This interview was conducted as part of a series on the Mexican American in Minnesota.

Sebastian J. Hernandez better known as "Sam" has had significant impact on our society here in Minnesota. Sam's boundless energies have led him through successful ventures in business, the musical entertainment world, and most recently, have made him one of the key figures in education as it relates to and serves Mexican American and other minority youth in the City of St. Paul and the entire state.

His colorful past and highly active present day activities combine to promise an illustrious future in our state's history.

This is a transcript of a tape-recording interview edited to aid in clarity and ease of comprehension for the reader. The original tape recording is available in the Audio-Visual Library of the Minnesota Historical Society.
Moosbrugger:  This is Grant A. Moosbrugger interviewing Mr. Sebastian, "Sam" Hernandez for the Mexican American History Project, under the auspices of the Minnesota Historical Society. Do we have permission to tape this oral history for the Historical Society?

Hernandez:  Yes.

Moosbrugger:  Thank you. Maybe you can start off by introducing yourself; telling us a little about yourself.

Hernandez:  My name is Sebastian Jose DeFerdova Medina Hernandez, and I will take some time in the history to explain the reason for the names. I was born in the city of Fort Dodge, Iowa, January 20, 1930. I come from a family of seven children, plus my father and mother making it a family of nine. Originally the family pattern is somewhat hazy, as all of our families are. In talking with my grandmother, who was our verbal historian, she determined that the father of my father, was Alfredo DeFerdovier. He has a French heritage, from Cataluña, in Northern Spain. He came down to México, and married a Mexican woman, then went back to Spain. There was a tremendous amount of travel between Spain and México at that time. When he went back, he went back to Cataluña, near the south area. Today it is called "San Sebastian", in Northern Spain. He became quite active and a high leader in a small canton type of community in the mountains of the area. As time passed, he rose in power in the community. His name was changed from "DeFerdovier" to "DeFerdova", which is the counterpart in Spanish. During this time, there were a number of local civil strife which
Hernandez: were part of the history of Spain at that time. At the time of the local
government period in Mexico, there was a man by the name of Pedro Hernandez.
He was living in this small town and was against the local government, which
was, in part, operated by Mr. DeFerdova. Mr. Hernandez began to look for
financing to counter revolutionize, as was occurring all over the nation at
that time. One of the funding groups was called "La Mano Negra", (The Black
Hand) which was an arm of the Mafia, from Italy. If you study the history of
the Mafia, it was an organization organized originally to overthrow corrupt
government, much like the Jesse James type of thing, but it wasn't like Jesse
James, because eventually, they failed. And once they failed, they were outlawed.
Once they were outlawed, they operated under an outlaw profile, which
to this day, the Mafia does, and so does what little is left of the "Mano Negra".

Moosbrugger: What area of Spain's history would this have been?

Hernandez: This would have been the mid-eighteen hundreds. Incidentally, the reason for
the "Mano Negra's" philosophy, has to do with Spanish culture; however intimate
the relationship is between man and man, because of the "Familia - padrazco,
and extended family system", it was not so intimate to be able to deal appro-
priately with the kiss of death as the final stage. So they changed that
cultural aspect to have the black hand with ink imprinted on the door. This
meant that the person behind that door, the family leader, would be destined
for death. Culturally, along with the Italian and Spanish philosophy, this
would give the leader of the family time to distribute his wealth, to say the
children are going to go to this family, and so on, because he knew of his
impending death. That's where the "Mano Negra" came from.

Mr. Hernandez then grouped together with a small local army and fought against
Mr. DeFerdova in the process of local war. Mr. Hernandez killed Mr. DeFerdova
in combat. At the end of the war, Hernandez went to the family and said, "I am
Mr. Hernandez. I inadvertently killed the household leader of this family, what is my responsibility at this point? Well, Mrs. DeFerdova said, "Help keep this family alive". So Mr. Hernandez, not being married, did so. About a year and a half from that point he ended up marrying Mrs. DeFerdova and Mrs. DeFerdova then became Mrs. Hernandez. The family was adopted by Mr. Hernandez, so my father's name changed from DeFerdova to Hernandez. That's the reason for my name.

