

A GRANDE DAME STRIPPED OF HER JEWELS: THE LAST DAYS OF JACOME'S DEPARTMENT STORE

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In 1896, Carlos Jacome opened "La Bonanza," a general mercantile store in downtown Tucson, Arizona. For eighty-four years the store flourished, evolving into a mainstay of Tucson's retail life: Jacome's Department Store. As the store grew and prospered, it developed a distinctive image. Derived from the Mexican-American background of its owners and managers, Carlos and his son, Alex, Sr., that special image set it apart from Anglo-owned retail establishments. Yet, like Tucson's other leading retailers, Jacome's had its roots in an era when the town was far removed from the mainstream of American economic life, and local concerns dictated its survival. Fundamental changes in American business organization, economy, and values between World War I and the 1920s portended an end to this localized focus. Many of those changes brought short-term benefits, but by the 1960s it was evident that they worked against the interests of Jacome's and other downtown independent retailers in Tucson.

An *Arizona Review* article in 1960 raised the question that was to confront independent retailers across the United States in the coming decades: Did concentration in the industry spell the end for many of them? Citing the bitter depression-era struggle for survival between chain stores and independent retailers, the article pointed to many signs

This article is excerpted from *Jacome's Department Store: Business and Culture in Tucson, Arizona, 1896-1980*. (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1989).

that the battle was escalating. The chains, especially the discounters, continued to wage war against fair trade laws and other legislation passed to protect small retailers. Congress focused its attention on collusion between lending agencies and major retailers because of charges that dominant firms had reserved prime shopping center locations and made them inaccessible to smaller stores. Independents were also finding it increasingly difficult to compete with the chain stores' mass media advertising and the price advantages they enjoyed from manufacturers.¹

Since the early 1930s, three department stores, Jacome's, Levy's, and Steinfeld's had dominated the downtown retail district. Together with specialty shops such as Dave Bloom and Sons men's store and Cele Peterson's women's shop, they shared a competitive-cooperative relationship which only enhanced their dominance. Thus, when Levy's joined the nationwide Federated Department Stores in 1960 and made plans to open a store outside this central business district in 1961, the first real wave of concern spread through downtown Tucson.

Up to that point, downtown retailers, exerting power and influence far beyond their numbers, had exhibited more concern with conditions in the local community than with those nationwide. The Penney's and Sears chains had located downtown years earlier, and retailers had come to accept their existence as part of Tucson life. Shopping centers on the outskirts of town offered some competition, but downtown retailers had remained comfortable because shopping patterns had not changed significantly. Much of their complacency also came from knowledge that industrial growth did not accompany Tucson's tremendous expansion after World War II, and thus the city remained geographically and economically isolated from the vast changes taking place in the mainstream of American economic life.

Levy's move, however, heralded the onset of a new era in the "Old Pueblo," whether the retailers wanted it or not. C. Wright Mills' 1956 description of the American power elite nicely fits Tucson's power structure before and after the pending change. According to Mills, traditionally a "set of cliques or crowds," composed of old upper-class people in the community, sat at the top of local society, judging and deciding the important community issues. These cliques, which in the case of Tucson were heavily dominated by downtown retailers, identified their principal socioeconomic interests with the immediate area. With the arrival of national corporations and their executives, whose

interests were broader in scope, local cliques were displaced. From this point on it became evident that success emanated from regional and national contacts as these corporate executives with national status assumed positions of power and authority in the community.²

Leon Levy's awareness of this nationwide shifting of power from local influentials to the corporate managerial elite and the parallels he might have drawn in relation to Tucson is open to question. Certainly the reasons he gave for joining Federated reflected a personal realization that in economic terms local independent department stores were losing power. As he stated, "Taxes were eating the store up and we could not borrow the funds to continue to expand and grow."³ In a business where strategic location is necessary for survival, Levy saw the downtown area beginning to lose its vitality and felt expansion beyond its borders was essential. Besides the favored status chains enjoyed in capital markets, Levy probably had another reason for joining Federated: scale economies afforded it by the national parent company in everything from distribution systems, buying practices, and management training to advertising programs and computer technology.⁴

To the downtown retailers, Levy's expansion plans were "old news." As early as 1958, the store had announced plans to branch out, initially choosing a site at Broadway and Wilmot. When these plans fell through shortly after Aaron Levy's death, Leon closed a deal with the owners of the El Con Shopping Center for a store to open in 1960. At the same time, Levy's went public, selling stock first to employees at seventeen to eighteen dollars per share.

