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# Hispanic Migration to Northeastern Colorado During the Nineteen Twenties: Influences of Sugar Beet Agriculture

## Abstract

Growing beets to process into sugar was a large and important industry in 1920s Northeastern CO. The infrastructure to support the sugar beet industry was built and expanded in the first decades of the 1900s. Beyond infrastructure requirements the sugar beet industry relied on seasonal low skilled field labor. The migration and settlement patterns of sugar beet laborers in the 1920s to Northeastern Colorado were influenced by the actions of the Great Western Sugar Company. In 1909, German-Russian immigrants were the dominant demographic working the beet fields in Northeastern CO but by 1927 that trend shifted overwhelmingly to families of Mexican and Mexican American heritage. These Hispanic families came from the Southwestern US as well as Mexico and primarily spent the summer living at the beet fields. During the winter some laborers returned to the Southwest or Mexico, others lived in poor areas of Denver, and others still lived on the outskirts of Northeastern Colorado towns. In Fort Collins, Greeley and other Northeastern Colorado towns, the Great Western Sugar Company subsidized housing for select Hispanic beet labor families. This thesis advances understanding of Colorado history as it relates to early Hispanic migration and offers a case study in migration forces. While social networks are important to patterns of labor movement, the recruitment efforts and housing initiatives of the Great Western Sugar Company were highly influential.

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HISPANIC MIGRATION TO NORTHEASTERN COLORADO DURING THE  
NINETEEN TWENTIES: INFLUENCES OF SUGAR BEET AGRICULTURE

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A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics

University of Denver

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

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by

Gregory T. Chase

November 2011

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## INTRODUCTION

This is a study of the process of Hispanic migration to Northeastern Colorado, which accelerated during World War I. Castles (2010) argues that migration, while a normal part of social relations is characterized by complexity and diversity. The context of migration, which includes movement and settlement, must be linked to other “economic, social, political, and cultural relationships at work in particular places at a particular historical juncture” Castles 2010, 9) In Northeastern CO, the industry of making sugar from beets experienced sustained progress through the 1920s because of cheap agricultural labor provided by Hispanic migrants. During this time, the Great Western Sugar Company (GWSC) was the most important sugar producer of Northeastern CO. This thesis examines the relationship between migration and industry.

In this thesis, the relationship of Hispanic migration and settlement in Northeastern CO is compared to national themes of minority migration but specifically to the role of industry and company practices of recruitment and housing initiatives for seasonal labor. Who made up the diverse population of Hispanic migrants to Northeastern CO and were there trends in where they settled and for what duration? What role did the Great Western Sugar Company play in Hispanic migration and settlement? While sugar beet agriculture acted as the impetus for the migration process, GWSC actively encouraged migration and permanent residence of Hispanic workers on land that



was both marginalized and at the outskirts of Colorado sugar growing and processing towns.

The migration of Spanish-speaking people to Northeastern CO unveils a narrative of rich family lineage in the northern mountains of New Mexico, the fleeing of Mexican families as refugees of war, and the drive for economic opportunities. Furthermore it attests to the growth of American industrial agriculture and represents a case study in 1920s Colorado migration and labor relations. As part of the broader social context this paper describes the rising industrial agriculture sector of growing sugar beets and its influence over migration.

The industry of interest to this paper is the processing of sugar from beets. The first successful American beet sugar factory was built in 1879 in Alvarado, California. This industry became especially profitable after passage of the 1887 Dingley Act, which increased tariffs to cane sugar, improving the competitiveness of beet sugar. Of the sugar beet growing regions in Colorado, the South Platte River Valley in Northeastern CO was the most productive sugar beet growing area of Colorado and the regional focus of this paper. The sugar beet industry, which started in Colorado in 1899, was the largest employer of Hispanics in Colorado by the late 1920s (Mahony 1930, Roskelley and Clark 1949). Their employment was as agricultural hand laborers, performing low-skilled, tedious work at the irregular demands of seasonal agriculture. Through their sweat and toil, Colorado was the largest sugar producing state in the United States in 1909 (Reich 2008). Exploitation of migratory labor was also a part of the growth and success of the industry. At the same time, substandard housing opportunities and low wages kept many

agricultural laborers in the troughs of poverty despite the success of the 1920s sugar beet industry for GWSC (Kulkosky 1998, Bundy 1936).

The migrant population of interest in this paper is Spanish-speaking people from Mexico and the Southwestern U.S., but issues of nomenclature always become challenging when lumping together diverse groups of people. In the U.S., the terms Hispanic and Latino are both used to characterize just about anyone with a Spanish-language heritage. There are regional differences in the use of these terms and around 2000 there was a growing trend toward the use of Latino in the news and in the vernacular (Arreola 2004). While it is perhaps more accurate to use national origin labels such as Guatemalan, Mexican, Puerto Rican, or Cuban when possible, this becomes less clear when considering Spanish-speaking peoples in the Southwestern United States whose families through generations have made ties with American Indian and Mexican families. Chicano is sometimes used for this group and can be associated with the political movements of the 1970s for civil rights. Deutsch (1987) uses Chicano to refer to both Spanish Americans and more recent Mexican immigrants while acknowledging that this is contested. Hispano is another term, used primarily for Spanish-Indian and Mexican descendents living in the Southwest (Nostrand 1992, 1980). Because identities and categories are contested it is important to highlight that Hispanic/Latino American refers not to one people but to many (Novas 2003, Arreola 2004). In an attempt for fluidity in writing I choose to use the Hispanic label. I use this in part because it is the term that many of the Mexican and Mexican-American residents in Northeastern Colorado used to self identify in the oral histories archived at the Greeley Municipal Museum.

The following literature review discusses geographic themes of migration and settlement patterns and reviews the historical relations between the U.S. and Mexico before presenting my research question. The methods and data section discusses archival research, introduces select archival sources, and describes my experience and process. My findings are presented in four parts: 1) The Sugar Beet Landscape, a description of the process and development of the beet sugar industry across Colorado; 2) Migrant Population, describes who migrated to Northeastern Colorado; 3) Settlement Patterns, describes where Hispanic laborers were settling and presents patterns of seasonal migration in accordance with the beet growing and harvest season; 4) The influence of the Great Western Sugar Company, which argues that the migrant population and the settlement patterns were highly influenced by GWSC, answering why the migrant and settlement patterns developed. The discussion and conclusion section summarizes the findings and describes the implications of those findings.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

In this research I focus on Mexican nationals and Americans of Spanish and Mexican heritage who migrated to Colorado for low skilled agricultural labor positions between 1915 – 1930. Defined in the broadest terms, a migrant is anyone moving housing, regardless of the distance (Lee 1966). Under this definition, someone moving across town, across the country, or across an international border is considered a migrant and includes men and women migrating for high skilled positions as well as low skilled positions. However, the influences and opportunities of migrants are different for low skilled workers with limited resources than for highly skilled workers (Li 2009). The literature presented in this paper focuses more attention on the migration influences and paths of low-skilled workers.

Migration, especially across international boarders, is a major factor in global and demographic change. A full understanding of migration must consider the movement of migrants, the settlement patterns of migrants, and the changes in both the receiving and sending regions of migrants (Castles and Miller 2009). Despite a call for a holistic approach to migration, two general themes of international migration studies can be seen 1) the study of determinants, processes, and patterns of migration and 2) the ways in which migrants become incorporated into receiving societies (Massey et al. 1993). What directly follows is a brief overview of different theories and elements of the process of migration.

## Migration Theory

Migrant labor is a longstanding phenomenon in part because labor demands and opportunities have fluctuated geographically throughout history. Ravenstein is credited as the first person to theorize migration in his 1885 paper “The Laws of Migration” (Gregory et al. 2009). Ravenstein theorizes that: relationships and trends exist between migration and distance; migration occurs in stages; as streams of migration develop, counterstreams of information, goods, money and even people must develop in response, and; economics play a role in the determination of migration. The details of Ravenstein’s theories are loosely defined because of the complexity of migration (Lee 1966).

One long-standing approach to studying the determinants and patterns of migration is with economic theory. Neoclassical economic theory considers migration a reaction to differences in wages. Therefore, economic theory focuses on wage differentials and migration costs, including macro-economics (the economic strength or weakness of a country or region) and micro-economics (individual choice) (Massey et al. 1993). One flaw of economic theories is that it assumes perfect knowledge of wage differences, which is difficult to obtain (Massey et al. 1993, Castles and Miller 2009). Economic theory alone cannot fully explain migration patterns.

Push and pull factors of economic and social indicators are another way of theorizing migration causes and patterns. For example, foreign investment in Northern Mexico in the 1980s and 1990s *pulled* or attracted migrants to the area while declining agricultural prosperity in Southern Mexico *pushed* residents from the area (Jones 1995). The push and pull framework weighs positive and negative perceptions of the sending

and receiving regions against each other to determine or predict migration processes (Lee 1966, Jones 1995).

Migration systems theory, which has its roots in geography, proposes a more interdisciplinary approach to migration studies, arguing that migratory movement is the result of established links between the sending and receiving countries or regions such as colonial history or trade patterns. The theory suggests that migratory movement results from interactions at multiple levels, including nation-states, business and global markets, and at the local scale of relationships between migrants.

Network theory has its roots in sociology and anthropology and identifies the interpersonal ties that form between families and communities of sending and receiving regions (Castles and Miller 2009). The interaction between migrants develops migration networks, which form to ease the difficulties of moving to a new place (Massey et al. 1993, Castles and Miller 2009). Massey et al. (1993), argue that these social networks reduce the costs and risks of migration resulting in an increase in the probability that migration will occur for others, known as cumulative causation. This is especially applicable for migration of low skilled migrant workers with less economic and social opportunities, such as migrant beet field workers.

Recently, it has been argued that studies researching the determinants of migration, have concentrated too heavily on the push factors of sending regions than on the demands that pull labor to the receiving region (Krissman 2005, Castles 2010). Social networks play an important role in migration patterns and trends but the recruitment efforts of the agricultural industry have historically influenced those networks and the

flows and patterns of migration (Krissman 2005). This argument is of special interest to this project because the large sugar company played an active role in encouraging migration and settlement in Northeastern CO.

### **History of Mexican Migration in the US 1880 - 1940**

The relationships between Mexico and the United States are broad and longstanding. The contemporary border landscape, includes the daily international movement of a highly mobile workforce of employees from north of the border commuting south and employees south of the border commuting north between Tijuana and San Diego (Arreola and Curtis 1993). The transnational ties between the southwest and Mexico are older than today's political boundary. Most of the area *was* Mexico before Texas declared independence only to be annexed into the U.S. in 1845, leading to the American-Mexican War. From these events, the many Mexicans living in the area became U.S. citizens through no migration of their own (Dunham 1976). In other words, the border crossed them. After the American-Mexican War, Mexico was forced to secede its Northern border of the Arkansas River, in Southern CO, all the way to the Rio Grande. This was mandated by the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in which Mexico lost California, Arizona, Texas, Southern Colorado, New Mexico (Kulkosky 1998, note 29). The land owned by Mexicans living in the newly annexed United States West was supposed to be honored under the treaty (Dunham 1976).

Four stages of early Mexican migration to and within the United States can be identified and are represented in Figure 1. The first stage began in 1880 and continued until 1910 and represented an increase in northward Mexican migration. This flow was

the product of two important factors. One was the weak Mexican economy resulting from poor governmental policy under President Porfirio Diaz. The other was the rapid industrialization in the American West creating labor demands greater than local labor supplies (Hoffman 1974). Railroads and agriculture were the two original drivers of labor demand at the time (Hoffman 1974, Peck 2000), with agriculture being the primary draw to Colorado (Kulkosky 1998). Early on, those migrating to Colorado were primarily Hispanics from New Mexico and elsewhere in the Southwest.

### Early Mexican Migration To and Within the United States

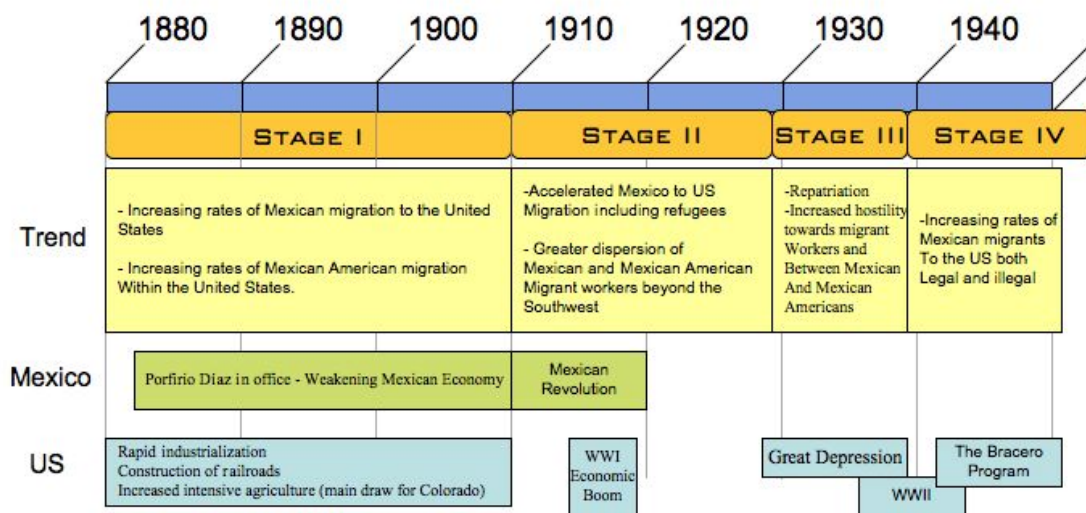


Figure 1. Timeline of early Mexican migration to the United States.

The beginning of the Mexican Revolution in late 1910 indicates the start of the second stage of Mexican migration to the United States. The decade of violence that ensued pushed many people over the border into the United States as refugees (Aguayo 1998). The pool of newly arrived potential laborers was growing, especially along the



border. The beginning of WWI had two important outcomes for Mexican migrant labor. First it cut off the supply of incoming European immigrants and second, it further stimulated industrialization. As a result, greater demands for labor in factories, mining, and the agricultural sector were created. Most were low-skill jobs originally filled by European migrants, but increasingly filled by a mobile Mexican population (Hoffman 1974). This second stage of Mexican migration is characterized by a dramatic increase of immigrants as well as an increase in Mexican Americans joining the mobile migrant labor force. This important change in the migrant labor population was clearly visible in Northeastern Colorado, especially in agriculture. In the major beet growing areas of the U.S. it was WWI that indicates a shift towards primarily Hispanic field laborers (Valdés 1989).

The third stage, characterized by the Great Depression, created massive public pressure for repatriation of Mexicans to Mexico (Hoffman 1974) and increased tension between Mexican and Mexican Americans (Bundy 1936). Many of the Spanish-speaking migrant workers were US citizens, some even born in Colorado (Roskelley and Clark 1949) but public pressure for repatriation mounted nonetheless. A rhetoric of nationalism and racism ensued that claimed the Hispanic workers who had been toiling in the fields for over a decade were no longer welcome (Kulkosky 1998).

The fourth stage of early Mexican migration represented another cycle of increased migration starting with the 1942 inauguration of the Bracero Program, which served as a catalyst for renewed legal and illegal Mexican migration (Mitchell 2010). Though this period comes well after the focus time of this project, the Bracero Program is

best understood within the historical context provided in this paper and is an important era of Mexican labor in US agriculture. Of these four stages, the first two characterize differing rates of increased low skilled migration, the third stage is represented by a decline and even reverse migration, and the fourth stage is characterized again by a renewed increase in migration. The flux of migration rates is the only constant.

This study is most concerned with what I have identified as the second stage of early Mexican migration, focusing on the shifting labor population as influenced by WWI and the changing trends through the 1920s. This time period is important because it captures the first significant wave of Hispanic migration to Northeastern CO. Increasing numbers of people inevitably requires more housing. When looking to cut costs, farmers and processors often looked to labor whose housing was notoriously bad (Kulkosky 1998). Therefore, I study both the trends in movement of migrant labor as well as the housing available for the migrant agricultural laborers.

The use of migrant labor was common throughout the U.S., as much of the agricultural sector needed cheap labor (Valdés 1989). Areas of sugar beet agriculture also employed Hispanic labor. The social and professional networks of labor between these agricultural regions and the Hispanic populations of the American Southwest and those in Mexico were often coaxed or developed by the industries employing the laborers. This trend can be seen in the late 1800s as well as later in the 1900s.

