

## Chapter Four: Transitions

*“The growth of Salinas has indeed been phenomenal”<sup>1</sup>*

*“As a bustling and prosperous business city, Salinas[‘s] civic leaders are hard-boiled to agitators...but their hand goes out to the newcomer who wants to be a good citizen.”<sup>2</sup>*

### INTRODUCTION

Salinas’s residents spent the better portion of the first 75 years of existence embracing new arrivals in their effort at city building. Agricultural workers, the poor, and immigrants from a variety of backgrounds and racial and ethnic groups joined together to create a diverse but nonetheless communal city culture based on all things agricultural. In part, the willingness to integrate new arrivals on the part of more established residents came from the need for settlers of any race to add to Salinas’s population, but it also came from newcomers’ collective determination to proactively join into one community. In the words of one Jewish Salinas resident, “We worked ourselves into inclusion.”<sup>3</sup>

However, the infamous 1936 lettuce strike exposed racial and class fissures that threatened to derail the culture of camaraderie everyone had spent so much energy creating. The harsh media spotlight that depicted Salinas’s citizens as greedy anti-union racists alarmed them. In response, they patched over differences among themselves, which was helped along by the crisis of World War II. In the postwar era, city leaders initiated several annexations that brought ethnically diverse working classes who had lived outside the city limits more fully into city life. The

---

<sup>1</sup> N.a., *Salinas: City in a Hurry*, 1940, Local History Collection, Economic Conditions Folder 1, Steinbeck Library, 1.

<sup>2</sup> “Bravo Salinas,” *Salinas Index-Journal*, March 16, 1940, p.6

<sup>3</sup> Interview by Carol McKibben with Peter Kasavan, March 17, 2017, Salinas.

Chamber of Commerce and City Councils made determined efforts to attract industry and manufacturing to newly annexed property in hopes of re-purposing marginal agricultural land for both residential development and industrial use. New industry also offered year round employment making seasonal agricultural workers into stakeholders. Only noncitizen Braceros were left out.<sup>4</sup>

Ethnic and racial lines blurred in Salinas and gender differences complicated group homogeneity. Not all Filipino stoop laborers supported labor activism and most middle class Filipino women and Filipino contractors sided consistently with growers; most labor activists were newly arrived white Dust Bowlers and led by women in their group; Chinese and Mexican people were as divided by class and gender in their views as whites were, and just like in other agricultural communities in California, Japanese residents, women and men, overwhelmingly supported (and even belonged to) the Grower-Shippers Association (GSA) opposing labor organizing. In fact, many independent Japanese lettuce growers were falsely accused of being strikebreakers in 1936 when they brought their crop to market themselves rather than relying on scabs or fieldworkers of any ethnicity.<sup>5</sup>

Everyone believed that they had a shot at middle class life. Individuals and families from all groups focused their energies on educating their children, acquiring land, buying homes, and creating businesses. Most Salinas residents supported unions and appreciated union membership as a means to achieve the

---

<sup>4</sup> The Bracero Program explicitly disallowed its workers from permanent migration status and a path to citizenship. See Mae Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004) Chapter 4, "Braceros, Wetbacks, and National Boundaries of Class," 127-166.

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Henry and Kent Hibino by Carol Lynn McKibben, Salinas March 6, 2018; Yasuo W. Abuko, "Henry Hibino...mayor of Salinas," *Nichi Bel Times*

American Dream, even as they feared and disdained the more radical activism of the era. *The East Salinas Pioneer* on May 9, 1940 noted that Salinas Mayor Ed Leach proclaimed “Union Label Week: Insomuch as the union label is the best consumers assurance that the article so marked is made in America under fair working conditions by adult workers receiving American standard of wages.”<sup>6</sup>

Salinas’s government officials and city planners promoted Salinas as the Central Coast’s urban hub not only by expanding its footprint but also by aggressively marketing its geographical location as a center point in the region. Built on a vast wide and flat plain with plenty of water and without contiguous borders with any other municipality (still unique in the nation for a city of its size), Salinas appeared to be the perfect spot for industrial development. Under the auspices of the Monterey County Industrial Development Committee (MCID) Salinas’s business community enticed industry into the newly annexed outskirts of town. Also important, annexations and increased population made a compelling case for federal and state investment in highways and infrastructure in Salinas and Monterey County.<sup>7</sup> They succeeded all too well. New industries meant increased

---

<sup>6</sup> *The East Salinas Pioneer* on May 9, 1940, 1.

<sup>7</sup> N.a., *Salinas: City in a Hurry*, 1940, Local History Collection, Economic Conditions Folder 1, Steinbeck Library, 1. See Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003), 23-61. Robert Self famously described the ideology behind Oakland’s regional development as an “industrial garden”, in which city leaders believed a carefully constructed mosaic of commercial, retail, and industrial development surrounded by suburban living would support a thriving city center. In a similar way, Salinas’s city leaders conceived of a clear and determined strategy of urban development based on agricultural productivity, commerce and industry that added population and, provided a solid tax base, which in turn supported the development of the town itself, its schools, parks, recreation centers and transportation systems.

pollution, leading to strong pushback from an energized, but loosely organized group of environmental activists, mostly made up of middle class white women who successfully challenged industrial giants such as Standard Oil, often in direct conflict with their husbands who were members of MCID.

One of the most important of Salinas's annexations, Alisal, emerged as a surprise. A vast, sparsely settled area for decades, it became a clearly defined community between 1933 and 1941 (and a most attractive space for annexation), with its own newspaper, *The East Salinas Pioneer*, a special section in the main Salinas newspaper, the *Salinas Index-Journal*, ever expanding business and residential developments, and a thriving social milieu. Its school system grew almost exponentially every year, requiring the hiring of teachers and administrators who appropriated almost any available structure as classroom space. Nonetheless, many Alisal residents opposed annexation by Salinas and voted it down in 1949, 1950 and 1955 before finally agreeing to join Salinas in 1963. Many Alisal residents saw annexation as a threat and an attempt to control them by an entity (Salinas) that they resented as condescending and even hostile. Intense feelings about power, taxes, and control, but also disputes about what defined community drove debate in Salinas throughout the post-war years and into the crucial next decades.

#### THE CONSEQUENCES OF WAR

World War II allowed Salinas's residents to shift their collective focus away from labor conflicts and put their energies behind the war effort. International

---

Like Oakland's city builders, Salinas's leaders expected federal and state support as well in everything from urban development to the construction of highways.

politics and the progress of the war replaced labor issues and enthusiastic reporting about Filipino festivals and Salinas shopping days on the front pages of the main local newspaper, *The Index-Journal*, which acquired the *Monterey County Post* and renamed *The Salinas Californian* during the 1940s. The union paper, *The Independent*, ceased publication at the outset World War II because (like the *East Salinas Pioneer*) its editor and publisher were drafted into the military.

The profound moment of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 papered over differences of class and ethnicity in Salinas as it did elsewhere in the country and promised to fulfill the dream of common purpose, which was now defined as supporting the war effort wholeheartedly whatever one's racial or ethnic identity or class status. Young men of draft age joined the military. *The Salinas Californian* enthusiastically reported on the diverse citizenry now enlisted in every branch of the armed forces, tracked their whereabouts, and printed excerpts from letters home, often on the front pages.

The Gattis family had arrived as part of the Dust Bowl migration and settled in Alisal but like other Dust Bowl refugees had been marginalized as transient farm laborers in the 1930s. Nonetheless, they found acceptance when their family members joined the Navy. In later decades, Jim Gattis became one of the most important leaders in Salinas city life, a real estate developer, one of the founders of the Steinbeck Center and one of its leaders in the capital campaign to fund it, and also board member of Salinas Valley Memorial Hospital among other numerous distinctions. It began with the war: "We had four boys and two fighting age," recalled Jim Gattis, "My oldest brother went into the Navy and went into Normandy.

My second oldest brother [also Navy and stationed on the USS Alaska] did not see combat. Both survived.” Jim recalled his wide-eyed impression of the impact of the proximity to military training grounds to his home in Northeast Salinas: “We lived at one point on Natividad Road. It was out behind the Rodeo grounds. They were training medics out in the field. It was fascinating as a kid to see the military operating.” Jim went on to become one of the founding members of the annual California International Air show Salinas, which celebrated military prowess through demonstrations from such groups as The Blue Angels and The United States Air Force Thunderbirds, and in the very same place in Alisal that he recalled as a child.<sup>8</sup>

Albert Fong, born and raised in Salinas but too young to remember the war, nonetheless emphasized the collective support of Chinese Americans for the war effort, “The fathers, uncles, brothers [of most] Chinese families in Salinas served in the military. There were the Chin Brothers, the Cho’s, the Ahtye’s, the Lee’s and many, many others,” he stated. Fong, a leader in Salinas’s Chinese community and in the city itself is currently president of the Chinese Association of Salinas and also serves on the City of Salinas Library Community Service Commission. He emphasized both the enduring community of Chinese Americans in Salinas and also their collective integration in Salinas’s economic, cultural and social life in large part because of their close connection with other Salinas residents during World War II.<sup>9</sup> He noted that the U.S. policy relaxing immigration restrictions on Chinese people during and after the war made a difference, too, if not in numbers of new

---

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Jim Gattis by Carol Lynn McKibben, September 18, 2017, Salinas.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Albert Fong by Carol McKibben, March 7, 2019, Salinas.

immigrants, then in a collective feeling among Chinese Americans that they now really belonged to the community as Americans. York Gin, prominent businessman and, like Fong, also from a long established Chinese family in Salinas spearheaded the effort to persuade Alisal's residents to join Salinas during the fights over annexation in the 1950s.<sup>10</sup>

Newspapers in Salinas featured prominent photos of young men of Italian, Jewish, and Mexican descent. Just like the rest of America, Salinas's residents felt fully integrated into the mainstream because of their collective identity as Americans (without hyphenation) with the advent of war.<sup>11</sup> That embrace included unreservedly surrendering their Japanese friends and neighbors to the federal government's (clearly unconstitutional) program of internment, which Nikkei prefer to call "incarceration," a more accurate descriptor for what happened to them.<sup>12</sup> Although editorials in the local press had strongly opposed the mistreatment of Filipinos a decade earlier, the silence was deafening when thousands of Salinas's Japanese residents, citizens and noncitizens alike were rounded up, registered at the Armory (located in the center of town), and forcibly incarcerated for an indefinite period. Non-Japanese residents of Salinas remembered the pivotal event of arrest and incarceration not as something traumatic for the community, but as a natural consequence of the bombing of Pearl Harbor and the subsequent U.S. declaration of war against Japan (and Germany). Many residents recalled the moment matter-of-

---

<sup>10</sup> "Gin and Cislini Give C of C Statements on Alisal Consolidation," *Salinas Californian*, June 12, 1963, 1.

