

THESIS

BEET BORDERLAND:
HISPANIC WORKERS, THE SUGAR BEET, AND THE MAKING OF A NORTHERN
COLORADO LANDSCAPE

Submitted by

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In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the Degree of Master of Arts

Colorado State University

Fort Collins, Colorado

Summer 2002

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2002

Colorado State University

JUNE 28, 2002

WE HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER OUR SUPERVISION BY SIERRA STANDISH ENTITLED *BEEET BORDERLAND: HISPANIC SUGAR BEEET WORKERS IN NORTHERN FORT COLLINS* BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING IN PART REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS.

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ABSTRACT

Beet Borderland: Hispanic Workers, the Sugar Beet, and the Making of a Northern Colorado Landscape

At the turn of the nineteenth century, the arrival of the sugar beet industry wrought change in northern Colorado. The sugar beet was a totally new plant—it was unlike corn, wheat, alfalfa and other crops that local farmers were familiar with. The biological characteristics of the beet required a particular style of intensive labor, indeed shaping the daily life of laborers. Hispanic migrants to Fort Collins worked and lived under the influence of the sugar beet, but they were not passive participants in the story; they effectively transplanted some of their cultural traditions and left their own imprint in the landscape.

Two years after the turn of the twentieth century, the Fort Collins landscape still bears the mark of the sugar beet. Yet even as landscape tells history, history must help explain landscape. Adobe houses still stand in some old neighborhoods, suggesting that Hispanic inhabitants once played a part in the early chronicles of Fort Collins. This thesis endeavors to flesh out that story—to explain the origins of Hispanic beet workers; how the beet changed their lifestyle, bodies, and public identity; and in what ways they modified their environment.

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Summer 2002

Acknowledgements

The following people brought life to this work: Frank Martínez and his daughter, Esmerelda Chacon; Ivan and Elsie Vasquez; and Teresa Solis. These people graciously shared their lives with me. I learned more from them than a hundred books could teach me. Eugene and Patricia Jacquez spontaneously welcomed Carl and I into their house near San Luis (we were escorted by their daughters on an ATV). They helped clarify and enhance my understanding of life in the San Luis Valley.

Tom Katsimpoulos of the Loveland Museum and Kimi Jackson of Colorado Legal Services spent generous amounts of their professional time with me. In their separate ways, they both helped me question and explore migrant fieldwork in new ways. Karen McWilliams, my former boss at the Fort Collins Office of Historic Preservation, has always offered me her enthusiasm and aid. I need to acknowledge Los Amigos de la Casa Romero/ Friends of the Romero House—they are people of vision and gumption. Knowing all of the members of this group has propped up my motivation to create a meaningful document. I am also grateful to the staff at the following institutions: Fort Collins Public Library, Local History Archive; Morgan Library, Colorado State University; Colorado Historical Society; and Denver Public Library.

Colorado State has provided me with support in various forms. To Lou Swanson in the Sociology Department I am grateful for a scholarship from the graduate school; the assistance helped to make this thesis possible. A graduate research grant, also supplied through the graduate school, boosted this project significantly.

I want to thank the members of my thesis committee. They provided me with a core

guidance and confidence. Rick Knight of the Fish and Wildlife Department warmly supported my efforts. Janet Ore, who has witnessed the development of this project the longest, offered me consistent assurance while encouraging a critical perspective on the built environment. Jared Orsi steered me toward a better conceptualization of social history and kept me tracked toward a best, completed thesis. Mark Fiege, my advisor, has spent hours and hours directing and coaxing me as I wrestled with this work. I am fortunate to have come to Colorado State and studied under a professor of such high caliber; I am still realizing the extent to which his attention expanded my perspective on environmental history. His personal faith in my project sustained me through my doubtful moments.

I am indebted to the people around me. Ms. Jodi Crane showed unwarranted respect and kindness, especially since so many books and papers mounded in her living room for more than a year. Good roommates and friends are hard to find. I am proud and appreciative of my fellow graduate students in the history department. It is hard to measure the degree to which these people offered intellectual stimulation, moral support, and friendship. My grandmother's visit reinforced the value and scale of my effort. My gratitude must also go to my parents, Miles and Carolyn Standish; their love for nature and books is infectious. More importantly, they have always made me believe that I can do whatever I set my mind to do. Through this process my sister, Skye, has expressed the kind of sympathy that only siblings have; besides, she knows what it is like to have indeterminate quantities of schoolwork in front of you. And finally, Carl has provided my

backbone of support. Sometimes he has left me to my workspace; other times, he has offered companionship and insight into the project. His natural curiosity about people and the land has enticed the two of us down many paths that I may have never walked alone.

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Introduction- The Making of a Borderland

On the corner of Tenth and Romero Streets in Fort Collins, Colorado, stands a small adobe house. The house does not look like the rustic mud box—complete with colorful tile roof—that is portrayed in old western movies. Rather, this adobe is painted white and possesses a gabled roof, fence, and flowers in the front yard. The Romero family built this house in the 1920's and lived here for the rest of the century. In 2002, the house stands empty. The next few years may witness a new life for the old adobe: local efforts aim to transform the home into a house museum, reflecting the historic lifestyle of local residents. Situated within the Andersonville district in Fort Collins, the structure belongs to a neighborhood that was created to house sugar beet workers. Although Fort Collins's sugar beet era has come and gone, its legacy lives on in local memories and in the regional landscape.¹

From 1903 until 1954 the Fort Collins sugar beet factory processed raw beet roots into granulated table sugar. Through the spring and summer the building stood inactive, waiting, looming next to fields of growing beet plants. Come mid-autumn, the first harvested beets rolled through the factory doors and the annual “beet campaign” commenced. Once inside, the beets were pulverized and boiled until the maximum amount of sucrose could be extracted from their flesh and crystallized into pure sugar—ready to be shipped out to American consumers. The process emitted a sharp, pervasive odor, and the older residents of beet towns remember the annual beet

¹ The Friends of the Romero House/ Amigos de la Casa Romero organized in 2001 to fund and develop a Hispanic house museum in the Romero Family's old adobe house. The organization plans to interpret the significance of the neighborhood and contribute to curriculum (to be used in local schools) that explores the historic Hispanic presence in Fort Collins. for more information, see editorial, *Denver Post*, July 2, 2001, 6B.

campaigns with a wrinkled nose. Nonetheless, the smell could also be associated with something that Fort Collins was good at: making a profit on sugar beets. For several decades, this singular industry contributed greatly to the wealth and pride of Fort Collins.²

The arrival of the sugar beet industry altered the historical experience of Fort Collins and the Hispanic migrants who traveled there. The Spanish word for sugar beet is *betabel*.³ When the smell of the beet campaign drifted into the Spanish-speaking homes of Fort Collins, it joined the many other ways in which the beet affected the lives of local Hispanic people. As field workers who tended the sugar beets, they did not typically enjoy the sweet economic fruit that the beet industry bore. Nonetheless, they contributed their time and muscle to the success of the sugar beet. In turn, the nature of *el betabel* intimately shaped the lifestyle, bodies, and public identity of the Hispanic population in Fort Collins. The dynamic interaction between the biology of the beet and the background of its workers produced a distinctive landscape in northern Colorado.

Indeed, the sugar beet influenced the identity of all of Fort Collins for the first half of the twentieth century. Beet growers, factory workers, and other residents could point out the Great Western Sugar Company's local beet factory with satisfaction; the coming of the sugar beet industry had accelerated the pace of the local economy. For farmers, one annual sugar beet harvest could reap profits many times over the amount of most other crops. In turn, however, the farmers had to commit a dramatically larger

² *The Silver Wedge: The Sugar Beet in the United States*. (Washington, D.C.: the United States Beet Sugar Association, 1936), 52-57; Bert Nelson and Edward Willis, "History of the Fort Collins Factory District, The Great Western Sugar Company," 44. Colorado Historical Society, Denver. ✕

³ Jose Aguayo, "Los Betabeleros (The Beetworkers)," In *La Gente: Hispano History and Life in Colorado*, ed. Vincent C. de Baca. (Denver: Colorado Historical Society, 1998). 105.

amount of labor to the cultivation of this crop; thus, sugar beet farming called for a massive influx of field laborers—Germans from Russia and Hispanics.⁴

The written record does not neglect Spanish-speaking Coloradoans. Southern Colorado's San Luis Valley, just above New Mexico, is recognized as the northernmost extension of Spanish/Mexican colonialism in the United States. The valley is home to the town of San Luis, Colorado's oldest municipality (founded in 1852). The region thus enjoys a measure of historical status and receives scholarly attention from the fields of sociology, anthropology, history and more. The setting for the Romero House, however, lies hundreds of miles north of the San Luis Valley. Less than an hour's drive down from the Wyoming border, Fort Collins exists within a different geographical and historical realm of Colorado. Spanish-speakers did not journey en masse to northern Fort Collins until the early 1900's. Theirs is a tale not of daring, nineteenth-century conquest but of modest yet brave migration in the twentieth century.⁵

There are different versions of the story that the Romero House represents. Social historians have recently examined the massive northward migrations of Hispanic people from the southwest and Mexico during the twentieth century. By investigating how these individuals and families moved into new areas and mingled with local Americans, historians articulate the layered and constantly changing ethnic identities of Spanish-speakers in the U.S.⁶ Although the studies acknowledge the significance of the migrants'

⁴ R.L. Adams, *Field Manual for Sugar Beet Growers: A Practical Handbook for Agriculturalists, Field Men and Growers*. (Chicago: Beet Sugar Gazette Company, 1913), 3-8.

⁵ For texts that focus upon the Hispanic presence in southern Colorado, see Jose de Onis, ed. *The Hispanic Contribution to the State of Colorado* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1976); Evelio Echevarria and Jose Otero, eds. *Hispanic Colorado, Four Centuries: History and Heritage* (Fort Collins, Colorado: Centennial Publications, 1976).

⁶ See Sarah Deutsch, *No Separate Refuge: Culture, Class, and Gender on the Anglo-American Frontier, 1880-1940*; (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); George J. Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press,

shift in location, they do not appraise the impact of space and land with the same intensity as scholars of landscape and environmental history. Landscape historians emphasize the perception of the viewer: who and what is visible in an area? The presence of laborers and ethnic variation can challenge traditional notions about the appearance of a region—especially the agrarian setting of this thesis.⁷ Environmental historians seek out other aspects of the landscape: they scrutinize the living and non-living dynamics that impact each other. Scholars have explored the relationship between people and the land in Hispanic villages in the southwest, thus enhancing the body of environmental history and building the background of migrants.⁸ All of these efforts—from the fields of social, landscape, and environmental history—contribute to a larger picture of Hispanic sugar beet workers in Fort Collins. I intend to fuse these branches of study to demonstrate the significant connections between ethnicity and the land in northern Colorado.

In very crude terms, the East and the South met in the West. An industrialized sugar beet landscape—triggered by the technological developments of the eastern United States and Europe—needed labor. The Hispanic population of the American southwest and Mexico experienced numerical growth and economic hardship—they needed work. These forces converged in the fields of northern Colorado. The sugar beet and the sugar beet industry profoundly shaped the lives of Hispanic workers; in turn, these same people coalesced into a new community, modifying their landscape in the process.

1993); David G. Gutierrez, *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the Politics of Ethnicity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

⁷ See Don Mitchell, *Cultural Geography: A Critical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2000).

⁸ See William du Buys, *Enchantment and Exploitation: The Life and Hard Times of a New Mexico Mountain Range* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1985); Devon G. Peña, "Cultural Landscapes and Biodiversity: The Ethnoecology of an Upper Rio Grande Watershed Commons," In *La Gente: Hispano History and Life in Colorado*, ed. Vincent C. de Baca (Denver: Colorado Historical Society, 1998).

Because there is no expressly environmental history of Hispanics in Fort Collins, I initiate this thesis by exploring the ways in which the city's different residents interacted with the land around them. Chapter One maps Fort Collins as a borderland between two distinct groups: English-speakers and Spanish-speakers. First, Anglos came from the East, settling northern Colorado with a systematically gridded pattern. Into this established zone arrived poor, employment-hungry Spanish-speaking migrants, culturally descended from the Hispanic regions of the southwest and Mexico. Many of these migrants from the south harkened back to a traditional village lifestyle that emphasized communal subsistence and charted the land on the basis of natural cycles and topography. In Fort Collins, therefore, the Anglo map provided the dominant perspective; within this framework, Hispanics would bring and cultivate some of their previous customs. Certainly, other ethnic groups also participated in Fort Collins' history. One group, the Germans from Russia, contributed a great deal of effort to the early sugar beet industry. Today, these people still proudly possess a noticeable identity; yet, in comparison to Hispanic migrants, the Germans from Russia more readily adopted Anglo cultural and economic customs.

Chapter Two focuses on beets and work. Initially, Spanish-speaking migrants worked Fort Collins' beet fields with Germans from Russia, but by mid-century the fields were filled predominantly with Hispanics. The nature of the beet dictated the method of its cultivation; in turn, the fieldwork molded the lives of the field workers. To maximize beet growth, workers were called upon to perform intensely physical jobs that tested and altered their actual bodies. The style of work that prevailed in sugar beet regions—influenced by the length of the season and the tasks that beet maintenance

required—in turn both deepened family bonds and restricted the growth of a larger community.

Chapter Three looks more closely at Hispanic community development, exploring the geographic implications of where people lived. Some workers occupied the houses—typically referred to as shacks—that farmers provided to their employees. Other Spanish-speakers lived within small neighborhoods that emerged on the edge of Fort Collins. These neighborhoods—though erected for the economic convenience of the beet industry—exhibited a substantial Hispanic presence. The increasing visibility of Hispanic residents obliged public acknowledgment of their cultural identity, their significance in the beet industry, and their citizenship within Fort Collins. In other words, the growth of the Spanish-speaking neighborhoods affirmed the Hispanic presence on the map of Fort Collins.

This thesis is being written at a time when the local community and municipal organizations are simultaneously striving to further the awareness of the Hispanic contribution in Fort Collins. Even though the factory closed fifty years ago, the beets imprint still exists upon the landscape and the people. Certain local faces who witnessed the golden era of the Fort Collins sugar beet industry are elderly and their time with us is limited; there is an urgency to hear their stories while we still can. And, hopefully, this thesis will contribute to the renaissance of Hispanic history in Fort Collins.⁹

⁹ In addition to research efforts of The Friends of the Romero House/ Amigos de la Casa Romero, the City of Fort Collins is currently investigating local Hispanic history. With the intention of designating a historic district, the city's office of historic preservation is conducting a survey of the three neighborhoods that were built to house sugar beet workers: Buckingham, Andersonville and Alta Vista.

A note about terminology:

Recently, a group called the “Hispanic Women of Weld County” split. Now there are two groups: the “Hispanic Women of Weld County” and the “Latina Women of Weld County.” What is the difference between the two organizations? Appellation. Simply, some women prefer to be “Hispanic” while others recognize themselves as “Latina.” The members of the two groups once perceived a commonality to their heritage in Weld County, Colorado. However, individual interpretations of terminology grew powerful enough to disenchant particular members of the original organization. The women could not agree on the word that best described them; consequentially, some individuals felt the need to establish themselves on their own terms. This story highlights the importance of considering and explaining my use of terminology.¹⁰

The ethnic identity of any given Colorado resident can come with many names. A Coloradoan of a Spanish-speaking heritage might classify him- or herself using one (or more) of these cultural terms: Mexican, Hispanic, Manito, Latino/a, Chicano/a, Mexican-American, Spanish-American. Depending upon whom you ask, these words have different meanings. Some Spanish-speakers in Fort Collins have expressed dislike for “Manito” and “Chicano/a.” These words can communicate a specific ideology, time period, or geographic origin; I do not believe that they successfully represent all of the people discussed in this thesis. Some Fort Collins locals proudly identify themselves as

¹⁰Theresa Solis, interview by author, informal dictation, Greeley, CO, 6 June 2002.

“Mexican” or “Mexican-American.” While these words are straightforward and useful for identifying people who are from Mexico, it, too, does not accurately convey the historical background of all of the Fort Collins residents who came from a Spanish-speaking heritage—some people locate their origins in New Mexico or southern Colorado rather than Mexico. Indeed, some residents call themselves “Spanish-American,” associating their background with Europe rather than with Mexico. “Latino”—typically referring to a person from Latin America—arguably represents the group of Spanish-speakers who migrated to Fort Collins. Although some migrants technically arrived from points within the U.S., their places of origin could still be categorized as northern tendrils of Latin America. However, “Latino” does not exist prominently in the historical vocabulary of Fort Collins. It seems that “Hispanic” emerges as the most familiar and neutral term—yet, its significance was strong enough to break up the Hispanic Women of Weld County. One woman explained to me her personal objection: “Hispanic” is a word used frequently in official government forms, lumping together Spanish-speaking people from places as diverse as Cuba, Puerto Rico, Mexico and Central America. With respect to the validity of her opinion, I have nonetheless opted to use “Hispanic” because the term emerges frequently—and usually uncontestedly—in the literature and conversations surrounding Spanish-speakers in Fort Collins.¹¹

In this study, therefore, I have found it most efficient to choose terms that are already used in the vocabulary of northern Colorado. “Hispanic” and “Spanish-speaking”

¹¹ Solis interview.

refer to people who share the legacy of the Spanish language.¹² “Anglo” and “white” are used interchangeably; they represent the settler or Coloradoan who is culturally associated with the eastern United States. Although a strict definition of “Anglo” refers to a person of English descent, I again rely upon a broader association; in the western United States, “Anglo” has traditionally signified a whole array of non-hispanic European Americans:¹³

¹² Sara A. Brown, *Children Working in the Sugar Beet Fields of Certain Districts of the South Platte Valley, Colorado* (New York: National Child Labor Committee, 1925), 58-59. This government report on conditions in northern Colorado demonstrates the popularity of the term “Spanish-speaking” to indicate all beet workers in the region who are from Mexico or of Spanish descent. Ironically, the author recognizes that many “Spanish-speaking people” are born in the U.S. but does not classify them with “native-born Americans.” “Hispanic” was not frequently used until later in century.

¹³ R. W. Roskelley and Catherine R. Clark, *When Different Cultures Meet: An Analysis and Interpretation of Some Problems Arising When People of Spanish and North European Cultures Attempt to Live Together* (Denver: Rocky Mountain Council on Inter-American Affairs, 1946), 5-6. This text specifically chooses to use “Anglo,” explaining that the word signifies English-speakers in parts of the United States, and “is not a racial or national term and has no scientific basis, but is commonly so used and understood...”

