"May Our Country Never Need Bread": The Life and Times of the Pardo-Gonzalez Bakery

Joann Haskins Cimino

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/sunlandtribune

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/sunlandtribune/vol19/iss1/9
"MAY OUR COUNTRY NEVER NEED BREAD":
The Life and Times of the Pardo-Gonzalez Bakery

By JoANN HASKINS CIMINO

The bread and biscuit bakers of Philadelphia in 1788 coined a phrase, "May our Country never need bread."¹ The Jose and Rosalia Gonzalez family seemed to have taken this charge seriously as they came over from Spain to provide bread for at least two decades for the immigrant community of Ybor City.

In 1905 Jose and Rosalia and their children left their home in the village of San Martin de Luina in Asturias, Oviedo, Spain. They came to join the brothers of Rosalia: Saturinino and Gumersindo Pardo, who had established a bakery in Ybor City. After arrival, the Gonzalez family moved into a home on Eighth Avenue - next door to the bakery.

The bakery was a two-story building. The rear section of the first floor contained four wood-fired ovens for bread baking. Later, in
the 1920's the ovens were fired with gas burners. Upstairs were housed the young apprentices who came to learn to bake and begin a new life in Tampa. Like the old patriarchal times, daughter America Escuder tells that, "when you hired a young man, you provided housing, as well." Spanish speaking workers were usually hired at the bakery. Neighbors were mainly Italians with the exception of the Gonzalez relatives. An unusual fact was that, "the Italian people learned to speak Spanish but few Spaniards spoke Italian."2

The bakery deliveries required six horse-drawn wagons. The horses were housed in stables behind the bakery. Bread was delivered to homes in West Tampa and Ybor City. An early delivery for breakfast and lunch began at 4AM and from 2PM to 5PM for the dinner delivery. Many of the customers were cigar factory workers and Cuban bread was primary for a typical breakfast of 'pan y cafe con leche' and for sandwiches at lunch.

The drivers of the wagons had an assistant, usually a young gentleman, 12-14 years old, and sometimes younger. These helpers were called "secretarios." A bonus for them was free bread for the family. The driver and "secretario" would gather loaves in baskets and divide the block to deliver the bread by impaling it on a large nail located next to the front door. The horses learned where to stop on the routes, but a weight "pesa" was placed in the road to prevent the horse and wagon from moving. The horses were equipped with blinders and in the summer wore straw hats. All drivers had to wear white shirts and dark trousers.

A former "secretario" who remembered in his early teen years helping with deliveries was Ralph Reyes who worked at Pardo and Gonzalez Bakery. Reyes remembers bread costing five cents a loaf and recalled, "earnings of $12.00 a week."3 He later owned his own bakery after a series of training, first to work dough by hand, and to make his own yeast. He attended THEORY OF BAKING AND COOKING SCHOOL in Miami in 1943. After returning from service in World War II he was a Master Baker and eventually owned his own "Capri Bakery."

Tampa celebrity and former baseball player Al Lopez, Sr., recalls, "a family member became III and though he was only nine years old he knew how to carry on! The bread must be baked and delivered."4

Pardo Gonzalez Bakery produced five different loaves of bread. The regular long Cuban loaf and a short, fat Italian type. A soft, dense "Vienna" bread had added shortening. It was formed in a short loaf, rolls, and a twisted loaf with small "horns" on each end. A large round loaf was popular for holidays. At Easter, colored eggs were baked on top.

At Christmas time the bakery would accept the traditional suckling pigs to be roasted in their large ovens. These were brought in large pans, already fragrant with lemon or sour orange, garlic and sage seasonings. There were as many as 40-50 pigs roasted in the four large ovens.