<sup>11</sup> Interview by Carol Lynn McKibben (by phone) with Everett Alvarez, August 24, 2018

<sup>12</sup> The term "Nikkei" refers to anyone of Japanese descent.

factly. According to one resident, who was a child at the time, “We had gone to church. After church my cousins and I were sent up to a little candy store and we heard the Japs had bombed Pearl Harbor. Obviously they were the enemies.”<sup>13</sup> It was “obvious” to all that the “they” included Japanese nationals living in Salinas who had nothing to do with Pearl Harbor as well as Japanese American citizens--men, women, children, young and old people alike--who lived and worked in the community as friends, neighbors and fellow countrymen since the 1890s.

It was as though they evaporated in plain sight. As shown in earlier chapters, Nikkei in Salinas integrated themselves into every aspect of Salinas’s community life by 1940, but it was always tenuous. Admired as much as they were resented and envied for their collective work ethic that made them innovative and successful agriculturalists (despite restrictive legislation), and as outstanding scholars and athletes in the local schools, Nikkei individually and collectively became embedded in Salinas’s complex community culture. Japanese cultural celebrations and events made the front pages of the newspapers and were routinely treated with the same respect and admiration as other groups. Not only that, but the newspapers regularly printed positive stories about visits from Japanese dignitaries and officials who sought to calm fears about Japanese aggression in the Asia-Pacific region, which Salinas’s residents appeared to accept at face value, even when Japan invaded Manchuria in 1931 and in the aftermath of the infamous Rape of Nanking in July 1937. “We always got along fairly well with our fellow townsfolk,” recalled James Abe, a former lettuce grower and long-standing Salinas resident who returned from

---

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Bill Ramsey by Carol McKibben, October 15, 2018, Salinas



incarceration to become harvesting chief for Bud Antle, a large shipper and important member of the Grower Shippers Association (GSA).<sup>14</sup>

However, actions by the Japanese such as the Rape of Nanking were well publicized and influenced Americans' perceptions of Japan as an aggressor long before Pearl Harbor, including in the minds of many Issei.<sup>15</sup> When a former picture bride, Nami Hashimoto returned to Japan with her husband's ashes in 1940, she refused to register her two youngest sons with the Japanese government citing her opposition to Japanese aggression in the Pacific and specifically the Rape of Nanking to explain her reluctance, even though her two eldest sons were already living in Japan, registered as Japanese citizens, and enlisted in the Japanese military. One returned with her and the other was killed in action fighting for Japan during the war.<sup>16</sup>

Many Nikkei dismissed or overlooked evidence of racism directed against them and usually sided with growers and shippers (mostly whites) in labor disputes, even as tenant farmers and laborers. As shown earlier, although Nikkei maintained membership in the GSA, white members raised the specter of enforcing the Alien Land Act behind their backs as a means of preventing Nikkei farmers from claiming newly available farmland (even as tenants) for lucrative lettuce production.

---

<sup>14</sup> Yasuo W. Abuko, "Henry Hibino...mayor of Salinas," *The Nichi Bei Times* January 1, 1974, Henry Hibino collection.

<sup>15</sup> The term Issei is used to describe the first generation of Japanese immigrants. Due to racial restriction in immigration policy, Issei were deemed ineligible for naturalization and citizenship. See Mae Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 37.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Mas and Marcia Hashimoto by Carol McKibben, Watsonville, March 27, 2019.

One notable exception to the mistreatment of Salinas's of Nikkei at the height of anti-Japanese fervor came in the form of one Gertrude Waterman, Dean of Girls at Salinas high school. According to her friend and contemporary, Ruth Andresen, "She was very determined that the Japanese children going to graduate in 1942. They were all out at the Rodeo grounds so she got all the caps and gowns and diplomas and handed them out. It was very important. I'm not sure she even had the school boards support. She got the principle [Albert M. Davis] to go along with her." Described by Andresen as "A clear thinker, a good decision maker, and a very logical person," Waterman was a formidable figure among Salinas's community of women, considered both "nice" and "practical," and resolute in adhering to a moral compass that would not allow her to disparage or deny the humanity of her Japanese students: "She was willing to be forthright. If something needed to be done she did it. She probably would have told the principal [at Salinas High school in 1942] this is what were going to do and would have set about doing it. She was extremely loyal to her students [including those of Japanese descent]...You don't often use the term noble with respect to a woman but I thought Gertrude Waterman was noble."<sup>17</sup>

Thus, although it might be tempting to see a linear path of racial hatred and exclusion based on later events, the historical relationship between Salinas's Nikkei and non-Japanese people was a complicated mixture of acceptance, admiration, resentment, and apathy. Just like relationships among everyone else in Salinas, the experiences and relationships between Nikkei residents and others depended on gender, class, occupation, and places of residence, but generally Nikkei participated

---

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Ruth Andresen by Carol McKibben, June 28, 2019, Salinas.

fully in the Salinas communal enterprise whatever their citizenship status. Nikkei families interacted intimately with whites, Filipinos, Chinese, and Mexicans especially when they lived on outlying farms and unincorporated areas, but also in integrated neighborhoods between the 1890s and 1941. The 338 Nikkei families in Salinas mostly rented homes although ten families were listed as property owners.<sup>18</sup>

Asian groups (mostly Chinese, Japanese, and Filipinos but also some Sikhs and Koreans) shared boundaries in neighborhoods and patronized one another's stores. They also sought one another out for professional services. Doctors, dentists, accountants and attorneys of Chinese or Filipino descent, for example, depended on Nikkei to support their respective professional practices, and in turn, Nikkei shopkeepers and professionals counted on a clientele from the larger community of Asians more than from whites or other ethnic groups to sustain their businesses.<sup>19</sup>

On the other hand, many Nikkei residents recalled antipathy between Asian groups. Kay (Endo) Masatani's "parents did not allow her to associate with the Chinese. Likewise, the Chinese families did not encourage their children to associate with the Japanese. [Masatani] had a Chinese childhood friend, Helen Lee. After they left Chinatown, on the way to Lincoln School they would walk together and be friends at school. Until they returned to Chinatown when they no longer spoke to each other. Their parents did want them to associate. [Masatani] went to Japanese School at the Buddhist Temple after school Monday, Wednesday and Friday. Along

---

<sup>18</sup> Source: 1930-1940 City Directories for Salinas.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Dr. Byron Chong and Alfred Fong, Chinese Christian Church, Salinas, March 19, 2019; See also Jean Vengua, <https://voicesofmontereybay.org/2019/05/02/stories-of-chinatown/> for an overview of the ways Asian communities in Salinas interacted personally and professionally over time in Salinas.

the way to school she stopped at Aki Toya Store...to buy senbei (Japanese rice cracker treats). Since her family had businesses, she was able to take lessons in tap dance and piano. [She] played with other Japanese children at Central Park or Urabe Park.”<sup>20</sup>

After Pearl Harbor, however, and regardless of class, gender, or citizenship status, all Nikkei appeared as imminent dangers to the security of the nation. In the wake of the attack by Japanese fighters in Hawaii, and in the hysterical aftermath that followed, Asian, Mexican, and white Salinas residents no longer hid their resentment and fear of Nikkei but supported Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s Executive order, 9066, issued on February 19, 1942, which called for the compulsory incarceration of all Nikkei, citizens or not. Within two months of that order, over 120,000 Nikkei were forced out of their homes and businesses up and down the West coast, even though over 70 percent of them were American citizens. They had less than a week to dispose of all of their property. One survivor of the incarceration commented on the sense of extreme isolation Nikkei felt at that moment: “The only national group that supported us were the American Friends, the Quakers, not even the ACLU (American Civil Liberties Union).”<sup>21</sup>

In rare instances non-Japanese Americans took responsibility for safeguarding Nikkei property. The Hashimoto family had the good fortune to retain their family property with help from a local attorney: “We boarded up our house and put our car on blocks and stored it in the garage with our appliances. We had a

---

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Kay Endo Masatani, by Larry Hirahara March 3, 2019, Salinas.

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Mas and Marcia Hashimoto by Carol McKibben, Watsonville, March 27, 2019.

refrigerator and other appliances. We owned our house. We didn't sell it. We gave the keys to a trusted friend, Stacy Irwin." Irwin paid the property taxes on the home with money she received from the Hashimoto family who sent it to her out of the paltry salary they earned working in the camps, thus saving their home and property from seizure by the federal government for nonpayment of taxes as so many other Nikkei experienced. She also took care of young Mas Hashimoto's dog, which she sent to the Poston camp with help from Greyhound bus drivers, a circumstance Hashimoto recalled with gratitude decades later. It meant a lot to an imprisoned child to have the comfort of his pet.<sup>22</sup> It was more common for families to lose everything, however, even after their neighbors promised to safeguard their possessions. According to Marcia Hashimoto, whose family lived in Woodland, California when Pearl Harbor occurred, "The Woodland, California sheriff told my parents to store everything in a warehouse and he would guard it. But then he died of a heart attack. When my family returned from Amache camp, everything was gone. We had nothing left."<sup>23</sup>

Salinas's residents turned on their Japanese neighbors as a response to the news of the capture of 108 Salinas members of Company C, 194<sup>th</sup> Tank Battalion stationed in Manila who were then forced to join the infamous "Bataan Death March" (only 47 of the Salinas guardsmen survived).<sup>24</sup> Although most Salinas

---

<sup>22</sup> Interview with Mas and Marcia Hashimoto by Carol McKibben, Watsonville, March 27, 2019.