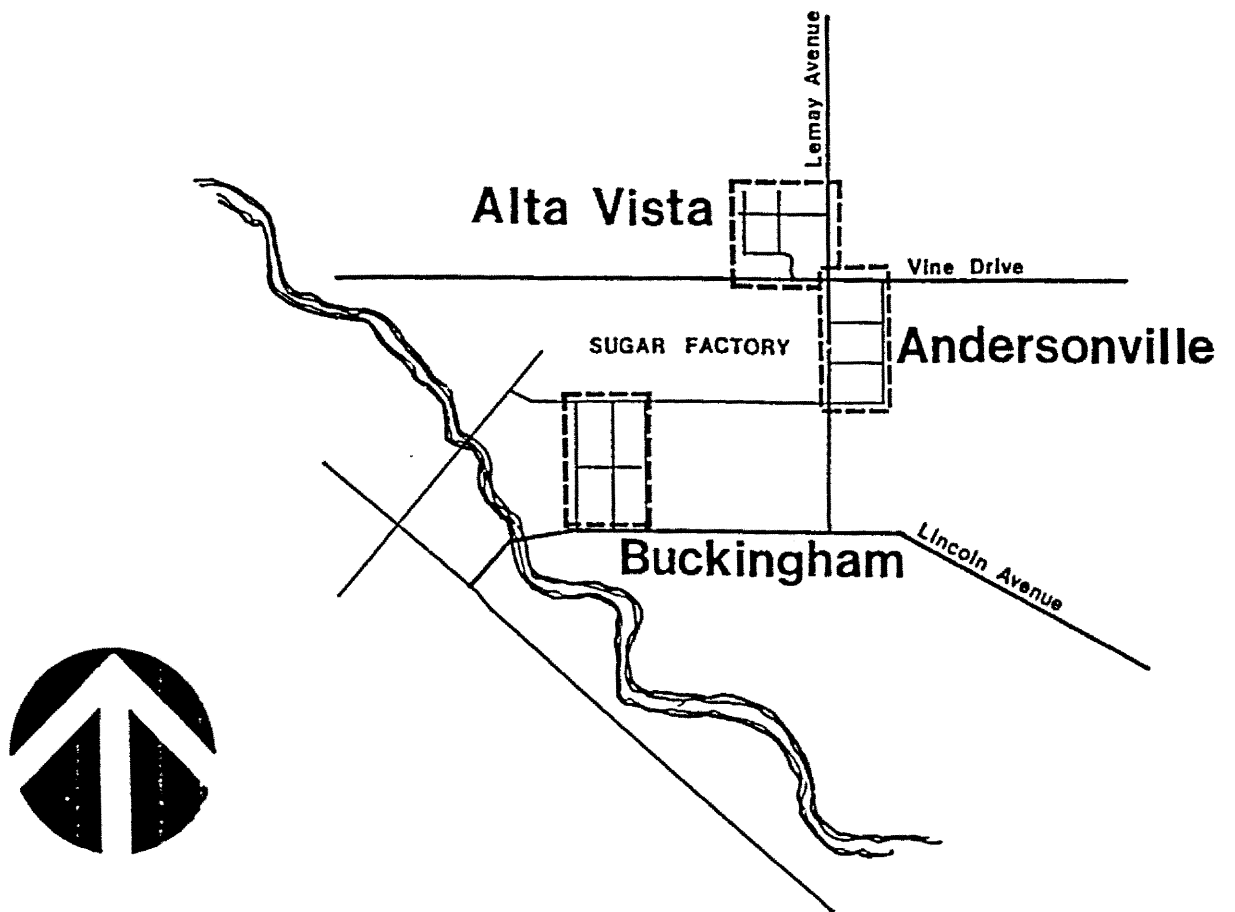


Fig. 1.
Map of Alta Vista, Andersonville, and Buckingham. The sugar beet neighborhoods are separated from the rest of Fort Collins by the Cache la Poudre River. (City of Fort Collins, 2)

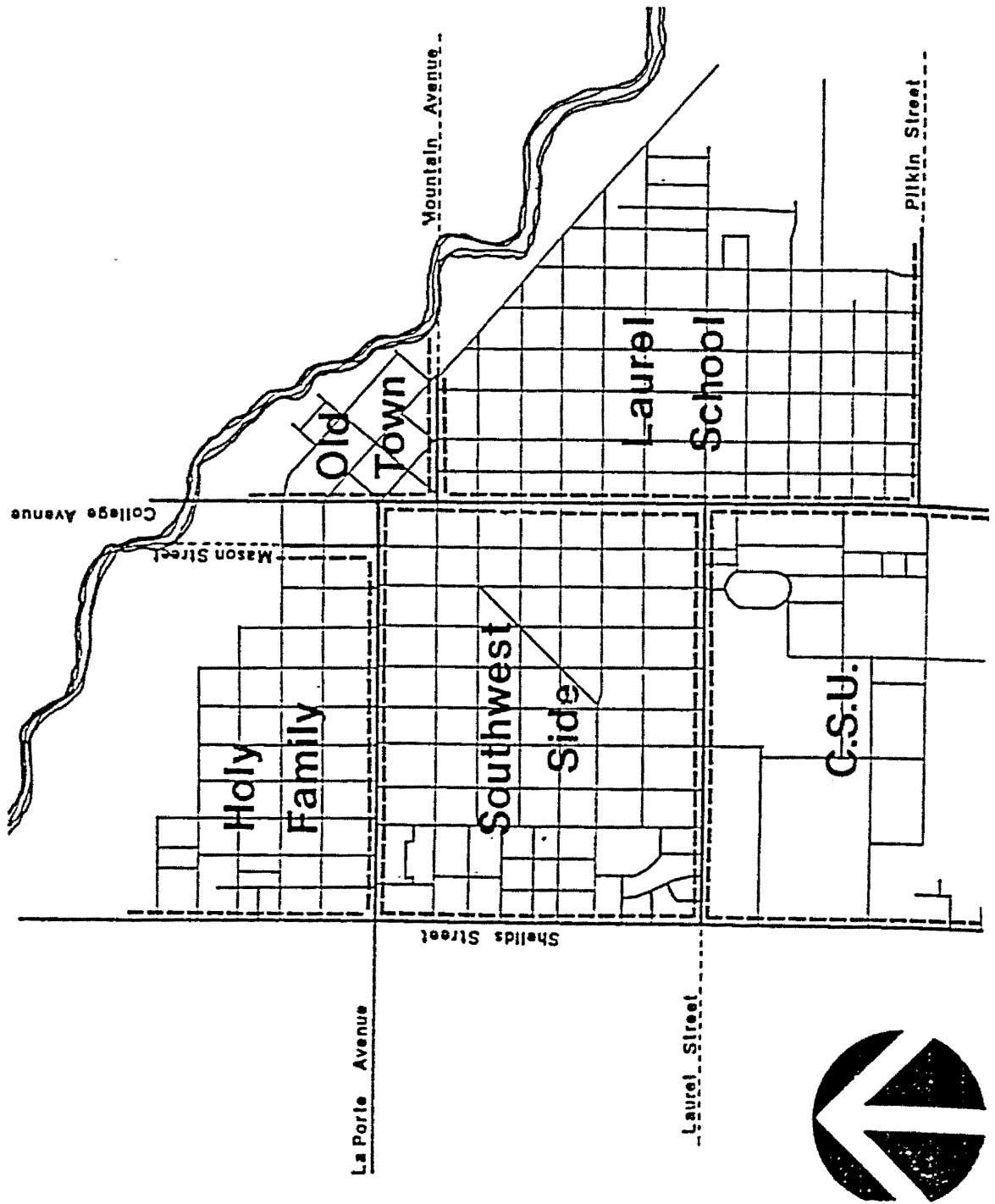


Fig. 2.
 Map of the Fort Collins original townsite, on southwestern side of river. (City of Fort Collins, 6)

Chapter One- Migrants and Maps

Margaret Salas Martinez was born January 15th, 1910, near Las Vegas, New Mexico, a place known for having some of the most deep-rooted families in the United States—families who have resided in the same place for centuries. The Salases, however, left Las Vegas three weeks after Margaret’s birth. Her memories of growing up are from a neighborhood called Buckingham, just across the Cache la Poudre River from Fort Collins, Colorado. She and her family settled into the community of sugar beet workers, mingling with German-Russians and Spanish-speakers. In 1937, Margaret and her husband, Charles Martinez, purchased a two-room adobe house in Alta Vista, another local “barrio” of laborers.¹⁴

By then, these small neighborhoods were predominantly Hispanic; many German-Russians had moved out. Many of Fort Collins’ residents referred to Margaret’s community as “Spanish Colony.” However, just because the inhabitants made tortillas and grew lots of flowers, the “colony” did not necessarily embody life as it had been back home. In fact, there was no singular “back home” that everyone claimed. Residents traced their family trees back to various origins. Therefore, on the Anglicized turf of Fort Collins, members of Margaret’s neighborhood developed their own brand of Hispanicization—a mixture of the migrants’ varied origins and their new life in Fort Collins. In particular, they bore the mark of the sugar beet. The sugar beet explained why they or their families came to northern Colorado, their daily lifestyle, and their social status in Fort Collins. Simply put, commercialized agriculture imposed a commonality

¹⁴ Mr. and Mrs. Charles Martinez, interview by Charlene Tresner, 23 January 1976, transcript, 1-8. Oral History Archive, Fort Collins Public Library.

among these diverse transplanted Spanish-speakers. Hispanic sugar beet workers responded by constructing their own community and simultaneously changing the composition of the landscape.¹⁵

Charles and Margaret both migrated to Fort Collins at young ages. Their parents brought them from physically rugged, culturally Hispanic areas: Margaret, from northern New Mexico, and Charles, from the Mexican State of Durango. Like many other people who grew up in Fort Collins, the couple spent most of their lives in and around the city. Although they maintained a Spanish surname, they used English first names. While their parents remembered life in regions farther south, Charles and Margaret truly were Coloradoans.

“Colorado” is Spanish in name but quite mixed in character. Hispanic influence does not dominate a chart of the region or the history of the state. Assorted groups of humans have come, settled, mingled and left their names upon the land. A typical roadmap of the region testifies to the various people who have crossed into region: places are identified in Indian, Spanish, French and English tongues. A little bit more attention to the map reveals a pattern: the bottom third of the state possesses many counties, cities, and landmarks labeled in Spanish, while the top two-thirds of the state is marked primarily in English names. Therefore, a horizontal line roughly splits the map of Colorado, separating the areas where white settlers and Hispanic pioneers have each—successfully—left their handle on the land.¹⁶

Fort Collins lies above this line. Although Hispanic people would come to northern Colorado and alter the local environment, their presence is not immediately

¹⁵ Barbara Hawthorne, “Cultural History of a Mexican-American Family in the South Platte River Valley of Northern Colorado” (Master’s thesis, Colorado State University, 2000), 92.

¹⁶ “Colorado State Map.” Colorado Department of Transportation, 2001.

obvious; travelers from Mexico or the southwestern United States will believe that they have passed beyond the extent of Hispanic colonial influence as they approach the high prairie around Fort Collins. In the old section of town, the visitor sees a preponderance of wood frame houses; in the irrigated countryside, farms blend into shortgrass prairie. Many of the old houses date back to the initial years of sugar beet cultivation, a period when Fort Collins bloomed into a bustling, provincial city. The older houses of Fort Collins are neatly lined along wide, gridded streets, complemented by green lawns and big old shade trees.¹⁷

The geometrically plotted neighborhoods and fields of northern Colorado reflect the Anglo-American tradition of land allocation. The physical arrangement of Fort Collins echoes the Land Ordinance of 1785, the U.S. federal law that carved public lands into squares in preparation for sale to private citizens. Using this system of demarcation, mapmakers could plan regions on a coordinate plane. The resultant grid divided the land into precisely-measurable amounts. Right angles prevailed. Consideration for topographic elements was not necessary. Frequently, property lines were initially drawn on paper, independent of ecological dimensions; they were not apparent until fences, roads, and fields marked them off. In early Fort Collins, the buildings, their plots, and the streets all cooperated; most streets ran north-south or east-west, while the structures were situated in between. Fort Collins was a relatively flat part of Colorado, with gentle dips and swells that were easily subdued by this grid system. Rural lands existed as an extension of the urban checkerboard—the sprawling coordinate plane linked the city’s hinterland economically and spatially with Fort Collins. Only rarely did a natural feature—such as

¹⁷ Fort Collins Neighborhood History Project, “Buckingham, Alta Vista, and Andersonville Neighborhoods” (Boulder, Colorado: Community Services Collaborative, December, 1983), 4-9.

the Cache la Poudre River—persist in the eyes of mapmakers enough to make an appearance in street diagrams of the city. The distinct style of settlement identified early Fort Collins with Anglo culture.¹⁸

The land grid reveals more than Anglo culture; it reflects a level of industrialization and imperialism. Historian Kate Brown demonstrates how two gridded cities—within the boundaries of self-defined opposites, the U.S. and U.S.S.R.—reflected parallel patterns of development. Karaganda, Kazakhstan and Billings, Montana both emerged as the babies of industrializing bureaucracies; they were conceived in the minds of distant officials and surveyors, and sprang to life within weeks. The birth of Fort Collins replicates certain patterns: the underlying land grid, the early presence of the army, and the growing network of railroad lines all demonstrate the heavy influence of big business and the federal government. Indeed, the city developed quickly in response to a local, corporate-controlled factory. The gridded plan of northern Colorado allowed for efficiency and well-documented commercial expansion. In addition, the planners of Karaganda and Billings negated the presence and valid land claims of the original inhabitants. Early inhabitants of Fort Collins also would also have dismissed the local Indians' historical use of the land. A grid could not measure and explain the Arapahoe lifestyle.¹⁹

The tidily drawn map of old Fort Collins contrasts with the settlement patterns of the Hispanic southwest. In northern New Mexico, Margaret's birthplace, parcels of land were traditionally identified by their relationship to natural and man-made

¹⁸ See Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, Fort Collins, CO, early 1900's. Fort Collins Public Library. Richard White, *Its Your Misfortune and None of My Own: A New History of the American West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 137-38; Kate Brown, "Gridded Lives: Why Kazakhstan and Montana Are Nearly the Same Place," *American Historical Review* 106 (Feb 2001): 23.

¹⁹ White, 24-27.

features—boulders, arroyos, ditches, and roads. Spanish and Mexican land grants formally designated property limits with the most visibly obvious markers that nature or humans could provide. The edges of one grant for sixty-three families were described in 1799 “as: the lands of the Indians on the north; the middle road to Picuris on the northwest and west; the cuesta (brow of a hill) on the opposite side of the Rio Don Fernando, on the south; and the Cuesta de la Osha and Palo Flechado on the east.”²⁰ These self-evident borders offered practicality and flexibility to their users. For example, if a river or irrigation ditch followed the edges of property, it could touch more parcels and more landholders could have access to the water. A whole community might have identified itself with a parcel characterized by a particular, organically-shaped, unsymmetrical watershed—not squared-off boundaries that had been imagined on paper. To best describe borders, a diagram had to refer to certain, local topographical traits. Because roads, ditches, and mountains do not always conform to straight lines and right angles, a gridded map of the property possessed less relevancy.

Within the grid system of northern Colorado, residents became accustomed to precise, quantifiable boundaries; within the Hispanic landmark system, locals used boundaries that corresponded with the land use of the particular place. Whether on paper or simply in their minds, the residents from the two regions possessed very different kinds of maps. In the early twentieth century, both of these peoples dwelled in northern Colorado, making it a cartographic borderland—a space shared by inhabitants who possessed different traditional perspectives on the land around them.

²⁰ Myra Ellen Jenkins, “Taos Pueblo and Its Neighbors: 1540-1847,” *New Mexico Historical Review* 41 (April, 1966): 92, 100.

These borders were political *and* physical. Hispanic newcomers to northern Colorado experienced a change of scenery. Situated on the edge of the high plains, Fort Collins watches the sun set over the Rocky Mountains. According to legend, French trappers nicknamed a nearby spot “La Porte”—the door to the West...after this point, easterners could expect to encounter the mountains, deserts, mesas, and generally rough country that characterized the western lands. Migrants from New Mexico and Mexico might have identified with these more “western” features, although the diversity of their origins requires that this statement must remain a generalization. Fort Collins, nonetheless, occupied a gentle landscape of dry, but grassy, prairie. Here, the calm ground flows predictably off to the East, contributing to the Great Plains that occupy the middle of the United States. Indeed, the agriculture that Fort Collins would come to adopt identified the area with eastern Colorado and Nebraska rather than the more arid, rugged, interior West. A disparity existed between the flat Fort Collins landscape and the drier, more varied terrain of southern Colorado, New Mexico and Mexico.

As revealing as maps and land surveys can be, they provoke further questions. What explains the presence of historic adobe houses in the older districts of Fort Collins? How did Charles and Margaret come to leave their Spanish-named origins and live in the Anglo-dominated regions of northern Colorado? There was a single, powerful allure: jobs. In the early twentieth century, Spanish-speaking people throughout the American southwest and northern Mexico found it increasingly difficult to maintain traditional farms and communities. Many were compelled to leave their long-established homes to find work.

Significantly, the migrants were leaving the land that their ancestors had lived in and struggled over for centuries. These were the people who began to settle the northern frontier of Mexico in the sixteenth century. The first Euro-Americans to establish themselves in the region, Spanish and Mexican pioneers moved into what would become modern day northern Mexico and the southwestern United States—specifically, the Mexican states of Chihuahua, Durango, Sonora, and Coahuila, and the U.S. states of New Mexico, southern Colorado and Texas. The original soldiers, priests, and colonists journeyed in the name of Spain. They intended to found communities, convert Indians to Christianity, and, if Spanish conquest history would repeat itself, find gold or other mineral wealth.

They met with mixed success. The Spanish did not find vast amounts of gold in this region. In their attempt to convert Indians, however, the Spanish gained more ground. Cooperative Indians became incorporated into Hispanic settlements while the hostile Indians, over a course of centuries, become less threatening; European diseases and Spanish military technology reduced the Indians' ability to persist.²¹

The colonists who occupied long-lasting settlements had to be hardy people. To start with, they marched the long, hot trail through the deserts of northern Mexico. When they finally reached their destination, they found a land typified by arid plains, mesas, mountains, and rivers. The colonists frequently relied upon Indians for food and water. In this dry environment, successful Hispanic settlers learned how to modify and adapt to their environment. Heirs to a long Spanish/Moorish tradition of irrigation in dry lands, the newcomers blended their previous customs with techniques that they learned from the

²¹ Nancy Hunter Warren, *Villages of Hispanic New Mexico* (Santa Fe, New Mexico: School of American Research Press, 1990), 3-7.

Indians. They literally molded the land to suit their needs—they constructed earthen work irrigation ditches and built themselves adobe houses. Gradually, colonists attained a degree of self-sufficiency, growing crops with river water and ranging their livestock on the grassy plains and mesas.²²

Between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, the little colonies multiplied and settlement patterns evolved. Through a system of land grants from Spain and, later, Mexico, small villages gained a foothold in the countryside. Although the villages all shared a Hispanic heritage, each community was shaped by its particular geography. The disparity of soil types produced adobe villages each of which could possess, literally, a distinctive color. Mountain villages, isolated by distance and tricky terrain, were forced to look inward for sustenance; to survive, these groups learned to be economically independent, growing and raising the food that they needed. Villages based upon rivers had more contact with Indians and other travelers. Trade routes introduced outsiders and outside ideas. With greater access to water, these villagers could plant more crops than their mountain counterparts.²³

Despite the varied characteristics of the settlements, however, most Hispanic villagers shared the same fabric of daily life. This part of North America remained comparatively isolated from urban areas for centuries. Village life—based upon Hispanic agrarian patterns—stayed slow. Significantly, the villagers possessed and managed their land with a communal emphasis. A typical family owned a house, the land immediately surrounding the house, and a small plot for growing crops. Called the *ejido*, the rest of a

²² Peña, "Cultural Landscapes and Biodiversity," 224.

²³ John R. Van Ness, "Hispanic Village Organization in Northern New Mexico: Corporate Community Structure in Historical and Comparative Perspective," in *The Survival of Spanish American Villages*, ed. Paul Kutsche (Colorado Springs: The Research Committee, Colorado College, 1979), 42-43.

village's allotted space remained common lands belonging to the whole community. Elected boards supervised the distribution of pasture land and precious irrigation water.²⁴

In *No Separate Refuge*, Sarah Deutsch argues that the isolation of the villages, scant rainfall, and communal land management created a relatively egalitarian climate in these communities. These circumstances suggest that cooperation, rather than individualized efforts, best improved everyone's welfare. There existed few opportunities for a particular household to grow commercial crops on a large scale; diversified subsistence farming characterized their day-to-day efforts. In addition, personal greed (in the form of overgrazing, overcutting timber in the *ejido*, or other overuse of local resources) was checked by cultural prohibitions. Indeed, the system of labor among the villages seemed to enhance community bonds rather than separate individuals. Groups of women or groups of men completed their tasks with the help of their peers. Among families, work was organized by gender.²⁵

For the inhabitants of these villages, then, life was a joint venture—although various members assumed different roles, they all had a stake in the community's health. Indeed, the definition of "community" did not necessarily stop with the humans. The wild and domestic animals, the wild and domestic plants, the water, and the very land itself belonged to the life-giving network. The village land, like homemade food, was not to be sold to strangers; it was too intimate and communal. To the villagers, their environment signified survival and reflected their identity.²⁶

²⁴ deBuys, 175-177.

²⁵ Deutsch, 14-15; Devon Peña and Rubén O. Martínez, "The Capitalist Tool, the Lawless, and the Violent: A Critique of Recent Southwestern Environmental History," in *Chicano Culture, Ecology, Politics: Subversive Kin*, ed. Devon G. Peña (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1998), 162.

²⁶ Van Ness, 42; Deutsch, 53.

These bonds were deeply entrenched, but not indefinitely secured. The growing population compelled families to find new land and found new villages. Groups migrated into southern Colorado in the mid-nineteenth century, establishing communities in the high, dry San Luis Valley. Today, one can still meet farmers and townspeople whose family members claimed the first water rights in Colorado.²⁷

And yet, villagers throughout the southwest region found their resources stretched too thin. Overgrazing eroded the *ejidos*, and the land lost its ability to absorb and hold water. The Hispanic villagers contributed to the overuse, but cannot wholly take responsibility; Anglos coming in to the southwest also exploited opportunities that the land offered. Like the villagers, Anglos pastured their animals in delicate areas. Unlike the Hispanic residents, they stripped high mountain timber for the construction of railroads. The surge of new arrivals accelerated the level of impact. In some cases, the fallout of all of this intensive use was exhausted, unfertile expanses of land.²⁸

In a process that would further diminish village resources, Anglo speculators exploited the loose interpretation of land grant boundaries. The Mexican American War, settled by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, ceded New Mexico, Colorado, and other southwestern regions to the US. Under the US legal system the Spanish and Mexican land grants (defined, of course, by old roads and meandering rivers) were considered inaccurate. Ironically, centuries of possession and usage could not always prove ownership. Through Anglo manipulation of the US legal procedure, many villages lost their communal *ejidos* to savvy opportunists.²⁹

²⁷ Jack Guinn, "Hispanics Search for a New Image," *Empire Magazine, The Denver Post*, Nov. 27, 1966, 58-60.

