexico City and Tampico because they represented places of power for local Porfirian elites, and were well-known foreign-owned business tied to U.S.

¹⁴ Letter from Francis Hill Sanborn to Donald A. Sanborn, "Sanborns in Mexico," 1960. Archivo Sanborns Hermanos.

¹⁵ "Los Manifestaciones de Anoche en la Capital," *El Imparcial*, 22 de Abril de 1914, 4.

¹⁶ "A Chain Plus Personality," 77.

¹⁷ U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *Investigation of Mexican Affairs*, 66th Congress, 2d Sess., 1920, 3231. Document available online <https://www.loc.gov/item/21020652/>

¹⁸ A. Granville Patton, "Anglo-American Notes," *El Universal*, 10 Abril de 1919; *The Pharmaceutical Era*, Vol. 52, 1919, pg. 228

commercial power.¹⁹ Both attacks were probably caused by the wave of fervent nationalism and revolutionary rhetoric directed against U.S. residents, property owners, and businesses.²⁰

In July, 1914, Frank Sanborn wrote his brother Walter about Mexico's fragmented and precarious political situation.²¹ "Even if the Huertistas and Carrancistas should elect a man satisfactory to both parties, we do not believe it would be sixty days before some other party would be formed by someone who hadn't been given a tit to suck," he wrote. Frank lamented that "we are going to keep on having revolutions" without end unless "a very strong man of the old Diaz [*sic*] type" took power. The outbreak of Revolution caused many of Sanborns regular upper-class clientele to stop visiting the store. Frank complained that

The old crowd of wealthy natives are mostly gone. They belonged to the Cientifico [*sic*] party and their health demanded a change, and this new bunch of newly rich don't know how to spend money and get something for it, except they bought automobiles and get drunk...They hadn't learned to use tooth brushes or pastes and a peso box of face powder was a piece of wasteful extravagance, so our stores with good merchandise didn't draw them much.²²

¹⁹ Ibid. "It is greatly to be regretter, [*sic*] as Sanborn's was as popular a place of meeting as the parent store is here." See also, John Hart, *Empire and Revolution*, 304.

²⁰ Ibid., 321.

²¹ Walter had returned to Los Angeles to recover from contracting malaria in Tampico.

²² Letter from Frank Sanborn to his brother Walter Sanborn, July 8, 1914. Quoted from Carla Zarebska, *La Casa de los Azulejos* (México: Sanborns, 1999), 117.

The letter suggests that the company had catered its store specifically towards a client base of wealthy Mexicans and government bureaucrats. Frank Sanborn also claimed that despite the social upheaval and swirling anti-American rhetoric in the capital, “the anti-feeling did not cut much figure in our volume of business.” In fact, Sanborn maintained that “Ex minister Lozano, one of the most rabid of the anti american [*sic*] bunch, the one who supplied the list of the american [*sic*] houses that needed smashing, comes in to the fountain frequently with friends.”²³ Sanborn may have been referring to the political figure José María Lozano, who served as an agent of the public ministry in 1904.²⁴ Yet the Revolution posed a larger problem for the company’s overall profits and success. As Sanborn noted in his letter to his brother, the trouble was that “our customers are not here.” Still, he remained optimistic that they would eventually return.²⁵

By 1914, as the ongoing civil wars raged on between the competing regional factions led by Emiliano Zapata, Venustiano Carranza, and Francisco Villa, the Mexican state had completely disintegrated.²⁶ The violence had splintered the country. As the political situation worsened, Frank wrote his brother in September 1914 to report, “There is no government, there are no courts, no protection, no security. Conditions are almost as unstable as they could well be and still even now

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ “Efemérides del Periodismo Mexicano: José María Jozano,” *Cambiodigital: Sin hora de cierre*, 29 de Octubre de 2017, <http://cambiodigital.com.mx/mosno.php?nota=353606> (accessed: January 11, 2018).

²⁵ Letter from Frank Sanborn to his brother Walter Sanborn, July 8, 1914. Quoted from Carla Zarebska, *La Casa de los Azulejos* (México: Sanborns, 1999), 117.

²⁶ Mark Wasserman, *Persistent Oligarchs: Elites and Politics in Chihuahua, Mexico, 1910-1940* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 5, 10, 95.

we are looking forward to the coming of Pancho Villa, when we hope there will be a turn for the better.”²⁷ Pancho Villa led a powerful revolutionary movement called the Division of the North, the largest of the revolutionary armies. In the United States, newspapers lionized the leader and portrayed him as a “Bandit-General.”²⁸ Frank’s personal correspondence is interesting and somewhat ironic in that he welcomed the arrival of Villa. The letter provides a unique perspective into understanding how Americans living in Mexico experienced the social and political uncertainties of Revolution. Sanborn remained optimistic that his company would survive the specter of violence even though the elites from the old regime had stopped frequenting the drugstore. Frank wrote

We are not yet beaten, even if some fainthearted [*sic*] friends feel they are, and we are coming out on top yet. People are returning every week due to the lies published in the US papers stating that Wilson’s policy has triumphed, that peace reigns supreme, that American and Mexican flags float side by side..., such rot.²⁹

The success or failure of Sanborns was deeply connected with the changing political landscape of Mexican politics. As a U.S. merchant operating in Mexico City, Frank Sanborn observed, at a local level, the results of civil war and the effect of Wilsonian policies towards Mexico. He sharply criticized Woodrow Wilson’s intervention of Mexico as a “proven failure,” claiming that “peace does

²⁷ Letter from Frank Sanborn to his brother Walter Sanborn, September 14, 1914. Quoted from Carla Zarebska, *La Casa de los Azulejos* (México: Sanborns, 1999), 117.

²⁸ John Tutino, “Revolutionary Confrontation, 1913-1917 Regions, Classes, and the New National State,” in *Province of the Revolution: Essays on Regional Mexican History, 1910-1929* ed. Thomas Benjamin and Mark Wasserman (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1990), 51-52; “E. Alexander Powell, “A Visit to the Bandit-General Pancho Villa,” *New York Times*, March 29, 1914.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

not reign, and never were we more unsafe than today.” As John Mason Hart observed, the U.S. invasion of Veracruz had “electrified Mexico and unleashed a public fury against the U.S. citizens residing there.”³⁰ As a result, Sanborn wrote, “We are despised ‘gringos’ now. All of this crowd are anti’s and I do not know as I blame them. They judge us by Wilson and in the eyes of all Mexicans, he is responsible for all their troubles.”³¹ By August 1914, as the northern armies approached the capital, and as the Zapatistas army marched closer from the south, Victoriano Huerta and the Constitutionalist leaders of the old regime fled Mexico City.³²

The changing political landscape in Mexico City somehow did not seriously impact the commercial survival of Sanborns during the Mexican Revolution. Evidence shows that the Sanborn brothers attempted to create a retail environment free from the revolutionary politics surrounding the store. During times of political uncertainty, the Sanborn brothers survived in part by turning their store into “citadel of neutral respectability.” They forbade Sanborn employees from talking about politics and the same policy applied to guests who entered the store. Sanborns created “a unique haven free of the era’s atmosphere of brawl and tension,” that still catered specifically to the upper-class customers that included “the wives and families of rival leaders.”³³

On November 19, 1914, an advertisement for Sanborns printed in *The Mexican Herald* spoke about the dull times and uncertainties of living through the Revolution in Mexico City. Printed on

³⁰ John Mason Hart, *Empire and Revolutions*, 321.

³¹ Letter from Frank Sanborn to his brother Walter Sanborn, September 14, 1914. Quoted from Carla Zarebska, *La Casa de los Azulejos* (México: Sanborns, 1999), 118.

³² Tutino, “Revolutionary Confrontation,” 57-59; Alan Knight, *The Mexican Revolution: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 54.

³³ Michael Scully, Pan America’s Crossroads Store, 10.

the eve the fourth year the revolution began, the ad told readers to “Cheer up! Every cloud has a silver lining[.] Get on our ship and catch a cloud. The easiest way to Cheer up is to come to Sanborns’ Big Fountain.” Offering live music every night and a special “cheer up” menu for guests, the company owners imagined their store as a fortified vessel impervious to the social violence outside. The Sanborn brothers strategically rebranded their company during the Revolution and marketed their store as a safe place for visiting customers. However, by years end, the political situation had changed once again as both the Villistas and Zapatistas troops had entered the capital.

Zapatistas in Sanborns: Contesting a Site of Porfirian Power, 1914

In December 1914, during the occupation of Mexico City by the División del Norte, and the Zapatista Liberation Army of the South, a group of Zapatistas decided to eat at Sanborns. Their decision to go there was surely not accidental. They knew that Sanborns was where the most powerful people in Mexico shopped and ate. An unknown photographer documented the movement of the troops in the capital and accompanied the Zapatistas into Sanborns.³⁴ The presence of the Zapatista soldiers in Sanborns signaled that a new political power had arrived in the capital city. Scholars and journalists have often erroneously attributed the setting of these images as within the Casa de los Azulejos.³⁵ In fact, Sanborns had not yet moved into what would become

³⁴ The images of the Zapatistas eating in Sanborns appear in the photo archive of Agustín Víctor Casasola in the Fototeca Nacional in Mexico. Little is known about who photographed the Zapatistas in Sanborns. For an analysis of the Casasolas’s and the photo archive, see John Mraz, *Photographing the Mexican Revolution: Commitments, Testimonies, and Icons* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012), 45-52.

³⁵ See for example, Carlos Monsiváis, “Notas sobre la historia de la fotografía en México,” *Revista de la Universidad de México*, Vol. 35, No. 5-6 (Diciembre-Enero 1981). Monsiváis writes, “Usted ya los

their flagship location. This common misunderstanding is important to note because Sanborns held social significance long before their store occupied the historic building. The Zapatistas were eating in one of the two Sanborn drugstores found in downtown Mexico City, the one at 12 San Francisco Street and Betlemitas (now Filomeno Mata).³⁶

The photographer took several shots of the Zapatistas in Sanborns. One image that is now known as “Sanborns waitresses attend the Zapatistas,” depicts a group of soldiers eating their breakfast at the soda-fountain bar of the drugstore.³⁷ The major contrasts in the photograph make this particular image very powerful, showing the revolutionary soldiers within an elegant salon of the Porfirian regime. The duality of the situation invites the spectator to glance into the changing political culture of Mexico during the violent period of the Revolution.³⁸ The image shows a group

conoce: unos zapatistas con expresión indescifrable desayunan en el palacio porfirista de Sanborns.”

“El palacio” is clearly a reference to El Palacio de los Azulejos; Guadalupe Irizar, “El Regreso Zapatista,” *Reforma*, miércoles 17 de marzo de 1999, 2^a. “En el mismo lugar, la misma mesa, la misma barra en donde hace más de 84 años, el 24 de noviembre de 1914, los zapatistas del Ejército del Sur entraron a la capital de país y se fotografiaron ahí, para la memoria de todos, en la Casa de los Azulejos, los zapatistas del EZLN repitieron ayer la escena.”

³⁶ Fondo Ayuntamiento y Gobierno del Distrito, Boticas, Vol. 1356, exp. 401 Año 1913-1914, Sanborns Hmnos. Botica en la calle San Francisco. AHCM.

³⁷ Casasola, Agustín Víctor or Miguel Casasola, *Meseras de Sanborns atienden a zapatistas*. Diciembre, 1914. Fondo Casasola, 6219, Fototeca Nacional, México.

³⁸ This idea is inspired by Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Geoff Dyer (New York: Hill and Wang, 2010), 23.

of rugged Zapatistas wearing bandoliers and sombreros resting their rifles along the lunch counter while drinking coffee and eating bread served by the Sanborns waitresses.



Figure 6: Casasola, Agustín Víctor or Miguel Casasola, *Meseras de Sanborns atienden a zapatistas*. Diciembre, 1914. Fondo Casasola, 6219, Fototeca Nacional, México.

The female workers are shown positioned behind the bar in black dresses, black shirtwaist, and white aprons. One waitress in the center of the photograph posed with her arms extended holding a coffee cup had her eyes fixed ahead towards the soldier who is looking at the camera. The Zapatistas were dining inside the new Sanborns refreshment parlor, the recently inaugurated part of the store devoted to the company's expanding ice cream and soda fountain business. The soldiers sat around the marble lunch counter in a large room painted white and lined with gold framed mirrors.³⁹

³⁹ "Sanborns' Annex is Proving Popular," *The Mexican Herald*, January 21, 1914, 3.

These photographs never appeared in illustrated magazines or newspapers at the time. However, they nevertheless came to represent powerful visual testaments of the temporary upheaval of Mexico's social order during the Mexican Revolution.⁴⁰ Scholars who have analyzed these photographs tend to focus on race and class. Carlos Monsiváis, in his description of the photograph, suggested that, "primitivism peek[ed] into an important site of Porfirian power in order to permit careful comparisons with the elegant 'científicos' of the fallen regime." The Zapatistas had entered a "sacred zone in order to commit profanity, and then, disappear[ed] without a trace."⁴¹ Fernando Benítez said the Zapatistas, "Clutched their cups of coffee awkwardly while the waitresses contemplated the great savages as submissive and as frightened as themselves."⁴² The Spanish writer and journalist Arturo Pérez-Reverte described the group of, "serious looking mustached guerrillas so

⁴⁰ Monsiváis, "Notas Sobre la Historia de la Fotografía en México," s/p. Monsiváis points to the 1940s publication of *La Historia Gráfica de la Revolución Mexicana*, by Ismael Casasola, as initiating the process of circulation for a set of carefully chosen photographs from the Revolution that included "Los Zapatistas en Sanborns."

⁴¹ Ibid. "el primitivismo se asoma a un sitio neurálgico del porfirismo, para permitir las comparaciones protectoras con los atildados 'científicos' del régimen caído. ¿No es cierto que todo contraste remite a paradojas conmovedoras? Estos soldados acuden a una zona sagrada para incurrir en profanación y, luego, desaparecer sin remedio."

⁴² Fernando Benítez, *Historia de La Ciudad de México*, tomo 7 (Barcelona: Salvat Editores, 1984), 59.

"Se atrevían a entrar en el *quick-lunch* de Sanborns y sentados frente al mostrador, tomaban torpemente su taza de café mientras las meseras contemplaban a los grandes salvajes tan sumisos y asustados como ellas mismas."

burned by the sun that their skin looks black.”⁴³ Andrea Noble noted, “The lack of élan for the city is clearly legible in the faces of these Zapatista troops, whose rural demeanor is wholly incongruous in the gentrified ambience of the North-American ‘soda fountain.’”⁴⁴ The significance of the racial descriptions used in these analyses are the binaries that separate a sense of place and entitlement. Sanborns represented the natural site of distinction for elite white Mexicans while the uncouth, rustic, and racially dark colored Zapatistas seemed unsuitable in their urban surroundings. The Zapatistas entered Sanborns because they understood the store’s social meaning and they recognized it as a place reserved for powerful Mexicans. Eating in there served as a symbolic act of resistance against the old Porfirian regime. To borrow from Michel de Certeau, since the Zapatistas lacked their own space in Mexico City, they had to “get along in a network of already established forces and representations.”⁴⁵ What made aristocratic institutions like Sanborns unwelcoming for rural peasant outsiders had much to do with the racial politics and class tensions of the time. During the Porfiriato, indigenous people suffered widespread discrimination due to their ethnicity and were

⁴³ Pérez-Reverte, Arturo. “Desayuno en Sanborn’s.” domingo, 12 de mayo de 1996. Artículos de Arturo Pérez-Reverte: Recopilación de los artículos publicados por Arturo Pérez-Reverte en El Semanal. <http://arturoperez-reverte.blogspot.ca/2009/10/desayuno-en-sanborns.html> (accessed January 15, 2018). “Los guerrilleros, bigotudos, serios, están tan quemados por el sol que su piel parece negra.”

⁴⁴ Andrea Noble, “*Zapatistas en Sanborns* (1914): Women at the Bar,” *History of Photography*, Vol. 22, No. 4 (Winter, 1998); See also, Andrea Noble, *Photograph and Memory in Mexico: Icons of Revolution* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2010).

⁴⁵ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 18.

caricaturized in the press as being incompatible with modernity.⁴⁶ In fact, not long after their arrival in Mexico City, Emiliano Zapata and his revolutionary soldiers decided to leave the city, since they garnered such little support from the urban inhabitants.⁴⁷

Sanborns, on the other hand, held particular racial and class connotations connected with Porfirian power and upper-class respectability. Mexicans living in and around the capital understood that Sanborns represented a place of leisure for Mexico City's upper-class.⁴⁸ In choosing to eat there, the Zapatistas deliberately challenged the social meaning of the institution and its associations with Porfirian power and U.S.-styled modern consumerism. They had used the store as a stage to publicly contest state power. The image of the Zapatistas in Sanborns photographs are similar to other acts of political iconoclasm. For example, on December 6, 1844, Mexicans tore down statues and portraits of the deeply unpopular President Antonio López de Santa Anna during the military uprising of Mariano Paredes y Arrilaga. A group of people went so far as to break into a graveyard and dig up the remains of Santa Anna's amputated leg before dragging it around the streets.⁴⁹ The 1914 photograph of the Zapatistas in Sanborns represented the temporary replacement of Mexico's state government during the armed period of the Mexican Revolution. The Zapatistas had

⁴⁶ Víctor Maximino Martínez Ocampo, "Los restaurantes en la ciudad de México en la segunda mitad del siglo XIX, 1869-1910 (Tesis de Licenciado, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2015), 125.

⁴⁷ Tulio Halperín Donghi, *The Contemporary History of Latin America*, trans. John Charles Chasteen (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 184.

⁴⁸ Monsiváis, "Notas Sobre la Historia de la Fotografía en México," s/p. As Monsiváis contends, "La sociedad era, únicamente, la Buena Sociedad."

⁴⁹ Will Fowler, *Santa Anna of Mexico* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 238-239.

specifically chosen to eat at Sanborns because they recognized it as a site of Porfirian power within the capital.⁵⁰ This next section examines another instance during the Mexican Revolution when Sanborns became a site of contestation over power and racial politics.

Jack Johnson vs. Walter Sanborn: The Fight over Power, Class, and Racial Politics

The world famous African American heavyweight boxing champion Jack Johnson spent nearly seven years living in exile. He escaped prejudicial prosecution in the United States for violating the Mann Act in 1912, a federal law that prohibited the interstate trafficking of women.⁵¹ While living in Madrid in 1918, Johnson received correspondence from Arthur Craven in Mexico City, a fellow pugilist and poet Johnson defeated in a match in Barcelona on April 23, 1916. Craven wanted to bring Johnson to the capital and help arrange several bouts for the boxer. Johnson was anxious to go. On May 15, 1918, he cabled Craven from the Palace Hotel asking for a cash advance and first-class travel accommodation for himself, his wife Lucille Cameron, and his boxing promoter.⁵² In January 1919, he received a visit from Enrique Ugartechea, a Mexican professor of

⁵⁰ Andrea Noble, *Photograph and Memory in Mexico: Icons of Revolution* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 107.

⁵¹ David J. Langum, *Crossing Over the Line: Legislating Morality and the Mann Act* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 179-186. The 1910 Mann Act criminalized the transportation of women across state lines to prevent prostitution. However, as the case of Jack Johnson shows, authorities used the law as a pretext to criminally charge people for their sexual activity, even if it was consensual.

⁵² Telegram from Jack Johnson to Arturo Craven. May 15, 1918. Investigative Case Files of the Bureau of Investigation, 1908-1922; Records of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Record Group (hereafter RG) 65, M1085, Reel 874, 5040, National Archives and Records Administration (Hereafter NARA). I wish to credit and thank Randy Roberts for locating these valuable sources that

physical culture, journeyman, and the founding father of Mexican wrestling known as Lucha Libre.⁵³

Arrangements were soon made to bring Johnson into Mexico.

Mexican journalists filled the sports columns with articles detailing Johnson's eminent arrival.⁵⁴ In early March 1919, *El Pueblo* reported that Johnson and his wife Lucille Cameron departed on a steamship that sailed from Madrid to Veracruz with a stop in La Habana.⁵⁵ On March 24th, 1919, two days after his arrival in Veracruz, Johnson took a train to Mexico City. More than

he examined in his book, *Papa Jack: Jack Johnson and the Era of White Hopes* (New York: The Free Press, 1985).

⁵³ Letter from John W. Lang, Major Inf. from the Military Attaché of the American Embassy in Madrid to W. E. Allen, Acting Chief of the Bureau of Investigation, Department of Justice, and the Director of Military Intelligence in Washington D.C. "Jack Johnson," January 18, 1919. Investigative Case Files of the Bureau of Investigation, 1908-1922; Records of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. RG65, M1085, Reel 874, 5040, NARA. For information about Enrique Ugartechea, see, David C. LaFevor, "Forging the Masculine and Modern Nation: Race, Identity, and the Public Sphere in Cuba and Mexico, 1890s-1930s," (Ph.D. Dissertation, Vanderbilt University, 2011), 81.

⁵⁴ "Jack Johnson boxeara este mes en Mexico," *El Pueblo*, lunes el 3 de marzo de 1919, 2; "El 12 del Presente Llegará a Veracruz Jack Johnson," *El Pueblo*, el 3 de Marzo de 1919, 2; "Los Críticos de Boxeo Opinan Sobre la Actuación de Jess Williard," *El Pueblo*, lunes 17 de marzo de 1919, 2; "El Boxeador Johnson," *El Pueblo*, 23 de marzo de 1919, 5; "No se Permitirá que el Negro Johnson dé Ningún Asalto," *El Pueblo*, el 26 de Marzo de 1919, 5.

⁵⁵ "Jack Johnson boxeara este mes en Mexico," *El Pueblo*, lunes el 3 de marzo de 1919, 2.

three thousand people awaited at the train station for a chance to see Johnson.⁵⁶ While a band played, Mexicans shouted, “Viva Johnson” and “Brave Jack” while Johnson faced a swarm of reporters and outstretched hands that encircled him while he walked to a waiting car.⁵⁷

Mexicans viewed Johnson as a celebrated boxer known for his worldwide fame in the sport and for being a strident and outspoken critic of U.S. policy.⁵⁸ Living outside the boundaries of U.S. authorities and government control made him a maverick. The U.S. Bureau of Investigation monitored the activities of Johnson during his time on the run. Government agents labeled Johnson “a traitor to his country,” and feared his deliberately subversive politics and status as a popular black athlete would incite blacks into rebellion.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ “Jack Johnson Explica Claramente Por Que se Dejó Vencer Por Jess Willard, En El Match Efectuado en La Habana,” *El Pueblo*, 31 de Marzo de 1919, 2.

⁵⁷ For a thorough and detailed examination of the Mexican newspapers that recorded Johnson’s time in Mexico, please consult Richard V. McGehee, “The Dandy and the Mauler in Mexico: Johnson, Dempsey, *et al.*, and the Mexico City Press, 1919-1927,” *Journal of Sport History*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (spring, 1996), 22.

⁵⁸ Gerald Horne, *Black and Brown: African Americans and the Mexican Revolution, 1910-1920* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 31-36; Theresa Runstedtler, *Jack Johnson, Rebel Sojourner: Boxing in the Shadow of the Global Color Line* (University of California Press, 2012); Randy Roberts, *Papa Jack: Jack Johnson and the Era of White Hopes* (New York: The Free Press, 1985).

⁵⁹ Letter from John W. Lang, Major Inf. from the Military Attaché of the American Embassy in Madrid to W. E. Allen, Acting Chief of the Bureau of Investigation, Department of Justice, and the Director of Military Intelligence in Washington D.C. “Jack Johnson,” January 18, 1919. Investigative Case Files of the Bureau of Investigation, 1908-1922; Records of the Federal Bureau of

Jack Johnson and his wife Lucille Johnson quickly became popular icons in the capital city. He frequented social events like bullfights, cruised around in automobiles around the capital, and traveled the country despite the social conflagration of the Mexican Revolution. He befriended Mexican government officials, including President Venustiano Carranza, who appealed to the exiled American by offering him armed escorts during his many trips around the country.⁶⁰ Johnson also immersed himself with radical politics including his tacit support for dissident communists from the U.S. also living in exile in Mexico. Johnson also encouraged African Americans living in the United States the idea of immigrating to Mexico. He started a “Land Company” that he advertised in *Gale’s Magazine* and *Obrero Mundial* that said

Colored People: You who are lynched, mobbed, persecuted, and discriminated against in the boasted “land of Liberty,” –the United States. Own a home in Mexico where one man is as good as another and it is not your color that counts, but simply you. Write for particulars.

Jack Johnson Land Co., *Mexico City*, D.F., Mexico. No 59 Donceles Street.⁶¹

Johnson’s public declarations underscored the blatant anti-black racism woven into U.S. society. He challenged ideas of liberty by comparing U.S. society alongside the freedoms promised under

Investigation. RG65, M1085, Reel 874, 5040, NARA; Assistant Director and Chief to A. Lanier Winslow of the Department of State. October 24, 1919. Investigative Case Files of the Bureau of Investigation, 1908-1922; Records of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. RG65, M1085, Reel 874, 5040, NARA.

⁶⁰ Jack Johnson, *Jack Johnson: In the Ring and Out* (Chicago: National Sports Publishing Company, 1927), 113, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/york/detail.action?docID=679931>

⁶¹ U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee, *Investigation of Mexican Affairs*, 1113; “Ensancha su labor el subcomite del senado Americano,” *El Diario Constitucionalista*, 22 de enero de 1920.

Mexico's new 1917 Constitution. This public stance posed a potentially dangerous situation for U.S. officials. U.S. intelligence officials monitored Johnson's activities in Mexico and viewed him as a renegade from justice using Mexico as a platform to spread revolutionary sentiment.⁶²

On the same day that Mexico learned of the death of Emiliano Zapata, articles appeared in the news dailies in Mexico City that described a scandal involving Jack Johnson and the Sanborns restaurant at the Casa de los Azulejos. On the afternoon of April 10, 1919, Johnson entered Sanborns for a meal. Accustomed to eating at various distinguished restaurants in the capital, he took a seat at a table in the dining salon and asked a white American waitress for a menu. She replied that Walter Sanborn had ordered her not to give him service and told Johnson to leave the establishment immediately. Mexican journalists wrote that certain Sanborns customers would have objected to sharing their dining experience with Johnson due to his race.⁶³ *El Pueblo* reported that Walter Sanborn had specifically refused to serve Johnson because black people, "were not permitted with people who did not have the same skin color."⁶⁴ At the time, Sanborns had catered its

⁶² Randy Roberts, *Papa Jack: Jack Johnson and the Era of White Hopes*, 212.

⁶³ "El Boxeador negro Johnson se hace servir helados en Samborns, con el apoyo de varios generales de brigada, brigadieres, coroneles y otros oficiales de menor graduación," *El Universal*, 11 Abril, 1919, 7; "Un Magno Escandalo Hicieron los Defensores del Boxeador Johnson," *Excelsior*, viernes 11 de Abril de 1919, 8; "A Jhonson no le Quisieron Servir en 'Samborns,'" *El Pueblo*, 11 de Abril de 1919, 4. It is clear from reading these newspaper accounts that Johnson's race was the reason why he was denied service by Walter Sanborn.

⁶⁴ "A Jhonson no," 4. "Dícese que el dueño y señor de 'Sanborn's' no permitió que le sirvieran a Johnson, porque no está admitido que gentes como Jack se encuentren junto a personas que no tienen el color de marras.;" "Negro Riot Propaganda and Activities of Jack Johnson at Mexico City,"

restaurant to aristocratic Mexicans and U.S. citizens in the American Colony in Mexico.⁶⁵ A U.S. citizen named C.L. Gardner witnessed the events that transpired and later testified to the U.S. Senate that a fuming Johnson left his seat in the presence of numerous men and women who were dining during the normal eating hour. According to Gardner, Johnson vowed to return later and “raise a rough-house.”⁶⁶

El Universal reported that Johnson exited Sanborns and walked into a different restaurant where he encountered a friend who was a Mexican general. After explaining what had happened, the general assured Johnson that he would rectify the matter.⁶⁷ Around 8:00pm, Johnson returned to Sanborns accompanied by an entourage of armed Carrancista military brass and a large crowd.⁶⁸ The military personnel included Generals Rafael de la Torre (the former Inspector General of the Police), Francisco Montes, Juan Mérito, colonels Guillermo Castillo Tapia and Carlos Domínguez, Johnson’s wife, and two unnamed people.⁶⁹ People strolling along the bustling Madero Avenue also

Memorandum from the Division Superintendent of the Bureau of Investigation to the Assistant Director & Chief of the Bureau of Investigation (Burke), October 15, 1919. Investigative Case Files of the Bureau of Investigation, 1908-1922; Records of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. RG65, M1085, Reel 874, 5040, NARA. Quoting Army Ranger Captain W.N. Hanson, the memorandum states, “Jack Johnson went into Sanborn’s store to be served, and Mr. Walter Sanborn refused because he was a negro.”

⁶⁵ “Otra Buena Noticia para Ud.!” *La Demócrata*, 19 de Octubre de 1922, 8.

⁶⁶ U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee, *Investigation of Mexican Affairs*, 1114.

⁶⁷ “El Boxeador negro Johnson,”7; “A Jhonson no,” 4.

⁶⁸ “Un Magno Escandalo,” 8.

⁶⁹ “El Boxeador negro Johnson.”7; “A Jhonson no,” 4.

noticed the ensuing spectacle and gathered at the store's entrance. *Excelsior* reported that the angry and threatening crowd who accompanied Johnson into Sanborns included as many as 100 people. They filed into the premises and lined the walls around the tables in the patio full of dining customers. The boisterous crowd denounced the act of discrimination by the store owner. They demanded Walter Sanborn come and apologize.⁷⁰ Meanwhile, just outside the store, an army captain accompanied with a squadron of twenty-five soldiers readied themselves in the event they needed to restore order.⁷¹

Inside the Sanborns dining salon, Johnson and a group of armed military officials sat down at a table and caused a great scene. Newspaper accounts in Mexico City offered embellished and conflicting reports of what happened next. According to *El Universal*, which offered the most detailed account of the incident, the group banged their fists on the table and demanded the waitresses serve them ice cream. To the surprise of the generals, everyone received service except for Johnson.⁷² The generals demanded Walter Sanborn come and speak to Johnson and give him a public apology, but the store owner refused to enter the dining salon.⁷³ The military officials went into the drugstore in search of the store owner. When they found him, General Montes confronted Sanborn about drawing the color line against Johnson and reportedly told him that Mexico did not discriminate against people based on racial differences. He said that unlike the United States, Mexico's laws protected Mexicans and foreigners alike. Sanborn reportedly replied, "You are right,

⁷⁰ "Un Magno Escandalo," 8.

⁷¹ U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee, *Investigation of Mexican Affairs*, 1114. This detail was also reported in "El Boxeador negro Johnson," 7.

⁷² "El Boxeador negro Johnson," 7."

⁷³ U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *Investigation of Mexican Affairs*, 1114.

but I acted to defend the prestige of my store.”⁷⁴ Another newspaper account suggested that Lucille Johnson, who was Caucasian, then had a verbal altercation with Sanborn and rebuked him for his discriminatory treatment of her husband.⁷⁵

The crowd that had accompanied Johnson into the restaurant filed into the drugstore and watched the situation unfold. The people demanded that Sanborn apologize to Johnson. Meanwhile, curious onlookers gathered outside the store overheard the wild cacophony and entered The House of Tiles for a chance to witness the brewing scandal. The people who collected inside the store joined in and demanded that Sanborn apologize to Johnson. Sanborn apparently continued to refuse. General Torre threatened to close the establishment while other people apparently threatened to set fire to the building.⁷⁶ *Excelsior* reported someone in the crowd suggested initiating a boycott of the store. Many people occupied the empty tables in the dining salon and demanded service from the Sanborn waitresses with the intention of dining and ditching.⁷⁷

During the incident, General Rodríguez reportedly reminded Walter Sanborn that he imposed a \$150.00 fine on him for refusing to serve ice cream to a black man in the Sanborns in Tampico, Tamaulipas.⁷⁸ If true, the allegation would suggest that the event with Johnson was not

⁷⁴ “El Boxeador negro Johnson,” 7. “Sí, caballeros...ustedes tienen razón, pero yo defiendiendo el prestigio de mi casa.”

⁷⁵ “Un Magno Escandalo,” 8.

⁷⁶ “El Boxeador negro Johnson,” 7.

⁷⁷ “Un Magno Escandalo,” 8. If true, this form of protest against Sanborns shares similar characteristics with the 1947 labor strike at Sanborns Monterrey described in chapter 4.

⁷⁸ “El Boxeador negro Johnson,” 7. “Acuérdese, Mr. Sanborn, que en Tampico le impuse a usted una multa por la misma causa...porque se negó usted a servir un helado a un negro...¡y pagó usted

first time a black man was denied service due to their race. Colonel Domínguez told Sanborn to respect the 1917 Constitution and Mexican law which provided freedoms to all people in the national territory. The situation escalated, and General Mérito stepped in with his pistol in hand and threatened the store owner with physical violence. Another man raised a cane in an attempt to hit the owner until Lucille Johnson intervened.⁷⁹

Eventually, inspectors from Mexico City's municipal government arrived with an entourage of uniformed police officers brought in to restore order.⁸⁰ Finally, in order to alleviate the tense situation, Sanborn capitulated. He apologized and shook hands with Johnson. Gardner then witnessed Johnson, his wife, and the military officials returned to their seats and posed for a photograph to "prove that they were there." Gardner claimed that the crowd of people who occupied the vacant tables "got away with at least \$1,000 worth of food and never paid for it." According to Gardner, Johnson offered to pay for his own bill, so he could deny being responsible for those who dined and ditched.⁸¹ Gardner's estimate of the total cost was undoubtedly an exaggeration. However, it speaks to the scale of the spontaneous protest launched by Mexicans who were probably not ordinary Sanborns customers. Nevertheless, they entered the restaurant and used it as a stage to demonstrate their protest against an act of racial discrimination. The photograph that

ciento cincuenta dólares de multa!" The Sanborn brothers had opened a drugstore in Tampico in January, 1913 and operated the store until April 18, 1919 when they sold off the branch to local Tampico business owners. See, A Granville Patton, "Anglo-American Notes," *El Universal*, 10 Abril de 1919, 7.

⁷⁹ "El Boxeador negro Johnson," 7.

⁸⁰ "Un Magno Escandalo," 8.

⁸¹ U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee, *Investigation of Mexican Affairs*, 1114.

Garner referred to appeared in the newspaper *El Universal* on April 11, 1919 and offers veracity to his testimony.



Figure 7: Jack Johnson, his wife Lucille Johnson and military officials pose for a photograph in the Sanborns dining salon. Reprinted from, “El Boxeador negro Johnson se hace servir helados en Samborns, con el apoyo de varios generales de brigada, brigadieres, coroneles y otros oficiales de menor graduación,” *El Universal*, 11 de Abril, 1919,7.

Walter Sanborn and his commercial establishment were publicly embarrassed by the scandal. Accounts of the incident appeared in national and international presses. The public narrative that formed in the aftermath suggested Johnson was a victim of racial discrimination by a white store owner trying to enforce Jim Crow laws in Mexico. However, due to the swift intervention by the Mexican government, Sanborn was publicly condemned, and Johnson received his constitutional protections as contained within Mexico’s 1917 Constitution.

El Pueblo reported “This U.S. citizen has forgotten that in Mexico you are not permitted to commit such disrespectful acts and no one is obliged to consent to such form of humiliation like the

one done to Mr. Johnson. Watch out, Mr. Sanborns!”⁸² *Excelsior* wrote that Johnson expressed his gratitude for the support given by his military friends and that he wanted to become a Mexican citizen because the country provided him freedom.⁸³ *El Universal* noted that Johnson “easily found sponsors among our brave generals to give him the pleasure of being served by white Mexicans in the white owned restaurant, and even received an apology by the merchant who had refused to sell his merchandise.”⁸⁴

Historical accounts of the incident tend to enforce the public narrative that Sanborns lost their business license as a result of the Jack Johnson incident.⁸⁵ This is due to the reliability on an article published in *The Chicago Defender* on July 1919, that claimed Walter Sanborn had his business license revoked by city authorities due to a petition launched by Generals Rafael de la Torre and Montes.⁸⁶ However, *El Universal* reported that during the incident, Lucille Cameron showed Walter

⁸² “A Jhonson no,” “Pero ese ciudadano norteamericano se olvida de que en Mexico no se puede ni se permito siquiera cometer tales desacatos, y nadie está obligado a consentir en ninguna humillación como la que se hizo al señor Johnson. ¡Precauciones, señor del Sanborn’s!”

⁸³ “Un Magno Escandalo,” 8.

⁸⁴ “El Boxeador negro Johnson,” 7. “...El famoso pugilista negro, Johnson, cuyo oficio es contrario a las leyes de la civilización, encontró fácilmente a padrinos entre nuestros aguerridos generales, para darse el placer de ser servido por mexicanos blancas y en fonda propiedad de blancos, y aun para exigir una satisfacción por el hecho de un comerciante se negará a vender su mercancía a quien le venga en gana.”

⁸⁵ Theresa Runstedtler, *Jack Johnson, Rebel Sojourner*, 226; Gerald Horne, *Black and Brown*, 34.

⁸⁶ “Refused Johnson; License Revoked: Mexican...Jack in Battling Color Line,” *The Chicago Defender*, July 12, 1919, 1.

Sanborn a written copy of a charge filed against him by an Agent of the Public Ministry.⁸⁷ This crucial detail was overlooked by historical accounts examining the Jack Johnson incident.⁸⁸ On April 11, 1919, the President of the Municipal Government of Mexico City imposed a \$500.00 peso fine on Walter Sanborn “for having refused to provide service for the black man Mr. Jack Johnson yesterday afternoon, and for intending to behave according to the laws his country [in The United States] and disobeying the mandates of our laws.”⁸⁹ However, just five days later on April 16th, 1919, the municipal government revised its earlier decision. The new memorandum stated that there had been an “error of interpretation” and that for the “scandals in his establishment” Walter Sanborn was granted a personal meeting within the offices of the President of the municipal government to privately discuss the imposed fine. Out of public view, the Mexican government then changed the reason for the infraction. The updated version then claimed Sanborn lacked a business license for their drugstore located on 16 de Septiembre Street.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ “El Boxeador negro Johnson,” 7.

⁸⁸ To the best of my knowledge, no historian who has recounted the Jack Johnson incident at Sanborns as located or examined the government records detailing this infraction.

⁸⁹ “Acuerdo del C. Presidente del Ayuntamiento,” 11 de Abril de 1919. Fondo Ayuntamiento y Gobierno del Distrito. Infracciones de droguerías, boticas y farmacias, vol. 2358, exp. 16, Año 1919-1920. AHCM. “Por acuerdo del C. Presidente Municipal, se impone una multa de \$500.00 QUINIENOS PESOS, al señor Sanborn, propietario del establecimiento Sanborn’s Bros., por haberse rehusado ayer en la tarde a atender al negro señor Jack Johnson y pretender conducirse de acuerdo con las leyes de su país, desobedeciendo los mandatos de nuestras leyes.”

⁹⁰ “Acuerdo del C. Presidente del Ayuntamiento,” 16 de Abril de 1919. Ayuntamiento GOB DF, Infracciones de droguerías, boticas y farmacias, vol. 2358, exp. 16, Año 1919-1920. AHCM. “Por un

Walter Sanborn may have threatened diplomatic pressure against the Mexican government in order to have the infraction changed. On April 17th, 1919, *El Universal* ran a short article buried on page ten that reported members of the municipal government had indeed imposed a \$500.00 fine on the “known storekeeper” Walter Sanborn, for operating one of his drugstores without a license. The article noted that Sanborn filed an appeal against the disposition on the grounds of unconstitutionality.⁹¹ The storeowner intended to file a diplomatic claim since he believed the fine was imposed in response to the incident involving Jack Johnson.⁹² Government documents show that Sanborns received their notification for the fine on April 21, 1919. That same day, Walter Sanborn wrote a letter to the Municipal President arguing that the imposed fine was an error, and that the store had licenses for both store branches. Sanborn accompanied his letter with his original drugstore licenses and evidence they he had paid for them. Nowhere in the letter did he mention the Jack Johnson incident. In concluding his letter, he wrote that, “In view of the above and given that we have the license form in doubt and that therefore there is no reason given for the imposition of

error de interpretación, en el acuerdo anterior girado por esta Secretaría a esa Mesa, se manifestó a usted que la multa...era por haberse ocasionado en su referido establecimiento algunos escándalos, y que para que enterara la multa correspondiente se le había dado cita en estas oficinas. Sírvase usted rectificar al expresado señor Sanborn, manifestándole que la multa de \$500.00 QUINIENOS PESOS, se le ha impuesto por carecer de licencia en su Droguería abierta al público en la Avenida 16 de Septiembre.”

⁹¹ The appeal of unconstitutionality was called a *recurso de amparo*.

⁹² “Se aplicará una multa a un conocido comerciante,” *El Universal*, el Jueves 17 de abril de 1919, 10.

the fine, we ask that it be lifted.”⁹³ Just one day later, the municipal government agreed and cancelled the fine and promptly returned the license.⁹⁴

Though the public discourse affirmed a narrative that Walter Sanborn had lost his battle against Jack Johnson with the brave assistance of members from the Carranza government, behind closed doors another story had unfolded. In the offices of the municipal government, Secretary General G. Rojas quickly reversed his decision to impose a fine on Sanborns. The unreported internal maneuvering that occurred between April 11th and April 16th 1919, allowed the government to manipulate the punishment levied against Sanborns. The municipal government was probably aware that the Sanborn brothers operated in compliance changed the infraction as a way to provide a means to absolve Sanborn from any criminal wrongdoing. There is no evidence in the archival record indicating exactly why the initial infraction against Walter Sanborn changed. Nevertheless, it can be inferred that Walter Sanborn likely used his social power and political connections within Mexico City’s municipal government to have his fine dropped. The incident in Sanborns occurred during the presidency of Venustiano Carranza (1917-1920). Weakened by the uncertainties of warfare, the Carrancista government and their allies held power through the use of military force,

⁹³ Secretaria a Sanborn (Walter Sanborn) al Presidente Municipal de la Ciudad de Mexico, 21 de Abril de 1919. Ayuntamiento GOB DF, Infracciones de droguerías, boticas y farmacias, vol. 2358, exp. 16, Año 1919-1920. AHCM. “En vista de lo expuesto y dado que tenemos en debida forma la licencia y que por tanto no existe el motivo que se da para la imposición de la multa, con todo respeto pedimos se sirva resolver que queda levantada dicha multa por no haber lugar a su imposición.”

⁹⁴ “Que por equidad se le condone la multa de \$500.00,” 22 de Abril de 1919. Ayuntamiento_GOB DF, Infracciones de droguerías, boticas y farmacias, vol. 2358, exp. 16, Año 1919-1920. AHCM.

corruption, repression, and control over the press.⁹⁵ The public embarrassment Sanborns received in the government-controlled newspapers amounted to a slap on the wrist by a nationalist government insisting on Americans being subject to Mexican law.

There is the high probability Walter Sanborn held powerful connections with factions within the Mexican government who manipulated the outcome and dropped the fine. Owning and operating an established business institution that catered specifically to Mexican elites provided the Sanborn brothers ample opportunity to establish connections with other powerful Mexicans. The two brothers held considerable economic and social power and were considered elites in Mexico City. Aside from the regularly printed advertisements for their store, the social activities of both Sanborn brothers periodically entered the society columns found in the English sections of Mexican newspapers such as *The Mexican Herald* and *El Universal*.⁹⁶ Their names became synonymous with the elites of Mexico City.

The Jack Johnson incident exposed an unenforced racial code existed at Sanborns influenced by U.S. anti-black racism. Certain racial limitations existed on who could enter the establishment and who could spend their leisure time there. During the era of Jim Crow, discriminatory laws systematically prevented African Americans from entering spaces demarked for whites across the United States. The racial animosity whites held against blacks continued among members of the American Colony living in Mexico, some of which were Sanborns customers.

⁹⁵ Alan Knight, *The Mexican Revolution*, 72.

⁹⁶ See for example, "Little Stories of the Street and Town," *The Mexican Herald*, February 21, 1904, 9.