<sup>23</sup> Interview with Marcia Hashimoto by Carol McKibben, Watsonville, March 27, 2019.

<sup>24</sup> The march began on April 9, 1942 and was characterized by extreme abuse and deprivation of Filipino and Americans captives on the part of Japanese soldiers. After the war, the march was judged a war crime by the Allied military commission.

residents understood that the Battalion was stationed in Manila, news about the death march did not leak into the press (and public knowledge) until after the end of the war, so hostility against Japanese cannot be attributed to that event alone.<sup>25</sup> Once the news of the Bataan Death March came out, however, it only intensified Salinas's residents' collective scorn for Nikkei and opposition to their return to the Salinas community in the postwar. According to a Japanese community newspaper, the *Nichi Bel Times*, in something of an understatement, "The fact that a federalized California National Guard artillery unit was stationed in the Philippines when World War II broke out and many of the men were captured on Bataan didn't help the feeling back home against Japanese Americans."<sup>26</sup>

The event of Pearl Harbor had the opposite impact on Filipinos. When the Japanese attacked Manila on the same day as Pearl Harbor, any doubts about Filipinos as loyal Americans disappeared. Filipinos were welcomed (even celebrated) on the Monterey Peninsula. Special training grounds were built for the Philippine Scouts at nearby Fort Ord, who joined their American counterparts in training there. The Philippine Naturalization Act passed Congress in May 1942 allowing Filipinos to become U.S. citizens, which they did en masse. The Fort Ord military newspaper, *The Panorama*, included a special section for Filipinos, known as "FILIPINOTES" that highlighted their exploits as brave fighters in the common cause of defeating Japan, and also informed Americans about Filipino culture and

---

<sup>25</sup> Colleen Finegan, "Incarceration for Profit: The Role of Central California Farmers in the Incarceration of the Japanese," unpublished paper, private collection, Finegan Family, August 1, 1986, 4.

<sup>26</sup> Yasuo W. Abuko, "Henry Hibino...mayor of Salinas," *The Nichi Bei Times* January 1, 1974, Henry Hibino collection.

community life.<sup>27</sup> Some Filipinos befriended Nikkei neighbors and friends before incarceration and after the war, but most did not and remained solidly identified with the American community united against all Nikkei, citizens or not.<sup>28</sup>

The experience of incarceration disrupted life in the most profound ways for Nikkei residents of Salinas. There is no evidence of organized resistance to the Executive Order on the part of Salinas's Nikkei community, who, with notable exceptions, appeared to have complied with sadness. Those who objected were referred to as "No-No's," "Resisters" and "Pro-Japan," within the confines of the camps. Nikkei who wished to show solidarity as loyal Americans saw the objectors as a cause of tension. When the War Relocation Authority separated the objectors from the rest of the prisoners and sent them off to a separate camp at Tule Lake, one survivor recalled, "We were happy when the pro-Japan group was sent to Tule Lake so we loyal Americans could get on with the war effort, [which included] selling war bonds."<sup>29</sup>

The vast majority of Nikkei remained loyal to the United States in spite of the banishment and ostracism they experienced. Marcia Hashimoto recalled that her parent's adamant loyalty included a clear understanding that the treatment of Nikkei was morally wrong, unconstitutional, and a lesson to their children to remain civically vigilant: "My mother wanted us to remember this incarceration and understand that we are American citizens and have the right of protection under the

---

<sup>27</sup> Carol Lynn McKibben, *Racial Beachhead: Diversity and Democracy in a Military Town*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012, 56-57.

<sup>28</sup> Interviews by Larry Hirahara with Kay Masatani, Sus Ikeda, and Mae Skasagawa March 3, 2019, Salinas.

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Mas and Marcia Hashimoto by Carol McKibben, Watsonville, March 27, 2019.

Constitution. We should not let this happen to anyone else.”<sup>30</sup> Although most survivors did not join actively in the Civil Rights movement on the Monterey Peninsula, championed largely by African Americans from nearby Fort Ord and Seaside, they clearly sympathized with its aims.<sup>31</sup>

It was striking that the Armory, located right in the middle of Salinas’s downtown became one of the most important registration centers in California. The famous Salinas Rodeo grounds were also one of the most significant detention centers and departure points in California for Nikkei sent to incarceration camps. Yet, this huge event right in the middle of the city was largely ignored in the local press. The Minutes of the Grower-Shippers Association noted on June 22, 1943 that a Dr. Lechner would “speak at the Salinas High School at 8:15 on the Japanese situation,” but did not indicate the content of his talk, or identify who Dr. Lechner was or represented.<sup>32</sup> Bill Ramsey recalled the matter-of-fact acceptance of Japanese incarceration among Salinas’s residents and its small blip on the radar of the community: “They were our neighbors before the war. Then the war happened. Then they were our neighbors after the war.”<sup>33</sup> Nine years old at the time, Ramsey could not have fully appreciated the tremendous suffering, the tension, and continued animosity directed at his former neighbors and friends, especially when some returned to Salinas in the postwar years.

---

<sup>30</sup> Interview with Mas and Marcia Hashimoto by Carol McKibben, Watsonville, March 27, 2019

<sup>31</sup> Carol Lynn McKibben, *Racial Beachhead: Diversity and Democracy in a Military Town*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012.

<sup>32</sup> Regular Meeting of Shippers,” June 22, 1943, Minutes, 1943-1949, Grower-Shippers Association basement.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Bill Ramsey by Carol McKibben, October 15, 2018, Salinas.



Mas Hashimoto understood all of it. Like Bill Ramsey, he was a child at the time of Pearl Harbor and he remembered in painful detail his older brother's death at the Salinas Assembly Center, which he referred to as "our first prison."<sup>34</sup> Hardly a neutral way station, it was a terrifying place for its Nikkei inmates who had absolutely no idea what would happen to them or how long they would be away from their homes and businesses. Hashimoto's mother had recently been widowed. She had to manage on her own as a single parent with three underage sons, a situation that was emotionally agonizing for her. One of her sons, Noriyuki, aged 13, suffered a severe head injury while playing baseball at the Salinas detention center, but "didn't want to worry [my] mother so he went under the barracks and quietly died...we left his ashes in the mortuary in Salinas. The first thing we did when we returned was [to] pick up his ashes for burial."<sup>35</sup> Noriyuki was obviously aware of his mother's anguish in finding herself in the Assembly Center, and was willing to "quietly die" rather than add to her troubles by complaining about his injury. This tragedy, ignored in the local press, represented a dark symbol of how Salinas's larger community rendered Nikkei lives inconsequential and invisible after Pearl Harbor.

Mas Hashimoto vividly remembered life in Poston, Arizona where he spent the next three years and three months of his childhood. "We lost our privacy along with our civil rights. Our family of six lived in a room that was 20 x 25 (feet). We ate dust. We lived with dust. Privacy was nonexistent. We did have flush toilets though.

---

<sup>34</sup> The center was constructed on the Salinas Rodeo Grounds at the north end of Salinas. It is a California Registered Historical Landmark, No. 934.

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Mas and Marcia Hashimoto by Carol McKibben, Watsonville, March 27, 2019.

[By contrast, the Salinas Assembly Center had outhouses, which women and men were forced to share]. After we were there for a year, they [military authorities] must have thought ‘Well we should have education for the children.’ Hashimoto described how the War Relocation Authority hired local teachers to teach the incarcerated children, “The [teachers’] pay was better [in the camps] than in the local area [so] white teachers came to teach us...most of them were kind and considerate.” He emphasized the creativity of incarcerated Japanese in making the best of a terrible situation. Inmates found building materials in the “wood piles [leftover from building barracks] and made furniture.” Marcia Hashimoto kept a woodcarving made from scrap wood, a gift to her parents from a friend who was also incarcerated in Amache, Colorado. In several camps, incarcerated women made brooches from seashells they collected and presented them as gifts of appreciation to family members, friends, and the medical staff.<sup>36</sup>

Incarcerated Nikkei installed irrigation systems in the camps to grow vegetables to supplement their meager government rations and taught irrigation techniques to Native Americans living on a nearby reservation. Native Americans viewed the plight of the Japanese as similar to their own forced removals and formed a close bond with the incarcerated Nikkei. “They saw what happened to us as the same thing that happened to them,” Hashimoto said.<sup>37</sup>

Nikkei families clearly comprehended the hostility against them that remained in the aftermath of the war. Only 25 of the over 300 original Salinas

---

<sup>36</sup> Interview with Mas and Marcia Hashimoto by Carol McKibben, April 16, 2019, Palo Alto.

<sup>37</sup> Interview with Mas and Marcia Hashimoto by Carol McKibben, Watsonville, March 27, 2019.

