



# **HANG YOUR WAGON TO A STAR: HISPANICS IN FORT COLLINS, 1900-2000**

## **A HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

Submitted to:

**Advance Planning Department  
City of Fort Collins, Colorado**

Prepared by:

**Adam Thomas  
SWCA Environmental Consultants**

State Historical Fund Project 01-02-065: Historical Survey and Context,  
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### On the Cover:

Detail of a family portrait, Libarado (Lee) Martinez Family. (Courtesy, Fort Collins Public Library)

## INTRODUCTION

# A Spirit of Optimism

On April 5, 1996, 88-year-old Jovita Vallecillo Lobato returned to the campus of Colorado State University (CSU) for the thirteenth annual El Centro Achievement Awards. That academic year, 1,095 Hispanics attended classes among the university's 22,000 students. But when Lobato graduated from the school in 1936, she was the first and only Hispanic student to do so. Her memories were bittersweet. "It brings up a lot of unpleasantness, but there are a lot of good memories, too," Lobato told a reporter from the *Fort Collins Coloradoan*. "Our people lived together. We had a lot of singing in the evenings. But going out of that nest, it was bad."<sup>1</sup>

Like many of Fort Collins's Hispanic families, Lobato's parents came here to work in the sugar beet fields. They saved all they could and eventually purchased a small house. Lobato became the first Mexican-American to graduate from Fort Collins public schools. She paid her way through CSU, (then the Colorado Agricultural College) by making salads at the Northern Hotel. Lobato graduated with a degree in economics and sociology, with a minor in education. Her brother graduated two years later with a degree in forestry. Mrs. Lobato went on to teach in Colorado, New Mexico, and New Jersey. In 1963, she earned a master's degree in psychology from the University of the Pacific in Stockton, California, and she had

earned several hours toward her doctorate.

Lobato's story is both common and unique to the Hispanic experience in Fort Collins. In isolated neighborhoods north of downtown, Hispanic families forged an unusually strong and vibrant community, steeped in traditions spanning centuries. But venturing from these neighborhoods – going out of that nest, as Lobato put it – was to enter a culture of discrimination. Store windows displayed signs reading "No Dogs or Mexicans Allowed." Teachers often sat Hispanic students in the back of the classroom, figuring that they were unwilling or unable to learn.

Despite these obstacles, Hispanics in Fort Collins managed to create and retain a lively, expressive culture. Holy Family Catholic Church hosted an array of Latino spiritual and social gatherings, and the church, like the Hispanic neighborhoods, served as a sanctuary from Anglo criticism. The Great Depression and World War II produced a new generation of Hispanic leaders who sought to combat poverty, end discrimination, secure basic social services, and guarantee quality education. From their small homes in Andersonville, Buckingham, Alta Vista, or the Holy Family Neighborhood, shanties beside beet fields, and cramped hotel rooms in Fort Collins, the Hispanic community has displayed a remarkable ability to overcome adversity and create new opportu-

### A NOTE ON TERMS

The number of terms describing Spanish-speaking peoples of the Americas is astounding. Unfortunately, no one term adequately describes the diversity of Latin cultures that have evolved in the Western Hemisphere. Referring to all Spanish-speaking families in Fort Collins as Mexican or Mexican American is inaccurate. Many of the city's oldest families trace their heritage to New Mexico. They resided there *before* Mexican independence and most likely would have referred to themselves as Spanish. As well, Fort Collins is home to people from Central and South American and Spain.

This context will use the term "Hispanic" as a general reference to Spanish-speaking people. The word comes from *Hispania*, the Latin name for the Iberian Peninsula, on which Spain and Portugal are located. The term is a reference to language rather than ethnicity. Despite a multitude of dialects, the one common feature among the ethnic groups studied in this context is a Spanish-language heritage, whether or not they speak it today. I also use *Latino*, a more general term grouping Spanish, Portuguese, and French influence in Central and South America. The term *Chicano* is used only in references to the Hispanic political activism in the 1960s and 1970s.

nities for future generations. They share in Lobato's philosophy: "Hang your wagon to a star. Otherwise, you might not get anywhere."<sup>2</sup>

Underlying this spirit of optimism is a heritage that predates the city, the state, and even the United States. Long before French fur traders descended south from Canada along the Front Range of the Rocky Mountains and centuries before American fortune seekers first gazed upon the frosty summit of Pikes Peak, Spanish was the first European language spoken in what would become Colorado. Spanish explorers and set-

tlers gave the state its name, noting the region's ruddy soil. Even today, seventeen counties and over a hundred communities retain their Spanish names. People of Spanish descent have resided within the state's boundaries for over four centuries, eclipsing any other European ethnic group and contributing a cultural legacy exceeded only by Native Americans. And because so many early Spanish explorers and settlers intermarried with indigenous populations, today's Hispanic community shares also in that heritage.

This project was paid for in part by a State Historical Fund grant from the Colorado Historical Society.



**Figure 1.**

Detail of an elaborately carved rosette, one of a group of six decorating the front doors of Holy Family Catholic Church. *(Photo by the author.)*



## SECTION I

# Colorado's Hispanic Legacy

Spanish influence in Colorado began in 1540-41, when Don Francisco Vázquez de Coronado led a detachment of Spanish soldiers along the Cimarrón River. They crossed into the southeastern corner of the state, becoming the first Europeans to enter the region. The expedition sought gold and glory. Somewhere on the Great Plains rose the Seven Cities of Cibola, a place of unimaginable – and mythical – wealth. But Coronado found only dust and snow, searing heat and bitter cold – and treachery. “After nine days march,” Coronado wrote to the Spanish king, “I reached some plains, so vast that I did not find their limit anywhere I went...

...I am sure...that there is not any gold nor any other metal in all the country, and the other things of which they had told me are nothing but little villages, and in many of these they do not plant anything and do not have any houses except skins and sticks, and they wander around with the cows [bison]; so that the account they gave me was false, because they wanted to persuade me to go there with the whole force, believing that as the way was through such uninhabited deserts, and from the lack of water, they would get us where we and our horses would die of hunger. ... Apparently the winter could not possibly be spent here, because there is no wood, nor cloth with which to protect men, except the skins which the natives wear and some small amount of cotton cloaks.<sup>3</sup>

Coronado returned to Mexico City empty handed; Spanish explorers did not reenter Colorado for another two decades.

But Spain continued to colonize what would become the American Southwest. In 1598, General Juan de Oñate established Santa Fe as the capital city for the province of New Mexico. The settlement soon became the cultural and economic center of the region, a position it would maintain for over two and a half centuries. But while Spanish colonial settlements in the province of New Mexico continued to grow and prosper, Colorado remained isolated. Until explorers and traders blazed the Santa Fe Trail, there were no established roads north of the capital, just cart paths to Taos, Mora, and Ratón. Exploration into Colorado resumed in 1664 with the Archuleta expedition, followed by Ulibarrí (1706); Villasur (1720); Rivera (1765); Fathers Domínguez and Vélez de Escalante (1776); Governor De Anza (1779); and Melgares (1806).<sup>4</sup>

By 1650, Spanish settlers were familiar with much of the territory north of Taos to southern Colorado. In his 1706 expedition, Juan de Ulibarrí claimed all of what is now Colorado for the Spanish Empire, calling the new province San Luis.<sup>5</sup> But complete Spanish control of Colorado would not last long. The empire struggled to maintain significant settlements north of the Arkansas River as French trappers crossed into northeastern Colorado. In 1719, Don Antonia Valverde Cosío led an expedition against the Comanches in Colorado, discovering French

settlements on the South Platte River. His findings enraged government officials in Mexico City, and, in 1720, the viceroy dispatched Pedro de Villasur, 42 soldiers, three settlers, and 60 Native Americans to engage and push back the French. The expedition was the closest to that time to enter what is now Larimer County as it trailed the French into Nebraska. Ansel Watrous, in his *History of Larimer County*, asserts that another band of Spaniards came through the county searching for gold. This claim is unsubstantiated. Spanish colonial records indicate that the Villasur expedition never accomplished its goal; marauding Pawnees – most likely incited by the French – killed Villasur and most of his men at the junction of the North and South Platte rivers. In time, all of Colorado north of the Arkansas and east of the Front Range – including Larimer County – became part of French Louisiana. The United States acquired the territory in the Louisiana Purchase of 1804. Spain ceded most of the rest of Colorado to the United States in the Florida Treaty (also known as the Transcontinental or Adams-Onís Treaty) in 1819. The remainder of the state was taken from Mexico in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which concluded the Mexican War (1845-48).<sup>6</sup>

As a consequence of these treaties and other land purchases in the Southwest, Mexicans quickly became a significant ethnic group in the United States. (Many, however, regarded themselves as Spanish rather than Mexican because they had settled in the region before Mexican independence in

1821.) The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo granted these Mexican settlers American citizenship; however, it did not protect their property rights. Many found themselves displaced and impoverished by the wave of Anglo settlement in the Southwest.<sup>7</sup> This situation only further deteriorated as Mexican nationals left their country in the first half of the twentieth century. Robert Adams describes the problem:

Mexican migrants were denied a chance to learn and assimilate new customs as they were forced to move from one camp to the next; when they failed to conform they were mocked by Anglo-Americans. In turn, the Spanish Americans who had pioneered southern Colorado found themselves condemned, because of their brown skins, by the new arrivals.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, Hispanic heritage in Colorado spans centuries but has been largely supplanted by Anglo culture. However, while Spanish colonial influence in northern Colorado was limited, its contribution to the entire state was profound and long lived.

**Map 1.**

Spanish and French colonial influence in the American Southwest, circa 1770, depicted within the modern-day borders of New Mexico and Colorado. (Map by the author.)



## SECTION II

# Hispanics in Fort Collins

The first substantiated Hispanic settler in Larimer County was also the first European in the Big Thompson River Valley. Mariana Modena came here in 1858 with his Native American wife and five children. He had previously discovered the location while on one of his many trips trapping and hunting with Kit Carson and Jim Baker.<sup>9</sup> Many Hispanic families followed Modena to what is now Larimer County and, like their Anglo neighbors, took advantage of liberal homesteading policies such as the Homestead Act. This 1862 legislation granted a quarter section, or 160 acres, to anyone who paid a small filing fee and lived on and improved the land for five years. After residing on the quarter section for six months, the settler could buy the land for \$1.25 an acre.<sup>10</sup> For example, the José de Jesús Aragón family, ancestors of some of the area's most prominent Hispanic families, came to Fort Collins in a caravan from New Mexico. Familiar with livestock feeding and irrigated farming, the individual families scattered onto farms and ranches across northern Colorado. Many Hispanic men worked in limestone quarries north of Fort Collins or on railroad section gangs. Later they toiled in sugar beet fields and at the refinery.<sup>11</sup> By 1908, enough Hispanic families had arrived in Fort Collins that the city could support a chili parlor, located at 374 Jefferson Street.<sup>12</sup>

Between 1910 and 1930, a series of

events combined to push even more Hispanic families out of Mexico and the Southwest and pull them into northern Colorado. A half a century of reform in Mexico had increasingly



**Figure 2.**

The Libarado "Lee" Martinez family, one of Fort Collins's most prominent Hispanic families. (Courtesy, Fort Collins Public Library.)

divided the country's classes and military. In 1911, the middle class joined peasants and workers to overthrow dictator Porfirio Díaz in a bloody civil war known as the Mexican Revolution (1911-1920). Revolutionary leaders Emiliano Zapata and Francisco (Pancho) Villa, through local agrarian leaders, organized massive armies to fight for *tierra y libertad* (land and liberty). While they were widely supported, the revolutionary armies were poorly armed and failed to capture any of Mexico's major cities. The Mexican Constitution of 1917 did address the concerns