A. Granville Patton, "Anglo-American Notes," *El Universal*, Viernes el 18 de abril de 1919, 7.

In 1922, a meeting held at Sanborns in preparation for the Fourth of July celebrations exposed the continual presence of racist sentiment within the walls of the House of Tiles. During a special luncheon attended by various committee members from the American Colony, Duval Moss, in charge of event amusements shared his plans for entertainment for an event held at the Condesa Hippodrome. *El Universal* reported the recreational activities for children included sporting events, games, and races including events named, “The Legless Woman,” “The Ocean Wave,” “Dare Devil Doughty in the Death Leap,” and “Shoot the [expletive deleted]-Head.”⁹⁷ The use of this derogatory racial epithet in a game designed for children offers evidence that some U.S. citizens living in Mexico normalized white supremacist convictions that were prevalent at the time. They were also accustomed to the Jim Crow laws that were in place in the United States.⁹⁸ Walter Sanborn likely felt belittled by the fact he was forced to concede wrongdoing and publicly apologize to a powerful black American man living in exile outside the boundaries of the racially segregated United States.

The story of Jack Johnson and his battle for the color line in Sanborns remained deeply embedded in Mexico City’s public memory, mentioned in press accounts more than seventy-five years later.⁹⁹ On November 2, 1919, *El Universal* published a special two-page section of *calaveras*, the traditional Mexican poems dating back to the 19th century that appear around the national Day of the Dead celebrations. These poems generally poke fun at the elite class. One of the poems printed in *El Universal* titled, “Johnson, Fifi” featured a caricature of Jack Johnson as a drooping skeleton

⁹⁷ “Anglo-American Notes,” *El Universal*, El Martes 20 de Junio de 1922, primera sección, 8.

⁹⁸ Gerald Horne, *Black and Brown*, 34.

⁹⁹ Agustín Barrios Gomez, “La Casa de los Azulejos,” *El Informador*, Domingo 28 de Agosto de 1994,

with big lips and enormously arms. The image depicted Johnson wearing shorts and a sleeveless shirt with large boxing gloves dangling around his ankles.¹⁰⁰

The accompanying poem read:

Este boxeador fifi,
 En México un héroe fue,
 Aunque Samborn le hizo--¡fu....
 Pero el general Fafá
 Le dijo: --Amigo, ten fe,
 Que si alguno te hace ¡mú!
 Yo a todos les hago mé.

This unmanly boxer,
 Was a hero in Mexico,
 Although Sanborn made him leave...
 But the general haha
 Told him: --have faith, friend,
 If someone does that, don't speak
 I myself will do it to all of them.

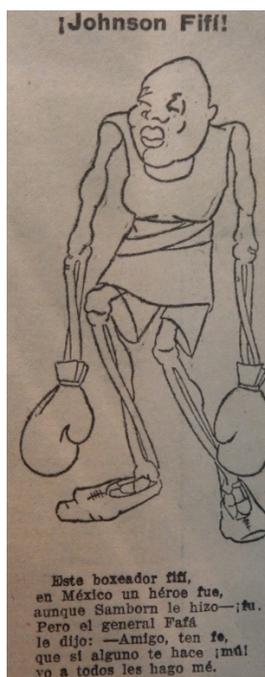


Figure 8: *Calavera* of Jack Johnson. “¡Johnson Fifi!” *El Universal*, 2 de Noviembre de 1919, 17.

¹⁰⁰ “¡Johnson Fifi!” *El Universal*, 2 de Noviembre de 1919, 17.

The newspaper jokingly depicted Johnson as being a *fifi*, a gendered characterization that classified him as being an upper-class effeminate man. This gendered charge was typical of the time period and the phrase was used to pick on members of the upper-class. Mexican newspapers had also previously used the term *fifi* to describe upper-class male customers at Sanborns.¹⁰¹ In this case of Johnson, the newspaper considered him unmanly because he needed Mexican military generals to assist him against the discrimination he faced at Sanborns.

The scandal involving Johnson and Sanborns occurred during two pivotal social moments within Mexico and the United States, set between racial tensions and Revolution. Mounting social tensions between blacks and whites in the racially segregated United States eventually erupted into widespread social violence known as the 1919 Race Riots. In various cities across the United States, and most notably in Chicago, racially motivated attacks resulted in the deaths of almost two hundred people. White people living in the United States considered African Americans as racially inferior and culturally different people.

U.S administrators feared the rise of African American militancy against whites in post-World War I society.¹⁰² They also viewed Jack Johnson as an imposing threat to U.S. society. The Bureau of Investigation feared Johnson was working alongside Carranza's government to instill propaganda that would "incite the Negroes of this country" to rebel.¹⁰³ This was no idle threat given

¹⁰¹ "La Droguería Sanborns," *Acción Mundial*, 28 de abril de 1916, 2. "“llego otro marchante, mexicano, uno de tantos fifis muy de la casa.”"

¹⁰² Jonathan S. Coit, "Our Changed Attitude': Armed Defense and the New Negro in the 1919 Chicago Race Riot," *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (April 2012), 227.

¹⁰³ Memorandum from the Division Superintendent of the Bureau of Investigation to the Assistant Director & Chief of the Bureau of Investigation (Frank Burke), October 15, 1919. Investigative Case

the appearance of the Plan de San Diego in January 1915, a document that called for an uprising against Anglos in South Texas. A fine imposed by the Mexican government against a powerful white American business owner could have potentially caused a diplomatic dispute between Mexico and the United States. These concerns may have influenced the decision-making process of Carranza's government to alleviate unnecessary political pressure and further weaken an already precarious central government.¹⁰⁴

Jack Johnson might have been a celebrity that belonged in the boxing ring, but Walter Sanborn probably believed he was a fugitive of justice that did not belong in his store among his white upper-class customers. The swift condemnation of Sanborns in the press boosted Jack Johnson's public spotlight in a favorable way. Johnson may have felt satisfied with the overall outcome. As Randy Roberts points out, the celebrity boxer had an insatiable appetite for self-promotion.¹⁰⁵ However, despite the public narrative suggesting Johnson won the color battle against Sanborns, the aftermath reveals no real threat existed to the Sanborns business and that an aura of white elite masculinity still lingered heavily within the House of Tiles, one that privileged certain people above others. In the end, the company owners of Sanborns had manipulated the outcome to make sure their business was not impacted by their act of discrimination. As this next section shows, Sanborns maintained their prominence as an elite institution that catered to Mexico's upper-class elites.

Files of the Bureau of Investigation, 1908-1922; Records of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. RG65, M1085, Reel 874, 5040, NARA.

¹⁰⁴ For more on the Plan de San Diego, see Charles H. Harris III and Louis R. Sadler, *The Plan de San Diego: Tejano Rebellion, Mexican Intrigue* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2013), x-xii.

¹⁰⁵ Randy Roberts, *Papa Jack: Jack Johnson and the Era of White Hopes*, 211.

Homo sapiens and Homo Sanborns: Upper-class Leisure and Sociability, 1920-1960

Throughout the 1920s-1960s, Casa Sanborns developed into one of Mexico City's premiere destinations for the social activity of business leaders, government officials, foreign visitors, and Mexico City's high society.¹⁰⁶ It served as a meeting place of distinction where the upper class spent their leisure time eating, drinking, and entertaining themselves by socializing, dancing, or listening to music. A company souvenir booklet from the late 1930s for English-speaking tourists described Sanborns as the "meeting space of the socially elite," and a place where "the great and the near-great in the world's affairs" gathered daily to meet and dine with friends in Mexico City's "foremost restaurant."¹⁰⁷ Daily newspaper advertisements also encouraged readers to "Meet me at Sanborns."¹⁰⁸ The company had converted the downstairs patio into a stage of reunion where customers performed their social roles.

Going to Sanborns was part of a public spectacle for some, a place for sociability and identity performance for others, and a tradition for customers who made spending their leisure time at the store part of their daily routine. The restaurant and coffeehouse served as a space where Mexico's social and political elites sought others from similar powerful backgrounds. It became "synonymous to a cosmopolitan meeting place, a sort of international club without dues, constitution or by-laws, known even to thousands of people who never have been there."¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ "Sanborns Scrapbook," *Ayer y Hoy*. Company document. 1965. ASH.

¹⁰⁷ "Sanborns Souvenir," company booklet, 1939. ASH.

¹⁰⁸ Escobosa de Rangel, *La Casa de los Azulejos*, 106-107.

¹⁰⁹ Alvert Avigdor, "Sanborn Hermanos: An American Drug Store in a Mexican Palace," *Druggists Circular*, Vol. 83, No. 12 (December 1939), 18-19.

Customers who formed part of the “international club” at Sanborns were well-known members of Mexico City’s social and political power.

From the 1920s through the 1960s, every morning, small groups of intellectuals, diplomats, business leaders, economists, celebrities, lawyers, and senators from the Chamber of Deputies filed the squared tables in the patio of the House of Tiles. Carlos Monsiváis said that the people who met there formed individual “tables” identified by distinct names. The tables included “The Scorpions,” “The Communicants,” “*La Osa Mayor*,” “The “Communists,” “The Elephants,” “The Legion of the Knights of Columbus,” “*Las Cuquitas*,” “The Hare Table,” and *Las Polveaditas*.¹¹⁰ Another table at Sanborns included *Los Contemporáneos* (The Contemporaries), a prominent literary group composed of the Mexican writers Jaime Torres Bodet, Xavier Villaurrutia, Jorge Cuesta, Salvador Novo, and others.¹¹¹ The group collaborated and met every Sunday at Sanborns for breakfast.¹¹² The gender suffixes used for the names raises questions concerning the sex of the members of each group. Each name could indicate whether the tables had only women, mixed-gender, or male only.

Monsiváis said that each table at Sanborns maintained a set of codes shared among the other tables. For example, a guest could not receive an invitation to join a table unless other group

¹¹⁰ See Carla Zarebska, *La Casa de los Azulejos*, 199. “Cada mesa era identificada con un nombre en los Azulejos: los Alacranes, las Comulgantas, la Osa Mayor, las Comunistas, los Elefantes, la Legión de los Caballeros de Colón, las Cuquitas, la mesa de la Liebre, las Polveaditas... Y claro, como todo, había jerarquías, mesas más importantes que otras y la espera para ser invitado a una de ellas, lo cual significaba un enorme prestigio.”

¹¹¹ Vicente Quirarte, introduction to *Los Contemporáneos en El Universal* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2016), 11.

¹¹² *La cocina Mexicana a través de los siglos*, (México: Fundación Herdez, 1996), 58.

members approved the notion the day before. Each member had to dress appropriately, talk respectfully, and could not leave the table for any reason if someone came over to say hello. A social hierarchy existed among the tables themselves. People who received an invitation to sit at a more prestigious table considered it a great honor.¹¹³



Figure 9: A Sanborns waitress attends a group of men sitting at a table in the tea salon at the House of Tiles. Hermanos Mayo. *Cafetería Sanborns de México, Calle Madero*. Hermanos Mayo, Cronológico, Sobre 7644, Tira 4. Fototeca, AGN. Mexico City.

The Mexican writer and politician Andres Serra Rojas became a regular Sanborns customer at a young age. He considered himself, “a law student at the Palace of Tiles,” perhaps inferring that the men who gathered there regularly included lawyers and Mexican state bureaucrats. Serra Rojas described being a member of a political table called *Las Peñas*. “During the first years of the 1930s, we formed our traditional table with men that today are now part of the history of Mexico.” Serra Rojas sat alongside other men that included Antonio Carrillo Flores, Manuel Sánchez Cué, and Antonio Ortiz Mena. He recalled that during the 1940s, the same table grew to include men like

¹¹³ Zarebska, Carla. Interview with Carlos Monsiváis. April 1999. Available in Carla Zarebska, *La Casa de los Azulejos*, 1999.

César Sepúlveda, Antonio Martínez Báez, Othón Pérez Correa and Emilio J. Bello. For decades, these men gathered every morning at 7:00am for coffee, and used Sanborns as their meeting house until the 1970s.¹¹⁴ Andrés Henestrosa recalled his memories of the distinguished educator Dr. Roberto A. Esteva Ruíz, who shared tables at Sanborns with students, university alumni, and young waitresses.¹¹⁵

When Carlos Monsiváis started going to Sanborns as a university student, he remembered seeing the powerful men that frequented the patio, including President Adolfo López Mateos, the Mexican painter Rufino Tamayo, Salvador Novo, and others. He described Sanborns not just as a coffeehouse, “but *the* café where the Mexican establishment ate their breakfast” [emphasis added].¹¹⁶ In 1999, during an interview with Carla Zarebska, Monsiváis illustrated what it was like going to Sanborns:

It was another Mexico, the society had grown, but not to the point that famous people could not walk around and recognize each other. The jokes that were said there would be heard all

¹¹⁴ As quoted in, “Los Intelectuales y sus Mesas Cuadradas,” *Sanborns Azulejos: Tradición y esplendor de este siglo*, 7 de Marzo de 1995. ASH. “Desde 1925, casi al tiempo que José Clemente Orozco pintaba su mural en Sanborns concurría, como estudiante de Jurisprudencia al Palacio de los Azulejos... Fue al poco tiempo, durante los primeros años de los treinta, que se formó nuestra tradicional mesa, con hombres que hoy forman parte de la historia de México.” “Jurisprudencia” was likely a reference to the Escuela Nacional de Jurisprudencia.

¹¹⁵ Andrés Henestrosa, “La Nota Cultural,” *El Nacional*, 11 de Mayo de 1967, 3.

¹¹⁶ Zarebska, Carla. Interview with Carlos Monsiváis. April 1999. Available in Carla Zarebska, *La Casa de los Azulejos*, 1999. “Sanborns no era un café más, era el café a donde iba el México institucional a desayunar.”

week. Sanborns represented the combination of a Mexico that wanted to Americanize itself with the institutions of Mexico. It was a meeting place with a respectful atmosphere.¹¹⁷

Sanborns established a borderland connecting Mexicans with U.S. culture and modern commodities. More than a restaurant, Sanborns was a site of power, a political salon and cosmopolitan club frequented by Mexico's well-known elites. In 1956, Luis Correa Sarabia penned an article in the newspaper *Novedades* titled, "Homo Sanborns" where he described the place as

a marketplace of opinions, a political club that is the site of Mexico where the viewpoints of distinguished people from diverse political parties converge together. The people who go there come in search of information about their ideas and their problems. Sanborns really fulfills this function. To prove it, remember that Miguel Alemán; who we can all agree earned his rights as a Mexican politician; used to ask his friends and collaborators: "What did they say in Sanborns?"¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ Ibid. "...Era otro México, la sociedad había crecido pero no al punto de que la gente conocida no pudiese circular y reconocerse. Los chistes que ahí se hacían seguían escuchándose toda la semana. Sanborns representaba la combinación de un México que quiso americanizarse, con el México de las instituciones. Era un sitio de encuentro con atmósfera de respetabilidad."

¹¹⁸ Luis Correa Sarabia, "Homo Sanborns," *Novedades*, May 27, 1956. "Sanborns es hoy ágora, mercado, lonja de opiniones, club político o mejor, el sitio de México a donde confluyen los puntos de vista de personas distinguidas de los diversos partidos políticos, personas que ahí acuden en busca de confronta de información de sus conceptos sobre determinados problemas. Que Sanborns llena realmente una función de este tipo, bastará recordar que el señor licenciado Miguel Alemán, a quien



Figure 10: “What did they say in Sanborns?” Caricature of Jose Clemente Orozco (left) and Mexican President Miguel Alemán (right) positioned between two Sanborns waitresses. Reprinted from, Luis Correa Sarabia, “Homo Sanborns,” *Novedades*, 27 de Mayo de 1956.

The Mexican intellectual, poet, and essayist Andrés Henestrosa once claimed that, “there are two classes of men, the *Homo sapiens* and the *Homo Sanborn's*.”¹¹⁹ His observation encapsulated the type of exclusive masculinity Sanborns represented in the minds of its customers. In Henestrosa’s view, the illustrious and powerful individuals who met at Sanborns collectively formed a distinct class of men separated from the rest of Mexican society. Each customer could imagine themselves as members belonging to a private club and social community reserved for a specific social class. The new bourgeois that had formed after the revolution resumed the tradition of spending leisure time at

nadie va a negarle sus quilates de político mexicano solía preguntar a sus amigos y colaboradores: --
¿Qué se dice en Sanborns?”

¹¹⁹ Escobosa de Rangel, *La Casa de Los Azulejos*, 107; González Gamio, Angeles. “Homo sapiens y homo Sanborns,” *La Jornada*.

<http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2003/11/23/034a1cap.php?printver=1&fly=> (accessed January 26, 2018).

Sanborns. A glitterati of bankers, business owners, foreign dignitaries, politicians, military officials, intellectuals, journalists, academics, actors, and foreigners all made going to Sanborns an important part of their identity. They met at Sanborns with other powerful people day or night.¹²⁰ The store's location along Madero Street in downtown Mexico City provided convenience for many generations of professionals who worked in the retail shops, banks, and office buildings in downtown Mexico City.¹²¹ Sanborns intersected many powerful Mexican institutions and was within walking distance from the Bank of Mexico, the Nacional Finance Company, the National Palace, the Chamber of Deputies, and prominent downtown hotels.¹²²

Conclusion

On March 16, 1999, eight members from the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) entered Sanborns at the House of Tiles.¹²³ Wearing their black ski-masks, the group walked towards the back of the store and symbolically recreated the famous scene from eighty-five years before, when the Zapatistas Army from the South had entered the capital and ate along the bar at a Sanborns. The newspaper *Reforma* reported that Subcomandante Marcos, along with his group of male and female delegates had traveled from La Realidad in the jungles of Chiapas to Mexico City, “to promote the national consultation for the Recognition of the Rights of Indigenous People and for the End of the War of Extermination” in Chiapas.¹²⁴ Groups of photographers and television

¹²⁰ “A Business that Became a Social Institution,”11.

¹²¹ “A Business that Became a Social Institution,”11.

¹²² “Los Intelectuales y sus Mesas Cuadradas,” *Sanborns Azulejos: Tradición y esplendor de este siglo*, 7 Marzo de 1995. ASH.

¹²³ Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN).

¹²⁴ Guadalupe Irizar, “El Regreso Zapatista,” *Reforma*, el Miércoles 17 de Marzo de 1999.

cameras gathered to witness the historic event, as members from the Democratic Revolution Party (PRD) met and ate alongside the Zapatistas. Sanborns waitresses, cooks, and cleaners could not help but greet their famous customers. The *Reforma* article included a photo recreation of the iconic 1914 photograph of the Zapatistas in Sanborns. In a similar framing, the masked Zapatistas are positioned at the bar while a Sanborns waitress extends her arms with a tray holding a beverage. *Reforma* positioned the two photographs side by side to show readers the historic significance of the scene. Newspapers accounts of the event repeated the mistaken claim that suggested the 1914 photograph of the Zapatistas took place in the House of Tiles.¹²⁵ As the Zapatistas finished their meal, they filed out through the tea salon while customers shouted, “Long live the EZLN!” and, “Zapata lives!” A reporter asked a delegate from the Zapatistas if they knew what happened in Sanborns 8 decades ago. “We know history,” he responded.¹²⁶

¹²⁵ Guadalupe Irizar, “El Regreso Zapatista,” *Reforma*, el Miércoles 17 de Marzo de 1999; “De nuevo, un grupo de Zapatistas comió en la Casa de los Azulejos,” *La Jornada*, 17 de Marzo de 1999 <http://www.jornada.com.mx/1999/03/17/sanborns.html> (accessed August 14, 2018).

¹²⁶ Irizar, “El Regreso Zapatista.”



Figure 11: Members of the EZLN eating at Sanborns in the House of Tiles. Reprinted from, “El Regreso Zapatista,” *Reforma*, miércoles 17 de Marzo de 1999.

The Zapatistas were well aware of the significance Sanborns played in the history of the Mexican Revolution. In recreating the famous scene in Sanborns, they drew parallels between their own revolutionary struggles and the Mexican Revolution. The members of the EZLN chose to eat in Sanborns in remembrance of the Zapatistas from 1914 who used the institution as a stage to contest Mexican state power. The EZLN recognized the social and cultural significance of their act and used recreated the scene in Sanborns to emphasize the consistent struggle of indigenous groups in Mexican history. The EZLN used Sanborns to demonstrate their social power.

Going to Sanborns meant affiliating oneself with other powerful individuals who collectively built the commercial institution into an important place for local elites. Between 1910 and 1960, Sanborns owners consciously manipulated conceptions of race and gender in order to adapt to the chaotic changes in Mexico City’s urban landscape. An internal Sanborns document from 1965 titled, “Yesterday and Today” offers evidence that company administrators understood the necessity to adopt commercial changes throughout different stages in Mexico’s history. One of the pages contained a pencil sketch of San Francisco Street that showed a stagecoach drawn by horses driven

by two men in top hats as they pass a crowd and the recognizable façade of the House of Tiles. In conjuring up memories of Mexico's Porfirian past, the caption read, "Sanborns today, like yesterday, moves to the rhythm of time: always moving forward. In these illustrations we can appreciate the fashions, the public, and the distinct concept that has been the character of our merchandise."¹²⁷

Another page in the document provided a visual contrast between the 1914 photograph of the Zapatistas eating in Sanborns and a restaurant scene from the 1960s. The latter photograph showed a group of men in business suits sitting along the bar while attended them. The text read, "The tables and the trends have changed, but yesterday just like today, the city dwellers continue preferring the service of Sanborns. Yesterday, during the period of Revolution, terrified waitresses attended a group of Zapatistas; today, men from businesses, families, and tranquil citizens enjoy the traditional coffee or the rich dishes that have made Sanborns famous."¹²⁸

This chapter has shown that between 1910 and 1960, the Sanborns business was shaped by largescale transformations in Mexican society. What began as a drugstore established during the Porfiriato, evolved into a social institution during Mexico's Revolution, and bridged across Mexico's post-revolutionary time period. They were able to maintain their business success despite the

¹²⁷ "Sanborns Scrapbook," *Ayer y Hoy*. Company document produced in 1965. Archivo Sanborn Hermanos. "Ayer, como hoy, Sanborns se mueve a ritmo del tiempo: siempre hacía adelante. En estas gráficas podemos apreciar las modas, el público y el distinto concepto que se tenía de la disposición de la mercancía."

¹²⁸ Ibid. "Los muebles y las modas habrán cambiado, pero ayer como hoy, el público capitalino sigue prefiriendo el servicio de Sanborns. Ayer, en épocas de Revolución la amedrentada mesera atiende a un grupo de zapatistas; hoy, hombres de empresa, familias, tranquilos ciudadanos, gozan del tradicional café o de los ricos platillos que han hecho famoso a Sanborns."

onslaught of revolutionary violence by manipulating conceptions of race and gender. Sanborns developed into a place of leisure for local elites from Mexico City. Upper-class Mexicans mingled and dined at Sanborns, performing their social identities with other powerful elites. However, Sanborns served as a stage where people contested Sanborns's association with Mexican state power, elite sociability, U.S. capitalism and racial politics. The incidents involving revolutionary soldiers, Mexican citizens, and Jack Johnson entering Sanborns collectively demonstrate how people entered the store specifically to challenge conceptions of gender, race, and class. Sanborns customers played a significant role in molding the store into the type of place they wanted it to represent for themselves. As the next chapter shows, Sanborns managers adjusted their store according to the rhythms of social, political, and cultural changes that occurred during Mexico's postrevolutionary time period. Changing economic conditions and Mexican nationalism shaped how store owners promoted their company to a larger audience that moved beyond local elites.

Chapter III

“Reminiscent of Old Mexico”: Commercializing Nationalism through Food, Commodities, and Invented Traditions, 1920-1950

During the 1920s and 1950s, the Sanborns brothers systematically adjusted their business operations to evolve within Mexico’s changing nationalistic trends and economic conditions. The owners incorporated a Mexican cultural aesthetic throughout their store: They decorated the interior designs of stores in Mexico City and Monterrey with Mexican artwork and upholstery; restaurant menus started featuring select Mexican food dishes; a redesigned uniform worn by waitresses mixed together clothing worn by indigenous women in Mexico, and an added curios department offered customers high quality Mexican silver, folkloric arts and handicrafts.

By using company ephemera, restaurant menus and menu inserts, internal Sanborns records, personal correspondences, periodicals, advertisements, travel guides, novels, and other print material, this chapter shows how Sanborns became *Mexicanized* in order to sell more merchandise and reach an larger audience of customers. I argue that Sanborns increased its customer base beyond local elites by acting as a cultural translator across national, ethnic, racial, and generational lines. Sanborns owners capitalized on the wave of intense nationalism that followed the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920), in order to market their store as a symbol of Mexican identity and national progress. Around the time Sanborns moved into the House of Tiles, the company started inventing their own narratives about their place in Mexico. These invented traditions centered around major developments within the company’s own history that were formulated to help the company navigate the profound changes caused by the Revolution.¹ These traditions told a story about Sanborns’s

¹ Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds. *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1. Hobsbawm defines “invented tradition” as “a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to

seamless entry into Mexican society and the arrival of modernity that accompanied their commercial foundation. Ultimately, these traditions promoted the company's contributions to Mexico's economic progress and modernization.

The Revolution caused a dramatic shift in the way state planners and nationalists thinkers envisioned race and the presence of indigenous groups within the nation. Highly influential essays written by intellectuals such as Manuel Gamio and José Vasconcelos, among others, influenced social policy and prevailing racial thoughts towards present-day indigenous people, and the contributions made by Mexico's ancient civilizations. Gamio's *Forjando Patria* (1916) called on revolutionary leaders to forge a new nation that culturally included *mestizaje*, or mixed racial groups, within a developing modern Mexico.² Vasconcelos's *La Raza Cosmica* (1925) argued that the racial evolution of the *mestizo*—the mixture of race between indigenous and white ancestry—created a spiritually superior cosmic race that improved society.³ Incidentally, Vasconcelos's widely-read essays were published the same year José Clemente Orozco was commissioned to paint a mural inside Sanborns in House of Tiles that became *Omnisciencia* (Omniscience), which depicts racially indigenous nude figures shaped by the presence of a divine power.

These seminal works continued to influence generations of scholars who study Mexico's national integration. For example, in Rick A. López's *Crafting Mexico*, he argues that in order for Mexico to transition from a fractured and regionally separated country into a unified nation, state inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past.”

² Manuel Gamio, *Forjando patria: Pro-nacionalismo*, trans. Fernando Armstrong-Fumero (Boulder: University of Colorado Press, 2011).

³ Ilan Stavans, *José Vasconcelos: The Prophet of Race* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2011).

planners and cultural nationalists created an *ethnicized* vision of Mexico, one that embraced its indigenous and cultural past by promoting folklore and vernacular arts.⁴ Nationalists argued for state intervention into the production and promotion of Mexico's popular art.⁵ My research on Sanborns as a cultural translator intersects greatly with López's work, particularly his chapter on the role of foreign-Mexican collaboration in the promotion of an ethnicized Mexican identity.⁶ Some of the important figures and institutions López analyzes in his chapter were deeply connected with Sanborns. My research delves further into understanding the important relationship that Sanborns played in commercializing, promoting, and shaping Mexico's popular art for both domestic and foreign consumers during the 1920s-1940s.

Jeffrey M. Pilcher's book *¡Que vivan los tamales!* analyzes how cookbooks, eating habits, and politics shaped Mexico's national identity. He explores the intersection between food, gender, class, and modernized technologies, showing that Mexico's national cuisine, which emerged in the 1940s, combined the culinary tradition of corn-based indigenous meals with European foods.⁷ Yet, my research shows that the Sanborns restaurant featured an indigenous corn dish, the *tamal* on its American-style menus as early as 1920. In the 1930s, Sanborns included a "Mexican Dishes" selection on its menus, including *tortillas*, refried beans, guacamole, *mole enchiladas*, *chalupas*, *rajas*, and *tortas*. This information suggests that Sanborns was at the vanguard of establishing a

⁴ Rick A. López, *Crafting Mexico: Intellectuals, Artisans, and the State After the Revolution* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 2.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 97. See specifically chapter three, "Foreign-Mexican Collaboration, 1920-1940."

⁷ Jeffrey M Pilcher, *¡Que vivan los tamales!: Food and the Making of Mexican Identity* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998).

postrevolutionary national cuisine. Sanborns helped change class-based assumptions about indigenous meals that were long associated with the lower-class.⁸

The rise of Mexico's tourism industry during the postrevolutionary period was an important economic factor that increased the Sanborns customer base and contributed in the store's development into a cultural translator. Between 1930-1940, Mexico experienced a five-fold increase in the number of foreign tourists entering Mexico. Statistical data from the Secretary of Tourism shows that in 1930, 24,000 foreign visitors entered Mexico; that number climbed to 126,000 in 1940, and more than tripled to 385,000 by 1950.⁹ Sanborns owners capitalized on these developments in order to market their stores in Monterrey and Mexico City as a secure tourist destination. For example, a 1940s company booklet stressed the convenience of Sanborns stores. Both Sanborn stores were within walking distance from prominent downtown hotels in Monterrey and Mexico. Sanborns Monterrey provided customers with a currency exchange; the air-conditioned store provided comfort from the searing heat; the restaurant featured a mixed-menu of American and Mexican cuisine, and the soda fountain served up ice cream and sodas that were "distinctly 'American.'" Being a U.S.-owned and managed business meant that travelers could speak their native language, pay with U.S. dollars, and find all the "hints of home" they were familiar with while visiting an institution "Reminiscent of Old Mexico."¹⁰ Sanborns commercialized Mexico's nationalism and benefited from favorable economic conditions that widened its customers base.

⁸ Ibid., 131.

⁹ Gabriela Pardo, ed. *Turismo en México: Treinta Años de la Secretaría de Turismo, 1975-2000*, (México: Secretaría de Turismo, 2005), 44.

¹⁰ "Sanborns Monterrey Mexico." Company souvenir booklet. (Mexico: Editorial department of the National Chamber of Hotels, 1940s). Author's personal archive.

This chapter explores how Sanborns built upon its commercial success and elite reputation and developed into a cultural translator for generations of Mexicans and foreign tourists.

José Clemente Orozco's Mural in the House of Tiles, 1925

In 1925, Francisco Sergio de Iturbe approached the Mexican painter José Clemente Orozco (1883-1949) and asked him to paint a mural on the central staircase in the House of Tiles, the building he owned and leased to Sanborns.¹¹ The early work by the young artist from Zapotlán, Jalisco was known for having stark contrasts and a powerful style that accompanied his brooding subject matter.¹² Orozco had recently painted the patio at the National Preparatory School in 1922 under contract from the minister of Public Education Secretary, José Vasconcelos. The murals were admired by Iturbe who specifically sought Orozco and privately commissioned him to paint the mural at his property that would be titled *Omnisciencia* (Omniscience).¹³

¹¹ Magdalena Escobosa de Rangel, *La Casa de los Azulejos: Reseña histórica del Palacio de los Condes del Valle de Orizaba* (México: San Ángel Ediciones, S.A., 1986), 110.

¹² Xavier Villaurrutia, "The Jose Clemente Orozco Mural in the House of Tiles: Sanborns' Mexico," company brochure. No date. ASH.

¹³ Magdalena Escobosa de Rangel, *La Casa de los Azulejos: Reseña histórica del Palacio de los Condes del Valle de Orizaba* (México: San Angel Ediciones, S.A., 1986), 110.



Figure 12: José Clemente Orozco, *Omnisciencia* (Omniscience), 1925. Sanborns, Casa de los Azulejos. Photo taken by the author.

Omniscience is a mystical painting that features a racially brown colored nude man and woman symmetrically opposed from one another, separated by a kneeling androgynous figure illuminated by fire. On the left, an indigenous man stands with a sword resting on its blade centered between his legs, hiding his genitals. His clenched hand grips the weapon, but he is physically restrained by the arm of a larger, and more powerful masculine being standing at attention behind him, who has his other hand resting on the man's head, securing him in place. This faceless figure shares the same skin pigment as the indigenous man he protects and represents an unidentifiable higher power. The imagery of the masculine symbolizes the strong, powerful, warlike and possibly vengeful male who has his head turned towards the divine with his eyes closed. The indigenous female figure on the right stands naked like her counterpart, though her hands are bare and relaxed passively at her sides. The woman's braided hair curves around her neck and over her shoulder. Behind her, another faceless and racially similar, physically taller and powerful being stands close to

her side. An outstretched arm covers the view of her breasts, while the rest of her body stands exposed. However, unlike the male on the left, the head of the woman is not constrained by the hand of her protector and thus is free to think. Her head faces forward, away from the divine, and appears tense and occupied by deep internal thoughts.¹⁴ The rigid lines surrounding the kneeling figure in the center suggests the presence of an ordered being, the divine, directing its power above. The brightly colored paints used for the illuminations of fire stand in contrast to the darker hues used for the skin tone on the bodies of the figures and along the bottom of the mural.

Orozco's mural of *Omniscience* in Sanborns appeared several years before Mexico's revolutionary muralism fully developed in the 1930s. The location of this early commission is also significant. Orozco painted his mural within a U.S. owned commercial establishment frequented by powerful elites that included Mexican government officials, intellectuals, and foreign visitors of Mexico. On May 13, 1925, the famous Mexican painter Gerardo Murillo, better known as Dr. Atl, wrote a letter addressed to Frank "Samborn" that was likely intended as a public announcement for a banquet he wanted to have at Sanborns honoring Orozco. In the letter, Dr. Atl thanked the Sanborns brothers and Francisco Sergio de Iturbe for allowing Orozco's painting of "nude figures" to be displayed in such a prominent public setting.¹⁵ Atl claimed that as a customer who ate regularly at Sanborns for breakfast, he and his friends were apparently shocked to discover Orozco was painting there. According to Atl, he believed that the Mexican art world had arrived in "a new era,"

¹⁴ Xavier Villaurrutia, "The Jose Clemente Orozco Mural in the House of Tiles: Sanborns' Mexico," company brochure. No date. ASH.

¹⁵ Dr. Atl to Sr. F. Sanborns, 13 May 1925, as found in *La Casa de los Azulejos* (México: Sanborns Hermanos, 1999), 180. "un gran fresco con figuras desnudas."

one that operated, “outside the official spheres.”¹⁶ Unlike other mural projects commissioned by the Mexican government in officially sanctioned spaces, Orozco’s painting “was done in the house of a cultured American.”¹⁷ This ensured that Orozco’s “example of culture” would be admired by both Mexicans and Americans.¹⁸ On May 15, 1925, A Sanborns manager replied to Dr. Atl thanking him for the “very interesting letter,” but declined the invitation to host the banquet for Orozco. The letter said Frank Sanborn had been out of the country for the past few months on a business trip to Europe and the United States.¹⁹

Dr. Atl’s public letter indicates political and cultural ramifications tied with Orozco’s mural inside Sanborns. Dr. Atl was likely interested in promoting Mexican art and revolutionary muralism to a wider audience. Having the painting displayed in a popular U.S. business operating in Mexico allowed members of Mexico’s high society and visiting tourists a chance to view Mexican muralism up close. Company owners recognized that the Orozco mural could increase their customers by emphasizing that *Omniscience* was inside their store. For example, a postcard printed in the 1940s featured the façade of the Casa de los Azulejos and the Orozco painting on the interior, side by side. The backside description read that Orozco was considered one of Mexico’s most famous painters, and that *Omniscience* was considered “one of the most important paintings of the master.”²⁰

¹⁶ Ibid. “ambos significan que entramos en una nueva era de grandes manifestaciones artísticas fuera[sic] de las esferas[sic] oficiales.”

¹⁷ Ibid. “porque ha sido en casa de un americano culto donde ha tenido lugar.”

¹⁸ Ibid., “Yo me permito felicitarlo a Ud. Sincera y calurosamente, por haber dado el ejemplo de cultura que acaba Ud. De poner ante los ojos de la sociedad de México y de la sociedad americana.”

¹⁹ E. B. Schildt to Dr. Atl, 15 de Mayo de 1925, in *La Casa de los Azulejos* by Carla Zarebska, 180.

²⁰ “In a City famous for hospitality Sanborns is among the finest.” Sanborns postcard. 1940s? ASH.

The letter also suggested that Atl personally believed the Sanborn brothers had helped legitimize and promote Mexican mural art at a time when the Mexican government was actively sponsoring visual displays of national culture in postrevolutionary Mexico.²¹ Sanborns provided a cultural space that showcased a visual form of Mexico's postrevolutionary nationalism, one that incorporated indigenous people within the national culture. The mural acted to reinforce revolutionary ideals in what Roger Bartra called *La cultura oficial mexicana*, or the official Mexican culture, which represented the "habits and values that marked the behavior of the Mexican political and bureaucratic class."²² The new aristocratic class that formed after the Revolution used Sanborns as their political salon (chapter two). Sanborns represented what Mary K. Coffey called a "privileged site of institutionalization," though not exactly an example of the state-sanctioned artwork normally commissioned in Mexican museums that took place in the 1930s, which is the focus of her book. However, the Orozco painting was a symbol of Mexican culture that helped define Sanborns as culturally important space.²³ The presence of the Orozco mural in Sanborns is an important example of the type of transnational collaboration to promote Mexican culture in postrevolutionary Mexico.²⁴

Sanborns Mexican Silver

²¹ Mary K. Coffey, *How a Revolutionary Art Became Official Culture: Murals, Museums, and the Mexican State* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 1.

²² Roger Bartra, *Oficio mexicano* (México: Editorial Grijalbo, S.A., 1993), 31. "Se trata de un conjunto de hábitos y valores que identifican el comportamiento de la clase política y burocrática mexicana." See also Mary K. Coffey, *How a Revolutionary Art Became Official Culture*, 4.

²³ Mary K. Coffey, *How a Revolutionary Art Became Official Culture*, 2.

²⁴ Rick A López, *Crafting Mexico: Intellectuals, Artisans, and the State after the Revolution* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 97.

Alongside its popular restaurant and modern drugstore, Sanborns filled its floor space with a range of consumer products imported from Europe, Asia, and Africa.²⁵ Canes, phonographs, lamps, mirrors, china, porcelain, toys, kitchenware, and furniture were among the luxury household gadgets one could find at Sanborns.²⁶ Sanborns also packaged Mexican culture into its store merchandise and publicized the company contributions to the development of Mexico's local industries. Customers could shop for Mexican liquor and tobacco or check out Sanborns' own collection of hand hammered Mexican sterling silver in its silver department.²⁷ Silver was one of the first Mexican industries that the company used to market products that were made in Mexico. In the early 1920s, Frank Sanborn became a devoted antique silver collector. His passion for silver was even attributed to the revitalization of Mexico's silver industry that had been disrupted following the violent period of the Revolution. One account suggests that Sanborn was dismayed at the lack of "a competent silversmith" in Mexico City who could duplicate a valuable piece of antique silver to his liking. He apparently commissioned a coppersmith to duplicate early pieces (That same coppersmith was apparently also commissioned to design the copper lamps found today in the Sanborns Tea Room²⁸).

²⁵ "The Historic 'House of Tiles,' Mexico City," Sanborns company brochure. 1924?

²⁶ "Venta de Balance," Sanborns company advertisement, *El Universal*, 4 de Junio de 1922, segundo sección, 6-7. See also, "Anglo-American Notes," *El Universal*, Viernes 9 de Junio de 1922, primera sección, 8.

²⁷ "What's Inside Sanborns," company brochure. 1920s? ASH.

²⁸ "Sanborns," Company pamphlet. 1938. ASH.

Frank Sanborn developed a working relationship with local silversmiths in Mexico City who shaped articles based on his personal design which he then sold in his store.²⁹ “From dainty filigree to massive dinner services,” The Sanborns silver department carried hundreds of articles that included heavy plates and trays styled after English designs, as well as cigarette cases and matching lighters, fruit bowls, teapots, tea sets, cups, pitchers, and candlesticks.³⁰ Silver jewelry was hammered with “native turquoise, obsidian, amethysts, and rose quartz.”³¹ A 1939 Sanborn brochure featured a photograph of the silver department. Three Sanborns vendors were shown attending customers at the sales counter. Long rows of wooden shelving units held the neatly arranged silverware gleaming inside the glass cabinets. On the bottom of the picture, three superimposed images reveal three male workers hammering designs into silver plates. The caption said that Sanborns silver was famed for its “distinctive patterns wrought by master-craftsmen retained exclusively by this great store.”³²

Sanborns promotional material boasted that their own records indicated, “that its volume of business in this [silver] department to local residents exceeds that to the tourist trade.”³³ A 1942 article also claimed, without evidence, that Sanborns commissioned over 120 workers to

²⁹ Carle Hodge, “Mexico’s Mecca for Tourist Trade,” *Coronet*, Vol. 30, (August, 1951), 150.

³⁰ Quote from Michael Scully, “Pan America’s Crossroads Store,” *The Pan American*, (January, 1942), 9. See also, “Up and Down Madero,” *Modern Mexico: Mexican Chamber of Commerce of the U.S.* Vol. 16, No. 10 (1944), 23-24. See also, “Sanborns,” Company pamphlet. 1938. ASH.

³¹ “What’s Inside Sanborns,” company brochure. 1920s? ASH.

³² “Sanborns Souvenir,” Sanborns booklet. 1939. ASH.

³³ “Sanborns Souvenir,” Sanborns booklet. 1939. ASH.

manufacture silver; it was estimated that Sanborns sold \$250,000 worth of silver a year.³⁴ It also suggested there were, “more than 2000 skilled silversmiths [and] at least 100 dealers in silverwork in the country today,” due to Frank Sanborns’ personal interest in Mexican silver.³⁵ No public records exist that can verify any of these claims. However, these assertions do testify to the fact that the commercial success of Sanborns and its silver department were connected to a revitalized Mexican silvery industry that formed during the postrevolutionary period.

Sanborns ephemera offer a glimpse into understanding how the company publicized the commercial success of its silver department. Sanborns marketed its silver department as “universally popular,” and that it offered an “extensive assortment” of silver that could not be found anywhere else in Mexico.³⁶ Promotional material also claimed Sanborns played an intricate part in the development of Mexico’s silver industry. Silver was “another thing that Sanborns deserves credit for...If there are today many small and some larger shops in Mexico, where Mexican Silver of varying goodness is produced, it is because of the demand created by Sanborns.”³⁷ Company brochures also promoted Sanborns by appealing to an authenticity and familiarity that could only be found in a U.S. company operating in a possibly unsafe Mexico. One brochure suggested that customers could find another “so called” silver shop operating close to the “Sanborns neighborhood” who benefited by the “Sanborns overflow” of their silver business, but they risked

³⁴ Michael Scully, “Pan America’s Crossroads Store,” *The Pan American*, (January, 1942), 8. See also, Carle Hodge, “Mexico’s Mecca for Tourist Trade,” *Coronet*, Vol. 30, (August, 1951), 150. See also, “Sanborns,” Company pamphlet. 1938. ASH.

³⁵ Michael Scully, “Pan America’s Crossroads Store,” *The Pan American* (Jan, 1942), 9.

³⁶ “The Historic ‘House of Tiles,’ Mexico City,” Sanborns company brochure. 1924? ASH.

³⁷ “Sanborns,” Company pamphlet. 1938. ASH.

being taken advantage of by their tour guides who know “some place where he can get a commission on your purchases that would be the best place for him to take you no doubt, but, would it be the best place for you to buy? [emphasis in the original]”³⁸ The brochure suggested that the flourishing popularity of Sanborns’s silver department helped stimulate local industries and silver producers. A 1960s internal document reveals that Sanborns managers viewed their silver department as contributing to Mexico’s local artisanal silvery industry. In developing its silver department, the company sought and retained silversmiths to manufacture pieces exclusively to be sold at Sanborns.³⁹ While promoting Mexico’s silver industry, Sanborns owners also publicized their store as the only authentic silver producer in the country that could assure customers were getting the utmost quality and purity in their silver items. Sanborns even compared the quality of its silver to the food it offered in its restaurant, claiming that with food you could, “taste the difference. If you could taste Sanborns Silver you would find that it excels [*sic*] in quality just as much as does their food.”⁴⁰

Mexican Art, Antiques, and Curios Department

In Sanborns Monterrey, and upstairs on the second floor of Sanborns in the Casa de los Azulejos, customers could shop in Sanborns’ Mexican Art and Antiques department, that featured 18th century velvets, brocades, antique furniture, and art objects like carved chests which “are all of

³⁸ “Sanborns,” Company pamphlet. 1938. ASH.