What surprised the downtown merchant community was Levy's announcement that he planned to join Federated. According to Leon Levy, the initial contact from the chain came shortly after he returned from Europe in January of 1960. Meeting with Fred Lazarus and John Lavor of Federated, Levy received an interesting offer, which he explored further with Lavor over a three-day period. After this initial session, certain questions about the venture continued to concern him. For instance, would Levy's employees receive full credit for their years of service when absorbed into the Federated pension plan? With the resolution of this and other problems in the ensuing months, Levy's and Federated signed the papers closing the deal on August 1, 1960, at the Pioneer Hotel. Two months later the El Con store opened.⁵

As the 1960s advanced and other major businesses followed Levy's lead into the east and north sections of the city, Alex Jacome looked to

business organizations and political entities to stem the “pressure from outlying competition,” which was affecting his trade. To Lee Davis, chairman of the Tucson Trade Bureau’s Promotional Committee, he protested the discontinuance of “Downtown Wednesday Only Specials” which had drawn customers to the area.⁶ He also requested the Mayor and City Council to permit free parking for customers “because the majority of businesses require foot traffic to survive, whether a Central Business District or a Shopping Center.”⁷ Letters to state legislators directly attacked the chain stores, with Alex suggesting “Sunday closing laws [because the] . . . big chain stores were promoting Sunday more than ever.”⁸

Alex’s appeal for help from local and state government did not signify that he viewed them as benefactors. On the contrary, even while looking to the government for political help, his view of the state was an interesting blend of “the Latin tradition” and opinions long held by small businessmen. In both cases, the state was seen as having only negative functions: to regulate and to tax.⁹

Like the businessmen of his father’s generation, Alex also expressed strong beliefs in the free enterprise system and the operation of supply and demand in a competitive market. It is not clear how he reconciled his belief in competitive free enterprise and his support of fair trade laws legalizing price fixing to avoid “ruinous competition.”¹⁰ Nor did he explain how the chains were limiting, under the guise of competition, his ability to participate in the free market system. Perhaps like other American businessmen, Alex wanted not so much a “free” enterprise system but a “safe” free market for his particular business.

Yet he insisted that promotion of a competitive free enterprise system, both at home and abroad, was central to his political philosophy. When discussing United States expansion in international trade, for example, he urged the “promotion of the private enterprise system . . . to counter the Reds.”¹¹ The same fear of communist influence marked his views on domestic labor movements. Of particular interest was his belief that César Chávez, labor organizer of farm workers in the San Joaquín Valley of California, was a communist. Chávez’s movement represented a real threat to the established social system of which the Jacome family had become a part. In a real sense, Chávez’s questioning of the rationales by which local ethnic stratifications were maintained presented a challenge not only to American agribusiness but also to those like the Jacome family who had risen within the system.¹²

His views on bilingual programs closely corresponded to his general political philosophy. Although more conservative than views on bilingualism generally expressed by the Hispanic business community, they contained some of the same concerns. Most leading Hispanics felt that Hispanic students needed a strong English-language competency to compete in the business world. At the same time they urged that strengthening bilingual skills would prove advantageous in the international marketplace. Citing his own experience, Alex maintained that bilingual programs were not in the best interests of the Hispanic child. Spanish was spoken in his home, but at school he had no problem learning "English and other courses offered."¹³ A \$1.3 million grant awarded by the Ford Foundation to the La Raza Council for bilingual programs drew his special attention because he feared the program would "segregate and harm the Mexicans more than ever."¹⁴ Similarly, in a letter to Senator Paul Fannin, he opposed the 1975 Voting Rights Act providing that ballots and election materials must be bilingual.¹⁵

Civil rights activities and the movement for bilingualism also popularized new descriptive terms for Mexican Americans. Alex's reactions to those terms gives a strong indication of his identification with his culture. On October 29, 1976, the University of Arizona's College of Liberal Arts Committee on Mexican American Studies published "*Noticiero Chicano*," with articles containing such terms as "Chicano" and "La Raza." Upon receipt of the publication, Alex drafted a letter to Paul Rosenblatt, Dean of the College, stating, "If Arizona State can use the words 'Spanish Surnamed' . . . I think the University of Arizona should eliminate the use of the word 'Chicano' or 'Raza.'"¹⁶ Reflecting the sentiments of an earlier era when President Theodore Roosevelt coined the phrase "hyphenated Americans," Alex clarified his cultural identification in a letter to Senator Fannin. "Don't misunderstand me," he stated, "I am proud of my Mexican ancestry, but first of all I am an American and there is no hyphenation to it, just like the Italians, Danes, English and others who changed their names and became American."¹⁷

The civil rights activism of the 1960s produced legislation which increased governmental regulation of the store's personnel practices. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Executive Orders decreeing Affirmative Action programs, according to Alex F. Jacome, Jr., took "lots of extra time . . . especially in terms of paperwork." The dress styles and grooming of those entering the work force during the turbulent sixties also led to a stiffening of policies governing the store's dress code. No

longer could men wear beards or hair below their collars, and women were required to wear clothing deemed appropriate to their sex. Yet, for women, this dress code broadened from the 1950s edict of only black or navy blue dresses to a variety of colors and even pants.¹⁸

Jacome's continued to look for sales personnel to fit the profile developed by its founder many decades earlier. Loyalty and honesty were high on the list of desired attributes. In so doing, the store was going against the national trend, especially among the chains, of recruiting a low-skilled, high-turnover work force to reduce costs.¹⁹ Alex's father, Carlos, could have written his son's answer to a student in merchandising about the personal characteristics and attitudes Jacome's looked for when hiring workers: "show imagination . . . work hard . . . and be honest and above reproach."²⁰ Training for employees emphasized what Carlos had instilled in his children many years earlier, "Make your store a friendly store, and it will live forever."²¹ Yet customer complaints indicated that some personnel no longer adhered to that principle: "Jacome's isn't the friendly store it used to be" wrote one customer in 1967.²² To a similar complaint about an employee, Alex replied, "I'm sorry one of the many Jacomes was not around to be of help."²³