The Gonzalez home had contained four bedrooms, living room and dining room. A favorite area was a large, screened porch that extended around the house. There were two tables on the porch that could accommodate forty people. The children would use the porch on rainy days for roller skating. All yards contained fig trees. Figs were mostly eaten raw and the surplus was stewed.
Pardo-Gonzalez Bakery – 2011 8th Avenue, Ybor City, Florida.
Gonzalez enjoyed visits with his friend Casimiro Hernandez at the Columbia Restaurant and have his usual cup of caféc solo. Nearby the Falsone family owned a bar. In the evening the parents would send a son to pick up a pitcher of beer from Falsone for the dinner table.

In the 1920 City of Tampa Directory, the following Tampa bakeries were listed:

Alessi, Nicola, 734 Cherry St., West Tampa
Allen, E H. Co., 701 Polk St.
Anastasie C. & Co., 1904 7th Ave.
Barbera, Antonio, 636 Main St., West Tampa
Bostain’s Bakery, 110 W. Lafayette
Colom, Antonio, 916 7th Ave.
Columbia Bakery, 2118 7th Ave.
Diaz, J. & Bro., 1320 7th Ave.
Federal System of Bakeries, 116 Lafayette
Ferlita, Rosario, 2516 15th Ave.
Garcia, Silverio, 1818 9th Ave.
Gareiga, Serafin, 1714 Nebraska Ave.
Georginni, Pietro, 2704 Nebraska Ave.
Golden State Bakery, 2311 Florida Ave.
I & L Bakery, 1320 Franklin
Joyce, H. C., 1332 7th Ave.
LaBarbera, Guiseppe, 2605 15th Ave.

America G. Escuder particularly remembers Manuel Securi, a baker who was especially skilled in making "Cocas". "This was a sweet breakfast bread, elaborately arranged with fruit such as apple and peaches. This bread was cut in wedges and sprinkled with sugar. These are common in some areas of Spain."5

On the origins of Cuban bread, America Escuder believes, "it may have been a variation of long French bread which contained no shortening and Spanish bread which contained a small amount of shortening and no sugar."

Anthony Moré, whose family is still active in the bakery business believed that "Cuban bread was developed in Cuba during the Spanish-American War."6 His father, the late Juan Moré, learned to bake after being drafted into the Spanish Army. Juan found his way to Tampa after the war bringing the Cuban bread recipe with him.

America remembers Jewish neighbors who would invite their family to celebrations. "Spanish people did not have prejudices.
There was a unity among the immigrant families."

Adam Katz and the Steinberg Shop were the shops that the family purchased their yard goods, shoes, bed linens, towels and home needs. America recalls patent leather Mary Jane’s for Sunday and oxfords and high tops for winter days. Gonzalez paid his bill once a year for these family supplies.

Jose and Rosalia wanted their family to benefit from their new homeland and make a contribution to the community. Rosalia Sullivan was the first immigrant graduate of Hillsborough High School in 1913. Both Rosalia and America were among the first young immigrants to attend Florida State College for Women (FSU). America attended Barnard College in New York for further studies in Nutrition and Rosalia Sullivan was the first Spanish teacher on Channel 3 - WEDU - in the 1960’s. Anita Quintana and America Escuder were charter members of Altrusa International of Tampa Bay. Anita Quintana was in the employment of the Social Security Administration for many years and lived in retirement in Miami. Youngest daughter, Zenaida Nunez, now deceased, managed real estate in Pinellas County.

Oldest son, Anibal, remained in the bakery business until it closed due to the demise of the cigar industry, "brought about by the increase of supermarkets and community growth especially after World War II." He then joined his wife, Anita "Nena" at Casa Arte in Ybor City which was well known for many years as a center for classes and supplies in sewing and needlework. Their son, Rene Gonzalez, is founder and thirty-two year director of the Spanish Lyric Theatre.

The youngest son, Ricardo "Tayo", became affiliated with the Red Star Yeast Company for many years and returned to California.

ENDNOTES


2 Interview with America Escuder, September 17, 1982.

3 Interview with Ralph Reyes, September 1988.


5 Interview with America Escuder, September 17, 1982.

6 Food Section, Tampa Tribune, February 19, 1976, 3E.

7 Interview with Rene Gonzalez, September 2, 1993.