A specific example is found in the 1950s when the American Crystal Sugar Company, of North Dakota maintained a labor agency that employed a team of recruiters throughout Texas with two recruiters in San Antonio. The recruiters, usually Mexican

themselves, had ties to the migrant labor community. This was important for the growth of the North Dakota sugar beet industry as a work force was acquire and maintained who was willing to accept low wages for harsh work. This was the only way to be competitive (Norris 2009). Thus, the longstanding ties between the US and Mexico that were developed by early industry were 1) paramount in developing labor networks for Colorado and elsewhere and 2) fraught with inequality, a condition necessary for the financial success of industrial agriculture (Mitchell 1996).

### **Spatial Settlement Patterns of Migration**

Studies of migrant settlement patterns examine where migrant groups live, the influences that lead to housing patterns, and how the housing location influences their access to amenities and opportunities. Early research of migrant settlement patterns established that new immigrant groups moving to urban areas, with limited economic resources, clustered in ‘less desirable’ regions of the city but were able to improve the social and economic status over time (Harris and Ullman 1945, Fong 1999). This model may have applied to some white European immigrants but overall is an inadequate model. Traditionally researchers studied immigration groups in the US either in regards to acculturation-assimilation, where the incoming groups are assumed to merge into the mainstream Anglo society or as the ethnicity-pluralism school of thought that recognizes differences among ethnic groups and does not assume assimilation to be the desired outcome (Li 2009). Both schools of thought fall short of explaining *causes* of immigration and the injustices incurred on immigrant populations, especially minority immigrant populations. An effort to explain the causes of immigration within a

political/economic context, considering racial/ethnic dimensions, has marked an important change in migration and immigration studies of the past three decades (Li 2009). I have maintained attention to these broad influences and acknowledge that this narrative speaks directly of Hispanic immigrants of multiple backgrounds and migration paths.

Today, there is greater diversity in where immigrants settle in cities. The spatial distribution and settlement patterns of migrants result from many forces including state and city institutions, race ethnic hierarchies, economics, and social networks (Massey and Denton 1985, Skop and Li 2003, Skop 2009, Li 2009, Hall and Lee 2010). This spatial distribution of housing is important because where people live is a large determinant to overall welfare (Skop 2006). It appears that this is also true historically, as demonstrated in this thesis. The spatial distribution of immigrant labor housing in Ft. Collins through the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was segregated along lines of race and class and physically divided in a way that poor, Hispanics had less access to amenities.

Several geographic studies exemplify the concept of how the location of settlements impacts welfare. One describes the Mexican enclaves that developed on marginal land at the fringe of early 1900s Phoenix, Arizona. Other studies details how during the late 1800s and early 1900s the development and growth of the industries of copper mining (Harner 1995) and cotton farming (Lukinbeal, Arreola and Lucio 2010) increased demand for labor, leading to increased Mexican immigration and subsequent changes in the demographic and physical characteristics of Arizona towns. In the Phoenix area, Mexican laborers were at times paid with marginal land along the urban fringe

rather than with money. Meanwhile, others lived in developing barrios and cotton camps also on less desirable land, removed from the developed parts of the city. As they built their lives and a local economy these barrios established the foundation of the decentralized suburban housing patterns outside Phoenix (Lukinbeal et al. 2010). In this way the agricultural industry influenced migration and these Mexican migrant families began to transform the city.

Explicitly researching the role minority populations have played in constructing places is important because it is often overlooked. The common narrative for US history focuses more attention to the role and accomplishments of Anglo immigrants. It is clear that minority populations played important roles in the development of US cities (Arreola 1995, Lukinbeal et al. 2010) but the spatial distribution and settlement patterns of minorities within a city is a complex and changing dynamic that results from many forces including state and city institutions (Skop and Li 2003, Hall and Lee 2010).

The role of industry can create a demand for immigrant labor, as discussed above. However, influences for local patterns of housing often occur at a different scale. For example, local government can play a role in the settlement patterns of minorities once they have arrived in an area. In Austin, Texas, the city's 1928 City Master Plan overtly encouraged segregation by only building schools for black children in one area of the city. The city, which had a large black population, became more divided after this City Master Plan was implemented (Skop 2009). Denver itself was a segregated city in the 1920s as the following passage describes.

In 1920 about 15 percent of Denver's population was Catholic. Its 6,000 African Americans lived in a segregated neighborhood in Northeast Denver; the Jews

were concentrated on West Colfax avenue: Italian Americans lived in North Denver: and Mexicans lived around Larimer Street in the Auraria neighborhood west of downtown Denver, and in the “Bottoms” of North Denver or elsewhere near the Platte River (Vigil 1999, 4).

The passage goes on to explain the strong hold the Ku Klux Klan held over Denver politics throughout that time implying overt segregation efforts. Historically, Hispanic, Denver residents have experienced the poorest living conditions (Dorsett 1977).

The spatial layout of migrant sugar beet laborer settlements and the living conditions within those settlements culminated from the actions of employers, recruitment agencies, state initiatives, government policies, and laborer social networks. The intersection of these factors all embodies the sugar beet landscape. When studying such a landscape it is important to remember that landscape alone does not cause injustices but may reproduce and represent other forces of today and yesterday (Henderson 2003). Furthermore, some actors maintain greater influence over others therefore maintaining greater power over the spatial layout, conditions, and physical representation of a landscape of laborer settlements. Little choice was granted to Hispanic migrants in Northeastern CO as to where they could live, though GWSC was most influential. This complex power dynamic is embedded in the sugar beet landscape and in essence, the goal of this project is to explain how these actors interact and what has resulted.

The history of The Great Western Sugar Company and other beet sugar growers and processors is well documented (May 1982, Hamilton 2009, Reich 2008). Also it is understood that industries have played an important role in bringing Mexican migrant

workers into the United States and establishing the social networks that continue this migration pattern (Peck 2000, Kandel and Parrado 2004, Krissman 2005). The relationship between sugar beet agriculture and Mexican migration along Colorado's Front Range has been acknowledged (Kulkosky 1998, Aguayo 1998, Dorsett 1977, Bundy 1936, Lopez, Lopez, and Ford 2007), however, it has not specifically been examined with regards to how beet agricultural labor became part of a political, economic, and industrial, social system.

### **Research Question**

This research will identify housing settlement patterns of Hispanic sugar beet laborers in Northeastern Colorado relative to sugar beet farmers, processing plants, towns, and each other by answering the overarching question:

What were the Hispanic migrant settlement patterns within the landscape of the Northeastern Colorado sugar beet farming and processing, 1920 – 1930, and what role did the Great Western Sugar Company play?

I answer this question in four sections; a) *the sugar beet landscape* addresses what the sugar beet industry of Northeastern CO entailed and what it required of agriculture and labor, b) the *migrant population* speaks to the demographics of sugar beet laborers, placing a face and history to the migrant field laborers, c) the section on *migrant settlement patterns* is largely about the seasonal mobility of labor and discusses quality of housing and where several of the permanent housing communities were built, and d) the fourth section discusses *the role of The Great Western Sugar Company* in the migration paths and experiences of Hispanic sugar beet agricultural laborers.

My goal is to describe the physical settlement patterns and the migrant journeys of Hispanic sugar beet labor as they resulted from the political/economic context of 1920s Colorado, and furthermore, describe how they resulted from the actions and decisions of the Great Western Sugar Company and the farmers that held beet contracts and hired Hispanic labor.

In Northeastern Colorado, the spatial layout of migrant sugar beet labor settlements and the poor living conditions within those settlements, culminated from the actions of employers, recruitment agencies, state initiatives, government policies, and laborer social networks. These factors together embody the sugar beet landscape.

Sugar beet companies recruited many Hispanic families for field labor creating “Mexican” communities in Northeastern Colorado. In these rural areas of Colorado, where sugar beet farming occurred, inequality and racial housing segregation was present. As previously discussed, sugar beet agriculture enticed many migratory workers to Colorado’s Front Range, many of whom were Mexican and Mexican American. Due to the seasonality of sugar beet growing and processing they either continued on as part of the mobile labor force (Peck 2000), lived in sedentary poverty through the winter in beet labor camps, (Bundy 1936) or lived in the developing Hispanic slums of Denver and Pueblo (Kulkosky 1998).

It is important to answer the questions of how sugar beet farmers and companies influenced living conditions and settlement patterns of Mexican and Mexican American workers and what company and farmer recruitment practices were because it will clarify the chronological trends in Mexican and Mexican American migration to Colorado. This



broadly contributes to studies of the Colorado history by providing a case study of agricultural migration. Furthermore, in answering questions on the forces of labor and living conditions as they relate to Mexican and Mexican American poverty this research will uncover the degree of personal autonomy Mexican and Mexican American labors had in creating and improving their own living and working conditions. As a case study, this thesis also contributes to the discussion of migration forces, supporting the importance of labor recruitment and retention efforts of companies.

Lastly, this thesis considers settlement patterns in two ways; first the relative spatial distribution of housing for Hispanic labors to others in the area and second the pattern of seasonal residence compared to year round residence. Additionally the housing opportunities, conditions, and relative location of these seasonal and permanent workers are considered. The details of spatial and seasonal settlement patterns of the sugar beet landscape will be uncovered primarily through archival research.

## **METHODS AND DATA**

### **Archival Research**

Historical landscapes are often covered or obscured by the contemporary landscape making it difficult to uncover the details of former industries and social relationships through field research. Through scrutiny and the integration of wider theoretical frameworks, archival researchers strive to make sense of fragmented and incomplete records of history, which include diaries, reports, logbooks, plans, maps, and photographs (Roche 2005). Archival research can re-evaluate material with the use of contemporary concepts and can develop comparative perspectives between history and today (Roche 2005, Thomas R. M. 2003).

Physically, the archive is made up of systematically organized collections, which can be requested through a controlled environment. One role of the archive is to keep information from being amassed beyond unusable scale where records would be lost. The archive is the means of differentiating discourses (Foucault 1972) and represents both a system of organization and the location of documents. Archival research can re-evaluate material with the use of contemporary concepts and can develop comparative perspectives between history and today (Roche 2005).

As an example, Lukinbeal et al. (2010, 14) “stitch disparate theories and information from urban history, the history of the Salt River Valley, and ethnic geography to expand [their] knowledge of the process of Mexican urban colonia

formation in the region.” They combined immigration policy, economics, and agricultural trends to describe the growth and creation of a decentralized, residential landscape by Mexican migrant workers. Their sources were collections at the Arizona State University Libraries, the University of Akron, and the Litchfield Park Historical Society. They also interviewed “key informants” about the Mexican history of Litchfield Park (one of the largest colonias) and used historic maps, aerial photographs, and reconnaissance to confirm claims from the interviews and corroborate map data. From these sources they describe the development of Mexican colonias and map the colonia boundaries and argue the importance of the early suburban settlements.

Though my topic does not deal with suburbanization, it similarly deals with the settlement patterns of Mexican migrant agricultural workers, as influenced by their relationships with farmers and industrial agriculture institutes. Following the example of Lukinbeal et al. (2010) my investigation of the archives will be hermeneutical: interpreting documents and questioning existing assumptions. A challenge of hermeneutical archival research, is understanding the biases of manuscripts and other documents from 80 years ago (Roche 2005). *The Dictionary of Human Geography* advises that researchers conducting hermeneutical studies maintain an open mind and use judicious reflective sensibility (Gregory et al. 2009). Interpretation, despite its challenges in remaining objective, allows for greater depth in description (Bohman 1991). Also, notation of what is and is not recorded in the archive can inform researchers of priorities and interests of record keepers.

The process of reviewing the archives is time consuming and requires planning and flexibility. Harris (2001, 332) proposes the following counsel for graduate students as they prepare for archival research:

“For many graduate students the first serious encounter with archives is preceded by a thesis proposal. They are asked to spell out as precisely as possible what they want to learn and how they propose to learn it...They are asked, in short, to provide a sketch map of where they intended to go. I have two strong and somewhat contradictory responses to this process. One is that a crucial component of successful research is prior mapping of just this sort. The other is that no one should be held to his or her initial mappings. They are necessary preliminary efforts, but immersion in the archives will almost certainly change them. Ideally, research and writing are a constant process of remapping that continues to the final draft.”

Two important changes have been made from the initial proposal stage. Foremost is the narrowing of geographic scope from Eastern Colorado to Northeastern Colorado, the impetus for which was the availability of information on Northeastern CO alone. Also the narrowing of the temporal extent by removing the 1930s for similar reasons of availability of resources. These changes allowed the thesis to take on greater specificity. Some changes to the archival sources have been made from the proposal as several of the initially identified collections proved useless while others were so large that a sampling would have been more time efficient. Furthermore, several previously identified sources have gone un-scrutinized, most notably the Western Historical Collection at the University of Colorado at Boulder, while other sources, unidentified within the proposal, surfaced through discussions with archivists, such as a collection of oral histories that contained rich descriptions of family histories and first hand descriptions of the communities of Hispanic agriculturists settled on the outskirts of towns.

The landscape, and what it represents, is not unchanging but dynamic, which is why the sum total of history must be taken into account (Schein 1997). Archived material allowed me to view the construction and changes of the historical sugar beet landscape, and develop a narrative of Hispanic migration to Northeastern CO as influenced by political, economic, industrial, and social dimensions.

### **Archived Sources**

Geographers and historians use archival research as either their primary method (Mitchell 1996, 2002, 2010, Norris 2002, 2009, Ogborn 2003, Peck 1996, Peck 2000) or to build greater understanding of field observations (Harner 2001, Lewis 1979, Lewis 1998, Oberle 2004, Raitz 2001, Mitchell 2007). Using archival research and sources as the primary method is appropriate for this project.

The types of archival materials used by researchers vary depending on the task. The task here is to identify and describe Hispanic settlement patterns within the sugar beet landscape of Northeastern Colorado. To do this, I must discuss who migrated and why, the housing settlement-patterns and conditions of those who migrated, and the location and patterns of sugar beets farming and processing. The following groups of sources were especially useful.

#### **Oral Histories Archived at the Greeley Municipal Museum**

A series of interviews were recorded near and in Greeley, around the year 2000, in an effort to document the area's Hispanic heritage. Copies of the interviews are available at the Greeley Municipal Museum in the Hazel E. Johnson Research Center, where they can be listened to as tapes. Many of the participants interviewed were born in

the area to families who came up through Mexico and into the United States. The timeline at which this migration occurred spans a range of over 200 years, demonstrating variation among the many migrants lumped together as “Mexican” under any early study of demographic change in the area. One of the families trace their heritage to early Spanish settlers and explorers landing in Veracruz, Mexico before 1600. Eventually they migrated into New Mexico and became part of Spanish/Mexican/Indigenous heritage that characterizes much of rural New Mexico. Others interviewed talk of their parents migration from Northern Mexico, escaping the violence of the Mexican Revolution and the economic hard times.

One limitation of this source is that it mostly involves families who ultimately settled in the area permanently. In this way it can only capture the story of those families while excluding the experience of the migrants who worked seasonally in Northeastern CO but never established permanent residence in the area. Nonetheless, these interviews provide descriptions of a variety of migration paths taken to Northeastern CO and the agricultural and industry jobs that employed migrant workers. Furthermore there are descriptions of growing up in migrant settlements on the outskirts of town. All of those interviewed lived in Northeastern CO during the 1970s and witnessed or took part in the active civil rights movement. The Latino agricultural communities of Northern CO were especially outspoken and involved. In this way, the interviewed residents have a keen awareness for the historical disparities they witnessed and experienced growing up.

## The academic work of Paul Taylor

The published work of Paul Taylor is not a strictly archival source, though it is not easily accessible. Fortunately the library at the University of Denver has a copy in circulation of *Mexican Labor in the United States Valley of the South Platte Colorado*, the only copy I have seen available. The copy, accessed at the University of Denver, of the 1929 monograph has a cardboard cover and the pages are browned and cracking at their edges. The string and staples that bind the volume appear to be giving up and many pages float free. This work is one part of a larger series of University of California Publications in Economics by Taylor after several years of intensive fieldwork.