Theft and wage problems also surfaced in employee relations. The pension fund, based as it was on profits, made employees acutely aware of thefts. With the 1951 move to Pennington and Stone, however, the store had to employ undercover agents to monitor the sales help from time to time. Customer theft was also a problem. At Christmas time, off-duty police were utilized to prevent shoplifting. Curtains were shortened in the women's dressing rooms for better visibility, and the number of garments a person could take into a fitting room was restricted.²⁴

Blaming the inflation and recession of the early 1970s on Richard Nixon wanting "to be reelected," Alex wrote Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater that "Jacome's employees want a wage hike; the auto workers got theirs, and the steel workers got theirs. Where is this going to stop?" Although Goldwater's reply to this particular letter is not known, these two heirs of Arizona department store magnates corresponded regularly through the years, sharing similar views on a diversity of subjects. Whether discussing politics, foreign policy, or a multitude of other questions, they displayed an obvious intimacy in their correspondence which reflected a longstanding relationship. For instance, in 1962, Goldwater was aiming for the Republican presidential nomina-

tion, which would place him in the running against the Democratic incumbent, John F. Kennedy. After a Saturday night speech, Alex sent him a letter saying, "I hope you won't mind a little fatherly advice . . . in criticizing the Democrats I am afraid you lose friends." In the same letter he also suggested that Goldwater "not mention Mrs. Kennedy unless she commits a major crime. Your remarks regarding her were a little too vituperous [*sic.*]" In 1963, before the Kennedy assassination, Goldwater complained to Alex about Kennedy's Latin American policy, saying that the administration's total emphasis on economic aid would not solve the problem.²⁵

In contrast to their similar political views, the Senator and Alex took divergent paths in matters of business management. Goldwater's Department Store abandoned its family-owned and family-operated origins in the early 1960s and joined a chain, the Associated Dry Goods Corporation. Operating a number of select department stores from New York to Los Angeles, Associated was one of a number of groups which exercised financial control over its stores while allowing each to retain its individual character and personality.²⁶

Although chain stores like Goldwater's and Levy's were moving away from the family-oriented philosophy from which they sprang, family continued to dominate Jacome's management. In contrast, Levy's began to emulate the chain store practice of wooing graduates of prestigious business schools to its management team.²⁷ For example, shortly after joining Federated, Leon Levy brought Henry Quinto into Levy's management. Quinto, a highly experienced Harvard graduate and former employee of the Allied Stores Corporation, became Executive Vice President for the store and assumed the presidency in 1967. Together with Leon Levy, he helped elaborate explicit goals and procedures which replaced what had been, for the most part, unwritten policies. Levy's also increased executive salaries to attract others with credentials like those of Quinto.²⁸

While management of Jacome's remained under family control, both the family and the store managers were changing. In 1962, the popular merchandising manager and Alex's brother and right-hand man, Richard Jacome, died. He was the twelfth of thirteen children.²⁹ Three years later, the oldest, Carlos, Jr., died in Seattle, Washington, where he had moved at an early age.³⁰ By 1972, six of Alex's brothers and sisters were gone, and another generation of Jacomes was taking over the store's operation. Moving up in the ranks was Alex's son, Alex F. Jacome, Jr.,

promoted to sales manager and assistant to the merchandise manager in 1967. At the same time, Richard C. Jacome, Jr., became divisional merchandise manager of domestics and housewares, and Henry G. Jacome, Jr., assumed management of the men's furnishings and clothing departments.³¹ In 1972, Alex, Sr., stepped down as president of Jacome's and became Chairman of the Board. His son, Alex F., succeeded him.³²

Throughout the 1960s, management of the store brought excellent profits, which peaked at an all-time high of \$4,000,000 in 1967. While on a buying trip to Europe in April, 1968, Alex, Sr., received a letter from the store's comptroller, Gilbert Martinez, describing the "unusually busy April . . . [with a] 28 percent increase in sales." According to the letter, income taxes and the pension fund took a total of \$132,000. The import shop alone grossed \$9,000.³³

One reason for the store's continued prosperity was its mastery of marketing techniques. Jacome's utilized Spanish- and English-language newspapers in Mexico to promote its merchandise.³⁴ It capitalized on ordinary changes as well as unique events to publicize the business. For example, the *Department Store Journal* demonstrated how the store's advertising made almost everyone in Tucson aware that the popular piece goods and notions department had been moved from a central location to an out-of-the-way space in the basement.³⁵ The store sent customers special materials reminding them of its long tradition. Of special importance here was a "First Day of Issue" envelope with a commemorative stamp bearing Carlos' portrait as a member of the Constitutional Convention of 1912 to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of Arizona statehood.³⁶ Jacome's also conveyed a strong emotional message of attachment to its customers when in 1975 it initiated a special shopping day before Christmas for the physically handicapped. Established in honor of Alex F. Jacome's son, Gilberto, this day gave the physically handicapped in Tucson an opportunity "to do their Christmas shopping without having to contend with the hustle and bustle of the holiday crowds."³⁷