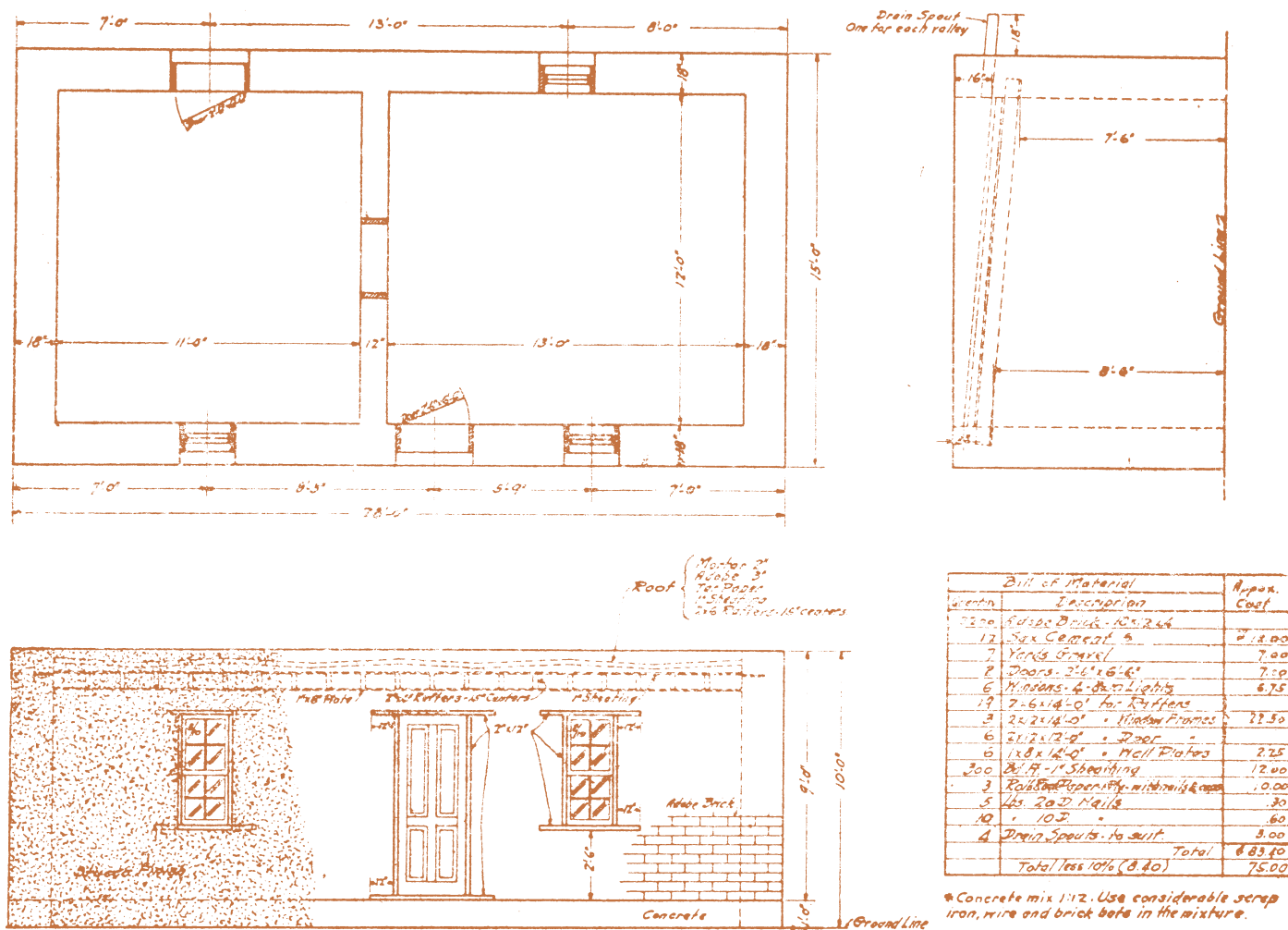
of many of the revolutionaries, but by that time the conflict, combined with mounting population pressures and economic ruin, drove many Mexicans to seek a more peaceful existence north of the border. In the first three decades of the twentieth century, ten percent of Mexico's total population emigrated to the American Southwest. Among them was Buckingham resident Adela Ambriz, who remembered traveling to Mexico City and visiting Díaz's palace.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, as mentioned before, many Hispanic families in the American Southwest lost their property to Anglos as Spain and, later, Mexico sold or surrendered land to the United States.<sup>14</sup>

Pulling Hispanics to northern Colorado was the Great Western Sugar Company (Great Western), which found its traditional sources of labor quickly vanishing. Beet sugar had become the "white gold" of Colorado. In 1904, Fort Collins completed its own sugar factory, processing sugar beets into granulated sugar. In time, the factory became part of Great Western, the largest beet sugar corporation in the United States. But even before Fort Collins opened its sugar factory, families of Germans from Russia were at work in Larimer County's beet fields. Sugar companies preferred German-Russian labor for three reasons. First, Volga Germans grew sugar beets in their gardens, giving them some experience with the new crop. Second, they developed a unique worldview as they survived and prospered on the barren steppes of Russia; they idealized hard work, often manifesting it with human traits – an adversary to be challenged and defeated. Beet labor was particularly tedious and difficult, but German-Russian families met the challenge undaunted. Third, this worldview spawned an idea that no one – not even women and children – was exempt from hard work. Beet growers and sugar producers only

had to contract with the male head of the household – or *hausvater* – and he, in turn, employed his entire family in tending the fields. But Germans from Russia lived meagerly, saving what they could. Many families rose quickly from contract laborers, to tenant farmers, to farm owners. At the same time, immigration policies tightened and, in the wake of World War I, European immigration all but ceased. Consequently, as Germans from Russia left contract labor positions, Great Western struggled to find replacements. But the "push" factors in Mexico and the southwest made the overtures of labor recruiters all the more appealing to Hispanics. Rumors spread of quick prosperity to be found in the beet fields of Colorado. Moreover, government policies limiting European immigration actually made crossing the Mexican-U.S. border easier. Western farm lobbyists convinced Congress to exempt Mexicans from its immigration policies for two reasons. First, without European immigration, growers needed a dependable source of cheap labor. Second, they argued that Mexicans had no desire to reside in the United States and would, at the end of the season, return to south of the border. Soon, thousands of Hispanic families migrated to and settled in northern Colorado.<sup>15</sup>

### Hispanic Neighborhoods

Early Hispanic migrants to Fort Collins did not settle in a particular neighborhood as did German-Russian families. Instead, they scattered onto homesteads and field-side shanties, bunkhouses at the quarry, or hotels and houses in town. While some of the earliest Hispanic settlers brought their families with them, most were single men who moved frequently as they followed employment. Many did not intend to remain in Fort Collins, so they never sought to purchase a



home in town. But the evolution of the sugar industry changed this pattern. With the exodus of German-Russian laborers, officials at Great Western sought a reliable, local source of labor for its beet fields and factories. Migrant laborers often required an entire season to become skilled at tending beets or working in the factory. But there was no guarantee that that same worker would return the next season. The investment in training would be lost. "The Mexican's practice of moving away in the fall is disadvantageous to himself, to the grower and to the sugar company," writes C.V. Maddux in the October 1923 edition of *Through the Leaves*, Great Western's corporate magazine. "This year it cost over two hundred thousand dollars to

ship in beet labor. That is an expense of making sugar, which the industry as a whole has to bear, even though it is for the time being absorbed by the Company without any charge to the grower."<sup>16</sup>

Great Western realized that it had to offer migrant workers an incentive to remain in Fort Collins all year. One way to do this was to offer affordable, comfortable housing. Thus, in the summer of 1922, Great Western, in the words of its corporate magazine, "launched an important experiment near Fort Morgan."<sup>17</sup> There it constructed 13 adobe homes at a cost of \$75 each. The company also had plans to construct a meeting hall, which by 1925 appeared complete with a shaped parapet and exposed vigas (ceiling

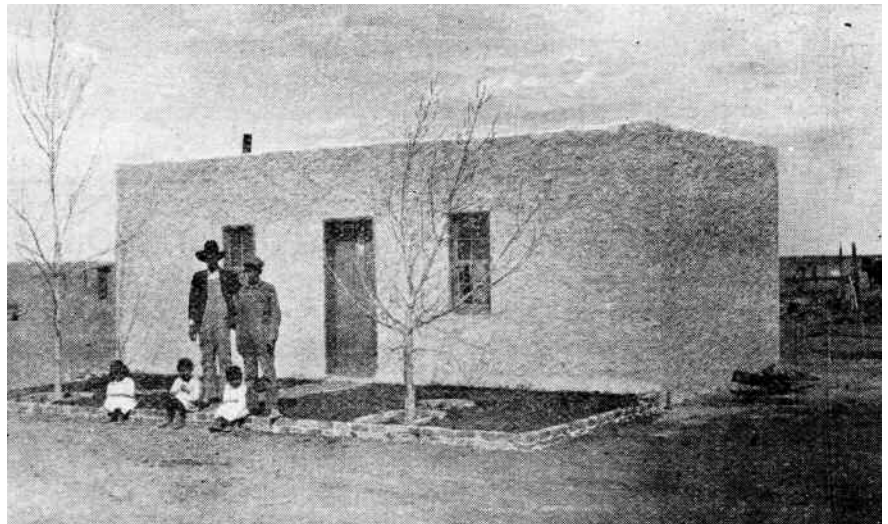
**Figure 3.**

Floor plan, roof plan, and bill of specifications for Great Western's adobe beet labor houses. This standard plan characterizes the adobe structures in Alta Vista. The bill of materials calculates the cost at \$75, noting that "the bill... does not include floor lumber. The colonists usually plan on putting floors into their houses the second year, and in the meantime, use adobe floors, which serve very well." (*From "Colonizing Beet Labor," Through the Leaves*, October 1923, p. 394-5.)

beams). The experiment was a success; the following year the company built 42 adobe homes in colonies throughout northern Colorado and Nebraska, and 200 the next year. Great Western in 1923 announced plans to build a “Spanish Colony” northeast of the sugar factory in Fort Collins. It offered Hispanic laborers a house on a 50-by-85-foot lot, which could be purchased through the company’s generous installment plan: the resident paid nothing the first year and \$40 annually for the next three years, thereby reimbursing the company for the \$120 worth of labor and materials expended in the house. And in the fifth year, the resident paid \$25 to \$50 for the lot. Moreover, Great Western paid the property taxes and withheld interest charges during those five years. In return, the company could, if it perceived misconduct, eject any family from these adobe homes within 30 days. The company also wanted workers to construct their own homes, so it hired Felipe and Pedro Arellano, of northern New Mexico, to build six, two-room, white-painted model adobe structures. Great Western furnished straw, lime, and gravel and, later, lumber for the roof. In a matter of weeks, tiny adobe houses appeared in the neighborhood. Soon, residents referred to their settlement as “*la Colonia Española*” or “*la Colonia*,” for short. The neighborhood’s modern name, Alta Vista (meaning “high view”), takes on a distinctively Hispanic flavor.<sup>18</sup>

But Alta Vista was not the first Fort Collins neighborhood with an adobe house or Hispanic families. Anecdotal evidence suggests that, at least a decade earlier, an adobe dwelling may have existed in Andersonville. However, the only adobe house remaining in the neighborhood is the Romero House, constructed in 1933. Nonetheless, a few Hispanic families did reside in Andersonville and

Buckingham as early as 1910.<sup>19</sup> Referred to by Anglos in Fort Collins as “the Jungles” for the areas’ perceived mystery and wildness, both neighborhoods were historically settlements for German-Russian families. But as Hispanic laborers replaced German-Russians in the beet fields, so too did they replace them in the sugar factory neighborhoods. Indeed, the transition was remarkably quick. In 1922, 70 percent of beet laborers already residents



**Figures 4 and 5.**

In the top photograph, Marcial Hajar poses with his family in front of a new adobe house in Fort Morgan. This dwelling was the model on which most other Great Western adobe houses were constructed. It was widely promoted among beet growers and appeared in *Through the Leaves* as an good example of quality housing for Hispanic migrant workers. Below is an adobe house on Martinez Street, Alta Vista. Sans the side-gabled roof, it retains almost the same massing and fenestration as went it was constructed. (Top photo from “Home-Owning, Permanent Beet Labor Colony is Growing,” *Through the Leaves*, July 1923, p. 291; bottom photo by the author.)