In 1927, Taylor, an assistant professor of Economics at Berkeley entered the field, interviewing Mexican laborers in California, Texas, Colorado, Pennsylvania, Indiana, and Illinois. He studied housing and working conditions, mobility and job opportunity for Mexican farm laborers. One of Taylor's goals was to establish an estimate of the amount of labor needed in U.S. industrial agricultural. The rhetoric of the time, as expressed by the growers hiring Mexicans, was that without a continuous supply of Mexican labor coming over the border, farmers would not survive or be able to compete. Taylor eventually challenged this assertion, much to the dismay of many powerful and successful farmers. Taylor relied heavily on informal interviews, walking up to laborers, asking first about the weather or for directions. If the laborer seemed receptive, Taylor would dive into more pointed questions asking, where are you from? How long have you been here? What are the wages in this part of the country? Taylor also spent a significant proportion of his time talking with company people of industrial agriculture operations,

labor agency contractors, American and Mexican consular offices, and others. Taylor was often granted access to labor records and candid answers from many of those benefiting from Mexican labor. These candid responses were especially true before Taylor published his first volume of work (Hoffman 1976).

Taylor's first volume published on the Imperial Valley of California caused a stir from farmers and industry peoples who felt they were being attacked for their business practices and labor relations by Taylor's depiction of Mexican labor conditions. Resulting from this, the president of the University of California, Berkeley appointed a committee to review the integrity of the South Platte study. The committee supported the research (Hoffman 1976).

The results and calculations of Taylor's research on Hispanic labor in the South Platte River Valley were instrumental in the development of this thesis. Also, the population estimates computed by Taylor have been most informative. In my own investigation, of 1920s county-level census data for demographic information proved nearly useless. Individuals were labeled within a narrow view of color: white, white foreign born, and colored. This was far less useful than Taylor's calculations of Mexican field laborers. There is a collection of Taylor's papers archived at the Bancroft Library at the University of California at Berkeley. Some of the original interviews are available there and are one avenue for further research.

#### Through The Leaves

*Through The Leaves* (TTL) was printed and distributed by the Great Western Sugar Company to its farmers using Longmont Call Press. During the 1920s, the



magazine was distributed monthly and in the 1930s it was distributed every other month. The aim of the magazine was to provide information to the farmers it contracted by acting as a conduit between company and farmer. It was used to convey weather trends, success and failures of regional beet farmers, and company news. There were frequent articles about related tariffs and trends in beet prices, nematodes that threatened crops, new and evolving planting, thinning, and blocking techniques to insure the biggest beets with the largest sugar content. However, most important to this research is the dialog presented in TTL about labor contracts. Over and over, there are calls to farmers to contact and use GWSC as a liaison for migrant labor.

As a source, TTL is an excellent representation of the image that The Great Western Sugar Company wanted to represent to its farmers. It is possible to see changes in attitudes towards laborers through the topics covered. Also there is a persistent paternalistic tone in the magazine from GWSC towards its farmers, and as shown below, the encouragement of its farmers to act paternalistic to their Hispanic migrant laborers. In evaluating the magazine I have remained aware that GWSC would have been conscious that TTL represented them and therefore it is likely that they portrayed themselves in the best light possible. There is very little mention of labor troubles outside of the need for improved housing and migrant labor laws. As covered by TTL, both labor and housing troubles are blamed on the farmers and on policy.

The collection, located in the Western History and Genealogy Department at the Denver Public Library, consists of over 20 bound volumes, and includes issues from

1918 to 1971. I looked at the issues from 1918 through the late 1930s, paying special attention to any references to labor and Mexican migration.

The writing in TTL is directed at a specific community: beet farmers. Trade journals are used in academic research elsewhere. Roseberry (1996) writes about his use of coffee trade journals to study coffee trends. He writes that reading the journals is as if to be peering over the shoulder of the intended reader. It is not possible to say what the article's authors would think of a graduate student in 2011 scrutinizing their portrayal of Hispanic field labor. What can be said is that while I was not the intended audience, the use of *Through The Leaves* by researchers must have been known as Paul Taylor cites the magazine in 1929.

#### Reports and archived papers

Throughout the early 1920s and 1930s, many reports were filed on the labor conditions in Colorado and generally for agriculture workers. Many of these reports are archived in the Western History and Genealogy Department at the Denver Public Library. In the first decades of the 1900s child field labor was still acceptable, continuing into the 1930s, especially among immigrant families. The presence and use of child labor spawned some of the investigations into labor conditions, leading to more holistic observations (Johnson 1939). In Northeastern CO, the conditions of agricultural labor were studied by sociologists (Roskelley 1940, Roskelley and Clark 1949), economists (Taylor 1929), social welfare groups (Mahoney, Donald, and Fitzgerald 1927, Mahony 1928, 1930, 1931) and the government (Johnson 1939). These sources together make it possible to compare and contrast the results generated from researchers empirical surveys

and interviews. A challenge of these reports is that their research questions do not directly address my own. No researcher during that period was specifically interested in studying the Great Western Sugar Company as an influence to Hispanic migration and settlement. However the study of sugar beet agricultural working conditions is inherently geographic and covers topics of migration.

### Newspapers

Few prudent people take newspapers today as a bastion of truth or an all-encompassing picture of a time and place. It is arguable whether contemporary newspapers are legitimate academic sources. However, historical newspaper reports, supply an account of local happenings that may have failed to be recorded elsewhere. Furthermore, they also represent what was seen as important in the community at the time, presenting or belying trends and general opinions of the time. As with all archival materials, what is not in the archives may be as telling as what is included in the archive. What is *not* covered in the newspapers is also telling of the labor story. Mitchell (2002) found that the mainstream Denver newspapers paid little attention to the growing free speech struggle in 1913 that occurred between the Industrial Workers of the World and the Denver police. It is possible that the Denver newspapers had little interest in labor disputes of the early 1900s despite their occurrence. This gap in topical coverage is one element to be wary of for historic newspapers.

Nonetheless, geographers often use newspapers as one historical account among many (Harner 2001, Mitchell 2002). In this research, newspapers serve to add substance to the greater narrative and were helpful in initiating some early ideas. The Western

History and Genealogy Department of the Denver Public Library had numerous local newspapers archived and available on microfilm.

### **Notes from the archive**

Searching for and identifying pertinent resources was one of the great challenges of this project. My own experience in the archives began at the Denver Public Library's Western History and Genealogy department (WHG). Located on the 5<sup>th</sup> level of the Central Library in downtown Denver. WHG houses a large collection of historical resources on the West and more importantly employs a number of archivists who were invaluable in my initial trips to the library in July 2010. I was introduced to several mediums for searching their collection beyond the basic online search tool. For example there is a massive index to their collection of newspapers that exceeds those entered into their online search engine. Also, the online finding aids for their collections, located at <http://history.denverlibrary.org/>, reveals many collections but is incomplete to that available by asking the archivists and volunteers at the helpdesk. The majority of my time spent in the WHG department was accrued July through December 2010.

The other locations housing important resources and employing helpful archivists were the Fort Collins Museum and Discovery Science Center, the location of a local history archive and also the Greeley Municipal Museum, in which the Hazel E. Johnson Research Center is located. While these archives presented different maps, reports, and local newspapers, they also provided an opportunity to informally observe the High Plains landscape of Northeastern CO while driving to and from Denver. The old agricultural roots are still present as is the Hispanic heritage.

One challenge I experienced in identifying archival resources during this project was with what I feel is a disconnection between archives. While archivists maintained a deep knowledge of their own archive, I was never once guided to resources outside their own institution or encouraged to contact their counterparts at other museums. It is possible I was not asking the right questions but it is also likely that the sheer volume of museums and other institutions makes it difficult to keep track of everything. The Colorado and Wyoming Association of Museums (CWAM) identifies hundreds of museums within the two states and over forty in the Northern Front Range alone. Not all of these museums are geared towards history and fewer yet maintain archives. Trained in an era of easily accessed information, especially of academic articles, an adjustment was required to navigate the compiled information of multiple archives. Currently the archives of History Colorado (formally the Colorado Historic Society) are closed to the public as a new building is constructed. Numerous documents, pertinent to this project will again be available for review in the near future but have been left out because of inaccessibility.

### **Summary of Methods and Data**

Reviewing this variety of archived materials has allowed me to develop the narrative of Hispanic migration to Northeastern CO and situate that narrative in the context of the expanding sugar beet industry. The sources represent both academic and personal accounts of agricultural workers experience and trends in migration and settlement. The findings presented below synthesize the information available in the archives, directed by contemporary geographic literature.

## FINDINGS

To describe the settlement patterns of 1920s Hispanic migrant agricultural laborers to Northeastern CO the findings from a review of the archives are organized into four sections. First, *the sugar beet landscape* describes the components and layout of a sugar beet industry, including the historical context of beet sugar and the reliance of the industry on low skilled, seasonal labor. Second, the *migrant population* explains the changing demographics of the hand laborers, showing the use of specific populations. However, there was diversity within the 1920s majority beet labor population who were commonly lumped together as “Mexican.” Third, the section *migrant settlement patterns*, explains the housing locations and includes the conditions and seasonality of the housing. Fourth and finally, *the role of The Great Western Sugar Company*, describes just that. The GWSC was involved in recruiting and housing many of the Hispanic agricultural sugar beet laborers and therefore is accountable for some of the housing conditions and patterns of migration and settlement.

### **The Sugar Beet Landscape**

The pattern of early 20<sup>th</sup> century migration to Northeastern CO is inextricably linked to the practice and seasonality of sugar beet farming. This section describes where sugar beets were grown and includes a discussion of the components and construction of the sugar beet landscape: both agricultural and industrial. Also, a history of the beginnings of sugar beet processing in Europe gives context to the growth of making

sugar from beets as an industry and highlights the necessary elements for success.

Therefore, I explain in detail, the processes of sugar beet agriculture to better understand the labor demands and needs.

### The History of Beet Sugar

The industry of producing sugar from beets in Colorado is a twentieth century story but the emergence of beet sugar begins almost two centuries earlier in Europe.

While there is reference of cane sugar being shipped to Europe as early as 1319, it was not until the 1700s when a Prussian chemist, Marggraf, at the Academy of Science at

Berlin, experimented with extracting sugar from beets. In the early 1700s others had discovered that alcohol could be acquired through the fermentation of the root, leading to

the hypothesis that there was sugar in beets. In 1801, a student of Marggraf, Franz Carl Achard, constructed and put into production the world's first sugar beet factory, located

outside of Berlin. At this point in history, sugar was an expensive luxury, enjoyed only by the rich and produced almost exclusively from cane grown in the tropics. During the

Napoleonic wars in the early 1800s, a navel blockade by Britain drove the price of cane sugar in France beyond even what the affluent could afford. To access more affordable

sugar, Napoleon issued a grant to experiment with beets leading to the construction of a French factory in Lille. From this success, over 100 factories were constructed across

Europe between 1822 and 1825. Beet sugar was now a viable industry. With beets, the

French were able to produce sugar for thirty cents per pound despite the beets containing just six percent sugar. Under the navel blockade, cane sugar had risen to over one dollar a

pound. In 1840, just 4.35 percent of the worlds sugar production was from beets with the

remainder produced from cane. In 1900 beet sugar comprised 66.17 percent of the worlds total sugar production (Palmer 1908).

Two other factors contribute to the success of beet sugar globally: 1) the abolition of slavery in the tropics changed labor costs, and 2) new beet varieties were cultivated that yielded a higher percentage of sugar, increasing efficiency. Traditionally, the landscape of sugar production was solely tropical but with the arrival of beet sugar the established spatial boundaries were redefined to include the temperate zone.

In the United States, the sugar beet industry was behind that of Europe. The first sugar beet factory was built in Philadelphia in 1830 but failed. Over the following five decades attempts to produce beet sugar were made on the east coast, the Midwest, and California, but without success. It was not until 1879 that the first successful American sugar beet factory was constructed in Alvarado, California. After an increase in tariffs under the Dingley Act in 1887, sugar beet production in the United States rapidly increased. In 1888, with just two factories, 1,000 tons of beet sugar was produced in the U.S. in a single year for the first time. In 1900, 76,659 tons of sugar were produced and in 1901, 185,000 tons of beet sugar were produced (Palmer 1908). In 1901, The Rocky Mountain News ran the headline “Louisiana Outstripped by Colorado Grown Sugar,” and continues enthusiastically to describe the early success of the budding sugar industry.

#### Colorado’s Beet Growing Regions

In the U.S., the production of beet sugar flourished in spatial relation to where beets could be grown. Primarily this was California, the Rocky Mountain-Great Plains region and the Midwest (Valdés 1989). Colorado was the dominant growing and



processing center for the Rocky Mountain-Great Plains region and within Colorado three distinct sugar beet growing and processing areas emerged. In Western CO, sugar beets were grown in and near Grand Junction and Delta. This area was Colorado's smallest beet sugar producing region, but also its first. Today, Western CO continues as an agriculturally productive area. In Southeastern CO, sugar beets were grown in the Arkansas River Valley east of Pueblo, an area better known for dry-land farming. In Northeastern CO, sugar beets were grown near the South Platte River and its tributaries. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s Northeastern CO produced the greatest tonnage of sugar from beets with two to five times more acreage than the other regions; it was the most important area within the state for sugar beet production (Taylor 1929).

#### Northeastern Colorado Sugar Beet Growing and Processing

An important element to all agriculture in Northeastern CO was access to irrigation, mainly supplied by the South Platte River and its tributaries. The headwaters of the South Platte River are along the Continental Divide at over 14,000 feet above sea level. Upon exiting the Rocky Mountains, the South Platte flows north and east through Denver and across the High Plains to its eventual confluence with the North Platte River at North Platte, Nebraska. In total, it runs about 450 miles and picks up water from tributaries such as Clear Creek, the Big Thompson River, and the Cache La Poudre River to name just a few (USGS 2008). Irrigation from the South Platte and its tributaries were, and continue to be, a crucial component to viable agriculture in Northeastern CO. All of the towns processing sugar beets were along these waterways.



Figure 2. The Northeastern Colorado Landscape. Looking west and north across the plains from Interstate 85. The foothills of the Rocky Mountains are far in the distance.

The regional economy of Northeastern CO was dominated by agriculture and industry throughout the first half of the twentieth century and this heritage continues. Elements of production and extraction persist across the contemporary landscape between Denver and Greeley; gravel pits, feed retailers, and tractor suppliers are located along State Highway 85. Many agricultural fields seen from the highway are also spotted with oilrigs slowly turning over and the air, at times, heavy with the smell of manure. Set back from the interstate, old farmhouses sit in groves of massive cottonwood trees. To the west, the Front Range of the Rocky Mountains is faded behind the haze of today's urbanized I-25 corridor (Figure 2). Looking east, south, and north, the rolling High Plains are uninterrupted. In 1900, Northeastern CO, including the Denver area, was home

to 226,376 people (US Census). All of Colorado had less than 550,000 people (Austin 1921) and the residents of Northeastern CO were largely agrarian.

In March of 1871, The Rocky Mountain News ran the headline “Plans to establish beet sugar industry.” These plans were based on the discovery that the soil and climate of Northeastern CO are ideal for growing sugar beets. The regions dominant ecology is short grass prairie as part of the High Plains and the loam soil is a mixture of clay, silt, sand, and some organic material. While the soils also tended to be high in alkaline, sugar beets are tolerant to such conditions (Twitty 2003). However, it was not until the turn of the century that a Colorado beet industry became a reality.

One reason three decades passed between the declaratory Rocky Mountain News headline and the actual manifestation of the beet industry in CO, relates to factors beyond the physical geography of soil type and climate. Mitchell (2010, 147) argues that a built landscape must be created in order to foster nascent economies: “In order for capital to circulate a landscape must be produced (a landscape of farms, factories, means of transport and communication, marketplaces, homes, schools, etc).” This is directly relevant to beginning a beet sugar economy. While crops such as peaches or tomatoes are ready for market after being harvested, sugar beets are more of a raw material and must be processed in factories. The most obvious addition to the landscape for the creation of a sugar beet industry is the construction of factories to process beets into table sugar. The distribution of sugar beet factories is seen in Figure 3 and shows a coarse distribution of factories with many small towns each the home of a sugar beet processing factory.