The same year Jacome's profits peaked, Levy's announced a new five million dollar department store at the El Con shopping center and mentioned Jacome's as a possible tenant for its existing store. The *Tucson Daily Citizen* reported on September 27, 1967, that "President Alex G. Jacome said today he has talked with El Con developers of the shopping center about taking over the Levy store, 'but only in general terms.' Jacome's has another thirteen years on a lease for its Stone

Avenue store, which Jacome said continues to be a profitable business."³⁸

Several factors supported a move to El Con. This was not the first time Jacome's had thought of opening another branch. As early as 1928, Carlos indicated "he was contemplating opening other stores." During that period of time, Carlos and Alex went to Phoenix to look at a specific site, were wine and dined by the property owners, and then decided after retiring to their hotel for the night that they had enough problems in Tucson. The next day the stock market crashed.³⁹

Also, the proposed move to El Con was one customers and competitors supported.⁴⁰ Henry Quinto personally took Alex through the old Levy's store and suggested he could "stay downtown and die on the vine, or come to El Con and take his chances." According to Quinto, Levy's motive for inviting in a competitor was the need for a strong anchor on the other side of the mall.⁴¹ Herb Bloom, who together with his brothers had opened a second store at El Con in 1963, also talked to both Alex and his son about taking the old Levy location. According to Bloom, he really "put the heat on because he wanted a local store close to their shop."⁴²

Yet Jacome's resisted. As Alex explained to a customer, the store would have to "borrow most of the capital to launch the enterprise" and splitting the business between the two stores would probably yield no profit.⁴³ The Steinfeld lease on the downtown store, which stipulated that Jacome's could not have another store within fifteen miles, was another major problem. Years later, Steinfeld's Jim Davis acknowledged that if Jacome's had challenged the lease in court, they might have broken it. There were precedents in other states. On the other hand, he believed Steinfeld's could have persuaded Jacome's not to go to El Con since it was only three miles away.⁴⁴

Jacome's was offered the Levy building at \$1.25 a square foot.⁴⁵ According to Holden Olsen, Executive Loan Officer with the Southern Arizona Bank, Alex did discuss the offer with people in the bank office. In Holden's opinion, he could have acquired necessary interim bank financing if he had secured permanent financing from an insurance company. Except for occasional extensions of payoff dates on outstanding notes, Jacome's credit record with the bank was fairly good. Olsen also felt Alex probably would have won approval of the interim bank loan at one-half percent over par, something Alex demanded and usually got because of his personal relationship with the bank president.

Yet, to Olsen's knowledge, the El Con offer never reached the loan proposal stage.⁴⁶ In order to assess the feasibility of acquisition, Alex hired an appraiser from California to look at the old Levy store. Taking this man's advice, he called the El Con Center owner and said, "We pass."⁴⁷

In February, 1968, Levy's closed the downtown store and on September 16, 1969, opened a six-million-dollar, 225,000-square-foot structure at the new location in El Con.⁴⁸ The store was built on the site of the old El Conquistador Hotel,⁴⁹ and the opening was celebrated with several parties. There was a press preview luncheon attended by representatives from several nationally known publications and a champagne party featuring Cary Grant.⁵⁰ A few months later, Levy's announced they were considering two more suburban stores, one ten miles east of the El Con site and the other ten miles west.⁵¹ Construction of a westside store in the Foothills Mall followed in 1982, but the eastside location remained undeveloped as late as 1985, when Federated Stores changed the name of Levy's to Sanger Harris.

The disintegration of the central business district, almost coinciding with the El Con Shopping Center opening in 1960, continued relentlessly after Levy's closing of its downtown store. Survival of the remaining businesses required a number of strategic changes. Most pressing was the need for cohesive action to deal with problems such as parking, advertising, zoning, and rising taxes. As early as the 1950s, downtown retailers were aware of many of these problems. Yet, as reported by the *Daily News Record* in 1972, they had made little progress.⁵² A 1979 headline in the *Arizona Daily Star* declaring, "Retailers Admit Infighting Slows Downtown Plans," showed little had changed in almost two decades.⁵³

Number one on the list of problems was parking. Downtown customers had to search for a parking space and, if lucky enough to find one, then deal with a parking meter. They encountered neither problem at a shopping center. Further, the Tucson Police Department was notorious for its tight control of downtown parking. Cele Peterson remembers, with chagrin, arriving at her place of business only to find an illegally parked vehicle blocking her private alleyway. When Peterson resorted to parking in front of her store, she, like her customers, was frequently ticketed by the diligent Tucson Police.⁵⁴

High taxes, deteriorating buildings, zoning ordinances, and loss of the Mexican trade were among the most pressing problems the

merchants faced. According to Cele Peterson, one of the reasons for property deterioration, especially on Congress Street, was the high taxation the city levied on any improvements to buildings. A strict enforcement of zoning ordinances presented store owners difficulties as well. For instance, a requirement of two fire exits per store made surveillance for theft very difficult. Similar regulations at El Con were much less rigorously enforced.⁵⁵