³⁹ “Sanborns Scrapbook,” *Ayer y Hoy*. Company document produced in 1965. ASH.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

Spanish or Mexican origin.”⁴¹ Advertisements for Sanborns’ gift and novelty department appeared in a variety of Mexican newspapers in the capital as *Mexican Folkways*. Published by Frances Toor from 1925 – 1933, this influential magazine became an important example of the transnational collaboration that took place between Mexicans and foreigners to promote Mexico’s folkloric art. The magazine served as a public platform where leading Mexican artists, researchers, and intellectuals collectively brought attention to Mexico’s countryside, indigenous history, popular art, and folkloric culture.⁴²

As editor, Toor invited a litany of well-known figures to participate in the bi-monthly publication. Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, Jean Charlot, Dr. Atl, Salvador Novo, Anita Brenner, Robert Redfield, Elsie Parsons, Luz Vera, William Spratling and others made contributions to the magazine. Alongside the magazine images and articles printed in English and Spanish were advertisements for cigarettes, the national lottery, bookstores, hotels, and restaurants, *La Escuela de Verano* at the National University, photography studios, and art shops like the Sonora News Company, Weston’s Mexican Art Shop, The Aztec Land, Tlaquepaque Art Store, and Sanborns.⁴³

An advertisement for the Sanborns’s Gift Shop appeared in the very first issue of *Mexican Folkways* in June, 1925. It announced that the store department was recently renovated and reopened for the public with new merchandise on display for its customers.⁴⁴ Compared with the other advertisements for art shops in *Mexican Folkways*, it appears that Sanborns did not sell the types of

⁴¹ “The Historic ‘House of Tiles,’ Mexico City,” Sanborns company brochure. 1924? ASH.

⁴² For a brief history of *Mexican Folkways* see, Rick A. López, *Crafting Mexico*, 102-105.

⁴³ *Mexican Folkways* Vol.1, No. 2 (Aug-Sept, 1925), n/p.

⁴⁴ “Sanborns Gift Shop,” company advertisement. *Mexican Folkways*, Vol. 1 No. 1 (June-July, 1925), 30.

Mexican folkloric handicrafts that were sold in other stores. From 1925 to 1930, Sanborns advertisements in *Mexican Folkways* offered readers novelty artwork that arrived from Europe and the United States, and not local Mexican producers.⁴⁵ This suggests that Sanborns did not always claim a local connection to Mexican industries. Sanborns may have developed its Mexican Curios and popular art department in response to the competition of local art businesses.

The presence of Sanborns advertisements within the pages of the publication testifies to its growing presence and association within elite networks in Mexico's intellectual circles and members from the art world that identified Sanborns as a commercial house that specialized quality arts. These connections are also shown through special events that were held at Sanborns. On August 11, 1925, North American students from The Escuela de Verano held a party in honor of their faculty at Sanborns. The following week, teachers and administrators of the Escuela de Verano responded to the fiesta thrown by the students and hosted their own special event at Sanborns on August 18th that was attended by members of the Secretary of Education, the Rector of the National University, and other functionaries.⁴⁶

Frank Sanborn developed a business relationship with Frederick H. Davis, an art collector and known authority of Mexican heirlooms who worked at the Sonora News Company. Despite

⁴⁵ The advertisements that appeared for Sanborns in the magazine offered little variation over the years for the exception of adding Spanish text to accompany the English. Advertisements for the Sanborns Gift Shop did not appear in the magazine after 1930. See, "Sanborns Art Shop," company advertisement. *Mexican Folkways*, Vol. 1 No. 5 (Feb-March, 1925), n/p. See also, "Sanborns Art Shops," company advertisement. *Mexican Folkways*, Vol. 6 No. 4 (Oct-Dec, 1930), n/p.

⁴⁶ "Boletín de la Escuela de Verano," *Boletín de la Secretaría de Educación Pública*, Tomo VI, Núm. 9 (Diciembre, 1925), 182.

Davis' integral role as being a part of a small intellectual group that developed the market of Mexican popular art, the archival record is notable for its silence about his time in Mexico and offers only traces about his connection with Sanborns.⁴⁷ Rick A. López's work offers probably the best summary of Davis's time in Mexico. The Illinoisan entered Mexico City in 1900 in order to manage the art department at the Sonora News Company which specialized in Mexican folkloric art, curios and souvenirs.⁴⁸ The company sold hand carved leather, Indian sarapes, silver, linen, gemstones, and other handicrafts.⁴⁹ Davis held a personal interest in Mexican popular art and antique heirlooms. His experience as an art collector and buyer enriched his credentials among art collectors and made him a central authority on Mexican handicrafts. He established contacts with artisans from remote regions across Mexico, and from his position at the Sonora News Company, Davis developed markets for artisans to sell their crafts.⁵⁰ He also played an instrumental role promoting Mexico's silver industry. Similar to Sanborn, he developed contacts with silversmiths from Mexico City who produced patterns based on Davis's own patterns. According to Courtney Kennedy, this allowed Davis to "help shape the Mexican silver aesthetic."⁵¹

⁴⁷ Anita Brenner, "The Davis Collection," *Mexico This Month*, Vol. 3, No. 9 (September, 1957), 26-27.

⁴⁸ See Rick A. Lopez, 110-112.

⁴⁹ "Mexican Curios and Souvenirs," Sonora News Company advertisement. *Mexican Folkways*, Vol. 1 No. 2 (Aug-Sept. 1925), n/p.

⁵⁰ See Anita Brenner, "The Davis Collection," *Mexico This Month*, Vol. 3, No. 9 (Sept. 9, 1957), 23, 27.

⁵¹ Courtney Kennedy, ed. Auction Catalog, *Fine Silver & Vertu Auction*, Dallas: Heritage Auction Galleries Design District Annex, March 19, 2009), 20.

As his reputation grew, he earned the attention of Frank Sanborn who in 1933 invited him to bring his workshop into Sanborns.⁵² Soon afterwards, under the guidance of Davis, Sanborns added a store department that specialized in Mexican arts and curios.⁵³ From his position as manager, Davis was in charge of the Mexican Department on the second floor of the House of Tiles, from which he molded the department into a central feature of the store. The partnership seemed an ideal match for both parties. Until the arrival of Fred Davis, Sanborns did not sell the type of vernacular arts and handicrafts that were sold elsewhere.

Prior to the 1930s, the majority of customers interested in purchasing Mexican popular art were upper class Mexicans, foreign residents, and visiting tourists, especially those from the United States.⁵⁴ Davis was able to use the popularity of Sanborns as an established market that would allow

⁵² “Sanborns Souvenir,” company souvenir booklet. Mexico City, 1939. ASH. From the book, “Mr. Fred Davis, in charge of the department which offers Mexican artcarft [*sic*], is considered an authority in this particular field. For years (until six years ago) he owned and operated his own establishment. Fred Davis, as thousands of people know is a Mexican handicraft expert.” See also, Carla Zarebska, *La Casa de los Azulejos*, 189.

⁵³ Francis Hill Sanborn to Donald A Sanborn, August 12, 1960. ASH. Francis Hill Sanborn chronicled a summarized history in a letter to his nephew titled “Sanborns in Mexico.” Francis Sanborn was the son of Frank Sanborn, one of the company founders. In the letter, Francis writes, “As tourists from the U.S.A. started to return to Mexico after revolutionary years had passed, they found Sanborns...the ideal place to eat and meet, and soon Sanborns added departments of Mexican Arts and Curios, as well as handmade Sterling Silverware, under the guidance of Mr. Fred H. Davis, an acknowledged authority.”

⁵⁴ See Rick A. Lopez, 111.

the artwork and handicrafts of the craftsman he networked with to bring forth their best pieces for a high end market.⁵⁵ By the time Davis joined Sanborns in 1933, Mexico City had an established marketplace for the folkloric arts and handicrafts that filtered in from different regions of the country. Writing in 1933, Michael and Virginia Scully wrote in *Motorists' Guide to Mexico* that the “real lure of Mexico City, however, lies in the displays of native work in the arts and crafts which are distinguished from any other in the world.” Leather, silver, glass, wood, and popular jewelry were some of the “modern craft wares” available in art shops across the capital. Published sometime after Davis had already moved his shop into Sanborns, *Motorists' Guide to Mexico* speaks to the notoriety that both Sanborns and Davis’s held in association with the world of Mexican popular art. The authors told readers that they could find jewelry made from silver and precious stones at Fred Davis’s shop, “who has adapted many Indian designs and created some fine modern ones.”⁵⁶ For antiques, readers were told that the most easily accessible and best collections found in Mexico City were found in the shops of Fred Davis and Sanborns. Not only did both shops provide a wide selection of furniture, paintings, and ceramics, but the buildings that they occupied “are themselves among the city’s most priceless antiques.”⁵⁷ This poignant observation suggests that the memories of social and political power attached to the historical architecture where their stores were located helped reinforce the commercial popularity of Sanborns and Davis’s art shops. In other words, architecture held power that conjured up memories of the past that allowed business owners like Sanborns to attach their legacy to the centuries of history contained within the buildings they occupied. López

⁵⁵ Mary L. Davis and Greta Pack, *Mexican Jewelry* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996), 165.

⁵⁶ Michael and Virginia Scully, *Motorists' Guide to Mexico* (Dallas: South West Press, 1933), 103.

⁵⁷ Michael and Virginia Scully, *Motorists' Guide to Mexico* (Dallas: South West Press, 1933), 107.

shows that in the 1940s, the highest quality producers of Mexican artwork found a market to sell their work at Sanborns.⁵⁸

The popularity of Sanborns as a tourist destination and space of leisure for Mexico's upper class allowed Davis and Sanborn the chance to capitalize on each other's trades and combined expertise. Davis helped Sanborns market Mexican popular art to the store's upper-class clientele. Sanborns became a leading commercial house for high-end Mexican art. The collection of Mexican art was packaged and sold under the Sanborns brand as being the most authentic and high quality Mexican art found in the republic. Customers who shopped for art at Sanborns were assured that the Mexican curios, arts and crafts were, "carefully selected from every nook and corner of Mexico."⁵⁹

Mexicanizing the Sanborns Waitress Uniforms

According to the Mexican researcher Carla Zarebska, Fred Davis is also credited for inspiring the design of the iconic Sanborns waitress uniforms that are still worn today.⁶⁰ Beginning sometime in the 1930s when Davis worked at Sanborns, the design of the Sanborn waitress uniforms notably changed. The old design featured a long black dress, black shirtwaist, and white

⁵⁸ Rick A. López, *Crafting Mexico*, 270.

⁵⁹ "The House of Tiles," company souvenir booklet. (México, Productores de Impresos, 1941, ASH.

⁶⁰ Zarebska, *La Casa de los Azulejos*, 189.

apron that resembled the uniforms typically worn by waitresses in the United States. The new colorful uniforms represented a selective hybridization of Mexico's folkloric past. According to Sanborns management, the inspiration for the new uniforms was drawn from the clothing typically worn by indigenous women in states that were, "the most generally representative of Mexico."⁶¹



Figure 13: A group of Sanborns waitresses posing for a photograph inside Sanborns in the House of Tiles, ca. 1930s. Reprinted in Carla Zarebska, *La Casa de los Azulejos*, 174.

The uniform consisted of three parts that included the *huípil de mezcla*, the traditional blouse originally from Puebla. The "modern, bright, and comfortable" long and colored striped skirt known as *amarres* derived from Oaxaca, and the cap was inspired by Nayarit.⁶² The uniform design

⁶¹ Brenda Gudiño, Sanborns coordinator, employee presentation, July 9, 2015, Sanborns Headquarters, Lago Zurich #245, edificio Presa Falcon, Piso 7, Col. Granada Ampliación, Mexico City. Gudiño explained to this author that the uniform is based on "typical" clothing found in Mexico. During the course of my fieldwork between 2015 and 2017, I spoke with several Sanborns waitresses across Mexico they repeated this same narrative about the historical meaning of the uniforms they wore. This suggests Sanborns managers teach their employees about Sanborns history as part of their job training.

⁶² *Ibid.*, "moderno, brillante y cómodo." See also, Carla Zarebska, 174.

combined a hybrid mixture of Mexico's regional diversity and elements of its indigenous and cultural past. It is an example of how Sanborns commodified the bodies of its female employees to become visual representations of Mexican culture.⁶³ This romanticized and selective appropriation of Mexico's indigenous past helped solidify the authenticity of Sanborns as representing Mexico's cultural heritage.⁶⁴ These new uniforms eventually became standardized and experienced very few alterations over the next eighty years.

Part of the attraction in going to Sanborns was the interaction that customers had with the Sanborns waitresses. The waitresses and their uniforms became part of the social spectacle and visual scenery depicting Mexican culture inside the store. Some foreign visitors recognized the uniforms as tropes that represented Mexico's indigeneity. For example, in the mid-1940s, Ethel Shorr wrote a personal account of her experience at Sanborns for an article that appeared in *The Argonaut* newspaper. She described a scene from the main restaurant in the House of Tiles, which contained "a beautiful glassed-in patio, where the waitresses are dressed in picturesque native costumes."⁶⁵ In an article about Sanborns in *The Pan American* magazine, an author wrote that the Sanborn brothers had "combined a master business stroke with a real contribution to Mexican culture," by renovating the historic House of Tiles. Along with Orozco's mural, the Sanborn brothers had carefully researched the correct colonial design for the columned patio walls, and the

⁶³ Donica Belisle, *Retail Nation: Department Stores and the Making of Modern Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 109).

⁶⁴ Néstor García Canclini, Introducción a la edición 2001, *Culturas híbridas: Estrategias para entrar y salir de la modernidad* (México: Debolsillo, 2013), ii.

⁶⁵ Ethel Shorr, "Personal," *The Argonaut*, 1946? Sanborns Hermanos Scrapbook. ASH.

“waitresses were uniformed in the gay Tehuantepec Indian costume.”⁶⁶ Interestingly, the clothing worn by the Tehuantepec were not one of the groups that Sanborns had modeled their uniform from, indicating that customers may have interpreted the cultural constructions differently. These accounts suggest that visiting customers understood the uniforms as a construction of indigeneity.

Sanborns waitresses were used in politically and culturally oriented jokes that ridiculed the appearance of their uniforms. Waitresses became personified as tropes that represented an artificially constructed part of Mexico’s national identity, and specifically its indigenous history. Those that have written about Sanborns outside of company histories have often focused on the appearance of Sanborns waitresses in relationship with Sanborns and Mexican culture. In Rodolfo Usigli’s classic novel *Ensayo de un Crimen*, he described the everyday life of Mexico’s upper class in the 1940s. In one scene inside Sanborns at Azulejos, the protagonist, Roberto de la Cruz, finds a table in the center dining salon with a view of the Orozco mural where he witnessed, “a small group of waitresses on the second shift whispering to each other in their fake aboriginal outfits.”⁶⁷

The physical appearance of female workers took on a political role during the presidency of Luis Echeverría Álvarez (1970-1976). Echeverría resurrected the populist attitudes of President Lázaro Cárdenas by appealing to Mexico’s indigenous past. By publicly donning indigenous styled

⁶⁶ Michael Scully, “Pan America’s Crossroads Store, *The Pan American*, Vol. II, (January, 1942), 10.

⁶⁷ Rodolfo Usigli, *Ensayo de un Crimen* (México, Penguin Random House, 2015[1944]), 69. “Lo habían fascinado siempre las proporciones del antiguo patio, convertido en comedor por la industria del pequeño norteamericano. Buscó una mesa en el centro, desde la cual pudiera ver el fresco de Clemente Orozco, evitando los pavos reales que ensuciaban las otras paredes. Era el momento de tregua entre el almuerzo y el té; había poca gente, y las meseras del segundo turno, con sus tajes falsamente aborígenes, cuchicheaban reunidas en pequeños grupos.”

clothing such as the *guayabera*, he assumed the identity and nostalgia associated with *lo mexicano*, that which is Mexican. In 1971, his wife, María Esther Zuno followed in the trend styled by her husband and arrived at parties wearing typical dresses found regionally in Mexico. But instead of being celebrated for her cultural appreciation for Mexico's indigenous past, Mexicans joked that the first lady's clothing appeared as a disingenuous attempt to blend into society. Significantly, the comparison was quickly drawn to the "typical" outfits worn by the Sanborns waitresses, who were colloquially referred to as *las esthercitas* (the little Esther's) by visiting customers.⁶⁸ A Sanborns waitress named Consuelo Torres who worked at the House of Tiles from 1939 to 1989, remembered being "affectionately" called "Esthercita" by a male customer. As she remembers, a man she called "The Bandit" said, "Come on, *Esthercita*, come work with me, I'll pay you whatever you want," but she refused.⁶⁹

Carlos Fuentes' novel *La cabeza de la hidra* begins with a scene inside Sanborns at Azulejos. During a brief interaction where an approaching waitress brings the character's breakfast, Fuentes describes the woman as, "a waitress disguised as an Indian."⁷⁰ The reference to Mexican indigeneity undoubtedly referred to the uniform designs of the Sanborns waitresses. Yet, the racially loaded word "Indian" further implies a set of issues involving the gender and class differentiation between the employees and customers. Sanborns waitresses came from working class backgrounds (chapter

⁶⁸ José Agustín, *Tragicomedia Mexicana: La vida en México de 1970 de 1982* (México: Editorial Planeta Mexicana, S.A., 1995), 15.

⁶⁹ As quoted in Carla Zarebska, *La Casa de los Azulejos* (México: Sanborns Hermanos, 1999), 203. "A mí me llamaba cariñosamente 'Esthercita', y siempre me decía: ándale Esthercita, vente a trabajar conmigo, te pago lo que quieras, pero yo siempre le decía que no."

⁷⁰ Carlos Fuentes, *La cabeza de la hidra* (México: Editorial Artemisa, S.A., 1985),14.

4), and their jobs required them to perform a service role for their middle and upper-class customers, much like a mother provides for her family.⁷¹ The word “Indian” holds both racial and class connotations associated with Mexico’s poor rural communities. If the uniform worn by the working-class women workers embodied a visually constructed representation of Mexican indigeneity, then it suggests that Indians were working as servants for elite clientele.

Fine Dining at Sanborns, 1919-1940

The choice of cuisine offered in restaurants has often been an important element that defined identity and class consciousness. High-end restaurants, in particular, provided an environment for elite customers to savor culinary excellence and display their social distinction.⁷² The rise in prominence of Sanborns centered around the quality of its restaurant. As the company expanded over the first half of the twentieth-century, so too did its restaurant menus and the choice of available food items, particularly Mexican-style cuisine. These changes reflected part of a larger transformation that occurred with eating habits, technology, and national identity in post-revolutionary Mexico.

⁷¹ A Sanborns waitress named Consuelo Torres worked at the house of Tiles of Tiles from 1939-1989. She developed friendships with certain clients that for her, “era un honor haber tratado con ellas y haberlas servido como a mi familia.” Quote in Carla Zarebska, *La Casa de los Azulejos*, 210.

⁷² Paul Freedman and James Warlick, “High-End Dining in the Nineteenth-Century United States,” *Gastronomica*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (Spring 2011), 44.

By the time Sanborns opened for business in the Casa de los Azulejos in 1919, it had greatly expanded its soda fountain and lunch counter business into a popular restaurant. The restaurant was open from 7:30am – 9:30pm and located on the main floor in the patio. The aristocratic Mexican families and members of the American Colony who ate their breakfast, lunch, and dinner in the tea salon were treated with an exquisite assortment of upscale food items that could satisfy their delicate appetites.⁷³ Depending on the time of day, dining customers could choose from an à la Carte menu, Club Breakfast, Table d’Hote Luncheon, and Supper à la Carte.⁷⁴ Early menu items sometimes emphasized the French language, however the foreign flair did not reflect the majority of American-styled cuisine offered in the menus. The French terminology was likely used to conjure up notions of gourmet food from Paris even if the meals themselves were mostly American-styled.⁷⁵ An advertisement from October 21, 1919, just a few days after the inauguration of Sanborns, described “an ideal meal”: *Consommé en tasse*, salad, broiled mackerel, and “Chicken à la Sanborn,” which consisted of a chicken breast served on a slice of ham with a cream sauce. The main course was garnished with olives, asparagus tips, sliced tomatoes and radishes. The meal concluded with two desserts, Peach Melba and an almond brittle cake served with hot coffee.⁷⁶ The Sanborns “Commercial Lunch” was served Monday through Saturday and cost \$2.00. As a major restaurant,

⁷³ “Otra Buena Noticia para Ud.!” *La Demócrata*, 19 de Octubre de 1922, 8.

⁷⁴ Marqués de San Francisco, “The House of Tiles.” Sanborns Brochure, ed. 11 (Mexico: Bland Brothers Publishing, 1936), 34. Author’s personal archive.

⁷⁵ Paul Freedman and James Warlick, “High-End Dining in the Nineteenth-Century United States,” *Gastronomica*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (Spring 2011), 51.

⁷⁶ “What You Ought to Know,” *El Universal*, Martes el 21 de Octubre de 1919.

the lunch specials changed daily and usually featured a soup, salad, bread, main course, desert, and choice of coffee, tea, or milk.⁷⁷

During the 1920-1930s, the Sanborns restaurant offered an upscale, cosmopolitan, and Americanized menu for Mexican diners. The emphasis on American-styled cuisine followed with trends in culinary literature at the time which promoted foreign recipes.⁷⁸ Food items were grouped according to food types (eggs, salads, soups, sandwiches, fish, and meats) and also by meal courses, following the format commonly found in restaurants during the time period.⁷⁹ A typical Sanborn menu from 1920 still placed a heavy emphasis on the Sanborns' soda fountain business. A full page devoted for "Specials" was dedicated to eighteen sweet dishes that included American pastries like angel food, the banana split, Charlotte Rouse, and ice cream sandwich. Some of the dessert names included distinctly Mexicanized dishes such as *tres marías*, Mexican sundae, *buenas noches* (three different colors of ice cream with a scoop of vanilla), and "Popocatepetl" (chocolate ice cream with raspberry syrup). Mexican diners likely felt a sense of pride seeing the incorporation of native foods and locally recognizable naming of food items inside the menus of a foreign, cosmopolitan

⁷⁷ "Programa Musical Cuarteto Sanborn," Sanborns ephemera, Mexico City, Agosto 27 – 1 de Septiembre, 1922? ASH.

⁷⁸ Jeffrey M. Pilcher, *¡Que vivan los tamales!: Food and the Making of Mexican Identity* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998), 130.

⁷⁹ See for example, the menu for the restaurant at the Hotel St. Francis. Powell Street, San Francisco, CA. August 3, 1920. "Menu Collection," Los Angeles Public Library.

<http://dbase1.lapl.org/images/menus/fullsize/a/13731-inside2.jpg> (accessed October, 12, 2017).

restaurant, as a validation for their national community.⁸⁰ Sanborns owners had marketed their restaurant menu to include foods and culinary descriptions that were grounded within Mexican culture as a way to identify with the surrounding community.

Food items on the 1920 menu were listed and accompanied by their corresponding prices. The visual design was mundane with a notable lack of visual art aside from the trademark three owls Sanborns logo on the front cover. Menu items were listed with minimum culinary descriptions which might infer a lack of experience in quality design, or perhaps the waitresses provided the dining customers with the description. The menu also included separate groupings for parfaits, ice creams, pastries, and sodas, which offered customers the choice of Coca Cola, root beer, milk shakes, specialty tonics, and ice cream sodas. The inside pages of the menu assured customers that, “The water we serve is extracted from our artesian well and we guarantee it absolutely pure.”⁸¹ This emphasis on Sanborns’s hygienic quality has been a part of the company’s strategy to build their store’s reputation as offering authentic and safe menu options for customers. An early English advertisement from 1910 explained that at Sanborns, a customer could get treated to a refreshing drink that provided a “feeling of confidence...If you haven’t tested the quality of Sanborn’s ice cream soda, you are missing something that belongs to you.”⁸² Another ad assured that Sanborns

⁸⁰ Jeffrey M. Pilcher, *¡Que vivan los tamales!: Food and the Making of Mexican Identity* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998), 137.

⁸¹ “Salón de Té ‘Sanborns’”. Sanborns Restaurant Menu. Mexico City, 13 de Octubre de 1920. ASH. “El agua que servimos es extraída de nuestro pozo artesiano y la garantizamos absolutamente pura.”

⁸² “Ice Cream Soda at Sanborn’s,” *The Mexican Herald*, April 19, 1910, 7.

took the greatest efforts to use only, “the very best material and electropura water” in serving customers drinks from the, “new Iceless Soda Fountain.”⁸³

In the early years of the establishment, Sanborns catered its menu for the large contingent of American diners who visited the Sanborns drugstore’s soda fountain and lunch counter. By the time they had moved to La Casa de los Azulejos, the opening of the Sanborns restaurant still featured a menu styled in American cuisine with eating times scheduled after U.S. eating culture. Breakfast and lunch specials were served between 7:30-11:00am and 12:30 – 2:30pm respectively. Eggs were prepared fried, scrambled, poached, *rancheros*, (ranch-style eggs) or *a la Cocotte* (baked), served alongside ham or bacon. Egg dishes were served with sides of peas, creamed corn, sautéed potatoes, corn, succotash, asparagus, and al Gratin potatoes for an extra cost.⁸⁴ Sanborns also offered their own traditional egg meal, the “Tortilla a la Sanborn,” a Spanish-styled egg tortilla that cost \$1.00.

A Sanborn menu from 1920 showed an assortment of entries that were both upscale and traditional American home-style meals. Fish entries included freshly caught sturgeon, salmon, lobster, and shrimp. Meat options included the Fillet à la Sanborn served with French fries, tournedos, and Chateaubriand served with mushrooms. Sanborns also provided dishes like “Ol’ Mammy Hash”, corned beef hash, and Boston styled beans, which were traditional home-style American food. This contrast between French haute and folkloric American dishes suggests a variation in culinary expectations and eating habits among Sanborns customers.

The most fascinating meat option, however, also happened to be the least expensive entrée available on the menu, the chicken *tamales* that cost .40¢. Tamales were the only notable Mexican

⁸³ “Sanborns Positive Prescription Accuracy,” *The Mexican Herald*, October 2, 1910, 2.

⁸⁴ “Salón de Té ‘Sanborns’”. Sanborns Restaurant Menu. Mexico City, Octubre 13, 1920. ASH.

entrée available. The company incorporated into their menu a popular corn dish that was a symbol of Mexico's vernacular indigenous cuisine. Tamales and other indigenous foods were long considered meals associated with the lower class. It was not until the mid-1940s that these class conceptions against indigenous meals had diminished. According to Jeffrey M. Pilcher, it was after popular reform and capitalist developments that incorporated corn-based foods, that "the middle class appropriated tamales for themselves, transforming a basic element of popular culture into a symbol of national identity."⁸⁵ What is fascinating is that by listing chicken tamales on the menu, Sanborns had embraced an indigenous corn dish associated with the lower class in 1920. The folkloric Mexican dish appeared on their menu similarly to the choice of including "Ol' Mammy Hash." By marketing the tamale in their menu, Sanborns owners raised the corn dish to a higher standard, one associated with upper-class exclusivity.

Aside from its popular restaurant located downstairs, Sanborns also catered to lounging guests in the banquet hall located on the upper-level. Dinners were served to people who attended Sanborns Te Dansants. An English language Sanborns advertisements from 1921 said that these dinner dances were reserved for people who liked everything *comme il faut*.⁸⁶ Food preparation occurred in three different kitchens located on the premises that were equipped with electric ovens and a modern refrigerator.⁸⁷ Sanborns featured a menu specifically for The Balcony Grill that was notably different from the full menu options available downstairs in the main dining salon. The

⁸⁵ Jeffrey M. Pilcher, *¡Que vivan los tamales!: Food and the Making of Mexican Identity* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998), 131, quote from 153.

⁸⁶ "What you Ought to Know," *The Mexican Post*, August 12, 1921. "comme il faut," means properly.

⁸⁷ "Drug Store Housed in a Palace Here," *El Universal*, July 4, 1923.

special menu was available from 6:00 pm – 10:00pm.⁸⁸ In addition to preparing meals for dining guests in its restaurant and upstairs grill, Sanborns also provided boxed lunches for travelers on the go. A menu from the 1920s offered “Lunches for Travelers and Picnics,” which included a short list of sandwiches, eggs, chicken, salads, pastries, fruits, preserves, and snacks.⁸⁹ Typical outings for tourists might have included visiting Teotihuacán, Xochimilco, Tepotzlotlán Cuernavaca, Taxco, Popocatepetl, and Chapultepec Park. These box lunches might have afforded comfort for tourists who were likely unfamiliar with the local food options near these destinations and their questionable levels of quality.

An undated menu from the early to mid-1920s shared certain continuities and peculiarities with the 1920 menu. The two-page menu featured one side printed in English, the other in Spanish in the same type font. Food items were grouped in a similar format according to food type and by the order of meal (Cocktails, Soups, Eggs, Chicken, Vegetables, Salads, Desserts, Club Tea), but also by method of preparation. This menu included a number of new food categories that included oysters, soufflés, mutton chops, steaks, and non-alcoholic beverages. Customers could order a modestly priced anchovy or *Paté-de-foie-Gras* sandwich, or try broiled quail on toast, and broiled or roasted teal duck served with potatoes. New upscale salad options were served with lobster and shrimp, along with eggs stuffed with anchovy, mayonnaise, sardines, chicken and Sardellen. Desserts featured exotic items like waffles, gingerbread, “French pancakes”, and rum and marmalade omelets.⁹⁰ Sanborns also included a special Club Tea section that included 12 meal packages served

⁸⁸ Sanborns Mexico, “Casa de los Azulejos menu insert.” Mexico City, Mexico. Dated to 1930s.

ASH.

⁸⁹ Sanborns Lunches Para Viajes y Dias de Campo. “Sanborns Lunch Menu.” Mexico City. 1920s.

ASH.

⁹⁰ Programa Musical Carteto Sanborn, “Sanborns Mexico,” Mexico City, 1924? ASH.

with coffee or tea. Customers could choose from a range of light snacks to hearty meals such as Welsh Rarebit on toast, shrimp patties, cold cuts and potato salad, Chicken à la King with Saratoga Chips, or Pancakes.⁹¹ The more expensive menu items were meat entries that included a short culinary description. There were four different Southern Fried Chicken options, prepared with either French fried potatoes, fried bananas, with corn cakes and maple syrup, with fried bananas and waffles with maple syrup, or with candied sweet potatoes and hot biscuits. Chicken meals were also prepared in a casserole with cheese and asparagus tips, with lemon sauce and asparagus in a noodle sauté; chicken croquettes and chicken patties.

In addition to the chicken tamale which appeared again on the menu, an entry for “*Enchiladas* ‘Sanborn’” was grouped in its own separate category. The addition of *enchiladas* provided another native corn dish for customers and demonstrated how Sanborns incorporated popular indigenous foods into its culinary repertoire to appeal to Mexico’s national culture. “*Enchiladas* ‘Sanborn’” was an example of how Sanborns invented their own tradition by combining local food culture into its upscale menu items and making it their own.⁹² This is also apparent with the “Sanborns Special Blend” of coffee, the “Sanborn Cup” (a cold drink for four persons), and the Chicken à la Sanborn mentioned earlier.⁹³

Throughout the 1920s, special luncheons, banquets, and holiday dinners held at Sanborns demonstrated that the company continued to emphasize American styled food for dining guests.

⁹¹ Sanborns Te Dansant. “Sanborn Up-Stairs Grill Special Restaurant Menu.” Mexico City. 1924?. ASH.

⁹² This was not the famous *enchiladas suizas*, which did not appear in Sanborns menus until the 1950s.

⁹³ Sanborns Te Dansant. “Sanborn Up-Stairs Grill Special Restaurant Menu.” Mexico City.

Undated. ASH.

The choice of cuisine offered in the menus was tailored specifically to the tastes of visiting diners. For example, on September 14, 1923, a luncheon for members of the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce were presented with a five course meal that consisted of *consommé en tasse* along with a spread of pickles, celery and California olives; oyster soufflé, a main course of chicken à la Maryland with relish; sweet potatoes, and Parkerhouse rolls; a stuffed *aguacate* salad with cheese straws, and a California peach ice cream and cream puff served with black coffee.⁹⁴ The appeal to Californian cuisine offers evidence that Sanborn held business connections with his hometown state that provided them with a supply chain that could import specialty food items not otherwise available in Mexico. A year later in 1924, U.S. businessmen who attended a luncheon for the American Chamber of Commerce of Mexico at Sanborns were served lobster cocktail, julienne soup, ripe olives, radishes, and crackers. A chicken patty was the main course served alongside baked ham, apple compote, potato croquette, grapefruit salad and bread. The meal concluded with mince pie à la mode served with black coffee.⁹⁵ These specialty luncheon menus did not reflect the regular everyday menu at Sanborns. However, collectively they demonstrate that the company offered meals that reflected the tastes of its dining customers.

One meal presented to dining customers appears strikingly similar to Thanksgiving dinners hosted by California restaurants and hotels in the 1920s, including the Peacock Grill in Venice, and

⁹⁴ Luncheon given by an old time Angeleno to the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce. "Sanborns Restaurant Menu." Mexico City, Mexico. September 14, 1923. ASH.

⁹⁵ Luncheon given by the American Chamber of Commerce of Mexico, S.C.L. "Sanborns Luncheon Invitation and Menu." Mexico City. 1924. ASH.

the Hotel Windermere in Santa Monica.⁹⁶ An invitation printed in English and Spanish for a Thanksgiving Dinner held at Sanborns on November 28, 1929 offered dining guests a cocktail (oyster or fruit), Consommé Julienne, breadsticks, salted almonds, mixed olives, pickles, and a spiced peach salad. The meal included two main courses, turban of red snapper in a sea food sauce, and roasted turkey in a chestnut dressing served with potatoes (candied sweet or mashed), peas, and asparagus. Desserts included a New York cheesecake, mince or pumpkin pie, and bisque glace served with café noir. The meal cost \$5.00 per person.⁹⁷

By the 1930s, Sanborns had slowly begun to expand its menu to incorporate a variety of food items that included typical Mexican dishes. A 1932 Sanborn dinner menu printed in English and Spanish provided customers with a five-course meal for \$2.00. Entrée choices included baked fish with Hollandaise sauce, broiled fillet of beef, or a green *chile mole* served alongside scalloped potatoes, baked squash, fried eggplant, and *frijoles a la Mexicana*. Also included was a choice between an egg muffin, white or Graham bread, and tortillas. This inclusion of distinctively Mexican-styled foods within a special dinner menu with select options signified a marked evolution of its menu items that featured Mexican national cuisine. The changes in the menu were notable and exemplified by a 1933 edition of the *Motorists' Guide to Mexico*, that described Sanborns as an American-styled

⁹⁶ See Peacock Grill. "Special Thanksgiving Dinner." Venice, California, November 30, 1922, and Hotel Windermere, "Thanksgiving Dinner," Santa Monica, California. 1920. "Menu Collection," Los Angeles Public Library. (<https://www.lapl.org/collections-resources/visual-collections/menu-collection-> [accessed 10.16.2017]

⁹⁷ Sanborns Thanksgiving Dinner. "Sanborns Restaurant Menu." Mexico City, November 28, 1929. ASH.

restaurant that featured some “accents” of Mexican cuisine.⁹⁸ The popularity of the Sanborns restaurant was such that an undated menu from the mid to late 1930s announced to readers that “If you do not find room in the Tea Salon you can always find it upstairs where we serve our Grill Specials from 6:00pm-10:00pm.”⁹⁹ Menus from the 1930s had a sizeable increase in sandwich options, too. Customers could choose from twenty-one sandwiches that included caviar, anchovy paste, lobster, sardines, veal, deviled ham, Westphalian Ham, and Gruyere cheese. The 1930s menus expanded bread items which were limited in menus from the previous decade. Customers could now choose from toast, pancakes, waffles, muffins and Sun-Maid raisin bread. Sun-Maid was a well-established Californian based fruit company whose brand was also advertised for a raisin tart among different pastry items. Sanborns coffee was also listed for purchase in ½ kilo bags for \$1.00, suggesting that its blended coffee had gained such notoriety that customers were not only interested in spending their leisure time drinking coffee in the “meeting house for all in Mexico” but also at home.¹⁰⁰

A 1939 menu printed in English shows that Sanborns listed their own “Mexican Dishes,” described in Spanglish, that were grouped separately from the other food categories. The list began,

⁹⁸ Michael Scully and Virginia Scully, *Motorists' Guide to Mexico* (Dallas: South-West Press, 1933), 100.

⁹⁹ Salon De Refrescos, “Sanborns Mexico Restaurant Menu,” Mexico City, Mexico. undated. ASH. “Si no encuentra lugar en el Salón de Té puede siempre encontrar en Los Altos donde se sirven Especialidades del ‘Grill’ desde 6:00 a 10:00pm.”

¹⁰⁰ Salon De Refrescos, “Sanborns Mexico Restaurant Menu,” Mexico City, Mexico. undated. ASH. Quotation is from “Blue Palace is Rendezvous,” newspaper clipping found within “Sanborns Hermanos Scrapbook.” No date. ASH. The commodity chain of Sanborns coffee is another fascinating area for future research.

incidentally, with Rice á la Valenciana, a Spanish side dish, followed by an “Individual Tamale Pie.” The following items listed were typical Mexican dishes: *Chile con Carne* served with “Frijoles” and rice; *Enchiladas Mexicanas* served with sliced tomatoes; Enchiladas á la Sanborn; Turkey Mole Enchiladas; Texas Enchiladas; Eggs “*Rancheros*”; *Chalupas* with Cream; *Rajas Poblanas*; *Salpicón* (chopped seafood); *tacos*; *guacamole*; *Torta Compuesta* (sandwich with combined meats or cheese); *Totopo Jalisciense*; Chicken Tamales with chili sauce; and *Frijoles á la Mexicana*.¹⁰¹ On the back of the menu, Sanborns denoted an entire column for a “Mexican Dinner” for \$2.25 that included Enchiladas, refried beans, Mexican rice, tortillas, guacamole, cooked fruit and a choice between coffee, tea or chocolate.¹⁰² These menus from the late 1930s show that Sanborns vastly expanded their restaurant menus to include Mexican-styled cuisine. The company intentionally incorporated native food items in its menus, reflecting the changing eating habits and culinary tastes of their customers. Sanborns was also shaped by Mexico’s evolving national culture that by the 1940s embraced indigenous cuisine as a cultural marker that symbolized its national identity.¹⁰³ Sanborns restaurant menus continued to evolve by mid-century with an notable increase in Mexican dishes.¹⁰⁴ The famous *enchiladas suizas* that Sanborns are widely known for began appearing in restaurant

¹⁰¹ Ironically, the restaurant’s efforts to sound sophisticated with the French “á la” were undermined by the incorrect direction of the accent on the a!

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Pilcher, 130.

¹⁰⁴ Unfortunately, due to time constraints and self-imposed restrictions on chronologically ordering this chapter, I regret not having the ability or space to provide a more in-depth analysis on Sanborns menus beyond the 1940s. However, I intend to return to this topic for my future book publication.

menus in the 1950s.¹⁰⁵ One menu showed them appear under a *Platillos mexicanos* section that included a choice between, “Traditional enchiladas a la Sanborns, *Mexicanas*, or *suizas* with chicken or chalupas with cream and chicken.¹⁰⁶ Sanborns *enchiladas suizas* became a cultural trademark and a culinary example of the way that the company invented tradition during its rise in prominence in order to establish links between Mexican identity.

Porfirio Díaz’s Banana Split at the Sanborns Bar: Invented Traditions and Cultural Authenticity

Part of the strategy business owners created for situating Sanborns within their surrounding culture was through the invention of a series of myths about the company’s legacy and contributions to Mexican society. Some of these stories have been repeated enough times throughout history they became accepted and even praiseworthy examples of the company’s contributions to Mexican culture, even if these stories lack any historical evidence to suggest their validity. Many of these traditions center around the major changes that occurred during the development of Sanborns between the 1910s-1940s. Sanborns invented traditions for symbolic purposes that helped the U.S. business succeed through a landscape of great political, cultural, and social transformations that occurred during Mexico’s Revolution and its postrevolutionary time period.¹⁰⁷ These traditions

¹⁰⁵ Anecdotal evidence provided by Carla Zarebska suggests that the enchiladas suizas were invented in the Sanborns in the Café del Prado (1949). See Zarebska, *La Casa de los Azulejos*, 226.

¹⁰⁶ See, Sanborns: Fundada en 1903.” Sanborns Restaurant Menu.” Mexico City. 1950s. ASH.

¹⁰⁷ Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds. *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1. Hobsbawm defines “invented tradition” as “a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past.”

helped Sanborns portray its seamless entry into Mexican society. The company ascribed cultural elements associated with Mexico's past within the stores that gave it a sense of authenticity and permanence. Ultimately, these traditions helped Sanborns expand its customer base beyond Mexican elites to include customers from different backgrounds. The importance of this section is not simply to provide historical evidence that proves repeated falsehoods in a company narrative. Rather, it attempts to contextualize the formation of these myths within the developments of the company and the larger processes of historical change that shaped their development.

One of the prevailing myths Sanborns invented has been built off the belief that soda fountains simply did not exist in Mexico before the company imported one in 1910.¹⁰⁸ Soda fountains were already available in different business establishments and even for home use before Sanborns was even established as a business.¹⁰⁹ For example, the French-styled Café Paris which was established in 1900, operated an ice cream parlor, confectionary department, and American-style bar. A newspaper article reporting on its inauguration said that it was decorated with “French mirrors, elegant counters, soda-fountain and pretty adornments.” Customers were waited on by “Attentive, and neatly dressed lady-waitresses,” who offered customers an assortment of different pastries, ice creams, and “fruit-sirups imported from the United States and Europe.”¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ “Wanted,” Classified Advertisement, *The Mexican Herald*, April 3, 1910, 7. The classified ad written in English sought “a boy, 16 to 20, as helper at soda fountain.”

¹⁰⁹ “Home Soda Fountain for Health and Comfort,” advertisement for Carlos Felix & Co. *The Mexican Herald*, June 18, 1902, 5.

¹¹⁰ “The Café ‘Paris’”, *The Mexican Herald*, Wednesday November 28, 1900, 5. Incidentally, it is worth wondering if the Café Paris might have been a source of inspiration for how Walter and Frank Sanborn designed their own store, which featured similar interior decorating and store departments.

The soda fountain myth derived from the company's institutional memory and began when the drugstore expanded into a diversified drug and prescription business.¹¹¹ Before the addition of the soda fountain, business was slow, and the Sanborn brothers installed the soda fountain as a way to distinguish their drugstore from other competitors.¹¹² The soda fountain was a great success for the company and helped foment the evolution of Sanborns from a one dimensional drugstore that prepared prescription medicines to a thriving social institution that featured an American-styled restaurant. Frank Sanborn viewed the installation of the soda fountain as a momentous occasion that helped establish his own foundation in Mexico City. In 1944, Sanborn told Woodrow Wirsig that he originally entered Mexico specifically for recreational hunting, and that he liked it so much that he opened the soda fountain just "to support myself."¹¹³

Accompanying the tradition of owning the first soda fountain in Mexico is the myth that President Porfirio Díaz and his wife Carmen Romero Rubio often frequented the Sanborns lunch counter and soda fountain to share a sundae or banana split.¹¹⁴ This myth claimed that Díaz, who

Café Paris was located at Plateros street No. 3 (now Madero Street) across the street from the Casa de los Azulejos.

¹¹¹ Francis Hill Sanborn to Donald A. Sanborn. "Sanborns in Mexico." 1960. ASH.

¹¹² Michael Scully, "Pan America's Crossroads Store," *The Pan American*, Vol. 2 (January, 1942), 9.

¹¹³ As quoted by Woodrow Wirsig, "Meet me at Sanborns," *Coronet* (March, 1944), 46.

¹¹⁴ See for example, Woodrow Wirsig, "Meet me at Sanborns," *Coronet* (March, 1944), 48. See also, Donald A Sanborn, Walter D. Sanborn, Jr. and Dorothy Sanborn Walkup, "Sanborns in Mexico," undated family letter. ASH; *Mexico's Greatest Brands: Un recorrido por algunas de las marcas más grandes y confiables de México* Vol. II. (México: Superbrands Ltd. 2005), 86; Carla Zarebska, *La Casa de los*

was one of Mexico's most controversial and a romanticized political leader, was a frequent customer of the Sanborns drugstore. It seems highly unlikely that Díaz would have gone to Sanborns as a customer, especially with the onset of the Mexican Revolution that began in November 1910. Díaz abdicated his power and fled to Paris in 1911. Nevertheless, the story of Díaz eating in Sanborns has appeared in documents dating back to the 1940s. The story is important for understanding how Sanborns survived the turbulent years of the Mexican Revolution. As Eric Hobsbawm has shown, during periods of great change, traditions can, “give an impression of continuity, community, and comfort, despite overwhelming contextual evidence to the contrary.”¹¹⁵ The myth of Díaz helped establish the narrative that Sanborns was an institution that bridged across Porfirian Mexico and the Mexican Revolution.