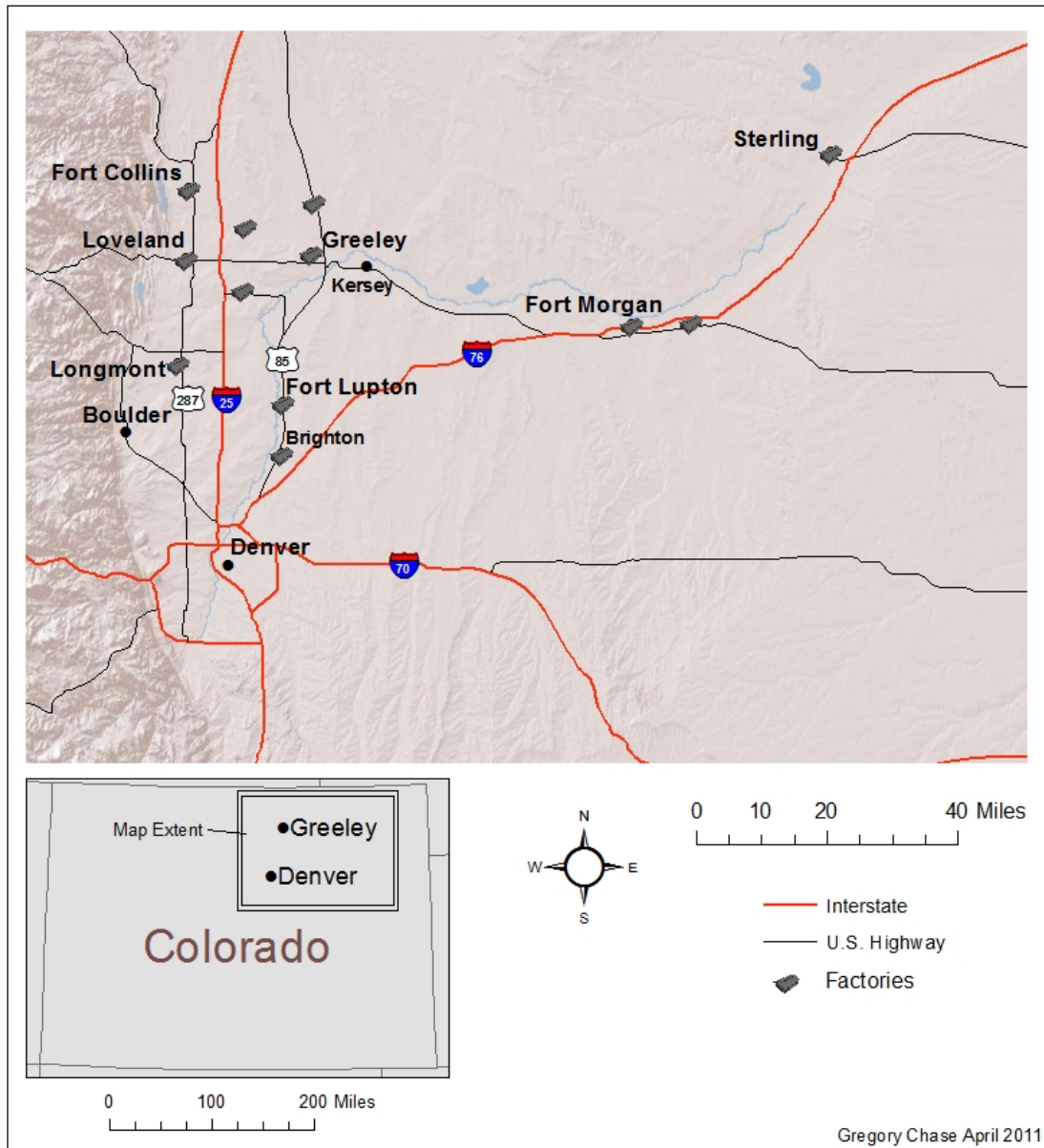


Figure 3. The distribution of historical sugar beet factories across Northeastern Colorado. Note, the factory in Ovid, CO does not appear on the map as it is far north and east of Sterling along Interstate 76. Twelve of the 13 factories, listed in Table 1 appear on this map.

The first Colorado sugar beet processing factory was built in Grand Junction in 1899 (Reich 2008) and the first Northeastern CO sugar beet factory was built in Loveland

in 1900. Though sugar beets were grown in the area at least as far back as the late 1860s it was the building of this first factory that indicates the beginning of sugar beet farming as part of an industry in the area (Taylor 1929). These factories were large and took substantial funding. Their construction was not without planning, debate, and local champions. The Rocky Mountain News reported on February 13, 1901 that B. H. Eaton, the former Colorado governor, was heavily involved in securing 8,000 acres to be dedicated to growing beets near Eaton, Colorado. Eight thousand acres produced the volume of beets necessary to convince a sugar company to build a factory in Eaton. Not only were these factories large and expensive, they lay idle for much of the year. The sugar companies would not invest in building a factory without insurance of a viable and plentiful annual beet In Eaton, local farmers had been growing beets and feeding them to their cows for three years previous to Eaton's pitch in order to prove the productive capability of their land and climate.

Beet cultivation was a capital-intensive venture (Twitty 2003). The location of factories and agricultural land had to exist in proximity to one another. Sugar beets are heavy and perishable, deteriorating in quality if stored in their raw form; therefore the manufacturing of sugar from beets must be near the fields and timely (Thomas 2003a). As the acreage of sugar beets increased across Northeastern CO so too did the construction of factories. As seen in Figure 3 above, many small towns had their own factory to ensure that the heavy goods would be processed before its sugar content began to reduce.

Including the factory in Loveland, nine sugar factories were built in Northeastern CO between 1900 and 1906. The other towns were Eaton, Greeley, Windsor, Fort Collins, Longmont, Sterling, Brush and Fort Morgan (Table 1). Brighton, Fort Lupton, Ovid, and Johnstown, CO had sugar processing factories by 1927. In Northeastern CO, there were several smaller sugar companies, Greeley Sugar Co., Eaton Sugar Co, Fort Collins Sugar Manufacturing Co., but these were acquired by the Great Western Sugar Company (Twitty 2003). The Great Western Sugar Company, owned factories elsewhere in CO but was most dominant in Northeastern, CO and Nebraska.

Beyond the beet industry requirement for numerous beet factories, the “produced” landscape necessary for a successful sugar beet economy included transportation infrastructure for beets and beet labor (roads and rail). Also, all agricultural production faced challenges of year-to-year weather variability, ie., drought. For this, irrigation was improved in Northeastern CO, stemming from the South Platte River. Amongst other infrastructure, over 40,000 miles of highways were built by 1916 to support the growth of

Table 1. Location and year of sugar beet processing factory construction  
(Taylor 1929)

Location	Year	Location	Year
Loveland	1900	Brush	1906
Eaton	1902	Fort Morgan	1906
Greeley	1902	Brighton	1917
Windsor	1903	Fort Lupton	1920
Fort Collins	1903	Ovid	1926
Longmont	1903	Johnstown	1927
Sterling	1905		

sugar beet and other agricultural economies in Colorado. This stimulated agriculture by increasing the farm to market road system or in the case of beets, farm-to-factory infrastructure. The Denver Chamber of Commerce was a major champion of Colorado agriculture, soliciting government funding and supporting increased agricultural production striving to become a center of agriculture for the West (Dorsett 1977). With the building of this new landscape, the seasonal cycle of beet growing became ingrained in Northeastern CO. Each spring, the fields were prepared and planted and each fall, beets were harvested and shipped to the factories. In contrast to the scientific and highly mechanized method of processing beets into sugar, the growing of beets was largely done by hand.

#### Growing and Harvesting Beets

Sugar beets, like most crops, are seasonal. Beets are planted in the spring and harvested in the fall. On the Front Range, farmers usually planted between the first and the tenth of April. Seeds were first planted densely in rows and once they began to sprout the process of thinning began. Workers removed the weakest plants, by hand, to ensure the greatest rate of success for the strongest plants. This began when the plants were about an inch to an inch and a half tall. Eventually only the healthiest plants were left and were “blocked” to be six to twelve inches apart from one another. The job of thinning and blocking could not be done with a machine, making hand labor vital to the operation. The hired labor typically crawled on their hands and knees through the fields or bent over, using a short hoe to perform the job (child labor was common). The goal was to grow a

high tonnage of beets with a high percent of sugar per beet. Proper distance between healthy plants achieved this.

The beet-harvesting season, October and early November, started by loosening the soil with a machine. Beets were then pulled from the ground by hand and the leafy growth was chopped off, known as topping. This was done with a beet knife, which has a long blade with a hook at its end. The beet was pulled from the ground with the hook and the blade was used to chop off the leafy top of the beet. The top needed to be removed or it would taint the sugar. The topped beets were piled in the fields where horse drawn carts, and later trucks, came through for pick up and delivery to what was known as a beet dump. From the beet dump, beets were transported by rail to a factory to be processed into sugar. The left over beet tops were fed to cattle (Contreras and Contreras 1999).

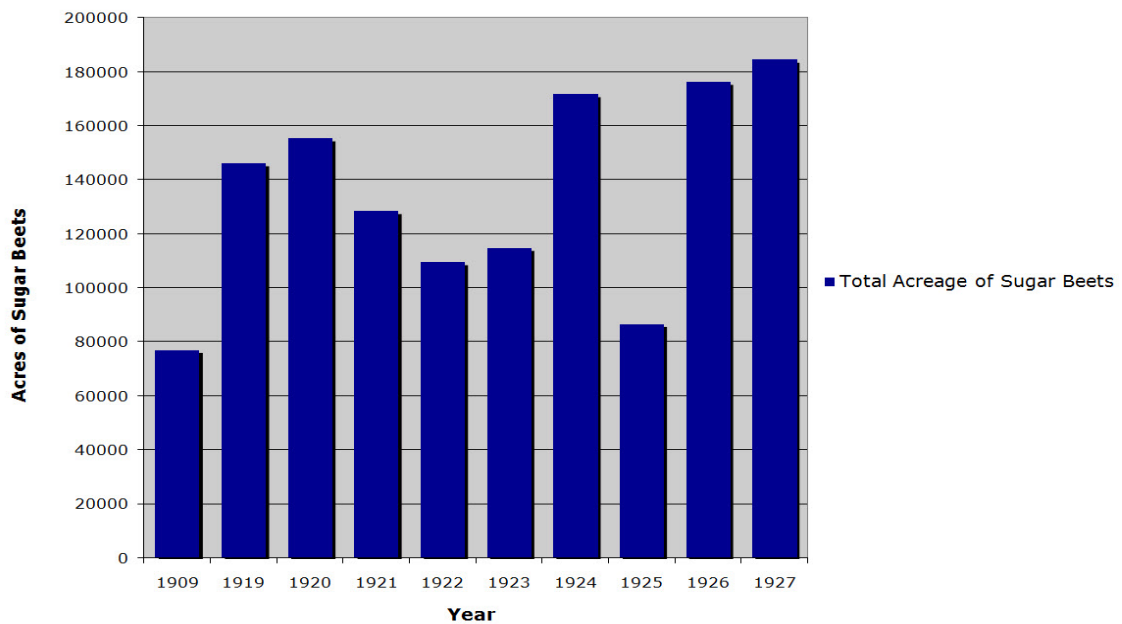


Figure 4. Total Acreage of Sugar Beets Grown in Northeastern Colorado by Year. Data adapted from Taylor 1929.



While the farmers performed the initial jobs of plowing and turning the field, hired labor was needed between April and November. They worked in intense bursts with idle periods in between. When labor was needed it was often in the form of 12-hour or more days. One beet laborer (Contreras and Contreras 1999) recalls using coal miners lamps in order that he and his brother could start harvesting beets in the middle of the night, working until 8 in the evening the next day. The beet harvest was hard on workers bodies. Laborers would wrap their wrists for support but inevitably backs would be sore and hands torn up despite the entire agricultural season of work. This variability in work intensity, between idleness and feverish work, meant that farmers depended on securing workers that would be at the ready when needed and willing or desperate enough to work for long hours at low pay. Otherwise it would be unprofitable to the farmers and the sugar processors (Contreras and Contreras 1999, Twitty 2003). Furthermore, as indicated in Figure 4, there was significant year-to-year variability in beet acreage. For example, 1925 saw a bad drought resulting in low crop yield. This further stressed the lopsided and inconsistent demands of labor putting both the companies and the laborers in difficult situations.

#### Growing beets: Labor required

The industry grew rapidly as indicated by the proliferation of factories. By 1910 Weld County alone was producing over 34,000 acres of sugar beets and in 1930 it produced over 82,000 acres (Shwayder 1987). With the building of factories, the increase of irrigated lands, the improvements in beet variety (beets with higher sugar content) and cultivating techniques, the sugar beet industry was up and running (Thomas 2003a).

Addressing the thirteenth annual session of the Trans-Mississippi Commercial Congress, in St. Paul Minnesota, August 1902, Truman G Palmer, the secretary of the American Beet Sugar Association, argued to gain financial support for the sugar beet industry. In Kansas, methods were being experimented with to avoid the burdensome hand labor of weeding and thinning. In Michigan, they were working to drastically reduce hand labor field hours by mechanizing the harvesting process of pulling and topping beets and loading them onto wagons. Palmer predicted that as the industry moved forward, a formative reduction in labor requirements for beet agriculture and sugar production would occur. In his mind this would set the US apart from Europe, where labor was cheap but rent was high. Palmer's pitch was successful in achieving Congressional support. However, his prediction of an industry unbound from cheap agricultural hand labor did not come to fruition. It was decades before the agricultural advances he envisioned came to pass. Instead sugar beet agriculture was dependent on both physical infrastructure (machinery, railway, factories) and a large and temporary labor supply. As the industry grew swiftly over the first two decades of the twentieth century so too did the demand and arrival of new labor. These demands were met through imported labor first from Europe and later from Mexico and the Southwestern United States.

The importation of labor occurred alongside the development and support for the industry. The sugar companies arranged for agricultural laborers and subsidized travel to help their farmers out. In this way the rising sugar industry changed not only the built landscape of Northeastern CO but also the local population. In Greeley, the second

Northeastern CO town to build a sugar factory, the townspeople originally resisted the industry, arguing it would ‘spoil’ their quaint agricultural community with labor and union disputes, common byproducts of factories and increased agricultural production. Furthermore they argued against the potential air and water pollution associated with the factory. Nonetheless, the factory was built on the east side of town and the area around the factory began to fill with labor housing. Eventually, the Great Western Sugar Company built an entire community for Hispanic workers (Shwayder 1987). But who were these immigrants? Where were they migrating from and why? The following section describes in greater detail the immigrant labor population, the diversity within that population, and how it changed over time.

### **The Migrant Population**

As established above, the sugar beet industry amassed a large and growing footprint through the first decades of the twentieth century, requiring roads, rails, factories, and expanding acreage of land cultivated with beets. Also, cultivating beets in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century required tedious and arduous hand labor. In Colorado and other U.S. beet growing regions, it was understood that the local labor force was inadequate and unwilling to meet the needs of the industry, thereby requiring alternative sources of labor be obtained (Valdés 1989). Immigrant labor was incorporated into Northeastern Colorado beet growing in 1901, the very first season of industrial beet agriculture (Twitty 2003).

The nature of beet agriculture relied on significant numbers of seasonal workers. Therefore, changes in the local population would inevitably follow the growth of the

sugar beet industry in Northeastern CO because its population was not equipped to handle the demands of sugar beet agriculture. The promise of a new industry promised demographic change. Population change associated with the sugar beet industry could have only been avoided by either growing sugar beets in areas where the necessary labor population already existed, by continuing the use of only cane sugar grown in the tropics (not growing sugar beets as an industry), or by making scientific advancements to agriculture that avoided the extreme need for spring and fall hand laborers. These advancements did not exist in the 1920s so outside hand laborers were required to expand and grow the industry (Taylor 1967).

This section presents demographic information to characterize the immigrant laborers that worked the beet fields. The goal is to describe *who* the beet laborers were, giving a face to the workers. Furthermore I recognize and draw attention to the diversity among the labor population, especially within the population often referred to as *Mexican*. Understanding the multiple paths that migrant laborers took to Northeastern CO gives context to the settlement patterns.

#### German Russian immigrant labor

The first group of immigrant sugar beet laborers was German Russians. Specifically, they were people of German heritage who had been living in Russia previous to their migration into the U.S. I include a brief history of these immigrants here because they were instrumental in providing the labor vital to the nascent sugar beet industry and their back story is relevant to their identity in Colorado's High Plains and as hand laborers.