Probably the biggest blow to Jacome's was the drying up of the Mexican trade. Some of the contributors to that decline were the Pioneer International Hotel fire, the requirement that Mexican customers pay sales taxes, withdrawal of free parking stamps to Mexican customers, and the drop in value of the Mexican peso. The Pioneer fire occurred on December 20, 1970, and destroyed the major residence for Mexican tourists coming to Tucson.⁵⁶ Shortly afterwards, Mexican tourists encountered a sales tax from which they had previously been exempt. To make matters worse, Tucson's Mayor and Council withdrew the free parking stamps Mexican customers had grown to expect. One of the strongest proponents of these changes was Reuben Romero, a Hispanic Councilman, who contended that the well-to-do Mexicans who shopped in Tucson could afford to pay.⁵⁷ The final blow was the devaluation of the Mexican peso in August of 1976. When the peso, which had been pegged to the United States dollar for twenty-two years, was allowed to float, purchases of everything "from clothing to tractors by Mexicans who frequented Tucson retailers dropped twenty-five percent and more."⁵⁸

In addition to those problems, downtown business owners suffered from the repeal of federal and state fair trade laws. These laws had prohibited discounters from undercutting the manufacturer's retail price. In December, 1975, President Gerald Ford signed the Consumer Goods Pricing Act, which terminated all interstate utilization of "fair trade" or resale price maintenance. In 1975 both the House and Senate of the Arizona legislature passed repeal measures, but the Conference Committee could not resolve differences between the two measures. With passage of the federal law, however, the question was moot. In their long campaign for change, the discounters argued that the laws conflicted with a free market, sustained inflation, and in the last analysis were unconstitutional. Until repeal, discounters had carried products with unfamiliar labels and unknown quality. After repeal, they expanded their product lines and broadened their target customer

population, drawing from the former middle-class customers of conventional retail stores like Jacome's.⁵⁹

Recognizing that it would benefit from fair trade laws, Jacome's had supported their enforcement in the Tucson area. When Korby's, the first mini-department store to locate outside the downtown area in 1951, was said to be selling national brands such as Van Heusen and Haggar at lower prices, Jacome's and other retailers complained to the manufacturers, threatening to withdraw their business. The owners of Korby's, Nathan and Flo Kaiserman, resolved that controversy by showing copies of their newspaper advertisements to the manufacturers. Their ads proved that they were not selling below the suggested retail price. Still, in the years that followed, local retailers kept a close vigil over the actions of their competitors to ensure these laws were observed.⁶⁰

Fair trade repeal was only one of a long list of reasons downtown retailers had for looking at the question of their very survival. Most of them concluded that their only course was to move out of downtown. In 1963, Dave Bloom and Sons expanded to El Con and in 1965 closed the downtown store.⁶¹ Steinfeld's, rather than Jacome's, opened their El Con store in the old Levy building in March of 1971.⁶² Like the Bloom brothers, Cele Peterson saw her customers moving to the east side of town and heard from them the difficulties of getting downtown. She opened an El Con store the same year as the Blooms, and in the first year, her business went up over thirty percent. Unlike the Blooms, she maintained her downtown store—until one more parking ticket provoked her to close it in 1979. By the time she left, the only remaining retail stores of consequence were Jacome's, Penney's, and Lerner's.⁶³

In 1976, Jacome's found a way to bypass the fifteen-mile stipulation in the Steinfeld lease by going outside Tucson to Sierra Vista, Arizona, for their second location. Optimistically announcing that "there undoubtedly will be more to come," store management signed the lease for a 65,000-square-foot structure and hired architect Terry Atkinson to draw up plans for the internal allocation of space.⁶⁴ Problems with the Sierra Vista city government led to the postponement of the opening, planned for August. Canceling merchandise orders, they rescheduled for March 1977. Again unable to open, Jacome's dropped the Sierra Vista project altogether. The developer sued for breach of contract, but after a court trial, Jacome's emerged the winner.⁶⁵

Still searching for a site, they discussed terms with the owner of Park Mall, the second major shopping center to appear in Tucson. Small

space allocation, 30,000 square feet as compared with Sears' 225,000 square feet, led them to look elsewhere. In turn, they gave close scrutiny to Phoenix, El Paso, and Green Valley.⁶⁶

During the same period, Jacome management spent many hours talking with bankers about expansion. What they encountered in trying to obtain capital for expansion characterized the plight of independent retailers across the United States. Typically, family-run independents were generating inadequate retained earnings to expand. In fact, as inflation soared and recession grew in 1974 and 1975, all but the very healthiest had to cut their operations drastically. Like other independents, Jacome's found the bank willing to lend for operating capital but not for expansion. In advising them to focus on what they already had, the bank officials also suggested a reduction of expenses by shutting down one floor of the store. Because the overhead would remain the same, according to Alex F. Jacome, Jr., this afforded no savings for the store.⁶⁷

Jacome's had at least one other alternative to expansion. According to Alex F. Jacome, Jr., "Over the years the store had several inquiries from the chains." However, Alex, Sr., felt that acquisition of the firm by a department store chain represented a "betrayal of the family name and the integrity and honesty it represented."⁶⁸

In all probability, this decision to ignore the chains' overtures reflected the influence of culture on Jacome's survival. Certainly the admonitions of Carlos to his children about integrity and honesty in business played a strong role in the decision not to consider joining a chain. Just as important was the precedence family interests took over the maximum exploitation of economic opportunities. Some experts have argued that the exceptionally strong familistic trait within the Mexican-American culture curtails mobility by sustaining emotional attachments to people, places, and things. As a source of collective pride, familism is ultimately the cause of resistance to change of all sorts.⁶⁹ At Jacome's, protection of the family and its name rested upon a management structure in which the family members assumed the positions of trust. Rationalized chain management would have eroded that control. Increased risk to the family name and managerial depersonalization were avenues they chose not to pursue.