²⁸ deBuys, 215-234.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 177-185.

The outcome was profound. People had traditionally relied upon their land as a source of sustenance and identity; now, the land had lost a great deal of its productivity or was simply owned by somebody else. Some villages persevered, but numerous people had to adopt a non-village lifestyle. Individuals and families, possessing little formal education, supported themselves through wage labor. Many traveled in and out of the region to find work. Some former villagers sought sugar beet jobs in the Fort Collins area.

Significantly, Deutsch argues, some of the villagers who were faced with change opted for work that perpetuated group self-sufficiency rather than individual autonomy. Homesteading, an alternative to wage labor, attracted some Hispanics. However, the successful homesteader used dry, non-irrigated lands for commercial farming—an adjustment away from traditional Hispanic farming techniques. This style of farming also scattered families over the landscape, instead of clustering them near irrigation ditches and the local church. Wagerworkers, on the other hand, could travel to find jobs while maintaining part of the family in a house in the village. In this pattern, home base remained within the social and economic circle of the community. Many Hispanics preferred this method of subsistence, emphasizing the group at the center of the culture.³⁰

New Mexico and southern Colorado were not the only places that experienced dramatic change at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries. Contemporary events in Mexico encouraged a large number of people to look for work in the north. Venustiano Carranza, Mexican head of state from 1915-1920, outlawed debt peonage, and thus freed many northern peasants to leave the large landholdings on which

³⁰ Deutsch, 30-31.

they worked. In the midst of civil war, Mexico was an inhospitable home for many of its citizens; in the tumultuous years before 1915, ten percent of Mexicans died or left the country. Mobility offered these people an opportunity to avoid the conflict. To add to their crisis, Mexican peasants—like their Spanish-speaking counterparts in the southwestern United States—had also suffered a loss of *ejido* land in the nineteenth century. In a familiar story about struggling to survive, many Mexicans looked northward for opportunity. Prospects for work existed in mines, quarries, on railroads and in fields. The sugar beet industry and its demand for large amounts of labor signified that Mexican immigrants and Spanish-speaking Americans would soon share the same niche in the Fort Collins sugar beet structure.³¹

Thus, the stage was set. While the settlement along the Cache la Poudre River had already been baptized with the English name “Fort Collins,” economic and natural forces facilitated the arrival of Spanish-speakers. The roadmap indicates which group got there first. But maps are not the only yardstick of landscape; in the unfolding tale, another group would arrive, experience Fort Collins and the sugar beet, and, in turn, shape their new environment.

³¹ Douglas W. Richmond, *The Mexican Nation: Historical Continuity & Modern Change* (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2002), 183, 199, 234, 236.

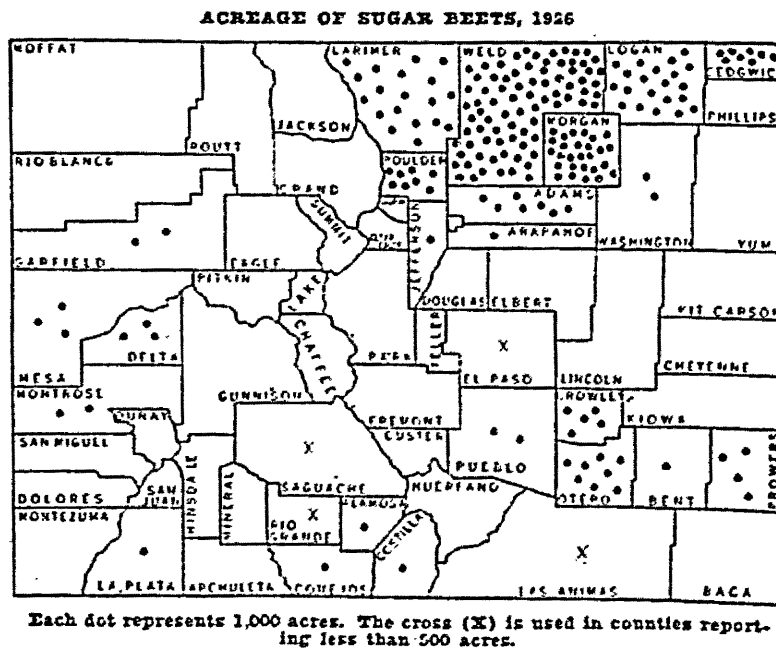


Fig. 3.
 Map of Colorado Sugar Beet Regions, 1924. (Coen, 12. Courtesy of Morgan Library,
 Colorado State University)

Chapter Two- The Story of the Beet

“I don’t know how God gave us the strength...”³²

It was a cool spring morning in 1924, and somewhere in the southwest several families waited on a railroad platform, expectant for the northbound train. The families were large; many parents shepherded groups of five, six, seven children or more. They also brought with them all of the living accoutrements that they would need during the upcoming beet season: cooking utensils, their kitchen stove, extra clothing, and, perhaps, feather beds. Small babies cooed and fussed in the arms of grown-ups. Perhaps the babies sensed it—they understood that their whole family was waiting to board a train and ride into the unknown.³³

They stood on the platform that day because the fathers in the group had recently signed contracts; each had committed his family to work a set amount of sugar beet acreage on a farm in northern Colorado. The majority of these people had probably never been to Fort Collins or the surrounding environs. However, they now planned to spend the rest of the spring, the summer, and the early fall on a farm outside of Fort Collins,

³² Ivan Vasquez, interview by author, 21 February 2002, Loveland, Colorado, informal dictation. Ivan Vasquez lived and worked in the sugar beet fields around Loveland, a small city a few miles to the south of Fort Collins.

³³ B. F. Coen, *Children Working on Farms in Certain Sections of Northern Colorado, Including the Districts In the Vicinity of Windsor, Wellington, Fort Collins, Loveland, Longmont, Based upon Studies Made During Summer, Fall and Winter, 1924* (Fort Collins, Colorado: Colorado Agricultural College, 1926), 86-91; U.S. Department of Labor, Children’s Bureau, *Child Labor and the Work of Mothers in the Beet Fields of Colorado and Michigan* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1923), 65; Hawthorne, 70.

working on a stranger's land, and probably living in whatever house the stranger provided.³⁴

Most of these people intended their move to be temporary. The contracts for work and shelter extended until the beet harvest was completed in the fall; afterwards, many families intended to leave, to winter in Denver or, perhaps, to return to their former villages farther to the south. As it would turn out, some families would make Fort Collins their home. Like Margaret and the rest of the Salas family, they were crossing a border, leaving the hispanicized southwest, and they might be leaving for good. And for the people who stayed in northern Colorado, the pervasive element in the lives of field workers—indeed, a pervasive element through the lives of many Fort Collins residents—was the sugar beet.³⁵

The beet fields needed workers, thus providing the impetus for Hispanics to migrate northwards. Representatives of sugar companies traveled to southern Colorado, New Mexico, and Texas, seeking families to work in the fields. They scouted out settlements like Pueblo, Aguilar, Trinidad, Raton and El Paso for their prospective “labor shipment.” Recruiters used diverse advertising tactics: newspapers, handbills, and door-to-door visitation. In addition, neighbors would certainly have exchanged news and opinions about these job prospects. A typical family contract offered free, round-trip railroad transportation; a habitable house and suitable drinking water for the duration of the beet season; and an opportunity to keep chickens, coys, and a garden. The contract also mentioned the number of acres that the family was responsible to work, the location

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 86-91; J.L. Williams, “Company Has Large Force Seeking Labor for Growers This Season,” *Through the Leaves* (April, 1924): 169-170.

³⁵ (Mr. and Mrs. Martinez 1976, 5-7); Deutsch, 34.

of the plots, the size of the house/shack in which the family would live, and the distance from the closest trading center.³⁶

While such a contract did not promise an easy lifestyle, it did have its attractions. It pledged decent living quarters and water. It promised a predictable wage. And it suggested to Hispanic families that they could rely upon traditional sources of sustenance to supplement their income—the option to keep livestock and gardens. The vision of a comfortable house with familiar animals and plants might prove to be (as the recruiters probably understood) the extra incentive that enticed more workers. It was to these typical terms that a father—whether he could read or not—committed. He and his family now played a part in the Colorado sugar industry.³⁷

El Betabel- The Beet

What circumstances attracted the families to the train platform to start with? The sweet lure of sugar beet profits had infected Colorado with beet fever, and the drive to recruit and contract beet workers was a direct result. As the Hispanic families waited for the train that would bring them to their new jobs, they participated in a sugar beet drama that had been mounting for decades. By tracing this drama, we can better understand the momentum that eventually sought out and carried whole families to northern Colorado—and comprehend how Hispanic actors added their own mark to the setting.

³⁶ W.E. Skinner, *Outline: Mexicans in Rural Colorado*, (N.P.: [1924?]), 23-25; Williams, 169-170; C.V. Maddux, "Some Facts Regarding Beet Labor," *Through the Leaves* (January, 1924): 50-51.

³⁷ Skinner, 23-25; P. Gonzales. Expense receipt for recruitment trip on behalf of The National Sugar Manufacturing Company, February, 1927, National Sugar Manufacturing Company Archive, Colorado Historical Society, Denver.



Fig. 4. Sugar beet field in the vicinity of Fort Collins. (Courtesy of Fort Collins Public Library, Local History Archive)

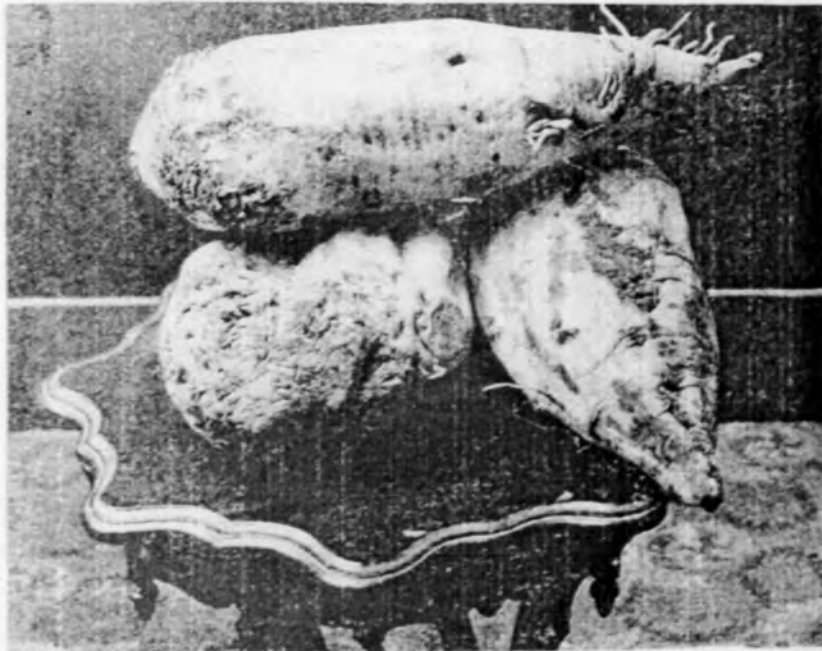


Fig. 5. "The Kind Raised At Fort Collins." (Courtesy of Fort Collins Public Library, Local History Archive)

With a twenty-first century palate, it is hard to imagine a world without sugar. In modern America, the sweet stuff finds its way into cereal, coffee, and many other day-to-day foods. Dentists decry its insidious presence; dessert is a nightly ritual. Many nineteenth century Americans, in contrast, would have considered sugar a luxury. Westerners who lived far from trading centers cherished even just a small bit of the sweet white crystals. This might explain why Brigham Young, president of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Salt Lake City in the 1850's, became excited when his European missionaries reported upon the success of French sugar beet factories. Young wanted a locally available source of sugar for the relatively isolated Mormon community. He directed the missionaries to purchase and bring back the precious beet seeds and expensive refinery equipment, and they did. Although the enterprise ultimately lacked enough technical sophistication to be successful, the motivation to bring the sugar-making machinery to Utah—enough to transport bulky apparatus up the Mississippi River to St. Louis, and then overland via multiple ox-teams—reflects the sweet tooth of western Americans in the nineteenth century.³⁸

Mechanical and chemical expertise developed, and the beet sugar refining process reached maturity in the West. Only a couple of decades after Brigham Young's failed experiment, commercial sugar beet factories profitably established themselves in the western United States. The Dingley Tariff, signed by President McKinley in 1897, provided federal trade protection and powerfully boosted the infant beet industry. The new tariff placed a duty of 78.87% on imported sugar, stimulating interest in domestic

³⁸ Leonard J. Arrington, *Beet Sugar in the West: A History of the Utah-Idaho Sugar Company, 1891-1966* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1966), 5-6.

sugar production. In agricultural regions around Colorado, growers began to plant beets while companies established sugar-refining factories.³⁹

Because the beets would wither if not processed within days after the harvest, the vegetable root could not be refined in a distant facility. Thus, a sugar beet growing district and the local sugar factory became one interdependent unit—Fort Collins and its agricultural hinterland were economically tied. Sugar beet regions could be gauged by their amount of acreage put to beets, their numbers of factories, or both. By 1922, the sugar beet territory divided roughly into three groups: the Pacific states of California, Washington, and Nevada (18 factories); the Rocky Mountain states of Utah, Idaho, Montana, Colorado, Wyoming, Kansas, and Nebraska (55 factories); and the upper midwestern states of Minnesota, Iowa, Wisconsin, Michigan, Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio (33 factories). Fort Collins was situated in the heart of sugar beet country.⁴⁰

But how did the sugar beet come to flourish in Colorado in the first place? The first beet growers imported the seeds and the refinement technology from Europe. However, the western sugar beet industry was not entirely a human-imagined phenomenon, either. An innovative thinker in environmental ethics, Aldo Leopold, contended, “Many historical events, hitherto explained solely in terms of human enterprise, were actually biotic interactions between people and the land. The characteristics of the land determined the facts quite as potently as the characteristics of

³⁹ Ibid., 6; William John May, Jr., *The Great Western Sugarlands: The History of the Great Western Sugar Company and the Economic Development of the Great Plains* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1989), 226-237.

⁴⁰ Bert Nelson and Edward Willis, *History of the Fort Collins Factory District, The Great Western Sugar Company* [Denver?]: Great Western Research Library, 1955), 3-9; W.D. Lippitt, “The Beet Sugar Industry of the United States as Related to American Agriculture,” in *Through the Leaves* 10 (Jan. 1922), 4.

the men who lived on it.”⁴¹ While technological development and trade legislation contributed to Colorado’s sugar boom, subtle, organic factors also played significant roles. The forces that brought the Hispanic families to the train platform cannot be “explained solely in terms of human enterprise.” Fort Collins and the South Platte River Valley of northern Colorado possessed the natural conditions for prime sugar beet farming.

The beet’s “nature” existed on two levels in the Fort Collins landscape. As a plant that extracted sunlight, absorbed water, emitted oxygen, hosted parasites and competed with other species, the sugar beet participated in the natural world, evolved to fit into an organic realm of other plants and animals. But as a plant that people cultivated, harvested, processed and consumed, its “nature” was defined by its relationship to humans—its essential qualities that farmers and chemists struggled to manage. This second, human-oriented definition of the beet’s nature applies to a history about sugar beet workers. This story aims to explore the “biotic interactions between people and the land.”⁴²

In *Through the Leaves*—a monthly newsletter to beet farmers—the Great Western Sugar Company praised the nature of the beet for its suitability for the region. Indeed, the sugar beet exhibited “a unique resistance to the effects of alkali.” Although the area’s ground offered unpotable, alkaline water—unsuitable for many crops or for human drinking purposes—the salty dirt nourished young beet plants. In some parts of northern Colorado, the people had to haul in pure water for their domestic use, yet sugar beets thrived. Quick to grow, the plants shaded the dirt with their leaves, minimizing

⁴¹ Aldo Leopold, *A Sand Country Almanac, With Essays on Conservation from Round River* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1966), 241.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 241

evaporation from the soil during the warm season, and thus discouraging salts from rising upwards in the ground. Indeed, after several years of being grown on salty land, sugar beets could actually reduce the quantity of certain kinds of salt in the earth.⁴³

Locally available irrigation water, plenty of sunshine, and a sufficiently temperate climate also contributed to Fort Collins' fitness as a sugar beet district. Despite the relative dryness of the region, pioneers would have noticed that prairie grasses here stood taller and greener than they did on the plains farther east. Farmers could use the Cache la Poudre River and smaller creeks to tap distant mountain snowmelt for irrigation water. Even before the sugar beet arrived on the scene, a large complex of canals and ditches diverted water to various crops in northern Colorado. The ditch water was accessible to most farms; gates controlled and measured the flow. For the sugar beet farmer, the irrigation systems around Fort Collins represented a blend of naturally available water and human-created infrastructure.⁴⁴

A successful factory—vital for a successful sugar beet growing region—demanded its own list of obtainable ingredients from nature. Proper bricks, limerock, water, and fuel made a beet processing plant possible. A brick factory in nearby Soldier Canyon (now submerged beneath Horsetooth Reservoir) generated substantial bricks to wall up the factory. Limerock, used in the refinement procedure, could be quarried from Owl Canyon, 18 miles northwest of Fort Collins. Builders placed the

⁴³ Lippitt, 6-7; Adams, 10-18.

⁴⁴ Adams, 1; Colorado Water Conservation Board, "Statement Concerning 1942 Sugar Beet Production in Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District and its Relation to the Colorado-Big Thompson Project, Supplementing The Report of December 1941 entitled Agricultural Production in Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District as Related to National Defense," ([Denver?]: March, 1942), 2; Harvey W. Wiley, Chief of Bureau of Chemistry, U.S. Department of Agriculture, "The Influence of Environment Upon the Composition of the Sugar Beet." (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1901), 25-32; William Wyckoff, *Creating Colorado: The Making of a Western American Landscape, 1860-1940* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 125-132; United States Bureau of the Census, "Sketch Map of Colorado Showing the Irrigated Areas According to the Census of 1900," Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900.

factory on the side of the Cache la Poudre River, granting access to the regions largest source of water. Coal, too, was available in northern Colorado.⁴⁵

An unnatural (but very helpful) element in the beet landscape was railroads. Sugar beets would not keep for more than a week once they had been removed from the ground, making autumn an intense period of harvesting and transporting the crop. Indeed, the biological character of harvested beets compelled capitalists to insure an efficient rail network. After beet plants had been pulled and topped, the beets needed to be brought immediately to the plant to be processed before they withered and lost their viability as a sugar source. Fortunate beet farmers possessed land near the sugar factory and, using a wagon or truck, could deliver their harvest rapidly. However, the factory aimed to process maximum quantities of beets. Outlying farms, therefore, needed access to rails in order to speedily transport their harvest to the factory depot. In response to the demand, various railroad spurs and lines threaded their way through the Fort Collins countryside. By 1906, the Great Western Railway—an essential arm of the locally dominant beet company—was developed to the point that it “would completely traverse the beet-raising district of northern Colorado” and connected each of the six sugar factories in Loveland, Longmont, Fort Collins, Greeley, Eaton, and Windsor. Specific “beet dumps,” constructed next to the tracks, accommodated the growers nearby. Due to its transportation network, the Fort Collins factory could eventually process beets grown as far away as Wyoming.⁴⁶

⁴⁵Adams, 1; Bert Nelson and Edward Willis, “History of the Fort Collins Factory District, The Great Western Sugar Company, 1903-1955,” (Great Western Sugar Beet Company Library, 1954), 10, 17, 18, 20. Colorado Historical Society, Denver.

⁴⁶Carey McWilliams, *Factories in the Field: The Story of Migratory Farm Labor in California* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1940), 89; Nelson, 7, 15, 21, 23, 26, 28; May, 120-121.