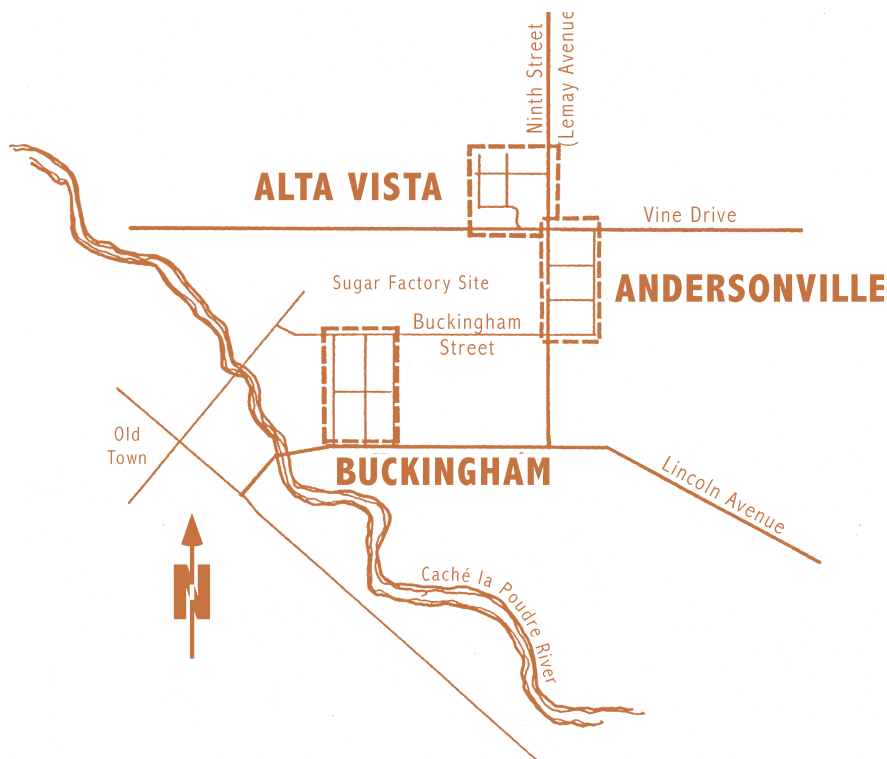




of Colorado were Germans from Russia. Only a tenth were Mexican or of Spanish descent. But at the same time, 90 percent of new migratory laborers Great Western brought into Larimer and Weld counties were from Mexico.<sup>20</sup>

Sugar factory boosters and executives strategically located Buckingham, Andersonville, and later, Alta Vista; they were within easy walking distance of the factory and the beet fields. Secluding the neighborhoods across the Cache la Poudre River from Fort Collins would keep seditious, suspect, and unwelcomed foreign influences from seeping into more established neighborhoods. As they envisioned their plant's location, sugar factory boosters also foresaw the villages that sprang up around it. On April 23, 1902, *The Weekly Courier* described the terrain on which the factory would be constructed, commenting that "the ground...is as smooth as a house floor, and the tract will afford ample room for factory, storage shed, side tracks, pulp silo and tenement houses for employees [emphasis added]."<sup>21</sup> However, the settlements stood on the broad floodplain of the river, a circumstance that would bring about tragedy early in their history. A flood on May 21, 1904, exploded from Poudre Canyon, bringing with it bridges, houses, and anything else unfortunate enough to be in its path – including much of Buckingham and Andersonville. The residents quickly rebuilt, but they remained isolated. Except for some industries, especially the sugar factory, this area remained untouched by the general pattern of settlement in Fort Collins as it spread south along College Avenue.

Buckingham was originally home to German-Russian sugar beet laborers even before Fort Collins's sugar factory opened. As with Hispanic laborers two decades later, the local sugar companies and growers in



**Map 2.**

The sugar factory neighborhoods northeast of downtown Fort Collins. (Based on Community Services Collaborative)

1902 realized the benefit of retaining as much labor as possible for the next year's campaign. As a result, the Fort Collins Colorado Sugar Company purchased a parcel of land adjacent to the future sugar factory site. They named the resulting neighborhood for the land's former owner, Charles Buckingham, a wealthy Boulder banker, investor, and real estate speculator.<sup>22</sup> The *Weekly Courier* describes the scene in late December 1902:

A new colony has been started east of town...by Russian sugar beet workers. Thirteen little box houses 20x12, with oval roofs and 4 little windows, have been put up, with sheds for horses and cows. The houses, while small, seem comfortable and new ones are being built daily.<sup>23</sup>

In late 1903, another settlement northeast of Buckingham evolved from an assemblage of migrant worker shacks on the Peter Anderson farm. An avid civic booster, Anderson was the leading champion of the

sugar factory in Fort Collins. He purchased the quarter section east of town in 1865 and later increased the farm to 330 acres. The Larimer County pioneer eventually amassed a small fortune running cattle and feeding lambs. He was vice president of the First National Bank of Fort Collins, president of the Wellington Bank, and owned a harness shop and hardware store. He was also one of the first farmers in Larimer County to plant sugar beets and use German-Russian labor.<sup>24</sup>

As Buckingham and Andersonville grew, they drew the scorn and intrigue of Fort Collins residents in the same way slums and tenements attracted the attention of the eastern, urban upper and middle classes. And this fascination continued well into the period of Hispanic occupation. Newspapers from the period are littered with sordid, tantalizing blurbs about liquor violations, “disorderly houses,” shootings, and stabbings. In reporting the creation of Andersonville, the editor of the *Weekly Courier* could not resist a tongue-in-cheek jab at the new German-Russian settlement: “It is rumored that two saloons will soon be opened at Andersonville, the new suburb. In that event a trolley line from this city to that point would be a paying investment.”<sup>25</sup> But residents within the settlements, whether German-Russian or Hispanic, struggled to improve their lot. Keenly aware of the suspicious eyes of Anglos across the Poudre, Buckingham, Andersonville, and later, Alta Vista residents maintained tidy, safe neighborhoods – a struggle that would continue to the present. Throughout the 1920s, Germans from Russia and Hispanics lived beside one another in what must have been a vivid blending of culture and custom. Property abstracts reveal the transformation. The following example was provided in an oral interview with Carolina and Eddie Galvador, who in 1948 moved into their

home at 612 Ninth Avenue, Andersonville:

...1903 Peter and Cora May Anderson to Anderson Place Lot 10 and 11, Block 4, Anderson Place  
1905 H.C. Howard  
1908 Howard to Phillip Schmidt (signature in German script)  
1910 Schmidt to Carl Albrandt and Jacob Schmidt  
1912 Albrandt and Schmidt to Carl Meisner...  
...1920 Meisner to Pete Fromm  
1922 Fromm to Manuel and Julian Martinez  
1929 Martinez to Luis Hernandez  
1931 Hernandez to Fred Salazar...<sup>26</sup>

But unlike their German-Russian predecessors, Hispanics in Fort Collins also settled in significant numbers south of the river in an eighteen-square block area bordered by Elm Street on the north, Howes Street to the east, La Porte Avenue on the south, and Shields Street on the west. The neighborhood later became identified with and named for its religious and cultural center, Holy Family Catholic Church. Traditionally a working-class neighborhood, Holy Family developed around 1900 and flourished after the completion of the sugar factory. Workers were attracted to the location because it provided easy access to the factory via a streetcar line while affording a sense of affluence gained by residing south of the Poudre. City directories suggest that Hispanic families were among the neighborhood’s first residents and, by 1935, Holy Family became solidly Latino. The houses in the neighborhood, while small and simple, were still larger and more sophisticated than those in Buckingham, Andersonville, or Alta Vista. As a family moved southward across the Poudre, it could geographically express increased affluence and financial success.<sup>27</sup>

Yet Andersonville, Buckingham, Alta Vista, and, to a lesser extent, Holy Family represented a geography of discrimination.



What are today quaint ethnic neighborhoods evolved that way because generations of Hispanic families could not afford housing elsewhere in Fort Collins or were not welcome in predominately Anglo neighborhoods. “You just look at the geographical areas [where] we grew up: Cherry Street this side of the north side of town, Buckingham, Andersonville, Spanish Colony,” observes Fort Collins attorney Andy Galvador. “...That’s where we were raised, and it was the other side of the tracks...”<sup>28</sup> And according to an unnamed officer, one of the duties of the Fort Collins Police Department during the 1950s and 1960s “was to keep the Mexicans on their side of town.”<sup>29</sup>

Perhaps more profound were the social biases – both race- and class-based – that permitted drastic environmental degradation around Fort Collins’s Hispanic neighborhoods. Environmental historians have discovered that city dumps, industrial wastelands, toxic chemical storage sites, and other environmental hazards tend to be located near poorer, minority neighborhoods. Residents either lack the political influence or economic affluence to resist these developments or are forced to these locations because of cheaper rents. In Fort Collins, Andersonville, Alta Vista, and Buckingham all stood in the shadow of the sugar factory, which produced thick clouds of coal smoke and soot from its tall chimneys, a rank odor from pools of rotting beet pulp, and streams of caustic, concentrated lime effluence. North of the Colorado and Southern Railroad tracks from the Holy Family neighborhood was the Fort Collins city dump. For older residents of the area, the dump still looms large in their memories. “Until the ‘50s sometime the dump was there, and it was moved to where it is now [on Taft Hill Road south of Harmony Road],” replied Ernie Miranda when asked about the

biggest change to the Holy Family neighborhood. “That’s the biggest change I can remember because there was always smoke coming into the neighborhood. It always had smoke because they’d burn it every day. So that’s the one thing we’ll probably never forget.”<sup>30</sup>

But neighborhood discrimination did not end with environmental inequalities. Buckingham, Andersonville and, especially, Alta Vista lacked infrastructure improvements as the city and county argued over which entity was responsible for the neighborhoods. Elvira Ortega, who grew up in Alta Vista in the 1950s, remembered outhouses, mud streets, and wood-burning stoves. But the sugar factory neighborhoods coalesced and leaders emerged who forced the city and county to extended services to their neighborhoods. “...The [Charlie] Martinez family...just took it upon themselves to become leaders for the community, and they would come out and do petitions and that sort of thing to get the city to put in a sewer,” Ortega said. “The roads weren’t paved. We were considered outside of the city limits and the three communities – Buckingham, Andersonville, and Alta Vista – were together, united more or less.”<sup>31</sup> They city did not complete a sewer line to Alta Vista until the early 1970s; paved streets came in 1980.

Charlie Martinez had a long history of leading families in his beloved neighborhood. As the city and county neglected Alta Vista, families in the settlement quickly realized that they would have to take matters into their own hands. A few years after the first adobe homes rose in a field northeast of the sugar factory, Alta Vista residents began electing “mayors” to one-year terms. While not officially recognized as such, Alta Vista’s mayors led campaigns to maintain and improve their neighborhood. Martinez was elected mayor

of Alta Vista in 1941 and his first duty was to collect a dollar from each family for gasoline that went into trucks used to bring sand, cinders, and gravel to fill ruts and holes in the dirt streets.<sup>32</sup>

As a result of fervent Chicano political activism (see below) and increased awareness and funding for the country's minorities in the 1970s, conditions improved within Fort Collins's Hispanic neighborhoods. From 1975 to 1980, the City of Fort Collins invested \$1,631,600 in Alta Vista alone. Philanthropic non-profit organizations such as Neighbor to Neighbor and Volunteers Clearinghouse concentrated their efforts to improve the living conditions of the city's impoverished Hispanic families. Neighbor to Neighbor even moved a house into Alta Vista to use as its office. In a profoundly symbolic affirmation of Hispanic autonomy in Alta Vista and Andersonville, in 1975 and 1976 the city allowed residents to rename their streets, formally known only by letters. Edward Gavaldon conducted the poll that renamed A Street in Andersonville as Romero Street, B Street as San Cristo, and C Street as Trujillo. Romero Street honored John Romero, one of Andersonville's first Hispanic residents. In 1925, he and his wife, Inez, built an adobe house in the neighborhood from clay dug in their yard. Romero became a notary public to help other Hispanic families with legal documents. He also acted as an interpreter and assisted in childrens' aid programs. In 1999, the City of Fort Collins, in partnership with the Poudre Landmarks Foundation, purchased the Romero House with plans to rehabilitate the structure as a museum of Fort Collins's Hispanic heritage. Trujillo Street was named for Ben Trujillo, who came to Fort Collins from Juanawato, Mexico, in 1916. Upon their marriage in 1930, Ben and his wife, Martina, moved to