Within a short period of time the government of Spain outlawed all members of the "Mano Negra" and they were forced to exile. So various "Mano Negra" members then moved from various parts of Spain, to typical departure point, which at the time was Málaga. Also at that period of time, there was another line of people in exodus. They had been, historically, the Arab strain people of Spain. The people who had been of the Moorish faith, the Islam faith, and had changed their names many times and became Christian or Catholic in hopes of becoming full citizens in equality. However, this was not always the case. In this one particular family they changed their name from whatever their Moorish name had been, to Medina, which is also a Moorish name. If you know, Medina is the second most influential city of the world of Islam, Mecca being number one and Medina being number two. The Medina family was also in exodus at that point and the two families; the Hernandez family and the Medina family, met in Málaga. Then they came to Pánama, which was the arriving point at that time. Then they worked their way up as itinerent workers, through the countries north of Panama and ended up in México at a very appropriate time, 1910. The beginning of the Mexican Revolution.

Mr. Hernandez, not knowing any other way of life than that which he had perfected through the "Mano Negra", organized a group of people who then sold stolen arms to both sides of the revolution. They sold to the "Federalists",
as well as to the "Carrancistas", who were being opposed by the two leaders which were "Pancho Villa" and "Zapata". My father then became a carrier of money between "Zacatecas" and "Nuevo Leon" which was the area that we settled in. My father was wounded any number of times as a young child, between the ages of nine and twelve during the Revolution. At the age of thirteen, at that time thirteen was the age in which the family members became blood members to the "Mano Negra", my father, not wanting that kind of life, decided to escape from "Leon, Guanajuato" to Texas. He married my mother then, at age thirteen, both of them (my father and mother being three days apart), and they headed for Texas. It became obligatory then for the "Mano Negra" to establish a contract on my father, a contract of either coming back alive or being killed. I am not too sure, from what my grandmother says, if the kill contract was ever determined. Merely because the highest leader in "Leon" for the "Mano Negra" was his step-father Mr. Hernandez. My father was caught over a period of time, three times. Like, let's say three years apart.

Moosbrugger: When he was in Texas?

Hernandez: When he was in Texas, they cut off one of his fingers and told him to head back to Mexico. That's where my oldest brother was born, Laredo. He then escaped to Prescott, Arizona. A year or so later he was caught again. By that time, a second brother had been born, Linus. They cut off another one of his fingers, and he headed from there. At that time, rather than attempt to become a resident, he joined the migrant path. From that point to 1941 we were in the migrant path. We traveled the United States as migrants. My father was a very well trained individual. He was never able to use his training because he just went in with the migrants. We were on the run, so we changed our names any number of times during those years. We went by Gutierres, Martinez, Perez and so on. I was born in Fort Dodge, Iowa while my folks were on the run. We didn't settle until 1941. Between 1930 and 1941
Hernandez: I started school, migrant school. I was at about age seven and a full time school member in 1942. In the meantime my grandmother remembers the fact that I attended 68 schools during that period of time. That gives you some idea of migrant mobility throughout these Midwestern States. Our area was mostly the Midwestern States, much more so than Texas or California. Although at different times we covered those states. Predominantly we were in South Dakota, Minnesota, Iowa, and Wisconsin migrants.

Moosbrugger: Subsequent to your father leaving Mexico, did his mother then come to the United States also?

Hernandez: Yes, the whole family.

Moosbrugger: At the same time?

Hernandez: Right. Also the whole family of the Medina side, which is of Arab stock. So my lineage is basically Spanish, Mexican, and Arab, Moorish. At one point in late 1939 in Fort Dodge, Iowa, a man by the name of "Alfonso" joined us. You know the system of "Mi casa es tu casa", my house is your house joinings? At that point I think two years passed and Alfonso then confirmed me and became my "Padrino" (Godfather) and a "Compadre" to the family. In 1941, we were the mobile orchestra for the migrant group that made up the 150 members of the migrant family. I forget the number of families, I would wager to say there must have been around 15 or 20 families that were part of the system. My father being the "Patron", the contract getter, for the families. His job was to go ahead a town or two, or sometimes a whole state farther. The families were in contract in Algona, Iowa, he would be in Delavan, Albert Lea, Truman, or Hollandale, arranging a contract. He would head back and move the families to a new contract.

