



Notes from the Archive

Seaver Center for Western History Research
Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County
September 2019

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THE COLLECTION

The Mercedes Prado Ferrell Photograph Collection contains 42 digital images, dated about 1905 through 1950. Many photographs show the Prado family living in a company town that operated as the Simons Brick Company plant number three located near Montebello, California. The common red bricks produced at Simons were used to construct many well-known structures, including the original 1913 wing of the Natural History Museum and UCLA's Royce Hall.

El Pueblo de Simons, as it was known, was populated with a labor force recruited mainly from the Mexican states of Michoacán, Jalisco and Guanajuato. The town had its own elementary school and post office, stores and restaurants. There was an orchestra, brass band, as well as baseball and softball teams and Fiesta beauty queens to be represented in local parades and sports events.

Mercedes and her family were introduced to me by Museum docent Barbara Sanchez, who was a classmate of Mercedes' daughter Shelley. Following my visit in 2016 to the home of Mercedes with my colleague John Cahoon, she agreed to loan a selection of items to the museum. The Seaver Center scanned each item and returned the originals. The collection includes family portraits and snapshots. They provide glimpses of the surroundings and daily life at the brickyard, including a portrait of the Simons orchestra.



Genaro "Henry" Prado (P-280-1)

Mercedes' father Genaro Prado was foreman and town sheriff. This photograph portrait provides rare visibility of an employed individual whereas the majority of the brickyard workers remain anonymous. He also owned a pool hall and the adjoining barber shop.



Portrait of music band. Genaro Romero Prado at far right holding bass fiddle. (P-280-6)

The 42 digital images can be seen on the Seaver Center's searchable [digitized collection page](#).

Betty Uyeda, Collections Manager

THE DONOR



Mercedes Prado, ca. 1936 (P-280-7)

Born September 11, 1920, Mercedes Prado became the 14th child to parents Genaro and Hermelinda (whose household would eventually total 16 children). The decade of the twenties was a very prosperous time at Simons, with bricks in high demand throughout the southland construction boom.

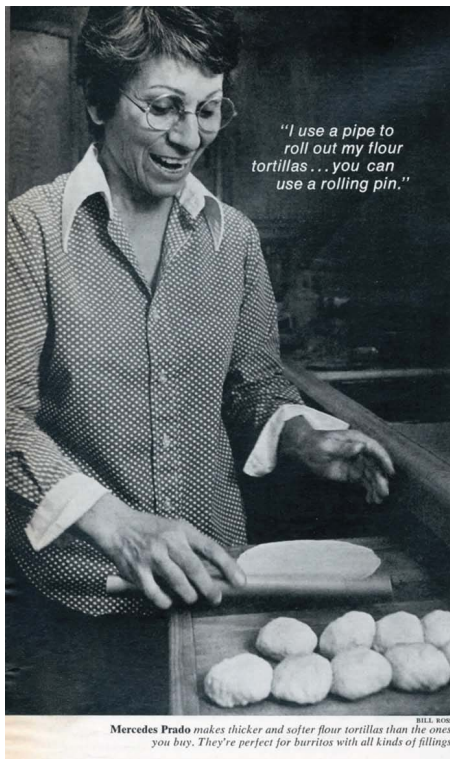
At age 7 Mercedes and her father gathered with the crowds at nearby Vail Field to witness the arrival of aviator Charles Lindbergh making a stop along his cross-country Spirit of St. Louis tour. Mercedes remembers a tall, lanky man with brown hair and "not bad looking."

She recalls the 1933 earthquake centered near Long Beach. As the shaking began, Mercedes described vacating her big house to safety across the way at her auntie's smaller house. When the shaking subsided, the aftermath of the earthquake devastated the brick production. New building codes (though later amended) forbid brickwork, and this prompted Simons to develop an earthquake-safe brick.

Being the family of the company foreman, their home had uncommon amenities: electricity, gas, running water in the kitchen sink and a telephone. But she and her family relied on an outhouse like everybody else.