Andersonville, where they raised their family. San Cristo Street was not named for a family but because it was, according to Gavaldon, "just a nice sounding name." In *la Colonia*, "A" Street became Alta Vista Street and "B" Street became Martinez Street, in honor of Charlie Martinez.<sup>33</sup>

### Hispanic Domestic Architecture

The architectural element most closely associated with Hispanics in Colorado is adobe-brick construction. However, during their occupation of Russia's treeless steppes, Germans developed adobe construction as well. Those Germans from Russia who came to the Great Plains continued to build adobe or sod houses. Buy no record exists of a German-Russian in Fort Collins constructing an adobe house in Andersonville or Buckingham. Most likely, then, all adobe structures in the sugar factory neighborhoods were constructed by and for Hispanic families.<sup>34</sup>

Adobe construction and its related architectural forms and styles are more closely identified with the American Southwest than any other form or style. And, like Hispanic culture itself, it is a union of European and Native American traditions. During their occupation of Spain from 711 to 1492, the Moors introduced to the country earthen brick construction, a technique common to North Africa. Meanwhile, several groups of indigenous peoples in the Americas devel-



**Figure 6.** Adobe bricks show through a crack in the stucco of this Alta Vista house. (Photo by the author.)

oped puddled-mud construction. Instead of baking individual bricks, these groups built walls of sun-dried mud applied in successive layers. (There is some evidence that these groups were familiar with mud-brick construction as well.) When Spanish conquistadors first encountered the multi-level pueblos of the American Southwest, they saw a form of construction with which they were intimately familiar. Spanish missionaries and settlers introduced wooden brick forms to these native populations, greatly improving the speed of construction and strengthening the structural integrity of adobe buildings.<sup>35</sup>

Unlike the majority of structures in Fort Collins, which are based on eastern architectural precedents and construction techniques, adobe buildings are more aptly suited to the semiarid environment and treeless landscape of the high prairie. In his landmark photographic study of Colorado's early Hispanic art and architecture, Robert Adams observes the ecological sensitivity inherent in adobe construction:

Adobe architecture did not, moreover, require a wholesale destruction of natural resources. Most materials needed no refining, and when abandoned returned directly to the state in which they were found. Exceptions like roof beams were taken in small quantities and reused.

Moreover, there was no attempt at the expense of available water to hide adobe behind green. The buildings were, after all, gracefully shaped and pleasant to look at. If a settler wanted shade, he built where the cottonwoods grew already, along streams; if he liked the sun, he built on the uplands. In any case, he did not object to what lived of its own accord in dry ground....<sup>36</sup>

Furthermore, as Adams observes, adobe construction is an architecture of the marginal – whether imposed by isolation on the landscape or isolation through discrimination. “Adobe buildings were popular first

because they were cheap and pleasant to live in,” Adams writes. “Fires which plagued wooden frontier towns were almost unknown, rats and mice found few hiding places in the solid walls and floors, and the sounds of the neighbors, who lived close by for protection and friendship, were modulated by thick walls.”<sup>37</sup>

The construction technique used in Alta Vista and Andersonville was the same as that used to build adobe structures throughout the American Southwest – with a few modern twists such as concrete foundations. Great Western described in detail the process used to construct the adobe bricks for its Hispanic labor colonies.

Straw is added to the mixture. Short, chaffy straw is preferable to the longer kind. Then the mortar-like material is moulded [sic] into bricks of whatever dimension is desired, most commonly 4x12x18 inches. The green bricks are left flat on the ground...for two days, and then are set on edge to expose more surface to the sundrying process. Several days later they are piled four or five tiers high, each brick being placed in a tilted position that will provide air space. The piles are then covered with straw or boards to prevent damage by rain. It takes two to three weeks to fit the bricks for laying into walls, depending on the weather.

...After the walls are laid, they are plastered both inside and out with lime. Cement is mixed into the plaster used on the outside to harden it and fine gravel is also added. That gives that appearance of stucco, when finished.<sup>38</sup>

Finished adobe bricks could weigh 30 to 40 pounds.<sup>39</sup> The archetypal adobe structure has an earthen flat roof supported by *vigas* (or long ceiling beams) and parapet walls. Those in Alta Vista were no exception, with the added refinement of a top coat of lime-cement mortar sealing the roof. But these structures presented significant problems for their occupants, especially leaks and the con-



stant sifting of dirt from the ceiling to the floor. Many adobe homes were quickly remodeled with pitched roofs when materials or money became available. Unfortunately adobe structures handled only vertical stresses; the horizontal load of a pitched roof often compromised the integrity of the walls. Consequently, constructing a pitched roof for an adobe structure was a bit of a gamble. As late as 1937, some of the houses in Alta Vista still retained their flat roofs. In time however, all were remodeled, most with simple, wood-framed, side-gabled roofs. An exception is 737 Alta Vista, which has a hipped roof.<sup>40</sup>

The Andersonville and Alta Vista adobe houses share many characteristics with their more southern counterparts. Doors and windows in the sugar factory neighborhoods and in New Mexico generally have simple one-by-four-inch wooden surrounds. The house at 724 Martinez was originally an L-shaped plan, while 744 Martinez appears as two houses strung together (fig. 8). These lateral combinations of one-room units are common in New Mexico, where adobe houses expanded room by room as a family grew. (Families could not increase the size of individual rooms because of the paucity of timber long enough and stout enough to span ceilings.) These adobe structures eventually formed *haciendas*, fortress-like compounds opening into a protected central courtyard or *placita*. While neither 724 or 744 Martinez Street are *haciendas*, they maintain combinations of one-room units.<sup>41</sup>

But the adobe structures in Alta Vista represent one of most unique neighborhoods in Colorado. Alta Vista contains one of the northernmost collections of Hispanic adobe domiciles in North America. Great Western constructed other adobe villages in its factory towns, most notably the Mexican Colony in Fort Morgan. But few, if any, were further



**Figure 7.**

Located at 425 Tenth Street in Andersonville, the Romero House is the neighborhood's only adobe-brick house. John Romero dug the earth for the bricks from the backyard. (Photo by the author.)

north than Alta Vista. And today none of the Great Western colonies retain as much of their historic integrity as Fort Collins's *la colonia*. Moreover, a defining characteristic of vernacular architecture is that structures grow organically; as a family increases and as its resources allow, members construct additional rooms to meet their needs. But in Alta Vista and Andersonville, they more often used wood-frame construction for those additions rather than adobe brick. Wood-frame construction techniques may have been a symbol of increasing affluence; it represented a willing dislocation from the realities of the

**Figure 8.**

This house at 744 Martinez Street, Alta Vista, is an example of room-by-room linear additions common to adobe structures. (Photo by the author.)



landscape and environment while signifying the homeowner's participation in a nationwide culture of consumption. In later years, many families chose to sheath their adobe houses in synthetic materials rather than repair the stucco plaster. Additionally, others replaced their narrow, double-hung sash windows with picture windows. The results were structures that were not entirely Hispanic or entirely Anglo. These houses, then, represent in microcosm the evolution of the Fort Collins's Hispanic community – an amalgamation of Spanish, Anglo, and indigenous influences.

A well-documented example of this phenomenon is the Charlie Martinez house at 736 Martinez Street in Alta Vista. The core of the dwelling is one of Great Western's original, two-room adobe houses. But Martinez added several wood-frame rooms behind the original structure and even constructed a wood-frame partition within the adobe rooms. While the façade retains much of its original massing and materials, Martinez replaced the two windows flanking the central door, using a picture window on the southern end.<sup>42</sup>

The remainder of the houses in Buckingham, Andersonville, Alta Vista, and Holy Family are generally architectural forms associated with working-class neighborhoods. By far the most prominent form is the hipped-roof box, ubiquitous throughout Colorado. This form is a simple rectangular plan with unornamented porches and a hipped roof. A slightly more sophisticated cousin, with ornate porches and a central dormer, is the classic cottage, which also appears in Holy Family. Other structures associated with Buckingham and Andersonville are prefabricated beet-worker shanties, often with arched roofs (fig. 13). Holy Family also contains a handful of shot-



gun houses (fig. 9), rare in northern Colorado. This form is one-room wide and two or more rooms deep, lacking a central hallway. Rooms connect to each other through a series of doors. There is some speculation that this form may have arrived in the United States via the slave trade from Africa through the West Indies. Whatever its origin, the shotgun house first appeared in New Orleans in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century and became a common vernacular form across the South. It spread north, east, and west along the Mississippi River and its tributaries. The presence of an African architectural form in a predominately Hispanic neighborhood within the United States provides an unusual example of ethnic blending.<sup>43</sup>

### Hispanic Churches

In its effort to retain a resident Hispanic labor force, Great Western did more than provide affordable, quality housing. It also sought to provide social and religious incentives for its migrant workers to remain in Fort Collins. As Great Western executive H.H. Griffin reported: "...[The company] wanted to establish some center that these people could call their own."<sup>44</sup> Catholics first celebrated Mass in Fort Collins in 1878. In 1901,

**Figure 9.**

A "shotgun" house located in the Holy Family neighborhood. (Photo by the author.)



they completed an imposing sandstone edifice on the northwest corner of Mountain Avenue and Howes Street, St. Joseph Church. Here Hispanics and Anglos worshiped together in an uneasy peace. But no organization, including the church, administered directly to the needs of Fort Collins's growing Hispanic community. In 1924, C.V. Maddux, a Great Western executive who championed the construction of Alta Vista and encouraged farmers to provide better housing for their migrant workers, seized an opportunity. With St. Joseph's pastor, Father Guillaume Joseph LeJeunesse, Maddux petitioned Denver Bishop John H. Tihen for a priest to serve the Spanish-speaking community. The bishop appointed Joseph Pierre (Peter) Truedell (also spelled Trudel) to the position. Father Truedell was ordained in Quebec, studied in Paris, and in 1911 came to Colorado for his health. He quickly learned Spanish and spent the rest of his life administering to the state's Hispanic community. Upon Maddux's recommendation, Great Western actually assisted the new Spanish-speaking parish in purchasing its own church building, the former Second (Westside) Presbyterian Church. This one-story, wood-framed building, renamed St. Joseph's Spanish Catholic Church, was located at the northwest corner of Whitcomb and Cherry.<sup>45</sup> (The Holly Sugar Company had already set a precedent, assisting its Hispanic and Italian workers to build a Catholic church in La Junta).<sup>46</sup> Maddux was one of the 500 people to attend the church's dedication, commenting "I witnessed them as they came out, and you could see goodness shining in their faces."<sup>47</sup>

The church continued to grow and, in the spring of 1929, Bishop Tihen traveled to Fort Collins to bless the cornerstone of a new worship space for the Hispanic community, Holy

Family Catholic Church. Parishoners saved what they could to build the structure and conducted fundraisers. Eva Martinez, wife of Lee Martinez, remembered in particular basket socials:

You fix your basket – you get a box and fix it real nice, decorate it with tissue paper, and all – whatever you want to put on it. And then you put enough food in there for two persons. They auction the baskets. And of course, if you had a boy friend or two boys that were interested in you, it would really bring something. ...They'd get up to fifteen and twenty dollars.<sup>48</sup>

The 96-by-45-foot structure of wire-cut brick supplied by the Fort Collins Brick

Company cost \$ 1 2 , 0 0 0 (\$116,751 in 2000, based on the consumer price index). The plan of the Romanesque structure was a simple rectangle, disturbed only by thick buttresses; the church even lacked a tower or belfry (fig. 10). But the structure's elaborate brickwork more than compensated for its lack of form. Contrasting in dark red to the structure's light red brick walls were elaborate window surrounds, belt courses at the foundation, and in wide, parallel rows near the cornice. Piercing the top center of the principal elevation was a cathedral-glass window set in three courses of corbelled bricks. (A corbel is a projection or series of projections,