Japanese families returned after incarceration when it officially ended in May 1945.<sup>38</sup> The Salinas Chamber of Commerce conducted a poll of local residents to ascertain whether Nikkei survivors ought to return to Salinas. The Salinas community responded with nearly unanimous opposition to the prospect, and sometimes expressed great anger and bitterness against their former neighbors and friends, disregarding all evidence of Nikkei patriotism as well as the fact that most Nikkei were American citizens. The Salinas Chamber questionnaire was widely publicized, creating the (deserved) impression of general hostility for Nikkei in Salinas.<sup>39</sup>

However, a petition signed by 440 Monterey County residents (including John Steinbeck, Jr. and Ed Ricketts), welcomed Nikkei back to the Monterey Peninsula in the name of “democratic values” that called into question the morality and constitutionality of the removal and incarceration of Nikkei in the first place. Noting that the War Department “has authorized all persons of Japanese ancestry whose loyalty has been investigated and attested by the Army or Navy Intelligence or the F.B.I. to return to their homes,” the petition acknowledged that among the returnees “will be veterans of this war and relatives of Americans, who are now fighting for democracy on all our war fronts.” The petition went on to assert that the Nikkei “had made their homes [on the Monterey Peninsula] for many years and had been part of the life of this community. Their sons are making the same sacrifices as our own boys.” Finally, and in upper case for emphasis, the petition asserted that

---

<sup>38</sup> Interview by email with Larry Hirahara, March 3, 2019

<sup>39</sup>Fred McCarger, “Survey of Attitudes of Salinas Citizens Toward Japanese-Americans,” (Salinas: Salinas Chamber of Commerce, 1943).

those Nikkei enlisted in the armed services had shown unquestionable bravery and loyalty to the United States and the U.S. government believed in the absolute loyalty of the families as well: “We the undersigned then believe that it is the privilege and responsibility of this community to cooperate with the national government by insuring [sic] THE DEMOCRATIC WAY OF LIFE TO ALL MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY.” *The Monterey Peninsula Herald*, the main publication for Monterey’s residents published the petition.<sup>40</sup>

Those few Nikkei who returned to Salinas initially found some refuge in a hostel located at the Salinas Japanese Presbyterian Church located on Lincoln Avenue, which James Abe, a Buddhist leader, and Reverend Thomas Woodbury Grubbs, a Presbyterian minister, co-directed in an effort to re-integrate survivors back into the community. “We heard rumors that an attempt would be made to keep us from opening,” Abe remembered, “A city health department officer came and told us we couldn’t have people living at the church as toilet and bathing facilities would be inadequate. He told us he would be forced to order the hostel closed if we violated the city health laws.” Public health officers were not alone in their opposition to the hostel. “Several others who said they were city officers also inspected the place and told us not to open,” Abe explained. However, both Reverend Grubbs and Abe stood firm in supporting Salinas’s returning Nikkei in offering transitional housing: “[Reverend Grubbs] said he wasn’t convinced that officials would move in to block what was clearly an emergency situation, but if they did he was perfectly willing to go to jail.”

---

<sup>40</sup> “Democratic Life for All” *Monterey Peninsula Herald*, May 11, 1945, p.9.

Three men who had been prisoners of war in Bataan and also high school friends of James Abe, approached him about the community's resistance to the hostel at Salinas Japanese Presbyterian Church: "They had heard some talk about [people] coming around to the hostel and preventing 'them' from returning. They said 'Jim, if anyone comes around and lifts a hand to bother you, you just call us up and let us know. We'll take care of them.' Fortunately [according to Abe] no one else came and the hostel was open, housing people until everyone was settled. "I never told anyone about those fellows visiting me because I didn't want to put them on the spot. Everything wasn't rosy in those days, but it was a wonderful thing those men did in giving me their support."<sup>41</sup>

These few positive examples of welcome hardly dispelled the overwhelming hostility to Nikkei who returned to Salinas after the war. Many Nikkei who had been incarcerated found some refuge in San Jose.<sup>42</sup> Many others originally from Monterey and Salinas regrouped and established a new community in nearby Seaside. They formed small businesses, usually in landscaping or gardening rather than engage in either farming, or, as was the case of the Monterey families, in fishing, which was their primary means of livelihood before the incarceration.

Seaside, adjacent to Fort Ord, more easily incorporated Nikkei and other minorities (especially those in multiracial families) into its community culture in the immediate postwar years. Fort Ord (and its affiliate community, Seaside) was designated as a "Compassionate Duty" military base to signify that it was a more

---

<sup>41</sup> Yasuo W. Abuko, "Henry Hibino...mayor of Salinas," *The Nichi Bei Times* January 1, 1974, Henry Hibino collection.

<sup>42</sup> Interview with Sus Ikeda by Larry Hirahara, March 3, 2019, Salinas.

welcoming destination for interracial and minority families than other bases or places in the United States at midcentury. Thus, mostly black but also other minority and multiracial families were deliberately stationed there, creating a far more diverse town with integrated neighborhoods well in advance of towns or cities in the nation as a whole, but also in many ways similar to the more mixed race and integrated populations in military towns elsewhere in the country and abroad.<sup>43</sup> The postwar Nikkei community in Seaside included interracial couples and families, particularly Japanese women married to American military personnel (often minorities themselves) who had been stationed in Japan.

Those Nikkei families who returned to Salinas focused on rebuilding their lives and supporting their elderly Issei family members. They resumed educations and found employment where they could. One teenager, alone in Salinas, “had no place to stay. [So] she became a House Girl. Like a nanny, she cooked, cleaned and took care of a [white] family’s children. She was also attending Salinas High at the time. She felt discrimination [at school]. Only... 6-7 Asian girls...would associate with her. But she graduated and later completed business school. The family of the house she stayed at had family friends that would often visit. Those friends were a family that was affected by the Bataan Death March. When this family visited, she was told to hide in the back room and not come out.”<sup>44</sup>

Nikkei survivors generally repeated their earlier settlement patterns of living in Salinas proper and in integrated neighborhoods. According to one longtime

---

<sup>43</sup> Carol Lynn McKibben, *Racial Beachhead: Diversity and Democracy in a Military Town*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012.

<sup>44</sup> Interview with Kay Masatani by Larry Hirahara, March 3, 2019, Salinas.

Salinas resident: “Most of [the Japanese] lived [within] Salinas [city limits] when the families came back. They were agriculture folks,” suggesting that Nikkei who chose Salinas also returned to positions as tenant farmers and employers rather than field workers.<sup>45</sup>

During wartime, non-Japanese Salinas’s residents focused their attention and energy on the building of the first USO in the United States.<sup>46</sup> The establishment of the USO drew soldiers and residents of the larger Monterey Peninsula to Salinas, not just for entertainment but for shopping and business too. Located in the heart of city center on Lincoln Avenue, Mayor Leach declared a city holiday to celebrate the dedication on December 9, 1941, which happened just two days after Pearl Harbor.<sup>47</sup> “Because of our proximity to Fort Ord it was quite a feather in the cap of Salinas. We were just a small agricultural town, so having the first USO became an important indicator that we were on the map,” recalled one longtime Salinas resident whose family roots began at the turn of the last century.<sup>48</sup> The USO quickly became the social focal point for Salinas’s residents: “Young ladies were invited to attend the dances and they were encouraged by church groups and school groups to do so. They were carefully were chaperoned by the group that had organized them.

---

<sup>45</sup> Interview by Carol Lynn McKibben (by phone) with Everett Alvarez, August 24, 2018; Casey Sakasegawa Wong (by phone) September 17, 2018; Salinas City directories, 1940-1950. Nikkei worked to overturn the law that kept them as tenant farmers rather than landowners in their own right according to The Alien Land Law which was challenged in the post war era but not overturned until the California Supreme Court did so in *Fujii v. California* (1952).

<sup>46</sup> This facility was called The Salinas United Service Organization Clubhouse and was the first government-constructed permanent USO center in the United States.

<sup>47</sup> Robert B. Johnston, *Salinas: From Village to City* (Salinas: Fidelity savings & Loan Corporation Publication, 1980) 23.

<sup>48</sup> Interview with Ruth Andresen by Carol McKibben, June 28, 2019, Salinas.

Women in the various church organizations would accompany them and while they danced with soldiers stationed at Fort Ord, the older women served refreshments. Everything was kept very proper. <sup>49</sup>Multiple announcements of wedding engagements between soldiers and residents appeared regularly in the *Salinas Californian*.

More concerning to Salinas's residents, the area around Lake Street on the outskirts of town proliferated with houses of prostitution, gambling parlors, bars, and liquor. The high rates of sexually transmitted diseases regularly announced by the Monterey County Department of Public Health showed that for better and for worse Fort Ord impacted every city in the county. One report issued in July 1944 noted a measles epidemic with 22 cases reported that month, but syphilis came in second with 15 new cases and gonorrhea third with 11 new cases, far surpassing any other communicable disease in Monterey County, even when a serious typhoid epidemic broke out in the labor camps located nearby. Equally concerning, local police department struggled with the issue of "victory girls." In a meeting in Salinas celebrating the fourth year of the presence of the USO in Salinas, Judge C. Lloyd Colby informed the group of the work of Traveler's Aid in assisting young women drawn to the Salinas USO. He reported that he saw "8-10...cases per week...girls from 18 to 27 years of age [in his courtroom], who follow soldiers from their hometowns are without funds and often have to be taken into police custody for their own protection...Whenever possible Travelers Aid takes responsibility in sending the girls to their homes or takes a hand in rehabilitation of those who wish

---

<sup>49</sup> Interview with Ruth Andresen by Carol McKibben, June 28, 2019, Salinas.



to go to work and become useful citizens.”<sup>50</sup> Thus, the support for soldiers stationed on the Peninsula that generated widespread good feelings in the city of Salinas through the USO had some obvious negative impacts too.

Economically, the entire county benefited from federal attention and largesse, and Salinas’s leaders took advantage of it as a way of enriching the city’s coffers and expanding the city’s footprint. However, as a place with an agricultural economic base, the primary interaction between local and federal government agencies dealt with the sales and marketing of lettuce, carrots, and sugar from sugar beets among the multitude of products grown throughout the Salinas Valley under the auspices of the GSA, who were also important members of Salinas Chamber of Commerce.

Although the GSA operated haphazardly throughout the 1930s, everything changed with the war. Suddenly, they organized and strategized. Almost every meeting involved members reporting on how to deal collectively with a host of new state and federal agencies and the challenges of agricultural production in wartime from prices for crops, to wage rates and labor, to production, transportation, and marketing of agricultural products.