She graduated Montebello High School at age 16. She later married to Vincent Ferrell and raised nine children (Randy, Cheryl, Shelley, Russell, Douglas, Robert, Frank, Michele, and James). In 1975 she embarked on a return to school at Rio Hondo College, taking classes in French, typing, shorthand, aerobics, tap dancing and swimming.

Mercedes' cooking tips were featured in the July, 1975 issue of Sunset Magazine. The circumstances of this opportunity came from the friendship between the Ferrells and the Tom family, operators of the New Moon Chinese Restaurant on San Pedro Street in Los Angeles. They often swapped home-cooked Mexican and Chinese meals.



"I use a pipe to roll out my flour tortillas... you can use a rolling pin."

Mercedes Prado makes thicker and softer flour tortillas than the ones you buy. They're perfect for burritos with all kinds of fillings.

Sunset Magazine, July, 1975, Courtesy of the Seaver Center

At age 76 Mercedes walked the entire route of the L.A. Marathon. She added that she could do cartwheels at age 76 too.

A4 SCVN-W **LOCAL** FRIDAY, MARCH 7, 1997

Woman, 76, takes on marathon with family support

By Dion Serrano
CORRESPONDENT

When the priest proudly announced her upcoming participation in the Los Angeles Marathon, Mercedes Ferrell shied away from the attention and stayed seated in the pew. After a third announcement, though, she finally stood to a chorus of cheers and well-wishes.

"Now I really feel the pressure," Ferrell, 76, joked.

She and her daughter, Cheryl Lineman, 55, walked the entire marathon route on Sunday.

But the pressure hasn't gotten to her yet. For the 76-year-old Ferrell, a marathon was just one of those hurdles you simply walk through.

"For me, this was one of the hardest things I've ever done," she said. All we did the (following) day was eat and rest."

Mercedes' daughter Shelly Ferrell, 47, was the first in the

MERCEDES FERRELL, left, and daughter Cheryl Lineman, 55, walked the L.A. Marathon.

family to run in the Los Angeles Marathon, leading Ferrell and Lineman decide to run this year.

"It wasn't even a dare," Lineman said. "After Shelly had run it, I asked Mom, 'Hey, Mom, you wanna try it?' and

she said, 'Uh, OK.' It was just something we wanted to do. Our goal was to finish."

Ferrell never backed down from any challenge, especially in the presence of her family. Despite asthma and an abdominal operation last August, she trained to finish the race by walking the Venice strand with the Los Angeles Roadrunners, a training club that helps L.A. Marathon participants. On alternate days, she would swim a mile at the recreation center in Compton.

"I was never able to do these things because I had to stay home and raise my kids," said Ferrell, a mother of nine. "I didn't learn how to swim until I was 55. But I did it. I always told my children that they can't be quitters."

On the day of the event, Ferrell found herself in like company, surrounded by others who would win simply by participating. She recalled sharing a thumbs-up and a smile with a man in his 40s recovering from a stroke. The sight of him going with slow, calculated steps, despite an immobile left arm, inspired the crowd and competitors, she said.

"I thought to myself, I'm better off than a lot of people. If they can do it, why shouldn't I try to finish?"

The family circle revolves around the constant give-and-take of its members. Ferrell credits her marathon success to her family, whose presence served as her guide.

"Cheryl held my hand and walked with me for most of the race," she said. "But my family was everywhere. My grandsons and sons would appear in different stages of the race, would walk with me, tell me how far and where to go. If you have a family's support, you can do anything."

Los Angeles Times, March 7, 1997, Newspaper clipping courtesy of the Ferrell Family



Keith Durlinger Staff Photographer

Mercedes Ferrell, 90, swims her morning laps at Smith Park Pool in Pico Rivera on Wednesday. Ferrell, a severe asthmatic, swims an hour everyday. She learned to swim at age 55, after the last of her nine children left home.

Whittier Daily News, July 29, 2011 Newspaper clipping courtesy of the Ferrell Family



Mercedes will turn 99 on September 11th



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The collections are a part of the History Department of the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County.
The Seaver Center opened in 1986 through a generous grant from the Seaver Institute.



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