**Figure 10.** Holy Family Catholic Church. (Photo by the author.)

But the structure's elaborate brickwork more than compensated for its lack of form. Contrasting in dark red to the structure's light red brick walls were elaborate window surrounds, belt courses at the foundation, and in wide, parallel rows near the cornice. Piercing the top center of the principal elevation was a cathedral-glass window set in three courses of corbelled bricks. (A corbel is a projection or series of projections,

each stepped progressively outward or inward.) As it exists today, one of the church's most intriguing features is its paired, oak doors at the center of the principal elevation. Each of these thick doors contains three panels of elaborately carved rosettes (fig. 1). These decorative details, combined with heavy, wrought iron strap hinges and a stucco-over-stone-surround, provide the entrance with an element of Spanish Colonial architectural style. A fire in March 1969 severely damaged the structure. At the time, some Catholics recommended reintegrating the Hispanic parish into St. Joseph, but Holy Family parishioners wanted to maintain their close-knit, little church. Under Father Bartholemew Quetglass, the congregation quickly restored and rebuilt its church.<sup>49</sup>

As Maddux predicted, Holy Family soon became the cultural and religious center of Fort Collins's Hispanic community. Many residents came to daily Mass, those in Andersonville and Alta Vista often walking the four-mile roundtrip; the journey was slightly shorter for families in Buckingham. For many of these Hispanic families, Holy Family was a welcome forum in which to express freely their culture while avoiding Anglo prejudices. "Holy Family has always been considered for the poorer Catholics and St. Joseph's for the richer white Catholics," said Elvira Ortega. "...I know people from here [Alta Vista] didn't feel like going to St. Joseph's. We thought we could go with the clothes we had to Holy Family but not to St. Joe's."<sup>50</sup>

One of the most visible and profound symbols of the church's Mexican heritage lies between the steps leading to the front door. There stand two statues commemorating the visitation of the Virgin of Guadalupe. In 1531, Juan Diego (fig. 11), an impoverished farmer of indigenous descent, was walking on

the outskirts of Mexico City when a vision of the Virgin Mary appeared before him. She instructed Juan Diego to build on this hillside a chapel in her honor. When the farmer informed the bishop of what had happened, the church official dismissed him. Undaunted, Juan Diego returned to the location and the Virgin appeared once again. As a testament of her will, she offered Juan Diego a bunch of roses at a time when the flowers were not in season. (Roses are a poignant Aztec symbol of truth.) The farmer gathered the roses in his cloak, and when he unfurled it before the bishop, an image of the Virgin Mary appeared on it. The Basilica of Our

Lady of Guadalupe is today one of the most important landmarks in Mexico and the image of Mary is a national symbol. Moreover, the Virgin of Guadalupe is a remarkable example of cultural syncretism; Spanish conquest in Mexico resulted in a culture that was not completely Spanish nor was it completely indigenous. The standard iconography of the Virgin is rich in Aztec symbolism, but its meaning is distinctively Catholic and Spanish. Its appearance in Fort Collins adds yet another layer to this immensely complicated and rich culture and, whether standing before the church or a house, or applied as a decal on an automobile's rear window, stands as a testimony to mestizo pride within the United States.<sup>51</sup>



**Figure 11.** Standing in front of Holy Family Catholic Church is this statue depicting Juan Diego as he unfurls his cloak, revealing roses and an image of the Virgin Mary. (Photo by the author.)

One of the Holy Family's most elaborate and distinctively Hispanic celebrations are *quinceañeras*. Literally "fifteen years," it marks a rite of passage for young Latinos, especially those of Spanish, Mexican, Venezuelan, or Argentinean descent. In an elaborate church ceremony, 15-year-olds reaffirm their baptismal vows. "A *quinceañera* is something in which the young person commits themselves to service of God and the church and consecrates themselves to the Blessed Virgin Mary," said Holy Family pastor, Father Doug Hunt. For girls, a *quinceañera* means white gowns with long veils, a tuxedoed escort, and standing at the center of attention in an event rivaling a wedding. Following the ceremony, family and friends gathered for a reception. Before the first dance, the 15-year-old girl passes a china doll to a younger girl, usually a sister, and trades her flat-heeled shoes for high heels. Both actions are symbols of her transition into womanhood. Fraught with meaning both spiritual and cultural, *quinceañeras* are also quite costly, often exceeding \$10,000.<sup>52</sup>

The church also hosted a number of social events and clubs, many of which still exist. The Altar and Rosary Society, formed in 1924 as *La Liga Eucharistica*, involved parish women in looking after the church. Men participated in the *Sociedad de San José* (Society of St. Joseph). Boys participated in the Crusaders, and girls had the Daughters of Mary. Other organizations were the Mothers' Club, the Blue Scapular Club, Holy Name Society, and the church hosted a troop of the Boy Scouts of America. The most prominent social event is the church's annual *fiesta*, a multi-day celebration and fundraiser held each year since 1965. "[The fiesta] gives us an opportunity to celebrate our common heritage and to give the community of Fort Collins a chance to share with us the spirit of

Holy Family Parish," writes an unnamed author in a brief history of the church.<sup>53</sup>

Beyond its spiritual functions, Holy Family also took an active role in improving the social and economic status of its parishioners. In 1937, Father Juan Fullana became pastor of the church. Remembered for both his toughness toward and sympathy for Fort Collins's Hispanic community, Father Fullana quickly gained the respect of both Latinos and Anglos in the city. "I don't think any of us have ever known another priest like him," remembered Ernie Miranda. "He'd tell it like it was. He'd get mad and he'd even slug some of the guys – some of the youngsters that had been disrespectful...."<sup>54</sup> The priest sought to mitigate rampant discrimination in Fort Collins by providing Hispanics with their own store and entertainment venue. He opened a cooperative grocery store and frequently rented a local theater to screen Spanish-language motion pictures. Most remembered among Fort Collins's older Hispanic families was Father Fullana's mop factory, which sold the finished product from the church basement.<sup>55</sup> Fort Collins historian Evadene Burris Swanson comments that the mops, made of linen, were "far superior to the commercial variety."<sup>56</sup> The priest left Holy Family in 1950. A few years later, while in Mexico City, thieves murdered Father Fullana. The people of Fort Collins revered the priest for his commitment to the Hispanic community and, in 1975, named the Holy Family neighborhood's Juan Fullana Elementary School (now the Fullana Learning Center) in his honor. Interestingly, the school that bears his name represented a victory for the Hispanic community over lingering discrimination in education (see below).<sup>57</sup>

Holy Family was not the only church associated with the Hispanic community.



Retaining its close proximity to the Holy Family neighborhood, Westside Presbyterian Church continued to minister to Hispanic families. First Presbyterian conducted services and Sunday school in English and Spanish. The Unitarian Church actively campaigned Fort Collins businesses to remove all “white trade only” signs. And Andersonville continues to be home to Templo Betel Assembly of God. Originally referred to as the Spanish Assembly Church, the church was constructed in 1960. Rev. John Vega and his wife, Rev. Orpha Vega, began ministering at the church around 1970. Both were born in Monterey, Mexico, and graduated from the Assembly of God Institute in Chicago. John Vega held four services per week, delivered in both Spanish and English. Orpha Vega directed the church’s Christian education program. Approximately 45 families attended the church, some working as missionaries in Mexico and Latin America. With the help from church members and fundraising activities by several area churches and organizations, a new addition was added to the east side of the church around 1977.<sup>58</sup>

While other churches continue to minister to Hispanics in Fort Collins, the community continues to be largely centered around Holy Family Catholic Church for its spiritual, cultural, and economic needs. Even today a steady stream of Hispanic men and women file into the church’s office, seeking assistance in translating bank statements or completing employment applications and resumes.

### Hispanic Labor

Before Hispanics could settle permanently in Fort Collins, they had to earn enough money to buy a house and to support or send for their families. Expanding employment opportunities in northern Colorado, especial-

ly related to the sugar beet industry, were crucial to Hispanic settlement. It was, after all, Great Western that built Alta Vista and helped establish Holy Family Church. Moreover, employment issues and subsequent labor organization proved to be fertile soil in which to plant the seeds of Chicano activism.

Yet Fort Collins’s original Hispanic settlers cannot be identified with one occupation or another. Many operated ranches and farms in jobs indistinguishable from their Anglo neighbors. But Hispanic migration – especially among single men – accelerated with the opening of the sugar factory in 1904. However, most did not go immediately to the



**Figure 12.**

Great Western’s sugar factory in Fort Collins, November 24, 1932, at the height of the beet harvest. (Courtesy, Fort Collins Public Library.)

ly related to the sugar beet industry, were crucial to Hispanic settlement. It was, after all, Great Western that built Alta Vista and helped establish Holy Family Church. Moreover, employment issues and subsequent labor organization proved to be fertile soil in which to plant the seeds of Chicano activism. Yet Fort Collins’s original Hispanic settlers cannot be identified with one occupation or another. Many operated ranches and farms in jobs indistinguishable from their Anglo neighbors. But Hispanic migration – especially among single men – accelerated with the opening of the sugar factory in 1904. However, most did not go immediately to the beet fields. Instead, they participated in a rather curious side industry created by the sugar beet refining process. During the factory’s first season, it used barium in the complex chemical process that transforms raw beet saccharine into pure white, granulated sugar. However, barium had to be imported at considerable cost from Germany. Searching for a lower-cost alternative, researchers at Great Western and a professor at the Colorado School of Mines discovered that lime – acquired from burning limestone – could replace barium in the refining process. In 1906, the Ingleside Limestone Company, a

subsidiary of Great Western, opened a quarry at Ingleside, a long-since vanished settlement near Owl Canyon, sixteen miles northwest of Fort Collins. In a few years, the operation grew to massive proportions; the quarry produced 80 percent of all the limestone required by Great Western's sugar factories. (The Fort Collins factory alone used between 6,000 and 7,000 tons of limestone a year.) While Hispanics were the largest ethnic group employed at Ingleside, there were a significant number of men from Japan as well as from Spain, Serbia, Croatia, Greece, Norway, and Sweden. Quarry work was risky, and many men died at Ingleside. But it paid \$3 to \$4 a day at the same time field hands received \$1 a day. While many single Hispanic men lived in the bunkhouse or tarpaper shacks at the quarry, those with families often resided in Fort Collins's Buckingham, Andersonville, Alta Vista, or Holy Family neighborhoods. The connection between Fort Collins's Hispanic community and the Ingleside Quarry was strong. Soon after receiving their own Catholic church in Fort Collins, some of the town's prominent Hispanic citizens, including Lee Martinez, helped to construct San Pedro Chapel at Ingleside. When the quarry played out and closed in the 1930s, many of its Hispanic workers moved to new limestone and alabaster operations north of the site.<sup>59</sup>

But the largest influx of Hispanics into Fort Collins came as the pool of Russian-German beet workers dried up following World War I. Originally, Great Western sent agents to southern Colorado and New Mexico to recruit Hispanic laborers. The sugar company quickly exhausted this pool of workers and turned to Mexican nationals. Great Western agents turned up in popular labor markets such as Fort Worth, El Paso, and San Antonio, and along the Mexican border.

Prospective laborers signed single-season contracts for a fixed rate per acre worked (\$21 to \$23 per acre in 1924). Magdalena Arellano remembered when a Great Western agent came to her home in Antonito, Colorado, in 1922:

...When the agent for 'la compañía azucarera,' the sugar company, came, my mother, uncle, aunt, and I left Antonito for Fort Collins. The sugar company paid our rail fare and put us up overnight at the Linden Hotel when we arrived in Fort Collins. The next morning we were contracted out to a farmer, living in a shack 'en el rancho' while we worked in the beets.<sup>60</sup>

Occasionally a farmer contracted with his laborers independent of the sugar company, making such agreements either at the end of the previous season or coming directly to a labor market before the beginning of the next season.<sup>61</sup>

Unfortunately, the words labor agents, executives, and growers used to describe Hispanic workers often degraded the laborers to mere beasts of burden. Some samples appear in Robert McLean's 1924 article "Mexicans in the Beet Field:"

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

– unnamed labor manager for Great Western, Fort Collins

The Mexican is a good worker, if treated right. If not, he won't work. He is very loyal or very mean. The trouble is, we haven't known how to treat him. Too many have thought they could beat the Mexican and they would be that much ahead. If any farmer beats the Mexican now, he has to talk to us."