Under the rule of Russian Tsarina Catherine II (Catherine the Great), a manifesto was issued in the early 1760s granting religious freedom, a 30 year tax exemption, and exemption from military service among other things as an incentive to settle Russia's eastern frontier. This prompted German settlement north of the Black Sea and in the Volga River region and placed little to no pressure on the Germans to assimilate. For generations they maintained their culture and language, adopting only some regional customs of dress, construction, and cultivation. By the 1870s the autonomy with which the Germans had lived in Russia had been severely restricted. "Russification" programs were instituted and military service became mandatory, ending the very reasons that led German families to migrate generations before. Many Germans living in Russia looked to move. They found employment and opportunity in the growing U.S. sugar beet industry, first in the Great Plains and later in Colorado (Taylor 1929, Cook 1978, Thomas 2003a).

Life in the eastern frontier of Russia, primed the German Russians for life on the High Plains of Eastern Colorado. Germans moving to Russia were faced with a challenging new landscape, devoid of trees over open and unending plains. Here they built houses reminiscent of adobe structures of the American Southwest but influenced by their lives in Russia. Furthermore, homesteading in Russia fostered a community accustomed to hard work in harsh conditions. A worldview steeped in hard work and desperation boded well for success as hand laborer in the beet fields of Colorado; arduous work was a way of life and a family affair. The sugar companies in Northeastern Colorado, focused their recruitment efforts to the German Russian population living in the Midwest as early as 1901 and soon recruited directly from Russia.

“After exhausting the supply of landless Volga German families in Kansas and Nebraska, the sugar companies began importing German families directly from Russia. In time, Great Western transplanted entire villages to Northern Colorado. Often it brought families to the state through Canada, avoiding the immigrant quota system at Ellis Island in New York Harbor” (Thomas 2003a, 6).

The population of German Russians was well established by 1909, so some believed that it was not necessary to continue company programs that sought out and brought in new migrant workers. It was thought that the permanent settlements of German Russians were well enough established to sustain the labor needs of sugar beet agriculture. However, the industry continued to grow, acreage planted with beets expanded, and some German Russians purchased their own land and esteemed to climb above the status and grueling work of the beet field laborer. The need for new labor continued (Taylor 1929).

#### Shifting to Hispanic labor

The population of Northeastern Colorado grew in the early 1900s as agriculture and industry developed. In 1910 the combined population of Arapahoe, Boulder, Jefferson, Larimer, Logan, Morgan, Sedgwick, Washington, and Weld Counties grew from 142,699 people in 1910 to 191,879 people in 1920, and 228,548 people in 1930 (US Census).

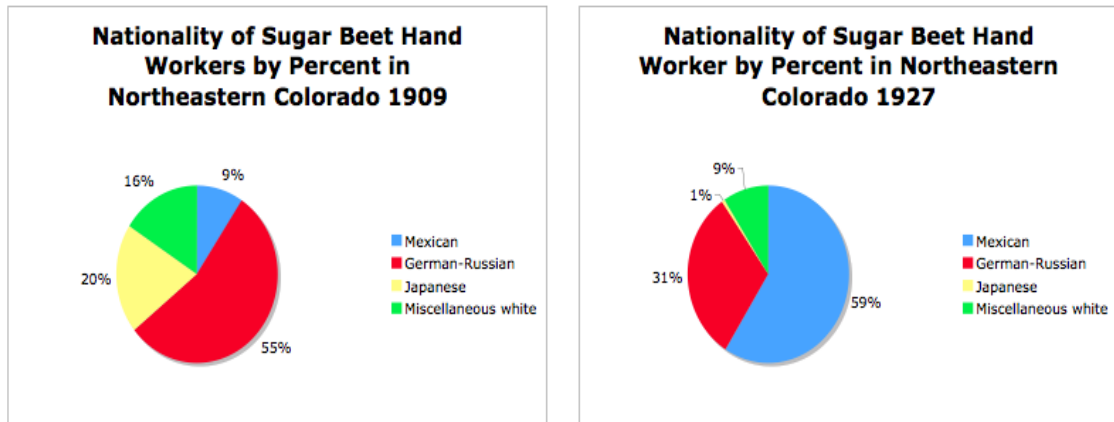


Figure 5. Changing demographics of sugar beet hand labor. Adapted from Taylor (1929).

The start of World War I, in 1914, marks the end of Eastern European migration to Colorado after which there were almost no new incoming German Russian beet field workers (Taylor 1929). The data in Figure 5, shows that the shift in demographics of sugar beet hand laborers in Northeastern Colorado is dramatic between 1909 and 1927. Indeed, the population of hand laborers shifted from being dominantly German Russian immigrants, to Hispanics. Taylor (1929) calculated that in 1909, 55 percent of the sugar beet hand labor was comprised of German Russians, nine percent “Mexican,” 20 percent Japanese, and 16 percent miscellaneous white. Japanese sugar beet laborers have been fairly underrepresented in the literature about sugar beet agriculture, and no longer immigrated into the U.S. after 1907. By 1927, 59 percent of hand workers were Mexican. German Russians had been overtaken and comprised 31 percent of the sugar beet agricultural labor population. The Japanese were virtually gone by

1927, perhaps resulting from the National Origins Quotas established under the Immigration Act of 1924. The miscellaneous white category was nine percent.

It is also important to consider the total numbers of these demographic categories. All but the Japanese, increased in total number between 1909 and 1927. The total number of hand laborers was 10,724 people in 1909, increasing to 24,251 people in 1927. German Russian field laborers increased from 5,870 to 7,563 but Hispanic laborers increased from 1,002 to 14,313 field laborers in Northeastern CO. This speaks first to the trend that most of the new sugar beet hand laborers were Hispanic, and second to the sizable overall growth in sugar beet agriculture in Northeastern CO. In 1909, 87,730 acres were farmed with sugar beets and in 1927 the acreage had more than doubled to 194,733. It is likely that the demographic change seen in the data was not linear but shifted dramatically around 1917 because of World War I. The trend showing greater numbers of Hispanic sugar beet workers over other ethnicities expanded geographically beyond Colorado as a



**Table 2. Shifting demographic trends of migrant beet hand laborers, 1909 and 1927.**

<i>Mexican</i>		
Year	Number	Percent
1909	1,002	9.4
1927	14,313	59.0

<i>German-Russian</i>		
Year	Number	Percent
1909	5,870	54.7
1927	7,563	31.2

<i>Japanese</i>		
Year	Number	Percent
1909	2,160	20.1
1927	175	0.7

<i>Miscellaneous White</i>		
Year	Number	Percent
1909	1,692	15.8
1927	2,200	9.1

<i>Total hand workers</i>		
Year	Number	Percent
1909	10,724	100
1927	24,251	100

survey conducted in 1935 throughout beet growing regions of Michigan, Minnesota, Colorado, Nebraska, Wyoming, and Montana reported that 67 percent of the head of households in the interview of sugar beet agricultural laborers were either Mexican or Spanish-American (Johnson 1939).

#### Diversity among “Mexican” field workers

As seen in the records of migration into Northeastern CO, and in the records of the ethnicity of field laborers, Spanish-speaking people who worked the fields were lumped into one group: Mexicans. However, great diversity existed among Spanish

speaking sugar beet migrants. Many were in fact U.S. citizens though the farmers who employed these migrants made little effort to distinguish differences among the Spanish-speaking labor population in Northeastern CO. This was not unique to Northeastern Colorado. Bundy (1936, 35) wrote of migrant beet workers in Southeastern Colorado, “[t]he companies and most of the growers make no distinction in the hiring of labor. Whether the workers be a Mexican citizen or an American citizen makes no difference.”

The histories below of several migrant agrarian labor families characterize the diversity of Hispanic laborers in Northeastern CO. These family histories give a face to the masses of migrant laborers and uncover the narrative of multiple migrant journeys and paths to Colorado. This section accentuates the long histories that some migrant families have in the Southwest; indeed the ancestors of many Americans of Spanish heritage were in the Southwest before the Mayflower landed at Plymouth Rock (Atkin 1968). This section also points to several specific places that families were migrating from. Considering this history answers the question of *who* migrated to Northeastern CO and does so with specific examples, giving a face to Hispanic agricultural laborers.

The first example is of a family that came from Mexico. In an interview with Rosalie Martel Martinez, which is archived at the Greeley Municipal Museum, Martinez tells the story of her parent’s migration to Northeastern Colorado. Martinez was born in the summer of 1935 in Fort Lupton, Colorado but her mother, Maura Olague Martel, was born in 1913, in Durango, Mexico. When Martel was 5, her father, Santiago Olague, migrated north to secure work and relocate his family away from the violence of the Mexican Revolution. In 1918, the family boarded a northbound train to reunite with

Santiago. From the window of the train the five-year-old Maura, and her family saw the bodies of rebels hanging from telephone poles, a powerful reminder of why they were fleeing the country. The Mexican Revolution had erupted in 1910 after the aging dictator, Porfirio Díaz, called for a democratic election and then imprisoned the presidential candidate, Francisco I. Madero for showing promise of winning. This followed a long period of economic downturn and an ever-increasing opposition, which eventually broke into a decade of conflict (Joseph and Henderson 2006).

The story continues that in route north, the train carrying the Olague Martel family was derailed by revolutionaries; the young Maura was stuck on the train but was passed through a window to her family and safety. However, her sixteen-year-old sister was abducted by rebel troops, never to be seen or heard from again causing lasting pain to her family.

The rest of the family joined Santiago and settled first in Kansas where, by word of mouth, he found work with the railroads. During this time the family lived in boxcars. In 1921 the family moved to Lamar in Southeastern Colorado, where Santiago found agricultural work. In 1929, her father, Santiago, and two of her brothers died and Martel's mother remarried. At this time the family moved into *La Colonia*, a community of Spanish speaking migrant's on the edge of Lamar. In the oral histories, archived at The Greeley Municipal Museum, interviewees casually used, *la colonia* to describe the small communities they lived in and it applies to several different towns. When known, I include an official neighborhood name. The family lived in a dirt-floored house in Lamar during the Dust Bowl. Today, there is no trace of this settlement as a flood wiped it out. It

is likely then, that the community was situated on the flood plains of the Arkansas River at the northern fringe of Lamar.

When Martel married, she and her husband moved to Northeastern CO. They first moved to Fort Collins and then to Fort Lupton for agricultural work. They again settled in a Spanish-speaking neighborhood in Fort Lupton where their daughter Rosalie was born. Rosalie Martel Martinez points out that there are a number of families in Fort Lupton who trace their roots back to the same area of Durango, Mexico, citing the use of social networks to eventually end up in Northeastern Colorado, mostly for agricultural field work (Martinez 2000).

Another Northeastern Colorado resident, whose family's heritage has been archived at the Greeley Municipal Museum as an oral history, also traces her heritage to Mexico and provides a second example. Mary Martinez Maralez was born in 1938 in the *Kersey Colony*, a Mexican and Mexican American settlement on the edge of Kersey Colorado. Her mother, Gavian Antuna, had moved to the Kersey Colony in 1918 as a two year old. She was born in Herington, Kansas, the daughter of Mexican migrant workers. Maralez' father, Carlos Martinez was born in Chihuahua, Mexico and had hopped the railroad in 1919, northbound and looking for work. After her parents married in 1937, they settled in the Kersey colony and her father secured work with the Union Pacific Railroad as a section man. Many considered this work a step above agricultural fieldwork because it was steady, eight hours a day, five days a week, year round work.

Emma Pacheco Brown, grew up in the Kersey Colony with Maralez. Her parents, Antonio Pacheco and Aloita Cordova were both born in New Mexico and had migrated to

Colorado for agricultural work where they met and married. Antonio Pacheco, eventually secured work as a section man also for Union Pacific and they lived in the Kersey Colony. Brown and Maralez speak of the tight-knit community within the colony where Spanish was the dominant language and Maralez didn't learn English until she entered school in Kersey. While agriculture was not the main income for these families, it speaks to the variation of work experiences among Hispanic residents. Both the family of Martinez Maralez and Pacheco Brown settled in the part of town most acceptable and accessible to migrant Hispanic families. However, this part of town also lacked some of the basic amenities that were available just a mile away in the town of Kersey (Maralez and Brown 1999).

A third resident of Northeastern CO who traces his roots back to New Mexico is Marvin "Jerry" Martinez. At the time of the interview, which is archived at the Greeley Municipal Museum, he lived in Longmont. His personal history is slightly different as he grew up in Cheyenne, Wyoming only to move to Greeley for college. However, during The Great Depression, his father, Magaro "Marvin" Martinez, followed the agricultural season through Colorado and into Wyoming, returning to Tierra Amaria, New Mexico each winter, trying to stretch the summer earnings long enough to survive until the next agricultural season. Magaro Martinez was one of the seasonal migrants, circulating between Colorado, Wyoming and New Mexico with the fluctuating seasonal demands of agriculture, including beets. He ended up in Cheyenne after a truck broke down on the way home to New Mexico and settled in what was known as "The Bottoms," a lower income, area of the Wyoming town. From Cheyenne, he found some work through the

Work Progress Administration and other depression-era programs. The ability to take advantage of these government programs makes an important difference between the Hispanics from New Mexico who were US citizens and Mexican nationals who were not.

The family of Magaro Martinez had been in Northern New Mexico for hundreds of years. Their heritage was Mexican, Spanish, and indigenous. This long history also characterizes Jerry Martinez' mothers heritage. His mothers surname is Romero and she traces her lineage in Mexico to April 28<sup>th</sup> 1598, when the Spaniard, Bartolome Romero, landed in Veracruz, Mexico. He eventually worked his way up through Mexico to Santa Fe in what was then New Spain. Jerry Martinez' mother grew up in Ledoux, NM, on the eastern flank of the New Mexican Sangre de Cristo Mountains. Her heritage is a 250 year mix of Mexican, Spanish, and Indigenous peoples as well as French. In this way the Spanish language spoken in New Mexico deviates from that spoken in Spain or Mexico. It has taken on Indigenous words and evolved over the several hundred years while people were living in the mountain towns. Her father also worked seasonally through Colorado and Wyoming, working the beet fields, picking fruit, and herding sheep.

Jerry Martinez' mother migrated from New Mexico, first to Las Animas in Southeastern CO and then to Denver. Eventually she made it to Cheyenne to work in a grocery store where she met Magaro Martinez. On both sides of his family Jerry Martinez had grandparents and parents who were part of the seasonal labor force that Colorado agriculture depended on (Martinez 2000).

These family histories and others are examples of the various paths that families and individuals took to get to Northeastern CO. They substantiate the broad claims of

reasons for migration established earlier in the thesis. It can be sure that not all field laborers were Mexican Nationals, many came from New Mexico and were of a Spanish/Indigenous heritage that formed over generations. Furthermore, not all of the Mexican and Mexican American migrants worked exclusively in the fields. The Hispanic migrants from New Mexico, such as Magaro Martinez, were eligible for government aid during the Great Depression, distinguishing them from Mexican Nationals who were not and in many cases returned or were deported to Mexico (Hoffman 1974). Bundy (1936) observed that sometimes the Mexicans who stayed in Southeastern Colorado worked harder because they were ineligible for depression era funding such as the Works Progress Administration. Because the farmers and companies made no distinction between Mexicans and American citizens of Spanish and Mexican heritage, jobs began going to Mexican Nationals, who were without assistance and thereby *willing* to work for mere survival. Bundy argued that some Hispanic Americans feared that taking work might disqualify them from obtaining relief during the next winter. The differences between Hispanics from Mexico and those from New Mexico include different push factor for migration, differences in cultural heritage, and differences in legal status. It is important to recognize the distinctions among the Hispanic labor population for these reasons. Unfortunately I have not been able to quantify the distribution between Mexican born and US born of Spanish heritage. However, the general themes of where seasonal sugar beet workers were migrating from is covered in the following section.

## **Settlement Patterns of Hispanic Beet Labor**

An initial inquiry of this project was to identify where Hispanic sugar beet field laborers were settling. This question, admittedly, was first approached more from a perspective of point-to-point migration with a fixed settlement location after migration. However, these settlement patterns are best characterized by changes in patterns of migration and a seasonal flux of migrants corresponding to the beet growing and harvesting season. I argue that there is no one area settled by Hispanic migrants though there are some trends. The most prominent trend in housing across the Hispanic beet field workers was first, to live near the fields for the beet season, and second to migrate elsewhere for the winter. Therefore, the pattern of Hispanic labor settlement can be characterized as one of seasonal migration with variation in winter residence.