By late 1979, Jacome's had almost reached final agreement for the opening of two stores outside the downtown area. One, a grocery store building in the Casas Adobes Shopping Center, had 16,000 square feet

and offered space for a scaled-down version of the Pennington and Stone store. A second site in Green Valley, like the Casas Adobes store, required a minimum amount of capital investment to open. Inflation aborted those plans and forced Jacome's to make preparations for liquidation in early 1980.⁷⁰

On January 15, 1980, Alex, Sr., arrived at the store as usual, greeted employee Armando Flores with his "usual smile and 'a good morning,'" and went to his office.⁷¹ While working at his desk, he complained of chest pains and collapsed. His son attempted to revive him until paramedics arrived to take him to St. Mary's Hospital. There Alex was pronounced dead upon arrival. He had suffered a massive heart attack.⁷²

"He died the way he wanted to, working in the office, with his boots on," said his daughter, Margarita. "He was the patriarch," stated Alex, Jr. "He not only ran the business, but the family as well—and that is kind of difficult for a number ten."⁷³ This reference was to Alex's tenth position in a family of thirteen children. Remaining were two sisters, Josephine and Rose, and four brothers, Henry, Arthur, Augustine, and John.⁷⁴ Friends and relatives from throughout Arizona, the United States, and Mexico came to Tucson for the funeral mass held at St. Augustine Cathedral.⁷⁵

During the last years of his life, Alex had continued to receive honors from the community. In 1974 the University of Arizona awarded him an honorary Doctor of Law degree for his "achievements in business and civic affairs and in the field of international relations." In 1976, he served as Grand Marshal of the Fiesta de los Vaqueros Parade, an event unique to the Tucson community, accompanied by his beautiful wife, Estela. Commenting upon his appointment as marshal, Arizona Governor Raúl Castro noted, "He typifies Tucson and has made our neighbors to the south and Southern Arizona become as one."⁷⁶

In late February, six weeks after Alex's death, the Jacome Department Store announced its closing because of the declining retail market in downtown Tucson. The firm was not going bankrupt, according to Alex, Jr., "It simply wasn't making enough money." Stockholders—about a "dozen family members"—would receive the distribution of the firm's assets. Although his father had made plans to liquidate the store prior to his death, Alex, Jr., acknowledged, "I'm glad he is not around to see it . . . after all, this was his whole life."⁷⁷

On Thursday, March 6, 1980, the *Arizona Daily Star* announced Jacome's "Out of Business" sale. The store offered "every item from [a]

\$1.5 million inventory of fine fashions, Home Furnishings . . . Antiques and Collectibles . . . [at] 20% to 50% off." According to the advertisement, "lifetime savings were offered on America's most reputable famous brand labels," many of long standing at Jacome's: Society Brand, Arrow, Haggar, Farah, and, of course, Stetson.⁷⁸

Employees at Jacome's, now numbering less than one hundred, felt a great sense of loss with the impending closing, and reactions were wide and varied.⁷⁹ Import shop manager, Grace Bourguignon, sensed it was coming even before the announcement because customers were treating her treasures differently. When the liquidators appeared, she refused to help them sell the articles she had pampered for so long.⁸⁰ Annie Shaar, an employee of thirty-eight years, noticed during the hectic activity of the first day of the sale that people in the store for the first time in years kept asking, "Annie, why are they doing this? Why is the store closing?" When she, in turn, asked why they no longer patronized the store, they typically replied that "they didn't come downtown because they did not want to fight the traffic."⁸¹ Nina Avenenti, a twenty-one-year veteran of the store, recalled that when the auctioneer intervened to sell an alpaca blanket from Peru which was selling for forty percent of its retail value, but which a customer wanted for less, she snatched it from the customer and "just walked away," only to sell it a few minutes later for the whole forty percent.⁸² Annie Shaar probably stated most succinctly what the others felt as the inventory dwindled, "I feel like I'm losing my family, my home, and it's very hard for me."⁸³

Jacome's management worked to place each employee in another job. When Leon Levy called to offer his help, many went to his store.⁸⁴ Tony Anton recalled that Alex, Jr., and Henry, Sr., placed several employees with other organizations and even found positions for him. Due to his ample pension fund, however, Tony elected to take a few years off.⁸⁵ Other employees revealed that several had deep feelings about the pension fund, which helped them through various emergencies after the store closed.⁸⁶ And some found employer concern reaching beyond finding them a job and provision of a retirement benefit. For example, Augustine Jacome told Grace Bourguignon "to get a new knee cap" before the store insurance ran out. She left the store the same day to go to the hospital.⁸⁷