– executive, American Beet Sugar Company<sup>62</sup>



Once they arrived in Fort Collins, Hispanic migrant beet workers faced many dangers. Up to 10 men would have to share a one- or two-room shanty at the edge of the beet field. With few exits, open flames, and all-wood construction, these beet shanties were death traps. On September 28, 1929, six Hispanic beet workers retired to their two-room shack on the Herman Schled farm, seven miles south of downtown Fort Collins. They had recently arrived from Las Vegas, New Mexico, to work the sugar beet harvest. Early the next morning, the workers were awoken with alarm. The *Fort Collins Express* recounts the tragedy:

The fire started in the room used as a kitchen. The six men were sleeping in the other room. Survivors say that when they awakened the partition between the two rooms was a wall of fire, shutting off escape thru [sic] the door of the room. A can of kerosene in the kitchen apparently exploded when the fire reached it, throwing the blazing oil over the entire room. There were also cans of lubricating oil in the building, it is said. The frame shack, lined with tar paper, burned like kindling; not even a sliver of wood was left unburned.

Two of the victims died on their beds on the floor of the shack. The third fell back into the flames after an unsuccessful effort to escape thru the window, which permitted the three injured to escape.<sup>63</sup>

When they were not crammed into inadequate and dangerous shacks, Hispanic migrant beet workers endured backbreaking labor relatively untouched by modern agricultural innovations. Even as late as the 1950s, only a little over 40 percent of beets were harvested mechanically.<sup>64</sup> Beet campaigns began in late March or April with sowing and thinning and continued to November with harvesting. Because “single germ” beet seeds were not developed until the 1950s, farmers actually planted a wad of seeds that,

in a few weeks, produced a patch of twisted beet plants. Laborers crawled along the rows of seedlings, using a hoe to “block” the plants so that each was 12 to 14 inches apart. Then the blocks were thinned by hand, removing the weakest plants and retaining the healthiest. After blocking and thinning (*el desaihe*), which could take up to a month and a half depending on the acreage, the workers then turned to hoeing. This involved piling soil around the beet plants while removing weeds. Accomplished in two stages – first and second hoeings – the second stage could span from mid summer to the harvest in November. By far the

most difficult and dangerous task was pulling and topping the beets for harvest. The huge beets, which often exceeded 12 pounds, were either pulled by hand or, in some cases, by horses. The laborers then had to knock the clumps of soil from the beets. (The sugar companies sampled each load of beets to determine the average amount of soil on each one. They were not about to pay for anything other than the beet itself.) Topping (*el tapéo*) required chopping through the toughest, most fibrous part of the beet plant with a long, broad knife forged into a hook at the end. It was a very menacing instrument and, considering the force required to cut through a beet, often sliced arms and especially legs. The topped beets were then lifted into a wagon and hauled to a beet dump on the railroad or at the factory. An average wagonload of beets weighed six tons.<sup>65</sup>

Great Western ceaselessly pushed its farmers and their migrant workers to produce bigger and better sugar beet crops. The com-



**Figures 13.**

A typical northern Colorado beet shanty, circa 1923. (Photo from U.S. Department of Labor.)

pany encouraged farmers to retain a portion of their laborers' pay after thinning and hoeing to ensure that they would return for the harvest. Another practice, although often discouraged by Great Western, was to pay bonuses to laborers for tonnage harvested over the district's average. By far the most successful program was Great Western's campaign competitions: factories competed against one another to win a pennant for the highest production. Farmers, factory employees, and even members of the community rallied to bring the pennant to their own town.<sup>66</sup>

But even with a successful beet campaign, a Hispanic migrant worker could not guarantee the he would be paid all that he was owed. Unfamiliar with the English language and American law, Hispanic laborers found themselves duped by unscrupulous growers and merchants. In his article "*Los Betabeleros*" (The Beetworkers), José Aguayo writes that some Hispanic laborers believed Great Western fieldmen fixed the scales to favor growers at the expense of workers. Others charged that growers and merchants conspired to deduct unreasonably high amounts for items purchased in a store before the worker had his check. "[The Hispanic migrant worker] has no means of knowing anything about the financial responsibility or credit rating of the grower," writes Thomas Mahony in his 1931 address "Industrial Relations in the Beet Fields of Colorado. "If the grower for any reasons is unable or unwilling to pay him at the close of the season, he is helpless. There is no guarantee in his contract, or from the sugar company that placed him – or from any other source – that he will get paid when his work is done. The State of Colorado gives him no wage protection whatever."<sup>67</sup> Most communities, however, had a few Hispanic citizens who managed to master the English language and

the law. In Fort Collins, for instance, John Romero, as a bilingual notary public, served this role. At other times, Hispanic beet workers took matters into their own hands, in some extreme cases burning the homes of farmers who cheated them.<sup>68</sup> "One time my patron didn't want to pay me," remembered Prudencio Gonzalez. "I told him I worked for him and my sons worked for him. It's a good thing he finally paid me. I was going to hit him with a hoe."<sup>69</sup>

However, the dishonesty of merchants went largely unnoticed by Anglos more concerned about the number of children in the beet fields. A legacy of child labor in the sugar beet industry extends to the very first German-Russian families who came to Colorado. As the patriarch, or *Hausvater*, of a German-Russian family sought a contract with a farmer, he became part of a far larger and complex system of economics that governed the sugar beet industry. Long protected by government-imposed tariffs, sugar prices still varied greatly from season to season. The problem for Great Western was that the company had to guarantee a minimum price for sugar beets almost a year before the sugar from those beets would hit the market. Generally the profit margin on a pound of sugar was only one to one-and-a-half cents. Consequently, the sugar companies had to negotiate contracts with farmers that took into consideration future market conditions – especially supply – while continuing to make it profitable for those farmers to grow beets. Into this complicated system came the contract laborers, who agreed to tend a specified acreage of beets. To survive, an individual laborer had to agree to tend far more acres than he could possibly do himself. The answer? Employ his entire family in tending the beets while keeping costs such as rent and food as low as possible. The result was a sys-

tem that paid the lowest wages to those who worked the hardest. While many Hispanic workers originally came to the beet fields as single men, more and more of them married and had children at the same time whole families arrived in northern Colorado from Mexico and the Southwest. Federal labor reports reveal that growers expected the laborers to employ their children in the fields, and the workers themselves realized the economic benefits of doing so. Moreover, Colorado's child labor laws exempted agricultural work from its minimum-age requirements.<sup>70</sup>

The Great Depression quickly made a bad situation worse. Living conditions among Larimer County's Hispanic migrant workers had become so intolerable by 1930 that the Methodist Episcopal Church in Fort Collins adopted a statement condemning migrant labor working and living conditions. It urged legislators "to bring about needed reform."<sup>71</sup> In 1931, the beet growers association in northern Colorado slashed field wages 25 percent – from \$23 to \$18 per acre. In Brush and Fort Morgan, prices dropped to \$9 per acre. "No family can exist on the wages paid to beet field labor this year," laments Mahony. "To expect them to do so is cruel and inhuman."<sup>72</sup>

And conditions only grew worse. Armandina Avalos remembered working as a migrant worker on Fort Collins-area farms during the Depression. A dozen migrant worker families would live in one house, a family to a room. "We had to sleep on the floor," Avalos said. "One night I felt something fall on me. I woke up, and I was all white. It was the first time I saw snow." And she remembered having to drink water infested with worms.<sup>73</sup> Facing homelessness and starvation, Hispanic migrant workers in Fort Collins did anything they could to support

their families. Some sold food from their homes while others worked in Holy Family's mop factory. Cleofas Ambriz, a Timnath-area beet worker, started one of the area's most interesting depression-era businesses. Realizing the market for bootlegged liquor during Prohibition, he distilled his own blend of alcohol made from grapes and bananas. Ambriz never sold his liquor to Anglos in Fort Collins for fear that they would turn him in. Nonetheless, he was jailed in Denver for three months when federal agents discovered and destroyed his still. "But that was no problem," remembered his widow, Adela. "We had another still hidden away. When he got back from jail we just pulled it out and were back in business."<sup>74</sup>

Hispanic migrant beet workers in northern Colorado, however, may have been spared the full brunt of the Great Depression, especially compared to those in California. There, as agricultural prices plummeted, droves of destitute farmers from Dust Bowl states, especially Oklahoma, saturated the labor market and severely strained charities and state welfare programs. But the relative prosperity of the sugar beet industry in Colorado may have allowed farmers and laborers to survive the economic downturn. The average value of the sugar beet crop in the state during the Great Depression was \$25,820,000 a year. While Colorado farmers grew beets on only 10 percent of all irrigated land in the 16 leading beet-growing counties from 1929 to 1939, the average value of the crop totaled 40 percent of the value of all principal crops grown on irrigated land in the state.

The problem, however, was that beet labor prices decreased more than sugar prices and gross income from beets. Using the Agricultural Adjustment Act (1909-1914) as a base period, W. Lewis Abbott found that in

the late 1920s, wages consumed 33 percent of a sugar beet grower's gross income. In 1933, however, only 23 percent of the gross income went to pay wages. During the base period, farmers received \$5.58 per ton of beets and paid \$19.08 per acre in wages. In 1933, they received \$5.32 per ton, but paid only \$13.87 per acre in wages.<sup>75</sup> Relief came with the *Sugar Act* of 1937, which reduced tariffs and substituted a more comprehensive, albeit indirect, means of regulating sugar prices, beet prices, grower-processor relationships, and wages. This redistributed beet profits in favor of farmers and field workers at the expense of the processing companies.<sup>76</sup>

But Hispanic migrant beet laborers continued to be underpaid and poorly housed. A 1951 report compiled by the National Child Labor Committee found that half of the migrant worker families surveyed in Colorado (many in the Fort Collins area) lived in one-room houses. Moreover, 92 percent had no means of refrigeration, only a third could be sure their drinking water was safe, and most families used "'pit toilets,' of which less than 1 in 4 would have passed elementary health inspection."<sup>77</sup> Some growers still considered their Hispanic migrant workers to be nothing more than beasts of burden. W.B. Gross, a Weld County beet grower, reveals in his 1950 testimony before the President's Survey Committee on Migrant Labor an unwillingness among himself and his fellow farm owners to accept the economic realities faced by their migrant workers:

The ability and willingness of the migrant worker to better his condition economically rests with himself. ... No person regardless of race or color is barred from owning land, owning property or any other avenue which he wishes to pursue in which he wants to improve his economic conditions.

...The migrant child has the same opportunity, educationally, as any other child of school age. The tragedy of the

migrant situation is that for some unknown reason the children of migrants are not encouraged by their parents to take advantage of our educational facilities.<sup>78</sup>

The real tragedy was that growers like Gress failed to understand that migrant workers did not have the financial resources to purchase land and could not afford to lose the productivity of a child working in the grower's own fields. And discrimination was so rampant and vicious during the 1940s, that the superintendent of a Weld County school district was quoted as saying, "the respectable people of Weld County do not want their children to sit alongside of dirty, filthy, diseased, infested Mexicans."<sup>79</sup>

But Hispanic migrant workers would not always remain quiet. At the conclusion of a 1942 conference in Greeley, the Commission on Organized Labor and the Problems of the Spanish Speaking People recommended "that we call upon the Trade Unions – A.F. of L., C.I.O and independent – to vigorously champion the cause of Spanish speaking people; to receive them at all times as equal members of their unions; and to make special efforts to prevent any discrimination against them."<sup>80</sup> Lest this commission seem amazingly far-sighted, as early as 1931 Thomas Mahony predicted that, "sooner or later these laborers will become organized and come under some form of labor leadership. ...It should be remembered that 'conditions not agitators make radicals.' The beet sugar interests by their attitude and actions towards these poor laborers are preparing the ground and sowing the seed for a rank crop of radicalism."<sup>81</sup>

Many Mexican families who were once farm owners lost their land in the midst of the Depression, forcing them into migratory labor. Among them was young Cesar Chavez and his family in California. The brutality of

fieldwork, discrimination, and unceasing poverty propelled Chavez into the leadership role Mahony had predicted. The new champion of Mexican migrant workers studied the tactics of the Civil Rights Movement and, in 1965, led a strike against the Delano vineyards in California. Although agricultural laborers were not covered by federal labor laws, Chavez and his United Farm Workers (UFW) managed to sustain the strike for five years. Instead of casting the strike as a management-labor conflict, he transformed it into “*La Causa*” (the Cause); the strike became an emblem of Mexican pride and a demand for the rights of full citizenship. In time, he expanded the Delano strike into a boycott of all California grapes. By the 1970s, UFW had spread to the beet fields of Colorado and became a powerful political force across the county.<sup>82</sup> It had opened the way for a formative campaign for Hispanic civil rights. Indeed, Armando B. Rendon’s 1971 *Chicano Manifesto* cites the Delano strike as the genesis of the Chicano Movement.<sup>83</sup> Thus, the fight for Hispanic civil rights actually began among the poor migrant workers. In Colorado, the once politically impotent *betabeleros* brought about a new era of Hispanic power and pride.