Beginning in 1921, Sanborns commissioned the publication of English language travel brochures and company booklets that were available in Sanborn stores and probably local hotels.¹¹⁶ The Mexican historian Manuel Romero de Terreros; also known as Marqués de San Francisco; penned a brief history of *La Casa de los Azulejos* that traced the lives of Los Condes del Valle de Orizaba, and the different people who occupied the House of Tiles from 1596 to the time in which

Azulejos (México: Sanborns Hermanos, 1999), 116; “Sanborns Souvenir,” Company booklet, 1939.

ASH.

¹¹⁵ Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds. *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 105.

¹¹⁶ “Sanborns Monterrey Mexico.” Company souvenir booklet. (Mexico: Editorial department of the National Chamber of Hotels, 1940s). Author's personal archive. The name of the publisher provides enough evidence to suggest these booklets were distributed to area hotels and likely available in the lobbies.

Sanborns occupied the building in the twentieth-century. Within the colorful forty-two-page booklet are various illustrations of the decorative architecture in the House of Tiles and the different store departments available in Sanborns. The booklet concluded by stating that Sanborns had recently taken over the House of Tiles, and “at great expense, have had it restored in such a manner that it’s [sic] stability is guaranteed for many years, without altering any of it’s [sic] architectural features.”¹¹⁷ An edition from 1936 featured a picturesque caravan of farmers walking with donkeys, dogs, and wagons led by oxen.¹¹⁸ The scene showed a mountainous background lined with cactus. This imagery conjured up notions that Sanborns had captured the tradition of Mexico’s past inside its modern retail store. The accompanied text read that the House of Tiles was, “One of Mexico’s [sic] famous historic landmarks now occupied by Sanborns.” Sanborns’s affinity with the preservation of Mexican tradition was not just limited to the architecture they rented, but the embodiment of spirit that incorporated the “Old-fashion Mexican way” into their stores.¹¹⁹

Sanborns promotional material also invented a narrative about the company’s seamless transition into Mexican society. A 1941 booklet stated:

Thirty eight years ago—or shortly after the turn of the century, the hoofs of horses ceased to clatter as they drew up in front of Avenida San Francisco No 12, [the site of Sanborn’s first store] and feathery bonneted and long-skirted members of the Capital’s socially elite, swept

¹¹⁷ Marqués de San Francisco, *La Casa de los Azulejos*, company booklet, 2nd edition (México: Bland Brothers Printers, 1922), 40.

¹¹⁸ *La Casa de los Azulejos* was reprinted at least eleven times. The 1936 version features the imagery in question.

¹¹⁹ “Sanborns Monterrey Mexico.” Company souvenir booklet. (Mexico: Editorial department of the National Chamber of Hotels, 1940s). Author’s personal archive.

down from their coaches and entered the shop, to behold for the first time a soda fountain from which was dispensed choice and cooling concoctions. Such was the start of Sanborns in Mexico.¹²⁰

This folkloric description paints a romanticized vision of Mexico's colonial past being swept away by the discoveries of modern technologies imported by Sanborns that were previously unavailable in Mexico prior to the arrival of the company. The narrative suggests that Sanborns was connected with the everyday life of Porfirian high society, and that the company contributed to Mexico's modernization.

Company owners Mexicanized the aesthetic of its store designs, company brochures and restaurant menus as a business strategy that linked the U.S. company within Mexican culture. Inaugurated in 1936, Sanborns Monterrey featured a well-lit patio underneath arched columns and tiled floors. The store departments were designed with a rustic look. For example, an image of the Sanborns cocktail lounge featured Mexican *zarapes* spread across the floor above decorative handmade wooden chairs and tables. The walls were fixed with metal lamps and framed pictures of Mexican landscapes. The description of the lounge said, "it seems to be an old Spanish custom for the travel world to meet in this luxurious cocktail lounge and sip concoctions that only a maestro could make."¹²¹ This language invoked thoughts of Sanborns as a cultural setting that captured the essence of a romanticized and timeless Mexico met with the modern luxuries and amenities that it provided. Sanborns helped foreign tourists understand an exotic and unfamiliar Mexico by translating the culture into identifiable visual markers. Foreign tourists who visited Sanborns may

¹²⁰ "The House of Tiles," Sanborns souvenir booklet. 1941. Author's personal archive. A souvenir booklet from 1946 appears with identical text and updated photos.

¹²¹ Ibid.

have thought the store felt authentic, even if they had identified the tropes were designed to appeal to Mexico's past. Sanborns marketed their store as an institution that commercialized Mexico's national culture.¹²² The rustic interior designs, the indigenous-looking uniforms worn by the waitresses; the type font used on the entrances to the store departments; the Mexican food on the menu, and the Mexican artwork displayed on the walls and sold on the store shelves were all designed to expand Sanborns's appeal to a wider audience.

Conclusion

In December 1941, the *New York Times* ran an article written by a U.S. tourist titled, "Things to do in Mexico," that suggested people visit the Pyramids in San Juan Teotihuacán, the Castle of Chapultepec, and Sanborns. Located just a few minutes' walk from the Central Alameda and surrounding markets, Sanborns provided Mexicans and tourists with convenience and comfort.¹²³ The author compared Sanborns in Mexico City as a more versatile version of the American Express

¹²² Sanborns of Monterrey. "Sanborns Post Card." Mexico City, Mexico. Publicaciones Fischgrund. 1950s? Author's personal archive. The postcard contains imagery of an indigenous woman in a traditional dress fanning the flames of an open wood stove. The iconography shows a romanticized vision of Mexico's culinary past and suggests Sanborns preserved Mexico's tradition and served authentic cuisine. The accompanied text said that Sanborns sold "Native hand-crafts from the four corners of the republic," hand hammered silver, "potent Mexican drinks," and "delectable native dishes in the charming restaurant."

¹²³ Dorothy Hirshfield, "Things to do in Mexico: A Visit to Sanborns, to the Pyramids and Other Suggestions by One Tourist," *New York Times*. Dec 14, 1941, 12.

company in Paris, whose agents connected wealthy tourists with French culture.¹²⁴ According to the article, at Sanborns, customers could, “buy anything from milk of magnesia to antiques of the Spanish colonial period.”¹²⁵ Customers who went to Sanborns could dine in the crowded restaurant and order from a mixed menu that included Mexican and American cuisine. They could mingle inside a cosmopolitan atmosphere with elite Mexicans and world travelers while enjoying the ambiance and decorative architecture of the Casa de los Azulejos, one of Mexico’s landmark buildings.¹²⁶ The article made clear that going to Sanborns was an important social experience that allowed people to enter Mexican culture.

Between 1920-1950, Sanborns expanded its consumer audience by developing into a cultural translator that worked across national, racial, and generational lines. Sanborns responded to Mexico’s modernization, economic developments, and its evolving national identity by weaving elements of Mexican culture in their stores. This chapter began by examining José Clemente Orozco’s 1925 mural *Omniscience* inside the House of Tiles. The artwork incorporated racially indigenous bodies and its setting inside Sanborns provided a public platform for people to examine Mexico’s national artwork up close. Orozco’s mural inside a U.S.-owned commercial establishment differed from other government sanctioned mural projects. Sanborns marketed Orozco’s painting as an example of its store’s connection with Mexican culture. The owners added store departments to broaden their retail operations to include Mexican silver and popular arts and crafts. These changes reflected broader consumer trends and the growth of national industries. Sanborns promoted itself

¹²⁴ Harvey Levenstein, *We’ll Always Have Paris: American Tourists in France since 1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 29.

¹²⁵ Dorothy Hirshfield, “Things to do in Mexico,” 12.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

as among Mexico's leading commercial vendors that contributed directly to Mexico's modernization and national progress.

Sanborns was considered a leading restaurant in Mexico City that emphasized American-style cuisine. However, the company modified its restaurant menus to incorporate dishes associated with Mexico's national cuisine. Corn dishes like tamales, enchiladas, mole, and tortillas slowly entered into the menus over time. These additions reflected the changing eating habits among Mexico's upper class and visiting tourists, along with the national trends that embraced indigenous cuisine as symbols of Mexican identity. Sanborns made vernacular cuisine a posh food choice in its high-end restaurant. In the 1930s, Sanborns customers were served their food by working-class waitresses dressed in newly designed uniforms. The uniform incorporated an amalgamation of "typical" clothing worn by indigenous women from rural areas in Mexico. This romanticized appropriation of Mexico's indigenous past made Sanborns waitresses into identifiable tropes that symbolized the country's national unity.

Sanborns owners invented traditions about their company's seamless entry into Mexico. These narratives helped Sanborns establish stability during three distinct periods in Mexican history: Porfirian Mexico, the 1910 Revolution, and postrevolutionary construction. The company collapsed and simplified these transformative periods by showing how Sanborns provided Mexico with modern technologies while preserving its cultural heritage. The next chapter focuses on the working women at Sanborns and how they navigated a gendered form of labor paternalism imposed by company managers.

Chapter IV

***La Gran Familia Sanborns: Working Women, Labor Paternalism, and Union Movement,
(1920-1948)***

On September 20, 1922, The American Chamber of Commerce of Mexico organized a banquet inside the Sanborn restaurant in downtown Mexico City.¹ Members of the Chamber used the luncheon to address import duties, remissions of income taxes, Mexican markets for U.S. products, and labor practices.² The owner of the restaurant, Frank Sanborn, gave a speech that was reprinted in Mexican newspapers. Having lived in Mexico for nearly twenty-years, Sanborn spoke as an authority about the responsibilities of American merchants while working in Mexico. He explained his personal philosophy about the labor relations with his employees. Sanborn told the Chamber he was proud of the 300 employees who worked under his management. According to Sanborn, the company removed less than one employee per month and annually kept 95 per cent of the workforce. He boasted that from the staff hired twenty years ago, the company still had two original employees on their payroll. The key to the success of retaining disciplined employees

¹ The American Chamber of Commerce of Mexico was created towards the end of World War I with support from the U.S. State Department to develop and protect U.S. business interests operating inside Mexico.

² “La Cámara de Comercio Americana Ofreció Ayer un Lunch en ‘Sanborns,’” *Excelsior*, 21 de Septiembre, 1922. See also, “American Commerce Chamber Gets Tips on How to Do Good,” *Excelsior*, September 21, 1922.

involved teaching them “honestly and loyalty” that were, “the only two qualities we demand to have enough capacity to develop in our employees.”³

Sanborn described his method to ensure labor discipline. “Our employees must be happy and if they are not, we will transfer them to another department,” he said. Upon moving them to their new job, if the managers determined that “their character” still made them “discontent”, then the company would fire the employee. One of the factors that, “has freed us from rust” was the frequent addition of, “new blood that gives more impulse to the old.” However, Sanborn stressed that beyond anything, worker loyalty to the company determined his overall business success. “For me, my boys and girls are my own responsibility. When they are careless, I scold them and when they do well, I praise them. I love them all and do not feel ashamed that they know that.”⁴ Frank Sanborn’s candid speech to the Chamber revealed his company’s labor paternalism that demanded

³ “El Banquete en la Cámara Americana de Comercio,” *El Universal*, 22 de Septiembre de 1922. “Las únicas dos cualidades que exigimos son la honradez y la lealtad y pretendemos tener la capacidad bastante para desarrollarlas en nuestros empleados.”

⁴ “El Banquete en la Cámara Americana de Comercio,” *El Universal*, 22 de Septiembre de 1922. “Nuestros empleados deben estar contentos y si alguno no lo está lo trasladamos a otro departamento. Si a la postre resulta que su carácter lo hace descontento y que la clase de trabajo que le toque no tiene nada que ver con su desagrado, lo despedimos. Creo que nuestro éxito se debe a las siguientes causas: un poco de viaje que nos ha librado de enmohecernos; la adición frecuente de sangre nueva que de más impulso a la vieja; pero principalmente, la lealtad de nuestros compañeros. Para mí, mis muchachas y muchachos forman mi propia responsabilidad. Cuando son descuidados los regaño y cuando lo hacen bien los elogio. Los quiero bien no me avergüenzo de que lo sepan.

Mexican workers served dutifully their U.S. managers or faced disciplinary actions, or possible termination.

Throughout its history, Sanborns provided ample job opportunities for young working-class Mexican women. Since at least 1921, Sanborns hired a predominantly female workforce who served an integral role in the daily store operations. Women served the food and drinks at the soda fountain; they worked as secretaries inside the office, behind the sales counters, and in the kitchen; they also served as managers, vendors, and assistants of different store departments. The goal of this chapter is to plot working-class women into the history of Sanborns. It examines their relationships and interactions with company management, visiting customers, and organized labor. By using government reports, census data, labor statistics, company ephemera, court records, periodicals, oral interviews, and internal Sanborns documents, this chapter observes some of the experiences of female employees who worked at Sanborns. I argue that Sanborns, like many American-owned businesses in Latin America, adopted a gendered form of paternalism in managing its workers; women workers rejected this paternalism with greater or lesser success, sometimes motivated by eruptions of fellow employees, organized labor, and customers in their workspaces. Paternalism is often defined by historians as a style of management based on the image of a fatherly figure that provides basic necessities to workers while simultaneously depriving them of their independence.⁵ This labor practice is designed to regiment worker discipline, mute the presence of outside labor influences, and develop loyalty to company objectives.⁶ Throughout its history, Sanborns

⁵ Jacquelyn Dowd Hall *et al.* *Like a Family: The Making of a Southern Cotton Mill World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), xvii.

⁶ Michael Snodgrass, *Deference and Defiance in Monterrey: Workers, Paternalism, and Revolution in Mexico, 1890-1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 4.

incorporated the imagery of family within its managerial practices, and eventually referred to its workers part of the *Gran Familia Sanborns* (Big Sanborns Family).⁷

This chapter spotlights some of the labor experiences of working class women by focusing on Sanborns as a place where public and private domains overlapped one another. It is within this unique privately-owned retail store that many female Sanborns employees were able to enter and interact with the public sphere.⁸ Gender historians have often defined the public sphere in terms associated with industrialization. For example, factories were considered inherently masculine spaces, though with notable exceptions.⁹ In Mexico, this was generally associated with jobs in

⁷ See for example, Francisco Martínez Gracidas, “Página Editorial,” *Azulejos: Revista Interna de los Empleados de Sanborn Hnos., S.A.*, Año IX, núm. 44 (enero, 1989), 3; “Lealtad y Responsabilidad demostradas en el Personal de la Gran Familia Sanborns,” *Sanborns Azulejos: Revista interna para el Personal de Sanborns y Sanborns Café*, Año XXVI, núm. 135 (Octubre, 2012), 5.

⁸ Steven B. Bunker, *Creating Mexican Consumer Culture in the Age of Porfirio Díaz* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2012), 68. Bunker described “sites of commercialized leisure,” and “privately owned space of public sociability.”

⁹ The exception being textile factories. See for example, Ann Farnsworth-Alvear, *Dulcinea in the Factory: Myths, morals, Men, and Women in Colombia’s Industrial Experiment, 1905-1960* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000). Farnsworth-Alvear argues that changing understandings of femininity and masculinity shaped how social actors understood the industrial workplace. She also argues that working women in Medellín lived gender through a “normative field—marked by ‘proper’ and ‘improper’ ways of being female.” See also, Joel Wolfe, *Working Women, Working Men: São Paulo and the Rise of Brazil’s Industrial Working Class, 1900-1955* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993). Wolfe argues that female textile workers led efforts to organize factory commissions, providing a model

manufacturing, industrial processing, and agriculture.¹⁰ Susie S. Porter analyzed the relationship between working women, discourses on morality and honor, and Mexico's rapid industrialization.¹¹ Porter shows that in the 1880s, women worked primarily in Mexico's cigarette and clothing factories. Mexican government administrators, led by Porfirio Díaz, turned to foreign investors from Europe and the United States to help stimulate a stagnating national economy. By the turn of the century, favorable economic conditions led to expanding industrial production which brought more women into urban factory jobs, particularly in Mexico City, Monterrey, and the area between Puebla and Veracruz.¹² Mexico City, as Porter notes, also held the largest service sector in these industrial regions.¹³

This chapter calls attention to the work experiences of women in the service and retail sector in Mexico City, Monterrey, and Acapulco. It contributes to an understanding of the relationship

male worker used in their struggles against state enforced labor systems during the Vargas years. See, Barbara Weinstein, *For Social Peace in Brazil: Industrialists and the Remaking of the Working class in São Paulo, 1920-1964* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996). Weinstein shows that Brazilian industrialists and engineers implemented changes to remake the industrial workforce into a new image using scientific management. Women and men participated in social welfare programs sponsored by industrial organizations.

¹⁰ See Susie S. Porter, *Working Women in Mexico City: Public Discourses and Material Conditions, 1879-1931* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2003), xii-xviii.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., xi-xiii.

¹³ Ibid., xiv.

between gender and class within the lived experiences of working class women.¹⁴ Sanborns was a mixed-sex environment that was long considered a space of elite power and homo-sociability that made space for upper-class women customers, and the working-class women who served them.¹⁵ Restaurants and cafeterias in Mexico City were places where women entered the public sphere through their labor skills. For example, René Rabell Jara shows how the Mexican government was opposed to coffee shops and restaurants hiring women to work as waitresses. In July 1913, the owner of *Café París* petitioned the municipal government to hire women as waitresses like those, “similar to the establishments in Europe and the United States...these women must be honorable ladies from a good background, so they can render their services to this establishment.”¹⁶ Working-class women at Sanborns participated in the public sphere by adhering to the company’s gendered paternalism that demanded loyalty and honor as requisites for work.

¹⁴ See for example, John French and Daniel James, “Squaring the Circle: Women’s Factory, Labor, Gender Ideology, and Necessity,” in *The Gendered Worlds of Latin American Women Workers: From Household and Factory to the Union Hall and Ballot Box* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 1-30. Ann Farnsworth-Alvear, *Dulcinea in the Factory*; Daniel James, *Doña María’s Story: Life History, Memory, and Political Identity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).

¹⁵ For an examination of Sanborns and its association with male sociability, see chapters 2 and 5. For an analysis of the gendering of commercial space, see chapter 1.

¹⁶ René Rabell Jara, *La cocina mexicana a través de los siglos*, vol. 6, la bella época (Mexico City: Clio, 1996). As quoted in her chapter, “Los revolucionarios también comen...y beben.” “utilizar los servicios de señoras en calidad de meseras, como se efectúa en casas similares en Europa y Estados Unidos’ si debiendo dichas meseras ser señoras honradas de buenos antecedentes en que puedan prestar sus servicios en esta casa.”

This study contributes to work by historians of labor and gender history of Mexico. Porter's study on working women in Mexico City from 1880-1931, shows that women, "acted within a discourse of female honor, the meaning of which was tied to shifts in women's participation in the workforce." The virtue of female honor and their sexual morality were seen as cultural benchmarks that legitimized women's place in the workforce and the public sphere.¹⁷ My work builds on Porter's by showing how a gendered system of labor paternalism at Sanborns required conceptions of female honor and loyalty from their employees throughout the 1940s.

María Teresa Fernández-Aceves's analysis of female tortilla workers shows that the mechanization process of the corn mills in Guadalajara favored male employees over their female counterparts. Working women mobilized in their union and carved out a political space for themselves by contesting gendered notions of female domesticity and motherhood that were enforced by the state, mill owners, and male workers.¹⁸ Fernández-Aceves challenges contending notions in labor histories that viewed the labor movement as dominated by male actors, revealing the active roles of women in labor mobilization.¹⁹ Her work also joins conversation with recent Latin American labor histories that examine how changing cultural understandings of gender shaped how people understood industrial workplaces.²⁰ The general cultural understanding of women's

¹⁷ Susie S. Porter, *Working Women in Mexico City: Public Discourses and Material Conditions, 1879-1931* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2003), xvii-xviii.

¹⁸ María Teresa Fernández-Aceves, "Once We Were Corn Grinders: Women and Labor in the Tortilla Industry of Guadalajara, 1920-1940," *International Labor and Working-Class History*, No. 63 (Spring 2003), 98.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 81-82.

²⁰ Ann Farnsworth-Alvear, *Dulcinea in the Factory*.

relationship to men in Mexico may have influenced the decision-making by Sanborns managers to hire a predominantly female workforce. As Fernández-Aceves and others have shown, state officials, company owners, labor unions, and other social actors, reinforced nineteenth century conceptions of working-women.²¹

During the 1922 bakers strike in Mexico City, which I discuss below, unionized male bakers protested in Sanborns because they recognized the company employed only non-unionized working-class women. Bakeries were predominantly male spaces of work. By hiring primarily unskilled “free” women to fill jobs traditionally held by unionized male bakers, Sanborns used its paternalism to undercut outside labor influences and paid women lower wages. The Mexico City government ultimately defended the U.S.-owned Sanborns against the striking Mexican bakers in an act that reinforced the reproduction of capital. Sanborns then pre-emptively organized their employees through a company-controlled union (referred to as *sindicatos blancos*) in extent of the pro-union national climate of the 1930s-1940s. My research into working-class women at Sanborns Monterrey contributes to labor studies that focus on Mexico’s urban peripheries.²² Michael Snodgrass’s study of Monterrey’s “unique system of industrial paternalism,” examines how Mexican workers and industrialists shaped the Mexican Revolution. His study untangles local union activity, the changing position of Monterrey’s industrialists to national labor movements, and shares the experiences of

²¹ Fernández-Aceves, “Once We Were Corn Grinders,” 82.

²² Susan Gauss, *Made in Mexico: Regions, Nations and the State in the Rise of Mexican Industrialism, 1920s-1940s* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010); Michael Snodgrass, *Deference and Defiance in Monterrey: Workers, Paternalism, and Revolution in Mexico, 1890-1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Menno Vellinga, *Industrialización, Burguesía y Clase Obrera en México: el caso de Monterrey* (México: Siglo veintiuno editores, 1979).

factory and railroad workers, extending the labor historiography beyond the Cárdenas years.²³ Snodgrass regretted that his study “necessarily ignores” other workers, including retail clerks, “whose voices remain muted in the archive.”²⁴ My study answers the call to unmute some of the voices and experiences of working-class retail workers in Mexico. Working women at Sanborns Monterrey and Acapulco played an active role in union movement in the 1940s, and 1990s, respectively. Yet, similarly to Fernández-Aceves’s conclusions, the labor inspectors, government arbitrators, union leaders, and lawyers who oversaw union decisions were men, showing that working women at Sanborns remained marginalized by male decision makers.²⁵

This work also contributes to labor histories that examine the role U.S. companies had in shaping working-class culture in Mexico. Steven J. Bachelor’s analysis of Mexican autoworkers in Mexico City shows that transnational corporations led by Ford and General Motors, “attempted to construct for their workers a new subjectivity” within the post-revolutionary industrialization period. These companies tried bringing autoworkers within the folds of a “transnational corporate family,” that was part of project constructed by industrialist to mold Mexican workers into efficient laborers.²⁶ Using company sports clubs, company newsletters, holiday parties, and other paternal forms of collaboration, U.S. companies sought to create a unified workforce of autoworkers that

²³ Snodgrass, *Deference and Defiance*, 1-5.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

²⁵ Fernández-Aceves, “Once We Were Corn Grinders,” 83.

²⁶ Steven J. Bachelor, “Toiling for the ‘New Invaders’: Autoworkers, Transnational Corporations, and Working-Class Culture in Mexico City, 1955-1968,” in *Fragments of a Golden Age: The Politics of Culture in Mexico since 1940*, ed. Gilbert M. Joseph et al. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 275-276.

were members of a “virtual middle class.”²⁷ Beginning in the 1930s, Sanborns management sponsored sports leagues, and also encouraged employee participation in government-sponsored events in Mexico City designed to link sports culture with national celebrations. By the late 1960s, under the ownership of Walgreens Company, Sanborns management launched their own campaign to create a unified “Gran Familia Sanborns.”²⁸ The company continued their gendered paternalism well into the 1990s by sponsoring company sports leagues, hosting family functions and holiday festivals for employees, and launching their own illustrated internal magazine for company employees called, *Azulejos*.²⁹

Working Women at Sanborns: Gender, Hierarchy, and Labor Conditions

In the 1920s, Sanborns developed into one of Mexico City’s most prestigious commercial institutions, and its restaurant was considered among the most elegant in the capital.³⁰ The sheer architectural size of the House of Tiles allowed Sanborns to accommodate hundreds of guests in its

²⁷ Ibid., 315.

²⁸ *Azulejos: Revista Interna de los Empleados de Sanborn Hnos., S.A.* Año IX, Núm. 45 (Junio, 1989). “la Gran Familia Sanborns.”

²⁹ The first edition of *Sanborns Azulejos* was released in 1968.

³⁰ Los Mejores Restaurantes en La Capital,” *El Universal*, 2 de Junio de 1922, Tomo 1. Suplemento de arte e información. “La Casa de los Azulejos, Elegante The Danzant.” Other restaurants included the San Angel Inn, Salon Bach, Café Colon, La Granja, Giacomini, Chapultepec, and La Opera. Most of these restaurants are still in existence today, which speaks to their importance as places associated with an aura of class and inaccessibility.

restaurant and upstairs banquet hall.³¹ The company hired a large number of working-class women to serve as waitresses, cooks, cleaners, kitchen assistants, pastry makers, clerks and vendors, who were needed to serve customers who attended the luncheons, parties, banquets, receptions, dances, celebrations, and diplomatic ceremonies at the highest level.³² Sanborns catered to large crowds at all times during its normal business hours from 8:00am until 10:00pm, seven days a week.³³ The popularity of the store inevitably placed a high demand on the workforce. Working women at Sanborns served some of the most powerful and important people from Mexico's upper-class.³⁴ During the everyday work experiences of Sanborns waitresses, working women served as important facilitators that provided the company's main interaction with customers. Some Sanborns waitresses developed working relationships with their regular customers. There were clients who visited Sanborns specifically to sit in the section of their favorite waitress.³⁵ As Snodgrass observes, having a stable income and job security was important for working women; other job opportunities for women in the retail sector existed elsewhere, but having the chance to work for a reputable company

³¹ Fondo Ayuntamiento y Gobierno del Distrito, *Diversiones públicas*, vol. 808, exp. 1412, 1921.

AHCM. When Sanborns received their new business license, the government inspector permitted Sanborns a maximum of 300-350 people to occupy the banquet hall located on the second floor.

³² For an example of diplomatic ceremonies see, "Chile cuando algunas naciones ponderosas esperan la venia de los fuertes para reanudar sus relaciones con México discreta con una condecoración el visto buena para nuestra política," *El Demócrata*, 9 de Abril de 1922, 1,11.

³³ The Sanborns Te Dansant, for example, was hosted from 5 to 7:15pm and from 7:45-10:00pm. "Inauguration of Sanborn's Te Dansant Tomorrow," *The Mexican Post*, August 11, 1921.

³⁴ Armando de María y Campos, "La Vida en México," *Mefistófeles*, 30 de Octubre de 1919, 13.

³⁵ Norma García, Interview with author, July 17, 2017, Mexico City. Pseudonym.

probably made women workers feel honorable and filled with pride.³⁶ The prominence of Sanborn may have drawn women to try and work there for their own reasons. The Mexican writer Andrés Henestrosa recalled that during the 1920s-1930s, there were ample job opportunities for young women at Sanborns. As a frequent customer who ate his breakfasts in Sanborns, Henestrosa remembered women working as counter assistants where they were, “able to leave their houses and show off their clothes.”³⁷

At Sanborns, a set hierarchy existed in the workspaces that separated unskilled Mexican women workers from the company’s upper-management who were white men from the United States.³⁸ Floor supervisors managed over their workers divided in each store department. These positions were held by men and women, some that were U.S. citizens.³⁹ However, Sanborns also hired Mexican women as floor supervisors and secretaries, suggesting that some upward mobility in

³⁶ Snodgrass, *Deference and Defiance in Monterrey*, 75-76.

³⁷ As quoted in Carla Zarebska, *La Casa de los Azulejos*, 136. “las jovencitas de sociedad en los años veinte y treinta, conseguían trabajar gratis en Sanborns como ayudantes de mostrador para poder salir de sus casas y lucir sus ropas, como lo hizo Antonieta Rivas Mercado.”

³⁸ “Solicitud de los Sres. Samborsn [sic] Bros S.A. para establecer en la Casa no. 4 de la Av. Francisco I Madero un The Danzan.” *Diversiones públicas*, vol. 808, exp. 1412. 1921. AHCM. The letter listed Frank A. Sanborn, President; E.W. Cartlidge, Vice President; Francis H. Sanborn, Vice President; Walter D. Sanborn, Secretary; Homer R. Porter, Treasurer; Edward L. Hine, General Manager.

³⁹ “Sanborns Souvenir,” Sanborns booklet. Mexico City, 1939. ASH. The brochure lists important supervisors by department. I then cross-checked their surnames using the AGN *buscador* to find their migration documents in the *Departamento de Migración* in gallery 5. I located the records of six individuals whose names matched that showed they were born in the United States.

the company was possible. For example, a company brochure from 1939 dedicated a page to the nine store supervisors at Sanborns that included Marie Guzman, Frank Sanborn's private secretary, and Refugio Muciño, the perfume department manager. Captions for the women highlighted their continued loyalty working at Sanborns; Guzman started in 1921, and Muciño in 1922.⁴⁰

Like all stores and restaurants, certain job positions inside Sanborns were considered more desirable than others. For unskilled female laborers, working as a waitress was considered a good position in the company.⁴¹ One current Sanborns waitress who started working at Sanborns in 1967, said that women who wanted to work as waitresses first started by washing dishes or doing miscellaneous labor in the kitchen under the observation of a manager. The managers graded worker performance and kept detailed records in the office that determined whether employees could enter better positions.⁴²

⁴⁰ Ibid. The document listed Refugio Muciño, Perfume Department, and Marie Guzman, Office Secretary. Guzman and Muciño had the only non-Anglo surnames, and their names did not appear in the AGN *buscador*, suggesting they were probably Mexican nationals. The description for Muciño read, "better known as "Cuca" has more than the ordinary amount of sense and she rules the destinies of the perfume department. Cuca drew her first pay check at Sanborns seventeen years ago, --and that was when she was very young, too. (No charge for that one, 'Cuca')." "

⁴¹ "Asunto: Alejandra Molina contra Casa Sanborn's Monterrey," Caja 341/6. Archivo General del Estado de Nuevo León (hereafter AGENL) Junta Central de Conciliación y Arbitraje del Estado de Nuevo León (hereafter JLCA). 28 Agosto, 1945 al 3 Abril, 1946.

⁴² Gutiérrez, María. Interview with author. Personal Interview. Acapulco, Guerrero, Mexico, June 8, 2018. Pseudonym. "En Sanborns, cuando entras, empiezas lavando platos y haciendo labores generales, en oficina hay expediente donde miran hasta qué grado de estudios tienes, entonces el

By 1921, Sanborns employed a far greater number of waitresses than any other restaurant in Mexico City. A Department of Labor report from the same year surveyed different restaurants, cantinas, and cafeterias located in seven districts in the capital. It counted the wait staff each establishment hired and listed if they were unionized or non-unionized laborers. Under the listing for “Restaurant Sanbons” [*sic*], the report indicated the company staffed, “40 waitresses non-unionized.”⁴³ The government inspector who collected the statistical information used clear gender suffixes to describe the sex of the workers throughout the report. For example, the listing for the Restaurant *Tokio* located on República de Uruguay 25, had a wait staff of “9 waiters and five waitresses, free,” whereas the *Restaurant Cosmos* on San Juan de Letrán had “10 waiters, six unionized, 4 free.”⁴⁴ Sanborns employed twenty more waitresses than *El Fénix* and *La Flor de México*; two of the leading coffee shops in the city; and twenty-five more than Lady Baltimore, a very popular restaurant, pastry, and ice cream shop located across the street from Sanborns.⁴⁵ Susie S. Porter’s

gerente ve el interés que tienes y te echa el ojo si trabajas bien y dice ‘bueno, a esta muchacha yo lo puedo ayudar.’”

⁴³ “Datos sobre empleados de Restaurante,” Departamento del Trabajo, Secretaria de Industria, Comercio y Trabajo (hereafter DTSICT), 14 de noviembre de, 1921, caja 294, exp. 25, AGN. “40 Meseras no sindicalizadas.”

⁴⁴ “Datos sobre empleados de Restaurante,” DTSICT, Noviembre 14, 1921, caja 294, exp. 25, AGN. “San Juan de Letrán #12. Restaurant ‘Cosmos’. Prop. José Asato. 10 meseros, 6 sindicalizados y 4 libres...Uruguay #25. Restaurant ‘Tokio.’ Prop. Manuel Yamauchi. 9 meseros y 5 mesras [*sic*], libres.”

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* Both *El Fénix* and *La Flor de México* listed, “20 meseras no sindicalizadas.” For a description of *El Fénix* *La Flor de México*, consult Alfonso Sierra Partida, *El Café y Los Cafés*, (México: Ediciones Café Literarios, 1966), 62.

analysis of census records concluded that a clear division of labor existed where, “men dominated in service jobs in first-class restaurants, while women worked mostly in second-class restaurants.”⁴⁶

The preference for hiring working women was, paradoxically, contrary to the labor trends of other major restaurants. The 1921 Department of Labor report reveals only a partial assessment of the number of women who worked at Sanborns. However, it showed that the company hired exclusively non-unionized women to work as waitresses. It can be reasonably assumed that the other working women employed there were also without union protections.

Without the strength of organized labor, and with limited mobility to climb the company ladder into higher managerial positions, working women at Sanborns faced uncertainties and limited protections at their jobs. Working women did have rights as workers established under Article 123 of the 1917 Constitution, which outlined the “right to dignified and socially useful employment” and permitted workers to form unions and strike if necessary. It also stipulated a minimum wage sufficient enough to support a family, a day of rest per week, and twenty days of paid vacations.⁴⁷ Yet, for working women, the boundaries between their rights as workers and the everyday working conditions they found at Sanborns were nonaligned. Porter notes that waitresses worked in labor environments they had little control over.⁴⁸ At Sanborns, women workers who performed well at their jobs were rewarded by their male managers with continued employment at the company. They demonstrated honor and loyalty through their dedicated service to the company, and by accepting

⁴⁶ Susie Porter, *Working Women in Mexico City*, 47.

⁴⁷ As quoted in Weis, *Bakers and Basques*, 110.; “1917 Constitution of Mexico.” 1917 Constitution of Mexico. <http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/mexico/1917-Constitution.htm> (accessed July 11, 2018).

⁴⁸ Susie S. Porter, *Working Women in Mexico City*, 47.

their subordination under Sanborns managers. However, women were also disciplined based on the same virtues by managers who controlled the movement of female workers or fired them from their positions. Thus, working women at Sanborns were required to either accept or reject the conditions of the gendered form of labor paternalism set by managers that demanded their discipline and loyalty to company objectives.⁴⁹

On June 16, 1921, the Department of Labor wrote a memorandum to Sanborns warning that their labor policies could potentially incite tensions among their workers.⁵⁰ The document reported that the company's labor contracts for their employees were "not acceptable" because it infringed on part 22 of Article 123 of the 1917 Constitution. That particular subsection of Article 123 stated that employers who dismissed workers without justification were required to pay indemnity for three months of wages. The Department of Labor had learned that Sanborns was in violation of these constitutional agreements, suggesting that certain employees may have petitioned directly to the government. The memorandum stated that company owners at Sanborns did have the power to dismiss their employees without justification, if necessary, but were bound to fulfill their labor contract they had signed or provide the required 90-days of wages.⁵¹ The letter forwarded to

⁴⁹ "El Banquete en la Cámara Americana de Comercio," *El Universal*, 22 de Septiembre de 1922.

⁵⁰ El Departamento de Trabajo.

⁵¹ "El Jefe de Sección de Legislación dice no es aceptable el contrato de Srs. Sanborn's Hermanos, Sucs. Porque infringe fracción XXII del artículo 123 Constitucional," DTSICT, 16 de Junio de 1921, Caja 303, Exp. 2, AGN. "El modelo de contrato que presentan los Sres. Samborn [*sic*] Hnos[.] Susc., se presta para eludir la disposición contenida en la fracción XXII del Artículo 123 Constitucional porque faculta [*sic*] al patrón para separar a sus empleados sin causa justificada en cualquier momento, en tanto que dichos empleados se obligan por el término de 90 días." See also, "1917

the company asserted that Sanborns was actively “trying to avoid compliance with some of the constitutional precepts that favor the labor class.” The government also warned Sanborns that it had the power to intervene if necessary and force the company to stop its unconstitutional labor practices. The memorandum stated that the Sanborns policy of dismissing employees before the end of the 90-day period “could create a feeling of hostility” which could lead to potential labor conflicts.⁵²

A few days later, the vice-president Francis Sanborn responded to the government. In his letter, he stated that the company’s, “objective is not to violate the laws, nor to harass our employees; we only want to avoid difficulties and damages.”⁵³ The terse response indicated that Sanborns acknowledged the government’s position and understood that the labor contract they

Constitution of Mexico,” Title VI: Labor and Social Security, Article 123, XXII.

<http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/mexico/1917-Constitution.htm>

⁵² “El Jefe de Sección de Legislación dice no es aceptable el contrato de Srs. Sanborn’s,” STSICT, 16 de Junio de 1921, caja 303, exp. 2, AGN. “Que el Gobierno debe intervenir para que cese tal práctica...El hecho de que el plazo de prueba que se toma la empresa para juzgar de las aptitudes de un trabajador sea tan largo y de que se reserve el derecho de despedirlo antes de terminar dicho plazo ha dado seguramente a los interesados motivo para juzgar en tal forma de las intenciones de esa negociación y ello puedo crearle un sentimiento de hostilidad que sería conveniente prevenir ya que entraña la posibilidad de que dé lugar a conflictos enojosos para la misma.”

⁵³ Francis Sanborn a Al C. Oficial Mayor de la Secretaría de Industria, Comercio y Trabajo. 20 de Junio de 1921, caja 303, exp. 2, AGN. “...Pues nuestro objeto no es violar las leyes, ni mucho menos hostilizar a nuestros empleados; unicamente [sic] queremos evitar dificultades y perjuicios.”

signed with employees required them to pay a 90-day wage severance if they were terminated. Yet, it did not say whether Sanborns would adhere to the Department of Labor's warning.

Sanborns employees worked in a potentially precarious labor environment. The Department of Labor memorandum to Sanborns suggests that workers may have lacked guarantees of future employment and risked losing their jobs all together without warning, or justification, and might not receive their 90-day indemnify as required by Article 123 of the 1917 Constitution. Evidence shows that even if employees went and filed lawsuits against Sanborns, the company hired powerful lawyers that defended them against any litigation in the court system.⁵⁴ The Department of Labor's warning to Sanborns foreshadowed a large-scale labor protest involving Mexican bakers that occurred exactly a year after the memorandum was written. As the next section shows, Sanborns became targeted specifically for its gendered system of paternalism.

Striking Bread Workers Confront Sanborns Paternalism, 1922

On June 16, 1922, telephone operators, tram workers, electricians, candy makers, and spinners marched in solidarity with a large contingent of striking bakery workers in downtown Mexico City.⁵⁵ The striking workers were an emblematic display of the continued labor struggles and

⁵⁴ "Ceuppens, Hector, Juicio Ord. Merc. Contra Sanborns Bross, Sucrs." Tribunal Superior de Justicia del Distrito Federal (hereafter TSJDF), 12 de Octubre de 1918, folio 269988, caja 1511, AGN.

⁵⁵ "El Gobmo. Impartirá Las Garantías Constitucionales a Los Obreros Libres," *El Universal*, 17 de Junio de 1922, 1,9.

class negotiation that took place after the Mexican Revolution.⁵⁶ The protests were part of a lengthy labor battle that pitted business owners against bread workers who demanded higher wages, shorter shifts, and medical benefits.⁵⁷ News of the protest march was reported in various newspapers in the capital. The striking bakery workers clashed with a mounted police force directed by Mexico City's government who actively tried to deter the protesters from stopping work production in non-union establishments. The coordinated effort by the cross section of Mexico's working-class temporarily paralyzed the city. Unionized bakeries stopped working, telephone service was temporarily disrupted, tram workers threatened to abandon their routes, and the protest disrupted city traffic.

At 3:30pm, a group of approximately fifty male bakers unfurled red and black strike flags and entered Sanborns in the Casa de los Azulejos during the busy lunch hour. While gathered inside the large dining room that was packed with aristocratic guests, the protestors demanded that the female waitresses, cooks, and kitchen assistants abandon their posts, walk off the job, and join the ongoing strike.⁵⁸ Panic erupted among the dining guests who fled the store thinking that it was part of an ongoing rebellion. The bakers made their way through the dining salon towards the kitchen

⁵⁶ Robert Weis, "Immigrant Entrepreneurs, Bread and Class Negotiation in Postrevolutionary Mexico City," *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (Winter 2009), 73;

⁵⁷ For a more in-depth analysis of the labor history of Mexican bakers, see Robert Weis, *Bakers and Basques: A Social History of Bread in Mexico* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012).

⁵⁸ "El Gobmo. Impartirá Las Garantías Constitucionales a Los Obreros Libres," *El Universal*, 17 de Junio de 1922, 1,9. "Un numeroso grupo de huelguistas con la bandera rojinegra desplegada, se presentó en la casa Sanborn's pidiendo que las señoritas meseras dejaran de trabajar y que las cocineras y galopinas [*sic*] abandonaran sus quehaceres, uniéndose a la huelga." Notice the newspaper made clear to emphasize that the workforce was strictly female workers.

and the pastries department and tried removing the female bakers who were working there.⁵⁹ The company owners immediately called the police who responded by deploying a squadron of troops to defend the business from the striking workers. The incident was picked up by the *New York Times* who reported that the police then surrounded Sanborns armed with rifles and were given orders to disperse the unruly crowd. It was reported that Celestino Gasca, Mexico City's governor, had given the police orders to shoot the bakers in the event of widespread disorder.⁶⁰

The *Times* reporting was not hyperbole. During the massive citywide demonstrations that took place in 1922, the police clashed in frequent violent incidents with striking bread workers. For example, bakers who tried to enter and disrupt work production in the factory Chambón, were met with armed policemen standing guard at the factory doors. During that particular incident, the escalation of tensions resulted in the death of one worker who received gunshot wounds from a policeman.⁶¹ On the same day, striking bakers attempted to breach a bakery located on Cedro Street

⁵⁹ “La Huelga de Tranviarios Tiende a Prolongarse por no Llegar a Ningún Acuerdo,” *Excélsior*, Sábado 17 de Junio de 1922, 1,5. “A las trece y media un grupo de huelguistas invadió el salón principal de la casa Sanborn tratando de llegar hasta el local en donde se elaboran los pasteles. La sorpresa fue grande: los comensales que eran muy numerosos abandonaron el lugar creyendo que se trataba de un motín. Los huelguistas penetraron hasta los amasijos y querían sacar a los pasteleros.”

⁶⁰ “Restaurant Guards Used in Mexico City,” *New York Times*, June 17, 1922, 2.

⁶¹ “Entre Gendarmes y Huelguistas Se Registro Ayer Sangriento Encuentro,” *La Raza*, Sábado 17 de Junio de 1922, 5. See also Robert Weis, *Bakers and Basques*, 116. The incident was also reported in “La Huelga de Tranviarios Tiende a Prolongarse por no Llegar a Ningún Acuerdo,” *Excélsior*, Sábado 17 de Junio de 1922, 5.

but a squadron of police officers stopped them. During the confrontation, a baker armed with a gun killed a policeman.⁶²

According to the newspaper *La Raza*, the police intervention at Sanborns was necessary to “pacify” the “somewhat militant” attitude of the protestors who had succeeded in temporarily halting the work production inside Sanborns, as well as *La Flor de México* and *El Globo*, two other well-known cafeterias and pastry shops located in the capital.⁶³ The police eventually cleared out Sanborns without major incident through the threat of force.⁶⁴ The English section of *Excelsior* reported that when the squad of police arrived, “the sight of a leveled barrel did wonders and the husky bakers beat a hasty retreat.”⁶⁵ However, another group of protestors entered the bakery *La*

⁶² “Strikers Kill Police Officer,” *Excelsior*, Saturday June 17, 1922, English Section.

⁶³ “Entre Gendarmes y Huelguistas Se Registro Ayer Sangriento Encuentro,” *La Raza*, sábado 17 de 1922, 1, 7^a. “Cesaron de trabajar los obreros de ‘La Flor de México’, ‘Samborn’s’ [sic] y ‘El Globo’.