Moosbrugger: When you use the word "orchestra" are you using it in that sense?
No, that was his main function, to be a contractor for the families. Then on the weekend, or in the evening, we would have a musical orchestra, a family orchestra. We would play for the dances, for the "quinceanera" parties, also for confirmation or baptism parties and the typical Saturday night dances of the migrant path. We played virtually all over the area. On one of these occasions we were hired to play in a town called Sioux City, Iowa for the 15th and 16th of September celebration and many, many people came from different states: Ohio, Michigan, Minnesota, Wisconsin, the Dakotas, and Iowa, and joined us in this big celebration. On this occasion Mr. Alfonso met with many of the friends that he knew from the migrant path. It was at that time that Alfonso discovered that the man who had sent him out with a contract, was Mr. Gutierres, who was really, in essence, Vicente Hernandez, my father. It was then that we found out that Alfonso was a contractor, to find Vicente Hernandez and force him back to Mexico. Alfonso was dying of cancer at that time, along with the fact that he was now my father's compadre, and he felt that, for these two reasons, he was not going to report that he had found Vicente. A little over a year later he died from cancer. Just before he died, he told my father that, as far as he could see, that would be the end of the "venganza" or the vendetta. So that same year when Alfonso was buried in Delavan, Minnesota, we became residents of Delavan. We worked for a large truck farming firm of onions, cabbage, asparagus, and so on. That's the first year I attended school full time. We stayed there and I graduated from high school in Delavan, Minnesota. I was drafted into the army. Rather than take the draft, I joined the Air Force that night. I was in the Air Force for four years. One interesting thing in the area of education, is that when I graduated from Delavan, I graduated second from the bottom. There was only one other person that had a lower grade than me, and I had a D minus average. I was out of school for six months before I got drafted.
Moosbrugger: What year?

Hernandez: This was in 1949-50. I joined the Air Force, was sent to Mankato, and given a battery test at Lackland Air Force base when I got there. It was for placement of careers. I had a straight nine in all battery results.

Moosbrugger: Which is out of a possible...?

Hernandez: That's the highest you can get on a battery test, on nine facets of a battery. I had a straight nine on all of them. I was second from the bottom in a small town of 20 graduating students and a population of 225. I say this, so you can understand the academic level of the community as opposed to a national norm.

What I am saying is that in a school of St. Paul or Minneapolis I would have totally failed competitively. There I probably would have carried, and yet the testing results of schools do not necessarily coincide with the testing abilities of battery tests at a military type intelligence. I was then placed into the area of intelligence, in the Air Force, and was sent to Syracuse, New York to study Russian. When I got there I signed up and I guess I was in the class for about a week and a half at which time we were informed that all members of that class, number 29, including one friend of mine from Amboy, Minnesota, were informed that if we were to stay in class number 29, if we graduated, would be sent to the Eastern Front in Europe, incognito for two years. Those of us who didn't want to go would have to pull out, not just pull out of the class, but pull out of the language field. I was engaged and about to be married in a week and I couldn't see living incognito for two years, so I pulled out from the Russian Language School.

I was sent back to another base, and from there I was assigned to the field of personnel. This put me into the area of finance clerk, payroll clerk, promotion
Hernandez: clerk, and administration, on that level. I was also sent to a school on
statistics. From there I was sent to Europe and I became part of a weather
department detachment, a mobil detachment unit, attached to various Air Force
bases. Our job was to report on the weather both for statistic purposes as
well as for daily pilot flights. I was assigned then as finance clerk, morning
report clerk. From there I was changed to statistician and from there to
First Sargent which is like a personnel director for the mobil detachment. I
spent two years in Germany and then I returned to the Minneapolis Airport.
At that time it had the 31st Air Division and also the reserve group there. I
became First Sargent for the weather detachment here in Minneapolis and I was
discharged as a Staff Sargent in four years. It is a very high rank, which can
be obtained only during war time. Right now, in a four year stretch, you are
lucky to make Corporal, or Airman Second. At that time the promotions were
relatively high, besides the fact that I was in personnel and wrote my own
promotions. That helps a lot and I happened to have the right officers agree
as to my capabilities. When I finished the Air Force, I was discharged in
Minneapolis and started college at Mankato State. I went there one year and
in fact, that's where I bought my first home, in Mankato. I sold the house
when I was offer...

Moosbrugger: Were you married at that time?