"Jacome's reaches the end with nothing but its dignity," read a *Tucson Citizen* headline on the last day of the store's existence. Mirroring the community's emotional response to the store's demise, the *Citizen*

described its last minutes of life. "It is 4:10 p.m. Friday, April 4, 1980. The department store at the corner of Stone Avenue and Pennington Street basks in the warmth of a bright springtime sun. It is a pleasant day to die." The *Citizen* article went on to describe the few items left from the store's month-long close-out sale as "a cut above your standard merchandise." It also explained that "when you're competing not with the guy down the street, but with the suburban expansion that offers your customers the glossy malls and expansive parking lots that your location can't provide, being a cut above the rest just isn't enough."⁸⁸

At 5:25 p.m. a woman's voice announced over the store's public address system: "Attention, Jacome's shoppers: The store will be closing in five minutes. Thank you for shopping at Jacome's." Henry Jacome, Jr., peeled a sale poster from the plate glass window, looked at it for a moment, and then commented, "Jacome's is no more." There were a few goodbyes to the store Carlos began so optimistically in 1896, and at "5:50 p.m. a key turned not only the tumblers of the lock to the store but the pages of the story of an era." Two of Carlos' grandsons, Henry and Alex, shook hands in final farewell tribute to "a grand [*sic.*] dame stripped of her jewels and her kingdom, but not her dignity."⁸⁹ In the end, she had remained true to her founder's vision.

NOTES

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- ³ Leon Levy Interview, November 5, 1984; Barry Bluestone et al., *The Retail Revolution, Market Transformation, Investment and Labor in the Modern Department Store* (Boston: Auburn House Publishing Co., 1984) pp. 24, 64, 71.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 71.
- ⁵ Leon Levy Interview, November 5, 1984.
- ⁶ Alex G. Jacome to Lee Davis, August 2, 1965, Special Collections, The University of Arizona (hereafter cited as J. P.).

- ⁷ Alex G. Jacome to Mayor Lew Davis and City Councilmen, April 7, 1967, (J. P.) Special Collections, The University of Arizona.
- ⁸ Alex G. Jacome to Senators Frank Felix, Douglas Holsclaw, Carmen Cajero, November 21, 1973, (J. P.) Special Collections, The University of Arizona.
- ⁹ Richard Arellano, *Strategies for Hispanic Business Development: Trends and Implications* (Washington, D.C.: National Chamber Foundation, 1984) p. 32.
- ¹⁰ Edward Kirkland, *Dream and Thought in the Business Community, 1860-1900* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1956) pp. 13-20; C. Wright Mills, *White Collar: The American Middle Classes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1953) pp. 36, 57.
- ¹¹ Alex G. Jacome, "Address to the Tucson Women's Club," 1963, (J. P.) Special Collections, The University of Arizona.
- ¹² Leo Grebler et al., *The Mexican-American People: The Nation's Second Largest Minority* (New York: The Free Press, 1970) pp. 6, 532; Senator Dennis DeConcini to Alex G. Jacome, July 13, 1979, (J. P.) Special Collections, The University of Arizona.
- ¹³ Alex G. Jacome to Honorable Paul Fannin, March 17, 1970, (J. P.) Special Collections, The University of Arizona; Richard Arellano, *Strategies for Hispanic Business Development: Agenda for Action, Recommendations* (Washington, D.C.: National Chamber Foundation, 1984) p. 16.
- ¹⁴ Alex G. Jacome, "Letters to the Editor," *Arizona Daily Star*, April 29, 1970, Sec. D, p. 14.
- ¹⁵ Alex G. Jacome to Honorable Paul Fannin, May 7, 1975, (J. P.) Special Collections, The University of Arizona.
- ¹⁶ Alex G. Jacome to Dr. Paul Rosenblatt, November 4, 1976, (J. P.) Special Collections, The University of Arizona.
- ¹⁷ Alex G. Jacome to Senator Paul Fannin, March 17, 1970, (J. P.) Special Collections, The University of Arizona.
- ¹⁸ Alex F. Jacome, Jr., Interview, June 8, 1984; Nina Avenenti Interview, May 21, 1985.
- ¹⁹ Bluestone et al., *The Retail Revolution*, p. 2.
- ²⁰ Alex G. Jacome to Helen D. Seright, October 17, 1969 (J. P.) Special Collections, The University of Arizona.
- ²¹ Alex G. Jacome, "Letters to the Editor," *Arizona Daily Star*, December 21, 1966, p. 22.
- ²² Mrs. Frank D. Wilkey to Mr. Jacome, January 16, 1967 (J. P.) Special Collections, The University of Arizona.
- ²³ Alex G. Jacome to Lucille S. Abel, May 15, 1976 (J. P.) Special Collections, The University of Arizona.