In its youth, Fort Collins did not possess a developed rail system or sugar beet economy. Established as an agricultural colony in 1872, the town grew slowly in its early years. The Colorado Agricultural College opened its doors in 1879, initiating a tradition of local agrarian research. On April 15, 1888, the college planted about 1/4 acre of its garden with sugar beets—the first beets known to be planted in the area. The experiment established that beets grown in Larimer County could offer a high, potentially profitable, sucrose level. In addition, the college determined that the waste from the beet refinement process—beet tops and pulp—made for inexpensive cattle and sheep fodder, suggesting a potential partnership between sugar production and a local livestock industry. These findings piqued local interest; the news coincided with the rising sugar beet fever in the West and the passing of the Dingley Tariff Act of 1897.⁴⁷

However, the creation of a sugar processing plant could not rest in the independent hands of forward-looking entrepreneurs; the project required conscientious cooperation between local farmers and capitalists. Again, the sugar beet's tendency to wither soon after harvest influenced the community—not only did the beet's rapid perishability motivate the construction of rail lines, but it also encouraged locals to consider their future as a group. Investors in the factory wanted to be sure that local farmers had committed themselves to growing a set amount of beet acreage, guaranteeing a supply of locally grown beets. Farmers convened at public meetings, discussing the recent development of sugar factories in other parts of Colorado. Most of the locals were only familiar with growing hay and grain crops. Yet, sugar beet enthusiasm was ripe;

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 2-4, 39-41; City of Fort Collins Planning and Development Department, Neighborhood History Project, "Architecture and History of Buckingham, Alta Vista, and Andersonville." (Boulder, Colorado: Community Services Collaborative, 1983), 1-5; McWilliams, 83.

farmers agreed to plant a large amount of acreage to this new-fangled plant. Thus, local business leaders in Fort Collins organized their own factory in 1902.⁴⁸

Two years later, stockholders sold their shares to a newly emerging giant, the Great Western Sugar Company. Within the next ten years, the town's population more than doubled. Building construction surged. A streetcar system developed. And a crucial ingredient to this sugar bonanza was labor—workers for the beet fields.⁴⁹

Even with all of the infrastructure and environmental blessings in the world, a region needed one crucial ingredient—labor—to complete a successful sugar beet season. The growth of large, desirable beets required detailed attention throughout their growing season. In fact, the demand for handwork in the fields often exceeded the abilities of farm families. Farmers who grew more than 20 acres typically needed outside assistance. And in a region where sugar beets were a common and profitable commercial crop, the supply of wage labor was outstripped by the demand. As much as weather, pests, and cultivation methods, the sugar beet farmer's strategy necessarily incorporated the issue of labor. The sugar beet forced industry leaders to seek out new people to work in—and inhabit—Fort Collins.⁵⁰

In 1902, farmers in Fort Collins were confident that they could hire “Russian help” to assist with the seasonal handwork. These workers—ethnically German immigrants from Russia—hired on to work beet fields at \$20.00/acre for one season. Arriving by train from Nebraska, many of these German-Russians were poor and ready to take whatever jobs that they could get. Even though they were an essential element to

⁴⁸ Nelson, 4-6, 13.

⁴⁹ City of Fort Collins, 1-5; Nelson, 18.

⁵⁰ See Maxwell Mattoon, “Beet Labor,” *Through the Leaves*, January, 1922; H.S. Looper, “Common Faults in the Treatment of Labor by Farmers,” *Through the Leaves*, April, 1922; Nelson, 8.

beet farming, they did not receive a high wage from the growers. Beet workers could not afford to build or buy themselves decent houses in Fort Collins. The sugar company recognized that they needed a steady, local source of labor, and directly planned workers' neighborhoods to permanently house the newcomers. "Buckingham Place," platted in 1903 by the northern banks of the Poudre River, was designed with the German-Russian beet workers in mind. Also established in 1903, nearby "Andersonville" housed more beet workers. While these small settlements could not provide homes for all of the local farm hands, they clearly represent the sugar industry's urgency to establish a stable workforce.⁵¹

From 1902 until World War I, German-Russian families fulfilled the bulk of the labor demand. The remaining work was assumed by Hispanic "solos"—individual men who usually stayed in the area only as long as they had a job. Although Fort Collins apparently never had a substantial Japanese presence, "solos" of Japanese descent were recruited to work the beets in other parts of Colorado. However, this balance of ethnically German, Hispanic and perhaps Japanese beet workers in Fort Collins was not to be maintained. Wartime restrictions on European immigration diminished the steady supply of new German-Russian field hands. A few years later, the National Immigration Act of 1924 placed permanent quotas on the influx of Europeans. Many of the established German-Russians in Fort Collins began to rent or buy farms of their own, further reducing the availability of local workers. Japanese "solos" in Colorado tended to form families and, like the German-Russians, begin their own agricultural ventures. The sugar

⁵¹ Kenneth W. Rock, *Germans From Russia in America: The First Hundred Years*. (Fort Collins: Colorado State University, 1976), 1, 4-6; Nelson, 8; City of Fort Collins, 9-14.

beet industry needed a new source of family laborers, and recruiters looked southward with more intensity.⁵²

Los Betabeleros- The Beet workers

The people who worked in beet fields—farmers’ families, German-Russian immigrants, Japanese “solos” and Hispanic migrants—all shared an interaction with the sugar beet plant. While these varied groups might have come to the fields from different backgrounds, they immersed themselves in the same tasks. But as the local beet industry matured, the Spanish-speaking *betabeleros* assumed more and more of Fort Collins field work. While Hispanic migrants became increasingly associated with the beet, the beet became linked with local Hispanic identity.

The expanded need for beet workers coincided with economic and political instability in Mexico and the southwestern U.S. Now, whole Hispanic families traveled northward. They left behind homes and farms that could not support them, or perhaps sought refuge from the turmoil of the Mexican Revolution. Margaret Salas Martinez recalled growing up in the 1910’s and 1920’s in Fort Collins; her family left New Mexico and lived in Buckingham neighborhood with “Germans.” Like other Hispanic families, the Salas family traveled to northern Colorado. They stayed permanently and worked in the sugar beet industry.⁵³

⁵² I haven’t discovered evidence that Japanese workers played a large part in the Fort Collins sugar beet story, although they were present elsewhere in the state. Harry Schwartz, *Seasonal Farm Labor in the United States, With Special Reference to Hired Workers in Fruit and Vegetable and Sugar-Beet Production*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1945). 111; Deutsch, 34, 128-29; Aguayo, 107, 112.

⁵³ (Mr. and Mrs. Charles Martinez 1976, 5-7)



Fig. 6. Hispanic sugar beet family. (Courtesy Fort Collins Public Library, Local History Archive)



Fig. 7.
Hispanic sugar beet workers, probably hoeing weeds. (Courtesy Fort Collins Public Library, Local History Archive)

In 1935, local author Hope Williams Sykes published her novel *Second Hoeing*. Setting her story in “Valley City”—understood by readers to be Fort Collins—Sykes told the tale of Hannah Schreissmiller and the German Russian community of beet workers. The story began as Hannah’s large family moved out of “Shagtown” (a fictional term probably used to correspond with “the Jungles,” aka Buckingham neighborhood) and onto a rented sugar beet farm. The Schreissmillers were moving on up—no longer hired hands on somebody else’s field, they would now labor over their own sugar beet plants. Although Spanish-speaking workers frequently performed the same exact jobs and lived in the same exact neighborhoods as German Russians in the 1920’s and 1930’s, they apparently played no part in Hannah’s world. Nonetheless, Sykes’ book serves to familiarize the reader with Hannah’s daily life on a sugar beet farm. One thing is made clear: work shaped the life of beet laborers.⁵⁴

One non-fictional woman who grew up in the Fort Collins area stated:

He [my father] went to the fields and he worked in the sugar factory, beets all that type of thing. Abelardo, Marta and me, us three, we used to get up at three o’clock in the morning, and dad used to take us to do beets, sugar beets. I’d say the rows were like a mile long. It would take all day just maybe to finish one row, but we’d get up early and we’d come home, I’d say around five.⁵⁵

Manual labor dominated and defined the Hispanic work experience in the Fort Collins area. Hispanic migrants found employment in quarries and mines, on ranches and railroads, and in the fields of various crops. However, sugar beet work provided the prevalent, consistent demand for labor. This, independently, had attracted many families to northern Colorado. The nature of sugar beet work tended to intensify the bonds of

⁵⁴ Hope Williams Sykes, *Second Hoeing*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1935). For excerpts on work in the beets, see 12, 35-43, 72-74, 92-95, 126-35, 155-62, 166-69, 177, 192-96, 200-01, 249-51, 257-59; (Mr. and Mrs. Charles Martinez 1976, 54)

⁵⁵ “Maria,” quoted in Barbara Hawthorne, 92.

family and friendship, while hindering the development of a larger, well-networked Hispanic community.

Sugar beets are gnarled, lumpy, dirty-looking roots—a plant only a farmer could love. Or, perhaps, the hired hand who must tend it and nurture its growth for the greater part of a year. Farmers typically needed hired laborers beginning in May, but their work could start as early as March. The first weeks consisted of “blocking and thinning,” a process of removing excess beet plants to make way for the best specimens. The beet plants grew from a seed ball containing one or more germ, resulting in a mass of seedlings springing from the ground early in the season. In this natural, unaltered density, these plants would not develop desirable beets. Therefore, a worker, using a long or short-handled hoe, “blocked” the young beet plants into bunches about 12 inches apart. A “thinner” crawled behind, removing all but one plant from each bunch. When a worker used a short-handled hoe, he/she would perform both blocking and thinning. Because field hands had to complete this task before the plants grew too large, they frequently performed under time pressure. Thinners often performed their job while walking on their knees.⁵⁶

Hoeing, the second stage, lasted until July. Depending upon the weediness of the fields, this operation might be performed by workers two or three times during the season. Like the thinning process, each hoeing had to be performed within a short timeframe; each day, workers might have spent fourteen to fifteen hours in the fields.⁵⁷

Next, the farmers and field hands experienced some down time. They had already thinned and tended the healthiest specimens; now, they waited and watched the plants

⁵⁶ Adams, 33-36; City of Fort Collins, 9-10.

⁵⁷ Schwartz, 102-105; City of Fort Collins, 9-10.

grow. Many workers utilized this period to find work in other crops. However, the contracts bound the worker families to return to the beet fields for the final push of the season.

In mid-autumn, about six to eight weeks after the last hoeing, the beet harvest began. The farmer loosened the plants from the ground with a mechanical or horse-drawn puller. Workers were responsible for picking up the beets, clapping them together to remove dirt, and placing them in piles. In the final step, field workers “topped” the plants. To perform this task, they used large, heavy knives with hooks on the end. The tool served two functions: the knife’s hook could grab the plant from a pile on the ground, while the blade could slice the crown of the root, separating the beet from the leaves. Farmers strategically wanted to prolong the period before harvest; the cool months of late fall added the most sugar content to their crop. The last stages of field labor, then, frequently exposed workers to the icy weather of late fall.⁵⁸

Farmers did not typically provide much training for these duties; most healthy individuals could carry them out. This meant that each family contributed many members to the fields.⁵⁹ Farmers desired dependable labor throughout the season. To meet the farmers’ needs, “contract families” committed to working a set amount of acreage each year. The farmer and the head of the household (usually the father) signed these contracts, pledging the family to complete a specified amount of work at a certain rate. In 1924, \$23.00 constituted the standard payment per acre. Although these agreements said nothing about the number of laborers, parents, farm owners, and company agents expected that

⁵⁸ Skinner, 27.

⁵⁹ Robert McLean, “Mexicans in the Beet Fields,” (1924) in *Hispanic Colorado: Four Centuries: History and Heritage* eds. Evelio Echeverria and José Otero. (Fort Collins: Centennial Publications, 1976). 78-79.

children old enough to do beet work would help. Indeed, larger families contracted to work more acres of beets.⁶⁰

Therefore, the nature of the beet strongly influenced—if not dictated—the nature of the labor. A sugar beet grew over a long season and needed human attention at various stages in its development. The reliability of a family contract system assured the beet grower that the work would be completed. It also necessitated that working families would spend the majority of their year in Fort Collins; the sugar beet added a new working class element to the local community.

The family system of work underlined the significance of unity; all hands provided a meaningful, perhaps crucial, contribution to the daily bread. Family members worked toward a common goal: one living wage. Although their toil was disagreeable on most accounts, some workers looked back upon their efforts with pride. In one former working family, the brother, Abelardo, recalled:

I remember my father in the fields. I can tell you, nobody ever topped beets like my dad. He was the best that there was. He tried to teach me how to do this, but I was never very good at it. I remember one day we were out in the field doing that (blocking and thinning); it was 100 degrees in town and we were out in the field, and it was about 104 degrees. I just couldn't go any further. I was sweating so hard that my face was red.

The one thing that I loved to do was to pick beans because we used to pack those sacks full of beans and then you'd have to carry them over to where they were weighed and then they'd pay you for them. What I did, I tried to be strong and carry those beans because we used to get paid four bucks for that sack of beans. I loved it. It also proved that I was macho and strong and I could do this sort of thing. That was my favorite fieldwork, beans...

His sister, Marta, remembered:

We worked beans, tomatoes, and chilies in the Fort Collins area. We would get up early in the morning. It was beautiful in the morning. It was nice and cool. We

⁶⁰ Coen, 80-81; Eva (Mrs. Lee) Martinez, interview by Charlene Tresner and Lloyd Levy, transcript of tape, 25 April, 1975, 1-2. Oral History Archive, Fort Collins Public Library.

would start picking beans. Then it would start getting so hot in the daytime, and we had to go get water. We had to go to the bathroom in the cornfields. It was just miserable. It was so hot and we had to wear a big hat just to cover us from the sun. Maria, she used to fall asleep because she couldn't handle the work. She would pass out because it was so hot. My dad said, "Let her sleep."⁶¹

Both Abelardo and Marta characterized their experiences as harsh, yet they both acknowledged a point of pride or loveliness in the fields. Their appreciation was tempered by bodily experience of their material surroundings. They were familiar with heat, smells, fatigue, and rarefied moments of beauty. Regarding physical experiences, Richard White contends that bodily work is a medium through which humans interact with and know nature. Addressing the issue in " 'Are You an Environmentalist or Do You Work for a Living?': Work and Nature," White argues that too frequently people encounter nature only through their recreation and leisure. He presents the evocative example of Lewis and Clark: modern readers of the expeditionary accounts look for details about the grandeur and beauty of the landscape, yet Lewis and Clark themselves dedicate a great many words to the daily challenges of travel. "What most deeply engaged these first white men with nature, what they wrote about most vividly, was work: backbreaking, enervating, heavy work. The labor of the body revealed that nature was cold, muddy, sharp, tenacious, slippery. Many more of their adjectives also described immediate, tangible contact between the body and the nonhuman world."⁶² Like these Anglo explorers, Abelardo and Marta explored the fields, and came to know them in individual, painful, and rewarding ways. The intense physicality of their efforts seared

⁶¹ "Marta," Hawthorne, 69.

⁶² Richard White. " 'Are You an Environmentalist or Do You Work for a Living?': Work and Nature," from *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* ed. William Cronon, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1996), 173, 176-77.

itself into their memories. All of the workers—Lewis and Clark, Abelardo and Marta—wished to record their struggles with the elements.

Vigorous work could create a meaningful bond between people and the land, a bond that humans internalized and carried with them. Writer Ed Quillen states: “Personally, I’ve never known a hard-rock miner who wasn’t also a rock collector, and this hobby implies a relationship that runs somewhat deeper than a paycheck.”⁶³ It seems that workers who are geologically engaged on a daily basis can’t get rocks off their mind. While the monotonous fieldwork in sugar beets and other crops differed vastly from the diverse tasks which Hispanic villagers had engaged in, work on the land was still work on the land. When sugar beet work dominated someone’s life—demanding strenuous effort through most of his or her waking hours—it may be presumed that these intense labors produced strong reactions in a person. Some workers responded with pride in their particular tasks. Abelardo recalled the pains that beet workers took to perform the job well:

The thing is you’d always have to leave one stem there, you can’t leave two. That’s why you call it thinning, and the reason why is because if you leave one stem it will grow a lot faster and produce a lot more fruit. If you leave two, there will be two fighting each other...Hard to learn.⁶⁴

Although sugar company leaders frequently categorized beet workers simply as “unskilled labor”—a nameless cog in the beet sugar machine—effective field workers contributed a personalized, experienced effort. They, in fact, had crucially important skills. In a comparable situation, Douglas Sackman highlights the human element in the industrialized procedure of packing oranges in southern California. Judging and packing

⁶³ Ed Quillen, “The ‘Niche West’ Reconnects Us to the Land,” *High Country News* 34 (April 1, 2002): 20.

⁶⁴ “Abelardo,” Hawthorne, 76.

oranges, house managers admitted, demanded a human eye and hand. Recognizing and enhancing the abilities of individual workers—rather than designing a new system of mechanization—could increase efficiency. The human eye and hand were also coordinated to nurture sugar beets, as veteran workers could verify. “Fieldwork is an art,” averred Stella DeLeon, the daughter of migrant workers. “The people who do it take pride in their work. It takes experience to thin beets properly. Poor thinning can wipe out an entire field.”⁶⁵

As much as fieldwork involved an aesthetic, honed skill, it also involved endurance and performance under pressure. Workers could appreciate the diligence and expertise of their coworkers—their family members. In this environment, children and parents came to know each other not only on a personal, familial level but also in a professional sense. “And today, I can tell you, nobody ever topped beets like my dad. He was the best that there was because I was on the side doing the same thing. To top and thin the beet, he would take two rows on his knees and I couldn’t catch him with one row.”⁶⁶ Brothers and sisters and mothers and fathers came to understand each other’s work ethics, physical capabilities, and attitudes. Sometimes families brought young children and babies to the field; if they could not work, they might be told to stay under a shady tree or in a special wagon that was brought for them. Children would know beet fields in their earliest memories. In these circumstances, labor conditions inhibited the development of boundaries between private life and work life. Families were as much an economic unit as they were a group of intimate relations.

⁶⁵ Colorado Water Conservation Board. 4-5: Douglas Sackman, “Nature’s Workshop: The Work Environment and Workers’ Bodies in California’s Citrus Industry,” *Environmental History* 5 (January 2000), 40-41; Stella DeLeon as quoted by Libby James, “Migrant workers have special friend here,” *Fort Collins Coloradoan* February 25, 1979, 2.

⁶⁶ “Abelardo,” Hawthorne, 50.

The standard beet working unit consisted of the father, some children, and, sometimes, the mother. Not every Hispanic mother chose and/or needed to work, and a 1921 study estimated that about four mothers in ten did not. The daily work of women, therefore, varied from family to family. A working mother would become integrated into the sugar beet work and a non-working mother would spend her day at the family's house.⁶⁷ A mother who did not work in the sugar beets could participate more fully in the traditional role of female villagers. Being at home could free a woman to tend to young or sick children, cook, clean, or maintain a garden. At home, her domestic work could actively foster the flavors and patterns of a Hispanic family's cultural lifestyle. In her 1976 interview, Margaret Sales Martinez proudly demonstrated her proficiency in the kitchen. She cooked handmade tortillas, chili, tacos, bueñolas, burritos and tamales. Clearly, her cooking abilities were a source of pride for she and her husband, and she believed that her diet had remained unchanged throughout her long lifetime.⁶⁸ Cuisine was symbolic on a day-to-day basis, perpetuating the family's sensory understanding of their identity. Women who had more time to focus on household tasks could help maintain the family's sense of cultural identity.⁶⁹

Gardens, it would seem, might have flourished around the homes of beet workers. After all, recruiters had promised potential beet families space for vegetable plots, chickens and cows. In addition, these plants and animals had traditionally belonged within the feminine realm of Hispanic villages; mothers who stayed home from the fields could adopt familiar duties. However, Skinner's report in 1924 indicates that "most of the contract and wage families bought the majority of the living, paying for it on credit.

⁶⁷ Skinner, 29.

⁶⁸ (Mr. and Mrs. Charles Martinez 1976. 41-47)

⁶⁹ Skinner, 29.

About 9% of the contract families had gardens and 3% had potato patches. The livestock owned by contract and wage families was much less than that of other economic groups.”⁷⁰ In 1924, homegrown vegetables and meat were not a part of the typical beet family’s diet. Although some households may have eaten family-raised food, the ability of some women to direct extra attention to the home did not guarantee this. Gardens and domestic animals would appear more frequently as Hispanic families grew deeper roots in the community.