Hernandez: I got married twelve days before I went overseas. I was gone two years. I
would wager that would be one of the reasons that we became so different. Al-
though my ex-wife and I are very good friends today, we really, just really
led very different life styles. It was really significantly different, but we
were at least compatible, workable, when we got back. I went to Mankato one
year and then I transferred to Florida State. My brother was running a business
Hernandez: over there and wanted to have me as a partner. He wanted me both for financial reasons as well as extension of family. I worked with him for a year and a half in the auto business, selling cars. I also went into my own business as an orchestra leader. I had my own Jazz and Dixieland Band for three years in Florida. In three states; Florida, Georgia, and Alabama, we averaged about five contracts a week. I had the G.I. Bill, the orchestra, and money invested in the auto dealership. I was also an advertiser for asphalt tile in highway construction. So ironically, I was making twelve thousand a year through college and I didn't make that kind of salary until...let's see I started off at seven thousand.

Moosbrugger: As a teacher?

Hernandez: As a teacher. It took me a number of years after college to make the kind of money that I was making as a senior in college because of the connections that I had found in Florida. When I finished college in Florida I got a BA in Spanish, English, Political Science, and History. Then I received a scholarship from Macalester so I moved from Florida State to Macalester and obtained my Masters Degree in Education at Macalester in 1961. I started teaching at Harding High School in St. Paul and remained at Harding from 1961 until 1969. During the interim of those years, I was in a number of other contracts, namely Adult Education, English as a Second Language, Spanish to the adult community, and also became involved in an International Exchange Program which, I believe, is the time I met you. I was involved in Experiment in International Living, American Field Service, the Work Abroad Program, and Swap. We had a very active Spanish Club as you recall. For three years running, we held International Festivals that grossed between ten and twelve thousand per year. The money was used to send students abroad on their own contracts for the American Field Services, with the Experiment, with Work Abroad. We also prepared our own with groups that I took to México in air-conditioned station wagons and campers.
Hernandez: We moved half a dozen to a dozen students all over México. The reason we were able to do that, is also because the year I met you, we were receiving 25 or 30 students from México and Latin America to the various families in the East Side. These families, mostly from México, would then reciprocate in kind. They would say when you come to México, "Aqui esta tu casa", (this is your home). We had homes all over México and we were able to travel very, very cheaply. The last trip we made we took six girls, and we spent $310.00 per individual in nine weeks. That included our gas out there and back, and everything. The reason for that was because of the availability of money, courtesy, and hospitality from the various families whose sons and daughters had indeed lived with us here in the East Side schools.

Moosbrugger: I recall your programs. They were indeed spectacular.

Hernandez: We had tremendous success there. I also worked for the International Institute teaching both English and Spanish to the incoming foreign bodies; then I transferred to Humboldt High School as Assistant Principal Intern under a minority training program for certain minority teachers in the district. I was to stay with that program for two and one half years, this would give me time to get on-the-job training as well as to finish my specialist degree at the University of Minnesota. But at that time Bill Gonzalez decided to retire from this job to go back to one or two years of teaching Vocational Education. So I turned around and applied for this job rather than finish my A.P. Program. I am now on the verge of completing my training program as a school principal I rather doubt that I'll go into it for a number of reasons which are personal decisions, rather than competition. I have been offered opportunities to go into principalship, among them, just a few weeks ago, at Roosevelt. But I really think that because of the nature of my role, I think I am a greater change agent in this kind of work than I would be in the confined atmosphere of a building.
Hernandez: Although I think there's a lot that could be done there too, I think more can be done through Urban Affairs, Affirmative Action, Human Relation type of endeavors that are a function of this office.

Mooesbrugger: O.K. getting back to some of the aspects of your very fascinating background and history, can you go back and mention who your brothers and sisters are, and if they are living; and your folks?

Hernandez: My father died in 1951. My mother, about six years ago, remarried another Hernandez. He is part of the family extension system we had. We had six Hernandez in our migrant family. The wife of John Hernandez died in 1946, and then my dad died in 1951. About 1958 the two married, so my mother never changed her name at all. She just changed partners I guess. My oldest brother Isidor, left home. He was the only one of age for the tail-end of World War II. He went to Germany and was trained in the Tank Armor Division. He was discharged after six years in the service. On the G.I. Bill, he finished four years of college at Florida State. That is the reason why I went to Florida State, at the tail-end of his career. He now is a Professor of English at the National University of Mexico. He also works part time at the Universidad de las Americas. Linus, my second brother didn't go to college. In fact, he got a war exemption because he was needed on the farm. In fact, he got a war exemption because he was needed on the farm. He ended up the top musician in our family. He is top guitarist and trumpet player. He has won a number of honors in the field of music. He still has a Jazz group, the Jazz group that I started. He still lives in Tallahassee, Florida, and he is a road engineer for the Highway Department in Florida. Frank, after me, is now the Personnel Manager for the district in Missouri for the American Family Insurance Company, in the claims division. Chris, after him, is a teacher of Spanish in California. He went to almost Ph.D. level in hopes of becoming a priest, but there was an inability to show certain certificates and documents all the way back from
Hernandez: Spain. Beatrice is a very reserved and shy person. Although she graduated valedictorian of her class, she married a migrant and to this day is of migrant lineage and is traveling. The youngest one, Emily, married a migrant who has just gotten off the migrant path and works for the Detroit Chrysler Corporation firm. She seems not to be as mobile anymore.