At the same time, new economic opportunities emerged for Hispanics in Fort Collins. In 1947, the Bureau of Reclamation, together with the State of Colorado, undertook the Colorado-Big Thompson Project. The colossal construction project diverted water from Colorado River headwaters west of the Continental Divide to the Big Thompson River on the east side. One of the largest pieces of the project was the construction of Horsetooth Reservoir west of Fort Collins. Many Hispanic laborers were at last freed from the beet fields, turning out *en mass* to work on Horsetooth and other Colorado-

Big Thompson construction sites. While the project lasted only seven years, many Hispanics gained skills that lasted a lifetime. And the Colorado-Big Thompson Project could not have been better timed; the sugar factory in Fort Collins closed in 1955 – symbolizing the contraction of the sugar beet industry and the jobs it had sustained.<sup>84</sup>

### Hispanic Life in Fort Collins

Like the German from Russia who preceded them to the beet fields, Hispanic families found both abundant opportunities and oppressive discrimination in Fort Collins. Certainly one of the most frustrating issues for both ethnic groups was identity. To many Anglos in Fort Collins, all Hispanics were immigrants from Mexico, even though their ancestors had lived in the American Southwest for more than four centuries.<sup>85</sup> But, in a matter of a generation, many German Russians shed their traditional clothing and spoke English fluently. Hispanics, however, could not hide their darker complexions and physical features that made them stand out from their Anglo neighbors.

Discrimination was, in most cases, overt. Originally, businesses placed in their windows placards reading “white trade only” or “no dogs or Mexicans allowed.” In time, those signs became simply “no Mexicans allowed.” Hispanics had to defer the sidewalks to Anglos, could not eat at lunch counters, and had to sit in the balcony at local movie theaters. “I got so used to going upstairs, I didn’t know there was a downstairs,” remembers Dan Martinez.<sup>86</sup>

But Hispanics in Fort Collins did what they could to secure essential goods from local merchants. Some businesses, like Nash’s Drug Store on Linden Street, actually promoted the fact that it willingly served Hispanics and Germans from Russia. These



merchants realized that the Hispanic community was underserved and could prove a fruitful market. Some Hispanic farm laborers asked their Anglo bosses to purchase items for them. And sometimes a Hispanic succeeded in looking white. “My mother, very light complected, had platinum blonde hair,” remembered Debra Bueno. “She used to do the shopping for families who lived in Buckingham.... So my mother, because she looked so light, could go into places other people couldn’t go.”<sup>87</sup>

However, perhaps more detrimental than the “white trade only” signs and movie theater policies was a less overt form of racism that denied Hispanics basic services. “...The Hispanics have long suffered most of all from simply being ignored,” stated a 1979 report of the National Conference of Christians and Jews.<sup>88</sup> As mentioned earlier, Andersonville and Alta Vista fell between the cracks of city and county government. Without a common language or United States citizenship, their residents were politically powerless. Municipal water mains and sewers, paved streets, and even police services lagged behind more affluent Anglo neighborhoods south of the Poudre. In an oral history interview, Ernie Miranda recalled an incident in the 1930s in which Buckingham residents feared Anglo retaliation for a murder in Wellington. But without police protection, the neighborhood’s residents were forced to defend themselves. “They had a couple of men there stopping all the cars that were coming in and to see what their business was in the neighborhood,” Miranda said.<sup>89</sup> The most troubling cases of discrimination by neglect, however, centered around education. This issue would coalesce the political power of Fort Collins’s Hispanic community more than anything else.

To address community issues, Hispanic

families organized and fought back against discrimination. One way to do so was to provide a formal Hispanic voice in Fort Collins. Thus, the Spanish Catholic Young Men’s Association began printing *La Estrella* in 1927. The newspaper, with some articles in Spanish and others in English, existed for less than a year. In 1932, the Robinson Printing Company published *El Faro*. Although it was also short lived, it does provide hints of Depression-era labor organization in the beet fields around Fort Collins.<sup>90</sup> And just as the Great Depression influenced Cesar Chavez, so too did it spawn a number of early Hispanic civil rights organizations. John Romero was secretary of Fort Collins’s Spanish-American rights committee, founded in 1934. The group pressed local merchants to end their discriminatory practices and tried to open up more diverse employment opportunities for Hispanic youths. These groups were short lived, however, until after World War II. The armed forces drafted young Hispanic men just like any other American male. Moreover, unlike African-Americans who were segregated into separate units, Hispanics and Anglos often served together. Empowered by their wartime experiences and treated as equals by their fellow Anglo soldiers and sailors, returning Hispanic veterans were appalled at their treatment in Fort Collins. The *Coloradoan* provides this narrative of a wartime homecoming:

It was a week night in July during World War II. Joe Cienfuegos and two of his army buddies were on furlough, happy to be away from war and home in Fort Collins.

Each had been wounded, each had been a prisoner of war.

To celebrate the homecoming, the trio strolled to a tavern on Linden Street and ordered three beers. Only two were brought.

“We won’t serve that Mexican,” the proprietor said.<sup>91</sup>

This experience was shared by many returning Hispanic Veterans. Among them was Angel L. García. “When I came home from the war, ...I just didn’t believe I would find so much discrimination being practiced against GI’s,” García wrote in a letter to the editor of the *Pan American News*.<sup>92</sup> In 1946, he and other Hispanic veterans formed the Joseph Alonzo (sometimes spelled Alonso) Martinez American Legion Post 187. They named the post in memory of Lee Martinez’s son, a casualty of the Battle of the Bulge. “[We] decided to organize the Mexican GI’s into a club for our own protection,” Garcia recalled, “but later we decided to use the best means of not only protecting ourselves, but [of] also getting the Mexican community interested and have them back us up.”<sup>93</sup> As an organization of *American* veterans of war, the Martinez Post pressured merchants to remove their “white trade only” signs, and, by the mid 1950s, they largely succeeded. Garcia said that the post submitted a resolution to the state Legion convention “to fight discrimination and open a way to our civil rights – especially for the GI’s who so democratically and eagerly fought for this country which still has a constitution, which says ‘We, the People.’”<sup>94</sup>

In the years that followed, the fight for Hispanic civil rights spread beyond merely removing “white trade only” signs to creating a new paradigm of racial equality in Fort Collins. With its liberal education and homeownership policies, the G.I. Bill of Rights created unprecedented opportunities for Hispanic veterans. For the first time in American history, large numbers of Spanish-speaking people moved into the skilled, business, and professional classes.<sup>95</sup> Freed from the cycle of poverty inherent in migrant labor, some Hispanics could devote time to organizing and motivating the community. In the mid

1960s, Hispanic residents of Fort Collins formed a chapter of the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC). But LULAC and other organizations like it were typically apolitical. At the dawn of the Chicano Movement, John R. Martinez argues in his article “Leadership and Politics” that LULAC represented a point of transition. Hispanics in the American Southwest were typically outside of the political arena, addressing policy concerns through proxies. But like the African-American civil rights movement, Hispanics would have to organize politically to create a shift in the greater American mindset. “The non- or bipartisan structure of these organizations casts too wide a net,” Martinez argues. “When specific issues arise, they often call for a partisan response; this causes an internal struggle.”<sup>96</sup>

And Fort Collins’s Hispanic community did start to organize politically. Beginning as a precinct committee chairman, Lee Martinez actively campaigned for Democrats, the party with which the majority of Hispanics identified. He voted in every general election from age 21 until his death. He prepared and distributed party literature to his neighbors, calling on them unite and place their power behind the vote. Martinez also served on the city’s Human Relations Committee and was a member of the Larimer County Democrat Executive Committee. “I knew Lee Martinez as a red, white, and blue American, for this is truly what he was,” writes James W. Guyer. “In the committees in which we served together, his advice, ideas, or suggestions were directed to the good of the many. I never saw him push or railroad an idea. He led!”<sup>97</sup> Martinez eventually enlisted the help of John Romero, who also became a leader in the party. Together they conducted voter registration drives. Their leadership in the Hispanic community has not gone unrecognized. A

small park near the Holy Family neighborhood bares Martinez's name and, as mentioned before, John Romero's adobe residence in Andersonville has been preserved as an Hispanic house museum.<sup>98</sup>

Yet younger Hispanics criticized Martinez, Romero, and other men of their generation for being too conservative. The activism of the United Farm Workers and organizations such as LULAC, combined with the fervor of the civil rights movement, Vietnam War protests, and student activism, helped spark the Chicano Movement. In 1968, Hispanic students in cities across the United States held a series of school boycotts to protest poor-quality education. These protests broadened into a radical and boisterous movement seeking increased power and an end to social, economic, and political discrimination.<sup>99</sup> Chicano Movement activism was particularly vigorous at CSU. The school often served as layover for student protesters representing a variety of causes and traveling between eastern universities and Berkley, California. These itinerant student protesters burning CSU's Old Main, resulting in the removal of the president's official residence from campus. These acts also fueled fiery activism among the university's Hispanic student population and Latino residents.

With renewed political empowerment, Fort Collins's Hispanic community began to actively protest injustices. One particularly volatile problem was the perception that police in Fort Collins unnecessarily accosted young Hispanic men. From the late 1970s to the 1990s, Hispanics frequently protested in front of police buildings, bringing about shifts in policy. With this new political affluence, the sugar factory neighborhoods could no longer be ignored. In the early 1980s, the City of Fort Collins proposed to widen Lemay and Ninth Street as a truck bypass.

The project would have divided Alta Vista and Andersonville. But residents protested, and the city developed an alternative plan that spared the neighborhoods.<sup>100</sup>

Despite rampant discrimination, there were times, as early as the 1920s, when Anglos and Hispanics came together – moments when Fort Collins's Hispanic community could shine. Most of these moments occurred on summer Sunday afternoons when townsfolk gathered at City Park to cheer on the local baseball team. In the 1920s, families of Hispanic beet laborers gathered at impromptu baseball diamonds on the edge of fields or in the shadows of the sugar factory. Games occasionally took place at sugar dumps. During the beet campaign, beet dumps were locations where farmers brought wagonloads of beets to be weighed and transferred into railroad hoppers destined for the sugar factory. But during the summer, dumps provided a place for Hispanic and, sometimes, German-Russian families to gather and play ball. Fred Olivas organized the city's first Hispanic baseball team and, by the end of the decade, it was competing against Hispanic teams from beet towns across northern Colorado.

