



March 30, 2019

Renaissance Hotel

Fort Worth, Texas

PARTT 59<sup>TH</sup> Biennial Convention

Madame Director, Pan American Sisters of the Board, Madam Director General, our new friend and Alliance Zone One Director, and my fellow Pan American Sisters present here today. It is with great pleasure that I share with you the report of activities for the PART of Laredo over this biennium.

No different from our State Organization, our table faces the great opportunity to broaden our membership. This was the driving force behind what unfolded in the two years I have had the great honor of being the Laredo Table Director.

It was at the centennial celebrations of the founding of the Pan American Round Table in 2016 that I began to understand on a deeper level the history, breadth, and importance of the Pan American movement as so embraced by our founder Florence Terry Griswold. It was at this moment, when I became aware of how the essential needs of the women and children of the Americas were not too or at all different from those in the present day. With the support of several of my Laredoan sisters we began to put together a plan of self-rediscovery. After all to know where you are going, you must first look at where you have been.

In May of 2017 I was elected and installed as the PART of Laredo Table Director. Over the summer months with the essential support of my board we began to work on organizing our yearbook. Upon doing this work we realized that there were no digital source files containing the information for the handbook we so depend on. We had been manually editing our book for many years and the most recent digital documents were at best ten years old. The board dedicated ourselves to the retrieval and capture of digital source files for the entirety of our yearbook, all administrative reports, tools, and communications for our table. This took far longer than the summer months, a year to be exact, but our table now has truly living and workable source documents stored on the table's computer, an external drive, and a cloud.

We also established a Facebook page and an Electronic News Letter distributed monthly highlighting our Upcoming Meeting Agenda, member spotlight, previous meeting pictures, member community activity highlights, and birthdays. The work completed in the first year of my term, reclaimed our administrative resources and began to give our table a digital presence. Both important factors in creating visibility of and accessibility to our organization.

During this process our established membership re-connected with the duties, obligations, and main purpose of our organization. There was greater digital availability of our

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table agendas and activities and we noticed greater engagement from our members. We consequently instituted that our September meeting be dedicated to committee goal setting, budget planning, and friendship building among the table members.

As we worked on generating our digital files and presence, we frequently met with the Head of Special Collections at TAMU, Jeanette Hatcher, to validate information about our table's history in the archives which have been housed there for well over a decade. It was Ms. Hatcher's fervor and familiarity with our table's history that made the path towards deeper reconnection possible.

She highlighted the historic importance of our archive. The PART of Laredo archive is the oldest recorded, preserved, and living archive of an organization wholly run by women serving women in the Greater Rio Grande Valley Region. She impressed upon us the rarity of organizations such as the Pan American Round Table and highlighted the progressive nature of our whole organization when it was founded.

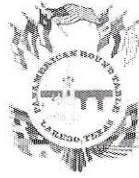
Just a short year before the Laredo Table was founded, in August of 1920 the 19<sup>th</sup> amendment finally granting women the right vote was ratified. This legitimized the political power and economic importance of women's involvement in the world beyond the home and social circles. Though we can agree we have yet to see robust recognition of this in our country, the legal framework granted by the constitutional amendment is key to any progress that has and is to be made on this front.

Florence Terry Griswold as we know was clever and very resourceful, she rode the wave of Women's Suffrage across the Americas to further her Pan American Vision. Because the Pan American Highway, a key component of the National Pan American Agenda at the time, was to make Laredo the "Gateway to the Americas" it was a logical choice both in terms of political support and media coverage to be the second table founded.

The Charter Members of the Laredo Table traveled with Florence and many of their San Antonio sisters to events in Mexico City. Through personal friendships, the Laredo Table was able to arrange for the committee to be received at the Castle at Chapultepec by Mexican President Alvaro Obregon and his wife, Maria Tapia, who was instrumental in the founding of the Mexico City table. The geographic, linguistic, and cultural advantages of the Laredo Table helped Florence in making headway to start tables in Mexico, particularly in Monterrey, Matamoros, and subsequently in Nuevo Laredo whilst she focused on championing tables along the southern border of Texas.

The history recorded in the Laredo archive is not just ours but it is beautifully intertwined with the history of many of our sister tables along the Rio Grande Valley and what now is the Alliance. It is a testament to the ability women have to make significant impact in our communities and beyond. This knowledge is what we needed to share with our table

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members to re-invigorate our mission and reconnect us with our purpose. It was through learning this that we knew where to go in the future.

We instituted an Ad Hoc Committee of Past Table Directors and designed a program named *Our Table in Review* which broke down the nearly 100 years of recorded history into ten ten-year sections. The Past Table Directors coordinate with members to present a decade of history at each of our meetings. We will complete the first five by May of this year. The remaining five will span the first year of Incoming Table Director Mary Ann Barry Garcia's term. We have found that through these presentations our membership has taken great pride in our history. The prospective members that come to our meetings have commented on how they have a better understanding of the table's mission. The consciousness that these installments have created lead our table to commit to actively share our history with our community. We hope that this will prove to be an effective way to generate a greater awareness of and subsequently a vested desire to belong to our organization.

In March of 2021 we will have our own Centennial Celebration. We selected March as it is Nationally recognized as Women's History Month. Our table has coordinated with the City of Laredo, TAMIU, the Webb County Heritage Foundation, IBC and Vantage Bank, as well as local women owned businesses to sponsor a monthlong exhibit at TAMIU highlighting the rich history of our table and the impact it has had in Women's History for our city, region, state, and hemisphere. It will be with great honor and pleasure that we share this milestone with all of our PARTT sisters as this is indeed a part of our shared history and future.

As many of you know I am a Texas transplant, In Laredo there is a saying: "Once you drink water from the Rio Grande you will be a part of this place forever!" Laredo has become my home, the place where I raise my three young sons, and have found my people.

I am grateful for the kindness, patience, and grace my table and all my sisters throughout the state and alliance have shown me on this journey. May we remain forever One for All and All for One. Una Para Todas y Todas para Una.

Respectfully submitted,



Nora Varela

PART of Laredo Table Director 2017-2019

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