



MASSACHUSETTS CULTURAL COUNCIL
FOLK & TRADITIONAL ARTS PROGRAM

FIELDNOTES

Fieldworker(s) [(Initials) Name]: (KK) Kate Kruckemeyer, ()

Accession Numbers:

KK-07-03-FN

Fieldnotes

- - -C

Audio recordings

- - -CS

Photographic documentation

KK-07-03-M

Additional materials

Initial Contact: _____

Contact Date: _____

Related Accession Numbers: - - , - - , - -

Individual/Group/Event: Puerto Rican food establishments in Springfield and Holyoke

Address: various, see attached

City: _____ Zip: _____ County: Hampden

Phone: Daytime: _____ Evening: _____

E-mail: _____ Website: _____

Contact person: _____

Title: _____

Location of Interview: _____

Street Address: _____

City: _____ Zip: _____ County: _____

Special Needs (including translation): _____

Traditions documented on visit (traditional art/skills, occupational experience, ethnic or religious community): Puerto Rican restaurants, food stand, and bakery in Springfield and Holyoke

Traditions noted for follow-up: _____

Other Possible Contacts: _____

Summary Description: see attached

This is not by any means an exhaustive list of Puerto Rican restaurants in Springfield and Holyoke. The following restaurants and contacts within those businesses represent some of the better-known establishments in the area, based on my perspective as a local resident (including newspaper coverage) and also the recommendations given to me by many contacts in the community.

Probably because these are businesses in a notoriously financially difficult industry, I did not necessarily find the proprietors (while all were quite pleasant) to be very interested in the idea of presenting about food, with the exception of Hector Ortiz of La Campesina.

It is out of the realm of my expertise to say anything definitive about the relative authenticity of the food at these restaurants. I would be happy to eat in all of them again (and in many cases I already have). All serve their food cafeteria-style and most seem to do catering as well. Fernandez Family Restaurant is the largest of these restaurants and perhaps because of the volume seems least likely to make individual dishes to order. By contrast, I have sometimes had dishes made to order at Mi Plaza, and Salsarengue told me they always cook platanos individually. La Campesina seemed to have more seafood dishes than the other restaurants, and Salsarengue's food seemed the least heavy/greasy (my one complaint about typical Puerto Rican *comida*).

SPRINGFIELD ESTABLISHMENTS

In addition to La Campesina (below), there are two other restaurants in the North End, according to Vanessa Pabon of TOLD: Castellanos on Main Street, and Latino's Kitchen. There is also a truck, Leissa's Pinchos, which sells Puerto Rican street food across from the plazita that is behind the Greek church on Main Street. [I tried to get staff of the truck to pass my number on to the owner, but this didn't work.]

La Campesina Restaurant

2595 Main Street
Springfield, MA 01107
(413) 739-8785 (restaurant)
(413) 204-1102 (cell)

La Campesina Restaurant is the establishment consistently mentioned when I ask about Puerto Rican food in Springfield; while there are other restaurants, this seems to be the best known, and also gets the most mention in the press.

Hector Ortiz and Maria Cardona are the husband and wife team who run La Campesina. The restaurant has been open 6 years, and serves food 7 days a week from 7am until 7 or 8pm. They can and do cater events and would be happy to do so for the schools. Prior to opening the restaurant, Maria and Hector owned a sofrito company for a number of years, preparing and bottling sofrito, the popular Puerto Rican cooking condiment. They started this company, Maria's Puerto Rican Products, in 1991 and sold it before they opened the restaurant. Hector Ortiz, the husband in the couple that owns the restaurant, worked for 20 years as a school counselor in Springfield; before this he worked as a teacher in Puerto Rico for 16 years.

Hector said that he and Maria would be happy to present about foodways. Both of them are cooks. Maria primarily speaks Spanish and would want an interpreter (Hector

said she doesn't like it when he translates for her, because she says he puts his own spin on what she is saying). Hector is very outgoing and congenial, and I imagine he'd make a good presenter. Hector has some contacts with musicians here and in Puerto Rico, and he occasionally books acts to perform at La Campesina. He is interested in arranging tours to the Island, as well, in which he could give people a more intimate and affordable look at life in Puerto Rico than most tourists get. He proudly showed me photos of the house he and Maria are building in the countryside for their frequent trips to visit.