#### FROM CHAOS TO CONTROL: THE GROWER-SHIPPERS ASSOCIATION IN WAR AND POSTWAR SALINAS

After several strikes by mostly Filipino fieldworkers in the late 1920s, growers, shippers, and packers responded by creating their own version of a union (association), in which they might negotiate collectively with workers associated

---

<sup>50</sup> “USO Council Enters Fourth Year in Salinas, Making Bigger Plan for Future,” *Salinas Californian*, January 26, 1944, 2.

with the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). In fact, they even referred to themselves as a “union.”<sup>51</sup> The GSA formed in 1930 and incorporated in 1935. However, as shown earlier, the GSA of the 1930s hardly constituted a powerful or even unified force. Infighting dominated almost every meeting as members divided in their responses to labor issues as well as over how best to transport, market, and price their crops, frequently undercutting and undermining one another. This chaos within the GSA led in part to the constant strikes and threats to strike throughout the 1930s, as workers could not depend on them as anything like a trustworthy negotiating partner. The minutes revealed that GSA members disagreed amongst themselves over everything from whether to hire a marketing broker to what any given crop was worth to how much to pay workers, whether field laborers (who were subdivided according to task and expertise) or packing shed workers (who were subdivided by gender and by wages determined hourly or by piece rate). Some members, such as Bruce Church, stood out as advocates for labor, endearing themselves to workers. When Church passed away suddenly in 1958, former workers including many who had been part of the Bracero program, also known as the Mexican National Program, attended en masse (and wept openly) at his funeral.<sup>52</sup>

---

<sup>51</sup> GSA usually referred to itself as an “association” but not always. Concerning the payment for dues for membership in GSA Bruce Church announced the following: “If dues for the first quarter of 1943 have not been paid, the member is not in good standing to maintain his membership in the union [meaning GSA].” July 14, 1943

<sup>52</sup> The Minutes of meeting from the GSA consistently referred to Mexican temporary workers as Mexican nationals. The term Bracero is never used.

Growers, shippers, and packers contributed to the expansion and development of Salinas during the war and postwar with philanthropic works supporting schools, libraries, and most importantly, marshaling forces and raising substantial funds to construct Salinas Valley Memorial Hospital. They also reached out to nearby universities such as the University of California, Davis and Stanford to improve technology in growing and harvesting produce. It was during this postwar era that GSA members organized a research committee to create partnership projects with “various scientists from the University of California” who established sites in Salinas to experiment with new, more efficient technologies growing and harvesting produce that might reduce costs, especially for labor.

Throughout the war years and into the 1950s, the GSA set up a formal public relations program to counter what was perceived as a negative image.<sup>53</sup> It became formidable and strategic, connecting to power centers in Washington, D.C., Sacramento, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. Minutes from monthly meetings during these transitional decades recorded frequent visits by designated GSA representatives to these centers of government, and active involvement in policy-making with important agencies such as the Office of Price Administration (O.P.A.) concerning price setting and rations during the World War II years and with the Immigration Service concerning labor negotiations with Mexico throughout the decade. In one meeting held shortly after the end of WWII, then GSA Secretary Jack E. Bias reported “There were over 500 bills effecting [sic] agriculture in the

---

<sup>53</sup> Minutes, GSA, June 25, 1954

legislative field this past year.”<sup>54</sup> Although GSA members concluded that it was in their best interest to work with (rather than against) state and federal government agencies and legislators in creating regulations that impacted them, they nonetheless remained deeply suspicious of government control, especially with regard to labor: “C.B. Moore talked [to the GSA] on Mexican labor and the chances of securing such labor for another season...he felt agriculture was going to have to fight control as... Washington wanted to control agriculture so long as the war lasted and even after the war was over if possible.”<sup>55</sup> This became a recurring theme throughout the 1940s and 1950s as tensions over federal and state involvement in labor issues increased. Again and again, GSA minutes showed that the group regarded any federal or state regulation over labor, production costs, or transportation as “really a regulation of profits,” and because of that perception of government as a sinister force determined to control them, the group believed that they needed to remain vigilant.<sup>56</sup> More concerning, the GSA routinely sent one of its members to Mexico City to negotiate directly with “officials in Mexico City in regard to Mexican nationals,”<sup>57</sup> an action which appeared to go behind the back of the federal government and was quite possibly illegal.

The membership of GSA had been haphazard during the 1930s, but membership “more than doubled [between] 1941 and 1946 [from] 23 members to 52.”<sup>58</sup> By 1949, the GSA included 100 percent of all growers, shippers, and packers

---

<sup>54</sup> Minutes, Grower Shippers Association June 12, 1946

<sup>55</sup> Minutes, Grower-Shippers Association October 7, 1943.

<sup>56</sup> Minutes, Grower Shippers Association, December 7, 1944

<sup>57</sup> Minutes, Grower Shippers Association May 16, 1944

<sup>58</sup> Minutes, Grower Shippers Association June 12, 1946

in Salinas and Salinas Valley. The association grew ever more organized throughout the war and postwar years. In fact, the GSA created several committees, each focused on a particular problem or issue facing the group. There were committees dealing only with marketing issues, problems of securing “shook” (wooden packing box material) at reasonable prices, and committees focused only on ice, and only on traffic or on transportation. One committee dealt specifically with packing shed worker issues and a separate one handled issues concerning field workers. One committee concentrated entirely on legislation and policy-making at the federal level; one or two of its members made frequent trips to Washington, D.C. to lobby on behalf of the GSA and then to reported back to members to explain policy decisions to the larger body. The minutes are filled with these committee reports for the 1940s and 1950s. Furthermore, the GSA insisted on a united front in everything from facing off the federal government to labor disputes: “The purpose [of GSA] being to bring the buyers and shippers closer together for the purpose of having a mutual understanding and enhancing the cooperative attitude of the industry.”<sup>59</sup>

The Salinas GSA made sure that it coordinated policy, especially with regard to labor, with associations of growers and shippers in Arizona, Texas, and the Imperial Valley. At the annual business meeting held at the Cominos Hotel in June 1945, for example, the packing house labor committee reported on contract negotiations with the C.I.O. set to expire on December 1 of that year. “Contracts were also expiring in the Imperial Valley, Yuma, and Phoenix districts. It was then decided that joint negotiations with other districts might prove fruitful...the negotiations

---

<sup>59</sup> Minutes, Grower Shippers Association June 15, 1944

resulted in a contract uniform to the Imperial Valley, Yuma, and the Salinas-Watsonville-Hollister districts.” The Salinas group took credit for standing firm against concessions from the other districts: “Your committee feels that it prevented the employers in some districts from granting most anything the Union asked for in order to keep their crop moving.”<sup>60</sup> This kind of coordination with the Imperial Valley and districts in Arizona over wages but also over transportation and marketing became routine practice by the 1950s. Representatives from grower-shipper organizations in Texas also made routine visits and presented reports to the Salinas GSA.

By the 1940s, the GSA no longer disputed agricultural workers’ rights to belong to unions, but remained deeply suspicious of them as cutting into profits with wage demands, particularly for overtime, and for impeding operations with demands for workers’ breaks and time off, especially during busy harvest seasons. The association lobbied hard for the passage of the 1947 Taft-Hartley Act and any federal or state measure that might curtail unions’ power. However, some GSA members countered that sentiment with efforts to accommodate union activism such as in 1944 when Bruce Church proposed a resolution “that no one work over eight hours before allowing a 2-hour dinner hour and opportunity to vote [for issues related to the union],” which passed unanimously.<sup>61</sup> After one meeting in December 1945, Church advocated a pay raise for packing house workers of 15 percent and urged his fellow GSA members in Salinas to accept the deal.<sup>62</sup> Church and his fellow

---

<sup>60</sup> Minutes, Grower Shippers Association, June 15, 1945.

<sup>61</sup> Minutes, Grower Shippers Association, May 16, 1944

<sup>62</sup> Minutes, Grower Shippers Association December 3, 1945

GSA member Frank Kellogg also advocated for wage increases of 15 percent for field labor a few months later “which was a substantial rise and required approval by the California Wage Board.” In order to afford increased labor costs, GSA member Art Sbrana (who had previously argued against Bruce Church on labor issues, but by the 1940s also supported higher wages), suggested requesting that O.P.A. allow “price ceilings on highly perishable [crops] be lifted as soon as possible.”<sup>63</sup>

Yet, in the immediate postwar era it was clear that growers had grown impatient and mistrustful, particularly with the CIO, which represented shed and field workers: “Personnel ...representing the shed union has not proved to be trustworthy. They have consistently refused to submit issues to arbitration as provided in the contract.” By contrast, truckers represented by the Teamsters were more to GSA liking, “The Teamsters union, while difficult to deal with, adheres to the contract when it is signed.”<sup>64</sup> Still, growers showed support for unions too. They routinely offered time off for workers to attend union meetings: “The manager announced to those present [at the monthly GSA meeting] that the C.I.O. was to hold a mass meeting next Monday, June 15<sup>th</sup>, and it was his recommendation that the crews of the various sheds should be released from their work not later than 4:00p.m. in order that representation of the union membership should be available for the meeting.”<sup>65</sup>

The GSA minutes frequently alluded to the Mexican National Program, but never used the term “Bracero” in their meeting minutes. The program, started in

---

<sup>63</sup> Minutes, Grower Shippers Association March 4, 1946

<sup>64</sup> Minutes, Grower Shipper Association, October 15, 1951

<sup>65</sup> Minutes, Grower Shipper Association, June 11, 1953.

1942 as an effort to replace native-born American workers who had enlisted in military service during World War II. The program brought a new population of workers into Salinas, but unlike their Filipino, Mexican, and Dust Bowl predecessors, they were explicitly left out of the life of the city. Mexican nationals who became part of the Bracero Program worked in the fields on a temporary basis to get the crops in, but had to return to Mexico afterward. They did not have standing as immigrants to follow a path to American citizenship or even permanent residency. Controversial from its inception until the program ended in 1964, the Bracero program brought noncitizen workers into agriculture not just to fulfill a necessary gap in the labor market due to the loss of workers to military service during wartime, but in the eyes of labor, to undercut wages, reduce the negotiating power of unions and guarantee a labor force without making a commitment to workers' inclusion in the larger American community. Workers were issued temporary "passports" that allowed them access to work but also required that they leave the country when the crop was finished. Braceros were never on a path to citizenship like other international immigrant workers who had been arriving on American shores since the 1600s. That did not mean that some former braceros did not stay. They did. Others returned to the U.S. after an interlude in their home states in Mexico.