Indeed, women may have preferred to stay at home and garden. Their labor at home was distinct and acknowledged; in the fields, they worked as another pair of hands under their husband’s names. When a season’s contract was fulfilled, the family’s labors were compensated for with a single check to the father. Many fathers responsibly spent their family’s wages on food supplies for the winter. However, mothers and grown children did not have the opportunity to manage their own earnings, decreasing their security in the case that the male head was a careless spender. This patriarchal family contract system also brought long-term consequences: females and children who worked during the mid-twentieth century could not add to their social security accounts. As a result, some senior citizens in 2002 receive about \$200 a month in social security payments—a sum that probably does not reflect the quantity of wage labor that most of these individuals have worked in their lifetime. While many Hispanic villagers probably did not experience the social security program, they acknowledged the contributions of all members of a family; women, in particular, would have earned status for their work. For villagers who moved to northern Colorado, the family contract system elevated the

⁷⁰ Ibid., 24-25. 57.

economic significance of fathers—at the expense of women and children—even as it mingled them into the same field.⁷¹

While mothers in sugar beet families contributed their daily work to the home or the fields, some sugar beet children attended school. State law mandated that all children attend school. In Fort Collins, however, this law was rarely enforced when it applied to working children; the beet season extended into the spring and fall months of the school year, and seriously curtailed the amount of time that laboring pupils could attend class. This stresses the tension between society and the beet: law and social norms were overwhelmed by the demands of the sugar beet industry. In 1924, Miss Brown of the Northern Colorado School District compiled statistics on 519 Spanish-speaking children. She categorized the vast majority of these students as “retarded”—one, two, or three years behind in their studies. Certainly, there were several factors that could contribute to poor attendance. Migratory conditions kept children on the road and switching schools, and inferior living circumstances encouraged illness. Hispanic children knew that their class would be taught in another language, and that they would subject to new cultural norms. In the long run, though, these children—second-generation migrants—attained greater English speaking skills and acculturation than their parents. They represented a gradual Hispanic adjustment to their new region; they could not easily embrace the educational system as a ladder to opportunity, but they were exposed to how it functioned. They could gain sufficient fluency in English to translate for parents and relatives. However, their families’ labor system obviously thwarted their scholastic

⁷¹ It should be noted that the Social Security Act, passed in 1935, did not initially benefit agricultural workers anyway. Benefits were expanded to more workers during the 1960’s. See American Social History Project. *Who Built America?: Working People and the Nation’s Economy, Politics, Culture, and Society. Volume Two: From the Gilded Age to the Present* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1992), 425, 452; (Vasquez, 2002): Deutsch, 60-62.

progress. More than any other reason, their ability to contribute to their family's income impeded the formal education of Hispanic beet working children.⁷²

As their classmates recited lessons, the brothers and sisters in a beet family performed hand labor. Blocking and thinning beets—a process carried out close to the ground—especially utilized short arms and legs. In a 1924 study conducted in cooperation with the National Child Labor Committee, researchers determined that laboring children of all families (including land-holding families) worked with the crops an average of 8.3 hours a day, for an average of 44 days a year. In general, children of contract families spent 9.4 hours a day in the field. Although German-Russians comprised a large portion of the contract families in 1924, “Mexican” and “Spanish” children tended to work the longest hours of any group.⁷³

The process of tending to the beetroot had more than a socio-economic influence on its attendants: it could literally shape their bodies. In 1923, the Children's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Labor surveyed the health of 1,022 children working in the beet fields of Colorado. The physician found only 5 children to be “without defect or disease.”⁷⁴ Some problems—such as malnutrition and tooth decay—were indirectly related to the subjects' status as sugar beet children. To make the crop profitable, sugar beet labor was cheap; therefore, sugar beet families were typically poor; therefore, sugar beet children did not have access to healthy food and professional medical and dental attention. Malnutrition and cavities were common maladies—exacerbated, but probably not caused by, the sugar beet industry.

⁷² Miss Brown. “Age and Grade Distribution of 519 Spanish Speaking Children, Showing Number and Percent. Accelerated. At age. and Retarded.” in Skinner. back pocket: Hawthorne. 180-181.

⁷³ Coen, 37.

⁷⁴ U.S. Department of Labor, v. 72-78.

However, the beet could leave a more distinctive and physical brand upon the children. The repetitive motion involved in caring for hundreds of plants left its mark. In the Department of Labor's 1923 medical examination of beet-working children in Colorado, Dr. Gertrude A. Light determined that 66.1% of the group had the orthopedic defect known as "winged scapulae." According to the report, when a child has "winged scapulae" his/her "back is high and bowed over, the chest is dragged downward, and free action in breathing is interfered with." The government report published this analysis:

The high percentage of winged scapulae suggests that the steady stooping in the kneeling and crouching position which blocking and thinning necessitate and the intermittent stooping to handle and lift the very considerable weights involved in the harvest has an effect on the outline and posture of the growing child's body.⁷⁵

Apparently, the Spanish language was not the only thing some beet children had in common. Their skeletal system told the story of their daily encounter with the same plant. In the spring, these children groped through the dirt, constantly bending their growing bodies to help the young plants grow big and strong. The process of blocking and thinning required the worker to kneel upon his or her knees, wading down long rows of crops. To thin effectively, the worker leaned forward, extending both arms to pluck the plants. Translated into modern medical terms, the process of thinning beets forced the workers' scapula to be protracted for prolonged periods of time. A predictable result of this activity is a weakening of the Serratus Anterior, a deep muscle that pulls the scapula to the ribs. When the Serratus is weak, the scapula fan out from the back in a "winged" fashion. While the condition does not necessarily cause pain, it cannot be isolated from the rest of the body; workers who spent

⁷⁵ Ibid., 76.

between 8 and 12 hours in one stint of blocking and thinning would have exhausted their whole body, and a weak Serratus Anterior could very possibly have contributed to back or shoulder pain. At the end of the day, the children finally stood up straight, shook out their dusty frocks and overalls, and walked their stiff and aching bodies back to the house.⁷⁶

The 1923 exams identified another common circumstance—cases of “flat foot,” that is, collapsed arches. The investigator argued that the

cause of flat foot in so considerable a number of cases (21.6 %) in the present study may again be laid to undue strain on immature muscles...The existence of left flat foot only, or the presence of a more marked collapse of the arch on the left foot side in case both feet were affected, was noted, which recalled the fact that children often support the weight of the body on the left foot and raise the right knee in topping beets.⁷⁷

Once again, the *repetition* of motion, combined with immature muscles, appears to be the culprit. The harvest-time process of topping—using a knife to whack the foliage off of the uprooted beets—called for a particular stance. According to the conjecture of contemporary health workers, long days of unvaried work altered and changed young bodies. Each beet itself may have been innocent, producing little affect, yet the accumulation of motions—motivated by the promise of larger profits for the farmer and stable wages for the beet family—indicates that the humans needed a large quantity of beets to make their venture worthwhile. As the children’s feet testified, the value of the sugar beet was in its numbers. The woody root had physically left its imprint upon the Hispanic community.

⁷⁶ Florence Peterson Kendall. P.T., F.A.P.T.A.. *Muscles: Testing and Function, Fourth Edition, with Posture and Pain* (Baltimore: Williams & Wilkins, 1993), 288-293.

⁷⁷ U.S. Department of Labor, 77.

Indeed, the beet imposed a lasting image. In the home of a former beet worker, Ivan Vasquez, I was introduced to his sister. In the midst of our discussion on sugar beet work, she nonchalantly showed me the stub of one of her index fingers. The rest of the finger lay buried on a farm—a sacrifice to the topping knife, buried by Ivan himself. Although Ivan’s sister has put her sugar beet work years behind her, sugar beet work cannot be separated from her maturing identity. In fact, her stub requires maintenance; she stated that she keeps it filed down. Most likely, this isn’t an isolated case; the process of topping sugar beets probably claimed many fingers and caused other permanent injuries.⁷⁸

Perhaps there is another, broader sign that one has spent time laboring in the fields. One former migrant worker stated, “I can tell by looking at people whether or not they are farm workers. It doesn’t matter whether they are local residents or true migrants. If they have spent years in the fields, I can tell it.”⁷⁹ Was there a certain badge of distinction, present in one’s physical appearance, which went beyond stooped backs, flat feet, or missing fingers?

If nothing else, contract families learned how to pass their working hours as easily as possible. “It was fun,” said Elsie Vasquez, reflecting upon her childhood in the fields. When I asked her why the beet work was fun, she told me, “It was something to do.” You could go to movies once in awhile, but you had to go to town and the movies cost money. What else could you do with your time? The beet fields were a place where Elsie could hang out with her family, talking, laughing, singing. When it got hot, you could jump in the irrigation ditch to cool off. So even though Elsie and her family engaged themselves

⁷⁸ (Vasquez 2002)

⁷⁹ (Stella del Con 1979, 1)

in strenuous work, their minds and their voices were free to express thoughts and tell jokes. The fields served as an interactive social space for the family members; there was a lot of time to talk.⁸⁰

Although beet growers often assigned specific fields to a particular family, handwork in other crops mixed people together. During lulls in beet season, many Hispanics sought other kinds of agricultural work. Opportunities existed to work side by side with laborers from different families; however, the companionship did not always blossom. Regarding her family's experience in the potato fields, Marta said,

We didn't know the other migrant workers. We just said, "Good Morning," and that was it. People were private more. They would work but there was no communication. Most of the people were from Mexico and Texas. They were families with little children...they were poor.⁸¹

It seems that the transitory nature of the work, combined with the varied origins of laborers, produced a workforce with a disparate background and little time to become acquainted. Not all families stayed on in one area, and many would simply move with the seasonal labor demand. Given that beet work isolated families to certain acreage for more than half of the year, it would be surprising if an extensive and cohesive Hispanic community forged its links through the workplace. Fieldwork in crops other than beets did not necessarily encourage a large, open, kinship among all Hispanics; on a smaller scale, however, it did appear to promote tight bonds with close friends. Marta spoke of the support that workers had for each other: "My father was a wage laborer. He would hear of field jobs through the word of mouth of his friends, 'Hinojos, let's go find a job. There's tomatoes. Let's go to Fort Lupton.' ...it was these friends who got together to

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ "Marta," Hawthorne, 72.

look for jobs in order for them to survive.” Workers pooled their resources, sharing information, food and transportation. If someone had a car, they’d offer a ride to their comrades. Having a network of friends helped to make ends meet. Although fieldwork didn’t facilitate a broadly based Hispanic community, it fostered important connections between friends.⁸²

Thus, the nature of the sugar beet became infused into the patterns of workers’ lives. Social encounters between relatives, friends, and co-workers were based upon a family contract system, a system designed to most efficiently nurture and harvest the beet plant through its growth cycle. The Hispanic labor experience was the necessary means of survival among a certain population. Most Hispanics moved to Fort Collins because they could not subsist in their original homes. Although the field labor provided an income, the payment was meager and stability difficult to find. As some mothers spent their day working in the home, they tasks could actively preserve certain familiarities from their previous life. In the English-speaking system education system of Fort Collins, Hispanic children directly made contact with a new language and a new culture. Although they could not achieve a traditional definition of success in schools, children gained a level of familiarity with their cultural environment, initiating a gradual adjustment of successive generations. In general, however, fieldwork characterized the daily experience of many children and most adults. Hours were long and tasks were arduous. Conditions encouraged people to seek comfort and look inward, to rely upon family and friends to get by.

⁸² Ibid., 70.

In the memories of the adults who arrived in Fort Collins—and, perhaps, in the stories absorbed by their children—their previous existence must have seemed like a different lifetime. To have grow up and lived in a village in southern Colorado, New Mexico, or Mexico was to have known a degree of constancy and tradition. Although villagers lived in poverty, they could maintain themselves; in northern Colorado, the living was much more tenuous. Here, Hispanics understood that they were low on the local totem pole, fulfilling the economic demand for “squat” labor. They did not view their lives as ideal, and looked to the future for improvement. As Marta’s sister, Maria, insinuated, it may have been easier to have a positive outlook on fieldwork once you had left it:

So, I mean, I like it. It was hard, but I like it, I enjoyed it, but I also knew that I’m not going to do this for the rest of my life. It’s too hard. I want to get paid for my work. I want to get an education, and I want to show what I can do, you know, get a trade. But I’m not going to condemn migrant work. It’s a useful thing. If it wasn’t for us, who’s going to do all this? So, I respect migrant work.⁸³

Around Fort Collins, Hispanics became identified primarily as field workers. In his 1924 study of children working on northern Colorado farms, B.F. Coen determined that among farmers, only two fathers in the region spoke Spanish. These two farmers were tenants, not landowners.⁸⁴ In that same year, another researcher, Robert McLean, identified Fort Collins as the only locale known in the region to have even this amount of farming among Hispanics. A labor manager contributed his opinion:

I do not look for them to buy land. They are not thrifty like the German-Russians. But the farmers may come more and more to turn the beet over to them and let them

⁸³ “Maria,” Hawthorne, 80-81.

⁸⁴ Coen, 54.

farm them. This work, you know, is adapted to the Mexican temperament. They take life easily and don't mind being idle part of the year.⁸⁵

Perhaps this labor manager did not know that many of his Spanish-speaking employees had a rich heritage of land ownership and farming. Some employees had known previous lifestyles that offered economic independence and sustenance. In a village, each man was his own master and equal with his neighbors. Village families in New Mexico would raise corn, wheat, barley, oats, chickpeas, pinto beans, and potatoes. They supplemented their crops with chicken, pork, beef, lamb, mutton, goat, and fish and whatever wild game was available. They controlled the means to feed themselves.⁸⁶

In northern Colorado, self-sustenance also depended upon access to the land. In 1924, families that owned their land raised two-thirds of what they ate, tenants, less than one-half, and contract families bought most of their food supply.⁸⁷ As Hispanic migrant families were almost exclusively contract families, Spanish-speakers around Fort Collins clearly did not reap a living directly from the land. Although some families may have been able to tend a vegetable or potato patch, they were dependent upon their wage to provide the bulk of their needs. In turn, they could not preserve the level of independence that villagers had known.

From afar, the image is interchangeable: Hispanic laborers working the sod, their crops irrigated with high mountain snowmelt. On both the village farms of southern Colorado and New Mexico and the commercial beet farms of northern Colorado, mountain water made cultivation of the valleys possible. Yet, as wage-laborers, Hispanics did not have as much control of or a stake in the management of beet farms. Irrigation

⁸⁵ McLean, 78-79.

⁸⁶ deBuys, 197-198.

⁸⁷ Coen, 100.

techniques were of less immediate consequence to the typical field hand. Ditches provided water for the fields; cisterns contained drinking water. Should the average beet worker know that this liquid was diverted from the Cache la Poudre River, it might not change his life much. However, he might have a highly developed interest in water: at previous time, in his village existence, water defined the identity of himself, his family, and his community.

Hispanic villagers would necessarily have understood the relationship between mountains and water. Marching from southern Colorado into northern New Mexico, the Sangre de Cristo Mountains—the Blood of Christ Mountains—drain water into the thirsty lands below their peaks. Drier than the prairie lands to the north, these valleys were made fertile by their proximity to sufficient snowmelt. The farther one traveled from these high, forested mountains, the less agriculture was possible. This kind of terrain characterized the Hispanic villages that developed in the southwest. Clearly, the villagers based their existence upon a stable water cycle—unlike the beet workers in Fort Collins, the villagers directly viewed and managed their watershed. The rugged, pine-covered slopes of the watershed were considered community property; here, the shade of trees regulated the pace of snowmelt through the sunny summer months. While they had access to the timber, pasture, medicinal plants and wildlife of the mountains, villagers needed to practice restraint if they wanted to protect and maintain their watershed. Downstream, *acequias*—the community ditch system—determined the land distribution and irrigation patterns. In the town of San Luis, Colorado, Hispanics utilized the traditional “long-lot” system: families received a narrow strip of land, only hundreds of feet fronting the *acequia*, with perhaps miles stretching into the uplands. In this pattern,

each family's unit of land possessed access to the earthen irrigation ditch and spanned across multiple life zones. The small patch of bottomland could be flooded and used to grow crops; the extensive uplands, for ranging livestock. The villagers jointly managed and depended upon the *acequia*. Even if local residents didn't frequent the high country, their watershed and their way of life were clearly connected.⁸⁸

All this could be recalled in the heart of a beet worker, peering over an irrigation ditch in northern Colorado. Unlike the small, tight-knit villages of the southwest, Fort Collins did not allocate an equal share of local resources to all families. Beet children grew up in a world where work most directly earned money, not food or closer bonds within a community. One year, their family might get paid \$22.00 for every acre that they tended; the next year, \$18.00. The family's financial ability to have food and make ends meet looked like it was in the hands of the grower, the sugar beet company, or some more abstract force. It might appear that the local mountains were merely a distant backdrop in the landscape of work. Looming distantly in the west, they offered scenery to the field hands, but did not seem to participate in the immediate environment.

Environmental historian William Cronon argues that the "geography of capital" is ultimately underpinned by "the geography of first nature." As technology assumes the work of humans, connections between land, water, and food have become increasingly invisible—yet exist as strongly as ever. Like the village farms in the Sangre de Cristos, the sugar beet fields relied on a healthy mountain watershed to quench their thirst. The Fort Collins irrigation canals did not explicitly reflect the level of snowpack from that year; nonetheless, the sugar beet workers needed that water to make a living. A dry year

⁸⁸ Peña. "Cultural Landscapes and Biodiversity." 242-245.

in northern Colorado might translate into lower wages during the upcoming season. In the case of Fort Collins beet workers, however, the mountains appeared more remote, were managed by strangers, and provided water to land that was owned by somebody else.⁸⁹

However, ties to the land were not severed—just changed. Sugar beets and other crops influenced the flesh and the lifestyle. The people physically experienced the land, the weather, and the plants; they endured uncomfortable and even disfiguring conditions, and developed pride in their work. The beet also reached into the daily routine of its attendants. The growing cycle determined when people would go to work, when they would go to school, and with whom they would work.

As the Fort Collins sugar industry grew in local significance, so did the population of field workers. Margaret's family was just one of the first to establish Spanish-speaking roots in the town. More Hispanic families moved into the worker's neighborhoods. Now home, rather than work, could offer socialization with other beet families. As an increasingly stable community developed among the sugar beet migrants, traditional village customs began to resurface. A new Hispanic community emerged.

⁸⁹ William Cronon, *The Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1991), 200.



Fig. 8. "Winter and Summer quarters of Mexican family, for last four years." Picture printed in 1924. Reprinted from Coen, 83. (Courtesy of Morgan Library, Colorado State University)

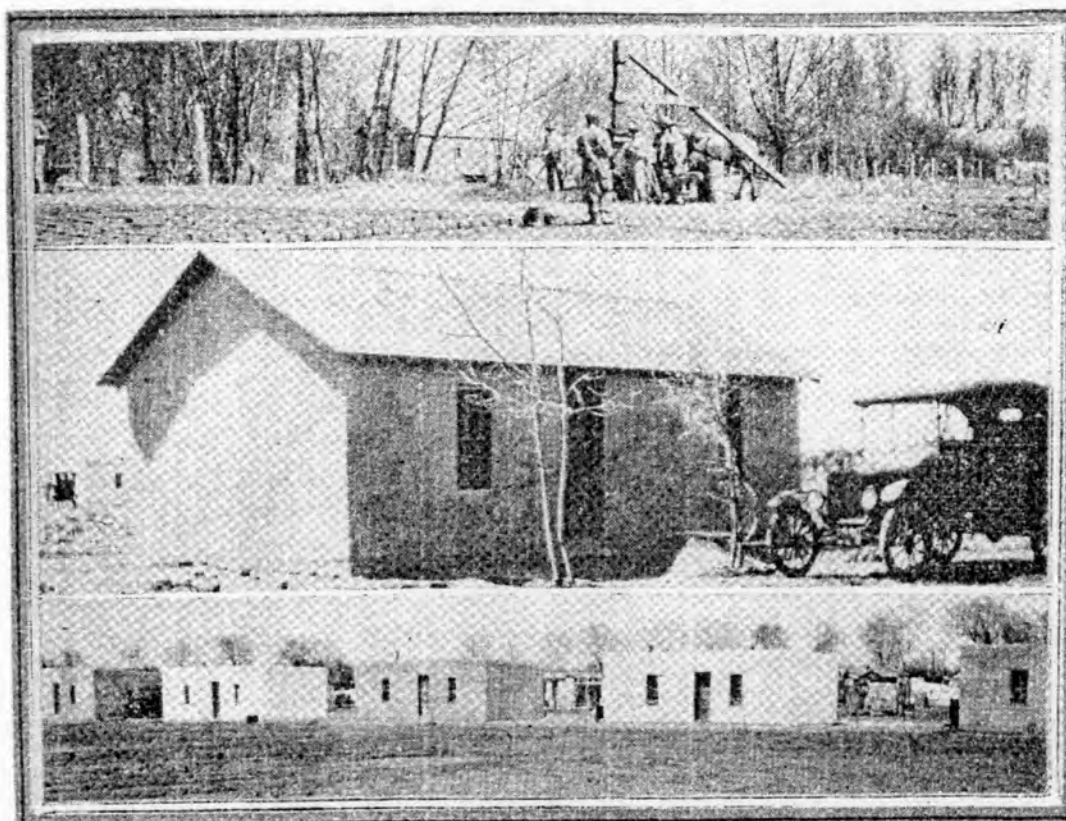


Fig. 9. "Views of the Growing Colony of Beet Workers Near Fort Collins, Colorado." Note the workers making adobe bricks. Reprinted from The Great Western Sugar Company, *Through the Leaves*, June, 1924, 323. (Courtesy of Morgan Library, Colorado State University)

Chapter Three
Advancing Onto the Map: From Shacks to Neighborhoods

It is logical to believe that people who were born and/or raised in northern Colorado considered northern Colorado their home. This was true irrespective of whether a person had white or brown skin, whether they kept an elegant Victorian house or sweated in the beet fields from sunup until sundown. Many beet workers perceived the Fort Collins area to be the center of their lives. Many white residents considered beet workers to be socially and economically peripheral. Through the half-century of the Fort Collins beet industry, and even into the post-industry years, these internal and external visions of local Hispanics continued to exist at odds with each other.

