

arrived on Chaska to work on the beet fields in 1929, remembered, according to the book **Barrios Norteños: St. Paul and Midwestern Mexican Communities in the Twentieth Century** (2000) by Dionicio Nodín Valdés, “We could have gone back to Mexico, but if we stayed they offered to help us. They would give us a home to live in and we got a raise of \$5 per family member. (More workers!). We lived in Chaska for three years....There were some people that did not have anything to eat,” she noted.

Everyone worked in the fields. But Antonio also played baseball on the area between the company homes and the sugar factory, as there were few cars then. He attended kindergarten school in Chaska and continued through a portion of his 7th grade. In the article, “During recess the kids would play in City Square Park across from the school—now the site of Wells Fargo at Chestnut and Fourth streets. He recalled the Civil War cannon that sat on the park (later melted down for a WWII metal drive). He recalls that it was ‘Mr. Smith’ who planted some of the ‘great big trees’ on the park.”

In the 1930s, with the Great Depression, Antonio’s father decided to leave Chaska. “We had to go to Mexico, because the government of Mexico said there were going to be opportunity to make farms and work over there.” Pedro Delgado acquired farmland through the government programs, and with the money he had saved in Chaska. Antonio and family now tends to the farmland, located not too far over the Mexican border.

Antonio has dual citizenship, and with his wife, Maria Delores Saldaño, and their 12 children continued to work on the farms.



When he left Chaska during 7th grade, it was the end of his schooling, but he never forgot the importance of education. He has put many of his children through college. He also passed on many ethics to his family, including the importance of work. It is something that he worked its way down to his many dependents. Antonio Delgado never smoked a cigar, never taken a drink of alcohol. His family, church, and work—that is all he’s known.



SHAKOPEE HERITAGE SOCIETY
2109 Boulder Pointe, Shakopee, MN 55379

952-693-3865

shakopeeheritage.org



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Pedro and Antonio Delgado

Migrants 1924-1932



Migrant workers stayed in homes on farms or in a row of small homes across from the sugar factory.

“Everybody that worked in the fields for the factory had their houses to come and pass the winter in...no pay, nothing,” said Antonio Delgado. “In some housesit or seven (families); in some houses, four or five; in ours, only three.”



Antonio Delgado was 87 years old in 2009. And as he laughed and smile, with gestures and jokes, he remembers growing up in Chaska, called *Sugar City* at that time.

Born on October 29, 1921, Antonio lived in Chaska from 1924 to 1932. His family was among the many Latino/a who, with many other Latino migrant laborers in Chaska and Shakopee, tended and harvested beets for the American. Crystal Sugar Company (which was the American Beet Sugar Company until 1934.)

The introduction of Latino/a and Chicano/a migrant workers from Texas in 1934, entire families came up for the sugar beet planting season (April/May to June) and harvest (September, October, and November), with the American Crystal providing housing, according to the <https://www.mnopedia.org/group/american-crystal-sugar-company>. For the laborers, however, the work was hard and the housing was often dilapidated. During the winter months they either retired south or settled in the Twin Cities area.

Chaska and Shakopee was surrounded by sugar beet fields, planted to feed the sugar plants. The factory, like the brickyard before it, established



Chaska and Shakopee as something more than forgotten farm towns, according to Mark W. Olson in an article in ***Chaska Herald*** on October 23, 2009 called *Fields of memory: Former beet farmer revisits his childhood home of Chaska*. It was built on the backs of migrant farm workers like Antonio and his parents, Pedro Delgado and Margarita Rodriguez. Many of those temporary workers, mostly from Texas and Mexico, vanished from records. “They moved from state to state, depending on the planting or harvest season.” But Antonio Delgado and his family put roots down in 1924 to 1932. Along with a few other Latino/a families lived in the sugar company housing across from the sugar factory, and were the area’s earliest residents of Mexican heritage. The small houses were torn down and are now the site of a townhouse development.

Antonio Delgado described the work of migrant farmer as “work in one field and finish that work and get work in another field, another field, another field.” While much of the meet harvesting work is now mechanized, in the 1920s and 1930s it was a labor-intensive and back-breaking work. And it required an influx of migrant labor, according to the article.

Pedro Delgado, Antonio’s father, had served in the



U.S. Army in WWI as a Mexican citizen for a few years, and in April of 1924 the family moved to Chaska from California. Antonio was only 2 1/2 years old when the family moved to Minnesota. It is possible that a recruiter from the American Beet Sugar Company actively got thousands of Latino laborers from the southern United States, primarily in Texas.

Antonio Delgado began working with his parents in the fields at age 6, thinning the beets—a process involving pulling out young beets so the remaining beets would mature. “They showed me how, and I keep on going,” he said in the ***Chaska Herald*** article.

“For \$8 an acre, his family would work ‘from sunrise until sunset,’ Delgado said. Did they get tired? ‘You get tired when you work all day,’ Delgado replied, matter-of-factly.”

Many of the beets were harvested and began piling up at the sugar factory. Then many of the manual workers would return to Mexico. Some would travel to Lubbock or Amarillo, Texas, where they would pick cotton. But Delgado’s remained because of school. There were about four or five Latino families with children in school.

Staying in Chaska or Shakopee weren’t always easy for migrant workers. According to Guadalupe Cruz, who