En la casa ‘Samborn’s’ [sic] fue preciso que interviniera la policía para apaciguar a los huelguistas que se presentaron en una actitud un tanto bélica, evitando de esta manera que el conflicto tomara serias proporciones.” See also, Alfonso Sierra Partida, *El Café y Los Cafés*, (México: Ediciones Café Literarios, 1966), 62.

⁶⁴ “La Huelga de Tranviarios Tiende a Prolongarse por no Llegar a Ningún Acuerdo,” *Excelsior: El Periódico de la Vida Nacional*, sábado 17 de junio de 1922, 1,5. “...cuando llegó la policía del cuarto puesto al mando del segundo comandante de la misma. Este oficial entre súplicas y amenazas consiguió que todos salieran sin mayores dificultades.”

⁶⁵ “Gloomy Prospects for a Strike Settlement Soon,” *Excelsior*, Saturday, June 17, 1922, English Section.

Europa that was located across the street from Sanborns. While inside, the protestors similarly demanded that the waitresses and female cooks in the bakery walk off the job.⁶⁶

The protesting unionized bakers who entered Sanborns and other downtown restaurants, specifically targeted prominent institutions who hired non-unionized female employees. Newspaper accounts of the bakers protest in Sanborns specifically changed the nouns to gender them female to make sure that the readers understood that all the workers at Sanborns were female. Normal language to describe a mixed-sex workforce would use *os* at the end of nouns. Instead, newspapers reported that the male bakers demanded the *meseras* (waitresses), *cocineras* (female cooks), and *galopinas* (female kitchen assistants) walk off the job.⁶⁷ Sanborns owners did not seem deterred by the act of protest in their store or the ongoing baker strike. After all, Mexico City's government acted as a mediator and defended the commercial establishment against the demonstrators, signaling that their institution's labor practices would be protected by the state. Days after the event, a personalized Sanborns advertisement in *El Universal* included language that blatantly mocked the city-wide strike. It stated that their storewide sale went, "merrily on in spite of the STRIKES. IT STRIKES US that

⁶⁶ "El Gobmo. Impartirá Las Garantías Constitucionales a Los Obreros Libres," *El Universal*, 17 de junio de 1922, 1,9. "Los propietarios se dirigieron en el acto a la Inspección General de Policía la que mandó un piquete de la gendarmería montada, para desalojar a los huelguistas de la referida casa. Cuando llegaron los gendarmes se habían dividido en dos grupos, uno de los cuales había penetrado en la Pastelería 'La Europea' que se encuentra precisamente frente a la casa de Sanborn's, con el mismo fin de hacer salir a las meseras y cocineras."

⁶⁷ Ibid. "Un numeroso grupo de huelguistas con la bandera rojinegra desplegada, se presentó en la casa Sanborn's pidiendo que las señoritas meseras dejaran de trabajar y que las cocineras y galopinas [*sic*] abandonaran sus quehaceres, uniéndose a la huelga."

you had better get busy at Sanborn's" [emphasis in the original].⁶⁸ The women workers at Sanborns had an "inherently weak" position in the company since their employer was a foreign merchant that ran a business not considered a strategic industry.⁶⁹ Yet, the incident exposed underlying tensions among elements in Mexico's working class who recognized Sanborns operated a gendered system of labor paternalism.

Unionized male bakers used Sanborns as a stage to publicly address their own labor grievances and those shared among many groups protesting in solidarity with Mexico's working class. They performed their demonstration inside a popular restaurant and a leading commercial retailer that served as a space of power and leisure. The audience sitting inside the restaurant included Mexican elites, such as government officials, merchants, industrialists, bankers, intellectuals, foreign tourists, and journalists.⁷⁰ Entering Sanborns to protest was part of a deliberate effort by union organizers to symbolically contest a public site of power and bring attention to larger labor struggles. The public demonstration followed the precedent established by labor movements during the Mexican Revolution that attempted to reclaim spaces for the working-class inside Mexico City's opulent downtown neighborhood.⁷¹ As *Excelsior* noted, the decision to protest in Sanborns, "made

⁶⁸ "Anglo-American Notes," *El Universal*, Martes 20 de junio de 1922, 8.

⁶⁹ John Lear, *Workers, Neighbors, and Citizens: The Revolution and Mexico City* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), 229.

⁷⁰ For more information, see chapter 1 and 2 of this dissertation.

⁷¹ John Lear, *Workers, Neighbors, and Citizens*, 233.

the scandal much bigger and vastly exaggerated its significance.”⁷² The temporary occupation of Sanborns exposed the vulnerable labor conditions for working-class women inside Sanborns. Male bakers demanded that female workers leave their posts and join their ongoing strike. In doing so, they challenged the gendered labor policies of a U.S. company operating in Mexico.

The strike incident contributed to a larger cultural dialogue that discussed the meaning of women’s participation in the workforce.⁷³ As John Lear shows, strikes in Mexico City that involved the presence of working women were often the result of the mistreatment by disrespectful managers.⁷⁴ This was also the case in other examples of labor movements in Latin American history where male workers would strike to defend women from employers from a different class.⁷⁵ In *Contested Communities*, Thomas Klubock argues that gender played an active role in class formation within Chilean copper mines. He shows that U.S. capital tried reorganizing the work environments and social lives of men and women along the “ideology of female domesticity,” with men placed as

⁷² “La Huelga de Tranviarios Tiende a Prolongarse por no Llegar a Ningún Acuerdo,” *Excelsior*, sábado 17 de Junio de 1922, 1,5. “Lo céntrico del lugar hizo que el escándalo fuera mayúsculo y que sus proporciones se exageraran fantásticamente.”

⁷³ Susie S. Porter, *Working Women in Mexico City*, xvii.

⁷⁴ John Lear, *Workers, Neighbors, and Citizens*, 226.

⁷⁵ John D. French and Daniel James, *Squaring the Circle*, 11. The historians observe that, “Despite differences in location and time frame, French and Cluff, Farnsworth-Alvear, and Levenson-Estrada all point to strike actions that originated in male anger at the sexual harassment of working-class women. In choosing this type of abuse as the focus of resistance against employers, male workers fulfilled an aspect of their masculine role: they acted to protect the weaker members of their class by defending ‘their women’ against attack by men of ‘another class.’”

the heads of household.⁷⁶ However, the incident in Sanborns shares several distinct differences. For example, the striking bakers did not work for Sanborns. In fact, Sanborns was not considered a bakery, even though the store made their own cakes and pastries.⁷⁷ Government inspectors did not include Sanborns in their census reports of Mexico City bakeries from 1922. Rather, the striking male bakers and their union organizers protested in Sanborns due to the recognition that the company's labor practices of hiring non-unionized working women threatened their own individual livelihoods.

Working women earned significantly less wages compared to men in bakeries and in various industries.⁷⁸ In Mexico city, bakeries were predominantly masculine workspaces. Census records from 1922 reveal that of the forty-four bakeries located in the capital, each establishment employed on average twenty-two male bakers, and only ten bakeries hired any women workers. The average maximum daily salary of a male bread worker was \$7.00 for a nine-hour workday.⁷⁹ To put that in perspective, the price of the Sanborns commercial luncheon cost \$2.00 pesos.⁸⁰ The scant statistical evidence available on female bakery workers show they made significantly less compared to male

⁷⁶ Thomas Klubock, *Contested Communities: Class, Gender, and Politics in Chile's El Teniente Copper Mine, 1904-1951* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 7. Quote is from page vii.

⁷⁷ "Gloomy Prospects for a Strike Settlement Soon," *Excelsior*, Saturday, 17, 1922. English Section. Francis Sanborn stated, "no bread was baked by them, only cakes and pastries."

⁷⁸ Susie S. Porter, *Working Women in Mexico City*, 45.

⁷⁹ "Estadística. Censo Industrial. Expediente de todas las panaderías existentes en el D.F. Secretaría de Industria, Comercio y Trabajo. Julio de 1922 – Enero de 1923. caja 412, exp. 3 AGN. Based on an analysis of the 44 different bakeries provided in the government sample.

⁸⁰ "Commercial Luncheon." Programa Musical Cuarteto Sanborn. 27 de Agosto de 1922? ASH.

employees. On average, women earned less than \$3.00 per day with the minimum wage averaging around \$1.67.⁸¹

The incident involving the striking bakers entering Sanborns does not appear within the larger narrative of working-class labor struggles that took place in Mexico City. Yet, the conscious decision to temporarily occupy Sanborns and use the store as a stage brought attention to the condition of labor inside the store and magnified the significance of the baker's strike. Sanborns owners hired non-unionized working-class women. Like many other large companies operating in Mexico, the Sanborns system of paternalism instilled discipline and loyalty among the workers who submitted to the company's gendered hierarchy. Paternalism prevented employees from the influences of outside labor unions who operated autonomously and outside company control.⁸² Employing a primarily female staff to service the daily store operations allowed Sanborns to pay lower wages than they would with men. However, this policy also created labor tensions that were magnified by the 1922 bakers strike.

It remains unclear whether working women received any form of non-wage benefits for their continued employment and acquiescence to the company's conditions of labor paternalism during the 1920s. There is some evidence that Sanborns provided employees, at the very least, some mild forms of entertainment in the store at the end of the year. A 1928 letter written by Francis Sanborn described an event where supervisors from the different store departments switched areas and mimicked the managers of other sections. For example, the drug store employees moved into

⁸¹ "Estadística. Censo Industrial. Expediente de todas las panaderías existentes en el D.F. Secretaría de Industria, Comercio y Trabajo." Julio de 1922 – Enero de 1923. caja 412, exp. 3 AGN. Based on an analysis of the 44 different bakeries provided in the government sample.

⁸² Snodgrass, *Deference and Defiance in Monterrey*, 54.

the Tea Room and a manager named Eddie played Joe Monroy, the manager of the soda fountain. An employee referred to as “Flapper” apparently dressed up as a waitress. The letter also said the “employees” organized a dance scheduled for December 29, 1928 inside the Sanborns banquet hall and sold 300 tickets amongst themselves for an event that was described as a “hat affair.”⁸³ These forms of entertainment for “employees” were probably meant for floor managers and not the general labor force.

Perhaps the most emblematic example of Sanborns’s gendered paternalism, in the 1920s, came in the form of an undated note drafted on company stationery that appeared in the Sanborn Hermanos Archive. The note was probably written by Frank Sanborn in the late 1920s, and it was likely accompanied with a gift meant for his son Jack sent on behalf of company employees that worked for Sanborns.⁸⁴ The note was addressed to, “Jackito, with all the love of your girls and little boys” [emphasis in the original]. The message then listed the names of 25 employees that included U.S. managers, and also unidentified Mexican employees such as, “Limon #1 – Limon #2,” Chelo, Tomasa, Magdalena, Marta, Carmela, Cuca, and others.⁸⁵ The seemingly innocuous language used by Sanborn to describe the sentiment shared by his employees is important for understanding how company owners felt about the relationship with their workers. Even though the archival records provide only fragments of information detailing the condition of labor inside Sanborns during the 1920s, the documents that exist sketch a narrative that outlines the company’s paternalism. Workers

⁸³ Francis Sanborn to Jack Sanborn, Teddy Sanborn, and Jack Sanborn Jr., Mexico City, December 19, 1928. ASH.

⁸⁴ Carla Zarebska, *La Casa de los Azulejos*, 135. Frank H. Sanborn had two sons, Jack and Francis Sanborn.

⁸⁵ Luis Peñaloza *et al.* to Jackito (Jack Sanborn Jr.?), Mexico City, 1929? ASH.

who consented to the conditions of paternalism inside Sanborns were recognized by owners for their honor and loyalty. Unlike other first-class restaurants that operated in the city, Sanborns showed a preference in hiring working women to carry out the store's daily operations. As the next section shows, however, Sanborns molded their system of labor paternalism by developing new strategies that promoted their company's benevolence towards the health and wellbeing of their employees.

Sanborns and Mexico's Sports Culture during the 1930s

Beginning in the 1930s, Sanborns began sponsoring male employee participation in recreational events and sports leagues. On September 21, 1930, Mexican organizers held a large-scale sports festival in Mexico City that coincided with the first anniversary of the *Academia Jaime Nunó* that honored Mexico's Revolution. The program featured a number of young men and women who participated in basketball games, boxing matches, cycling, and other events. The event also coincided with a relay race held between Chapultepec and Madero Avenue. The race featured employees from a number of prominent commercial establishments located on Madero Avenue, including Sanborns, the High Life department store, Bank of Montreal, *La Esmeralda*, *La Proesa*, and the drugstore *Beick Félix*. Faculty and alumni from the School of Physical Education at the National University of Mexico served as the racing officials. At 10:30, the runners took off from the entrance of the Bosque de Chapultepec along Paseo de la Reforma before finishing at Madero and Palma Avenues. Team Sanborns had the early lead, but eventually lost to team High Life, which received the "Willy Buck" trophy in a ceremony surrounded by an enthusiastic group of female employees who celebrated the victory of their fellow employees.⁸⁶

⁸⁶ Tiro Libre, "El Evento Celebrado Entre Chapultepec y Av. Madero Despertó Gran Entusiasmo," *El Nacional: Revolucionario*, Lunes 22 de Septiembre de 1930, 6.

The 1930 relay race was overshadowed by some controversy. *El Nacional* reported with dismay that despite the race requirements stipulating that only novice employees from the participating commercial houses could enter the race, it appeared that a number of runners did not belong to their respective institutions, including two on team Sanborns. Protests were lodged to the race organizers that some of the runners actually belonged to the International Sports Club.⁸⁷ That Sanborns was publicly accused of cheating in the race suggests that the companies involved took the race results very seriously and made efforts to try and manipulate the outcome in order to win public favor and recognition for their involvement in the state-organized event.

The annual Chapultepec – Madero Relay Race began in 1928 and was held each September until 1932. Team Sanborns won the first relay race in 1928 in an event attended by thousands of spectators who watched the competition between employees who represented the most prestigious commercial houses in the metropolis.⁸⁸ The relay race also coincided with Mexico's national Independence holiday as a means to link employee participation and sports culture with the national celebration. These government-sponsored events were used to highlight the involvement of young athletes in sports in order to promote the national achievements of the Mexican Revolution. Government-sponsored sports programs were quite common in Mexico, dating back the nineteenth-century. As David Wysocki shows, Mexican administrators throughout the twentieth

⁸⁷ Ibid. Club Deportivo Internacional.

⁸⁸ “El Equipo Sanborns Gano la Carrera de Relevos: Interés por la Próxima Pelea entre Joe Dundee y Bert Colima” *El Nacional*, 23 de Septiembre de 1929, 4.

century used sports culture as a mechanism to promote health, hygiene, physical education, and nationalism.⁸⁹

The involvement of Sanborns employees in the relay race demonstrated how the company advocated the wellbeing of workers through their participation in sports culture. *El Nacional* reported that the young employees who participated in the race, “were once destined to vegetate behind the counter, bending their backs” in toil, but had now, “sang to life the solemn hymn of health and rejoiced to be the product of a new era where the cultivation of muscle represented an indispensable activity of a well-balanced mind necessary to conquer their physical and intellectual wellbeing.”⁹⁰ The Sanborns employees who participated in the relay race likely had their own set of motivations for volunteering. Nevertheless, employee participation in the relay race helped promote Sanborns involvement with government-sponsored sports programs. These events may have served as a catalyst for Sanborns to sponsor their own athletic clubs.

⁸⁹ David Wysocki, “Exercising the Cosmic Race: Mexican Sporting Culture and Mestizo Citizens,” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Arizona, 2017), 50-55.

⁹⁰ Don X, “En la Prueba Chapultepec-Av. Madero Se Mejoró Mucho El Tiempo Del Pasado Año,” *El Nacional*, Lunes 21 de Septiembre de 1931, 1. “Quienes van a competir son los elementos comerciales, tipos que antaño estaban destinados a vegetar tristemente tras del mostrador o encorvando su espalda por encima del Mayor o del Diario. Ahora cantan a la vida el himno solemne de la salud y se regocijan íntimamente de ser el producto de una nueva era, donde el cultivo del músculo, sin ser una función fundamental precisamente, representa una actividad necesaria e indispensable para la formación de un cerebro bien equilibrado y para conquistar el bienestar físico e intelectual.”

Beyond the existence of a few sources, there is a general paucity of information in public archives that details the activities of Sanborns-sponsored sports leagues prior to the late 1960s. Yet, it has been well documented elsewhere that baseball and other organized sports leagues were common recreational activities promoted by Mexico's government and large companies operating in Mexico since the late nineteenth century.⁹¹ For example, Michael Snodgrass shows that Monterrey's industrial paternalism included sponsoring athletic clubs to regiment worker efficiency and to generate loyalty towards company objectives. By the 1920s, every major factory had their own company baseball team and competitively recruited athletic workers from Texas, Cuba, and even rival factories.⁹² Circumstantial evidence suggests that Sanborns executives may have started promoting their links to sports as early as 1920.⁹³ In 1931, a newspaper advertisement for Chicléts Adams featured a smiling woman in a cloche hat and dress handing a piece of gum to a uniformed

⁹¹ See for example, William H. Beezley, *Judas at the Jockey Club and Other Episodes of Porfirian Mexico* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 19-25; G. M. Joseph, "Forging the Regional Pastime: Baseball and Class in Yucatan," in *Sports and Society in Latin America: Diffusion, Dependency, and the Rise of Mass Culture*, ed. Joseph Arbeno (New York: Greenwood press, 1988); David Wysocki, David Wysocki, "Exercising the Cosmic Race: Mexican Sporting Culture and Mestizo Citizens," (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Arizona, 2017),16.

⁹² Michael Snodgrass, *Deference and Defiance in Monterrey*, 94-95.

⁹³ "Tournaments at the Alta Vista Tennis Club," *El Heraldo de Mexico*, 15 de octubre de 1920, 7. The tournament held their trophies on display in the storefront windows at Sanborns.

baseball player. The caption for the gum which was available exclusively at Sanborns said, “Mexican athletes know how good it is to have Chiclets on hand when they get thirsty during the game.”⁹⁴

A photograph found in the Sanborn Hermanos archive provides the most definitive evidence that the company sponsored recreational sports leagues before the 1940s. The image dated to 1938 featured a group of men either on a company team, or a company-sponsored team. The group posed in their jerseys emblazoned with a large S on the right breast and the trademark three owls Sanborns logo on the left. Their uniforms resembled those traditionally worn by baseball clubs in the United States, including fitted caps, buttoned jerseys, belts, slacks, stirrups, and cleats. The baseball club had good equipment, and the team posed with their bats and gloves and stitched uniforms on a baseball field behind a small grandstand featuring concrete archways, stone walls, and railings. Among the spectators sitting on the bench seats included what appears to be a large military band dressed in buttoned uniforms and peaked caps holding their instruments. Positioned in the middle of the baseball team were two male coaches standing in front of a kneeling woman with her arms around two young boys dressed in team uniforms, suggesting that the sports league involved the participation of family members. The photograph was signed in Spanish by an unknown individual presumably from the team, that read, “Respectively to Mr. Francis Sanborn. 1938 Championship.”⁹⁵ It is unclear where the team was based, or whether the team itself was part of a standard league or a yearly tournament. However, the photograph shows that Sanborns was directly involved in Mexico’s sports culture in the 1930s. During the 1940s-1950s, Sanborns continued to

⁹⁴ “El Compañero de todo Deportista.” Chicléts Adams advertisement. *El Informador*, 15 de Abril de 1931, 8. “Los deportistas de México saben lo bueno que es tener a mano Chicléts cuando, durante el juego, ataca la sed.”

⁹⁵ Unknown photographer. *Campeonato 1938*. 1938. Archivo Sanborn Hermanos, Mexico City.

sponsor teams likely composed of male employees. Men competed on company teams against Mexican sports clubs and other companies in softball, baseball, and basketball leagues.⁹⁶ These recreational leagues extended Sanborns paternalism outside the retail store and into the larger community. Sanborn's paternalism developed in direct response to the immense wave of revolutionary union organizing that followed the Mexican Revolution. As the next section shows, Sanborns preemptively organized their own workforce in the context of the pro-union national climate of the 1930s. The Union of Employees of Sanborns Monterrey helped the company maintain their gendered system of paternalism at their new branch store in the industrial capital of Nuevo León.⁹⁷

Sanborns Paternalism in Monterrey: The Case of Alejandra Molina, 1944-1945

By the time Sanborns Monterrey opened its doors to the public on July 16, 1936, the famous U.S. owned business had been operating for a third of a century. The additional chain marked the

⁹⁶ “Macabi Derroto a Sanborns y le Empato el Liderato en Softball,” *El Universal*, 24 de enero de 1949, 31; “Con el bat y el Pitcheo de Rafael Rosas, La Nacional Batio al Macabi,” *El Universal*, 31 de enero de 1949, 27. “Macabi” was likely the Israeli Macabi Hatzair México, a sports club; “Los Partidos de básquet en el 18 de Marzo,” *El Nacional*, 10 de diciembre de 1952, 2.

⁹⁷ El Sindicato de Empleados y Empleadas de Sanborns Monterrey. See, Carta de Lic. Alberto Margain Zozaya, abogado por Sanborns Monterrey, del Unión de Empleados de Hoteles, Cantinas, Restaurants y Similares del Estado de Nuevo León, Octubre 23 de 1947, Caja 392, exp. 10. JLCA. AGENL.

company's second attempt establishing a branch location outside the capital.⁹⁸ Sanborns owners tried duplicating their success from their store in Mexico City by exporting a similar business model to Monterrey. Company owners specifically sought a storefront located along a prominent thoroughfare in Monterrey's downtown business district. Walter Sanborn purchased an historic building situated along the corner of Morelos and Escobedo Street that was the birthplace of Fray Servando Teresa de Mier, one of the founding fathers of Monterrey.⁹⁹ Similar to the House of Tiles, the building contained powerful memories of Mexico's colonial past and held social capital and power tied with the foundation of the city that local residents surely recognized. Sanborns Monterrey provided an opportunity for Monterrey's upper-class residents and foreign visitors to experience one of the most respected and lavish business establishments in Mexico, compared alongside the famous Rumpelmayer's restaurant in the Hotel St. Mortiz, Sherry's restaurant, and Tiffany & Company of New York.¹⁰⁰

By the 1940s, industrial Monterrey was booming. An influx of migrants looking for industrial jobs caused the population of the city to double to over 350,000.¹⁰¹ Yet, As Michael Snodgrass shows, Monterrey experienced economic hardships following the post-war period as

⁹⁸ In 1913, Sanborns opened a drugstore in Tampico, Tamaulipas. However, less than a year after the inauguration it came under attack by Mexicans following the U.S. invasion of Veracruz. See chapter 2.

⁹⁹ "Sanborns of Mexico to Open Here," *El Porvenir*, December 8, 1935, Section 2a,1; See also, "Bancas Para La Céntrica Plaza 'El Roble'," *El Porvenir*, 5 de Abril de 1947,1.

¹⁰⁰ "Sanborns Monterrey Mexico," Company souvenir booklet, 1940s. Author's personal archive. See also "Sanborn's – The Hub for Americans in Mexico City," *El Porvenir*, December 15, 1935, 1.

¹⁰¹ Michael Snodgrass, *Deference and Defiance in Monterrey*, 289.

inflation and food shortages pushed real wages to historic lows.¹⁰² These tensions manifested into anti-government protests, hunger marches, and riots. By 1944, union movement paralyzed Monterrey, as workers protested for higher wages and against violations of their labor contract.¹⁰³

In 1944, Alejandra Molina started working as a second shift waitress at the soda fountain at Sanborns Monterrey. She was 30 years old, unmarried, and grew up in Monterrey. Alejandra lived in a home in the *colonia* (neighborhood) Ancira. Walking from her home she could probably arrive at work in thirty minutes.¹⁰⁴ Alejandra held an important position at Sanborns. The soda fountain was a popular attraction at the store that served as a meeting space where Alejandra interacted on a daily basis with her regular customers.¹⁰⁵ A large number of foreign travelers visited Sanborns Monterrey. Most were probably from the United States and stayed in the prominent hotels located nearby.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 290-291.

¹⁰⁴ Caja 341/6 “Asunto: Alejandra Molina contra Casa Sanborn’s Monterrey, S.A. ubicada en Morelos y Escobedo; sobre reinstalación en su empleo como dependiente, tiempo perdido, descansos obligatorios y pago de alimentos. Mediante convenio el actor recibe 400 pesos. (hereafter Alejandra Molina Contra Casa Sanborns) Archivo General del Estado de Nuevo León (hereafter AGENL) Junta Central de Conciliación y Arbitraje del Estado de Nuevo León (Hereafter JLCA). 28 Agosto, 1945 al 3 Abril, 1946.

¹⁰⁵ “Sanborns Monterrey Mexico,” Company souvenir booklet, 1940s. Author’s personal archive.

¹⁰⁶ “Sanborns Monterrey Mexico,” Company souvenir booklet, 1940s. Author’s personal archive.

These booklets advertised the proximity of Sanborns to local hotels and were probably distributed in hotel lobbies.

From behind the lunch counter, Alejandra served customers coffees, sandwiches, ice cream, pastries, shakes and sodas.¹⁰⁷



Figure 14: The soda fountain and lunch counter where Alejandra Molina worked at in Sanborns Monterrey. Photo from “Sanborns Monterrey Mexico,” Company souvenir booklet, 1940s. Author’s personal archive.

Her job required her to bus tables, clean the stoves, wash the windows, and attend any of the duties required by her bosses.¹⁰⁸ She earned \$54.00 pesos every two weeks. Dues collected by the Sanborns controlled company union collected .50¢ of her salary every second pay period.¹⁰⁹ To put

¹⁰⁷ “Sanborns Monterrey Mexico,” Company souvenir booklet, 1940s. Author’s personal archive.

¹⁰⁸ Caja 341/6 “Asunto: Alejandra Molina contra Casa Sanborn’s Monterrey, S.A. ubicada en Morelos y Escobedo; sobre reinstalación en su empleo como despendiente, tiempo perdido, descansos obligatorios y pago de alimentos. Mediante convenio el actor recibe 400 pesos.” AGENL. JLCA. 28 Agosto, 1945 al 3 Abril, 1946.

¹⁰⁹ “La confesión de la señorita Alejandra Molina,” Caja 341, Exp. 6. JLCA. AGENL. Alejandra stated, “Que recibía \$54.00 a la quincena.”

Alejandra's salary in perspective, the cost of the *comida corrida*, or table dinner of four servings at Sanborns in 1947 cost \$6.50 per person.¹¹⁰ Alejandra's job also provided an additional economic incentive in the form of tips from her customers.¹¹¹ Tips were deposited into a box kept by the cashier and could only be collected by employees who earned them.¹¹² In other words, tips were not distributed equally among the labor staff. Therefore, waitresses like Alejandra made more or less money depending on the frequency of the regular customers who came into the store, and the generosity of the clients who visited them. Building social relationships with their customers was an important way in which Sanborns waitresses earned their living. Sanborns waitresses developed strong and lasting client relationships that were part of the motivation of the customers to visit the store.¹¹³

¹¹⁰ "Sanborns Restaurant Menu. Mexico City, Mexico." 1947. Sanborns ephemera. Personal collection.

¹¹¹ Ibid. Testimony from Luis Pérez Salinas, a witness called to support Melina's case. Pérez Salinas was a Sanborns customer and called as a witness that presented testimony to the Council that, "que aparte del sueldo tienen propinas o gratificaciones que dan los clientes pues además existen unas alcancías donde se depositan las propinas y gratificaciones..."

¹¹² "Luis Pérez Salinas, testigo presentado por la actora," Caja 341, Exp. 6. JLCA. AGENL.

¹¹³ Norma González, Interview with author, Mexico City, April 9, 2016. Pseudonym; "Testimonio de Luis Pérez Salinas, testigo presentado por la actora." 11 de Octubre de 1945. Caja 341, Exp. 6. JLCA. AGENL.

By the mid-1940s, of the 110 employees who worked at Sanborns, ninety-eight were women, or 89% of the total workforce.¹¹⁴ Waitresses who worked the Sanborns Monterrey dining hall earned the same salary as those who worked the soda fountain.¹¹⁵ However, they likely received more tips based on the sheer number of tables and clients they waited on. The dining hall was much larger, seated more people, and provided a full menu, unlike the soda fountain which had limited seats along the bar, offered a limited menu of snacks and refreshments, and did not offer the food served from the dining hall.¹¹⁶ Alejandra and other soda fountain waitresses worked six days a week and rested on Sundays when the Soda Fountain Department was closed. The restaurant, cocktail lounge, tea room, and store remained open during their normal business hours of 7:30am – 9:30pm.¹¹⁷ Sanborns was an air-conditioned facility, which meant Alejandra worked in a comfortable workspace. This amenity was especially important considering the sweltering heat notorious to Monterrey. Alejandra probably liked her job as a soda fountain waitress. It gave her the ability to build client relationships and socially interact with customers. As a single, working-class woman who attended middle to upper-class customers, Alejandra supported herself with the wages and tips she received from working at Sanborns.

¹¹⁴ Document signed by F. Williams, manager. “Lista de Empleadoas y Empleados de Sanborns Monterrey, S.A.,” 28 de Octubre de 1947. Caja 392, exp. 10, JLCA, AGENL.

¹¹⁵ “Tabulador de Salarios,” Por la Unión de Empleados Por La Empresa Casa Sanborn’s Monterrey, S.A., Octubre 23 de 1947, Caja 392, Exp. 10. JLCA, AGENL. This document from 1947 shows that waitresses in the soda fountain and dining hall earned the same pay, \$6.00 per day.

¹¹⁶ “Luis Pérez Salinas, testigo presentado por la actora,” Caja 341, Exp. 6. JLCA. AGENL. Pérez Salinas states, “ya que en la Fuente no sirve comida de fondo.”

¹¹⁷ “Sanborns Monterrey Mexico,” Company souvenir booklet, 1940s. Author’s personal collection.

On August 23, 1945, after a year working at Sanborns, Alejandra showed up for her regular shift and was met by a store supervisor named Mrs. Bryan. Bryan told Alejandra she was needed in the office of the store manager, Mary Francis Williams (also referred to as María Francisca Williams). While in the office, Williams informed Alejandra she would be transferred from her position at the soda fountain to the kitchen. When Alejandra asked why she would be transferred, Williams said she was needed in the kitchen for a few days. Williams assured Alejandra that the change would be temporary.¹¹⁸ Alejandra obeyed her boss's orders and went to work in the kitchen. She quickly realized working in the kitchen had nothing in common with her old job at the fountain.

According to Molina, on her first day working in the kitchen, she and the other working women washed “thousands of plates” by hand because the dishwasher was broken. They then had to lift the plates and put them away. That night, she did not get off her shift until around midnight.¹¹⁹ The strenuous labor conditions in the kitchen took a physical toll on Molina. After a few more days working there, she visited a doctor and later explained to Williams that she could not endure the kitchen work anymore. Alejandra wanted her old job back. However, Williams responded that her only options were to stay in the kitchen or leave the company.¹²⁰ Her old

¹¹⁸ “La confesión de la señorita Alejandra Molina,” Caja 341, Exp. 6. JLCA. AGENL.

¹¹⁹ “La confesión de la señorita Alejandra Molina,” Caja 341, Exp. 6. JLCA. AGENL. “Que el primer día la pusieron a la declarante juntamente con otras compañeras de trabajo a lavar miles de platos y levantarlos, pues ese día estaba descompuesta la lavadora así como los demás días que estuve en la cocina, y que salían hasta las doce en la noche.”

¹²⁰ “La confesión de la señorita Alejandra Molina,” Caja 341, Exp. 6. JLCA. AGENL. Response to question 18 “Que después de estar unos días en la cocina, la declarante fue hablar con la Sra. Williams y le dijo que cuando la cambiaba, porque no podía con el trabajo con motivo de estar

position at the soda fountain was quickly filled by another female worker.¹²¹ The decision by Sanborns management amounted to a demotion at best and mirrored the labor policy lucidly described by Frank Sanborn during his 1922 speech to the American Chamber of Commerce in Mexico in the beginning of the chapter. Working in the kitchen was more strenuous and least desirable work. From Alejandra's point of view, the reassignment had no justification. When she inquired about the reason for the change, company management never told her the reason for her removal. On August 26, 1945, Alejandra walked off the job and never returned.¹²²

Alejandra filed a lawsuit against Sanborns with the Central Board of Conciliation and Arbitration of the State of Nuevo León a few days after she left Sanborns. The proceedings lasted until the following year, terminating on April 3, 1946. Evidence collected during the arbitration case included the disposition provided by Alejandra along with testimony from other Sanborns employees, managers and visiting customers. The documents in the arbitration case raise a litany of questions. Why did Sanborns managers decide to reassign Alejandra from the soda fountain to the

operada, y ella le contestó que si quería estar ahí bien y sino que se fuera, y que no la volvía a cambiar a su lugar.”

¹²¹ “Confesional ofrecida por la Señora Francisca H. de Williams y protestada como corresponde para que se condujera con verdad, contestó a las posiciones que le fueron articuladas verbalmente por el señor José Vildózola representante de la demandante,” 15 de Diciembre de 1945. JLCA. Caja 341/6 AGENL.

¹²² “La confesión de la señorita Alejandra Molina, En seguida el Representante Patronal en el Grupo hace las siguientes preguntas:” Caja 341, Exp. 6. JLCA. AGENL. “Que diga la absolvente cuantos días trabajó en la cocina.” “C.—Que tres días, que fueron los que aguanté trabajando con motivo de la operación.”

kitchen? Was the decision by Williams to move her to the kitchen a form of punishment or retaliation? If so, was the punishment enforced by the company because Alejandra had been outspoken about some of the company's labor practices? What arguments did the company use to justify Alejandra's reassignment, and were they legal according to Mexican law? And finally, what did the documents themselves reveal about the condition of labor inside Sanborns Monterrey? The case of Alejandra Molina against Sanborns helps illuminate the daily work experiences of working women inside Sanborns. It also shows that working women continued to resist the Sanborns system of labor paternalism that was developed in Mexico City in the 1920s.

Alejandra's arbitration case tended to focus on two major areas of concern. The first considered the character and integrity of Alejandra Molina as a Sanborns waitress, and the other focused on whether the company prevented her from performing her job and practiced equitable and just labor policies in the store. Alejandra argued in her lawsuit that the store manager fired her from her position at the soda fountain without justification. She demanded the reinstatement of her job as a soda fountain waitress. She also demanded wages for her day off and wages lost as the result of her firing, as well as pay that corresponded to the amount she earned when she ate meals on break. This last consideration suggested that Sanborns did not provide wages for employees who needed to eat meals while working their shift. According to Williams' testimony, waitresses who worked the soda fountain ate their food on their shifts, but the company did not feel obligated to "pay them for what it corresponded to."¹²³ Alejandra wanted the same benefits as other waitresses in

¹²³ "La confesión de la señora Francisca H. de Williams, Nebraska, Estados Unidos." Caja 341, Exp. 6. JLCA. AGENL. Question 5^a. "Si es cierto como lo es, que las trabajadoras del anexo y las del propio Restaurant toman sus alimentos dentro de sus respectivos turnos. C.-----Que si quieren las

the dining salon and kitchen. In those departments, employees received pay while eating during their break. Alejandra felt Sanborns did not provided employees at the soda fountain with the same labor standards as other employees with the same position in the company.

Sanborns managers argued that Alejandra’s customers made repeated complaints against her to the cashier and store managers.¹²⁴ They contended that she treated customers “rudely, arrogantly, and did not serve them properly and with due efficiency.” During their defense, Sanborns brought female employees from the kitchen staff and a cashier to testify about Alejandra’s negative treatment of store customers. They stated that the company had not fired her from the soda fountain. Yet, none of the witnesses called to testify, including the manager who supposedly received the complaints, could recall a single detail about any such complaints. During the arbitration proceedings, Sanborns focused on Alejandra’s character as a pretext to justify her reassignment to the kitchen. The company also indicated, “it has been the usual practice to change the workers from one department to the other at Casa Sanborns.”¹²⁵

trabajadoras ahí toman sus alimentos, pero no está obligada a dárselos, pagando lo correspondiente por ello.”

¹²⁴ Testimonio de Sra. Margarita Brayn [sic]. caja 341, exp. 6. JLCA. AGENL. “Que por las quejas que había de los clientes en contra de la señorita Molina si le dijo a esta que debía cambiarse.”

¹²⁵ Alberto Margain Zozaya, abogado por Sanborns, carta por los miembros del grupo especial No. Tres de la H. Junta Central de Conciliación y Arbitraje. caja 341, exp. 6. JLCA. AGENL. “Primero: que la señorita Molina atendía muy mal a los clientes de la soda-fuente; los trataba con grosería, con altanería y no les servía en forma correcta y con la debida eficacia lo que dichos clientes pedían; y Segundo: porque he sido y es costumbre en la Casa Sanborns de cambiar a los trabajadores de un Departamento a otro.”

A kitchen assistant named Nelly González testified on behalf of the company that managers only moved workers around store departments, “according to the needs of the work” not because of their bad behavior.¹²⁶ Nelly claimed she witnessed the different times customers complained against Alejandra and personally recognized who they were. However, when pressed by Jose Vildózola the government legal representative, it became clear that Nelly did not work alongside Alejandra before her reassignment to the kitchen. She therefore would not have witnessed any of the complaints, nor would she have spent much time near the soda fountain. Inside the store’s internal layout, the area between the soda fountain and kitchen included a bar and large dining room, a distance that another employee described as a half a block in size.¹²⁷ Alejandra denied the claims made against her by company managers and employees as slanderous accusations.¹²⁸ A Sanborns customer who regularly ate at the soda fountain during Alejandra’s tenure at Sanborns testified that he specifically asked to sit in her section.¹²⁹ While not always attended by Alejandra, the customer frequented enough to identify the other names of four other Sanborns employees who worked there and testified to the credibility of Alejandra by attesting to her respectability to her clients.¹³⁰

¹²⁶ Testimonio de Nelly González caja 341, Exp. 6. JLCA. AGENL. “9ª Diga si sabe o le consta que en la Casa Sanborns, según las necesidades del trabajo se cambian los trabajadores de un lugar a otro...Que sí, agregando que a la declaran te la cambiaron de trabajo.”

¹²⁷ Testimonio de Srita Guadalupe Loredó, caja 341, Exp. 6. JLCA. AGENL.

¹²⁸ “La confesión de la señorita Alejandra Molina,” Caja 341, Exp. 6. JLCA. AGENL. “Que no es cierto, que son calumnias.”

¹²⁹ Testimonio de Luis Pérez Salinas, testigo presentado por la actora. 11 de Octubre de 1945. Caja 341, Exp. 6. JLCA. AGENL.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

The government demonstrated that even if Alejandra had treated customers with poor service and rude behavior as Sanborns had claimed, the store manager had unilaterally fired her from her position and prevented her from returning to her job. This violated Alejandra's labor contract since her new job in the kitchen did not match her job description. José Vildózola argued that Alejandra's demotion to kitchen duties, "was not even remotely the same as her old job, and on the contrary it was an inferior category."¹³¹ Dishwashers and kitchen work were considered entry level positions at Sanborns and dissimilar from waitress duties. This contradicted the testimony by Williams who considered these positions equally.¹³²

Williams probably moved Alejandra to the kitchen as punishment for questioning managerial labor practices. The labor arbitration testimony reveals that Alejandra understood the other working women with similar positions at the company received wages while eating their food during their break. During her testimony, government arbitrator's asked Alejandra if she enjoyed her time working in the kitchen. She answered that she liked the job in the kitchen, "because in there they gave you [money] when you ate, in the soda fountain they did not."¹³³ Alejandra recognized that workers from other departments who shared lateral positions as her own received special economic incentives that she was not entitled to.

¹³¹ José Vildózola, Diciembre de 17, 1945. Caja 341, Exp. 6. JLCA. AGENL.

¹³² "La confesión de la señora Francisca H. de Williams, Nebraska, Estados Unidos." Caja 341, Exp. 6. JLCA. AGENL. Williams' testimony states, "When it comes to washing dishes and cups it's the same, but in the kitchen they don't attend the customers like at the soda fountain."

¹³³ "La confesión de la señorita Alejandra Molina," Caja 341, Exp. 6. JLCA. AGENL. Question 20^a. "Que si le gustaba el trabajo de la cocina, pues ahí les daban de comer, y en la Soda Fuente no."

Alejandra won her arbitration case against Sanborns on April 3, 1946, when the company reached a settlement outside of arbitration for the amount of \$400 pesos. The terms of the agreement stipulated that Alejandra must drop her lawsuit against Sanborns, and that she “voluntarily separate” from the company.¹³⁴ The document also made clear that Sanborns admitted no wrongdoing, and that they paid Alejandra her salaries punctually, provided her overtime pay, paid for “Sundays”, holidays, vacations, and compensatory pay for emergencies.” Ultimately, the weight of evidence presented in the case reveals that the store manager, Mrs. Williams, unjustifiably reassigned Alejandra with the motivation of firing her, and that the company would probably lose the arbitration case and decided to reach a settlement instead.¹³⁵ Alejandra’s labor contract with Sanborns provided the strongest evidence in her arbitration case since her original position as a waitress did not match her reassigned position in the kitchen.¹³⁶

¹³⁴ Carta de Lic. Alberto Margain Zozaya, Abogado de la Casa “Sanborns Monterrey,” 3 de Abril de 1946. Caja 341, Exp. 6. JLCA. AGENL. “...le entrega en este acto, mediante cheque a su favor...la suma de \$400.00, suma que recibe la interesada de absoluta conformidad y como transacción final con motivo de su separación voluntaria de su trabajo.”

¹³⁵ José Vildózola, “Alegatos: Que presenta la parte actora con motivo de la demanda que sigue en contra de la Casa ‘Sambors’ [sic], S.A. por desocupación injustificada y otros conceptos.” Diciembre de 17 de 1945. Caja 341, Exp. 6. JLCA. AGENL.

¹³⁶ José Vildózola, “Alegatos: Que presenta la parte actora con motivo de la demanda que sigue en contra de la Casa ‘Sambors’ [sic], S.A. por desocupación injustificada y otros conceptos.” Diciembre de 17 de 1945. Caja 341, Exp. 6. JLCA. AGENL. “La Empresa al contestar la demanda, no negó que en efecto la Actora prestaba servicios como Mesera en ese Departamento de Cocina, donde necesariamente realizaba trabajos distintos a los que tenía encomendados en la citada Soda-Fuente.”

Alejandra Molina's arbitration case against Sanborns exposed some of the labor conditions working women experienced inside the company. Her lawsuit showed that the company's labor hierarchy provided unequal economic benefits that depended on the position working-class employees had in the company. As an employee who worked at Sanborns for over a year, Alejandra understood how the system of labor paternalism at Sanborns worked. She likely complained to her managers that she deserved the same benefits as other employees who worked the same position as herself. Her dismissal from the soda fountain and subsequent reassignment to the kitchen can be viewed as an example of how Sanborns disciplined working women who questioned Sanborns management. Her actions likely displayed her disloyalty to company objectives and probably influenced the subsequent decision to downsize her role to kitchen duties. The Molina case also demonstrates how Monterrey's government pushed back against Sanborns paternalism and its unjust labor policies that disadvantaged working women. It is unclear whether the government response was motivated by Anti-Americanism directed against the U.S. company. Yet, the case itself is a clear example of how the government negotiated between corporate labor policies and workers.¹³⁷ State resistance forced Sanborns to settle with Molina out of court.

One factor that remained notably absent from the arbitration case is the strength of the company union, the Union of Employees of Sanborns Monterrey.¹³⁸ Like most company-controlled unions in Mexico, or *sindicato blancos* as they are called, these labor organizations are oriented towards

¹³⁷ Michael Snodgrass, *Deference and Defiance in Monterrey*, 283.

¹³⁸ El Sindicato de Empleados y Empleadas de Sanborns Monterrey. See, Carta de Lic. Alberto Margain Zozaya, abogado por Sanborns Monterrey, del Unión de Empleados de Hoteles, Cantinas, Restaurants y Similares del Estado de Nuevo León, Octubre 23 de 1947, Caja 392, exp. 10. JLCA.

the position of the company.¹³⁹ Alejandra likely filed her lawsuit because she knew the company union offered little protection for her job. The arbitration case for Alejandra Molina exposed the existence of underlying labor tensions between working women and Sanborns management. Molina's case foretold extensive challenges working women had with Sanborns's gendered labor paternalism that manifested into a massive citywide labor strike that rocked the city of Monterrey.