During the war and postwar years, growers grew so desperate for reliable labor that they created a special committee headed by J.T. Merrill to take charge of field labor. Merrill engaged in negotiations with both the Mexican government concerning the importation of Mexican workers and with the military concerning



the use of as many as 10,000 German POW's in the field, some put to work growing guayule, discovered in South America and considered a potentially profitable way to grow rubber to support the military.<sup>66</sup> Also under discussion, the GSA considered importing Puerto Rican workers. By 1945, John Jacobs, representing the Western Growers Association in Phoenix reported to the Salinas GSA that "everyone in Washington looked favorably upon the importation of Filipinos from the Philippine Islands but stated that now it was necessary to secure the approval of General MacArthur."<sup>67</sup> Apparently this plan did not pan out because in August 1945 the minutes highlighted that field labor was an ongoing problem: "The foreign labor problem is an important one. All foreign labor must be out of the country by January 1 and if Congress does not pass additional appropriation there will not be any recruitment of Mexican labor and at the moment there seems no other source to obtain field labor."<sup>68</sup> Almost every month GSA members expressed fears about government ending the Mexican National Program that gave them a much-needed workforce. In the early 1950s, GSA members toyed with the idea of importing Filipino contract workers from the Hawaiian Islands to join Braceros and other undocumented, transient workers from Mexico: "The Secretary announced 4,000 or 5,000 alien Filipino laborers available in the Hawaiian Islands for contracting...the bond for these men would be about \$75.00 per head." This compared with the much less costly "\$10.00 per head for transportation" of Mexicans who were part of the

---

<sup>66</sup> Minutes, Grower Shippers Association, February 15, 1944, September 5, 1944, and September 13, 1944.

<sup>67</sup> Minutes, Grower Shippers Association May 10, 1945

<sup>68</sup> Minutes, Grower Shippers Association, August, 24, 1945

Mexican National Program.<sup>69</sup> Growers explicitly stated that the plan for recruitment of Filipinos from Hawaii would give them a competitive edge: “This competition with Mexican Nationals might result in an agreement with Mexico which would give growers a few advantages.”<sup>70</sup> However, after a visit by a GSA member S.V. Christierson to Hawaii, it became clear that it would be “a waste of time [and] practically useless to try to recruit these workers because wages in Hawaii had gone up after the war and unemployment decreased significantly, making it impossible for growers in Salinas to compete. Christierson concluded “To me, our only hope is federal legislation permitting contract workers from the Philippines, Korea, and Japan to come in under bond for a period of 2-3 years.”<sup>71</sup>

Growers also hired Mexican undocumented workers, referred to as “wetbacks” or “wets” to supplement what they feared was an ongoing labor shortage in the postwar years. However, visits to the fields by representatives from United States Government Employment Services (USGE) checking “the extent to which wetbacks are employed with the Mexican Nationals,” alarmed members of the GSA because under the provisions of new legislation, “the Ellender and Poage Bills [made] it a felony to employ wets.” Instead of ending the practice of employing noncitizen workers, “a group of grower representatives [lobbied] to have the felony provision amended to make it a misdemeanor rather than a felony.”<sup>72</sup>

The minutes of the GSA reflected members’ conflicting feelings about the use of this transient labor force. At times they perceived and feared labor shortages, but

---

<sup>69</sup> Minutes, Grower Shipper Association, February 8, 1951

<sup>70</sup> Minutes, Grower Shipper Association, October 15, 1951

<sup>71</sup> Minutes, Grower Shipper Association, February 7, 1952

<sup>72</sup> Minutes, Grower Shipper Association, May 23, 1951

this was countered by worries that if Mexican Nationals were “brought in too early...there would be an abundance of labor,” which would leave growers in the position of supporting workers (or abandoning them to unknown fates). “It was also pointed out that there was some danger that the border [with Mexico] might be closed leaving workers stranded on the American side.”<sup>73</sup>

The presence of transient Mexican field workers alarmed Salinas’s citizens of Mexican descent as well as workers of any race or ethnicity who rightly perceived them as a threat to unions’ power to negotiate good wages and working conditions. Most Mexican Americans in Salinas generally resented the presence of these workers, who were men isolated from the cultural constraints of family or community. Supposedly, Mexico guaranteed that the men sent over to participate in this program not to be subjected to discrimination of any sort, including racial segregation in housing, and were to be paid the prevailing wage. However, growers who employed Braceros determined their wages, not American labor unions. Braceros were routinely housed apart from the community in racially segregated labor camps near fields. The 1949 Agricultural Act codified the program and the 1951 Migrant Labor Agreement (Public Law 78) further strengthened and legitimized it. The GSA in Salinas supported both pieces of legislation that guaranteed agriculture 200,000 Mexican national workers every year. Between

---

<sup>73</sup> Minutes, Grower Shipper Association, March 15, 1951

1942 and 1964 some 4.6 million Braceros entered the United States to work in agriculture throughout California and the southwest.<sup>74</sup>

Still, Braceros made an impact on Salinas even though they formed a group intentionally marginalized both by their employers and by Salinas's Mexican American community. Diana Lizbeth Soria, a resident of Salinas and descendant of Braceros on both sides of her family, recalled her grandfather's life and mostly positive experience as a Bracero:

When I was younger I remember my grandfather talking about his travels to the U.S. as a Bracero. My grandfather Margarito Soria was born on October 11, 1930 in a small *ranchero* town located somewhere in the country side Sierra, which is Spanish for range of mountains. This little town was called El Moral, Zacatecas Mexico. This small town he called home was not even considered a pueblo, because it was so small, but it was still a beautiful place to live. You would feel the fresh early morning breeze to the sound of crickets at night. This was also known to be a small agricultural countryside town. It only had between 20 to 25 families living in this little community, and to present day it is now a ghost town. The nearest pueblo there was Juchipila, Zacatecas, Mexico, which required you to ride your horse down the mountain, then catch a bus if you were lucky to get down there on your horse on time.

At the age of 20 my grandfather had already been married with one child at the time, who happens to be my oldest uncle from my father's side of the family. At this age my grandfather had been contracted as a bracero and took the opportunity to work in the United States, to be able to earn money and provide more for his family. Even though he was only going to be away for a certain period of time, it was still a difficult transition for him not knowing what life was going to like on the other side.

My grandfather took his first step on American soil in the summer of 1950. He had left his small *ranchero* town in Mexico, and through the bracero program they had him imported to work at a cotton farm in El Centro, CA near the border. The farm work wage was only 30 cents per hour. It's hard to believe much hard work they would do and how low the pay wage was for it. My grandfather's second contract was imported to Salinas, CA to work in the lettuce, broccoli, and cauliflower fields. He was there for 6 months, which was how long his contract was.

---

<sup>74</sup> For a thorough analysis of this program see Lori Flores, *Grounds For Dreaming: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants and the California Farmworker Movement* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2016)

Life in Salinas was good for him, braceros did not have to cook their own food, they would have a place where they would give them breakfast, lunch and dinner. There were only 2 braceros that were the same state from Mexico my grandfather is from, Zacatecas. There were about 200 braceros stationed where my grandfather was. They were divided into different groups and a bus would come each morning to take them to their work destination. Each group worked for different growers.

My grandfather describes himself as lucky because his *patron* a Spanish word for boss, made sure the Braceros were in good working conditions under his supervision. Their camps were isolated, which meant that my grandfather did not really go out and get to know the town of Salinas. The most effective way to communicate with my grandmother back home was by writing letters. The relationships my grandfather had and witness other Braceros from different parts of Mexico got along well.

Most Braceros did not associate with Mexican Americans. Mexican Americans who worked in Agriculture saw Braceros as a threat, and refused to communicate with them in Spanish. This made most of the Braceros feel discriminated towards their own people.

Although Diana Soria's grandfather clearly felt ostracized by the Mexican American community of Salinas during his tenure as a Bracero, he returned to settle permanently in Salinas. His family and extended family eventually became a permanent part of the community. By contrast, Diego Ruiz's paternal grandparents experienced extreme hardship as Braceros, but like Diana Soria's family, returned to Salinas, raising their families and integrating into the Mexican American community after their terms as temporary workers ended. According to her grandson, "Herminia Alvarez Ruiz, wife of former Bracero Raymundo Ruiz, remembered the arrival of her husband as he returned from completing his contract in the U.S., 'I did not recognize him, he was very skinny, darker than usual, and was exhausted. I had to ask if it was really him.'"<sup>75</sup> Ruiz's family blamed the Mexican government for the

---

<sup>75</sup> Interview with Herminia Alvarez by Diego Ruiz, July 18, 2016, Salinas.

plight of the Bracero's as much as American growers and the American federal government: "The Mexican government was also to blame. According to the agreement of the program, the government of Mexico withheld 10% of earned income from each Bracero in a special bank account that was never released. The reason for this deduction was to deter possible permanent settlement in the U.S. However, Braceros were never made aware of this "Bank account" and thus, the money mysteriously disappeared for them. In order to catch a ride back to his hometown of Santiguillo in the state of Guanajuato, Reymundo told his wife Herminia that he had to sneak into a train headed for Mexico. Upon his return home, he had only \$15 and a sewing kit for his wife to knit a dress."<sup>76</sup>

Ruiz's maternal grandfather had a similarly negative experience in the Bracero Program, "Eugenio Martinez, who completed consecutive contracts in the U.S., recalled that his bi-weekly checks amounted to \$24. He was supposed to be earning an hourly wage of 50 cents. At the end of a 10-12-hour workday, Eugenio should have had \$5-\$6, and at the end of the 6-day work week he should have made approximately \$30-36, minus the 10% deduction from the Mexican government. My grandfather's bi-weekly check should have been in the range of \$50-55, according to his understanding of his contract. Instead, his paycheck was significantly reduced, which made it very difficult to send any money back home to his family. Hermina

---

<sup>76</sup> Diego Ruiz, "The Exploitation of Our Guests," July, 2016; Lori. A Flores, *Grounds for Dreaming*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 148; Interview by Diego Ruiz with former Bracero, Eugenio Martinez, July 15, 2016.