Although I haven't researched in enough depth to say with any certainty who would be the *best* person in the area to present on foodways in terms of knowledge and repertoire, Hector Ortiz (and Maria Cardona with translation) seem like a logical choice given Hector's personality. [4/26/07]

El Bohío Restaurante

809 Liberty Street
Springfield, MA
(413) 781-7700

I visited this restaurant during a previous contract year [on 12/8/05] and spoke briefly with proprietor Miguel Martinez. Radio personality Anita Rivera had mentioned that they did special foods for Christmas and Three Kings day. I was hoping perhaps this meant that a special event was organized at or by the restaurant; however Miguel told me that while they would certainly cater events such as these if customers requested, they did not do anything special at the restaurant itself. The restaurant has been open about a year and a half. The small space was quite full with a primarily but not exclusively Hispanic clientele when I visited at about 2pm. This appears to have been an old-fashioned lunch counter establishment that the family took over; meals are served at tables, at a lunch counter, and take-out. I bought one of their chicken pasteles, and found it quite tasty. They are open 7 days a week, 6am-7pm.

SPRINGFIELD AND HOLYOKE

Old San Juan Bakery

2460 Main Street Springfield (413) 739-5969
408 High Street Holyoke (413) 534-5555

The owners of this two-outlet bakery are Oscar and Alicia Rosario; I was told by staff that the best way to speak with them was to call Oscar at the Holyoke location in the mornings, however my experience says this is easier said than done.

Old San Juan has a full line of baked goods and also serves breakfasts and sandwiches. Many of the items on sale are typical of all types of bakeries, but some are Puerto Rican specialties, for instance the *flan*. Everything I have had there has been extremely sweet.

HOLYOKE

Again, the following three establishments are certainly not the only ones serving Puerto Rican *comida* in Holyoke, but for a variety of reasons they are the ones best known to (and most frequented by) the fieldworker.

Fernandez Family Restaurant

161 High Street
Holyoke, MA 01040
(413) 532-1139

The Ada Fernandez Family Restaurant is a long-established business on the main business street of Holyoke. The business is currently run by two of Ada Fernandez's daughters, Jackie (Fernandez?) and Ada Rodriguez. Jackie is the person with whom I have spoken most often, however Jackie says that her sister Ada is really the person to talk with about traditional cooking. Ada, however, will be on maternity leave for spring and summer 2007.

Fernandez Family Restaurant does a booming lunchtime business serving working people in downtown Holyoke, and a brisk take-out business prior to dinner. The restaurant is open from 10-5 on Monday-Friday, but I have often found that they have sold out much of their food by 4pm or so. The restaurant is available as a banquet hall on Saturdays, and they do cater. Fernandez Family Restaurant has often been named "Best of the Valley" for Spanish food in the local alternative weekly.

Mi Plaza

325 Main Street
Holyoke, MA 01040
(413) 532-2700

Mi Plaza is a newer restaurant which is a stand-alone business within Nuestras Raices's microenterprise space. The restaurant is owned by fireman Ray Ortiz and his wife Ana (Ortiz?), who works for the Holyoke Public Schools. Gladys Malave is the head cook and manages the business on a day-to-day basis. Gladys speaks a limited amount of English; Ana is the best English-speaking contact for the restaurant, and she is typically there between 5 and 6pm. The restaurant is open 7am-6pm.

Like the other restaurants listed here, Mi Plaza is a cafeteria-style business, but I have found that there are often dishes on the daily menu (like *mofongo*) that Gladys prepares individually; service can take longer but the food here can also seem fancier because of this additional preparation.

Salsarengue Restaurant & Seafood

392 High Street
Holyoke, MA 01040
(413) 533-1894
Jose Bou cell: (413) 320-3148

Salsarengue is a new arrival in the local restaurant scene (October 2005), but has gained a relatively high profile for good food and because of the involvement of proprietor Jose Bou (pronounced bow, as in bow and arrow) in local revitalization efforts. Unlike many Holyoke establishments, Salsarengue is also open 7 days a week, and until 7pm, which is late by local standards.

Jose Bou and his wife ran a catering business for a number of years at the end of his tenure as a counselor at U.Mass. Amherst; after retirement he opened Salsarengue, and continues to do catering as well. Jose told me on my first visit that he is working with

Nuestras Raices on their project to open a *lechonera* (roadside pig roast/food stand) at the Tierras de Oportunidades farm site (see KK-06-09); the *lechonera* should be opening in May or June of 2007, and Jose will be in charge of it. He says he will also be coordinating the concert series at the treehouse performance site at the farm.

Jose Bou was recommended by contacts as particularly knowledgeable about both foodways and music; he was relatively modest and not entirely forthcoming on first meeting, but my sense is that he is in fact an important contact in these areas and could be cultivated as a resource and potentially as a presenter, and should certainly be used as a food vendor when opportunity arises.