From 1903 until 1954, the economic heart of Fort Collins throbbed in the shape of a sugar beet. Whole generations witnessed the infancy, growth, and maturation of the beet industry. Through these years, a dynamic larger world touched Fort Collins—the nation’s wars, financial slumps, and booms played their part in the lives of the area’s people. Meanwhile, Hispanic migrants steadily journeyed to northern Colorado to cultivate sugar beet fields; many stayed, and cultivated a Hispanic community and landscape.⁹⁰

It required a pioneering spirit for Spanish-speaking families to travel to Fort Collins and place themselves on the local map. Like other pioneers, they entered a foreign region and, in one way or another, made it their home. To understand the how and why of the pioneers’ arrival, one can look to the sugar beet. To appreciate the community that would bud and bloom, one must combine the influence of the sugar beet with the culture that former villagers brought with them.

⁹⁰ Terri Cotton, “Education: Stumbling Block or Building Block?” in “Hispanics in Fort Collins: A Changing Town, A Changing People,” a special insert in *The Fort Collins Coloradoan*, 27 Sept., 1981, 6.

The sugar beet explains the Hispanic migrants' initial, and frequently prolonged, experiences in Fort Collins. Although the years between 1903 and 1954 witnessed a period of dramatic, worldwide change—and, on a smaller scale, witnessed the development of the local Spanish-speaking community—the nature of sugar beet fieldwork changed at a much slower pace.

When the Fort Collins sugar plant opened its doors to its first load of harvested beets in 1904, the facility was state-of-the-art. In the next few years, efficiency improved dramatically as both growers and factory managers learned how to streamline their jobs. Although they were distant from the large manufacturing regions farther to the East, Fort Collins residents knew that they lived in a scientific era; the local presences of Colorado Agricultural College and the Great Western Sugar Company's sugar refining factory underlined the contemporary partnership between industry and agriculture. The sugar industry benefited from this alliance: new agricultural and irrigation methods developed, the Colorado/Big Thompson project shunted more water to Fort Collins from the western slope of the Rocky Mountains, and farmers could be satisfied that "sugar beets were king"—the local sugar beet business improved the value of their land.⁹¹

The need for field workers, however, imposed a consistently inconvenient source of overhead. Beet growers tended to consider the presence of these people as an unfortunate but necessary expenditure. Technology beckoned; yet, cost-effective field machinery that could take the place of handwork remained elusive. Hand labor was almost unaffected by technological improvement from the establishment of the beet industry until 1940. The stubborn nature of the beet seemed to resist attempts to mechanize its cultivation and

⁹¹ Nelson, 38, 41-44, 49.

harvest. The beet insisted that humans remain alongside it in the fields. Indeed, the high demand for field workers perpetuated even during the years of the Great Depression, an era of massive unemployment and hostility toward “Mexicans” who might steal the white man’s job. Despite anti-Hispanic sentiment, however, Colorado recruiters kept recruiting Spanish-speaking workers. One 1936 observer noted that “these importations of Mexicans” continued as late as 1934 and 1935, “the height of national financial and social difficulties.”⁹²

Even though Hispanic workers engaged themselves meaningfully in the local sugar beet economy, their visibility and cultural identity appeared scattered in the initial decades of the twentieth century. Clearly, sugar beet labor remained a consistent, vital need. And just as clearly, then, sugar beet workers were here to stay. Yet in many ways the vitality of their role was not reflected in the literal map that charted their homes, or in the more elusive map that consisted of custom and literature. The dominant local “American” culture directed the observer’s eye away from the Spanish-speaking element in northern Colorado; the homes of beet workers occupied unnoticed locations. But in their out-of-sight spaces, Hispanic people subtly modified their surroundings. The beet required a resident labor population, provoking the establishment of workers’ neighborhoods by the sugar company. Hispanic people gravitated toward the houses,

⁹² In the 1920’s and 1930’s, U.S. agriculture experienced a general decline due to natural and economic conditions. Mounting unemployment in the 1930’s exacerbated anti-Hispanic sentiment, as other Americans perceived that Spanish-speaking “aliens” took their jobs. A repatriation movement encouraged Hispanics to leave the U.S. and “return” to Mexico. In this environment of wide-ranging anti-Hispanic attitude, the beet industry of northern Colorado continued to need the low-status handwork that Hispanics provided. see Gutierrez, Chapter 3: “The Shifting Policies of Ethnicity in the Interwar Period,” 69-116. Abraham Hoffman, *Unwanted Americans in the Great Depression: Repatriation Pressures, 1929-1939* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1974). To view the relatively few amount of Colorado Hispanics that experienced repatriation, see the map on page 119; Schwartz, 103; Clyde McIntyre, “Beet Workers in Colorado,” Colorado Civil Works Administration, Writer’s Program, 1936. 26. Denver: Colorado Historical Society; Great Western Sugar Company, “Toward a Better Way of Life on Western Farms,” pamphlet, “Great Western’s 50th Anniversary,” 1955. 13-15. Denver: Colorado Historical Society.

owning them, living in them, transforming them. Thus, a curious thing happened: Hispanic residents, while remaining largely unacknowledged, changed the landscape of Fort Collins.

Chozas- Shacks

Margaret and Charles Martinez married on August 1st, 1927. When asked where she and Charles first lived together, Margaret replied, “Buckingham. And from there, different places; we went out to work the beets.”⁹³ Her parents had owned one of the small houses in Buckingham, but Margaret and Charles—young, freshly married, and probably poor—did not buy a house for themselves right away. Instead, they “went out to work the beets”; they probably lived a semi-migrant lifestyle, occupying the houses that their current beet farmer employers offered them.

Like Margaret and Charles in their early years of marriage, many Hispanic beet workers lived in the beet landscape of Fort Collins without owning their little piece of the community. In this stage, Margaret and Charles belonged to a shifting population that relied upon beet work to provide most of their sustenance and housing each year. They lived on the edge, season to season, taking whatever outside jobs they could. When sugar beets were out of season, men could often earn wages in the sugar factory, at a local rock quarry, or on the railroads. But these opportunities were limited, and, if pinpointed on a chart, the families’ residences did not consistently follow these other occupations; rather,

⁹³ (Mr. and Mrs. Charles Martinez 1976, 7) It should be noted that Margaret Martinez declared that she never actually worked in the beets herself. Like many other Hispanic mothers, she occupied herself with domestic duties. see Jim Heaton, video documentary, “Back then, Charles and Margaret Martinez,” Fort Collins Public Library, 1986.

the families could be identified with the beet farmers' shacks. The shacks existed on the periphery of fields and in the peripheral vision of the community. The experience of Hispanic beet workers in temporary shacks represented the subtle, incipient presence that Spanish-speakers assumed in Fort Collins.

While most early-twentieth century Hispanics in Fort Collins were beet workers, not all of the Hispanic beet workers lived permanently around Fort Collins. Some laborers moved with the seasons. The sugar factory, at its foundation, had established neighborhoods for field workers, and Great Western expanded the neighborhoods as the industry grew. Many residents of these neighborhoods owned their own houses and considered themselves permanent members of the community. However, these neighborhoods could not contain all of the workers. A large proportion of beet working families did not possess their homes—these were the people who relied upon rent-free housing contractually offered by the sugar beet farmer who employed them. Certain families were permitted to occupy these buildings after the beet harvest, while others wintered—whether by choice, lack of alternatives, or both—in Denver's Hispanic neighborhoods, or closer to former villages in regions farther south. After all, the terms of the beet contract specified a temporary agreement: housing, to be provided by the beet grower, only for the duration of sugar beet work. Indeed, some beet workers intended to be transient, shifting between Fort Collins and a home base in their old village or in Denver. However, many people willingly accepted year-round housing.⁹⁴

Fort Collins's sugar beet landscape—its fields, buildings, and irrigation ditches—minimized the status of Hispanic sugar beet workers. The quality and

⁹⁴ Coen, 88. Estimates of the total number of beet families who relied upon the farmers for housing ranges from 50% to 90%. Most likely this figure varied throughout the region, depending upon the affordable housing in or near each city.

geographic location of the temporary workers' housing contributed to the figurative and literal marginalization of the inhabitants. Many Hispanic migrants found that the contractor's sense of "decent housing" often went unfulfilled. One 1923 report determined that about half the housing offered by sugar beet growers to their workers could be classified as modest yet soundly built houses. The other half deserved to be called "beet shacks." A contemporary observer noted that

The shack was built of tar paper, or of corrugated iron, or was a roughly boarded shanty with, in some cases, only one window and one door. Sometimes it was only a caravan wagon, which, hung from end to end with pots, pans, washtubs and clothes, was moved about from field to field as the work required.⁹⁵

In 1924, researcher B.F. Coen recorded the particular conditions that shack-dwellers tolerated: no shade, one or two rooms, no screens on windows, dirty, leaky roof, cracks in walls, no bath facilities, no beds, poor outhouse. Shacks were "of the box-car type, low roof, usually without foundation, and usually not elevated from the ground."⁹⁶ Holes and cracks in the boards permitted snakes to enter in the summer and chilling drafts to blow in during the winter. The cramped quarters of these flimsy structures was exaggerated by the number of people that might be squeezed in—families with 7, 8, or 9 children occupied the little rooms. It seems that the housing available for the "beeters" remained at the discretion of the landowning beet farmer; in the decentralized beet industry, the sugar company encouraged, but did not enforce, high standards of housing for the labor. Some beet families might be put up in a snug and comfortable structure while others ended up accepting the shabby shanty that the farmer presented.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ U.S. Department of Labor, 66.

⁹⁶ Coen, 87-92.

⁹⁷ Charles E. Evans, Manager, Eaton and Greeley factories, "With the Beet Labor Here—" *Through the Leaves* (June 1924), 307-308.

Workers who lived in the sugar beet landscape also endured restricted and unclean water. Although water was carefully channeled and directed to irrigate sugar beets and other crops, it was not so carefully delivered to the homes of field hands. Very few of their houses possessed indoor plumbing. In a countryside with alkali soil, not many wells offered good water. Most contract families who lived by fields drank water that had been delivered from the closest town or city, and deposited in a cistern. “They bring you water once in six weeks,” said one father, “and dump it into that cistern. When its warm, it’s gets stale; and if you drink it, you get sick.”⁹⁸ For families who frequently did not possess the mobility that a car could provide, cisterns offered the only available source of water—even if it made one ill. And whether or not the water retained purity, it existed in limited quantity; the cistern curbed the degree to which beet workers could wash their bodies and their clothes, or water plants in a garden. A small number of contract families reported the use of irrigation-ditch water for all purposes. The ditch water, of course, drained off of the land and could easily have been contaminated by barns and privies. For the families who lived by the fields, the abundance or lack of clean water prescribed the degree to which one could maintain a wholesome, familiar standard of living.⁹⁹

These workers, then, at worst could experience unhealthy and uncomfortable living conditions; at best, clean water and a solid roof over their heads. No matter how low typical standards might be, beet families did possess some leverage to determine what they would accept. Both beet growers and the sugar factory recognized the value of efficient field labor. Thus, the Great Western Sugar Company urged beet growers to attract the most skillful workers. To this end, GWSC lauded the merits of decent lodging:

⁹⁸ U.S. Department of Labor, 68.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 68-69.

“good quarters, good water, wood, and above all, an accommodating farmer will...get a first class family every time.”¹⁰⁰ A hard-working and productive family, cognizant of their desirability, could afford to pick their employer for each season. A bad experience on one sugar beet farm might encourage a family to seek work elsewhere the following year. On the other hand, inexperienced families—especially the ones who were new to northern Colorado—would have to settle for what luck brought to them.¹⁰¹

Perhaps a family would also maneuver to work on a farm close to town. The simple geography of the temporary housing cramped a family’s ability to perpetuate and enhance their Hispanic identity. Despite the relative comfort of any farmer-provided housing, it could not escape its basic location: on the farm. Here, workers lived in isolation and impermanence; they could not easily have day-to-day contact with a larger Spanish-speaking community. The group-centered lifestyle of the village could not be arranged. Living next door to the fields, they were reminded at all times of their daily toil. In addition, they could not escape the notion that they constantly occupied space that did not belong to them. Indeed, they functioned in a peasant-like mode—as an extension of another man’s land. Without the security and satisfaction of ownership, many occupants would have lacked motivation to improve their homes or cultivate lasting, productive kitchen gardens. Those who did work the space around their shack had to squeeze garden maintenance into the precious moments spend away from the beet fields. Some children drank fresh cow’s milk, but the animal belonged to the farmer, not to the family. A Hispanic family’s identity was not expressed in farmer-provided housing.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Maxwell Mattoon, “Beet Labor,” *Through the Leaves* (Jan. 1922), 73.

¹⁰¹ L.H. Andrews, “How to Assist Beet Labor to Do Good Work,” *Through the Leaves* (April 1924), 171-172.

¹⁰² (Vasquez 2002)

The sugar beet industry, however, required the maintenance of a happy, sugar beet-working Hispanic identity. In 1924, Great Western created a promotional film, evidently aimed at recruiting Hispanic beet workers. Silent, black and white, and subtitled in Spanish, the piece documented Great Western's version of typical beet workers' lives. The Spanish-speaking viewer observed the work, play, and housing of sugar beet workers in an unspecified locale. Although the camera captured the various stages of work that field hands would perform—blocking and thinning, hoeing, topping, and shoveling harvested beets into a truck—special attention is paid to the community's activities. The film portrayed an after-work baseball game, a parade of lavishly adorned cars celebrating September 16th with a bonanza of Mexican and United States flags, a general fiesta, and children going to school. While the lifestyle of sugar beet workers does not appear luxurious, it does appear relaxed and social.¹⁰³

Significantly, fields and dirt roads provided the backdrop for all of these happy events; city and town do not play a role in the beet workers' free time. According to the images in the film, the workers' neighborhood and even their school seem to be isolated and rural. Yet—as Great Western understood—where there are sugar beets, there is a nearby factory and town. The very beets that the workers harvested would be transported to a larger settlement in a not-too-distant location. In this attempt to appeal to potential workers, Great Western presented the image of an established, segregated Hispanic community. Depending upon one's perspective, this community existed outside of—or independent from—the hub of the local population.

¹⁰³ Great Western Sugar Company, film, 1924, black and white, subtitled in Spanish, at Loveland Museum and Gallery, Loveland, Colorado.

If this film had been created near Fort Collins, it might have run parallel to local sentiment. The shacks and neighborhoods of Hispanic workers clearly occupied an economic niche in the landscape of Fort Collins. However, they did *not* occupy space in the idyllic sugar beet countryside that mainstream Fort Collins perceived. In *Second Hoeing*, Hope Williams Sykes paints a setting peopled only by “Americans” and German-Russian beet workers.

Hannah turned her face to the east and the fertile valleys, the sugar beet country of northern Colorado; the farmhouses with gaunt cottonwoods sheltering the big red barns, high silos, outbuildings clustering close. Small fields were cut by irrigation ditches, with cottonwoods following the larger canals that curved over the level countryside.¹⁰⁴

Here, Sykes depicted the important backdrop to her story—the fertile valleys to the east of the Front Range of the Rocky Mountains. The land was possessed and used, filled with buildings, waterways, and fields. The actors are “Americans”—represented as culturally refined Anglos—and the Germans from Russia. Sykes focused upon work in her novel; *Second Hoeing* only comes to a satisfactory ending after Hannah has labored, physically and spiritually, to uplift herself. Yet, workers’ neighborhoods and shabby farm shacks were depicted in a negative light—they represented the lazy and unclean character of their inhabitants. Although the negligence of farmers or the challenging, transient lifestyle of workers certainly influenced the quality of the housing, these factors played a minimal part of the story. And Spanish-speakers—in high demand in the sugar beet fields of 1935—played no part in the story. In the Fort Collins of Sykes’s imagination, Hispanic workers did even not exist.

¹⁰⁴ Hope William Sykes, *Second Hoeing* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1935), 12.

Sykes's attitude revealed a certain truth: Spanish-speaking residents were discouraged from participating in the public life of Fort Collins. Common spaces could not be taken for granted by all local residents. Some places were off-limits to people who did not look Anglo; signs in the windows of restaurants and grocery stores that read "White trade only," or "No dogs or Mexicans allowed," made this point clear. Hispanic people understood that they could not swim in the lake at City Park. Even the public school system shut out their culture; teachers forbid students to speak Spanish, and some teachers renamed Hispanic children with English names. In the early 1920's a Mexican family, when questioned whether they would attend a schoolhouse entertainment, replied "No. They don't want us."¹⁰⁵ One woman, Isabelle Gavaldon, recalls her mid-century high school experience: there were no Mexican cheerleaders and no Mexican football players. Indeed, Hispanic residents were not visible in the mainstream space of Fort Collins.¹⁰⁶

Thus, a casual visitor to Fort Collins might not fully understand the nature of the field labor that underpinned the city's prosperity. The main streets and common areas did not reveal the army of Hispanic families that contributed to the economic success of Fort Collins. In the visitor's eyes, the city possessed a white face. The large, brick sugar factory on the north side of town stood tall and proud. Flanked by outbuildings, roads, and rail lines, it demonstrated the economic lifeblood of the community. The trim farmhouses of independent beet-growing families existed in the minds of readers of *Through the Leaves* and *Second Hoeing*. Clearly, the symbols of local industry and agriculture rested firmly in the hands of affluent white residents. And a trip to the college,

¹⁰⁵ Skinner, 65.

¹⁰⁶ City of Fort Collins, "Mi Gente...the Fort Collins Experience," videorecording, 1998, Fort Collins Public Library, Fort Collins, Colorado.

local park, movie theatre, barber shop, or grocery store did not disrupt this image—these public spaces effectively segregated, if not excluded, brown-skinned people.

On the eastern side of the Poudre River, however, the visitor might encounter a few modest, densely populated neighborhoods: Buckingham, Andersonville, and Alta Vista, founded to house sugar beet workers. Here, the newcomer might freely mingle with Hispanic and German-Russian residents. A perceptive visitor would note the placement of these unpretentious settlements: across both the tracks and the river, on the northern outskirts of town—an area that few people passed by on the way to somewhere else. Even today the neighborhoods represent the edge of Fort Collins. Bordered by the river, light industry, and open fields, the little clusters of houses seem to be residential islands. The historically commercial and social nucleus of the city lies across the river, to the south and west. Earlier in the century, the neighborhoods' geographic separation from Fort Collins was official: both Andersonville and Alta Vista, though relatively older districts, would not be annexed into the city until 1974. Paved streets and city water arrived soon after. The proximity to the river was probably a mixed blessing; residents could enjoy the recreation, fishing opportunities, and large shady cottonwoods that the Poudre River offered, yet they lived in the river's floodplain. Great Western had not founded the workers' colonies in the most secure location. The 1904 flood took out many houses in Buckingham, and an overflow in 1961 destroyed houses in Alta Vista. Although these neighborhoods were considered permanent, the threat of floods always challenged their stability. The space that these neighborhoods occupied could be defined both in relationship to the river and in relationship to the rest of Fort Collins. The space

indicated that the residents possessed subordinate, tenuous, marginal, status in the local community.¹⁰⁷

Was the landscape defined by race? In a similar context—California’s Imperial Valley during the early twentieth century—cultural geographer Don Mitchell says yes. He contends that whites dominated and defined the Imperial Valley’s agricultural setting, reducing the significance of migrant workers in the success of crops, and thus in the success of the rural community.