Ruiz recalls never receiving any money...She wondered what her husband was doing on the other side of the border."<sup>77</sup>

As both of these family stories illustrated, Braceros did not benefit much from their employment in the U.S. The fact that many Mexican American Salinas residents feared and resented the presence of the transient newcomers did not help, as Lori Flores ably documented in her work on Mexican and Mexican American experiences in Salinas and the Salinas Valley. However, on June 17, 1958 tragedy struck and brought Braceros into the collective conscience of Salinas's Mexican American community. A group of fifty Braceros being transported in an illegally converted truck suffered severe injuries and death when someone lit a cigarette, which ignited two gas cans nearby. The truck blew up, killing fourteen of the farmworkers and severely injuring seventeen others. It was the worst non-collision traffic accident in the nation's history according to the National Safety Council. According to Flores, the accident generated widespread indignation among Mexican Americans in Salinas as it showed how callously these men had been treated. The minutes for the GSA showed that GSA members felt little responsibility (or remorse) for the accident: "The Executive Vice President commented briefly on the recent bus accident in Soledad. He introduced Mr. Elliott Freeman, Safety Engineer for the State Compensation Insurance Fund who investigated the accident. It was pointed out that the bus involved was a new one and had nothing wrong with it...The testimony of the Union's Mr. Mitchell was released to the press before it was presented [at a hearing on the accident in Washington, .C. two weeks prior]. It was this publicity

---

<sup>77</sup> Interview by Diego Ruiz with former Bracero, Eugenio Martinez, July 18, 2016, Salinas; Interview by Diego Ruiz with Herminia Alvarez , July 19, 2017, Salinas.

that antagonized our Governor Knight which caused him to urge passage of P.L. 78.”<sup>78</sup>

A few years later, on September 17, 1963, a Southern Pacific train traveling north collided with an unregistered truck transporting fifty-eight Braceros at the intersection of Thomas Ranch Road and Highway 101. This time, thirty-two Braceros were killed and twenty-four others seriously injured. Again, the tragedy garnered national attention and condemnation by Salinas’s Mexican American community for the heartless treatment of Braceros in their midst, according to Flores, but there is little other evidence in the local press to indicate much sympathy or attention to Bracero’s living and working conditions. Mexican Nationals, unlike packing shed workers, remained outside Salinas’s community culture and social life during their tenure as temporary, transient laborers under the Mexican National Program. Yet, when they returned to settle they found acceptance as stakeholders, just like every other group in Salinas.

The National Farm Labor Union led by Ernesto Galarza presented a threat to the GSA because it challenged the Mexican National Program head on. GSA spokesmen urged growers “to instruct their foremen or camp managers to expel any outside agitators who might come into their camps and to instruct their foremen to keep [the GSA] posted on any activities of the National Farm Labor Union.”<sup>79</sup>The National Farm Labor Union (NFLU) nonetheless continued its activism, which distressed GSA members. In meeting minutes for September 1952, for example, a

---

<sup>78</sup> Minutes, Grower Shipper Association, June 26, 1958. Public law 78 was a measure that had been passed in 1951. The GSA Minutes are incorrect in attributing the passage of this measure to the bus accident in 1958.

<sup>79</sup> Minutes, Grower Shipper Association, August 21, 1952



spokesman identified only as “The Manager” reported to the association that “The National Farm Labor Union was still active in the district and that they had sent a contracted Mexican national to the Labor department in Washington with unfounded complaints against growers of bad food, pay, and working conditions. [The Manager] also said that the Work Agreement requires that each payroll check indicate the number of hours worked, rate paid, deductions made and amount in Spanish. The Mexican consul has conceded that if this information is in English it will suffice, but the Manager stated that next year it might be wise to have checks printed in this manner in Spanish.”<sup>80</sup>

The GSA specifically identified Ernesto Galarza, leader of the NFWU as culpable in influencing policy at the national level, which they believed jeopardized the entire contract labor system, something the GSA depended on by the 1950s:

The Shippers of the Salinas Valley have been most fortunate in obtaining a sufficient number of Mexican Nationals to care for their crops and harvest them this year...There has been less difficulty with labor...than for the past several years. But again, let me sound a note of warning...the vegetable workers union is frantically and persistently writing and wiring the Secretary of Labor Tobin, as well as the President, demanding that no more Mexican nationals be imported into Salinas Valley. Why? Because the shed workers feel that [packing lettuce in cartons in fields rather than in packing sheds] a great deal of work has been taken away from them and given to Mexican Nationals in the field.<sup>81</sup>

The GSA believed that without Mexican contract workers, the crops could not be grown or harvested at all because citizen workers who lived in Salinas “do not wish to drive thirty miles to be in the field at 5:00 or 5:30 in the morning and [do]...a tremendous amount of stoop labor...working for only three hours then lay off the

---

<sup>80</sup>Minutes, Grower Shipper Association, September 25, 1952

<sup>81</sup> Minutes, Grower Shipper Association, August 21, 1952

rest of the day.” Furthermore, the hiring of packing native shed workers to do field work would constitute “an absolutely prohibitive cost.” Mexican nationals spent much of their workdays days in “weeding, thinning, [and] tying carrots,” tasks for which citizen packing shed workers would have to be paid union wages. In a specific reference to Ernesto Galarza, the report continued, “Just within the last few days a Mr. Galarza, purporting to represent the field workers has filed a complaint with the U.S. Department of labor...The hearing...is just another effort on the part of the discredited National Farm Labor Union to cause trouble...we sincerely hope that the Labor Department will find no fault [with GSA ] but no one knows, with the present labor-loving administration in Washington, what might happen.”<sup>82</sup>

For their part, packing shed workers protested any form of transient labor. At one board of supervisors meeting over the issue of housing for migrant farmworkers, the Central Labor Council hired attorney J.A. Bardin to argue against building labor camps because this would “invite excessive and cheap labor into this area, where ample labor already exists.”<sup>83</sup> Furthermore, “labor men pointed out that a camp would be an easy target for agitators.” Council President A.S. Doss ratcheted up the argument against the board proceeding with the building of another labor camp for transient fieldworkers threatening that it would “be the focal point of disease, of strikes...its dynamite!”<sup>84</sup>

---

<sup>82</sup> Minutes, Grower Shipper Association, October 16, 1952

<sup>83</sup> Board of Supervisors Meeting Minutes, March 22, 1945, The Alisal, Folder 1, Steinbeck Library Salinas.

<sup>84</sup> Board of Supervisors Meeting Minutes, March 22, 1945, The Alisal, Folder 1, Steinbeck Library Salinas.

The GSA understood from the conflicts of the 1930s how important it was to integrate workers in agriculture as stakeholders in the city. They created a committee to support CIO fundraising for cultural celebrations in Salinas and invested in a wide array of social welfare enterprises, support for increased housing construction, infrastructure, and roads to benefit their workers and the community as a whole. In 1952, growers donated funds to “be used for the erection of a building suitable for a Child Welfare Center,” in nearby Watsonville.<sup>85</sup> The workers in question, mostly working mothers, labored in packing sheds but mostly lived in the unincorporated Alisal (next to Salinas), and needed child care nearby when they were on the job.

Instead of labor rights, the postwar, mostly middle class Mexican American civil rights advocacy group, the Salinas Community Service Organization (CSO) together with CSO’s in other California cities linked to one another largely through the efforts of organizer and activist, Fred Ross, mobilized to challenge discriminatory practices in Salinas’s schools, especially over the issue of bilingual education and also focused on segregation in housing and public health within poorer sections of their community. The tragedies on the highways marked a turning point for the organization in Salinas. These middle class community organizers suddenly made efforts to support workers, even transient Braceros. As

---

<sup>85</sup> Minutes, Grower Shipper Association, July 24, 1952.

middle class residents of the city, engaged in the common purpose of building community but also focused their activist energy on the needs of their own group.<sup>86</sup>

Although experiences varied for Braceros who worked in Salinas during the war and postwar years, laborers in agriculture in Salinas were hardly limited to Mexican nationals but also comprised an array of racial and ethnic groups as they always had, including an increasing number of internal migrants from the American south and southwest (whites, Mexicans and African Americans). They usually started life in labor camps before moving into the least expensive part of Salinas, Alisal, which bound them up in a community all their own, apart from Salinas, but which became an increasingly attractive place as its population grew, almost matching that of Salinas, and as its residents built homes and businesses as they accumulated capital in the years of postwar prosperity. Alisal became part of the larger municipal project designed to solidify Salinas's place on the Central Coast region as the urban hub and to remake the area into a metropolitan center.

#### URBANIZATION AND INDUSTRIALIZATION

"Since 1933 the city has been annexing outlying areas like mad," one report on the economic conditions of Salinas written in 1957 proclaimed, "and it's been difficult to keep up with the changes in the city limits." Russell Scott, Salinas city attorney who presided over the annexations during this important period oversaw as many as thirty-nine separate annexations that increased the city's footprint from 3,123 acres or only about .005 square miles in 1874 to .08 square miles by 1933

---

<sup>86</sup> See Lori Flores, *Grounds For Dreaming: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants and the California Farmworker Movement* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2016), 75-107.

when the city added 51,935 acres of Romie Lane Territory. By 1940, the city was 3.2 square miles and by 1957, seven square miles. Its assessed valuation in 1940 of \$12,606,203 had increased dramatically to \$44 million by 1957 with a population of almost 21,500. The annexation of Alisal on June 12, 1963 increased the population to nearly 50,000 and added another 1.3 square miles to the city footprint.

“It was after the war that people started discovering Salinas. That was when Valley Center was developed. And then second was Sherwood Gardens,” recalled Ruth Andresen, 98, a Stanford educated geologist who arrived in Salinas in 1952 as the wife of a prominent obstetrician. Andresen became a leader among environmental activists in Salinas throughout the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>87</sup> She recalled the development of the city that was always linked to establishing a prestigious place in the region:

“[The Valley Center Development] had been the Nissen Ranch. That was also when the Memorial hospital was built. ...That was a tremendous improvement to have that huge modern new hospital. Bruce Church [and other members of GSA] were very influential in getting that built. It was quite an exciting event...It was the best hospital for the whole county. It was the most modern one between San Francisco and Santa Barbara. It was state of the art. A huge bond measure was floated for it. Now that was a benchmark.<sup>88</sup>

Not all members of the GSA supported the expansion of the city’s footprint if it meant encroaching on land that had been used for agriculture. Under the auspices of the “Greater Salinas Committee,” an election was held November 1947 to annex the increasingly populated area south of Main Street, also home to a variety of new commercial enterprises, and once the Nissen ranch. The mayor and city council

---

<sup>87</sup> Interview with Ruth Andresen by Carol McKibben, November 6, 2018, Salinas.

