

Historic cafe founder dies after illness at 91

By Matthew Aguilar

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The founder of the historic La Hacienda Cafe, one of the oldest Mexican restaurants in El Paso, died Tuesday in his home of Guadalajara, Mexico, at the age of 91.

Alfonso Lopez bought the abandoned building at 1720 Paisano in 1940 for \$1,000, and opened it as a cafe after his taco stand in Smelertown burned down. He ran the cafe by the banks of the Rio Grande with his wife Enriqueta until her death in 1981. The popular eatery was patronized by many of El Paso's politicians and power-brokers.

He died of a heart attack Tuesday after a long illness.

"He bought it for very little money and restored it, since it had been abandoned for over 20 years," granddaughter Virginia Lopez Gabriel said. "There were still bats in there. He started restoring it in 1941, and he had the restaurant all that time."

Lopez adopted Gabriel when she was 7, and she lived with her grandfather most of her life. She said he was a fun-loving person who was always happy to greet a new customer.

"He loved to go to the race track, and he was there every day that it was a race day," Gabriel said. "He was a good boss to all his employees, and a wonderful grandfather to me."

Gabriel lived with her grandparents in the restaurant for several years.

"After my grandmother passed away in 1981, he sold his restaurant, and everything kind of ended for him. In 1982, he moved back to Guadalajara. He went back to his birthplace to die."

Carlos Ratliff, who worked for Lopez at La Hacienda from 1959 to 1994, said he was saddened to learn of his former employer's death.

"I worked for him for (many) years. He was a very good and nice man with all the employees," Ratliff said.

Although Lopez's funeral



Special to the Times

Alfonso Lopez ran the La Hacienda Cafe with his wife Enriqueta until her death in 1981. Alfonso Lopez died Tuesday.

will be in Guadalajara, a memorial service in El Paso has been scheduled for 1 p.m. Friday at First Presbyterian Church, 1340 Murchison.

Survivors include his daughter Virginia R. Lopez; granddaughter Virginia Lopez Gabriel and three great grandchildren.