During the beet campaign, field laborers' housing was low density and decentralized spanning across the beet growing region. Farmers often provided housing. In the spring, Northeastern Colorado and other beet growing regions received the annual tide of migrant workers, arriving by train and automobile from throughout the Southwestern United States and Mexico (Taylor 1929). Contrasting the pattern of low density housing, winter housing was typically illustrated by high-density clusters of Hispanic families. During the winter months, most beet workers returned to homes away from the fields. Some laborers continued on in search of more agricultural work, some migrated back to Mexico or Northern New Mexico, others spent the winters in Denver and others still stayed in the towns of Northeastern Colorado. This section discusses in greater detail these patterns of seasonal beet labor migration by focusing on where



laborers were living during the year. Significant attention is also given to the quality of life in these settlements.

#### Variation in seasonal settlement patterns and housing quality

While considering the types of settlement and the different geographic locations it must be accentuated that the theme bringing all trends together is the movement of labor. While the occurrence of migration is partially a factor of the economic demands for a fluctuating seasonal work force, other factors influenced *where* workers lived. Typically, summer housing conditions, both good and bad, depended on the farmers. In the case of poor housing conditions the degree to which the laborers were empowered to take a stand against poor conditions or even move out varied. There was more variation in winter settlement conditions. Of those who stayed in Colorado, some laborers wintered in Denver, mostly in lower income pockets of the city along the South Platte River. Others remained in Northeastern Colorado, typically living in centralized groups, usually on the outskirts of town near the beet factories. Others still sought winter work in coalmines, settling with their families accordingly. Mitchell (1996) highlights that the rural industries of California (agriculture, mining, logging, and construction) were dependent on a highly mobile labor force; it will become clear, through an investigation of settlement patterns, that this mobility was equally important to the economic viability of Northeastern Colorado industry.

When talking about beet labor housing, the experience, in many cases of the 1920s Mexican migrant worker in Northeastern, CO was dominated by miserable conditions (Mahony, Dolan, and Fitzgerald 1928). While the work was demanding, the

housing was at times unacceptable. Many of the seasonal workers were housed in structures owned either by the farmer or the sugar beet company, commonly referred to as beet shacks. The general state of housing was so bad that Mahony (1931) of the Mexican Welfare Committee of the Colorado State council, Knights of Columbus, observed that it was only a matter of time before the Hispanics organized themselves. He postulated that whether their organization looked like the American Federation of Labor or something far more radical depended on how the area farmers treated the workers. To Mahony, it is conditions, not agitators that foment radicals. Several years earlier there had been tension between laborers and farmers (not mentioned in *Through the Leaves*) where the farmers were concerned by Mexican labor organizing and falsely claimed that the Industrial Workers of the World had been involved in agitating laborers to demand higher wages. Further fears were imbedded about 'Old Mexico' Communists under command from the Mexican Government being an agitator as well. The goals of this Old Mexico socialist group are unclear in the literature (Mahony, Dolan, and Fitzgerald 1928). These details accentuate a tension between farmers and laborers. Discrepancies over wages were often catalyzed to improve housing conditions and poor housing conditions were the norm.

#### Beet shacks

In the 1920s, beet shacks symbolized the poor housing of seasonal labor across the Northeastern CO agricultural landscape. As established, there were a number of different seasonal migration paths exhibited by Hispanic laborers. Regardless of whether they spent their winters in Denver, New Mexico, Chihuahua, or Greeley, it was some

variety of beet shack that housed most beet laborers during growing and harvest season. The first pattern of Hispanic labor and the only settlement pattern shared across most of the beet labor population is that of summer housing in proximity to the beet fields. These structures, which were often a set of rickety walls and a roof, were notoriously uninhabitable, especially around 1920. Some of these beet shacks were located in feeding corrals that were littered with cattle manure and only had access to foul water (Cooper 1920). Cooper also states that “Mexican” families were perceived as willing to put up with poor living conditions and therefore were preferred over the German Russians by those farmers not willing to provide adequate housing. It is more likely that the families who accepted such poor living conditions weren’t granted choice in the matter and took the work out of necessity. A suitable house was usually stipulated in the labor contract but ‘suitable’ was at the discretion of the farmer. Mahony (1930) bluntly described the overarching living, working, and social conditions of Hispanic laborers as “very bad.”

*Through The Leaves* took a contradictory stance on housing. While they championed for better housing for beet labor, as described below, they also highlighted the “good pay” associated with their brand of field labor. Part of the argument that beet field work paid well was the inclusion of housing for workers, implying that Hispanic beet laborers were well off. Roskelley and Clark (1949, 17) described this housing as varying from “reasonably good and attractive to almost unbelievably poor” not able to meet any standard of health, protection, or comfort. Data collected on the seasonal housing conditions of beet labor by Roskelley in 1939 but printed in the same 1949 publication, indicated that in Northeastern CO, for 100 houses, 76 had poor roofs that

leaked, 23 had no foundation or a poor one, and 12 had dirt floors. Twenty seven percent of families carried water for cooking over 100 feet, 14 percent over 250 feet. The housing settlement pattern for Hispanic beet hand laborers was dispersed across the beet growing region, temporary, and often inadequate. The off season housing patterns had greater variation.

#### Beet field to Denver seasonal migration

At the end of the beet season, some of the laborers would “drift into Denver,” where many were denied work because of racial discrimination. Inevitably, they would run out of money and live in destitute poverty (Mahony 1928). These laborers ended up in Denver for a number of reasons. They may have established their life in Colorado to shorten the length of their seasonal migration, or they may not have had the money to return to Mexico or New Mexico. Mahony, cites a Catholic Charities report, which indicated that in the winter of 1926 there were over 8,000 Hispanics living in Denver. It is implied that most of these residents are seasonal agricultural workers. Another housing study enumerated 12,345 Hispanic residents in Denver in 1940 (Carmichael 1941, cited in Atkins 1968). Atkins states that the increase in Hispanic residents was not due to sugar beet workers but families migrating from southern CO and elsewhere to Denver for employment opportunity within the city. However, this contradicts the findings of others and the opportunities for Hispanics were far greater in agriculture and mining than in urban employment (Taylor 1929).

Max Contreras and his family (Contreras and Contreras 1999), exemplify the category of agricultural labor that spent winters in Denver and the beet season in

Northeastern CO. Their experience is representative of a large group of immigrants moving seasonally between Denver and the beet fields. His father, Guadelupe, was from Chihuahua, Mexico and had worked in Texas and also in Montrose, CO before he moved to Denver in 1931. Initially, his father worked on a farm picking corn in what today is the Denver neighborhood of Stapleton. Eventually, they started picking beets seasonally, north of Denver in the town of Brighton. Contreras and his siblings would overload on homework beginning the first of April in order to finish for the summer by the first of May enabling them to work in the beet fields. School actually ended in June but at the time it was seen as acceptable for Hispanic children to leave school early for agricultural work (Taylor 1929). For the summers, Contreras, his 14 siblings, and father would live in Weld County. His mother had died of cancer the same year he started working in the fields: age 11. While not all of his siblings worked in the fields, picking beets was a family affair. His sisters did most of the cooking and the youngest brother's role was as the water boy. The long hours of working in the fields required this kind of family network. Without someone, in this case the gendered work of women, feeding the laborers it would not be possible to maintain long working hours. For the summer they lived in a house provided and furnished by the farmer as part of their beet contract. Contreras describes the houses he lived in, in the late 1930s as "not that bad" and then goes on to describe how he, his brothers, and his father slept outside in a tent because there was not room for all of them in the house.

As the beet season came to an end they would buy goods in an effort to stockpile for the winter. In Denver, the family lived in a three-bedroom house near West Colfax. It

is unclear exactly where they lived in Denver but from the cross streets mentioned I believe that they were in what is currently the neighborhood of Sun Valley. Today, this is one of the poorest neighborhoods in Denver sitting between Federal Blvd and the South Platte River. In the 1930s it was also a poor neighborhood and at the time was largely a Hispanic community. There were also some white families living there, but everyone was poor by Contreras's account. Many residents in the area did not have winter work and were attempting to stretch what they may have saved as seasonal agricultural laborers through the winter. While in Denver, Contreras worked in a Bakery on West Colfax after school slicing bread. He and his siblings also found work with Jewish families. The Hispanic neighborhood had initially been a white, Jewish community. In the words of Contreras, "after the Mexicans crowded in" the Jewish people, who had improved economically since migrating to Denver, moved up the hill and out of the neighborhood. These families often hired people to do chores on Saturday while they abstained from work in respect to their holy day. The young Max Contreras and others were able to work, splitting wood and emptying the ash box, from sun down on Friday until sunrise Sunday morning.

The Contreras family, represents a section of the migrant beet worker population that moved between Denver in the winter months and the fields for the planting and harvest season. In this way, they spent the summers working as hard and as much as they could in the winter taking little jobs and stretching what provisions they secured during the agriculture season. Contreras, remembers seeing the waves of heat over the field

while working in the summers and in reflection seems to realize just how hard the work was. At the time, it was survival (Contreras and Contreras 1999).

#### Beet field to Northeastern Colorado towns seasonal migration

Through the 1920s the number of Hispanic families spending the winter in Northeastern CO rose from 537 in 1921 to 2,084 in 1927. There was an average of just over 7 people to a family in 1924, as Figure 6 illustrates. The reasons migrant families stayed in Colorado varied and the location of their winter housing may say something about what they were doing for winter work if they had it.

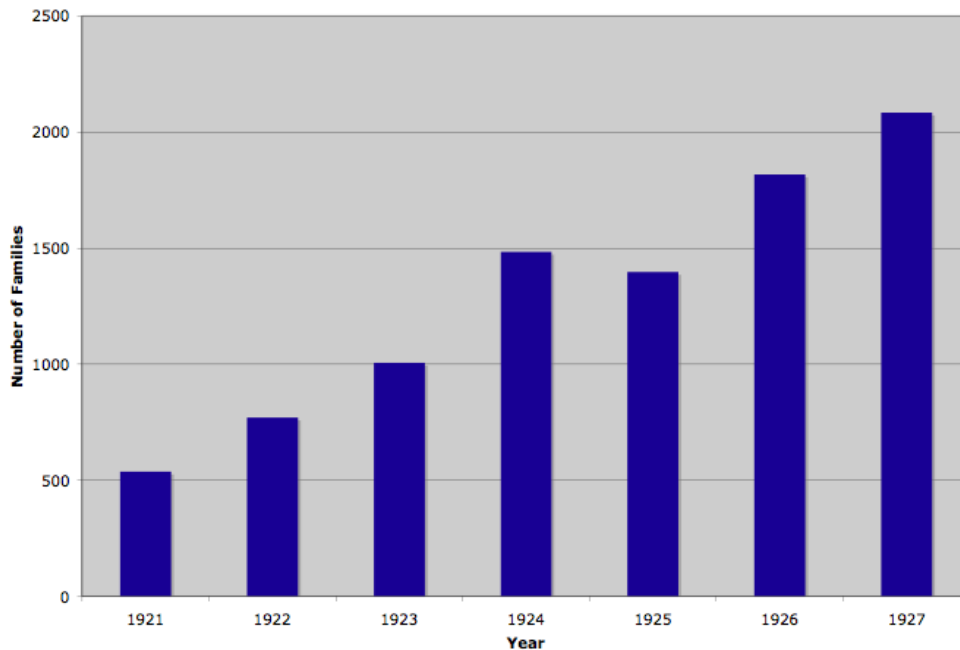


Figure 6. Mexican Families wintering in Northeastern Colorado. This trend was the result of Great Western Sugar Company initiatives (Taylor 1929)

The initial pull factor for Hispanic families coming to Northeastern Colorado was beet farming. Working as a hand laborer in the sugar beet fields did not fetch a livable years' salary. Those families spending the winter in Northeastern Colorado sought other work to supplement their beet wages and their settlement patterns reflect this. Some laborers moved to towns supported by the Great Western Sugar Company while others sought employment opportunities in different types of agriculture, coal mining, or quarry work. An example of this, as observed by Taylor (1929), was in Boulder County. Though Boulder County grew only 4.3 percent of the area sugar beets, the winter population of Mexicans was 13.2 percent. Taylor says this is because Boulder County had coalmines and these mines employed Mexicans. Discrimination against Mexican workers was common but mining, like agriculture, employed Hispanics. There were also workers who migrated to the Southern Colorado town of Trinidad for work in coal mines (Contreraz and Contreraz 1999).

In both Fort Collins and Greeley, substantial Hispanic communities developed, made up almost exclusively of residents who worked as seasonal beet field labor. What follows is a detailed description of these two locations and the beginnings of a discussion of the ways that the Great Western Sugar Company influenced these communities.

#### Fort Collins sugar beet neighborhoods

The sugar beet factory in Fort Collins was built in 1903 at the north end of town along the Caché La Poudre River. The factory was a series of buildings with machinery, storage sheds, smoke stacks, and rail lines (Twitty 2003). Three neighborhoods of beet factory and agricultural laborers developed in immediate proximity to the factory



northeast of old Fort Collins: Alta Vista, Buckingham, and Andersonville. Figure 7 maps these settlements (Thomas and Smith 2004). The sugar company sponsored the building of the initial housing development for German Russian sugar beet workers on land formally owned by Charles Buckingham, beginning the Buckingham neighborhood. East of Buckingham and the sugar factory, Peter Anderson developed a section of his farm into housing, which became the neighborhood of Andersonville, initially a German Russian community.

These neighborhoods are well documented in a recent study contracted to SWCA Environmental Consultants by the City of Fort Collins and funded by the State Historical Fund Project to complete a “historical survey and context” (Thomas 2003a, Thomas 2003b, Twitty 2003, Thomas and Smith 2004). Like Northeastern Colorado’s entire beet growing areas, the first immigrant group used to work the fields was the German Russians. Forty-eight German Russian families were brought to Fort Collins by the Colorado Sugar Company in April 1903. The *Fort Collins Weekly Courier* painted a positive image of these first immigrant arrivals who were going to make the sugar beet industry possible (Thomas and Smith 2004).

The three neighborhoods were built on the flat flood plains of the Caché La Poudre River and on more than one occasion, flooded. German Russian immigrants arriving as part of the first wave of migrant beet workers had come to Northeastern Colorado after the construction of the first sugar beet factory in Loveland. This first group was coming from Kansas and Nebraska. Some worked seasonally returning to the Midwest after the beet harvest; many opted to remain in Colorado (Roskelley and Clark

1949, note 11, Cook 1978, Thomas 2003a). The sugar company aided their settlement. “In November 1902, the Fort Collins Colorado Sugar Company constructed small dwellings on land belonging to Charles Buckingham, next to the burgeoning sugar plant. East of this settlement, Peter Anderson developed a section of his farm into another neighborhood of German Russian sugar beet workers” (Thomas and Smith 2004, 10). In this way, a socially and physically isolated ethnic enclave was created, separated from residential Fort Collins and amongst the industrial footprint of the sugar plant.

The neighborhoods, butting up to the sugar beet factory and bustling with immigrants were often referred to as the “Jungle” by the native-born white population of Fort Collins who viewed the area of the city with both contempt and fascination (Thomas and Smith 2004).