The 1947 Labor Strike at Sanborns Monterrey

On May 27, 1946, Sanborns entered a new period in its history when the Walgreen Company from Deerfield, IL bought the company for \$2,500,000 (\$12,500,000 pesos).¹⁴⁰ It was Walgreens' first foreign acquisition and it came at a time of U.S. postwar development and accelerated corporate expansion. Walgreen inherited the control of both Sanborns branches and kept in place the store management that existed in both stores. At Sanborns Monterrey, the employees of the Union of Employees of Sanborns Monterrey signed a new labor agreement with the company that reportedly

¹³⁹ Mennos Vellinga, *Industrialización, burguesía y clase obrera en México: el caso de Monterrey* (México: Siglo XXI Editores, 1979), 115-116.

¹⁴⁰ "Poderosa Empresa Droguera Compró Sanborn de México," *El Nacional*, 28 de Mayo de 1945, 2.

raised their salaries thirty percent and provided other labor concessions.¹⁴¹ However, not all of the employees felt secure with their labor protections under the company-controlled union. Working women continued to experience tensions with the store manager Mary Williams and the conditions of the gendered paternalism adopted by the company. Meanwhile, across Monterrey, intense union activity continued during the mid-1940s that included protests and strikes against foreign-owned companies that gathered massive profits at the expense of declining wages.¹⁴²

On October 20th, 1947, María Luisa Flores a Sanborns employee, visited the office of the Conciliation and Arbitration Board of Nuevo Leon. María was the Secretary General of the Union of Employees of Sanborns Monterrey. She requested that an official from the Conciliation and Arbitration Board witness an assembly of female workers at Sanborns. During a meeting held inside the patio at Sanborns Monterrey, a lawyer from the attorney's office of Labor Defense met with forty-four women workers. A Sanborns waitress named Alicia Herrera told the lawyer that women suffered poor treatment from the store's manager. One woman named Felicitas Blanco reported that when her mother's sickness forced her to miss work, the manager suspended her and replaced her job with a new employee. Blanco felt deeply hurt because she was interested in "climbing the

¹⁴¹ Carta de Lic. Alberto Margain Zozaya al C. Presidente de la H. Junta Central de Conciliación y Arbitraje. Octubre 23 de 1947. Found within, "Unión de Empleados de Hoteles, Cabarets, Restaurantes y Similares de Nuevo León contra Casa Sanborns, Monterrey, S.A. ubicada en Escobedo numero 920 sur cruz con Morelos: por Emplazamiento de Huelga Sobre: Celebración de un Contrato de Trabajo La parte actora se desiste." 23 octubre al 3 noviembre 1947. Caja 392. Exp. 10, JLCA, AGENL.

¹⁴² Michael Snodgrass, *Deference and Defiance in Monterrey*, 292-295.

ladder” and advancing in the company.¹⁴³ Social mobility and economic independence were reasons why Blanco sought a job at Sanborns. During the meeting, María Luisa Flores explained that for defending the rights of her workers, she was fired from her job by Williams. However, María would not know for sure since Williams never told her personally if she was suspended or fired from her job, and only the manager could make that decision.¹⁴⁴ The firing of the Secretary General of the company-controlled labor union exposed the virulent anti-labor position that Sanborns managers held towards its workers. It also revealed the inherent weakness in company-controlled unions oriented towards the position of management.

Alicia Herrera proposed that the best way of defending themselves and the interests of their jobs was to join a different union, one that actually provided labor protections for union members. She suggested the Union of Employees of Hotels, Canteens, Restaurants, an independent union that represented workers who operated across a broad spectrum of establishments and industries in Monterrey. Of the forty-four women present during the meeting, thirty-seven voted to enter the outside union. Another four said they would sign onto the proposal at a later time. The forty-four women represented 40% of Sanborns’ entire labor force.¹⁴⁵ The vote signaled that a significant

¹⁴³ Ibid., “Srita Felicitas Blanco quien por enfermedad de su mama en cierta ocasión y a pesar de haber avisado a la Gerencia, que no podía asistir a su trabajo, fue suspendida y después nueva en ocupa de como Empleada nueva, lesionando con eso sus intereses tales como antigüedad, y escalafón...”

¹⁴⁴ Tomás Mezquiti Jenz, 20 de octubre de 1947. caja 392. exp. 10, JLCA, AGENL.

¹⁴⁵ “Lista de Empleadas y Empleados de Sanborns Monterrey, S.A.” 1947. Caja 392. Exp. 10, JLCA, AGENL.

Sanborns had a total of 110 total employees of which 89% were women.

portion of the Sanborns labor force had no confidence in the Sanborns controlled union and felt vulnerable under the company's paternalism.

On October 23, 1947, the secretary general of the Union of Employees from Hotels, Cantinas, and Restaurants visited the offices of the Central Conciliation and Arbitration Board and presented them with a strike action against Sanborns Monterrey. The document provided a list of demands workers wanted met before a planned strike set for the following week at 12:15pm on October 30th. They demanded that Sanborns accept the terms of a new collective bargaining agreement. The petition also stipulated that Sanborns needed to “harmonize” the interests of the company with the laborers who worked there and offer solidarity with other unions on strike.¹⁴⁶ The union argued that the employee salaries were “meager” in comparison to similar restaurants in Monterrey and insufficient to cover expenses for wage earners and their families. According to the document, the wages of Sanborns employees should reflect the high economic potential of the company. The union pointed to Sanborns’ “enormous profits” and “the fame enjoyed by the commercial position of the establishment, the strong income from tourism reflect an economic boom for the company” which did not reflect the wages of the workers.¹⁴⁷ Sanborns workers

¹⁴⁶ Letter from Isaac Jara Reyna and Nicolas Ramos to Frances Williams, Manager of Sanborn's Monterrey, 23 October, 1947, caja 392. exp. 10, JLCA, AGENL. The unions were called, Unión de Trabajadores de la Industria Panificadora del Estado de Nuevo León, Sindicato de Trabajadores de Choferes Círculo Azul.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. “...las enormes ganancias de la Empresa que usted regente es obvio, que económicamente y en sentido favorable, la Empresa obtiene, ganancias que no se traducen o redundan en un pequeño aumento para los trabajadores. La fama de que goza el establecimiento, su colocación comercial, los fuertes ingresos por concepto de turismo, reflejan una bonanza económica para la Empresa.”

recognized that their U.S.-owned employer underpaid workers compared with other companies operating in the industrial capital. As Michael Snodgrass shows, Monterrey's industrial paternalism touted "a standard of living to which many a Mexican worker aspired."¹⁴⁸ Significantly, many of the demands the Sanborns employees listed were what Alejandra Molina argued for during her arbitration case, including paid holidays, payment for food, and protections against suspensions or separation from their work."¹⁴⁹

News of the planned strike appeared to have caught Sanborns management off guard. The company indicated they were unaware some of their employees joined an independent union. The Sanborns lawyer found the proposal for the augmentation of salary "illegal and absurd" based on the existence of the collective bargaining agreement signed the year prior. Sanborns produced as evidence a list of signatures from 70 employees from the Union of Employees from Sanborns Monterrey, who stated they found it "truly surprising" that the outside union was planning a strike since they did not authorize the motion.¹⁵⁰ The evidence presented by the company suggested that the majority of Sanborns employees remained loyal to the company union and were against the strike motion.

The proposed strike action against Sanborns set off a chain of events that exposed the company's fears of having workers protected by an autonomous union operating outside company control. Tensions between the outside union and Sanborns management ran high leading up to the

¹⁴⁸ Michael Snodgrass, *Deference and Defiance in Monterrey*, 167.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Letter from the Sindicato de Empleados y Empleadas de Sanborns Monterrey to al C. Presidente de la H. Junta Central de Conciliación y Arbitraje del Estado, 22 de octubre de 1947, caja 392. exp. 10, JLCA, AGENL.

proposed labor strike. On October 28, Isaac Jara Reyna wrote the Conciliation and Arbitration Board that they had found evidence and “certain fears that the company coerced the workers of the labor negotiation and has prevented them from acting freely and spontaneously their will” of whether or not to vote for the strike. They proposed that the vote be held within the premises of the Conciliation and Arbitration Board to prevent Sanborns from using scare tactics and intimidation against its employees.¹⁵¹ On the eve of the strike, Alberto Margain Zozaya, the Sanborns lawyer insisted the strike vote occur within Sanborns. Citing various legal precepts, he asserted that the company always carried out union voting on the premises, and that in the spirit of “leaving the workers in complete freedom to manifest impartially their desire” to vote yes or no, he argued against the vote being held in the Conciliation and Arbitration Board. The lawyer pointed to recent events involving striking chauffeur workers as evidence that the risk of outside labor agitators might pressure the workers to vote a certain way. Using the fear of potentially violent attacks directed against company management, the lawyer said it was better to “avoid this abuse and maneuver

¹⁵¹ Isaac Jara Reyna, Secretario General de la Unión de Empleados de Hoteles, Cantinas, Restaurants y Similares a los Integrantes del Grupo Especial Numero Dos. 28 de Octubre de 1947. caja 392. exp. 10, JLCA, AGENL. “Tenemos fundados y ciertos temores, de que la Empresa coaccione a los trabajadores de la negociación y les impida emitir en forma libre y espontanea su voluntad, votando o no por la Huelga. Como en casos precedentes, solicitamos el recuento de los trabajadores sea practicado en el local de la H. Junta Central de Conciliación y Arbitraje en el Estado.”

around this anarchy” and allow the recount to happen at the Sanborns store.¹⁵² The Conciliation and Arbitration board ultimately allowed Sanborns to hold the vote in their store.

Around 7:15pm on the eve of the strike, labor inspectors visited Sanborns and found the store closed to the public with company employees locked inside. The labor inspectors were denied entry and reported that the workers were either “detained” or kept there for a group meeting, the inspectors were not sure. Sanborns’s legal representative denied that the employees were locked inside the store and also denied that a meeting was being held to interrogate them.¹⁵³ Further testimony by workers revealed that employees were locked inside store as early as 3:00pm.¹⁵⁴ This included workers from the morning shift.

On October 30, 1947, Monterrey’s main newspaper *El Porvenir* ran an article buried in its morning edition that assured readers the strike vote would fail since only a small group of employees from the company were in favor of it.¹⁵⁵ With the two parties unable to reach an agreement, the vote for the strike proceeded. Two labor inspectors oversaw the strike vote that took place at Sanborns. Voting took place and the results concluded that the majority of employees voted against the strike,

¹⁵² Carta de Alberto Margain Zozaya, Abogado de Sanborns por los Miembros del Grupo Especial No. 2 de la H. Junta Central de Conciliación y Arbitraje. 29 de Octubre de 1947, Caja 392. Exp. 10, JLCA, AGENL.

¹⁵³ Tomas Mesquíti Saenz, documento por el Presidente de la H. Junta Central de Conciliación y Arbitraje del Estado, 29 de Octubre de 1947. Caja 392. Exp. 10, JLCA, AGENL.

¹⁵⁴ Reportaje de los Representantes que integran el Grupo Especial Número Dos, 31 de Octubre de 1947, Caja 392. Exp. 10, JLCA, AGENL.

¹⁵⁵ “Estallará la huelga en el C. Sanborns,” *El Porvenir*, Jueves 30 de Octubre de 1947, 18. Hemeroteca de la Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León (hereafter UANL).

83-22.¹⁵⁶ Based on the list of employees provided by Sanborns to the Conciliation and Arbitration Board, it appeared that a few employees did not participate in the strike vote. Labor inspectors wrote a scathing report that stated Sanborns imposed “terrible moral and material pressure” on its workers, and that managers “submitted them to confinement” the day before the vote. Inspectors said company managers imposed a “typical case of unlawful deprivation of freedom,” that included the objectionable behavior of Mrs. Bryan, the store supervisor, who coerced workers “by means of word and signs.” Inspectors concluded that the vote itself was flawed and should not be accepted.¹⁵⁷

Labor inspectors found Sanborns in blatant violation of a number of labor practices and highlighted the mockery of the voting process. According to the reports, ten employees voted using the names of other workers. The vote count included names that did not appear on the list of employees sent to the arbitrator’s office. Perhaps most appallingly, the names of Sanborns store managers appeared among the vote tallies. This effectively rendered all of the votes cast by the employees they oversaw as tainted. Furthermore, Patricia Bryan, the daughter of the Sanborns floor

¹⁵⁶ Alberto Margáin Zozaya, carta por los Miembros del Grupo Especial No. 2. 31 de Octubre de 1947. Caja 392. Exp. 10, JLCA, AGENL.

¹⁵⁷ Porfirio M. Diaz, El C. Inspector del Trabajo, reportaje al H. Grupo Especial No. 2 de la Junta Central de Conciliación y Arbitraje del Estado, 30 del Octubre del 1947, Caja 392. Exp. 10, JLCA, AGENL. “la terrible presión moral y material que ejercio [sic] la Empresa sobre las trabajadoras ya mencionadas.” “el caso presente se está en un caso típico de privacion [sic] ilegal de la libertad, por otra parte el presente recuento es objetable en cuanto la señora Bryan, estuvo en este acto coaccionado a las trabajadoras por medio de palabra y de señas.”

supervisor voted no, exposing the total lack of impartiality in the voting procedure.¹⁵⁸ Inspectors noted that during the vote tally, Bryan intimidated workers by standing just a few feet away from where they cast their vote. Ironically, the Sanborn lawyer agreed that workers were in fact victims of coercion, due to the presence of government inspectors and members from the outside union who supposedly encouraged workers to vote in favor of the strike.¹⁵⁹ The inspector reports reveal that women workers experienced intimidation from company managers who pressured them to vote against the strike. Fearing the consequences of voting the wrong way probably weighed heavily on their vote. Women risked serious repercussions in the event the vote failed, such as possible retaliation, punishment, or termination from the company, which were already well-documented tactics managers used to run their gendered system of paternalism.

The inspector report offered a conflicting summation. They documented that Sanborns actively interfered with the voting process and intimidated workers against voting for the strike. The report summarized incidents that showed the strike vote was deeply flawed due to a number of coercive practices. Yet, despite this, the inspector concluded that the results should ultimately be

¹⁵⁸ Porfirio M. Diaz, El C. Inspector del Trabajo, reportaje al H. Grupo Especial No. 2 de la Junta Central de Conciliación y Arbitraje del Estado, 30 de Octubre del 1947, Caja 392. Exp. 10, JLCA, AGENL.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid. “Todos los representantes de la Unión aproximadamente diez personas, y luego todo el Comité Ejecutivo de la Federación C.U.T., y además todos los abogados de la Procuraduría de la Defensa del Trabajo, y que estas personas estuvieron en al local de la Junta haciendo presión para que los trabajadores votaron a favor de la Huelga.

accepted, arguing that despite the impartiality, voter intimidation, and the pressure imposed by Sanborns managers, the workers still had the right to vote any way they wanted.¹⁶⁰

In the day following the strike vote, representatives from the independent union and the Sanborns lawyer met in the office of the Arbitration and Conciliation board. The Sanborns lawyer used the result of the vote to press the government to terminate the declaration for the strike and resolve the labor issue.¹⁶¹ Not surprisingly, the union representatives did not recognize the strike vote as legitimate and took issue with the assessment of the labor inspectors who reluctantly accepted the vote results. The issue with the employees locked inside the store the night before the strike, along with the coercive tactics used during the strike vote led to an investigation of wrongdoing directed against the company. The Conciliation and Arbitration Board interviewed the store manager Mary Williams who denied all wrongdoing and insisted she did not know what happened that night since she left that day around 12:00pm and went to her home in the Gran Hotel Ancira.¹⁶² It was clear that both the Arbitration and Conciliation Board and The Union

¹⁶⁰ Ibid. “No obstante que el recuento se practicó con todas las ventajas posibles a favor de la unión el resultado esta manifiesta pues hay una aplastante mayoria de trabajadores que votaron contra la huelga...deben ser tomados en cuenta ya que tienen el derecho, como trabajadores que son, de intervenir y manifestar si desean ir o no la huelga.”

¹⁶¹ Alberto Margáin Zozaya, carta por los Miembros del Grupo Especial No. 2. 31 de Octubre de 1947. Caja 392. Exp. 10, JLCA, AGENL.

¹⁶² “Monterrey, Nuevo León,” Noviembre 1 de 1947. Caja 392. Exp. 10, JLCA, AGENL.

representatives could not accept the results of the strike vote. By November 3rd, the Union declared they would not give up their labor strike against Sanborns.¹⁶³

On November 8th, 1947, a group of approximately forty people that included members from the Union of Employees of Hotels, Canteens and Restaurants entered Sanborns Monterrey and occupied the main dining hall. Mexican families eating their lunch watched on as the protestors sat at the tables and demanded service. While sitting around the tables, the people ordered food they did not eat, smoked cigarettes and ashed on the tables.¹⁶⁴ A detachment of uniformed police showed up to prevent disorder. *El Porvenir* reported that a similar event had occurred just days before. During that incident shortly after the union announced its continuation of their strike against the company, a group of twenty-four striking waitresses met outside the store holding strike flags accompanied by a group of “garbage dump scavengers” who were “especially chosen for their dirty and repugnant appearance.”¹⁶⁵

¹⁶³ Carta de Isaac Jara Reyna y Nicolas Ramos por al C. Presidente de la H. Junta Central de Conciliación y Arbitraje del Estado, 3 de Noviembre de 1947. Caja 392. Exp. 10, JLCA, AGENL.

¹⁶⁴ “Siguen Saboteando a la Casa Sanborn’s los Sindicalizados,” *El Porvenir*, 8 de Noviembre de 1947, p. 19. HNDM.

¹⁶⁵ “Siguen Saboteando a la Casa Sanborn’s los Sindicalizados,” *El Porvenir*, 8 de Noviembre de 1947, p. 19. “Se le había hecho la formal oferta de que no se repetiría el hecho ocurrido en días pasados, cuando un grupo de pepenadores de basura, especialmente escogidos por su desaseo y repugnante aspecto invadió el salón comedor de Sanborn’s.” The date was likely November 3rd, as mentioned in, Carta de Lic. Alberto Margáin Zozaya por al C. Presidente de la H. Junta Central de Conciliación y Arbitraje. Noviembre 4 de 1947. Caja 394, Exp. 6. JLCA, AGENL.

The Mexican lawyer, painter, and educator María de Jesús de la Fuente de O'Higgins was a frequent customer of Sanborns Monterrey and recalled the incident in a 2014 interview. According to O'Higgins, she arrived one day and encountered leaders from the Union of Employees of Hotels, Canteens, and Restaurants, along with the garbage collectors who then proceeded to occupy the tables in the restaurant. "Imagine with the temperature of Monterrey how awful they smelled," she said.¹⁶⁶ O'Higgins then sat at a vacant table and was approached by Mrs. Williams who knew the lawyer through her regular visits to the restaurant. In a surprising move, Williams asked O'Higgins if she would act as her legal representative and tell the garbage collectors to leave. Looking around the restaurant, O'Higgins noticed many candles since the power was turned off, perhaps due to a sympathy strike with electricity workers. She told the store manager, "That's not my job," and then praised her providing service during the times she entered and drank coffee with friends, which "was very important for society."¹⁶⁷ O'Higgins recalled another incident involving Sanborns and Williams years prior to the labor strike that provides evidence that the discriminatory practices conducted by

¹⁶⁶ Paula Cruz Bravo, Chapa Martínez, and Magda Isabel Hernández Garza, "María de Jesús de la Fuente Casas de O'Higgins," *Memoria Universitaria: Boletín del Centro de Documentación y Archivo Histórico de la UANL*, Año 5, Núm. 48 (Enero 2014): 29. "Es que los pepenadores de basura –alentados por Malpica y todos estos líderes de meseros, cantineros y similares-, los llevaron a Sanborns a que ocuparan mesas; ¡imagínense, olían a rayos! Con la temperatura de Monterrey."

¹⁶⁷ Ibid. "Entonces la Sra. William vino una vez a buscarme, quería hablar conmigo y me dijo que quería que la patrocinara; y le pregunté yo: '¿Por qué?', y me dijo que nos haga favor de que los pepenadores se fueran. Entonces había una huelga de luz eléctrica, entonces había velitas, y entonces le dije: 'yo no ocupo de eso'. Dijo: 'pero a ustedes las respetan mucho; siempre que viene usted, le dan la mesa'. Los clientes de esa época eran los abogados que venían a tomar café, eso era muy importante para la sociedad."

management was not reserved to just workers, but customers as well. According to O'Higgins, at some point between 1943 and 1945 when Constancio Villarreal Salinas was the mayor of Monterrey, the owners of Sanborns visited his office and asked for permission to not serve Mexicans, but only visiting foreigners who came there. A lawyer stormed out of the office and visited the law school at the University of Nuevo León and explained to O'Higgins and her colleagues what had just happened. The lawyer then suggested they all meet at a rally outside of Sanborns. Joined alongside members from the Union of Employees of Hotels, Canteens, and Restaurants, they stood on a platform in front of Sanborns. O'Higgins recalled that on the other side stood the American Consul who had also gathered alongside the store managers. Each member from the movement took turns standing on the platform and hurled insults at the store managers for their act of discrimination.¹⁶⁸

The continued occupation of the Sanborns dining hall by people described as street beggars, and “dirty and disheveled individuals,” caused sustained economic damages to the company and the salaries of Sanborns waitresses who saw a noticeable reduction in the tips they received. *El Porvenir* reported the strikes reduced tips from the normal \$10.00 - \$15.00 down to \$2.00 - \$3.00, as crowds of visiting U.S. tourists decided to spend their money elsewhere.¹⁶⁹ The prolonged worker protests and spectacle staged in the Sanborns dining hall were clearly designed to disrupt work production, cause economic strangulation, produce major embarrassment to Sanborns public image, and draw

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 24. “...Pero a una cuadra estaba el Consulado Americano; todos lo que hablaron les dijeron muchas cosas a las pobres mujeres, una era la Srita. Williams; y la otra Brian; las conocí muy bien.

¹⁶⁹ “Pidieron Garantías Al GBNO. Los Empleados del Sanborn’s,” *El Porvenir*, 4 de diciembre de 1947, 10. The report described the people as “personas sumamente desecadas reclutadas entre las filas de los pepenadores y limosneros.” See also, “Pedirán Garantías las meseras de Sanborn’s a las Autoridades,” *El Porvenir*, 9 de noviembre de 1947, 20.

awareness to the labor grievances held by the workers. As John Lear shows, these type of workplace occupations of food sellers shaped the collective identities of working people. Their presence in opulent sites of leisure challenged the social meaning of establishments that brought attention to labor conflicts.¹⁷⁰ The catalyst for the strike at Sanborns Monterrey was caused by the mistreatment of company employees by store managers; employees were collectivized within a company-controlled union that provided few protections and prevented workers from joining independent unions to demand better benefits and wages.

Union representatives refused to meet Sanborns' legal representatives within the offices of the Conciliation and Arbitration Board and stalled talks on five different occasions. The government appears to have tacitly allowed the strike to continue against Sanborns by means of approving requests for rescheduled meetings on five different occasions between November 8th 1947 and January 8, 1948.¹⁷¹ The maneuver allowed the strike to continue indefinitely causing significant financial losses and damage against Sanborns' reputation as customers abandoned the store.¹⁷² A frustrated Alberto Margáin wrote the Conciliation and Arbitration Board that the prolonged strike put Sanborns in "permanent check" as the company could not legally enter into conversations with

¹⁷⁰ John Lear, *Workers, Neighbors, and Citizens*, 193, 223-226.

¹⁷¹ "Alberto Margáin Zozaya manifestó que no está conforme ni acepta la prórroga concedida por este H. Grupo a los dirigentes de la Unión para que el Movimiento de Huelga estalle del día ocho de Enero." Caja 394, exp. 6. JLCA, AGENL.

¹⁷² "Siguen Saboteando a la Casa Sanborn's los Sindicalizados," *El Porvenir*, 8 de Noviembre de 1947, p. 19.

the government or the members of the union, Sanborns workers could not efficiently carry out the functions of their jobs, and the daily protests had caused significant damages.¹⁷³

In an interesting turn of events, representatives from the union visited Mexico City to enter in direct talks with Sanborns Mexico and the office of the Governor of Nuevo León. These talks produced a compromise that ended the labor dispute. The union bypassed the authority of both Sanborns Monterrey and the Conciliation and Arbitration Board of Nuevo León. The maneuver effectively removed Sanborns Monterrey from the labor discussions and muted them from having a voice in the terms of agreement.¹⁷⁴ Finally, on January 8, 1948, the labor strike directed against Sanborns ended.

There are no traces in archival records showing what labor compromises were given to employees at Sanborns Monterrey. However, the 1947 labor strikes revealed the conditions of labor experienced by a gendered workforce comprised almost entirely of working women. The gendered form of paternalism imposed by store managers made workers feel anxious in their workspace. Without support or labor protections in the company-controlled union, working women felt vulnerable and routinely experienced violations of their labor protections. However, working women rejected Sanborns paternalism by organizing themselves and by participating in union movement. They defended their rights as laborers by filing complaints against Sanborns with the

¹⁷³ Carta de Alberto Margáin Zozaya por al C. Presidente de la H. Junta Central de Conciliación y Arbitraje. 13 de Noviembre de 1947. “La maniobra pues consiste en prorrogar indefinidamente la huelga para ocasionar graves perjuicios a la Empresa y a los propios trabajadores no huelguistas, a quienes se tiene en constante ‘jaque’ o guerra de nervios, de tal manera que no se puede trabajar con la tranquilidad debida y a que tiene derecho la Empresa de acuerdo con las Leyes que nos rigen.”

¹⁷⁴ “Grupo Esp. Núm. 2,” 8 de enero de 1948. Caja 394. Exp. 10. JLCA, AGENL.

government, and by using labor protections offered in article 123 of the 1917 constitution. Despite the active role of rank and file women workers in union activity, the arbitrators, company lawyers, union representatives, and government officials who oversaw union decisions were all men. This showed that working women remained marginalized by male decisionmakers. Nevertheless, they expressed their power by using Sanborns as a stage to perform a series of embarrassing public spectacles that brought attention to unjust labor practices at the store. Working women challenged the symbolic economic and social power the store represented by inviting socially marginalized people into the dining hall. This sharpened into focus the wide economic gap that separated the upper-class customers from the gendered workforce at Sanborns.

The 1947 strike served as a catalyst that motivated workers in the Sanborns in Mexico City to fight against similar labor violations. Beginning in October 1948, Mexico City newspapers reported that a Coalition of over 400 workers from the Sanborns in Azulejos organized a meeting that voiced their grievances against systemic labor violations under the control of the company-controlled union. Not surprisingly, the company union was oriented to “move to the whim of the company owners.” A number of workers were removed from their jobs for merely organizing the Coalition, a tactic all too familiar with the workers in Monterrey, and also a notable violation of their rights as laborers.¹⁷⁵ Twenty-six workers were fired by company owners, and Sanborns refused to give them their jobs back.¹⁷⁶ On December 7, 1948, union representatives from the Mexican Union of Workers of Restaurants of the Federal District presented the Central Board of Conciliation and

¹⁷⁵ Coalición Sindical en Sanborn's...” *El Nacional*, 12 de Octubre de 1948, 1,8. “Expresaron nuestros informantes que López Girón es un esquirol y que la Unión sindical que maneja es un sindicato que se mueve al antojo de los dirigentes de la Casa Sanborns.”

¹⁷⁶ “XXX,” *El Porvenir*, 23 de Noviembre de 1948, 2.

Arbitration with their demands, including a new collective bargaining agreement, a sixty percent wage increase, and the separation of three department bosses who “were accused of exercising coercion to prevent workers from joining the union.”¹⁷⁷ The Coalition of Workers went on strike, demanding an increase in wages, and labor benefits stipulated in the Labor law. Newspapers reported that Sanborns was temporarily shuttered by the government for its “discriminatory policy” that was directed against people and the salaries of its workers.¹⁷⁸ The strike in Mexico City showed that the discriminatory labor policies and tensions among workers to the company’s paternalism were not isolated to specific company supervisors or isolated to a specific store, but a systemic part of the company’s hierarchal structure. The company-controlled union weakened labor protections for the predominantly female workforce which subjugated them under company management.

Conclusion

This chapter outlined some of the labor experiences of working women at Sanborns. It explored how Sanborns, like many other U.S.-owned businesses, used a gendered form of paternalism and hierarchical system of labor management to control its predominantly female workers. It showed that between 1920-1948, Sanborns employed white U.S. managers to supervise its Mexican workforce. Sanborns hired women because they could offer them less wages than men and because it was easier to control their movement in the company. Despite their inherent weakness in the company, women workers used their job opportunities to enter Mexico’s public sphere and earned wages for themselves. During their daily work experiences, women navigated

¹⁷⁷ Otra Huelga en la Casa Sanborn’s,” *El Nacional*, 1 de Diciembre de 1948, 1,4. Unión Mexicana de Trabajadores de Restaurantes y Similares del D.F.

¹⁷⁸ “Huelga del Personal de la Casa Sanborn’s: En ese establecimiento se hace la discriminación de gentes y de salarios a trabajadores,” *El Nacional*, 24 de Octubre de 1948, 3.

around the gender and class distinctions that separated them from their customers and bosses. Company managers demanded worker obedience and loyalty and rewarded workers for their continued employment. However, they also punished workers with demotions, suspensions, and termination from the company if their character was perceived as dishonorable. Women decided whether to accept or reject this paternalism. Sometimes they were motivated into action through the presence of outside labor movements, the eruptions of fellow employees, or the customers who visited their store. Working women were limited in their upward mobility at Sanborns and worked within a precarious labor environment. Sanborns-controlled unions were designed to rid the presence of outside labor organizations and collectivize workers towards company objectives. In the 1930s, Sanborns began organizing recreational sports leagues for male employees. The company continued to sponsor sports activities for men into the 1970s; the company established leagues in cities where they opened new store branches, such as in Acapulco.¹⁷⁹

The relative calm of labor activism following the 1947-1948 strikes suggests that Sanborns implemented changes to their approach to labor relations with employees. As the company evolved into a national chain, Sanborns hired Mexicans for managerial positions. Today, employee magazines show that Sanborns continues operating a gendered form of paternalism throughout its company.¹⁸⁰ For example, the company sponsored annual events for factory workers and their families that

¹⁷⁹ See for example, “Deportes,” *Sanborns Azulejos*, Año III, Núm. 17 (Marzo, 1974), s/p; “I Campeonato de Fútbol Sanborns,” *Sanborns Azulejos*, Año V, Núm. 34 (Diciembre, 1972), s/p.

¹⁸⁰ “¡Fomentamos la sana competencia!” *Azulejos: Revista Interna para el personal de Sanborns y Sanborns Café*, Año XXXVIII, Núm. 156 (Enero-Marzo, 2018). This article highlighted 63 employees from the “familia Sanborns” who participated in a Friendship Race.

coincided with national holidays like Children's Day.¹⁸¹ Managers held dinners and contests for workers who met monthly sales goals.¹⁸² Pages were dedicated to highlighting workers who registered six months without taking a day off, and ceremonies for loyal employees who spent decades at the company.¹⁸³ One company manager said that, "All of us who are part of this great Sanborns Family, our purpose is to be better every day, in our family, in our work, in our community, and with this we contribute to our great country."¹⁸⁴ The language used in company magazines stressed how workers were personally contributing to the overall economic development of Sanborns, and the collective betterment of Mexico as a whole. As the next chapter shows, people who entered Sanborns as customers also sought to define their own power and place within Sanborns.

¹⁸¹ "Día Del Niño," *Azulejos: Revista interna de los empleados de Sanborn Hnos., S.A.*, Año IX, núm. 44 (Enero 1989),2; "Día Del Niño," *Azulejos: Revista interna de los empleados de Sanborn Hnos., S.A.*, Año IX, núm. 45 (Junio 1989), 6.

¹⁸² Reconocimiento," *Sanborns*, Año 1, No. 5 (Enero 1969) s/p.

¹⁸³ "La Mejor Asistencia," *Sanborns Azulejos*, Año III, Núm. 17 (Marzo 1971) s/p; "Tu eres importante," *Azulejos: Revista interna trimestral del personal de Sanborn Hnos. S.A.*, Año XIII, núm. 62 (Octubre 1993), 14.

¹⁸⁴ Francisco Martínez Gracidas, "Página Editorial," *Azulejos: Revista Interna de los Empleados de Sanborn Hnos., S.A.*, Año IX, Núm. 44 (Enero, 1989), 3. "Todos los que formamos parte de esta gran Familia Sanborns nos hacemos el propósito de ser mejores cada día, en nuestro ámbito familiar, en nuestro trabajo, en nuestra comunidad y con esto contribuir a que nuestro gran país."

Chapter V

La Catedral de Homosexualidad: Male Bodies and Queered Spaces at Sanborns, (1960-2017)

In the 1970s, the Mexican singer and songwriter Juan Gabriel captivated audiences through his passionate love songs. “Juanga” or “El Divo” as he was popularly called never publicly divulged much information about his own sexuality. And yet, people everywhere viewed him as a popular icon who publicly challenged conventional male roles like earlier generations of Mexican celebrities.¹ Genaro Lozano, a political scientist at the Iberoamericana University explained that, though Juan Gabriel never attended gay pride marches or vocalized a message in favor of gay rights, “you heard his music at the marches and sung so loudly and proudly in the gay clubs. The drag queens imitated him during their shows and at the bars and sang his songs which have become their hymns.”² Queer men in Mexico had appropriated a national icon for their own, and through Juanga’s poignant vocabulary were able to find a voice to express their own desires.

During the 1970s and 1980s, Gabriel acted in a few Mexican movies, including the regrettable *En esta primavera* (Martínez Solares, 1979). This cheaply made drama and musical defines what Mexicans would call a *churro*, a bad film. The film, however, provides a reflection of Mexico’s

¹ Mónica Cruz, “Juan Gabriel, ícono gay para una generación de Mexicanos,” Verne: *El País*, last modified August 30, 2016,

(http://verne.elpais.com/verne/2016/08/29/mexico/1472502546_954858.html) [accessed January 14, 2017].

² Ibid. “...Pero su música se escucha en las marchas y se canta a todo pulmón y con orgullo en los antros gay. Las *drag Queens* que la imitan en bares y espectáculos cantan sus canciones, que se han convertido en sus himnos.” Translation by the author.

popular culture in the late 1970s; one scene draws attention to the linkage between male sexuality and the Sanborns department store. *En esta primavera* follows a young Juan Gabriel (playing himself) who meets Paloma (Estrellita), a beautiful university student who sought a chance to interview the superstar. She gets more than she bargained for. By lip-synching and dancing to his own songs, Gabriel eventually conquers Paloma's heart. Yet, as the drama unfolds, tragedy awaits the young lovers as Paloma's jealous boyfriend sabotages their romance through threats and intimidation.³

Audiences would have quickly recognized that *En esta primavera* was filmed in Mexico City. Several cinematic interludes included panoramic sights of the cityscape and easily identifiable landmarks such as el Zócalo, la Torre latinoamericana, and Sanborns. Sanborns provides the backdrop for an important scene in *En esta primavera*. As the music begins to play, Gabriel strolls alongside Paloma and sings to her, "Te propongo matrimonio," (I ask you to marry me). A red and blue Sanborns sign accompanied by its trademark three owls appeared along the wall while the couple embraced and strolled alongside the storefront.



Figure 15: Frame enlargement from *En esta primavera*, Gilberto Martínez Solares. Produced by Rosales Duran Producciones. 1979

³ *En esta primavera*, Gilberto Martínez Solares. Produced by Rosales Duran Producciones. 1979.

Suddenly, in a split cinematic moment, just as Gabriel sings the line, “Me quiero casar contigo” (I want to marry you), an unidentified older man walking in the opposite direction collides with Gabriel and kisses him on the mouth.⁴ At first glance, the collision might seem accidental, as the man was holding open his newspaper. The prop would indicate he was merely reading and not paying attention to his immediate surroundings. And yet, during the collision, the man does not appear to make any contact with Paloma, nor does he seem to even look in her direction. His eyes remained locked on the music star. After the encounter, a stunned Gabriel then smiled and returned his full gaze to Paloma, continuing the song without missing a stride. Meanwhile, the man with the newspaper maintains *la mirada*, his eye contact, on Gabriel while walking away in the opposite direction.



Figure 16: A man collides and appears to kiss Juan Gabriel in front of a Sanborns. Frame enlargement from *En esta primavera*, Gilberto Martínez Solares. Produced by Rosales Duran Producciones. 1979.

Was this scene merely a coincidence or a deliberate expression of Gabriel expressing desires? Surely Gabriel’s manager and his agent understood that this scene was included in the script and could have removed it. It is possible that Gabriel deliberately included this scene in *En esta primavera*

⁴ Many thanks to Víctor Macías-González for leading me to this source and analyzing this scene.

to express his own sexuality. This hidden code visually referenced Gabriel's sexuality in a way that was also deniable. The casual straight fan watching *En esta primavera* may not have noticed the significance in this sexual message. However, queer fans in Mexico probably understood what Gabriel had meant. They would have likely decoded the hidden meaning of this scene as a deliberate reference that linked Sanborns to male sexuality. This visual code suggested that men could explore their sexual desires with other men at Sanborns. Despite this silent reference linking an iconic figure in Mexico's gay world to a well-known male cruising destination in Mexico City, *En esta primavera* reinforced Juan Gabriel's heterosexual status by demonstrating his commitment to propose to Paloma, his true object of desire.⁵ The sexual behavior depicted on screen appeared accident in nature and ultimately deniable, reifying the heteronormative storyline.

Sanborns became a significant site to exercise male power and male desire across Mexico's twentieth century. In the 1960s, the retail store developed into the preeminent masculine queer space in Mexico. Several Sanborns stores throughout Mexico, and specifically in Mexico City; evolved into popular male cruising spots for middle class men.⁶ Mexico City was the site of masculine political power in the country. The expansion of Sanborns into a chain store with multiple store locations in Mexico City's middle-class neighborhoods made Sanborns more accessible to a wider consumer market and allowed more men to exercise their male power. Due in large part to the specific geographic location of Sanborns in relation to the proximity of Mexico's booming *gayborhood*, the Zona Rosa, Sanborns became cemented within Mexico City's queer world. More than a restaurant, Sanborns held both social and cultural significance as an important meeting space and

⁵ Vito Russo, *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), 17-36.

⁶ "Mexico, Mexico City," *International Guild Guide*, (1966), 197. The listing under Mexico City suggests, "Sanborn's Coffee House (Any of the five)."

destination for men to look for other men to have sex. For Javier Sánchez who cruised Sanborns in the 1970s, the store was the “cathedral of homosexuality in Mexico,” a widely available social institution found in cities throughout Mexico that facilitated as a central meeting point for men to meet other men and have sex.⁷ The aptly used religious metaphor inverts the store’s commercial significance and challenges its public representation as an institution associated with social power and Mexican tradition. Collectively, men challenged conceptions of masculinity at Sanborns by queering its spaces and creating their own place for themselves in a modernizing Mexico.

This chapter explores urban sexuality by analyzing the relationship between men and the Sanborns department store. It examines how men utilized the consumer spaces of Sanborns as environments for social reunion and areas to facilitate their sexual desires. I argue that Sanborns stores in Mexico City (and Acapulco) were sites of masculine political power. From the 1920s-1960s, Sanborns developed into a homosocial space where relatively elite men spent their leisure time and demonstrated their power. Men who cruised at Sanborns were not just arguably cruising for sex, but cruising for other men from the same powerful social positions they were in. Men having sex with other men at Sanborns were each related with the other elite men who were having coffee there. Thus, the through line between the homosociality of the 1920s and the development of male cruising that began in the 1960s was Sanborns, the site of male power. Men who were having sex with each other at Sanborns were continuing with the gossip they were having with power that was long associated with the social institution.

This is a story about how Sanborns was congenial for male activities, and how men helped shape discourses on masculinity at Sanborns. Men who cruised there collectively transformed

⁷ Sánchez, Javier. Interview with author. Personal interview. Mexico City, June 14, 2016. Pseudonym. During our interview, Javier described Sanborns as “la catedral de homosexualidad.”

Sanborns by queering its spatial environments. In doing so, they challenged acceptable gender boundaries long associated with the institution. Through various tactics and coded language, men cruising at Sanborns contested the meaning of this private commercial institution and made it their own. My goal of this chapter is to analyze the social and cultural changes that influenced why Sanborns developed into a cruising destination. It also seeks to understand the ways in which men collectively performed various forms of social behavior to communicate with each other in a way that safeguarded their intentions from the heteronormative environment that surrounded them.

Sanborns responded by using its own subtle tactics that attempted to enforce gendered norms for uses of its floor space, particularly in the men's bathroom. From the vantage point of men cruising at Sanborns, the addition of bathroom attendants, mirrors, urinal dividers, and warning signs constituted forms of surveillance that tried deterring their sexual activity. Forms of masculinity were also contested by the Mexican police who in the 1970s-1980s, targeted, surveilled, and raided well-known cruising destinations that included Sanborns and indiscriminately arrested men loitering outside the storefront and bathrooms. Mexican police detained and extorted men they suspected of being homosexuals, and others caught up in the dragnet, through the threat of public humiliation and punishment under the crime of *actos inmorales*. The state's involvement in enforcing gender regulations and policing acceptable forms of masculinity at Sanborns is another significant component in this study. Based on a collection of periodicals, travel guides, oral interviews, novels, film, artwork, archival data, and other print sources, this chapter attempts to queer Sanborns and illustrate the social and cultural importance that the commercial institution continues to provide middle class men in Mexico.

Sanborns developed into a popular rendezvous for men looking to have sex or socialize with other men due to the specific geographic location of their stores in relation to the proximity of Mexico's booming "gayborhood" in *la zona rosa* (The Pink Zone.) The notion of a "gayborhood," or gay neighborhood, according to Héctor Carrillo, was a kind of "liberated space" or zone of tolerance within an urban city that LGBT people had fought for. These spaces became "characteristic of American urban gay life."⁸ Located in the Colonia Juárez near Insurgentes and el Paseo de la Reforma, La Zona Rosa developed into a cosmopolitan hangout popularized by Mexico City's privileged class and tourists of Mexico. The social mixture contributed to a multicultural atmosphere fueled by "an aura of progress and the promises of modernity." The zone featured coffeehouses, teahouses, bars, night clubs, hotels, art galleries, and restaurants. It was a place where people from the upper-class spent their leisurely time, flaunted the latest fashion trends, and encountered others participating in the same type of progressive middle-class lifestyle.⁹

Four prominent Sanborns were located in the Zona Rosa. The Sanborns Niza, located off of Niza and Hamburgo; Sanborns Genova, located off of Londres Street near the Geneve Hotel; and Sanborns Reforma located at Paseo de la Reforma 45; and the Sanborns "Del Angel" located near the monument for the Angel of Independence. These stores along with the Sanborns at Aguascalientes off of Insurgentes in the colonia Condesa gradually evolved through time into notorious spaces of gay sociability and hookup spots for middle class men. Due to their proximity to

⁸ Héctor Carrillo, *Pathways of Desire: The Sexual Migration of Mexican Gay Men* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 170.

⁹ Quote is from, Rodrigo Laguarda, *Ser gay en la ciudad de México: Lucha de representaciones y apropiación de una identidad, 1968-1982*, 90 "un aura progresista con promesas de modernidad"; Eric Zolov, *Refried Elvis: The Rise of the Mexican Counterculture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 110.

Mexico City's gay neighborhood, the popularity of its brand name in association as a reputable social institution, the popularity of its restaurant and the spaces it offered for the leisurely activity of its customers along with its affordable menu items, and its late-night hours of operation were all attractive features that contributed to Sanborns development as a space of male sociability.

Prior to the 1970s, middle class Mexican men and tourists of Mexico often cruised at prominent institutions that included movie theatres, bathhouses, coffeehouses and restaurants. Sanborns, in particular, held certain distinction as being an important social institution for Mexico's prominent society and foreign visitors. This made it an attractive cruising space as middle men associated its floor space with modernity and a cosmopolitan lifestyle long associated with the store. Writing in 1966, Pedro Leder's autobiographical account of Mexico City's queer spaces described the groups of men who cruised around the city in places like Sanborns, movie theatres, and on the streets, and those who went to private parties as belonging from a certain social class. According to Leder, these men, "did not boast" about their sexuality, nor did they "try and hide it."¹⁰ His account describes groups of socially assimilated men who were able to maintain their power and social status by appearing straight while also having sex with other men in places like Sanborns. These men identified themselves as socially different from openly effeminate men who dressed in makeup, wigs, or female clothing. Identified by some as *las locas* or *los obvios*, these men may not have had the choice of passing as being straight and therefore had limited access to certain cruising spaces within Mexico City's built environment.¹¹ One man who cruised at Sanborns in 2013 described *las locas* as "people who are stereotypically and very obviously gay." These men, who are more open with their "mannerisms" in public "seem gay" or are "being too obvious" about their sexuality. Some men

¹⁰ Pedro Leder, *Hubo una vez...antes del sida* (México: Mendez Impresores, 2016), 61-62.

