



Adelina Barrasa

Lived:

Unknown - Unknown

Worked as:

cinema proprietor, motion picture exhibitor

Worked In:

Mexico

by **Laura Isabel Serna**

Exhibitor Adelina Barrasa owned the Cine Odeón, a 3,000-seat theatre located at 29 Mosqueta in the heart of Mexico City. When the Mexican Departamento del Trabajo/Department of Labor conducted a *censo obrero* [census] of the film exhibition industry in 1923, Barrasa was the only woman listed as gerente o propietario [manager or owner]. At the time, Barrasa had twenty-six employees. One, most likely the day-to-day manager, was a foreigner. Two women worked as taquilleras [ticket sellers]. The remaining twenty-three employees—projectionists, their assistants, musicians, and plant staff—were all male and Mexican. Based on Barrasa’s response to the census questions, the projectionists and musicians belonged to unions. The two ticket sellers did not and were paid a mere 2.50 pesos a day (approximately \$1.25 in US dollars in 1923). At the time the census was conducted, Barrasa claimed 8,000 pesos, approximately \$4,000 US dollars, in exhibited or liquid capital. According to folio 96 of the Censo Obreror, the theatre operated from 4:00 pm to 11:00 pm, six days a week. It is unclear from the census materials how involved Barrasa was in the day-to-day operations of the cinema or how she came to own the theatre, but when the Odeón opened in 1922, the *Heraldo de México* hailed it as “the premiere cinema in the capital” (6).

As the Department of Labor census demonstrates, women rarely owned or operated motion picture theatres. When their work was formally acknowledged, women occupied the poorly paid posts of ticket sellers. This represents an extension of the role wives and daughters had played in Mexican cinema exhibition during the two decades after the introduction of motion pictures in 1896. In smaller, sometimes makeshift, theatres or itinerant exhibition companies, women had worked alongside their husbands or fathers, performing a range of duties, although most likely not working as projectionists. Adelina Barrasa, about whom we can learn in property ownership registries, seems to have been singular in her cinema ownership at a moment when Mexico’s exhibition industry was becoming increasingly corporate. The uniqueness of her position draws

our attention to the unexamined experience of taquillistas, employment that allowed young single women to survive or contribute to their household incomes and that was crucial to the everyday operation of movie theatres across the Republic.

Bibliography

“El Gran Cine ‘Odeón,’ se inaugura hoy en la tarde.” *Heraldo de México* (4 May 1922): 6.

Archival Paper Collections:

Censo Obrero, Departamento de Trabajo. Volumen 620, Expediente 5, Folios 1–217. [Archivo General de la Nación](#) (Mexico).

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