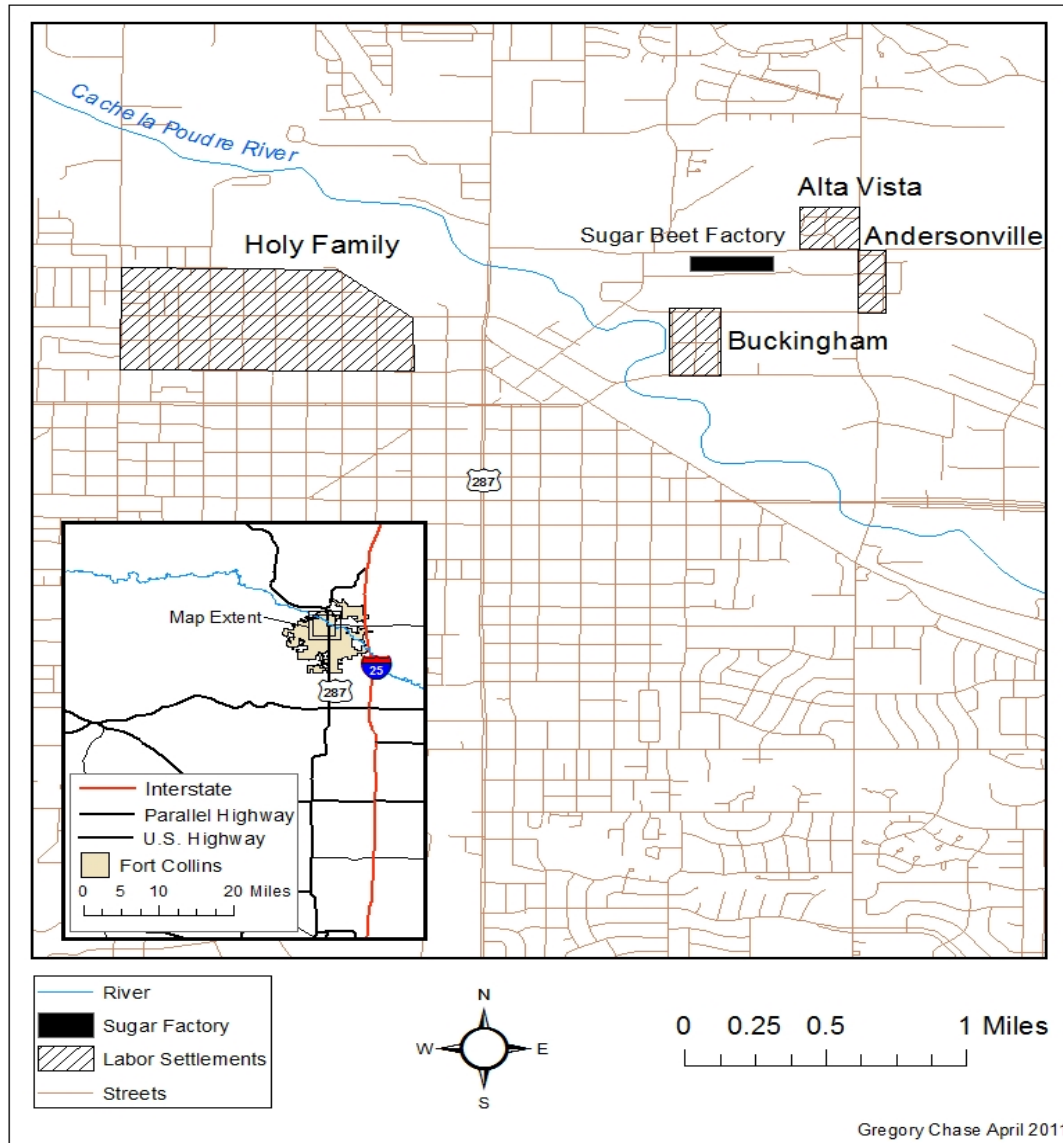


Figure 7. Fort Collins sugar Beet neighborhoods. Buckingham and Andersonville began as housing communities for German Russian workers and transitioned to Hispanic dominated communities. Alta Vista was created by the Great Western Sugar Company for Hispanic field laborers and Holy Family transitioned into a Hispanic community. (Adapted from Thomas 2003b)

“In Fort Collins, the intimate connections between the Volga Germans and the sugar beet industry manifested itself physically in the geography of the Buckingham and

Andersonville neighborhoods” as the orientation and spacing of the streets and housing resembled those in Russia (Thomas 2003a, 6). Thomas argues that this pattern was exhibited in Andersonville and Buckingham, which were built by and for the German Russian laborers but not in Alta Vista, which was built for Hispanic laborers.

The third community near the sugar factory was Alta Vista or Spanish Colony and housed the Mexican and Mexican American community of laborers. After WWI, the demographic shift in beet worker population from German Russians to Hispanics, as established above, was followed in the housing landscape as well. The new wave of agricultural labor thereby overtook the German Russians in the fields and in the sugar beet neighborhoods of Fort Collins as incoming residents were predominantly Hispanic. “Throughout the 1920s, Germans from Russia and Hispanics lived beside one another [in] what must have been a vivid blending of culture and custom” (Thomas 2003b). Perhaps vivid, or possibly it was a clash of culture as German Russian’s homes eventually turned over to Hispanic families. Regardless of the dynamics between the Hispanics and German Russians the ethnic enclaves that developed in Fort Collins did so because the houses were affordable compared to other parts of the city and perhaps more profoundly because Hispanic families were not welcome in the native-born Anglo dominated neighborhoods.

Alta Vista was built north of the factory with funding, encouragement, and the selectivity of residents, by the Great Western Sugar Company. The details of this involvement will be discussed below but the nature of life in Alta Vista was also isolated from the rest of Fort Collins and built on marginal land. Arguably, Alta Vista and

Andersonville were even more isolated from the rest of Fort Collins as they were not only on the other side of the Caché La Poudre River but also the other side of the industrial mass of the sugar factory.

Only one other neighborhood developed into a Hispanic enclave in Fort Collins. What became known as the Holy Family neighborhood, after its local church, sat south of the Caché La Poudre River. It shifted from having a few Hispanic residents in it to a majority by 1935.

While moving across the Caché La Poudre River and towards the rest of Fort Collins was perceived as an increase in social and economic standing, this community was not without exposure to environmental degradations. In the neighborhoods surrounding the beet factories the industrial machinery belched particulates and the air was often heavy with the odor of rotting beet pulp. For the vicinity of Holy Family it was the city dump just north of the houses, which burned trash daily, sending smoke into the neighborhood.

The Great Western Sugar Company and local entrepreneurs allowed early German Russian immigrants and later Hispanics the opportunity to shape the landscape by settling marginal land on the flood plains of the Caché La Poudre River and in the shadow of the massive sugar beet factory.

#### Greeley: The Española Subdivision

The town of Greeley, in Weld County, Colorado, was a prominent agricultural community in Northeastern Colorado during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Its sugar

beet processing plant was built in 1902. Agriculture and horticulture are still an important part of Greeley's economy.

In 1912, the Greeley Tribune reported the arrival of 133 Mexicans for fieldwork. However, it was not until the mid 1920s that a winter season residence of Hispanic families began to emerge. Some Hispanic families lived in Greeley before 1924, but in the fall of that year a permanent housing development was built for Hispanic, beet labor families. Forty structures were built on the outskirts of town and housed primarily Mexican American families. The project was financed and planned by the Great Western Sugar Company and most of the families were hand selected by GWSC (Lopez and Lopez 2007). According to Alvin Jose Garcia, who grew up in this neighborhood, everyone who lived in this colony worked in the area beet fields. To be selected, families had to prove to the farmers and the Great Western Sugar Company that they were good workers (La Tribuna 2006).

This settlement was called the Española Subdivision and commonly referred to as Spanish Colony by its residents and as the "Mexican Colony" by other Greeley residents. This housing development was removed from Greeley, and sat across the South Platte River, northwest of town. Somewhat uniquely, it was also removed from the sugar factory. The community drafted their own constitution and held several annual meetings over the conditions in the community.

The path to land and home ownership in this community were similar to the Alta Vista neighborhood in Fort Collins. The houses were built on Great Western Sugar Company land, who supplied building materials. The residents provided construction

labor and leased the houses for five years. At the end of the lease, 1929, residents began to buy their lots and homes from GWSC (Lopez and Lopez 2007). The lease agreements were favorable monetarily but the residents had to accept some element of company control.

The community fulfilled the Great Western Sugar Company's desire to have a small workforce it could rely on year after year. Sugar beet agriculture continued to need a seasonal labor force but GWSC also wanted experienced agriculturalists to work for its farmers that could lead the unskilled mobile labor force. The residents of the Spanish Colony also remained mobile, moving as families to housing provided by farmers in proximity to the fields for the agricultural season, beginning in March or April and moving back to Greeley for the winter months beginning in November or December (Lopez and Lopez 2007).

#### Trends in winter settlements

The spatial patterns of winter housing for Hispanic beet laborers was to cluster, usually on marginal land, near winter employment opportunities either in the city, or for some on property subsidized by GWSC. Spatial location in a city matters for resources available to communities and the locations of the Hispanic colonies and other residents were detrimental to resource availability and overall welfare. In Fort Collins, the sugar beet neighborhood of Alta Vista did not have a completed sewer line until the early 1970s or paved streets until 1980, despite continuous habitation. In general the Hispanics that stayed in Colorado created enclaves. Both Alta Vista in Fort Collins and the Spanish Colony in Greeley elected local government officials, unrecognized by the towns,

demonstrating an element of necessity and neglect from the city and also some measure of solidarity between and among the residents organizing towards increased standards of living for their communities.

The poor treatment of Hispanic labor stemmed from a notion that this demographic was a “necessary nuisance” to be dealt with. However, Mahony et al. (1927), of the Mexican Welfare Committee rightly acknowledged and advocated that these workers were an unrecognized and absolutely vital factor in the economic success of agriculture and manufacturing in the state of Colorado. The growing numbers of Hispanic residents wintering in Northeastern Colorado was not serendipitous, nor was it only a result of Hispanic family decisions. How and where Hispanics settled in Northeastern CO resulted from a combination of factors that were partially determined by the Great Western Sugar Company. The settlement opportunities for those migrant families wishing to winter in the area were influenced by both overt and subvert racist policies, limited economic resources, and Company assisted and encouraged localities. The subsequent section discusses the Great Western Sugar Company influence over migration and settlement patterns citing specific examples.

### **The Influence of The Great Western Sugar Company**

One goal behind this paper is to explain Hispanic migration and settlement patterns in Northeastern CO as they resulted from the actions and decisions of the Great Western Sugar Company. One obvious connection is GWSC’s creation of a demand for labor, driving migration and settlement in Northeastern CO of low skilled Hispanic workers. However, this view of Hispanic movement alone ignores the efforts made by



farmers and sugar companies to ensure the arrival of needed labor. That Hispanics became the largest labor group working the beet fields of Northeastern CO was not an abstract effect of the supplies and demands of migration. This trend was cultivated; Spanish-speaking Americans from the Southwest and Mexicans living in the border region were targeted for employment. Reflecting on his own work, Taylor (1967, 19) wrote the following about the power of farmers and the GWSC:

Enterprise made the principal decisions that determined the course of development of the western sugar beet industry and supplied a large part of the energy that achieved it. Science and government – and I would add labor – supplied the rest. Hand labor had no share in making the decisions, but its place within the industry was shaped by them, and its participation was necessary to give them effect.

As above, making sugar from beets is an industrial endeavor requiring a minimum acreage of beets to be profitable. GWSC ensured this acreage through contracts with private farmers and the farmers in turn contracted the agricultural labor as needed. While local farmers performed less intensive jobs of plowing, planting, and burning the weeds out of irrigation ditches, the tedious and arduous tasks of beet agriculture, blocking, thinning, and hoeing beets in the spring and pulling and topping the beets in the fall, were contracted to seasonal migrant laborers (Contreras and Contreras 1999).

In order to ensure that the seasonal labor force was large enough to work the required beet acreage, the Great Western Sugar Company acted as a liaison connecting farmers to families and individuals recruited as seasonal labor. One-way transportation north was provided for those migrating each spring to work the beet fields. “In 1926 transportation fares were provided for 14,500 persons who came by train or auto from eighteen states. Full fares for 10,800 and half-fares for 3,700 were paid by GWSC. To

recruit these laborers, 55 sugar company labor agents were employed, 20 of them worked full time for three months and 35 worked part time” (Taylor 1929, 132). There were five other agents that worked fulltime and year round and three of those that spoke fluent Spanish.

Clearly the recruitment system was well established, GWSC had even appointed a labor commissioner after World War I (The Sugar Press 1952). The process started in February and labor recruiters spent months traveling the rural mountains of Northern NM in areas such as Tierra Amarilla. The recruiters drove the winding and at times treacherous mountain roads canvassing the small towns in search of the spring’s beet labor force. They held public meetings and went door-to-door, distributing informational booklets printed in Spanish. The recruiter’s goal was to either sign New Mexican Hispanics up with beet contracts or to put them in direct contact with Northeastern CO farmers who handled their own labor contracts (TTL May 1928, Crane 1929).

While many of the Hispanics hired were from New Mexico and the Southwest, Mexican nationals were also hired. These Mexican nationals recruited for beet labor were solicited within the US, mostly in Texas. The GWSC maintained recruitment offices in El Paso and Fort Worth with the objective of hiring Mexican seasonal laborers (Taylor 1929). It is possible that recruiting Mexicans already in the US allowed them to avoid the patron systems that highly influenced migration across international borders throughout the early 1900s (Peck 2000).

The practice of recruiting cheap migrant labor was a sub-industry of industrial business more broadly. Mining, railroads, logging, and other large-scale agricultural

industries relied upon a migrant workforce. The measures they took to ensure the availability of such a labor pool led to large networks of mobile labor (Roskelley and Clark 1949, Peck 1996, 2000 Mitchell 1996). The Great Western Sugar Company's recruitment practices were influential in changing the demographic composition of Northeastern CO. Furthermore, their practices fostered the development of migration social networks, encouraging chain migration, an argument made by Krissman (2005).

While seasonal work was important, it also became apparent that ensuring the return of the best workers was advantageous. Early on the Great Western Sugar Company recognized the poor condition of its laborers. While the beet labor living conditions were understood as inhuman they were primarily identified as an inefficiency in agricultural production. Company recruiters took note of how potential laborers asked them specifically about the quality and size of the housing associated with their beet contracts. They also asked about the quality of water available. At times the recruiters were turned down for labor contracts because of the unacceptable housing conditions (Cooper 1920). GWSC identified improved housing as a method of easing the burden and reducing costs to recruitment efforts because it encouraged the return of trained seasonal laborers through improved relations. The efforts taken by GWSC to improve labor housing are described below.

#### The Great Western Sugar Company's campaign for housing

Throughout the 1920s there were recurrent articles in the Great Western Sugar Company magazine, *Through the Leaves* (TTL), calling for farmers to improve the housing conditions of their laborers. These company articles are used heavily throughout

this section. Table 3 displays select TTL titles related to beet labor and the housing initiatives pursued by GWSC. In these articles, special attention given to the idea that good housing will entice the *best* Hispanic workers. This sentiment is illustrated in the March 1920 issue of TTL; “The housing of our beet help is something that is of prime importance in the securing of good satisfactory labor for our growers, and is something that receives too little thought and attention by them as a whole” (Cooper 1920, 187).

In some instances it was not that too little attention was being paid to the housing; there were farmers who preferred Hispanic laborers because, in their experience, the Hispanics would put up with worse living conditions than the German Russians (Cooper 1920). In this way, some farmers felt they maintained greater power over these laborers and could cut housing costs. Other farmers spoke out against this mentality while simultaneously belying racial tones of Northeastern CO in 1920; “I have employed all kinds of beet labor, and have as much regard for Mexican labor as for any. I have always found them peaceable to have about, and not so exacting, nor do they ask as much, as some classes do. Of course, like all the rest, there are good and bad, but I don’t figure you can beat a good Mexican” (Martin 1921, 155). Leaving aside what the article’s author and farmer, Martin, implied by a class of Mexican workers, he provided good housing for the Hispanic workers he hired and in turn felt this had lead to improved labor relations. Cultivated alongside the call for improvement of labor housing was a pitch to encourage that more seasonal laborers reside in Northeastern CO for the entire winter.

Before 1920, very few labor families spent their winters in Northeastern CO, instead returning to the Southwest as described above. Working to increase the number of

families wintering in the area, GWSC again used TTL as a platform for this message. The first TTL articles of this vein called for farmers to winterize their summer labor housing and employ some of their laborers through the winter. Arguing that the labor housing otherwise sat idle and empty through the off-season, the articles suggest that it would not cost the farmer anything extra. The GWSC, very much viewed this move as a component of improving the beet crop. Their reasoning was that if a farmer could use the same laborers year to year, they would save time and money training field labor and ultimately grow a better crop because of the laborers experience. The offer for winter housing didn't apply to all hand laborers. Because the goal was to *improve* the quality of labor, only select individuals and families would be invited to stay the winter. High rewards were promised to farmers who would participate. According to Maddux (1923), writing in TTL, even if the farmers had to construct some new housing, the increase in crop production and time saved in training would pay for the investment. Furthermore, he argued that this was *best* for the laborers themselves, citing high food and rent costs in the city and little employment opportunities for Hispanics. Maddux concludes; "The Mexican practice of moving away in the fall is disadvantageous to himself, to the grower and to the sugar company" (381).