¹¹ Ibid.

complained that *las locas* ruined cruising places because they stayed there to gossip. Men who chose to express their sexuality too obviously risked “ruining it for the rest of us,” as their presence would raise suspicion as to why they were lingering in the store.¹²

Socially assimilated men who had sex with other men in Sanborns may have identified themselves as belonging to a different social class from *las locas*. Having sex in a Sanborns bathroom probably created a deep sense of gender anxiety and made men feel threatened or endangered by the consequences of their actions. Yet, men also felt a certain degree of excitement having sex in a “forbidden” place like a public bathroom.¹³ One man described going to the Sanborn bathroom as “extremely arousing.” He compared it like going to, “a wild party. It was anything but private, like you were there in the middle of the spotlight and that’s basically what everyone was looking for.” The Sanborns bathroom was, “somewhere that just runs your imagination wild, like the wildest thing could happen in those bathrooms.”¹⁴ Men experienced a range of emotions while cruising for sex in

¹² Ruiz Garibay, Alejandro. Interview with author. Personal interview. Mexico City, September 13, 2016. “*obvios* or *locas*. *Locas* are like very feminine gay men. The *locas* they ruin places because they stay there to gossip or to *chismear* or *comadrear*. So yeah, they say that. It’s supposed to be something discreet, it’s not like an actual meeting place. I think they don’t like the fact that some people try to turn it into an actual gay bar.”

¹³ Ruiz Garibay, Alejandro. Interview with the author. Personal interview. Mexico City, June 30, 2016. “I guess the excitement of doing it in a place that is forbidden, something forbidden.”

¹⁴ Ricci Camillo, Omar. Interview with the author. Personal interview. Mexico City, August 22, 2016. “Party, like a wild party...No, it was anything but private, like you were there in the middle of the spotlight and that’s basically what people are looking for, o sea si estuvieran buscando como un

the Sanborns bathroom. They recognized the inherent risks of discovery and the dangers involved by having sex in a public space. Men also understood that sex was considered strictly forbidden in a consumer space like Sanborns. However, these men also felt excitement for many of these same reasons, indicating that they understood that by queering Sanborns they were challenging the gender boundaries associated with the store.

Queering the men's bathroom at Sanborns required that men navigated with certain discretion and communicated in coded language to maintain the secrecy of their sexual activity from the outside world. Having sex in a public bathroom was a precarious endeavor and likely produced social anxieties among men. The men who pinned blame on *las locas* were likely responding to the real sense of danger and anxiety they experienced from having sex in a department store bathroom. Socially assimilated men who had sex with other men at Sanborns distinguished themselves as socially different from *las locas* as a means of self-regulation. They imagined themselves differently as a means of protection to deflect the fears and anxieties caused by having sex in public bathrooms. A man named Alejandro summed up the sense of fear and anxiety he experienced during an interview with the author. The Sanborns bathroom was, "not the ideal place to have sex with somebody. The positions you can do it are not very comfortable, you are always on the lookout if somebody arrives, or worried you might get caught which is exciting and worrisome. It's not like a five-star hotel, it's a bathroom."¹⁵ After all, Sanborns was a family store, a traditional place where parents dined with

lugar privado con alguien más pues te vas a un hotel...It was surely arousing, for like a personal basis [it] would be extremely arousing, I think; somewhere that just runs your imagination wild, like the wildest thing that could happen in those bathrooms."

¹⁵ Ruiz Garibay, Alejandro. Interview with author. Personal interview. Mexico City, June 30, 2016. Quoting from English.

their kids. Customers who became aware that the Sanborns bathroom served as a space for men to have sex with other men might raise their concerns with store management.

Cruising and Male Sociability

Sanborns developed an international reputation as being a place for male sexual encounters as early as 1966. Listings for Mexico City within the gay travel guide *International Guild Guide*, suggested a number of restaurants and coffeehouses, included Chipps, La Red Coffee House, Paris Café, Salón Tenampa, and “Any of the five” Sanborns locations located throughout the capital.¹⁶ Sanborns had quickly developed into a staple for men who used the store as areas of socialization, cruising, and launching points where they could plan the rest of their evening. A March 1967 article in *Sucesos para todos* described sources of entertainment available for men in the Zona Rosa that mentioned the appeal of Sanborns. “As a general rule, homosexuals say the atmosphere of Sanborns is very attractive...It has something about it. On Saturday’s, a group of people would meet there that threw parties at certain places.”¹⁷ A man interviewed in Rodrigo Laguarda’s book, *Ser gay en la ciudad de México*, described Sanborns like a staging ground for men. “In the Sanborns, someone would say, ‘there’s a party at this place,’ and everyone in Sanborns would go to the party.”¹⁸

¹⁶ “Mexico City,” *International Guild Guide*, 1966.

¹⁷ Ricardo Piña, “Zona Rosa,” *Sucesos para Todos* (marzo, 1967), 75-77, “por la regular los homosexuales decimos que el ambiente de Sanborns es muy atractivo...Tiene un no se que. Los sábados se junta ahí n grupo de gente que hace fiestas de terminados lugares.”

¹⁸ Rodrigo Laguarda, *ser gay en la ciudad de México: Lucha de representaciones y apropiación de una identidad, 1968-1982*, 94.

The Sanborns Reforma developed particular notoriety as a very prominent and well-known cruising destination and hangout spot. Inaugurated in 1953 at a cost of \$5 million, Sanborns Reforma was located along el Paseo de la Reforma in front of the monument for the Angel of Independence. The Sanborns “Del Angel” developed into an important meeting space for Mexicans and foreign tourists alike. On October 27, 1978 a front-page article published in *El Universal* described the availability of private clubs in Mexico for people of *ambiente*, or people who like others of the same sex. The report featured a photograph of the Sanborns Del Angel. The caption underneath described this Sanborns, which was open 24 hours a day as being, “physically possessed” by the people *del ambiente*. It then added a caveat that “many families prefer to withdraw from those places rather than stand the girly mannerisms of the homosexuals.”¹⁹ The article later described “the famous Sanborns” restaurants chain as an ideal cruising site for visiting tourists.²⁰ Featured in a prominent Mexican newspaper, this article announced the popularity of Sanborns as a place associated with male cruising. It also suggests how the commercial institution tied with the traditional values associated with Mexico’s middle class, was contested by men who refashioned Sanborns into their own way, perhaps at the expense of other customers. The Sanborns Del Angel provided an attractive option for men looking for sex due to the store’s late-night hours of operation and its proximity to the Zona Rosa. But unlike trendy gay bars situated in that

¹⁹ José Luis Parra, “Clubes Privados Para la Gente ‘gay,’” *El Universal*, octubre 27, 1978, 1A. “La gente del ‘ambiente’ se posesiona materialmente del Sanborns “Del Ángel’, que permanece abierto las 24 horas del día. Muchas familias prefieren retirarse de esos lugares a soportar los movimientos amanerados de los homosexuales.”

²⁰ José Luis Parra, “Clubes Privados Para la Gente ‘gay,’” *El Universal*, 27 de octubre de 1978, 1A. “También algunos restaurantes, principalmente los famosos ‘Sanborns’, son sitios ideales para el ligue de los turistas.”

neighborhood that might charge an exorbitant cover charge and drink minimums, Sanborns offered a relatively cheap evening for men to rendezvous at any given time, day or night. A Sanborns menu likely from the 1970s listed a cup of coffee and hot milk for \$3.75 pesos.²¹

Sanborns Reforma was also a destination for men looking for sex with women. A waitress who worked the night shift at Sanborns Reforma from the late 1970s-1985 remembered seeing elegantly dressed female sex workers lining the boulevard outside the store. She saw women bending over and talking to men who passed by in their cars. After a deal was made, the women would disappear with the driver. During her time working in Mexico City, the waitress passed through the Zona Rosa and saw young men together and thought, “well, we are in Mexico, we see many things.”²² What she noticed from her time working and living in Mexico City is that Sanborns became a landmark for female sex workers looking for customers, and that the neighborhood surrounding the store was visited by same-sex couples.

The Sanborns Del Angel also featured a parking garage which allowed some men with access to cars easier accessibility to the store. The second entrance from the parking garage allowed men to bypass the store departments all together and head directly towards the action. Javier Sánchez described in an interview the importance of the parking garage in facilitating sex. “You entered the parking garage and you didn’t even need to enter the store, you went straight to the bathroom to see what was going on. Or sometimes you went up to see what was up there or you waited by the

²¹ “Sanborns fundada en 1903,” Sanborns restaurant menu, 1970? ASH.

²² Gutiérrez, María. Interview with the author. Acapulco, Guerrero, June 8, 2018. “Ahora si me preguntas si yo fuí a la zona Rosa pues sí, éramos jóvenes y ahí sí veíamos parejas de hombres con hombres pero nosotras penábamos, ‘bueno, estamos en México y se ven muchas cosas.’”

telephones and from there something would happen.”²³ Coming from the upper-class and owning his own car made Javier’s cruising experience much easier than most men.

In 1966, Sanborns opened a branch in downtown Acapulco, the popular tourist destination for many vacationing Mexicans and foreign tourists. Every weekend, generations of people from all over the country flocked the coastal city and made Sanborns a site of reunion. The store quickly developed into a center of male power for groups of politicians, journalists, and local elites.²⁴

Sanborns Acapulco replicated what was a social tradition in Mexico City. It became commonplace to see government officials talking together in the restaurant. Customers and waitresses remembered seeing celebrities from all parts of the world gathering at Sanborns. One notorious customer who ate regularly at Sanborns Centro Acapulco was a local pimp everyone called, “Chucho La Lumbre.”

Chucho worked for a brothel in Acapulco called Casa Rebeca, a prestigious locale that catered only to high-end clients. Chucho married Rebeca, who was the madam who oversaw the daily operations.²⁵ A waitress at Sanborns Acapulco who started working there in 1967, joked that,

“Chucho completed more hours of work [at Sanborns] than I did. When I opened the restaurant, I knew he was going to be there with his six packets of Marlboro, drinking his coffee and already well-

²³ Sánchez, Javier. Interview with author. Personal interview. Mexico City, June 14, 2016. “Entonces, entrabas al estacionamiento y ya ni subías a la tienda ya llegabas directito al baño y ya veías qué onda, ¿no? O a veces subías a ver que había arriba o te quedabas en el teléfono y ya de ahí salía algo.”

²⁴ Gutiérrez, María. Interview with the author. Acapulco, Guerrero, June 8, 2018; Fares del Río, Ramón. Interview with the author. Acapulco, Guerrero, June 7, 2018.

²⁵ The story is corroborated by this press account by Antiuy Rebolledo Ayerdi, “Botica 2,” *El Sur: Periódico de Guerrero*, 21 de marzo de 2013 <https://suracapulco.mx/impreso/9/antiuy-rebolledo-ayerdi-61/> [accessed August 8, 2018].

settled.”²⁶ The waitress said she developed a certain admiration for Chucho. She described him as charismatic and not very handsome, but he had “this gift of the gab to have everything that he wanted.”²⁷ Chucho enjoyed his leisure time and performed his social identity when he dined at Sanborns. He participated in the same conversations with all the other powerful men who gathered there. He reportedly once told the waitress, “I’m a pimp, I don’t work, I only drink my coffee and breakfast here, I do nothing.”²⁸ A Mexican architect named Ramón Fares del Río (b. 1941) became a regular customer at Sanborns Acapulco since its inauguration.²⁹ He recalled times when he shared the same table with Chucho and remembered seeing other local pimps eating there too. According to Fares del Río, beginning in the 1960s, the avenues outside of Sanborns Acapulco were commonly used as waiting areas for female sex workers looking for male clients. He remembered seeing “only women” waiting outside and not men, and that to this day women work the streets outside the store.³⁰

²⁶ Gutiérrez, María. Interview with the author. Acapulco, Guerrero, June 8, 2018. “¡Chucho cumplía más las horas de trabajo que yo! Cuando yo abría el restaurante, ya sabía que él iba a estar con seis cajetillas de Marlboro, se tomaba su café y ya estaba ahí muy anclado.”

²⁷ Gutiérrez, María. Interview with the author. Acapulco, Guerrero, June 8, 2018. “Incluso estoy retratada con ese señor porque lo admiraba, no era muy guapo pero tenía esa labia para tener todo lo que quería.”

²⁸ Ibid. “Soy padrote, yo no trabajo, sólo tomo mi café, desayuno aquí y no hago nada.”

²⁹ Ramón Fares del Río, *Acapulco: Arquitectura y Ciudad* (Acapulco: Academia Nacional de Arquitectura, 2011). Fares del Río was the nephew of Teodoro González de León, the architect who designed Sanborns Centro Acapulco.

³⁰ Ibid., “puro mujeres.”

By 1969, the male cruising sites listed in the *International Guild Guide*, included various Sanborns locations in Mexico City. Aside from “Any of the five Sanborn’s Coffee Houses,” it suggested specifically the Sanborns Reforma, Sanborns Niza, and the Sanborns on Insurgentes and Aguascalientes Streets.³¹ By 1972, the company had already opened a second branch in Acapulco called *Estrella del Mar*.³² The reputation of Sanborns as a popular male cruising site followed the institution beyond Mexico City. In 1973, the gay travel guide *Spartacus*, printed a listing under Acapulco for the “Sanborne’s [*sic*] Restaurant,” that encouraged readers to cruise the bathrooms in the evenings.³³ In 1977, The *International Guild Guide*, referenced the same Sanborns Acapulco store near the *zócalo* and labeled it “Mixed,” meaning that the store, “appears straight but sufficiently active to make it worthwhile.”³⁴ Cruising in Acapulco was concentrated in downtown near the beaches and main boulevards. Vacationers could cruise for men at the Sanborns and from there they could walk back to their hotels located close by. Javier Sánchez vacationed in Acapulco and recalled that cruising at Sanborns was easier and a safer option than other places in Mexico City. For Javier, tourists gave off, “a certain feeling that they were good people” and not going to attempt to rob him. The proximity to the beaches also meant that men often entered Sanborns wearing their bathing suit, which for Javier made “everything so much easier.”³⁵ For Javier and many other men,

³¹ *International Guild Guide Gay Listings* (Washington, D.C.: Guild Press Ltd, 1969).

³² “Sanborns Estrella del Mar,” *Sanborns Azulejos*, año V, núm. 34 (diciembre, 1972), s/p.

³³ *Spartacus International Gay Guide* 3rd edition. (Amsterdam: Euro-Spartacus, 1973), 250.

³⁴ *International Guild Guide 1978*, 197.

³⁵ Sánchez, Javier. Interview with author. Personal interview. Mexico City, June 14, 2016. “aparte andabas en traje de baño entonces todo era más fácil.”

Sanborns Acapulco was considered a safe locale for picking up men because it catered to respectable upper-class customers.

Cruising Inside the Store

The unique interior architecture of each Sanborns store and their physical location within the surrounding urban environment contributed to the decision making of men of whether or not they decided to use the space for cruising. Not all Sanborns stores developed into cruising sites. Different features and contours in the architecture lent influence on the way men could use each store. Each Sanborns provided a different interior layout for its store departments and these arrangements within the building's unique architecture shaped how men could navigate around the store for their own purposes. In other words, some stores simply did not provide the right ambiance necessary to make cruising possible. For example, the Sanborns at the Casa de los Azulejos drew too much foot traffic from tourists visiting the historic downtown to make cruising possible.³⁶ How company designers decided to construct and arrange the departments unintentionally contributed to how men cruised at Sanborns. The standardization of the floor designs meant that men who cruised at Sanborns used its uniformity to their advantage, allowing them to cruise multiple stores in the same way. This suggests commercial standardization allowed for the transposition of tactics that carried from on Sanborns to the other.

Despite the store's notoriety as a place for male cruising, Sanborns was not considered a "gay" space in gay magazines.³⁷ On the contrary, men who cruised Sanborns looking for sex

³⁶ García, Ferdinando. Interview with the author. Personal interview. Mexico City, May 28, 2016.

³⁷ "Guía de Lugares," *Macho Tips*, Año 2, No. 7 (Junio, 1986), 55. The Sanborns del Ángel and the Sanborn's located at Aguascalientes both included the symbol "BV" which meant, "lugar que no es

understood that they needed to practice complete discretion to mask their true intentions. Men looking for sex at Sanborns entered and used the retail store like regular customers. Whether men actually decided to purchase something, or merely acted out behaviors like shoppers looking for something to buy, they assumed a consumer identity in order to freely enter and appropriate the store space for themselves. Men learned different tactics when they cruised at Sanborns; by feigning the identity of a consumer drawn to the litany of modern products, they could easily assimilate within a crowd of regular customers and mask their erotic inhibitions. This afforded them the ability to navigate around the store and justified their presence in Sanborns in the first place. Through a set of coded behaviors, men contested the modern consumer outlet and created a queer environment for themselves.

The Magazine Rack

The Sanborns magazine rack provided a point of encounter for many generations of men looking for sex in Mexico City. Browsing over a variety of international magazines gave men an excuse to linger in the aisle and possibly spark up a conversation. Unlike other bookstores and magazine stands in Mexico, Sanborns allowed customers to thumb through the pages of books, newspapers, magazines and comic books without having to purchase anything, making it a very popular area of the store. In 1971, Javier Sánchez was seventeen years old and still in high school when he went to the Sanborns at Niza in the Zona Rosa. He remembered “feeling the look” from

gay, pero se trata bien a éstos y son bienvenidos.” See also, Rodrigo Laguarda, *Ser gay en la ciudad de México*, 101.

other men when he entered the magazine section.³⁸ The process of *el ligue* for Javier and many other men began by making eye contact at the magazine rack and from there men could decide their next steps. According to Javier:

Normally, you saw him and after “the look” you would take him to the bathroom, and in the bathroom, you confirmed that he was gay, and you entered the relation by saying, ‘let’s go to my house’ and everything. Obviously, if he was really handsome all you wanted was to take him to bed, right?³⁹

For Javier, the Sanborns magazine rack served as the initial point of encounter with other men looking for sex.

³⁸ Sánchez, Javier. Interview with author. Personal interview. Mexico City, June 14, 2016. “llegabas y sentías las miradas cuando veías las revistas y este bueno ya de ahí venía el ligue o el *cruising*.”

³⁹ Sánchez, Javier. Interview with author. Personal interview. Mexico City, June 14, 2016.

“Normalmente lo veías y la mirada te llevaba al baño y ya en el baño confirmabas que era gay y ya entrabas en una relación de decir vamos a mi casa y todo, obviamente si era muy guapo lo que más querías es irte con él a la cama y todo, no?”



Figure 17: The Sanborns magazine rack in Sanborn Reforma, Mexico City. Unknown photographer. *Sanborns Reforma*. 1954. Sanborns Mexico, unpublished photo collection. Archivo Sanborn Hermanos, Mexico City.

In 1987, Fernandino García entered a Sanborns specifically to read *Architectural Record*, a magazine he needed for his architecture courses that were not widely available in Mexico City. While standing in the Sanborns magazine section, a man struck up a conversation with him and asked if he was an architect. Unaware that the magazine rack was a well-known area of male cruising, the men eventually began dating and entered a short-term relationship. Fernandino had inadvertently discovered a tactic that men used to cruise in the Sanborns magazine section. The magazine that men held open in front of themselves served as an extension of their personality, identity, and social interests. For example, well-built men might show off their bodies with a muscle magazine. A closeted man who wanted to emphasize his straight world of modernity might read *Motor Trend*.⁴⁰ The magazine section served as a point of encounter where men cruised in a more open environment. As Javier Sánchez explained, All Sanborns stores were different, but, “practically all of

⁴⁰ García, Fernandino. Interview with author. Personal interview. Mexico City, April 9, 2016.

Pseudonym.

the Sanborns had a magazine section and it was there that you had the first contact.”⁴¹ Despite each store’s architectural peculiarities, there was a certain familiarity that pretty much all Sanborns stores had in common that allowed men to employ their tactics in different ways depending on the store and location.

The first time the historian George Chauncey visited Mexico City in the mid/late 1980s, he visited a Sanborns somewhere close to the Zona Rosa. He recalled that “within minutes of entering the restaurant with its adjacent magazine display area” he noticed, “Gay men —*obvious gay men*— carrying on lively conversations at so many tables and in so many of the booths, and congregating and cruising among the magazines. Incredibly open and convivial. And all quite tolerated by the staff and other patrons.” At the time, Chauncey was working on his now classic book *Gay New York* and could not help but notice the parallels between his research on gay sociality in New York City in the 1920s. According to Chauncey, what he witnessed at Sanborns was exactly “what I imagined the Childs Restaurant in Times Square to be like in the 1920s.”⁴²

The Men’s Bathroom

Since the 1960s, the men’s bathroom at various Sanborns branches developed into popular cruising sites for men looking to have sex with other men. Many generations of men had sex at Sanborns. Across time and within various locations in Mexico, men queered the Sanborns bathroom

⁴¹ Sánchez, Javier. Interview with author. Personal interview. Mexico City, June 14, 2016.

“Prácticamente en todos tenía sección de revistas y ahí era el primer contacto. ¿no?”

⁴² George Chauncey, email correspondence to author, June 16, 2017.

by using the architectural as a stage to explore their sexual desires.⁴³ Within the Sanborns bathroom men gathered in an anonymous space searching for other men to have sex. They found a quick anonymous hookup, a sexual release, and a place to find someone attractive that they could take home. One man who cruised at Sanborns described the bathroom as “like going inside a different universe.” The Sanborns bathroom was a place he considered “a safe environment,” that men entered “looking for the same thing.” Men who cruised the Sanborns bathroom, “are not worrying so much about common interest or a common background or common social status or stuff like that.”⁴⁴ Men who wanted to have sex with other men created a queer space at Sanborns which was unusual in modern Mexico. The Sanborns bathroom eliminated gendered and class identities as men pursued their sexual desires. Men who cruised at Sanborns appropriated the interior architecture specifically to make it easier for them to have sex with other men.

According to Pablo Leder who used to cruise Sanborns in the 1960s and 1970s, he and many other men were afraid to have sex in the bathroom. When he went there, he saw messages scribbled inside the bathroom stalls. Mexicans often wrote a description of the kind of sex they wanted along

⁴³ Distrikt, “Waking up my sexuality in Sanborn’s,” private correspondence, www.cruisingmx.com August 12, 2016.

⁴⁴ Ruiz Garibay, Alejandro. Interview with author. Personal interview. Mexico City, June 30, 2016. “It’s almost like going inside a different universe. Or not so much, that might be a bit much, but to go into a safe environment, I guess, for some people...a place where they are likely to be people who are looking for the same thing. They are looking for, without, I don’t know, worrying so much about common interest or a common background or common social status or stuff like that. At least for my experience, I don’t know for the rest of the people.”

with their phone number as an invitation for others.⁴⁵ Before modern technologies like the internet or personal computers, the Sanborns bathroom served as a private forum for male cruising and provided men with contacts where they could eventually meet and have sex in a more private setting. Javier Sánchez who cruised different Sanborns from 1971-1980s occasionally had sex in the bathrooms when it was not possible to go somewhere else. He recalled the mixture of fear and excitement that came with cruising men in the Sanborns bathroom:

There were times when nothing more than something quickly happened in the bathroom with someone but without going all the way, and sometimes in the bathroom stalls you'd do it fast but with certain fear, right? But that was part of the excitement because it was forbidden and sometimes the forbidden is the most exciting part because you know that it's not right, but it arouses you.⁴⁶

The sense of danger and excitement was part of the attraction men experienced when going to the Sanborns bathroom; they explored their sexuality in an institution the held a significantly different social meaning for the majority of its customers.

⁴⁵ Macías-González, Víctor M. Interview with Pablo Leder, Mexico City, May 25, 2017. Special thanks to Víctor Macías-González for generously sharing this detail of his interview with me.

⁴⁶ Sánchez, Javier. Interview with author. Personal interview. Mexico City, June 14, 2016. “había veces que nada más hacías cositas rápidas en el baño con alguien pero sin llegar a mucho y a veces hasta en los cubículos no, así rápido te metías y con cierto miedo no, pero también eso era parte de la excitación no, que era lo prohibido entonces a veces lo prohibido es lo más excitante porque sabes que no está bien pero por otro lado te excita mucho.”

Lying underneath the “forbidden” sentiments Javier and other men felt were certain social contradictions when private sexual conduct crosses over into public spaces. The idea of having sex in a public bathroom conflicted with the set of gendered rules and socially acceptable behavior associated with a heteronormative space like Sanborns. Javier only had sex in the bathroom when it was not possible to go elsewhere:

Generally, I did not have sex in the bathrooms because I feared the police might show up. Even though this never happened, I felt the police would show up there. So I cruised and we left together. It was nothing more than that. But sometimes there were those who did not want to leave or they were drinking with people at Sanborns. So they stayed in the bathroom a little while to do something and then returned to their girlfriend or their family and continued eating or drinking at the place.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Sánchez, Javier. Interview with author. Personal interview. Mexico City, June 14, 2016.

“Generalmente yo no lo hacía en los baños porque si me daba algo de miedo de que llegara algún policía, o sea aunque no, no pasaba pero pensabas no vaya a ser que vengan policías judiciales en aquel entonces, era no más el lígüe y vámonos, era más que nada eso, pero a veces había quienes no querían salir o estaban con gente en el mismo Sanborns tomando y entonces se quedaban a hacer algo, se tardaban algo y luego ya subían con la novia o con la familia a seguir comiendo o tomando según e lugar.”

The men's bathroom provided space where married men could have sex with other men.⁴⁸ It allowed men from different social backgrounds to temporarily enter and queer space to pursue their sexual desires and return to the straight world outside.

The development of cruising sites appears to have been determined in part by the incidental differences in the architectural designs of the bathrooms which influenced whether or not men decided to cruise there.⁴⁹ The location and the positioning of the store's layout provided unique experiences that facilitated male cruising. For example, outside the men's room at the Sanborns at San Antonio were a set of telephones which provided a vantage point for men to monitor the entrance of the bathrooms. Javier remembered passing the time there pretending to be placing a phone call and waiting to see if anyone who entered or left caught his eye. The telephones were also located close to the parking garage. As Javier explained, "if you liked someone, well, you hung up the phone and went over there and talked to see what's up, I remember all of this especially well."⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Arturo Castelán, "Hombre Casado Busca..." *Del Otro Lado: La Revista Gay de México y América Latina*, No. 20 (enero 20, 1995), 13-14.

⁴⁹ Ricci Camillo, Omar. Interview with the author. Personal interview. Mexico City, August 22, 2016.

⁵⁰ Sánchez, Javier. Interview with author. Personal interview. Mexico City, June 14, 2016. "Inclusive también por ejemplo el Sanborns de San Antonio me acuerdo de que tenía los baños, los teléfonos a la salida de los baños entonces ibas y hacías como que estabas hablando por teléfono y checabas quien entraba quien salía y entonces sobre todo quien entraba, entonces cuando te gustaba alguien pues colgabas el teléfono que a lo mejor estabas como medio haciéndole ahí al tonto y te metías... Si como que estás hablando y haciéndote, pasando el tiempo para ver quien bajaba, porque además los

The lack of a rigid boundary separating queer and non-queer spaces meant that the men who cruised the Sanborns bathroom did so carefully by navigating around the interior architecture. Men who entered the Sanborns bathroom with the specific intent of having sex with other men needed to communicate their sexual intentions to one another. They queered the Sanborns bathroom by using eye contact, body language, and other forms of non-verbal communication. Men who cruised the bathroom looking for sex also performed different rituals that mirrored regular bathroom behavior to avoid drawing attention to themselves or others. This helped preserve the queered space they had temporarily appropriated and allowed them to remain discrete about their true sexual intentions.⁵¹ Typically, men would enter the bathroom and assume positions in front of an open urinal or an open stall and pretend to go to the bathroom. Standing there, men displayed their sexual intentions by masturbating and by carefully observing the behavior of the other men around them. From there, men communicated their interests with other men through *la mirada*, a concentrated and penetrating gaze on the eyes of another person that lasted for several seconds followed by a quick glance at the other man's genitals.⁵² Men communicated with each other in silence, responding perhaps with raised eyebrows, a smile or other expressions with their mouth that indicated they are of *ambiente*.⁵³ Most of the action was concentrated out in the open between the stalls and urinals where men might

ponían abajo cerca del estacionamiento y ya si te gustaba alguien pues colgabas y te metías y ya veías qué onda no, de eso si me acuerdo, sobre todo de ese en especial.

⁵¹ Chauncey, "Privacy Could Only be had in public: Gay uses of the Streets," *Stud: Architectures of Masculinity*, 224.

⁵² Ricci Camillo, Omar. Interview with the author. Personal interview. Mexico City, August 22, 2016.

⁵³ Hernández Victoria, Miguel Alonso. Interview with author. Personal Interview. Mexico City, September 15, 2016.

perform oral sex, masturbation, and anal penetration. The sex on display also offered gratification for any other men who cared to watch the sexual performance from the sidelines. Men having sex might position themselves closer to the corridor that leads to the sinks to observe if anyone was entering the bathroom.⁵⁴

However, on the weekends if the Sanborns bathroom was packed with men, men having sex with other men often depended on someone referred to as “the lookout,” a man who helped facilitate a sexual environment for the other men having sex. Men I interviewed described the lookout as someone who likely was among the first to arrive that may have already participated in the action. Without hesitation, the lookout would “take control of the situation” and acted as a form of counter surveillance that protected other men within the temporarily queered space from raising the suspicion of others customer or Sanborns employee.⁵⁵ The lookout positioned himself near the corridor between the sinks and the bathrooms and from there surveilled the entrance to see if anyone new was approaching.⁵⁶ If so, the lookout might signal by clearing his throat or by saying something like “someone is coming,” or *aguas* literally, look out.⁵⁷ Men would react by disengaging and assuming a position in front of an unoccupied stall or urinal and then would mimic normal

⁵⁴ Ruiz Garibay, Alejandro. Interview with author. Personal interview. Mexico City, June 30, 2016.

⁵⁵ Ruiz Garibay, Alejandro. Interview with author. Personal interview. Mexico City, June 30, 2016.

“The first ones that are there kind of take control of the situation and of the surveillance and stuff.”

⁵⁶ Ruiz Garibay, Alejandro. Interview with author. Personal interview. Mexico City, June 30, 2016.

⁵⁷ Ricci Camillo, Omar. Interview with the author. Personal interview. Mexico City, August 22, 2016.

“It was basically clear his throat or like saying actually something like *hay viene* o *aguas* or something like that, but it was literally someone on the lookout.”

bathroom behavior. In the event the bathroom area was too crowded with men then someone had to leave because otherwise they risked making it too obvious what they were doing, which could potentially draw attention from Sanborns security or law enforcement.

Depending on how crowded the bathroom scene was also influenced the social behavior that the men practiced. For example, men who wanted to prolong their time in the bathroom waiting for something that caught their eye often practiced routines that imitated typical bathroom behavior. Alejandro recalled that some men entered the bathroom stalls, would then leave and wash their hands at the sinks before returning to either the stall or urinals. All of these tactics were designed to “make it seem less suspicious” that they were in fact lingering in the bathroom looking for sex.⁵⁸

Inside the Sanborns bathroom stalls provided another place where men explored their sexuality. Men used the privacy of the stall to gaze underneath the walls that separated each stall. They created codes by using their feet, performed sexual acts by using the shadows casted by the interior lights, and examined each other’s genitals through something called “under stall” where men positioned themselves in the bathroom stall in a way that displayed their genitals under the void in the separation between stalls for the occupant sitting in next on the other side.⁵⁹ Ferdinando García who cruised Sanborns in the late 1980s proclaimed that Sanborns had some of the first gloryholes in

⁵⁸ Ruiz Garibay, Alejandro. Interview with author. Personal interview. Mexico City, June 30, 2016. Quoted in English.

⁵⁹ Ruiz Garibay, Alejandro. Interview with author. Personal interview. Mexico City, June 30, 2016; Distrikt, “Waking up my sexuality in Sanborn’s,” private correspondence, August 12, 2016.

Mexico City.⁶⁰ Gloryholes are small partitions located on walls that allow men to insert their penises to receive anonymous oral sex by someone on the other side of the wall. The holes also allowed men to display their penises for the inspection of others. Men indicated their lack of interest by covering or filling the hole with paper.⁶¹ Men used the bathroom stall as private conduits to display their bodies and for communicating their sexual desires to other men through a set of visual performances.

Evidence suggests that the management of Sanborns was well aware of the popularity of its bathrooms as places where men had sex with each other. The company reacted with certain architectural modifications and other discreet tactics used to deter sexual activity from taking place in the bathrooms. The installation of bathroom mirrors, urinal separators, and the placement of bathroom attendants suggests that Sanborns management responded to increased sexual activity in their store by tacitly enforcing gender norms on the way in which people should use their bathroom.

⁶⁰ García, Ferdinando. Interview with the author. Personal interview. Mexico City, April 17, 2016.

⁶¹ Hernández Victoria, Miguel Alonso. Interview with author. Personal interview. Mexico City, September 15, 2016.



Figure 18: “Anyone caught using the bathroom for other purposes will be referred to the authorities.” Sign posted in a Sanborns men’s bathroom, Avenida Universidad and División del Norte, Mexico City. 2016. Photograph by Miguel Alonso Hernández Victoria. Used with permission.

The position of mirrors at certain Sanborns allowed people to see into the area of the bathroom stalls from the sink area making the possibility of sex less discreet or impossible.⁶² One man who cruised the Sanborns at Plaza Universidad commented that he went to the bathrooms one night and could not have sex because, “there was surveillance that checked to make sure no one stayed more than ten minutes in the bathroom.”⁶³ Another man lamented his frustration trying to have sex at the

⁶² Ricci Camillo, Omar. Interview with the author. Personal interview. Mexico City, August 22, 2016.

⁶³ “Baños Sanborns Plaza Universidad,” <http://www.cruising.mx/topic/banos-sanborns-plaza-universidad> [accessed August 19, 2016]. “Pues de noche entre 11 y 12 ya no hay chance de tener acción, las últimas dos veces que fui noté que hay vigilancia que checa que no se queden más de 10 minutos dentro del baño, por lo mismo llegan muy pocos o nadie a esa hora.” permission granted by the user to use this comment.

Sanborns at Plaza Universidad. “How fucked up it was that the security guys made us stop using the bathrooms. Now there are always those Sanborns guys in the bathrooms that give you paper towels to dry your hands, and now you cannot do anything.”⁶⁴ A few men I interviewed pointed to a specific moment when Sanborns began putting what they called *gente de vigilancia*, literally “surveillance people,” in the men’s bathroom.⁶⁵ Known as the *limpieza*, or the bathroom attendant, this Sanborns employee became a fixture within many Sanborns bathrooms; the attendant cleaned and handed out paper towels to customers. Men warned each other in private online forums not to get caught by the cleaning guy because they risked ruining the secret queered space for everyone else. Men tried regulating and controlling each other to preserve their queer space and prevent an increase in security in the bathroom.⁶⁶

From the perspective of men who cruised at Sanborns, the bathroom attendant served a dual purpose. He kept the bathroom neat and sanitary, but his physical presence also worked as a form of

⁶⁴ “Guardias de seguridad o policías (experiencias),” <http://www.cruising.mx/topic/guardias-de-seguridad-o-policias/page/5#post-817458> “me tocó varias veces cogermé a esos putitos en los baños del sanborns [sic] o en los del último piso, que culero que ya hasta quitaron algunos de esos baños y obviamente a los guardias también, ahora siempre hay de esos weyes [sic] que te dan el papel para secarte las manos, tipo sanborns, [sic] en los baños de la plaza y ya no se puede hacer nada.”

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⁶⁵ Ricci Camillo, Omar. Interview with the author. Personal interview. Mexico City, August 22, 2016.

⁶⁶ Ruiz Garibay, Alejandro. Interview with author. Personal interview. Mexico City, June 30, 2016.

“They usually comment like, *no quemes mi lugar*, be careful not to get caught because otherwise you are going to ruin it for everyone else because the security is going to increase.”

deterrence for men to be able to carry out their sexual desires.⁶⁷ Unlike a security guard who might alarm customers by their presence, the bathroom attendant worked as a subtle agent enforcing acceptable masculine behavior in the bathroom. The presence of the bathroom attendant created discomfort for some customers that prevented them from using the queered space they had sought to maintain. The bathroom attendant projected the company's authority into a private space. Much like the presence of a company employee within a changing room works to deter shoplifting or other misdeeds, the bathroom attendant at Sanborns provided a form of surveillance that men who cruised the bathroom were keenly aware of.

Men like Javier who cruised at Sanborns in the 1970s and 1980s suspected that the company management contemplated a change in policy to deal with having the bathrooms “totally full of homosexuals,” but could not do anything about it because it likely went against human rights policies. According to Javier, the only thing Sanborns could do was to hire maintenance and a cleaning guy, a direct cost to the company whose duty included working as a deterrent for sexual activity.⁶⁸ The bathroom attendant is a relatively new phenomenon, according multiple interviews with people who have cruised at Sanborns and are familiar with the change who believe the addition of the employee occurred sometime after Carlos Slim purchased the company in 1985.⁶⁹ For many men, the *limpieza* acted like a policeman for the store that allowed Sanborns management to

⁶⁷ Ricci Camillo, Omar. Interview with the author. Personal interview. Mexico City, August 22, 2016.

⁶⁸ Sánchez, Javier. Interview with author. Personal interview. Mexico City, June 14, 2016.

⁶⁹ Sánchez, Javier and Fernandino García. Interview with the author. Personal interview. Mexico City, May 28, 2016.

discreetly impose security measures that regulated the types of masculine behavior permitted in the bathroom.

Men who cruised Sanborns responded to the presence of the *limpieza* in the bathroom by learning his work habits, cleaning schedule, and work shift and have simply worked around his presence. Men have also shared this knowledge with other men connected with online cruising communities. Forum post listings for the bathrooms of Sanborns at Plaza Universidad described the bathroom attendant present in the morning “but he does not clean and only in the stalls is there action.”⁷⁰ Another man advised the online community that there was more action at the Sanborns Acoxpa on Tuesday’s after 7:00pm because the bathroom attendant had the evening off.⁷¹ Men that cruised the Sanborns bathroom looking for sex kept their discretion despite the presence of the *limpieza* by developing tactics and sharing information through technologies that helped other men navigate and maintain the queered spaces at Sanborns.

Cruising Outside Sanborns

The Sanborns on Aguascalientes street in Mexico City developed into a notorious male cruising destination that was known colloquially as *la esquina mágica* (the magic corner).⁷² Sanborns Aguascalientes offered a range of ways men could use both the interior and exterior architecture of

⁷⁰ “Baños Sanborns Plaza Universidad,” <http://www.cruising.mx> [accessed August 19, 2016].

⁷¹ “Sanborns Acoxpa,” <http://www.cruising.mx/topic/sanborns-acoxpa/page/13> [accessed: May 29, 2017].

⁷² Rodrigo Laguarda, “El ambiente: espacios de sociabilidad gay en la ciudad de México, 1968-1982,” *Secuencia* no. 78 (sep/dic 2010).

the store to find other men for sex.⁷³ Men could cruise inside the store in the magazine section and bathroom and outside the store, men loitered near the storefront looking for sex. Two significant geographical features contributed to the development of Sanborns Aguascalientes as a particularly attractive space for male cruising. First, the large department store was physically located between two prominent and generally safe middle-class neighborhoods, the Colonia Roma and La Condesa. Secondly, Insurgentes is one of Mexico City's most important avenues. This bustling transportation artery running north and south connects major swaths of Mexico City's urban landscape and is one of city's longest avenues. Aside from Sanborns, there were also gay bars located along the avenue and men cruised the street looking for male sex workers who walked along the side of the road. Men who had access to cars could easily drive there and turn off onto a relatively quiet Aguascalientes street and cruise for men loitering or walking around the store. The position of Sanborns off of Insurgentes allowed men who passed in their cars to drive in circles around the block until they encountered what they were looking for.⁷⁴

Men in Mexico City who cruised for sex in a car at Sanborns Aguascalientes had certain advantages. According to Javier Sánchez, "In general, it was more comfortable [cruising for sex] in your car, like an auto-service. It was like an extension of the *onda gay* because obviously whoever was out there at certain times going in circles around the block, it was not like they were lost; they were there because they were looking for men." Javier preferred cruising for the other men that were also driving around the block looking for sex because it gave him a bit more confidence about the situation. Owning a car meant the men were "people of another category, of another social status." Javier recalled meeting several "well-off family kids with good cars" at the Sanborns at

⁷³ Rodrigo Laguarda, *Ser gay en la ciudad de México*, 102.

⁷⁴ Sánchez, Javier. Interview with author. Personal interview. Mexico City, June 14, 2016.

Aguascalientes who he described as “good people, people with money, people that in some way were respected in Mexico.”⁷⁵ Men who owned their own car had the privilege of cruising for sex in several ways. They could easily arrive at a known cruising destination and decide whether to pick up a male sex worker or other men loitering on the street, or they could cruise other men who owned cars who shared the same powerful class backgrounds. Each of these options were made available by the fact that Sanborn Aguascalientes developed into a cruising site.

Throughout the 1970s, men cruised for sex outside Sanborns stores. Several stores in Mexico City became well-known male cruising destinations and waiting places for male sex workers. Male sex workers who charged money for their service sometimes stood outside Sanborns at night waiting to pick up men. In 1971, an article titled “Gay Mexico” that appeared in the international magazine *The Advocate*, considered the Sanborns along Reforma as “a mecca, naturally,” and said that the Sanborns on Niza and Hamburgo Streets attracted large crowds of men. The author told men to

⁷⁵ Sánchez, Javier. Interview with author. Personal interview. Mexico City, June 14, 2016. “Podías bajar y entrar al Sanborns y todo pero generalmente ya era más cómodo en tu carro no, como autoservicio. Y además como te digo era una extensión de la onda gay entonces obviamente quien andaba ahí a ciertas horas pues si andabas dando vueltas no era porque estabas perdido ni porque andabas buscando una calle, andabas buscando gente no... Si o sea en el carro obviamente dabas una o dos vueltas y si el mismo carro también daba dos o tres vueltas ya sabías que era ligue no, y ya de carro a carro pues ligabas y éste ya de ahí te frenabas te bajabas y platicabas qué onda qué hacemos y vamos, también el hecho de que tuvieran carro también te daba un poco de confianza porque ya era gente de otra categoría no, de otro estatus social y veías la calidad del carro también, éste si de juniors por ejemplo ahí conocí chavos de familia muy acomodada, con buenos carros y todo, de gente bien, bueno de gente de dinero no, de gente de alguna manera reconocida de México.”

avoid street cruising, especially along Reforma, due to the dangers posed by the Mexican police. Despite these warnings, the author informed the readers and potential travelers that, “if danger is your dish and you must tempt the devil, you can cruise the boys who hang out on the sidewalk near Denny’s (Diana and Reforma) or in front of any of the Sanborn drugstores and coffeehouses.”⁷⁶

Luis Zapata Quiroz’s 1979 novel *El vampiro de la Colonia Roma*, provided readers with a reinterpretation of Mexico City’s urban geography through the novel’s protagonist Adonis García. As a male sex worker, García understood the city in erotic terms that mapped sexuality on key landmarks in the capital city. According to Chris Schulenberg, Sanborns constituted, “a unique cloudy space whose merchantilistic [*sic*] discourse transforms itself into a decidedly sexual one through the protagonist’s body.”⁷⁷ In other words, Sanborns was not a queer space because of the decision of its store owners. Instead, it was built through the collective and repetitive behaviors of its customers and people who lived in Mexico who shaped its spatial usage from a commercial institution into a realm of sexuality. *El vampiro de la Colonia Roma* mentioned specific Sanborns locations in Mexico City that the novel’s protagonist used as waiting areas looking for male clients. The character, Adonis García made his money, “standing guard at the doors of Sanborns at Niza, there I had my debut, I owe a lot to the Sanborns at Niza.”⁷⁸ For Javier Sánchez—who believed Sanborns was “the cathedral of homosexuality,” in Mexico City—the Sanborns Niza was what he

⁷⁶ Douglas Dean, “Gay Mexico—IV”, *The Advocate*, November, 1971.