The Imperial [Valley] was destiny made manifest, the very culmination of the American Dream. As early as 1911, popular literature was picturing the Imperial Valley as a blooming, spectacular, visionary, quintessentially American place. It was a place made primarily by white American engineering ingenuity, as the Colorado River was eventually tamed and put to good use.¹⁰⁸

Here, the greatness of the landscape emerged from the forceful, intelligent influence of white “Americans”—reflecting Sykes’ sense of Anglo-American cultural superiority. According to Mitchell, this landscape could only exist if Mexican and other migrant workers were categorized as inferior, used, and then dismissed from the minds of most locals; their presence was not to be acknowledged in an idealized vision of the land. Workers would move from camp to camp, living in tents and in inadequate, impermanent housing for brief stints before leaving for the next job. However, early Fort Collins does not precisely match the situation in the Imperial Valley of this period; sugar beets required workers who were both skilled and semi-permanent or permanent. Therefore,

¹⁰⁷ For information about these floods, see Fort Collins Neighborhood History Project, 10; Rose Martinez and Estella Martinez, interview by Charlene Tresner, transcript, 7 October, 1976, 23. Oral History Archive, Fort Collins Public Library, Fort Collins, Colorado. Arlene Briggs Ahlbrandt and Kathryn “Kate” Stieben, eds, *The History of Larimer County, Colorado, Volume II* (Dallas, Texas: Curtis Media Corporation, 1987), 66-67.

¹⁰⁸ Don Mitchell, *The Lie of the Land: Migrant Workers and the California Landscape* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 108.

the local white population could not shake off the beet worker presence very easily. Nonetheless, Fort Collins' high profile citizens remained Anglo, and cheerleaders still had white skin. Meanwhile, northern Colorado possessed its own version of worker's camps: shacks.

Throughout the story of race, sugar beet workers, and marginalization, the specific history of German-Russians reflects a different kind of field worker experience in Fort Collins. Their status as "white" meant that other residents had a higher opinion of them. Although German-Russians were the target of "Russian" stereotypes and lived in shacks like other sugar beet workers, they were perceived as potential peers in the local Anglo community. For all practical purposes, these European immigrants arrived in northern Colorado and lived and worked in the same conditions that Hispanic migrants experienced. Yet, one observer noted, "They were scattered, oh yes, and they were farming, you see. They came here to work beets originally. And then they were a little more progressive and lots of them accumulated farms and ranches and became more successful."¹⁰⁹ Since 1870, German-Russians had been traveling to the American Midwest, planting family roots and establishing farms. The first wave to arrive in Fort Collins was particularly poor; nonetheless, when they entered northern Colorado at the turn of the century, they could look to a generation-old model of German-Russian land acquisition in the United States.¹¹⁰

Over time, German-Russians successfully integrated themselves into the visible landscape of Fort Collins. Unlike Hispanic migrants, they became renters and owners of

¹⁰⁹ Francis Gilbert Martinez, interview by Jonathon Anderson, transcript, 21 August, 1974, 9. Oral History Archive, Fort Collins Public Library, Fort Collins, Colorado.

¹¹⁰ Roqck, 5; Eloise Sagel Hanson, *From the Steppes to the Prairies: A Brief History of the German People from Russia in Fort Morgan, Colorado* (Fort Morgan, Colorado: Centennial Commission of Fort Morgan, 1984), 4-8.

commercial beet farms. Like the white Americans who settled the Imperial Valley, some German-Russians fulfilled the classic definition of the American dream. How could German-Russians, and not Hispanics, leave behind the beet workers' shacks and neighborhoods, and move up the local socio-economic ladder?

German-Russians appeared to assimilate into the American cultural environment more readily than Hispanics. Most obviously, they were fair-skinned. When signs in Fort Collins' businesses and public areas warned "Whites only," residents of German descent did not have to worry. Most likely these restrictions extended to one's ability to attain land and capital. Current social notions supported efforts to uplift white-skinned people while keeping Spanish-speakers in a dependent role. An observer of farm labor in the United States in 1945 commented upon the progress of German-Russian beet workers: "The sugar-beet companies, anxious to colonize their beet areas with a resident labor group, readily aided these ambitious workers by giving them generous terms on which to buy or rent company land." He went on to say: "The Mexicans, on the other hand, showed little interest in improving their status, and the overwhelming majority remained beet laborers."¹¹¹ In agreement with this statement, an observer in the early 1920's asserted, "Unlike the Russian-Germans, the Mexicans are poor economists. They lack the thrift and steady industriousness of the European peasants."¹¹² A generation earlier, one writer labeled "the Mexican" as "fatalistic" and "patriarchal," antithetical qualities of "individual thinking beings." This writer further reminded the reader, "a Northern people is more energetic than a Southern people." Such racialism determined that Hispanics were suited to menial positions while "Northern people" conducted the important

¹¹¹ Harry Schwartz, *Seasonal Farm Labor in the United States, With Special Reference to Hired Workers in Fruit and Vegetable and Sugar-beet Production* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1945), 108-109.

¹¹² Skinner, 37.

business of life. Not only did Hispanic sugar beet workers live and labor away from the center of Fort Collins' public life, but their "Southern" origins, even, were identified as distant from the "Northern" people's Old World homeland. This writer identified a previous pattern of environmental separation; why resist history?¹¹³

The blatant prejudice in Fort Collins created an ethnic awareness that even divided Hispanics. Some people claimed the title "Spanish-American," indicating that they or their ancestors had been residing in southern Colorado or New Mexico for multiple generations. Such a background asserted a more direct European lineage. Outsiders noted that "Spanish-Americans" resented being confused with "Mexicans," who purportedly had darker skin.¹¹⁴ One local Hispanic who was prominent in regional business and real estate—a deviation from the norm—was quick to identify his own Spanish and otherwise European pedigree.¹¹⁵ For him, perhaps, Mexican blood belonged in a different economic class.

The strain between "Spanish-Americans" and "Mexicans" reflected the relationship between recent Mexican immigrants and the established Hispanic community in the United States. From the turn of the century on, a relatively steady stream of newcomers ensured that the Hispanic population would typically have a percentage that had recently arrived and was less adjusted to life in the United States. Historian David G. Gutierrez argues that in this context of varying citizenship, economic status, and cultural assimilation, Hispanic people constantly questioned their ethnic identity.¹¹⁶ The relationship between recent Mexican immigrants and fixed residents could run a range of

¹¹³ "El Cinico," (translated: "The Cynic," 1903) reprinted in *Hispanic Colorado, Four Centuries: History and Heritage*, Evelio Echevarria and Jose Otero, eds. (Fort Collins: Centennial Productions, 1976), 74-76.

¹¹⁴ Coen, 53-54.

¹¹⁵ (Francis Gilbert Martinez 1974, 7-8)

¹¹⁶ Gutierrez, 6.

qualities. To a typical Spanish-speaker, other Hispanics might have represented job competition and persons who contribute to a bad “Mexican” stereotype—or, on a positive note, they might have offered social and economic support in a familiar language. In Fort Collins, minimal documentation remains to preserve the first hand opinions of Hispanic people during the sugar beet period; the internal conflict or lack thereof is perceived mostly through secondary sources. However, the relatively equal economic position of most sugar beet workers suggests a common plight. The hardship of work and local prejudice may have encouraged Hispanics to look to each other for strength. In 1926, the National Child Labor Committee documented a roughly even mix of Hispanics in the beet districts of northern Colorado: the Committee reported 52 “Mexican” contract families and 57 “Spanish-American” contract families.¹¹⁷ In this year, neither group overwhelmed the other. Although tension may have existed between Spanish-speakers of Mexican and American nativity, the split was not insurmountable: Margaret and Charles Martinez, born in New Mexico and Mexico, respectively, united in 1927 without any remarkable objections.¹¹⁸

Most white residents of Fort Collins did not have a deep understanding of the background of the local sugar beet workers—racist explanations popularly explained social divisions. Continuously through the decades, xenophobic excuses permitted the dominant class of whites to maintain a status quo; like the “American” settlers of the Imperial Valley, the local establishment could use the inherent, supposedly natural characteristics of Hispanics to justify their worker bee role at the bottom of the Fort

¹¹⁷ Brown, 59.

¹¹⁸ (Mr. and Mrs. Charles Martinez 1976, title page)

Collins totem pole. Shacks, accordingly, served as apt shelter for this lower class of people.

Beside irrigation ditches and on the edges of fields, the shacks were important because they initiated and familiarized Hispanic families with Fort Collins. It was from this vantage point that recent migrants viewed the region to which they had moved. Many children first came into the world within the four walls of a crowded shack; to them, there existed no other kind of home.¹¹⁹

As migrants spent more time in the Fort Collins area, the shack lifestyle minimized a family's ability to perpetuate and enhance its Hispanic identity. However, an internal view reveals a different pattern: rather than going dormant, social and religious customs simply adapted. Families utilized their hours between work to worship and recreate. When Ivan Vasquez's family lacked the ability to drive to church service, grandparents and parents instructed Ivan and the other children with stories from the bible. The mature members of the household ensured that the family would maintain a Catholic identity. Sometimes, large groups would gather on the farms for social events. Ivan remembers the dances in particular: no one dressed up, but dance-goers brought violins, guitars, beer, and good cheer. Indeed, one farm dance provided the romantic backdrop when Ivan's father met his mother.¹²⁰

Certainly, the hardship and inadequacy of the shack lifestyle could have tightened bonds within families and the Spanish-speaking community. However, few outsiders could have noticed or appreciated the vivacious but fleeting community activities; these occasions did not have permanent external face. Hispanics did not frequently own,

¹¹⁹ (Vásquez 2002)

¹²⁰ Ibid.

occupy or use the most obvious public spaces Fort Collins. Living in shacks, beet workers were still struggling just to make ends meet. In 1924, Coen suitably observed the struggling existence of beet workers:

In a new country such as Colorado, one in traveling across the country is struck by the large number of homes that are not kept in first class condition. The old community is the one with the better homes, better lawns, farms with better appearance. The homes of the beet workers are much the type of the homes of the homesteaders, the pioneers, the makers of the West.¹²¹

Neighborhoods- Colonias

However narrow opportunities might be, Hispanics knew that real estate was not completely out of reach. In 1937, Margaret and Charles purchased an adobe house in Alta Vista for \$195. They bought their adobe from a man named Tony Ortega and proceeded to enlarge the windows and add more rooms, including a bathroom. Margaret and Charles made Alta Vista their home for decades; there, they raised their children and participated in the local community. Charles' long-standing involvement ultimately prompted the locals to name a street after him.¹²²

The nature of the sugar beet called for a consistent labor force and thus the creation of housing developments like Alta Vista; in turn, these new districts facilitated Hispanic community life. In the disorder of migratory existence, settled neighborhoods proved to be the recipe for lasting community development. These workers' enclaves were, finally, a place to stop and get to know one's neighbor. After the disorienting effects of a new landscape and the isolating impermanence of field labor, Hispanic families could find a

¹²¹ Coen, 89.

¹²² (Mr. and Mrs. Charles Martinez 1976, 8-13, 18)

measure of constancy. Living in the midst of social contact, Spanish-speakers could coalesce and refer to themselves as a group called “Andersonville” or “Buckingham.”

Up until this point, I have used “community” in a generic fashion. My reference to the Hispanic community has simply signified the social blend of Spanish-speakers in Fort Collins. This vague definition can indicate a wide spectrum of people, from the temporary migrant workers who spend a season in Fort Collins to the firmly entrenched family of Margaret and Charles in Alta Vista. However, the growth of the Hispanic community clearly accompanied the influx of Hispanic migrants into the neighborhoods. Therefore, it becomes necessary to more precisely identify who lived and participated in the Fort Collins Hispanic community.

In *Community and Social Change in America*, Thomas Bender, asserted that “Community...is best defined as a network of social relations marked by mutuality and emotional bonds.”¹²³ Hispanic members of the neighborhoods demonstrated commonalities that could be traced back to the village lifestyle: diversified subsistence agriculture, adobe houses, shared space. However, not all of their commonalities emerged from the village; after all, residents lived in a twentieth-century sugar beet neighborhood, and they now participated in a larger, industrialized beet sugar system. As the Hispanic migrants left the isolated, close-knit villages and established themselves on the edge of Fort Collins they typified the transformed communities that Bender describes. The corporate housing did not destroy the Hispanic sense of community—it just changed it.

Although Bender considered territory to be a confusing way to study neighborhoods, physical space offers insight into the development of the Hispanic population in Fort

¹²³ Thomas Bender, *Community and Social Change in America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 7.

Collins. Bender argued that a preoccupation with territory distracts from the actual function of the community; this imposes a geographical and sometimes misleading definition of the group. Hispanic community growth in Fort Collins, however, can be understood by examining the patterns in which people desired to move from space to space —upwardly mobile families moved from the farm housing to the neighborhoods. Hispanic beet workers who lived on farms mingled with and supported each other. Clearly, Hispanic community existed within the people who dwelled in shacks; in fact, distance and hardship may have intensified personal and group bonds. Nonetheless, the neighborhoods represented the heart of the local Hispanic community. Here, residents created lasting, discernable changes upon the world around them.¹²⁴

The neighborhoods evolved into hybrid villages—they grew from an amalgam of various Hispanic and Anglo elements. The architectural and biological elements of each settlement reflected the prevailing street layout of the rest of Fort Collins, yet also harkened back to the lifestyle of southwestern villages. Inhabitants changed and were changed by the mixed environment. Within this space, many people could noticeably augment their identities—they were no longer just sugar beet workers, they were also church members, gardeners, *curanderas*, ball players, and community activists. Residents from different states and countries fostered lasting relationships. Neighbors shared resources and contributed to the local dynamic. The Spanish-speaking “colonies” actually colonized a bit of Fort Collins and made something new.

The Martinezes may have been long-term residents of their neighborhood, but their housing status was not exceptional. The 1920’s and 30’s filled Alta Vista, Andersonville,

¹²⁴ Bender, 5-6, 10.

Buckingham, and Holy Family settlements with Spanish-speaking renters and owners. These small neighborhoods reflected the intentions of their corporate sponsors: to create a year-round home for a supply of sugar beet labor. Great Western, like other sugar companies around the state, wanted to secure dependable workers; in 1903, the company sponsored the construction of workers' neighborhoods. The first inhabitants of the neighborhoods—the first beet workers of the 1900's and 1910's—were German Russians. The company did not plan the first two settlements with Hispanics in mind.

Platted in 1903, Buckingham Place once earned the nickname "La Russia," referring to the German Russian population that occupied the little neighborhood. The earliest structures usually contained two tiny rooms. Initially, Buckingham consisted of thirteen houses, each 20 by 12 feet. The flood of 1904 destroyed most of these original structures, but the neighborhood eventually swelled to 80 small houses on four blocks. Established later in the same year, Andersonville materialized in a similar pattern. To the northeast of Buckingham, Andersonville was smaller and more distant from town. Both neighborhoods embraced the gridded pattern of streets. The lots were narrow and the houses were set back from the street. Families lived elbow to elbow with their neighbors; in this sort of arrangement, residents would have close contact with each other.¹²⁵

Over subsequent decades, the German presence waned and the neighborhoods gained an increasingly Hispanic identity. In 1908, enough Hispanics lived in the area to patronize a local chili parlor. The construction of Alta Vista—originally dubbed the "Colonia Española"—reflected the changing demographics of Fort Collins in the 1920's. In 1923, Great Western announced plans to build this distinctly Hispanic settlement near

¹²⁵ City of Fort Collins, Neighborhood History Project, 10, 14.

Andersonville. Company officials anticipated that Hispanic beet workers would construct, buy, and occupy houses made of adobe. They hired Felipe and Pedro Arellano, builders from northern New Mexico, to construct and assist others in the construction of small adobe houses.¹²⁶

As Great Western knew, “adobe colonies” were in vogue in the sugar beet towns of Colorado. In what one researcher explained as an effort “to induce the better class of Spanish beet labor to remain the year round in the region of summer work,” Colorado’s sugar companies of the 1920’s designed housing developments specifically for Hispanic workers.¹²⁷ Great Western acknowledged that resident experienced labor could work better and more quickly. In Sugar City, Colorado, the National Sugar Manufacturing Company recognized the growing role of Hispanic laborers by erecting substantial barracks. The Holly and American Beet Sugar companies, operating elsewhere in the state, built colonies in the form of “adobe huts” or adobe “long houses” with trees, water, and turf available for gardening. They planned to make occupancy rent-free. An Anglo contemporary billed the companies’ plans as a pathway to “really pleasant little communities” in these places. Yet, the plans for upgraded housing did not feature ownership; Hispanic workers could not make a home with the guarantee of permanence. If the companies controlled the housing, the companies, not residents, could dictate the tenure of the communities. It is unclear whether the Great Western Sugar Company benevolently wanted to offer more autonomy to Hispanic locals when they designed a

¹²⁶ Ibid., 2, 10, 14, 15, 18, 21, 22, 26.

¹²⁷ Coen, 82.

plan for individual ownership within Alta Vista. Nonetheless, the inhabitants of Alta Vista built and bought their own houses.¹²⁸

Built within the influence of both Hispanic and Anglo culture, the neighborhood architecture assumed a hybrid style. While the future homeowners provided the construction labor, the company furnished the straw, lime and gravel used in adobe mixture. The end result reflected distinctly Anglo designs: houses were set back from the street, and possessed pitched rather than flat roofs. Yet Great Western, like the American and Holly companies, demonstrated an effort to create a traditional Hispanic setting in the new adobe colony. Under the supervision of the Arellanos brothers, the new buildings came to mimic some of the features of houses that Hispanics occupied in areas like southern Colorado and New Mexico. For example, the plain 1 x 4 surrounds in the doors and windows reflected a common trait in New Mexican architecture. Modern observation reveals other New Mexican patterns: one house demonstrates an L-shaped plan and another structure is actually two houses linked to form one. Beet workers frequently originated from poor villages where the use of adobe persisted even while wooden houses gained popularity in other regions; adobe construction would have been very familiar to some of the inhabitants of Alta Vista. Thus, many homeowners perpetuated the Hispanic practice of adding adobe rooms, one by one, as their need and free time would allow. For many Spanish-speakers, these adobe houses may have been the first barefaced symbol of their own ethnicity within a foreign environment.¹²⁹

¹²⁸ Markoff, 180; McLean, 79-80; C.V. Maddux, "Beet Workers Colonize," *Through the Leaves* (June 1924): 323-324.

¹²⁹ City of Fort Collins, Neighborhood History Project, 21-26; Chris Wilson, "When a Room is the Hall: The Houses of West Las Vegas, New Mexico," in *Images of an American Land: Vernacular Architecture in the Western United States* ed. Thomas Carter, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997), 116-117.

Holy Family was the fourth Hispanic neighborhood in Fort Collins. It is mentioned last not because it was built last, but because Holy Family occupied a conspicuously different kind of space. Unlike its three sisters, it lay on the southern side of the Cache la Poudre River; it was not an isolated unit among farmland but, rather, bordered the town's thoroughfares. While field hands often lived in the other three districts, factory workers made their homes in Holy Family. Most houses were small wood-frame or brick structures. As a working class area at the north end of town, Holy Family seemed like a natural extension of the company-subsidized neighborhoods of Hispanic field workers. In fact, the community derived its name from the first local Spanish-speaking Catholic church established within its borders in 1927. Some beet workers purchased the inexpensive houses and, by 1935, the area was densely Hispanic.¹³⁰

The growing population of Spanish-speakers in the neighborhoods reflected a degree of assimilation. Great Western sponsored adobe colonies for the “best class” of beet families—people who adjusted to and cooperated with the labor system. But residents of the housing developments accepted more than just the sugar beet work style; they also assumed a somewhat Anglo lifestyle. People appear to have moved comfortably into the checkerboard pattern of small houses and streets. The buildings did not cluster around a central plaza or designated common space, village-style; rather, they conformed to a dusty grid of unpaved streets and alleyways that typically followed the cardinal directions. Adobe houses could superficially blend in with other Fort Collins styles; some were built with flat roofs, while others assumed hipped or gabled roofs like their wood frame cousins. They lived on streets with names like “Main” or “Tenth.” If one

¹³⁰ Hawthorne, 91-123.

didn't look too closely, perhaps the neighborhoods seemed to aspire to be like wealthier, Anglo districts of Fort Collins. Yet, the essential, lasting element of many of these houses remained adobe. Homeowners often used adobe to add rooms to their houses. Within the English-named framework, residents continued to use Hispanic construction materials. Andersonville and Buckingham, initially composed of all wooden houses, began to sprout adobe buildings in the 1920's.¹³¹

The house lots were small, even by early twentieth century standards, but the narrow rectangles could accommodate barns, sheds, chicken coops, privies and gardens. The various structures demonstrated how the neighbors—like Hispanic villagers—used a range of available resources to sustain themselves. In Alta Vista, a ditch provided water for vegetables and space for goats to graze. Maybe the owners of the gardens and goats recalled a time when they manipulated *acequia* water to maintain similar organisms. Cows and chickens also populated the Hispanic neighborhood, providing homegrown sources of dairy products, eggs, and meat.¹³²

Although domestic animals offered some reliable food sources, the neighborhoods could not accommodate large amounts of livestock; in response, the residents, like the villagers, diversified their food sources. Hispanic hunters sustained their families with pheasants, deer, rabbits, and other kinds of wild game. The nearby river bottoms offered a good place to find animals; the rushing water also offered fish to the fisherman. When people came into meat, they maximized the opportunity. If a creature was caught, shot, or butchered, Ivan recalled, you ate everything except for the hide. (In the case of pork, you sometimes ate the hide, too.) During the deer season, Charlie Martinez used to bring

¹³¹ Maddux, "Beet Workers Colonize," 323.