Another TTL article of the same year declares; "It is to the farmer's own interest to help [their Hispanic laborers] solve this winter's problem because next summer the farmers who do help their beet workers over the winter will have hands that will work to the utmost for the farmer's interest." The article states that lives on the farms provide a "better fashion" of living over winters in the city (Queralt-Mir 1923). In these articles

GWSC invokes paternalistic overtones, advising both the farmers and laborers where and indeed what “fashion” to live in.

When farmers failed to begin housing laborers through the winter GWSC stepped forward to lead by example. In July of 1923 the Great Western Sugar Company announced that in the previous winter they aided one Hispanic family in Fort Morgan, CO constructing a house on the edge of town for winter residence. This was considered a success and quickly led to what GWSC called the “colonization” of Hispanic workers. Ten other families had already contacted the Fort Morgan sugar factory manager to be included in what would become a community of Hispanic beet laborers (TTL July 1923).

The GWSC described their reasoning for creating permanent settlements of workers as follows: “The Company’s purpose in colonizing the Mexican laborers is two-fold. There is a saving of transportation expense, which under present conditions is very high. Also, experienced resident workers will do better work and more timely work on the crop and increase the tonnage per acre” (TTL Oct. 1923). As the transportation to the job site was typically included in the beet contracts GWSC estimated in 1929 that it would need to purchase between 11,000 and 12,000 full fare train tickets to transport labor (Maddux 1929).

Winter housing would ensure 1) the return of what farmers considered the “best” beet laborers, and 2) cut down on the transportation costs of shipping seasonal laborers from the Southwest; both perennial stresses of the seasonal labor demands of sugar beet agriculture (Mahony, Dolan, and Fitzgerald 1927, Thomas 2003b). In this way GWSC housing initiatives were primarily a move towards efficiency.

Despite the calls for housing improvement from GWSC, some farmers saw the housing insecurity of beet labor not as inefficient but as a leveraging point, allowing them to maintain power over the laborers (Roskelley and Clark 1949). It may have been this sentiment that left The Great Western Sugar Company’s call for improved farmer built housing unheeded.

Table 3. Select *Through The Leaves* article titles related to labor and housing published in the 1920s

<i>Through The Leaves Article Title</i>	<i>Date Published</i>
<i>“Beet Shacks” vs. Beet Houses</i>	March 1920
<i>Mexican Beet Labor from a Farmer’s Standpoint</i>	March 1921
<i>What Concessions I am Willing to Make to Beet Help</i>	March 1921
<i>Colonizing Mexican Beet Workers</i>	October 1923
<i>Permanent Beet Labor</i>	October 1923
<i>Home-Owning, Permanent Beet Labor Colony is Growing</i>	July 1923
<i>Practicing a Labor Preachment</i>	November 1924
<i>Growers Are Keeping Their Beet Labor in Increasing Numbers Each Year</i>	November 1924
<i>Ingenuity and Perseverance Shown by Mexicans in Constructing Adobe Houses</i>	November 1924
<i>Higher Tonnage Pays for Better Labor House</i>	December 1924
<i>Beet Labor and Winter Employment</i>	November 1925
<i>Beet Growers Co-operative States Position on Immigration of Farm Workers</i>	December 1927
<i>Well, If Not Sentiment Then Good Business</i>	March 1928
<i>Mexicans Meeting Demands for General Farm Workers</i>	April 1928
<i>Better Houses-Better Labor</i>	April 1928
<i>When Beets Call to the Back Country: And You Buck Snow and Quicksand Slush to Get a Labor Contract</i>	May 1928
<i>The House That Beet Labor Built</i>	August 1928
<i>Beet Field Labor for 1929</i>	March 1929
<i>Your Beet Field Labor</i>	April 1929
<i>Many New Labor Houses Being Built</i>	June 1929
<i>Better Houses for Sugar Beet Workers</i>	1929

<i>Texas Labor Curtailed by Law: [ ]Eliminates Recruiting of Beet Workers in State</i>	1929
<i>Ten Years of Recruiting Labor</i>	July 1929
Mexican Immigration Already Cut About 80 Per Cent	March 1930
Mexican Immigration Reduced 76% Without Quota Restriction Statement of the U. S. Department of State	June 1930
A Mutual Responsibility in Beet Field Labor	April 1930
Earnings of Spanish-Speaking Agricultural Workers in Northern Colorado	June 1930

### Active colony construction

The Great Western Sugar Company began to sponsor the development of *Mexican colonias* on the outskirts of various Northeastern CO towns. Following their own mantra, GWSC proudly reported in October of 1923, they had begun “*Colonizing Mexican beet workers,*” controlling labor housing in their own way. This is what occurred in the Hispanic colonies in Greeley and the Alta Vista neighborhood in Fort Collins.

The companies approach was formulaic. Typically, they used land owned by GWSC and drew out lots for housing. They provided building plans and contracted the construction of a winter community to the laborers themselves to be built during the lulls of the beet season. Only select families could participate, based on their record with GWSC. For these select families, the GWSC in conjunction with labor contracts, granted five-year leases for the houses. The arrangement was to sell the plots to the families at the end of the lease if things went smoothly. Under this initiative, GWSC aided Hispanic families in building winter housing enclaves across Northeastern Colorado (TTL October 1923). Hispanic *colonias* were started in the factory districts of Fort Morgan, Kersey, Johnstown, Hudson, Orchard, Brush, Ovid, and Sedgwick, all following the guideline



that “only the most desirable families are permitted to locate in a colony” (TTL November 1924, 562). Sixty-five percent of those colony families held at least three years of experience with beet work.

While actively constructing winter residence, the Great Western Sugar Company continued to encourage farmers build more permanent housing for Hispanic beet laborers. It did this using TTL, printing building plans and instructions on a regular basis, pitched as a step-by-step guide for farmers to follow. These instructions used a built-in timeline based on the beet season and spelled out how to construct ‘adobe’ bricks, assemble the houses, and plaster the building before winter.

As more of these colonies were constructed, the number of Mexican families wintering in Northeastern CO increased. GWSC reported that in 1921, 700 Spanish-speaking families wintered in Great Western districts. In 1922 the number was 1,000, and in 1923, there were 1,523 Spanish-speaking families (TTL November 1924). TTL kept tabs on the construction of these towns, praising the progress of the Hispanic beet laborers. Normally the new houses, which were very modest, had two rooms but could be added to in the following years (TTL November 1924).

The Great Western Sugar Company was aware of the benefits of cultivating labor relations. They openly cited how positive labor relations can drive chain migration to an area.

The workers in the colonies draw other good workers to the beet raising districts. In 1922, twelve adobe houses were built at Fort Morgan, Colo. Since then six new homes have been constructed, and a number of the original buildings have been enlarged.

At the Fort Collins colony starting with 10 houses in 1923 there are now 23, the increase being due to incoming friends and relatives of the original settlers.

Similarly, workers who are retained in the beet growing communities and on the farms over winter will learn the advantages of this plan and more workers will follow their example (TTL November 1924, 577).

The increased rates of Hispanic residents in Northeastern CO through the 1920s was not a result of only job opportunities in the area, nor solely because of the lack of employment in sending regions. Hispanic migration to Northeastern, CO resulted from both push and pull forces as well as strategic recruitment and housing efforts spearheaded by the Great Western Sugar Company. Indeed, GWSC acted to secure a reserve of seasonal labor for years to come. Where GWSC chose to recruit from and the measures they took to subsidize housing for some laborers and not others directly influenced the migration paths and settlement patterns of Hispanic labor.

The method of payment was another way in which both the farmers and sugar company influenced the quality of laborers. Typically the first payment was made after the completion of thinning and the first hoeing. This required the families to wait 4 to 7 weeks after they began work in the fields. Payment of the second hoeing was typically made late in the summer. It was common for the farmer to withhold \$1 to \$2 per acre of the money earned until the harvest was completed. This was in order to hold the worker to their contract, which required staying to the end of the harvests. Usually the final payment, including the moneys withheld throughout the season, was paid in mid-November after the harvest was completed. Due to delayed wages, many of the families lived, off goods purchased on store credit, especially in the first month of the beet season. It was not customary for sugar companies to own and operate stores though some

families paid for goods with moneys advanced to them by the farmer. It was more typical that farmers would vouch that the laborers did in fact have a labor contract. Often payments were made straight from the farmers to the storekeepers. “By the end of the working season and the reckoning with the store-keeper that followed the harvest pay day found many beet workers with little or no cash reserve with which to begin the winter and with no work to back store credit” (Johnson 1939, 70).

This exemplifies not only the poor wages of beet labor but also that the laborers had little freedom or power of their own against the farmers or sugar company. An unequal power structure also existed for laborers living in housing owned by GWSC or farmers. In order to maintain their housing, which was often provided as part of their contract, laborers were bound to their commitment with the farmers and had few options if treatment was unfair. Roskelley (1940) argued that these contracts left the employee at the mercy of the employer as far as housing conditions are concerned.

#### Conclusion of findings section

The Northeastern CO sugar beet industry, among other factors, was inextricably linked to low skilled labor for its profitability. Therefore, the landscape of sugar beet agriculture includes these migration and settlement patterns of Hispanic field workers of the 1920s. The GWSC was the most influential player in driving the migration process through their recruitment efforts and in determining where many of the laborers lived by providing selective housing developments. In the final thesis section the findings are concluded and the meaning of these findings described.

## SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND CONCLUSION

The preceding section has reported the findings of an archival review conducted to uncover the settlement patterns of migrant, Hispanic agricultural laborers. Multiple archival sources were used including: *Through The Leaves*, a magazine published by the Great Western Sugar Company for its employees, several academic papers and reports including works of Paul Taylor, oral histories, newspapers, and conference papers. This section reviews some of the overarching and guiding concepts and summarizes the findings before discussing their importance.

Geographers and social scientists have long been interested in migrant settlement patterns. Patterns of migration include the journey from one region to another, the seasonal versus permanent nature of movement, and location and quality of housing. The patterns are diverse and nuanced. Classic models of immigration in the US, shows the development of inner city enclaves, while the contemporary urban immigrant landscape has seen ethnic enclaves developing in the suburbs (Li 2009). Historically, the choice for Mexicans to migrate into and within the U.S. has been influenced by industry, war, and economics.

At the regional level, local conditions have influenced minority settlement; in Austin, Texas this included city planning; in the Phoenix area it included the use of marginal land as payment to workers (Skop 2009, Lukinbeal et al. 2010). This thesis has

discussed the landscape of sugar beet agriculture in Northeastern CO and focused on the experiences of Hispanic laborers and the influential local conditions.

In review, sugar beet growing and processing developed in Europe in the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century but took root in the U.S. at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Sugar is produced from beets in proximity to where sugar beets could be grown: a factor of climate, soil, and openness to the importation of labor. Once enabled with the necessary infrastructure, Northeastern CO became the most productive sugar-producing region of the state. Sugar beets, like many crops, are seasonal leading to seasonal demands for low-skilled hand labor, a role filled by migrant workers.

The original migrant population to satisfy this labor demand was Germans from Russia. After the start of WWI this shifted dramatically to Hispanics. It is crucial to point out that there is significant diversity within the Hispanic demographic and multiple migration journeys and experiences of the Spanish-speaking beet field laborers of the 1920s in Northeastern CO. There were migrant Hispanic workers who hailed from northern New Mexico, and elsewhere in the American Southwest, others migrated from various regions of Mexico.

Some of the workers stayed in the area seasonally, while others settled down. The most dominant settlement pattern was one of seasonal migration with the beet season. Throughout the nineteen twenties the number of Hispanic families wintering in Northeastern CO rose from 537 in 1921 to 2,084 in 1927. Typically, the families wintering in Colorado lived in what became Hispanic enclaves. These enclaves developed in Denver, as well as on the outskirts of Northeastern CO towns.

The Great Western Sugar Company influenced the movement and migration patterns as well as the patterns of settlement for many migrant sugar beet agricultural laborers. In Greeley, Fort Collins, and several other beet towns The Great Western Sugar Company funded the construction of winter housing for select Hispanic families. This subsidized the housing costs for workers and supplied GWSC with a year-to-year work force.

The migration of Hispanic people to Northeastern CO broadly fits migration literature, which states that kinship and social networks play a role in patterns of migrant movement (Massey et al. 1993) and that industries can actively stimulate patterns and paths of migration (Krissman 2005). Roskelley and Clark (1949) recognized that both of these influences were driving migration to Colorado. In 1939, Roskelley had conducted a questionnaire with the heads and homemakers of 470 agricultural labor families in Northeastern and Southern CO. This comprised of 1196 persons who labored in beet fields. The questionnaire was directed at what he identified as Spanish American culture. While a breakdown is not given between the percent of people interviewed in Northeastern CO verses the southern part of the state, the summary of data does distinguish between the two geographies. In the Platte Valley of Northeastern CO, 16 percent of workers cited a friend as the source of encouragement to come to Colorado, nine percent cited a relative, 34 percent said the sugar company, 14 percent other, five percent were born in Colorado, and in 22 percent no data were collected. About one third of the Hispanic agricultural beet field laborers migrated to Northeastern CO because of encouragement by the sugar company. Friends and family represent the next biggest

influence with a combined rate of 25 percent. This data were collected almost a decade after the temporal focus of this thesis, nonetheless I believe it is representative of the trends that would have been present in 1929. Furthermore, it is likely that the friends and family encouraging others to migrate were themselves recruited by a sugar company.

That one third of the Hispanic labor population cited the direct encouragement from a sugar company as the impetus for their decision to migrate accentuates the argument made by Krissman (2005). The migration network, the elements that made the patterns of migration possible to Northeastern CO possible, were influenced significantly by the sugar companies that required labor, in this case it was the Great Western Sugar Company. To ignore company recruitments efforts would be an incomplete story. The pull or demand side of migration was important to the trends experienced in the South Platte Valley and because of the population that the Great Western Sugar Company sought, the Hispanic population began to grow. Because of the lack of opportunities allotted to Hispanic people in Northeastern CO in the 1920s, poverty indicated by poor housing conditions during the beet season and the winter, was inevitable.

Some of the laborers stayed in Northeastern CO and during the 1920s, seasonal Hispanic enclaves developed on marginal lands at the fringe of agrarian towns. These communities were directly influenced by the Great Western Sugar Company and often existed on company land. Coupled with physical isolation, local sentiments of racism towards Hispanic residents from native-born whites reinforced a divide between groups.

The advantage, for the beet growers and companies, in keeping Hispanic families in the area through the winter was having a reliable, captured work force for the coming

year. Furthermore, they argued this workforce would be more dependable because of the selectivity of those allowed to participate in the company-sponsored communities. From the standpoint of GWSC, less time and money were spent recruiting and transporting laborers and farmers gained greater stability knowing they had a core group of experienced laborers.

While the migrant Hispanic population that settled in Northeastern CO towns may have gained some stability in housing to their lives, they effectively only shortened their yearly migration journey, which moved to the cycle of the beet season. Furthermore, their winter homes and communities were isolated from the greater extent of town and lacked amenities. Tensions existed between the Anglo and Hispanic communities and hostility towards Hispanic people were often blamed as a lack of interaction and understanding between the two groups (Taylor 1929, Bundy 1936, Roskelley and Clark 1949). Through the production of isolated residential spaces, the Great Western Sugar Company reproduced and reinforced racial tensions between Anglos and Hispanics. Therefore, the landscape of Mexican and Mexican American poverty is as much an integral part of the sugar beet landscape as is the financial success for many farmers and GWSC.

This project set out to identify the settlement patterns of Hispanic field workers. I argue that while increased numbers of Hispanics became year round residents of Northeastern CO, the most dominant pattern across all field laborers is that of seasonal migration between the fields and winter housing. I have established the Great Western Sugar Company as an important force in this migration pattern wielding direct and indirect influence over the distance of winter migration. Further research could examine



this relationship enriched with literature on power dynamics and the reciprocal interaction between the use of power shaping space and space in turn shaping power (Harris 1991). Also, interesting studies could investigate the development of Hispanic identity in the Spanish colonies of beet labor, which through isolation maintained cultural heritage.

The question most begging to be answered is how the historical context described in this paper relates to the contemporary landscape of Northeastern CO and continued debates over immigrant labor. Colorado's agricultural sector remains reliant on immigrants. Today's Hispanic landscape would be better understood within a historical framework.

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