⁷⁷ Chris T. Schulenburg, “El Vampiro de la Colonia Roma’: Mexico City’s Maps and Gaps,” *Chasqui*, Vol. 39, No. 2 (Noviembre, 2010), 90.

⁷⁸ Luis Zapata, *El Vampiro de la Colonia Roma* (México: Editorial Grijalbo, 1979), 55.

referred to as “The Basilica.”⁷⁹ Javier was referring to the *Basílica de Guadalupe*, the national shrine to Mexico’s most important Catholic symbol. Located in the Zona Rosa, Sanborns Niza developed into an important site for male cruising where male sex workers gravitated around the Sanborns storefront. Surrounded by gay bars in a prominent upper-class neighborhood in Mexico City, *chichifos*, or male sex workers, stood around the brightly lit storefront and waited for men who drove their cars slowly around the block. This form of cruising carried risks for all participants. For example, thieves posed as sex workers who dressed and acted the part to gain the client’s confidence before pulling out weapons and demanding money or the valuables of the unsuspected clients.⁸⁰

El Vampiro de la Colonia Roma also highlighted several other Sanborns locations as areas where male sex workers stood outside and waited for their customers. In one passage, Adonis García described the typical “waiting areas” he used while looking for potential clients:

The Sanborns del Angel, Aguascalientes, and Niza, and sometimes even the Sanborns at Centro Medico or the San Angel because you see that *Sanborns has an irresistible attraction for gay men*. And you know what? I hung out at the magic corner. You know where it is, right? The one at Insurgentes and Baja California. That’s where the cine las américas is located. They

⁷⁹ Sánchez, Javier. Interview with author. Personal interview. Mexico City, April 17, 2016. “La Basilica.”

⁸⁰ Pablo Leder, *Hubo una vez...antes del sida* (México: Méndez Impresores, 2016), 106-107. Leder was describing an event from 1971.

call it the magic corner because anyone who stands there is cruising. And if you don't cruise it's because you're either ugly or an asshole, or both [emphasis added].⁸¹

Men appropriated Sanborns's commercial popularity and its links with cosmopolitanism and foreign modernity by remapping its floor space and exterior geography into areas of sexual exploration. The "irresistible attraction" that many men felt towards Sanborns was charged by their own sexual excitement and the store's linkage to male power and identity. Men had fused sexuality into their own social meaning of Sanborns' commercial space by linking sexuality, masculinity, power, and architecture into one place.

Police Violence, State Surveillance, Regulation and Control

Men loitering outside of Sanborns faced the danger of being accused of prostitution by the Mexican police. An article that appeared in the magazine *Christopher Street*, a New York-based gay magazine, provided testimony of a 17-year old military academy student. One night in 1977, while waiting outside of the Sanborns Del Angel, the student noticed a police car circling several times around the block. The patrol car full of four policemen eventually pulled up alongside him. An officer jumped out, grabbed him, and forced him into the backseat of the car before driving away. Surrounded by policemen, the student was beaten and asked, "What do you think you're doing, you

⁸¹ Luis Zapata, *El Vampiro de la Colonia Roma* (México: Editorial Grijalbo, 1979), 111. "El Sanborns del Ángel, el de Aguascalientes, el de Niza, a veces hasta el del Centro Médico o el de San Ángel porque ya ves que los Sanborns tienen un atractivo irresistible para los gays. O si no ¿sabes qué? Me paraba en la esquina mágica. Ya sabes cuál es, ¿no? La de Insurgentes y Baja California. Por ahí por donde está el cine las Américas. Le dicen la esquina mágica porque cualquiera que se pare ahí liga. Ya si no ligas es porque estás muy feo o porque de a tiro eres muy pendejo o las dos cosas."

filthy queer—looking for a pickup?” During this encounter, the police asked the man whether he had any money and looked at his body to see if he was wearing any valuable belongings. Unable to extort anything from the young man, the police dumped him off at Chapultepec Park away from the street lights and drove away.⁸² This account suggests that Mexican police understood the relationship queer men had identified with Sanborns. The police used their social power and an aggressive form of masculinity to contest queered spaces specifically located in and around Sanborns and other consumer places.

On the night of February 22, 1981, Pedro Fernando Valdés left the cinema and headed over to his friend’s house located between the Colonia Roma and Condesa, two prominent middle-class neighborhoods. While passing outside the Sanborns located off the corner of Aguascalientes and Insurgentes, he was accosted by men who claimed to be police. He was grabbed violently and forced into a waiting car. Inside the car, the police beat Valdés and accused him of being a criminal, a drug addict, a guerrilla, and a homosexual. According to Valdés, the objective of the police intimidation was extortion, as he ultimately paid a bribe for his release. In his letter published in the magazine *Uno más uno*, Valdés described himself as a typical middle-class Mexican. He was a “productive Mexican citizen, a university teacher and actor who complied with his civic duties and understood his basic constitutional rights.” He stated his sexual preference was “homosexual,” but “there is not and should not be any law that penalizes homosexuality itself.” He also stood in solidarity with other citizens fighting for their democratic rights, which included other male members of the Homosexual Front of Revolutionary Action (FHAR).⁸³

⁸² David R. Lennox, “Gay Life in Mexico: Part Two,” *Christopher Street* (June, 1977), 39-40.

⁸³ Known as the Frente Homosexual de Acción Revolucionaria. See, “Acusa, en carne propia, la represión a los homosexuales,” *Uno más uno*, mayo 8, 1981. O1S4, Centro de Información y

Valdés' account of police repression was part of a concentrated effort by agents from the Crime Prevention Investigations Division (DIPD) that targeted men suspected of homosexuality from the mid-1970s-mid 1980s.⁸⁴ Undercover police officers conducted surveillance and stakeouts in well-known spaces of male sociability and female prostitution, especially in the delegations of Cuauhtémoc, Benito Juárez and Miguel Hidalgo. This included commercial places like gay bars, theaters, coffeehouses, restaurants, and entrances of hotels.⁸⁵ The police patrolled the Zona Rosa, avenues such as Paseo de la Reforma, San Juan de Letrán, Lázaro Cardenas, Juárez and Cuauhtémoc, and the main department stores located in the San Angel neighborhood.⁸⁶ The Sanborns in San Angel was a well-known destination for male cruising during the 1970s-1980s.⁸⁷ Normally, the police arrived in "chocolates," unmarked brown colored automobiles with no license plates. From there they arbitrarily targeted and detained men located in these areas suspected of

Documentación de las Homosexualidades en México "Ignacio Álvarez" (hereafter CIDHOM), Homofobia en la prensa y otros medios de comunicación, Fondo I, Periodismo Comunicación, Identidades, sexo genérica, Centro Académico de la Memoria de Nuestra América (hereafter CAMeNA).

⁸⁴ División de Investigaciones para la Prevención de la Delincuencia.

⁸⁵ Sánchez Baños, "Acusan a la Policía de Explotar a Homosexuales," 30 Augusto, 1980, V1S1, CIDHOM, Razzias Contra homosexuales. CAMeNA.

⁸⁶ Benito Olivares, "Los de la 'Onda Gay' Acusan de Arbitraria a la Policía." No date. O1S4, CIDHOM, Homofobia en la prensa y otros medios de comunicación, Fondo I, Periodismo Comunicación, Identidades, sexo genérica, CAMeNA. See also, "100 Detenidos, Razzia de Homosexuales," Razzias Contra Homosexuales y prostitutas en la ciudad de México, V1S1, CAMeNA.

⁸⁷ Unpublished notes, CIDHOM, Fondo 1. CAMeNA.

being homosexuals. Armed police often used force to apprehend the men caught in the dragnet and threatened to haul them off to police headquarters. While apprehended and in the police vehicle, the agents used intimidation, physical violence, and accusations of criminal wrongdoing to extort money from the people they detained.⁸⁸

The repression and surveillance of known areas of male cruising included specific Sanborns stores located in Mexico City. The police harassment of men found in these areas offers evidence that suggests these immensely popular cruising spaces were becoming a social concern for the state. The police encroachment and use of an aggressive masculinity against men within these queered spaces at Sanborns also demonstrated how the Mexican government imposed a gendered ordering of the urban landscapes and particular places of consumption. The policing of a private commercial institution showed the limits of acceptable masculine behavior. Police repression and surveillance in these spaces attempted to reduce the presence of sexual activity from occurring in public. The police repression, economic extortion, and indiscriminate arrests of people found within zones associated with sex workers and male cruising areas, exposed the limits of PRI rule during the period of crisis. During the *sexenios* of José López Portillo and Miguel de la Madrid, the Presidents dealt with a looming economic crisis that included monetary inflation, recession, unemployment, and a destabilization of prices.⁸⁹ Miguel de la Madrid was elected by lauding a “moral renovation of society” that scapegoated specific groups of people that included young people, sex workers,

⁸⁸ Benito Olivares, “Los de la ‘Onda Gay’ Acusan de Arbitraria a la Policía.” No date. O1S4, CIDHOM, Homofobia en la prensa y otros medios de comunicación, Fondo I, Periodismo Comunicación, Identidades, sexo genérica, CAMENA.

⁸⁹ José Agustín, *Tragicomedia Mexicana 2: La vida en México de 1970 a 1982* (México: Editorial Planeta Mexicana, 1995), 131.

homosexuals, and lesbians. The police responded by using the authority of the president as a pretext to increase their repression of people of *ambiente*.⁹⁰ Innocent victims were also swept up in dragnets that targeted urban areas associated with immoral behavior. The police raids, mass arrests, and surveillance of specific urban areas with known activity of these groups resulted in extortion, detention, torture, and repression.⁹¹

The rise in popularity for male cruising in Sanborns produced social concerns that were important enough that involved the intervention of civil authorities, and for the store to start implementing internal policy changes. One particular set of unpublished testimonials by an unidentified man recounted that the Mexican police entered and surveilled Sanborns bathrooms. The man recalled that one night in January 1979, he entered the Sanborns Del Angel with friends to drink coffee at the restaurant. He then apparently decided to cruise the store. He first went to the magazine section to “read” before entering the bathroom. While at the urinals, he observed a young man standing there and he spoke to him. The man ignored him. As he went to the mirror and combed his hair, he turned around and found another man who flashed his police badge and stated that he was being detained for *actos inmorales*, or immoral acts.⁹² The man was taken into a police car where he encountered other men wearing sunglasses. He offered money to a man he called “the

⁹⁰ *Spartacus*, 1985, 499.

⁹¹ Manuel Aguilar Mora, “Razzias clasistas, Gente errante por la calle,” *Uno más uno*, 30 marzo 1984, 23.

⁹² Unpublished notes (possibly testimonial for the FHAR about political persecution of homosexuals) O1S4, CIDHOM, Homofobia en la prensa y otros medios de comunicación, Fondo I, Periodismo Comunicación, Identidades, sexo genérico, CAMeNA.

commander” who declined his offer. Eventually, the man was released because his friends, who were still inside the Sanborns, went looking for him and found him outside.

In May 1979, a similar experience occurred to the same unidentified man when he visited the Sanborns at San Angel and entered the bathroom. Looking around, he saw a suspicious man sitting in one of the other stalls. His presence made him feel uncomfortable and he decided to leave the bathroom and walk over to the telephones. Suddenly, “*el famoso güero*” who he had encountered in the other Sanborns apparently recognized him and produced his police badge, eventually leading him out of the restaurant. From there he was led into a waiting car, but before entering he decided to run. Pursued and eventually cornered by the police agents, the man finally offered money to the agents who debated whether they should detain him or accept the bribe. The 800 pesos in his possession was not enough for the officers, who asked if he could find a family member or friend to front 5,000 pesos. The man called a friend who then communicated with the FHAR, who then gave the following message: “Don’t give them a dime. Tell them to take him to the delegation or wherever they want and that from there they will speak with them in order to get him out.” The relayed message to the police angered them, knowing that there was no crime that he committed, the police let him go, recommending that he no longer hang out with “*esas ondas*,” or that circle of people.⁹³

The police raids continued throughout the 1980s and into the crisis period where mass arrests of people in zones associated with sexual activity sparked public dialogue and outrage. In

⁹³ “Mayo de 1979, Sábado por la noche. Sanborn’s San Angel.” Unpublished testimonial. O1S4, CIDHOM, Homofobia en la prensa y otros medios de comunicación, Fondo I, Periodismo Comunicación, Identidades, sexo genérica, CAMeNA. “Quen [*siz*] no les des ni un cinco. Que te lleven a la delegación o a donde quieran y que de allí les hables para que vayan a sacarte.”

1984, Carlos Monsiváis wrote for *Proceso* and traced the history of police raids in Mexico City as forming part of the, “impunity of urban violence, not a preventive method” to stop suspected criminal activity. The real objective was to, “destroy whatever sensation you had of being a citizen, destroy confidence in the rule of law, and destroy the relationship between young people and their parents.” According to Monsiváis, the Mexican state responded to increased crime patterns as a pretext to launch raids to prevent the public from mobilizing and exercising criticism.⁹⁴ One woman’s account of a gigantic police raid orchestrated on March 9, 1984 suggested as many as 500 people were detained by the Secretary of Protection and Highway Administration. Angela Yamasaki de Sánchez recounted the night she was detained along with her husband César Sánchez Flores and her three friends, Verónica Espinoza, Alejandro Rodríguez León and Fernando López Bastos. At 2:30 in the morning, while leaving a discotheque called Nitton’s in the hotel Benidorm off Cuauhtémoc Avenue, ten police agents approached them and made them enter a white Ford truck marked with Public Ministry on the side panels.⁹⁵ Within the Agency of the Public Ministry in the Colonia Guerrero, Yamasaki de Sánchez was accused of being a prostitute.⁹⁶ According to her account, among the other people detained were old women with grocery bags and young men with books under their arms. Yamasaki de Sánchez recalled talking with a man who told her the police

⁹⁴ Carlos Monsiváis, “Las redadas, contacto diario de la autoridad con los ciudadanos pobres,” *Proceso*, No. 385, 19 de marzo de 1984, 16. “Las razzias son una forma impune de la violencia urbana, no un método preventivo.” “Su objetivo es más directo: destruir cualquier sensación de ciudadanía, de confianza en las leyes, entre los jóvenes y sus padres.”

⁹⁵ Ministerio Público.

⁹⁶ Agencia del Ministerio Público.

beat them when they tried going to Sanborns and that they saw another man being arrested while he was talking in a Sanborns telephone booth.⁹⁷

Men looking for sex continued to experience risks of being extorted by the Mexican police well into the 1990s. The potential threat was large enough that gay magazines dedicated entire articles informing readers on how to better protect themselves. Readers were warned they faced extortion in a variety of cruising spaces in Mexico City. “Theaters, streets, avenues or ‘Magic’ corners, bathhouses, in the vicinity of bars and gay discotheques, foreign bus terminals, bathrooms of shopping centers or large department stores, parks, subway wagons and stations are the natural areas for these ubiquitous predators.”⁹⁸ The inclusion of bathroom department stores was a direct reference to Sanborns. On the very next page, an article titled “Caught Red Handed” described hypothetical situations in which police might catch men caught in the act of cruising and then extorted:

You are the worst. You show up horny, flirting as much as you can with your eyes. You are in the bathroom of that famous department store with the restaurant, pharmacy and

⁹⁷ “Narra una Dama, Víctima de Una Redada, Los Atropellos de las Autoridades,” *Proceso* No. 385, 19 de Marzo de 1984, 17, *Razzias en la Ciudad de México contra homosexuales y prostitutas*, CAMeNA. The Victim claimed that up to 500 people were detained by Secretaría de Protección y Vialidad. “Uno de ellos me contó que lo golpearon cuando iba a Sanborn’s y que vio cómo otro señor fue detenido también cuando hablaba dentro de una cabina telefónica.”

⁹⁸ “Homotextos,” *Del otro Lado: La Revista Gay* No. 7 (Julio, 1993), 30-31. “Cines, calles, avenidas o esquinas ‘mágicas’, baños de vapor, inmediaciones de bares y discotecas gay, terminales de autobuses foráneos, sanitarios de comerciales o grandes almacenes, parques, vagones y estaciones del metro, son los ámbitos naturales donde pululan esos ubicuos predadores.”

magazine rack, whose name begins with *San* and ends with *borns*. It excites you so much that they see you, so you show them your blazing fullness when suddenly, you hear someone shout, “You are being detained for indecency!” which breaks your innocent and harmless fantasies [emphasis added].

Men who did not pay the police a bribe risked being detained for *falta administrativo*, an administrative offense considered a crime under The Police and Good Governance Regulations.⁹⁹

Men cruising for sex with other men protected themselves from being victims of police repression by developing tactics to counter or limit police capabilities of using extortion. Articles in the gay magazine *Del Otro Lado* warned men not to wear jewelry and to only bring enough money one would normally use in a day. Writers also warned readers not to bring drugs and to avoid hanging around minors as the police might use these as pretexts to arrest and detain them for other crimes, since cruising itself was not illegal.¹⁰⁰ Armed with this knowledge, men continued looking for sex with other men in traditional areas of male cruising that included many Sanborns in and around Mexico City.

⁹⁹ “Con las Manos en la Masa,” *Del Otro Lado: La Revista Gay* No. 7 (Julio, 1993), 32. “Eres de lo peor...nomás andas calentando hornillas, flirteando con todos los que posan sus ojitos en los tuyos. Estás en los sanitarios de ese famoso almacén con restaurante, farmacia y revistaría, cuyo nombre empieza con San y acaba con borns. Te excita sobremanera que te vean, así que les muestras toda tu ardiente plenitud cuando, de pronto, el grito de ‘¡Queda usted detenido por faltas a la moral!’ rompe con tus inocentes e inofensivas fantasías.” The article warned men could be arrested for *falta administrativa* under El Reglamento de Policía y Buen Gobierno.

¹⁰⁰ “Algunas Sugerencias,” *Del otro lado: La Revista Gay* No. 7 (Julio, 1993), 31.

Conclusion

Today, Sanborns is still regarded as a queer place and area of encounter for men looking for sex. However, the locations of queer Sanborns has shifted over time, marked by the general expansion of Sanborns and the development of Mexico as a whole. Mexico's flourishing tourist industry attracted Mexicans and foreign visitors to Mexico City, Acapulco, and other destinations. Some of these travelers included queer men looking for sex with other men. The appearance of Sanborns under listings printed in international gay travel guides shows just how famous the retail store had become as synonymous with same-sex hookups. Tourists were drawn to Sanborns to find gifts and trinkets, English-language magazines, and familiar American-styled food. Their presence as customers fueled Sanborns's cosmopolitan atmosphere. Sanborns's attractive store features provided seemingly everything to anyone who could afford it. Middle-class men and foreign visitors looking for sex with other men refashioned the consumer space into areas of sociability and sexual exploration by re-appropriating the interior architecture into areas of sexual consumption.

The evolving spaces of male cruising at Sanborns stores depended on multiple interrelated factors. Not all Sanborns provided the proper comfortable amenities that made cruising there a real possibility. The location of individual stores and their architectural design influenced how men could appropriate the space and make it into a queer environment. The characteristics of each neighborhood, including its economic and demographic makeup, along with its accessibility and proximity to major transportation networks further shaped how certain Sanborns developed into popular cruising destinations.¹⁰¹ Under the ownership of Carlos Slim (1985-present), Sanborns has continued its expansion into other cities and states throughout Mexico. The result has been an

¹⁰¹ Espinosa, Miguel Angel. Interview with author. Personal interview. Mexico City, May 30, 2017.

Pseudonym. I want to thank Miguel for helping me develop these thoughts.

expansion in the possibilities of sexual encounters between men in the Sanborns bathroom. Men cruise Sanborns stores located in Acapulco, Ciudad Juárez, San Luis Potosi, Guadalajara, Morelia, Monterrey, Durango, and Zacatecas.¹⁰² As this chapter has shown, though, middle-class men identified spaces of consumption in terms associated with their power and sexuality. The opening of Sanborns stores in new cities provided more consumer spaces where men could perform their identities.

The commercial location of Sanborns stores influenced the cruising habits of middle-class men. For example, today, the bathroom in the Sanborns at Plaza Universidad in Mexico City is a popular male cruising destination. Located within a well-known commercial center off Universidad and Popocatepetl Avenues, this Sanborns is within walking distance from the subway and easily accessible by bus or car. The store is in the Colonia Coyoacán, a prominent and trendy neighborhood in the south of the city. It is also close to Mexico's National Autonomous University, the UNAM, meaning that the neighborhood receives a lot of foot traffic from students and young people. The men's bathroom inside the Sanborns at Plaza Universidad is located above the magazine rack and offers some privacy away from the store. The long corridor leading from the sinks to the bathroom stalls offers men a more ideal environment for them to have sex with other men. Despite the fear of surveillance by police and Sanborns employees; the proliferation of dating applications on mobile phones, and the increasingly visible presence of queer spaces like bathhouses, clubs, and bars, men continue to make going to Sanborns a ritual within their everyday lives. One Mexican man theorized that the reason men still have sex at Sanborns was due to an unconscious attempt "to

¹⁰² Álvaro López and Anne Marie Van Broeck, *Turismo y sexo en México: Cuerpos masculinos en venta y experiencias homoeróticas* (México: UNAM, 2013), 373. See footnote 150; See also, *Spartacus*, 1990. The book lists the Sanborns in Morelia, Michoacán, the one located in the Plaza de las Américas.

maintain this tradition for the community, this safe place, this secretly gay controlled space to keep on using it.”¹⁰³

For more than fifty years, the physical spaces of Sanborns became key to the kinds of masculine sociability and sexuality that its bathrooms and magazine stands encouraged. The stores became recognizable urban landmarks—like cathedrals—that men gathered at to exercise their masculine political power, socialize with each other, and have sex with other men. This chapter has shown how Sanborns developed into a preeminent masculine queer space in Mexico. Men collectively transformed Sanborns through habitual practices and coded language; men who cruised at Sanborns shaped its architecture and made it their own. Generations of middle-class and elite men rendezvoused (and continue to meet) at Sanborns; they socialized with other powerful men from similar elite backgrounds, used it as a secure locale when looking for male (and sometimes female) sex partners, and spent their leisure time drinking coffee or reading a magazine. Collectively, generations of men created, contested, and adapted to forms of masculinity by queering Sanborns and making the institution a tradition of their own. As the commercial institution became a regular fixture within Mexico’s changing urban landscape, queer men found ways to navigate the store and made Sanborns a place where they could exercise their power.

¹⁰³ Ruiz Garibay, Alejandro. Interview with author. Personal interview. Mexico City, September 13, 2016. Quoted from English.

Conclusion

On January 1, 2003, President Vicente Fox and his wife Marta Sahagún sat down for mass at the Iglesia de San Lorenzo in downtown Mexico City. The priest and parishioners anticipated their arrival and had saved room for them in the front aisle. After the hour-long mass, Marta handed the priest a sealed envelope containing \$20,000 pesos to support the church. Fox then answered questions from a group of seniors who gathered around him. He apparently promised them housing loans and microcredits to open *changarros*, small informal businesses that the President wanted to

legalize as part of his urban infrastructure development policy.¹ Around 2:00pm, the Fox's and their security personnel arrived at the corner of Eje Central and Madero Street. From there, they walked into the iglesia San Francisco de Asís located in the shadow of the Torre Latinoamericana. Fox greeted a group of onlookers mingling in the church. Eventually, the couple crossed the street and entered the House of Tiles for a meal at Sanborns.

Marta ordered mole *enchiladas* with rice, while Vicente had their famous *enchiladas suizas*. When they finished their meal, the couple received applause from dining customers and the visiting tourists who gathered there.² *El Universal* remarked it was “unusual” for the Mexican president to spend his Sunday sitting through mass in *Centro Histórico*, Mexico City's historic district.³ Interestingly, newspaper reporters did not find it at all peculiar that Fox and his wife decided to eat in Sanborns. The lack of commentary about why they decided to dine there reveals more than anything just how ubiquitous Sanborns had become entrenched within Mexican culture. Surely, the President would have recognized the symbolism connected with his choice to visit these three traditional cultural spaces located in the capital city. Intentional or not, by visiting Sanborns and the two churches, Fox linked together three different branches of power: The political power of the

¹ José Alejandro Sánchez, “Los Fox comen enchiladas en Los Azulejos, luego de ir a misa y dar limosna de \$20 mil,” *La Cronica*, <http://www.cronica.com.mx/notas/2003/44841.html> (accessed: 05/24/2018). See also, José Luis Ruiz, “Defiende Fox a los ‘changarros’” *El Universal*, Sabado 16 de Agosto de 2003, <http://archivo.eluniversal.com.mx/nacion/100792.html> (accessed 05/27/2018).

² Ibid.

³ Ariadna Garcia, “Realizan Fox y Sahagún paseo dominical por Centro Histórico,” *El Univresal*, Domingo 19 de enero de 2003. <http://archivo.eluniversal.com.mx/notas/115146.html> (accessed 5/25/2018). “inusual”

Mexican government, the traditional religious power of the Catholic Church, and the socioeconomic power of Sanborns. Fox probably visited these public institutions for political reasons, by performing an identity that appeared connected with the daily lives of ordinary Mexicans in order to promote his economic policies. Or perhaps Vicente Fox ate at Sanborns simply to pay respect to the store's owner, Carlos Slim Helú; the Mexican billionaire business mogul who owned the national chain since 1985.⁴ After all, the year 2003 marked the 100th anniversary of the Sanborns business.

Sanborns administrators celebrated their centenary by touting their company's progress as contributing to Mexico's national culture. The company released a special edition of their internal employee magazine, *Azulejos*, that underscored a common discourse shared among Sanborns directors. That discourse linked Sanborns within Mexican tradition and the national community. The special issue featured several messages penned by company directors. C.P. Francisco Martínez Gracidas, the Director of Human Resources thanked God for celebrating "the miracle" of being able to open their store doors for their customers. He also thanked the integral dedication from the 23,000 employees who collectively made up the "Great Sanborns Family."⁵ Sanborns chairman Juan Antonio Pérez Simón linked the business success of the company to the individual employee who, through their, "dedication, honesty, and discipline" served as examples for, "their children, close

⁴ Carla Zarebska, *La Casa de los Azulejos*, 237.

⁵ C.P. Francisco Martínez Gracidas, "Nuestros Primeros 100 Años," *Azulejos: 100 Años, Revista Intrerna para el Personal de Sanborns y Sanborns Café*, Año XXIV, Núm 98 (Especial 100 Años, 2003), 1. "Empezaré por darle gracias a Dios, que nos ha permitido llegar a este magno festejo como parte integrante de la Gran Familia Sanborns. Agradezco a cada uno de los miembros de la Familia que hacen posible el que todos los días celebramos el milagro de abrir nuestras puertas a nuestros clientes."

relatives, and new company employees.” He affirmed that the job represented, “the most important heritage for each person, it’s their great accomplishment. Their development gravitates in their lives, around their families and in society itself.” The individual worker also shaped the projection of Sanborns through their “spirit of service.”⁶ Company director Carlos Slim Domit saw the centenary of Sanborns as representing a celebration of the history and tradition of the entire country, as an institution bridged across Mexico’s revolutionary past and into the twenty-first century.⁷ After thanking the employees, shareholders, and the millions of customers who visited the 124 Sanborns stores located throughout the country, Slim Domit concluded that Sanborns was a fully integrated company that was, “permanently strengthening its tradition that has been the basis of its development.”⁸ Their messages made clear that the disciplined Sanborns employees, loyal customers, and shareholders, contributed to the commercial institution as a whole, and that Sanborns formed part of Mexico’s national identity.

⁶ Juan Antonio Pérez Simón, “Mensajes de la Dirección,” *Azulejos: 100 Años, Revista Intrerna para el Personal de Sanborns y Sanborns Café*, Año XXIV, Núm 98 (Especial 100 Años, 2003), 4. “dedicación, honradez y disciplina elementos que preservan y actualizan con responsabilidad...y puedan transmitírselos a las siguientes generaciones que incluye a sus hijos, parientes cercanos y nuevos colaboradores de la compañía. El trabajo es el patrimonio más importante de cada persona, es su gran realización. Su desarrollo gravita en sus vidas, en la de su familia, y en la propia sociedad.”

⁷ Carlos Slim Domit, “Mensajes de la Dirección,” *Azulejos: 100 Años, Revista Intrerna para el Personal de Sanborns y Sanborns Café*, Año XXIV, Núm 98 (Especial 100 Años, 2003), 5.

⁸ Carlos Slim Domit, “Mensajes de la Dirección,” *Azulejos: 100 Años, Revista Intrerna para el Personal de Sanborns y Sanborns Café*, Año XXIV, Núm 98 (Especial 100 Años, 2003), 5. “Es una empresa totalmente sistematizada que se encuentra en pleno proceso de actualización, fortaleciendo permanentemente su tradición que ha sido la base de su desarrollo.”

Sanborns owners held celebratory events commemorating their centenary that linked shareholders, company employees, visiting customers, and the store itself as contributing to Mexico's development and national culture. In October 2003, Sanborns chairman's Juan Antonio Pérez Simón and Carlos Slim Domit spoke during an Expo of Shareholders held at the Banamex Convention Center. With investors and Sanborns employees sitting in the audience, the directors told the crowd that throughout Mexican history, the concept of Sanborns had revolutionized how Mexicans coexisted in society.⁹ During the event, company administrators announced that The Institute of the National Fund for Workers' Housing (Infonavit), Inbursa Financial Group, and Sanborns collaborated to provide housing credits at the national level. They announced that 6,000 members of The Great Sanborns Family would have access to the financing. In a symbolic performance, company directors then handed out the first 100 housing credits to Sanborns employees. Photos of the event showed uniformed Sanborns chefs, waitresses, and cleaners standing in line on stage receiving their certificates from company managers. A photo caption read, "Thanks to the agreement that Sanborns made with Infonavit and Inbursa, our staff fulfill the dream of owning their own home."¹⁰ Through hard work and dedication, company employees were told that they were contributing to the trajectory of Mexican history.¹¹ The event showcased the company's

⁹ "Celebramos Nuestros Primeros 100 Años," *Azulejos: 100 Años, Revista Intrerna para el Personal de Sanborns y Sanborns Café*, Año XXIV, Núm 98 (Especial 100 Años, 2003), 15.

¹⁰ "Celebramos Nuestros Primeros 100 Años," *Azulejos: 100 Años, Revista Intrerna para el Personal de Sanborns y Sanborns Café*, Año XXIV, Núm 98 (Especial 100 Años, 2003), 16.

¹¹ Ibid. "El cumplir 100 años es un orgullo y a la vez un compromiso muy grande para todos los que formamos parte de esta Gran Familia, para seguir trabajando con esfuerzo y dedicación, y así, seguir construyendo muchos años más de trayectoria en la historia de nuestro país."

commitment to work with the Mexican government on national projects that mirrored the economic policies postured by Vicente Fox.

That same year, a special concert was held at The Palace of Fine Arts celebrating the 100th anniversary of Sanborns and the 75th anniversary of Mexico's National Symphony Orchestra. The event brought together President Vicente Fox and his wife along with senior members from his cabinet, Andrés Manuel López Obrador; the current President of Mexico and the former Mayor of Mexico City, as well as Carlos Slim and other Sanborns directors.¹² The cultural performance for Sanborns celebrated the company on a national stage. It highlighted the company's immense economic position as an institution tied with Mexican political power. Company directors and politicians conceptualized Sanborns within the narrative of Mexico's twentieth-century history.

Today, Sanborns clientele continue to use its floor space in their own way, sometimes much differently from the intentions of the architectural designers. For example, Mexican's are probably familiar with the experience of entering Sanborns for the sole purpose of going to the bathrooms.¹³

¹² "Concierto con Motivo de los 100 Años de Sanborns y los 75 Años de la Orquesta Sinfónica Nacional." Vicente Fox Quesada II. 2S Coordinación Agenda Presidencial. 2S.3 Eventos. 2003. Caja 4. Exp. 268439.22. Archivo General de la Nación.

¹³ Carlos Tomasini, "No fueron creados para esto, pero cómo nos hacen el paro...12 cosas que todos hemos hecho en Sanborns," last modified February 23, 2016, <http://www.chilango.com/general/nota/2016/02/23/clasicos-chilangos-de-sanborns> [accessed January 30, 2017]. Though I cite the *Chilango* article for convenience, throughout my time living in Mexico, I practiced this tradition myself. Many Sanborns stores require a ticket to enter the bathrooms and charge customers \$5 pesos to use the facilities, such as the Sanborns at the plaza in Coyoacán. Others, like the Sanborns Café across the street from Bellas Artes is free. The Sanborns

Mexicans find Sanborns convenient when looking for clean—and in some stores—free access to facilities.¹⁴

One area of study not explored in this dissertation that deserves further research is the role of Sanborns within Mexico's publishing world. Sanborns is one of Mexico's most important booksellers and distributors of media content.¹⁵ The magazine, discs, and sound department holds an array of national and international periodicals, as well as DVD's of Mexican "Golden Age"

at Azulejos has a sign telling customers that the bathrooms are for customers only, but no one enforces the rule. I shared many conversations with Mexicans who joked that the only times they ever entered Sanborns was to use the facilities. See for example, my interview with Ruiz Garibay, Alejandro. Interview with author, Mexico, June 30, 2016. "I think I was on my way home, coming back from school I guess, from college. I was on my way back, and I took the metro, there is a station there, so I took the subway and I got out there, and then I had to go to the bathroom before I went home so I went to Sanborns."

¹⁴ In 2010, during my first trip to Mexico, I was strolling through downtown Morelia, Michoacán when I needed to go to the bathroom. My partner knew where to go. Familiar with the urban landscape she grew up in, we headed to Sanborns near the cathedral just off the downtown plaza. Passing through the aisles filled with chocolates, electronics, perfumes, and trinkets, we headed directly to the bathrooms located on the second floor. At the time, I did not make much of the experience using the Sanborns bathroom. Nor did I think much of the afternoons we spent in the restaurant drinking coffee and getting free refills while we did our homework and used the free Wi-Fi. Going to Sanborns seemed like a particularly ordinary thing to do in Mexico.

¹⁵ Myrna Ortega, "Juan Antonio Pérez Simón: Sanborns Un Concepto de Empresa Mexicana Que Se Antoja Exportar," *Revista Hoy: Nueva Epoca*. No. 12, Año 53, Núm. 2292, 10-14.

cinema. As the corporation expanded its publishing house, it played a major role in defining the canon of Mexican film. Sanborns provided Mexicans access to new media material from around the world. The company allowed customers to browse the store and flip through the content they were interested in, unlike other bookstores that wrapped their books and magazines in plastic.¹⁶ Before the Internet era, Sanborns provided access to global content that was not widely available anywhere else. According to one Sanborns customer, “It was the closest thing we could have without traveling to the States. Especially for people who didn’t have the time nor the money nor the papers to do it.”¹⁷ According to a seventy-seven-year-old man who started going regularly to Sanborns Centro Acapulco in 1966, the downtown location was one of the only stores that had a magazine and book section in the city.¹⁸ The importance from this comment is not whether the statement was accurate or not, but that he had remembered the store as being a source of media content in the city.

In November 2015, while aboard a *microbus* outside of Plaza Carso in Mexico City, I entered a conversation with a woman about my research. She told me she enjoyed Sanborns particularly because of its magazine and book section. The woman wanted to buy a book Sanborns carried, but the price was too expensive. So instead of paying for it, each day after work she stopped at Sanborns and read a few pages until she finished it. The unfortunate truth about this account is it speaks more

¹⁶ García, Fernandino. Pseudonym. Interview with author, Mexico City, Mexico. April 9, 2016. “And they were the only place where you were allowed to go through the magazine without anybody giving you any shit.”

¹⁷ García, Fernandino. Interview with author. Personal interview. Mexico City, Mexico. March 7, 2017.

¹⁸ Fares del Río, Ramón. Interview with the author. Personal interview. Acapulco, Guerrero. June 7, 2018.

about the lack of publicly funded state library systems in Mexico. Nevertheless, Mexicans find the utility of the commercial spaces within their built environments and shape them according to their needs. In this case, they have utilized the vast collection of media content available at Sanborns like a public library.¹⁹ However, as my research has shown, since the 1920s, Sanborns has continued to offer complimentary services to its customers in order to draw them in to their store.

This dissertation has shown how throughout Mexico's twentieth century, the Sanborns chain has served as an essential site of contestation and redefinition of gender roles across Mexico. What began as a space of commercial leisure reserved for Mexican elites evolved over time into a place used by all classes. For over a century, Mexicans have utilized Sanborns as a stage performing their identities to gain power for themselves.

The case of Sanborns might be explained in further studies around regional areas as its social meaning replicated into other spatial realms. My research demonstrates that a narrow historical approach that focuses on a single commercial institution reveals patterns of development impacted by largescale economic, political, and cultural developments. One internal company document summarized these national changes by saying Sanborns "moves to the rhythm of time."²⁰ Sanborns was established during the peak moments of Porfirian modernization. The company catered specifically to Mexican elites drawn to foreign consumer culture and fashion and high-end leisure.

¹⁹ Carlos Tomasini, "No fueron creados para esto, pero cómo nos hacen el paro...12 cosas que todos hemos hecho en Sanborns," last modified February 23, 2016, <http://www.chilango.com/general/nota/2016/02/23/clasicos-chilangos-de-sanborns> [accessed January 30, 2017].

²⁰ "Sanborns Scrapbook," *Ayer y Hoy*. Company document produced in 1965. ASH. "Ayer, como hoy, Sanborns se mueve a ritmo del tiempo:

Its success as an elite social institution was showcased during the inauguration of the new Sanborns department store in The House of Tiles. Despite the ongoing Revolution and Anti-American backlash, the company flourished and developed into one of Mexico City's most prestigious restaurants and social clubs for local elites. Meanwhile, Sanborns's wholesaling and retailing business connected U.S. manufacturers with Mexican markets.

Throughout the twentieth century, going to Sanborns served a regular part of the daily lives for powerful Mexican men and women who gathered in the restaurant to drink coffee and eat with other members of the privileged class. Yet this dissertation has shown that, revolutionary soldiers, outside unions, striking workers, ordinary citizens, powerful black athletes, militant political groups, and generations of queer men collectively challenged and contested the social meaning of the commercial space. These people resisted against company-imposed projects, Mexican state power, U.S. foreign policy, imported racial politics, and hostile social environments.

In order for Sanborns to expand its customer base beyond local elites, the company implemented changes in the 1920s-1930s that systematically incorporated Mexican culture within its everyday business practice. Influenced by an intense wave of Mexican nationalism, Sanborns capitalized on these trends and commercialized Mexican culture into its store. For example, the redesigned Sanborns waitress uniform appropriated elements of indigenous clothing to create the aesthetic of authenticity. My dissertation has shown through a partial examination of Sanborns menus that between the 1920s-1930s, the restaurant added traditional corn-based menu items.

Working-women continue to play an essential role in the everyday operations of the Sanborns chain. The company's policy on hire a predominantly female workforce of cooks, cleaners, vendors, and waitstaff means that women must decide whether to resist male managers. The gendered form of paternalism that developed at Sanborns continues to play into the daily work

experiences of women at Sanborns. Future research is necessary to explore how Sanborns's gendered paternalism evolved while the company expanded into a national chain between the 1950s-present. Studying Mexico's private sector offers unique challenges for researchers who are limited by the availability of records in public archives. Nevertheless, a supposition develops from analyzing the labor experiences of workers from different chain stores in Mexico. In the case of Sanborns, the company operated their stores in states that have their own unique regional histories that lent influence on the work conditions inside Sanborns. Local factors such as the strength of outside union organizations complicated how Sanborns implemented their system of gendered paternalism. For example, in Acapulco, Sanborns employees are collectivized under the Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM).

Three separate labor eruptions occurred among workers at Sanborns stores in Acapulco in 1993, 1994, and 1995. A Sanborns waitress named María who participated in a month-long strike recalled that the CTM acted to defend workers from abuse by company managers. "We managed to get rid of the mistreatment of workers by the bosses, such as asking you [to do things that were not part of your job] and to stop screaming or insulting you...it was a strike against the boss's harassment of men and women."²¹ María recognized Sanborns operated a gendered system of paternalism that tried collectivizing workers under the company-controlled union. "They call it the 'Big Sanborns Family' because the business and the union work hand in hand," she said. When asked whether she thought her relationship with management and workers was paternalistic because

²¹ Gutiérrez, María. Interview with the author. Personal interview. Acapulco, Guerrero, Mexico, June 8, 2018. "Se logró que se quitaran los malos tratos a los trabajadores de parte de los jefes, como que te pidieran las cosas por favor o dejaran de gritarte o te insultaran y todo...entonces fue una huelga contra el hostigamiento por parte de los jefes a los hombres y a las mujeres."

the majority of employees were women, she responded that, “the concept of the ‘Big Sanborns Family’ is that we are one and Mr. job pays us well...the secretary tells us that we must all work together for the good of the company and that as workers, we must do it in the best way in order to have a good relationship.”²² Rodolfo “El Toro” Escobar Ávila, a PRI supporter and president of the CTM chapter in Acapulco, explained during an interview his thoughts about Sanborn paternalism and the company’s use of family as imagery to describe their workforce. According to Escobar Ávila, Sanborns “eats their children. Here, [at the CTM] our union is to protect ourselves.”²³ Surely, most Sanborns managers and workers would disagree with this strongly worded sentiment. Yet it reflects an underlying tension between organized labor groups and the Sanborns system of labor. Working women understood this system better than anyone else; women workers provided essential labor to the daily operations of the company and dutifully carried out their duties, but they often rejected paternalism when they felt disrespected or mistreated by Sanborns managers. Workers, organized labor, and Sanborns customers motivated women to challenge Sanborns paternalism in order to feel respected as workers.

²² Gutiérrez, María. Interview with the author. Personal interview. Acapulco, Guerrero, Mexico, June 8, 2018. “Sí se dice la gran familia Sanborns porque el sindicato con la empresa está de la mano...el concepto de la ‘gran familia Sanborns’ porque somos uno y el señor trabaja de la mano para que nos paguen bien...el secretario nos dice que debemos trabajar todos en unión por el bien de la empresa y de los trabajadores así que hay que hacerlo de la mejor manera y así se ha llegado a una buena relación.”

²³ Escobar Ávila, Rodolfo. Interviewed by author. Acapulco, Guerrero, Mexico. June 8, 2018. “Esta compañía se come a sus hijos. Aquí, nuestra unión es para protegernos.”

Sanborns began as a place of leisure for Mexico's upper class but it evolved in the 1960s into a sexual space that became shared among classes. Reflecting the general growth of Mexico City's middle-class neighbors, the company expanded under the ownership of Walgreens and molded their company into a site of middle-class leisure. Sanborns became the preeminent queer Space in Mexico City. For generations of middle-class Mexican men, it became a secure locale for men looking to have sex with other men. Men cruised each other in front of the magazine stands, outside the stores, and had sex in the bathrooms. Men also went there simply to hang out with other men, too. Men queered Sanborns by entering the stores as consumers and manipulating the store architecture to make it useful for themselves. Men communicated with other queer men through their habitual practices and coded language that safeguarded their secret intentions from the hetero-environment that surrounded them. Men feared the possibility of being caught by the Mexican police who in the 1970s-1980s, conducted mass raids on well-known male cruising sites and places waited on by sex workers. Their social marginalization made them vulnerable to aggressive police tactics that included threats of intimidation, bribery, and repression. Men also needed to navigate around Sanborns employees who used their own tactics to enforce gendered norms in the bathroom. Today, queer men continue to visit Sanborns to meet and have sex with other men. The proliferation of Sanborns stores throughout the country has shaped local urban environments and the collective identities of the customers who use the store.

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Canada

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Boletín de la Secretaría de Educación Pública

Business Week

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Christopher Street (New York)

Coronet

Del Otro Lado

Don Quijote

Drug Trade Weekly

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El Imparcial (Mexico City)

El Informador (Mexico City)

El Mundo Al Día (Mexico City)

El Nacional (Mexico City)

El Pais (Mexico City)

El Porvenir (Mexico City)

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El Pueblo (Mexico City)
El Sur: Periódico de Guerrero (Acapulco)
El Universal (Mexico City)
Excélsior (Mexico City)
Hoy
International Guild Guide
International Guild Guide Gay Listings
La Jornada (Mexico City)
La Raza (Mexico City)
La Tierra de México
La Voz de México
Macho Tips
Mefistófeles
Mexican Folkways
Mexico This Month
Milenio
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New York Times
Novedades
Nuestra Ciudad
Pan American
Proceso
Reforma (Mexico City)
Revista de Revistas
Revista para todos
Social
Spartacus
Spartacus International Gay Guide

Sucesos para Todos

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