Moosbrugger: What are Beatrice and Emily's married name?

Hernandez: Beatrice's is Díaz. In fact, part of her husband's line is the wife of Frank Hernandez, my brother. The other one is also a Díaz. In fact, these three people married into the Díaz family which is a very, very large family in Winnebago, Minnesota. One thing I would like to mention is when I started teaching in St. Paul in 1961, there was a very small movement of closing the ranks of the Chicano. In fact, Chicano is still a phenomenon, or is a movement, very new here. The only agitative group at that time was the beginning of the Latin Liberation Front and the Brown Berets. Then it began to pick up movement and a number of people were being asked to get involved in the advocacy for the Mexican American. Among them was me. I was at that time involved in the International Exchange program so I decided to change energies and move to the West Side or try to work on the West Side. I became involved around the clock and kind of worked for both National Task Force of La Raza, which is a National Organization, and also with Dewitt Western Region from Chicago. I was on the road as a consultant for that, and to this day, I am a Consultant for the National Task Group. It was just that break of never being home that brought about my wife's and my decision to go our separate ways. It wasn't for any other reason. It's just that when you get totally involved in something, you get uninvolved in something else. Anyway, my sacrifice happened to be my marriage.
Moosbrugger: Oh yes, we haven't touched upon that. Do you have any children?

Hernandez: Yes, I do. I have a girl, who has finished high school and lives in Roseville. She is married now, and has no children. She is not too involved in the movement. As far as my educational background, you will get that from the résumé. My personal philosophy of the Mexican American, which is the philosophy of this department I think, is the philosophy of culture plurism. Our definition is simply this: There are basic responsibilities for American citizens, pure and simple, regardless of color, creed, or nationality. They are very fundamental. We are convinced at this point that all of us have long fulfilled those responsibilities. They are basically established by a number writers to be: payment of taxes; the love of your country through patriotic efforts; the service in our armed forces when you are called upon to do so; and that's it. Those are the three fundamental reasons that national writers feel are the reasons for uniting as a national entity for the betterment of the Country. Over and above that, it is the right of individuals to retain their language and culture, not at the expense of the national unity. National unity is a very simple thing, as I mentioned it to you. Simply fighting for your country, protecting your country, and playing your roll as a tax payer. The philosophy of the melting pot however, is in contradiction, because it asks you to give up your language and your culture. The ethnic groups, called in this case Chicano, has now determined that entry into the melting pot is not complete. You can enter, you can arrive to the very fringe of the melting pot, and when it's all said and done, color is going to be a measurement of exclusion to some degree or another, depending on individuals. I would wager to say there are individuals that don't consider color at all. You certainly being one of them. But dominantly, there are more people who use color as a division line than those who don't. So we feel it's best to go back to our system and
Hernandez: totally perfect our system. It's best to become members of two perfected systems: the Anglo system; as well as our own. In that sense we can fulfill two roles: be bi-cultural and bi-lingual; and be part of the large groups that will teach in this country that which Europe has long ago learned. That is that the greater the number of cultures and languages available, the greater the diversity in people and the greater uniqueness will come from these people as contributors to the total whole of the nation. You show me a good person, you show me a contributing person, I'll show you one who is uniquely different is order to do so. Einstein being no exception.

Moosbrugger: How true. Beautiful interview. Thank you very much. Sam is there anything you'd like to add?

Hernandez: You have the involvement of the individual in such things as in Spanish and so on. I am totally bi-lingual and most of my family from my side certainly is. In fact, I think all of us are bi-lingual. All of us have made innumerable trips to Mexico. In fact, just recently my brother Linus found our family line in Leon, Guanajuato, a year ago. And as you will see by my involvement in the activities in social organizations, I'm quite involved in just about everything that this office gives me the opportunity to get involved with.

Moosbrugger: Thank you very much for the interview.