But these beet-field teams soon drew the attention of vast numbers of Hispanics and Anglos. After World War II, a new generation caught baseball fever. Soon predominately (but not exclusively) Hispanic teams like the Rebels, Legionaries, and the Merchants competed at Fort Collins-area baseball diamonds. They even contributed to improving the town's parks. In the late 1940s the Legionnaires worked with H.R. Philips, Director of Parks and Recreation, to improve ball fields. It was Philips who encouraged the Hispanic teams to play on Sundays as the main event at City Park. At the same time, teams organized formally with the National

Baseball Congress, forming the semi-professional Rocky Mountain League.<sup>101</sup>

In the 1970s, Sunday afternoon baseball faded in importance. But its legacy remained. First, it was an inexpensive and exciting diversion for the working classes so closely linked to the grueling cycle of agricultural and quarry labor. “Baseball was one of the most economical things we could get into without getting a lot of money involved,” said former Fort Collins Merchant Richard Baldivia. Second, and most important, it provided an acceptable forum in which Anglos and Hispanics could interact with each other. Indeed, the late 1940s saw the genesis of integrated sports. In 1947, Jackie Robinson became the first African-American to play modern major league baseball. As African Americans and whites learned to play together in the majors, so too did Anglos and Hispanics in the Rocky Mountain League. Bud Anderson longed to play for the Merchants as he watched them through the summers of 1955 and 1956. The following summer he had his own chance to play for the team. “Baseball in those days generated harmony,” Anderson remembered. “Everyone on the team was part of the working class. We never thought about [race]. That was the furthest thing from our mind.”<sup>102</sup>

Other sports also promoted unity within the Hispanic community and between Anglos and Hispanics. In the late 1940s, Charlie and Ray Montoya wanted to start training for the Golden Gloves State Tournament in Denver. Angel García agreed to manage and train the boxers while he and Father Fullana secured a sponsorship from the Elks Club in Fort Collins. The group eventually became the Diamond Boxing Team. Not surprisingly, they trained in the basement of the Holy Family Church hall.<sup>103</sup>

But not all Hispanic-oriented public

events were sports related. Many of the most colorful displays of Hispanic culture coincided were citywide celebrations, or *fiestas*, based on historic Mexican precedents. The two most prominent *fiestas* were *Cinco de Mayo* and Mexican Independence Day. Literally “Fifth of May,” *Cinco de Mayo* celebrates the day in 1862 when the Mexican Army defeated invading French forces under the command of Napoleon III. Originally, this celebration was limited to Hispanic neighborhoods. In time it has grown into the largest Hispanic gathering in Fort Collins, bringing together Hispanics and Anglos alike. Mexican Independence Day, September 16, was formerly the city’s largest Hispanic celebration. This *fiesta* included a parade down College Avenue, speeches, bands, and the crowning of a queen. At one time, Fort Collins’s Mexican Independence Day *fiesta* was one of the largest Hispanic celebrations in Colorado, bringing together people from across the state, including the Mexican Consulate from Denver. Other public events were far more solemn. On *el Día de los Muertos* (the Day of the Dead) and the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the Hispanic community remembered its dead and gave thanks for God’s blessings.<sup>104</sup>

### Education and Acculturation

For the Hispanic community in Fort Collins, quality education was one of the most prominent symbols of success and one of toughest battles in the fight for civil rights. For the migrant worker, education was an escape from the cycle of poverty. But it was education that they could least afford. Like their German-Russian predecessors, Hispanic beet workers realized the economic advantages of removing their children from school during the harvest. A 1923 report from the U.S. Department of Labor, conducted when



both Germans from Russia and Hispanics were in the beet fields, found that truancy and status in Larimer and Weld county schools were directly related. The children of beet farm owners attended 90 percent of school days each year, those who rented sent their children almost 89 percent of the time, but children of contract laborers missed a quarter of the school year. Records from Larimer County school districts reveal that the children of beet workers were absent almost five times as often as children who did not help in beet cultivation. The problem was so severe in Larimer County that many schools offered summer programs for the children of beet workers in addition to beet “vacations” during the regular school year.<sup>105</sup>

Even when they could go to school, many Hispanic children simply had to walk too far to get there. But for a brief time, the sugar factory neighborhoods did have a local school. In 1908, the school district constructed near Andersonville the Rockwood School – a four-classroom building for German-Russian children. Enrollment continued to grow and, by 1921, the school board doubled the size of the building. A contemporary article includes this glowing description of the enlarged building:

The halls are wide and especially well lighted, making it one of the most pleasant grade buildings in Fort Collins. Its east windows look out over a beautiful farming country; while from its western ones a glorious view of the mountains is seen. Long’s Peak is a familiar friend always in sight.”<sup>106</sup>

Throughout the 1920s, the student population of the elementary school shifted from a German-Russian to a Hispanic majority, mirroring a similar change in the Buckingham and Andersonville neighborhoods, not to mention the addition of students from Alta Vista.

For many older residents of the sugar factory neighborhoods, Rockwood was the only school they attended – the only school they *could* attend. Once they reached high school or when the Rockwood school closed, boys and girls in Andersonville, Buckingham, and Alta Vista were expected to attend schools in town – places like Franklin School, located on the southwest corner of Mountain Avenue and Howes Street. The school was two miles from Andersonville. Trips to the Remington and Lincoln schools were no easier. “I used to like to go to school at first,” Inez Romero said in an oral history interview, “but the reason I felt it was hard to go to school after we moved in this area [Andersonville], in those days there were no buses, no taxis. You had to walk, so...my parents didn’t push me into going, because they didn’t like the idea for me to walk.”<sup>107</sup>

An unreasonable distance to school was one of the reasons truant officers cited in a 1951 study on migrant farm labor in Colorado. They also reported that enforcing compulsory education in marginal places like Alta Vista, Andersonville, and Buckingham was a luxury wasted in those areas. But most officers were simply unwilling to enforce the law when it came to Hispanic children. “...Many people in the district would not appreciate our making those kids attend school,” one truant officer reported. “There is some feeling against the migrants. The farmers feel that their own children are corrupted and degraded by contact with the migrant kids. Many of the people direct their resentment against the big companies and farmers who they charge are ‘ruining the community’ by importing migrant workers.”<sup>108</sup>

Hispanic parents echoed similar frustrations. Many told the study’s reporters that they were unwilling to send their children to school when fellow students made fun of

them and teachers neglected them. Given this situation, the children were better off and more productive at home. “Juan is the biggest boy in his class,” one parent told a reporter. “Even the teacher thinks he is dumb. But believe me, he has never had a chance to go to school. So you see, we keep our children at home – not to make them work, but because it is not so bad as seeing them come home crying.”<sup>109</sup>

Not surprisingly, it was Holy Family Church that provided Hispanic families “a chance to go to school” free from discrimination. With Father Trudel’s blessing, Margaret Murray opened in 1928 a parish school in her home. With the completion of the new church building in 1929, classes moved into the small, wood-frame building that formerly housed the parish. Enrollment grew, and soon Margaret Linden and Jovita Vallecillo, the first Hispanic graduate of what is now CSU, assisted Murray. The 1934 academic school year began with 85 students and the church recruited more instructors: four Sisters of St. Joseph from Stevens Point, Wisconsin. Soon the school had over 100 children in eight grades. Boys arrived early to start a fire in the potbelly stove that heated the old structure. Parents seemed far more willing for their children to make the journey from the sugar factory neighborhoods to the school when they were certain that their children received the teacher’s attention while avoiding ridicule and alienation. In 1948, the city condemned the old school building, so classes moved into the new parish hall (fig 14.) adjacent to the rectory. Four medium-sized classrooms on the east end of the building held between 90 and 120 students each year. The school opened a kindergarten, and the parish converted the gym’s balcony into classrooms for the fifth and sixth grades. But the school struggled financially, closing forever at the

conclusion of the 1968-69 school year.<sup>110</sup>

The closing of Holy Family Parish School, combined with the cessation of classes at the Sue Barton (formerly Rockwood) School some years earlier, forced a majority of Hispanic children to attend LaPorte Avenue School, a vastly inadequate and deteriorated structure located on the edge of the Holy Family neighborhood. It was over this school that the Hispanic community in Fort Collins waged and won one of its biggest battles. The Poudre School District realized the closing of Holy Family would create a glut in elementary enrollment in northern Fort Collins. In 1968, a bond issue for a new school failed to pass in a general election. The district tried again the following year; this time Hispanic leaders went door to door to encourage community members to vote for the bond issue. It passed, but when the funds became available, the school district decided to build the new elementary school in one of the quickly growing neighborhoods spreading south along College Avenue. The Hispanic community was enraged. “We had

**Figure 14.** Holy Family Church Hall. (Photo by the author)



quite a battle with the school board and administration,” recalled Ernie Miranda. “They just wanted to build another school away from this area. And that...had been the history.”<sup>111</sup> Members of the Hispanic community contacted the Mexican American Legal Defense Association to come to their aid. Leading the battle was the organization’s attorney, Federico Peña, who went on to become mayor of Denver and Secretary of Transportation in the Clinton Administration. Peña and students from the University of Colorado law school researched the school district’s records, discovering a pattern of discrimination on the north side of Fort Collins. The school board reversed its decision, constructing in 1975 a new elementary school on the site of the old LaPorte School. In a con-

ciliatory gesture, the school board left the name of the new facility up to the Hispanic community who fought so hard for it. They decided to call it Juan Fullana Elementary School.<sup>112</sup>

But despite efforts to make quality education accessible, the Hispanic community has had to contend with a number of high school dropouts significantly higher than the national average. In 1980, one in every four Hispanic students in the Poudre School District dropped out of school. That was double the local average for Anglo students and six percent higher than Hispanics elsewhere in the state.<sup>113</sup> But that average has steadily improved as the Hispanic community and its culture have become more visible and celebrated.

## CONCLUSION

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### Sharing the American Dream

In June 1993, almost 60 years after Jovita Vallecillo Lobato became the first Hispanic to graduate from public schools in Fort Collins, Ana Chavez set another first – the first in her family to earn a high school diploma. Born in Juarez, Mexico, Chavez moved to Fort Collins three years earlier when her father, a migrant laborer, came to the area seeking work. Chavez had been on the move most of her life and never learned English. But in three years she had managed to overcome the language barrier and excelled in her classes. Her father worked extra hours at a meatpacking plant and saved what he could so that his daughter could remain at Poudre High School. The Chavezes characterize much of the legacy of the Hispanic community in Fort

Collins; they struggled and succeeded in the face of adversity, only to give back all they earned to future generations. Chavez wanted to attend college to become a social worker and help other migrant families.<sup>114</sup>

“...Colorado’s Hispanics and Chicanos appreciate the hardships and obstacles overcome by their parents and grandparents so that they could capture a share of the American Dream,” writes José Aguayo in his article on Hispanic workers in Colorado’s beet fields. “And many are thankful for the rich legacy of social and moral values carried down to them by their indigenous and Spanish forebears.”<sup>115</sup>



## SOURCE STUDY

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The Chicano Movement was an academic as well as a political awakening. At the forefront of the movement were scholars such as Julian Samora, who received his master's degree from CSU and went on to teach at Notre Dame University and the University of Michigan. His research into Hispanic culture in the United States led to a plethora of scholarship on the subject, a body of knowledge that continues to grow to this day. With its proximity to CSU, Fort Collins's Hispanic community has been examined through an array of disciplinary lenses. And the scholarship continues to grow, especially as more and more Hispanics enter American academia.

For background information, I relied on the Local History Archive at the Fort Collins Public Library. This collection includes subject files, ephemera, manuscripts, photographs, biographies, and oral histories relating specifically to the Hispanic experience in Larimer County and Fort Collins. Another local source is the Fort Collins Museum, which amassed a collection of Hispanic scholarship in preparation for its exhibit on this ethnic group. As well, I also consulted the Western History Collection at the Denver Public Library.

Another rich resource, acquired through CSU's Morgan Library, has been *Through the Leaves* and the *Mountain States Beet Grower*.

These publications provide a interesting glimpse into the mindset of the people who employed Hispanic migrant laborers. As well, reports from committees investigation labor conditions trace the evolution of Anglo attitudes toward Hispanics.

Because of the vast amount of scholarship, data gaps are few. However, oral histories need to be updated. Many of the existing interviews do not consider the effects of the Chicano Movement and do not provide an assessment of Fort Collins's Hispanic community in the late twentieth century. As well, the language barrier persists. Hispanics have found the Spanish language to be both a blessing and a curse. Attitudes toward the language changed over generations, making almost impossible the communication of culture and history between them.

At first because of discriminatory isolation practices and later because of ethnic pride, the Hispanic community in the city retains much of its identity and material culture. However, because Hispanic laborers in the past were equated with poverty and political impotence, much of that material culture is quickly disappearing. Educational and preservation endeavors, such as tours of traditionally Hispanic neighborhoods with older residents, will help preserve these places and objects for posterity.

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