¹³² City of Fort Collins, Neighborhood History Project, 21.

home venison for wintertime food. It may not have been gourmet, but he found a way to make his subsistence efforts more palatable: “Sometimes you fix it, it looks just like steaks.”¹³³

Small gardens offered nourishment to both the eye and the body. Luis Valdez—an Alta Vista resident who built his first adobe house in 1926—recalled the general appearance of his neighborhood through the years: the meticulously tended lawns, the watered and swept earthen patios. But Luis’ interest did not rest only with tidy yards—he also spent time in the vegetable garden in front of his house.¹³⁴ For many beet workers, their vegetable plots must have offered a meaningful contrast to the rows of sugar beets that they labored over. Although each garden had to be small, the planning, work and fruits of the land belonged to the family who engaged in it. One woman credited her garden—and her husband’s still—for her family’s survival through the lean years.¹³⁵ Yet gardens provided more than sustenance; they also supplied variety. Ivan and Elsie Vasquez recalled the garden foods that they raised during their respective childhoods: chilis, tomatoes, pumpkins, string beans, peas, corn and potatoes. Although Ivan begrudged the extra time and work that garden maintenance required, he relished the memory of fresh produce in the summer. However, enjoyment of a garden’s bounty did not have to be seasonal. Corn and pumpkin seeds could be dried and saved for later. Dried sweet corn, also known as “chicos,” mixed with beans to produce a savory flavor. Longtime inhabitant of Andersonville, Inez Romero, suggested that canning extended the

¹³³ (Vasquez 2002); (Mr. and Mrs. Martinez 1976, 47); Alephonso Garcia, “Beet Seasons in Wyoming: Mexican-American Family Life on a Sugar Beet Farm near Wheatland During World War II,” *Annals of Wyoming* 73, (Spring 2001): 14-15.

¹³⁴ *Fort Collins Coloradoan*, 19 May, 1975.

¹³⁵ Daniel Thomas, “Adela Ambriz Has Seen it All: Revolution, Bootlegging, Hard Times,” Fort Collins Triangle Review, (undate article available in the folder “Ethnic Groups- Hispanics,” Local History Archive, Fort Collins Public Library, Fort Collins, Colorado.)

viability of home-grown food: “We’d plant our own garden then, which made a difference; you’d have your fresh vegetables all the time and can a lot.”¹³⁶

But more than vegetables grew in Inez’s yard. The plants that grew there influenced the lives of the greater community. Inez’s mother, a *curandera* (healer), cultivated herbs to treat the bodily ailments of other Hispanic people; her garden, therefore, served a common good. Friends and neighbors relied upon Inez’s mother; they said, “Mrs. Rivera, with the touch of her hand, she would get you well.” Many people preferred Mrs. Rivera’s touch, herbs, and prayers to a formal visit to the doctor.¹³⁷ *Curandismo*, like midwifery, was a traditional village skill; mothers, grandmothers, or other mature women had taught younger women about the medicinal properties of plants for generations. While some men sometimes performed healing duties, the local *curandera* was typically a woman.

In a village, the *curandera* might utilize the *ejido*, extracting herbs from the wild; in Andersonville, Mrs. Romero relied upon her garden. In both situations, the healer called upon both scientific and spiritual powers. One old New Mexican *curandera* explained in Spanish, “I make all my medicines solely from herbs, Mexican herbs. That is all you need—that is the reason God put all those herbs on earth.”¹³⁸ As the old *curandera* suggests, the plants physically connected people to their spiritual beliefs; the botanical medicine worked in conjunction with prayers. In both the practices of the old New Mexican woman and Mrs. Romero, an element of the sacred pervaded their work. While residents of Andersonville did not have the opportunity to develop a land relationship

¹³⁶ (Vasquez 2002); Mrs. Inez Romero, interview with Charlene Tresner and Lloyd Levy, transcript, 14 April, 1975, 24. Oral History Archive, Fort Collins Public Library, Fort Collins, Colorado.

¹³⁷ (Romero 1975, 25-26)

¹³⁸ Juanita Sedillo in *Las Mujeres: Conversations from a Hispanic Community* (Old Westbury, New York: The Feminist Press, 1980), 20.

with a village *ejido*, nature—existing in herbs of Mrs. Romero’s garden—still served common needs.¹³⁹

Although Inez never learned her mother’s art, modern Hispanic women in Fort Collins continue to maintain knowledge about plants. In a recent video depicting Hispanic life in Fort Collins, local women discussed plant lore: leaves, flowers, roots, gum, eggs, and olive oil addressed various ailments. Chamomile soothed an upset stomach; rosemary could be applied to windburns. For the most part, they discussed common household plants, and wild plants were not mentioned. But while these women eagerly shared their plant knowledge, no one identified herself as a *curandera* outright; instead, they all reinforced the notion that a *curandera* was a rare and spiritual person who was dedicated to her role.¹⁴⁰

Pretty flowers weaved their way into the more positive stereotypes that surrounded the Hispanic lifestyle. One Anglo observed the creation of adobe colonies around sugar beet factories: “Trees are being planted, and as the Mexican is a lover of flowers, really attractive homes are to be found in some of these settlements.”¹⁴¹ Ironically, the prevalence of Hispanic flora is explained partly by amount of time that women spent in the beet fields; women who worked had little time to plant and tend vegetables, and often planted flowers instead. Nonetheless, the cultivation of flowers could have brightly signified another Hispanic tradition that migrants carried over from their previous village

¹³⁹ Ramon Del Castillo, “The Life History of Diana Velazquez: La Curandera Total,” from *La Gente: Hispano History and Life in Colorado* ed. Vincent C. de Baca (Denver: Colorado Historical Society, 1998), 224-225.

¹⁴⁰ “Mi Gente,” 1998. Among other things, the video reveals a group of modern women discusses the medicinal properties of different substances like plants, olive oil, and eggs. see Eva (Mrs. Lee) Martinez, interview with Charlene Tresner and Lloyd Levy, transcript, 25 April, 1975, 25-26. Fort Collins Public Library, Fort Collins, Colorado. In the year of this interview, Eva Martinez, like Inez Romero, keeps “prayer plants.” Although she doesn’t know what kind of plant it is, she seems pleased with it. Prayer plants may be an extension of the spiritual-botanical beliefs that *curandismo* represents.

¹⁴¹ Skinner, 38

life. Neighbors must have been proud of their floral displays; one can almost hear the wistful tone in Charlie Martinez's voice as he discusses his son's house in California: "With a home like that I—they got, I think, couple of acres of little trees and flowers—that'd be enough to keep me at home, flowers."¹⁴²

The Hispanic residents of Alta Vista, Andersonville, Buckingham and Holy Family maintained a broad spectrum of organisms that helped them subsist. As a group, the residents reflected a remarkably village-like ethic of communal property and cooperation. Although Margaret and Charles Martinez may not have lived in Holy Family or Andersonville, they could have felt comfortable within any of the various Hispanic enclaves. As neighborhoods defined a hub for Hispanic society, the community spirit flourished, and a sense of shared space developed between its members. Although the neighborhoods did not possess a plaza, the locals did share space and resources. In a Hispanic village, livestock grazed the ejido; in Fort Collins, Hispanics brought their horses and cows to other types of common grazing area. The sides of roads, the space between railroad tracks, and riparian riverside spaces offered good grass. Charles recalled that nearly every household had a horse and a cow. Neighbors engaged in a network of animals and plants, creating an organic, growing landscape that echoed a village subsistence lifestyle.¹⁴³

As former villagers may have recalled, old custom dictated an absence of fences. In the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, obvious barriers did not delineate separate plots of land. During the summer, livestock roamed over slopes and meadows; during the winter, they grazed over harvested fields, unrestricted by their owners' property lines. This system

¹⁴² Deutsch, 142-143; (Mr. and Mrs. Charlie Martinez 1976, 29)

¹⁴³ Ibid., 47-48.

disbursed resources relatively evenly, and all households received a share of prosperity or poverty (usually poverty).¹⁴⁴ Reproducing this sense of shared space and status, one native of Buckingham described his boyhood:

The house was just a small house, two bedroom. All of us kids, we all lived there together. Everybody around there was poor, so I didn't really think about poverty because everybody was equal, everybody was the same. At that time I really didn't know what poverty was...¹⁴⁵

Like a kid from a village, this boy knew only a lifestyle in which the distribution of wealth was balanced. Just as farm animals munched on food anywhere in the village, children of the "barrio" (the Hispanic neighborhoods) hopped from house to house.

I remember that our house was a United Nations because we had kids from all over the neighborhood make themselves at home. That's the way we treated them, that's the way my mom treated them. She'd feed them. They'd come in there, it was hang out for all the kids that we knew...It was a revolving door. It was fun.¹⁴⁶

Apparently, substantial fences did not exist on this street, either.

Village children in the southwest and neighborhood children in Fort Collins might have shared a perception of their community, but the physical territory that they roamed was different. Like his Alta Vista counterpart, a village boy on a typical day might have woken up in an adobe room next to a bed full of brothers and sisters. However, instead of preparing to go to school or the beet fields, the village boy would have headed off into the hills to graze some sheep. He came home in the evening, filled with the tale of his discovery: a high, crystalline mountain lake. By nighttime, the boy in Alta Vista had finished his lessons or his long daily work in the fields. He spent his late hours in the

¹⁴⁴ deBuys, 194-195.

¹⁴⁵ "Pepe," in Hawthorne, 101-102.

¹⁴⁶ "Abelardo," in Hawthorne, 100-101.

street, playing Cowboys and Indians; his family couldn't afford to buy him toys or a bike. Perhaps, this night, he and his friends ran down to the town dump and killed rats for fun.¹⁴⁷

In both of these situations, children explored the world around them. Inside of the home, the spaces were cramped; outside the front door, the air and the land beckoned. The children responded. And as they grew up, the experience of the landscape molded them. Village children more likely gained a sense of stewardship for the land around them; the earth directly provided food for the table. Children of the "barrio" became familiar with two disparate types of agriculture: first, the large scale commercial farms that belonged to someone else and second, the home gardens and animals that lived in the neighborhood.

Even as the sugar beet shaped humans, the humans influenced their surroundings; their neighborhoods combined the Hispanic and Anglo identities. For members of the "barrio," it may have required company initiative and resources to create a place for their permanent habitation. Yet, the company's plan did not keep its form; if one visits these neighborhoods today, they are no longer neat rows of tiny two-room houses. The years have granted personality to each structure. With burgeoning families and a gradual accumulation of funds, neighborhood residents would add on to and change their small plots. They enlarged their dwellings using wood frames, adobe, cinder blocks and their personal flair. Between 1937 and 1976, Margaret and Charles upgraded their house multiple times; in 1976, they had a suite of improvements to show off, ranging from room partitions to the new kitchen and bathroom to Margaret's Maytags. For the

¹⁴⁷ deBuys, 201; "Abelardo," in Hawthorne, 99.

Martinezes, Alta Vista was more than the site of a company town. Through the years, they had raised their children—Tom, Richard, Chris, Frances, Rachel, Charlotte, and Mary Louise—and seen them through school. They had spent the majority of their lives within the borders of this neighborhood, making their mark and adding to the sense of community.¹⁴⁸

Of course, the Martinezes were not alone; other neighborhood inhabitants planted family roots and staked their presence into the community. People spent time in group activities that didn't revolve around sustenance and physical survival. They found pleasure and importance spending time with each other. Through their organizations, Spanish-speakers edged into new spaces on the map and extended their community.

Although many Hispanic migrants strongly identified with Catholicism, field workers found it difficult to attend church unless they lived in town. When he was young, Charlie Martinez confessed, he didn't go to church much—he lived too far out in the countryside, and his family commanded only a horse and buggy as transportation. Those who did live close enough could attend St. Joseph's Church, a holy space shared by Hispanics and Anglos. As the Hispanic population grew, church officials sought out a separate place for Spanish-speaking worshippers. Holy Family Catholic Church, situated in the Holy Family neighborhood, was completed in 1929. At the time of his interview in 1976, Charlie regularly attended Holy Family and belonged to the Knights of Columbus. For many members of the Hispanic community, Holy Family Church contained the nexus of their cultural and spiritual lives. Here, parishioners worshipped, celebrated, and even obtained economic assistance when times were tough. Like the village churches of the

¹⁴⁸ (Mr. and Mrs. Charlie Martinez 1976, 11-21)

Southwest, Holy Family occupied a central role in people's daily lives. While the church marked Spanish-speakers as different, it also firmly institutionalized the Hispanic presence in Fort Collins.¹⁴⁹

Recreation offered a different kind of visible organization for sugar beet workers. From the 1930's until the 1960's, many cities in northern Colorado fielded Hispanic baseball teams. Every Sunday, remembered Viola Garcia, everyone went to watch the games; it was a "family affair," a time during the week when the Hispanic community gathered with pride to root for the Fort Collins team. They would even pile 8 or 9 people into a car to see a game in another town. Because most players in this league were Hispanic, they were not able to participate in other leagues. But even though Hispanic players and fans were separated from other baseball enthusiasts, the Hispanic contingent still claimed a ball field every Sunday. They jubilantly carried their community spirit into public space in Fort Collins and around northern Colorado.¹⁵⁰

Community activity did not always involve group action; sometimes, particular individuals found ways to contribute. Beginning in 1920's, Alta Vista would elect "mayors" to one-year terms—their responsibility was to initiate and coordinate community events. Charlie Martinez served as mayor in 1941. In order to fill potholes in the dirt streets of Alta Vista, Charlie collected \$1 from each of the 35 houses. The money bought gasoline for trucks that would carry the filling material: sand, cinders, and gravel. Charlie also became certified as a notary public, assisting his Spanish-speaking community members with their legal needs. Children in the neighborhood came to know

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, 64; (Romero 1975, 12-14); Ahlbrandt, 406.

¹⁵⁰ Ashley Ryan Gaddis, "Hispanic Ballplayers to Celebrate Reunion," *Fort Collins Coloradoan* 17 July, 1994, B1' "Mi Gente," 1998.

him as “Uncle Charlie.”¹⁵¹ Not only did one man engender a sense of kinship, but he also enabled the neighbors to manage their streets—a form of communal property—themselves. These qualities mimic the group-centered lifestyle of a Hispanic village; they also reflect traits that Bender identifies in his definition of “community.”¹⁵²

Other neighborhood inhabitants simply added to the community with Hispanic flavor—in more ways than one. A former resident remembered her early sensory experience in the “barrio”:

The houses were small in the Holy Family neighborhood and the families were big. Everyone was very religious and many yards had the Blessed Mother shrines in their yards. I remember there were fruit trees everywhere, apple, plum, apricot, cherries and peaches. There were lots of flowers and gardens with roses and tulips. Doors were open and you would hear Spanish music in the streets. At night it smelled everywhere of Mexican cooking, peppers, fried potatoes, tamales and tortillas. The only language that you heard was Spanish. Early in the morning the farmers would gather the field hands into trucks and all would be quiet until they returned at dusk.¹⁵³

Years later, this woman vividly recalled the experience of walking down a street on a warm evening. The smells, sights and sounds seem to have been transplanted by their owners from Mexico and the Southwest. Able to live next to each other, neighbors could intertwine their personal traditions. Consequently, families discovered that their household was more than a home; it was part of an enclave.

The Hispanic residents of Fort Collins planted their roots and spread their branches. As Spanish music and the smells of cooking drifted down the street, it was clear to any observer that the local sugar beet workers had claimed a spot on the larger

¹⁵¹ Ramon Coronado, “Neighborhood Tells Hispanic History,” *Fort Collins Coloradoan*, special insert, “Hispanics in Fort Collins: a Changing Town...a Changing People,” Sept 27, 1981, 6.

¹⁵² Bender, 16, 64.

¹⁵³ “Graciela,” in Hawthorne, 104.

map of Fort Collins. By the 1950's, they had "colonized" a small part of city, overlaying Hispanic traditions on top of an Anglo framework. The grandmother of Margaret Martinez in Las Vegas, New Mexico, may never have been able to envisage all of the new patterns in Margaret's lifestyle in Fort Collins. However, if she ever showed up on the street in Alta Vista, she could have walked in the Martinez door and made herself at home.

Conclusion

By the 1950's, the heyday of Fort Collins' sugar industry had come and gone. With it left the intense demand for sugar beet workers. Even on this new, smaller scale, the beet industry did not require as much labor; modern technology finally experienced some triumph, bringing effective mechanical harvesters and thinners into the beet fields. In addition, a segmented beet seed (altered to reproduce only one or two plants) reduced the need for hand-thinning as early as the 1940's. Great Western proudly declared that the era of "stoop labor"—the era of dependence upon a primarily Hispanic workforce—was over.¹⁵⁴

By then, however, the Hispanic element was entrenched in the Fort Collins landscape. Spanish-speaking beet workers and their descendants had settled in and branched out. They found work in other kinds of field crops and in non-agricultural sectors of the economy. Within a network of houses, churches, and businesses existed a firm Hispanic community.

Yet, racially-inspired segregation did not melt away as quickly as the beet work—"white trade only" signs and prejudiced attitudes persisted. Spanish-speaking people still needed to assert their presence and claim equality in the public spaces of Fort Collins. In the 1970's Alta Vista and Andersonville were finally incorporated into the city proper; consistent water, electricity, and paved roads followed. Visible signs of the Hispanic community mark Fort Collins today: Fullana Elementary School was named for the socially active Father John Fullana of Holy Family Church; Martinez Park honors Lee

¹⁵⁴ Nelson, 36; Great Western Sugar Company, "Toward a Better Way of Life on Western Farms," 14-15.

Martinez, a resident who was involved in the American Legion, the Holy Name Society, the Democratic Party and various Hispanic organizations.¹⁵⁵ As one local woman stated, “The more Chicanos that you have in an area, the more political activity you have. When community is small, you have very few in authority positions.”¹⁵⁶

As Hispanic people gain more visibility in Fort Collins, the older legacy of the sugar beet is still quite perceptible. The Ivan Vasquez’s sister still lives without the rest of her finger. Alta Vista, Andersonville, Buckingham and HolyFamily neighborhoods remain dynamic, mostly Hispanic enclaves (the German Russian community can also claim a viable representation). Certainly, today’s residents use plumbing and electricity, and children attend to their schoolwork instead of the beet fields. Nonetheless, the adobe homes are still small and Spanish language flows through them; the neighborhoods conceive of themselves as distinct from the rest of the city. Here the descendent of beet workers live side by side with new migrants from Mexico—the districts still serve as a home for recent arrivals as well as old-timers. Certainly, some Hispanic people have dispersed, opting to live in other sections of Fort Collins; still others have chosen to stay and live in the setting that their grandparents and parents spent so many years in.¹⁵⁷

We must remind ourselves that these sections of Fort Collins—currently being surveyed by the city in an effort to designate them as historic districts—were made possible by the sugar beet. In turn, the people who lived there made the local sugar beet industry possible. The natural world influenced human endeavor to create the present landscape. As the neighborhoods tell this agricultural story, they remind the observer that

¹⁵⁵ David Freed, “Neighborhood Renovation to Start Next Week,” *Rocky Mountain Collegian* 13 November, 1975, 1; (Eva Martinez 1975, 11-12, 20-26)

¹⁵⁶ Glenda Poteste, quoted in “Introduction,” Ramon Coronado and Terri Cotton *Fort Collins Coloradoan*, special insert, “Hispanics in Fort Collins: a Changing Town...a Changing People,” Sept 27, 1981, 1.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.

the patterns of today's lifestyle has been molded, in part, by yesterday's biology. If the sugar beet had not required intensive field labor over a long season, the Romero family might never have built the adobe house on Tenth street.

Our lifestyle continues to be tied to the people who labor in agricultural fields. Suddenly, crop science and ethnic studies don't seem to be so remote from each other. As the Romero House museum endeavors depict, the wealth of Fort Collins' history is to be found not only in elegant old mansions. Rosie Mercado, a long time Alta Vista resident, commented, "I have seen a lot of people move out. For some, if they had the opportunity to move out, I don't think they would."¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁸ Rosie Mercado, quoted in "Neighborhood Tells Hispanic History" by Ramon Coronado. *The Fort Collins Coloradoan* special insert, 6.

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