- ²⁴ Alex F. Jacome, Jr. Interview, June 7, 1984.
- ²⁵ Alex G. Jacome to Senator Barry Goldwater, March 27, 1962; Barry Goldwater to Alex G. Jacome, April 9, 1963 (J. P.) Special Collections, The University of Arizona.
- ²⁶ John William Ferry, *A History of the Department Store* (New York: McMillan Publishing Co., 1960) pp. 40, 54, 66, 170.
- ²⁷ Bluestone et al., *The Retail Revolution*, pp. 3, 17, 144.
- ²⁸ Henry Quinto Interview, January 11, 1984; Leon Levy Interview, November 4, 1984.
- ²⁹ *Arizona Daily Star*, November 5, 1962.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*, February 5, 1965.
- ³¹ *Tucson Daily Citizen*, November 29, 1967, p. 37.
- ³² *Arizona Daily Star*, April 6, 1972, Sec. D, p. 7.
- ³³ Gilbert Martinez to Alex G. Jacome, April 26, 1968 (J. P.) Special Collections, The University of Arizona.
- ³⁴ See, for example, *El Sonorense*, Hermosillo, Sonora, April 24, 1958; *Nogales Arizona International*, September 22, 1976.
- ³⁵ *Department Store Journal* (April 1964) pp. 51-52.
- ³⁶ Jacome Department Store to Dr. E. L. Larson, February 11, 1962 (J. P.) Special Collections, The University of Arizona.
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- ³⁸ *Tucson Daily Citizen*, September 27, 1967, p. 1.
- ³⁹ *Arizona Daily Star*, March 4, 1928; Alex F. Jacome, Jr., Interview, July 22, 1985.
- ⁴⁰ Mary Hamm Spencer to Jacome's Department Store, October 16, 1969 (J. P.) Special Collections, The University of Arizona.
- ⁴¹ Henry Quinto Interview, January 11, 1984.
- ⁴² Herb Bloom Interview, June 20, 1984.
- ⁴³ Alex G. Jacome to Mary Hamm Spencer, October 17, 1967 (J. P.) Special Collections, The University of Arizona.
- ⁴⁴ Jim Davis Interview, August 30, 1984.
- ⁴⁵ Alex F. Jacome, Jr., Interview, February 13, 1984.

- ⁴⁶ Holden Olsen Interview, February 13, 1984.
- ⁴⁷ Alex F. Jacome, Jr., Interview, February 13, 1984; *Arizona Daily Star*, January 23, 1958, p. 1; July 20, 1958, Sec. B, p. 1.
- ⁴⁸ Levy's Scrapbook, "Memoirs of Leon Levy," *Arizona Daily Star*, August 31, 1969, Sec. C, p. 11; "Levy's Section," September 14, 1969.
- ⁴⁹ Henry Quinto Interview, January 11, 1984.
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- ⁵¹ *Tucson Daily Citizen*, March 17, 1969, p. 43.
- ⁵² "Retail Scene Tucson," *Daily News Record*, August 3, 1972.
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- ⁵⁴ Cele Peterson Interview, August 2, 1984.
- ⁵⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁵⁶ *Arizona Daily Star*, December 20, 1970, p. 1; *Tucson Daily Citizen*, January 15, 1971.
- ⁵⁷ Cele Peterson Interview, August 2, 1984.
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- ⁶³ Cele Peterson Interview, August 2, 1984; *Arizona Daily Star*, November 9, 1979, p. 1.
- ⁶⁴ *Arizona Daily Star*, May 29, 1976, Sec. E, p. 9.
- ⁶⁵ Alex F. Jacome, Jr., Interview, February 13, 1984; *Arizona Daily Star*, May 29, 1976, Sec. E, p. 9; February 22, 1978, p. 6.
- ⁶⁶ Alex F. Jacome, Jr., Interview, February 13, 1984; Sam McMillan Interview, June 20, 1984.

- ⁶⁷ Bluestone et al., *The Retail Revolution*, pp. 25, 63, 67; Alex F. Jacome, Jr., Interview, February 13, 1984.
- ⁶⁸ Alex F. Jacome, Jr., Interview, February 13, 1984.
- ⁶⁹ Grebner et al., *The Mexican-American People*, pp. 350-351; Alex F. Jacome, Jr., Interview, February 13, 1984.
- ⁷⁰ Alex F. Jacome, Jr., Interview, February 13, 1984.
- ⁷¹ *Tucson Citizen*, January 17, 1980, p. 1.
- ⁷² *Arizona Daily Star*, January 15, 1980, p. 1.
- ⁷³ *Tucson Citizen*, January 17, 1980, p. 1.
- ⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, January 15, 1980, p. 1.
- ⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, January 17, 1980, p. 1.
- ⁷⁶ *Arizona Daily Star*, January 15, 1980, p. 1.
- ⁷⁷ *The Arizona Alumnus*, April, 1980.
- ⁷⁸ *Arizona Daily Star*, March 6, 1980, p. 3.
- ⁷⁹ Grace Bourguignon Interview, July 31, 1984; Librado (Tony) Anton Interview, July 24, 1984; Nina Avenenti Interview, May 21, 1985.
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- ⁸¹ *Arizona Daily Star*, April 3, 1980, Sec. B, p. 1.
- ⁸² Nina Avenenti Interview, May 21, 1985.
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- ⁸⁴ Leon Levy Interview, November 7, 1984.
- ⁸⁵ Librado (Tony) Anton Interview, July 24, 1984.
- ⁸⁶ Grace Bourguignon Interview, July 31, 1984; Toleta Martinez Interview, August 7, 1984.
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- ⁸⁸ *Tucson Citizen*, April 5, 1980, Sec. B, p. 1.
- ⁸⁹ *Ibid.*