<sup>88</sup> Interview with Ruth Andresen by Carol McKibben, November 6, 2018, Salinas.

printed a flyer showing significant loss of tax revenue for the city when residential, commercial and business development needed city services but did not pay city taxes.<sup>89</sup>

In a veiled reference both to growers who opposed annexation of even marginal agricultural land, and to the increasingly vocal merchants along Main Street who feared that Valley Center would siphon business from them, the proponents of annexation argued, “We must not let less than 2% of property owners stop the growth of Salinas.” With catchy slogans such as “Zoning is Not a Tool to Be Employed in Economic Conflict!” the group convinced Salinas voters that annexation and subsequent development would reduce taxes for everyone, increase property values, and add to Salinas’s prestige. “New, fine, highly restricted, and beautifully developed” housing was also planned on newly acquired land. The measure passed. The use of the term “highly restricted” was meant to convey that homes would be limited to Anglo occupation, indicating the prevalent use of covenants in this era to segregate housing by race.

The area south of Main Street became part of the city in 1947 and inaugurated a new era of breathtaking expansion and development, not just in commercial and housing development but in manufacturing and industrial growth too. In August 1947 developer R.T. Tustin Jr. broke ground for Valley Center, which included a Sears store, J.C. Penney’s, a Lucky grocery store and Thrifty drug store. According to the press, “The development [projected for completion by 1949] will have five acres of buildings, 15 acres of parking lots, and 55 acres of

---

<sup>89</sup> “Help Salinas Grow—Vote Yes! Zoning Is Not A Tool to Be Employed in Economic Conflict!” Source: Monterey County Historical Society

residences...Novel features of the center when completed will be the day center and medical building...patterned in a small way after the Mayo and Scripps clinics.”<sup>90</sup>

By the mid 1960s, Andresen noted the influx of industry and manufacturing that located even further south of Salinas, which brought in a new and sophisticated population of middle level managers giving the city a more worldly feel: “My husband was the only board certified ob/gyn in the whole county and his practice was thriving.” She listed the new companies that built factories just on the outskirts of town: “That was when St. Regis Paper Company, Smuckers, the big box company arrived. We already had Firestone, which had opened in 1963 and was the anchor at the south end. MCID had already put Firestone in place. We also had Spiegl freezing plant. He was considered the most brilliant agricultural developer in Salinas Valley. The reason I remember these initiatives is that the wives all transferred to my husband [as patients] because he was a specialist and they were mostly from back East and the Midwest...Schillings came. Peter Paul came. Everybody was invited [the new industry and new people]. We had all kinds of activities.”<sup>91</sup>

At first, all of the new investment, development and people appeared only as an asset, supporting the common purpose of the city in establishing itself as a regional leader. The design of a new library by a “world renowned architect” Weldon Beckett was a case in point as a collective effort “sponsored by the Salinas Women’s Club...[and] public support. Everybody was right behind that new library.”<sup>92</sup> Just like Salinas Valley Memorial Hospital, the new Steinbeck Library it

---

<sup>90</sup> *Salinas Californian*, August 11, 1947, 2.

<sup>91</sup> Interview with Ruth Andresen by Carol McKibben, November 6, 2018, Salinas.

<sup>92</sup> Interview with Ruth Andresen by Carol McKibben, November 6, 2018, Salinas.

was “the best, the first and the only,” in Monterey County and the region, according to Andresen.<sup>93</sup> The architect explained in remarks celebrating the library’s official opening (attended by Andresen) that the design of the building was to conform with the shape of the valley: flat and wide at the front and tapering at the back.”<sup>94</sup>This description of Salinas made clear that the possibilities for growth appeared endless in such an open geographical environment.

Besides all of the new construction and investment by industries making a place in the city, the annexations of outlying land continued unabated throughout the 1950s and 1960s. By the end of January 1947 then Salinas City manager announced that the city annexed both the Rodeo Tract (182.40 acres) and the Monterey Park Tract (80 acres), which included both residential and business areas with plans to subdivide the sections for housing and business development.<sup>95</sup> A few years later, Mayor Raffeto made a strong argument for annexation and consolidation of other unincorporated areas of the city, increasingly centers of population growth, and clearly meant to incorporate everyone, regardless of class, race or ethnicity in the common purpose of city-building: “The advantages of a strong community, tied together for maximum effectiveness, far outweigh the small costs resulting to taxpayers for annexation. If this area is to grow industrially, we must present a united front to those businesses we are asking to locate here.”<sup>96</sup> In addition to the usual residential housing, 13 apartment buildings estimated to cost \$1.7 million

---

<sup>93</sup> Interview with Ruth Andresen by Carol McKibben, November 6, 2018, Salinas.

<sup>94</sup> Interview with Ruth Andresen by Carol McKibben, November 6, 2018, Salinas

<sup>95</sup> “Salinas Expanded 1/8 in Size By Two Annexations,” *Salinas Californian*, January 30, 1947,1

<sup>96</sup> “Mayor Warns of Attempts to ‘Confuse,’” *Salinas Californian*, May 15, 1950, 1



were constructed. City leaders partnered with developers to provide housing for all of the new workers and middle level managers streaming into the city as employees in newly established industrial firms and businesses to reduce the chance that might settle in the nearby communities of Carmel, Pacific Grove or Monterey, places in closer proximity to beaches and recreation areas.

The Salinas Chamber of Commerce spearheaded an effort to advertise Salinas as the perfect site for investment by a wide range of industries and manufacturers, moving away from its singular identity as a center for agriculture only. Numerous articles in the local press breathlessly announced every new industrial and manufacturing plant that located in the vicinity of the city, claiming space to invigorate city coffers with new tax revenue. For example, when Pacific Lincoln Laboratories chose to make Salinas its West coast headquarters its representative listed five reasons for doing so: “Transportation services...climate...central location of Salinas in relation to major markets...reception by the members of the [Salinas] chamber of commerce industrial committee [MCID]...proximity to the Monterey Peninsula.” Indeed it appeared that Salinas would take advantage of every aspect of its location, including the vast still vacant surrounding landscape that allowed huge industrial plants the room to build and expand. The hope was that industry and manufacturing would not only add to the city’s revenue, but provide the year round employment for working people that agriculture simply could not do.<sup>97</sup> Working classes needed employment throughout the year and most importantly needed an avenue into the middle class world of home ownership and community that Salinas

---

<sup>97</sup> “Firm Leases Building on Sanborn Road,” *Salinas Californian* October 26, 1950

offered. Salinas needed them too. That is why annexing Alisal assumed such strategic importance in the postwar era, and had been attempted (and failed) in 1949, 1950, and 1955 before finally succeeding with a 72 percent voter turnout in 1963.<sup>98</sup>

The economic report for 1957 announced that the dream of Salinas as regional urban center but also closely knit community had finally been realized: “[Salinas] became the trading and merchandising center for an area that extended beyond the artificial county boundaries...[and assumed] a hub position” on the Central coast.<sup>99</sup> Although the economic analysis credited agriculture for Salinas’s increased wealth and status, it also emphasized that agricultural production, dependent as it was on a fluctuating labor market and uncertain weather conditions could not support a strong economy year round. “Since the Second World War, Salinas’s growth has spread rapidly into the surrounding green fields. The encroachment of subdivisions upon rich agricultural soils is a cause of concern to the produce industry, which depends on the products of those soils. The produce industry is the industrial backbone of Salinas, and any substantial weakening of it will have serious consequences.”<sup>100</sup> Although growers contested annexations as encroaching on precious farmland (even land that was marginally productive), the annexations happened at a remarkable pace between 1950 and 1970, and generally supported by the community at large including the landowning farming and

---

<sup>98</sup> “City of Salinas Report: Alisal Annexation November 23, 1962,”p.1, (Steinbeck Library Local History Collection).

<sup>99</sup> N.a., *Salinas: City in a Hurry*, 1940, Local History Collection, Economic Conditions Folder 1, Steinbeck Library, 2.

<sup>100</sup> Salinas, California General Plan for future Development, 1950, John Steinbeck Library, Historic File 25115, Planning and Zoning

ranching families who saw the value in new land uses for Salinas beyond agriculture.

## ALISAL

The rapid concentration of industrial development in Salinas did not go unchallenged, but it proceeded nonetheless. Perhaps nothing demonstrated the urge for common purpose more than the way Salinas's residents equated industrial growth and investment with a sense of community, which encompassed a diverse collection of ethnic and racial groups and socioeconomic classes. Thus, when they looked East and considered the annexation of Alisal, they framed the language of debate both in communal terms and in a disappointed reaction to the loss of the Wrigley chewing gum plant to Santa Cruz. In an editorial titled "Unite—And Fast" the *Salinas Californian* opinion page lamented that it was "Too bad...Salinas was not a united city [because] Wrigley may have come here instead of Santa Cruz, which IS united...they sensed that Salinas was a split community not pulling together." Touting the benefits of the company, the piece described Wrigley as "a beautiful concern—one that will employ 300 white clad, cosmetic free women...It is the sort of good, clean factory we need and a payroll of \$1,500,000." The editors expressed hope that with the December 19, 1950 vote for annexation of Alisal, "We believe Salinas will be a big united city at the annexation election...It must consolidate if we are to make progress...Our 35,000 population in case the Alisal population is annexed would look mighty good in the record as new district offices, terminals, and warehousing for the west coast."<sup>101</sup> Alas, it was not to be. Alisal did not join Salinas

---

<sup>101</sup> "Unite—And Fast," *Salinas Californian*, October 8, 1950,8

until the election of 1963 a full thirteen years after this article was written. The issue of annexation became one of the most controversial in Salinas's history and also the clearest evidence of the struggles that went into its collective but always contentious effort to bind disparate groups into common purpose.

The view of Alisal from Salinas had dramatically changed by 1940. Once disdained for its chaotic settlement of "shacks" and marginal groups of transient laborers, enthusiastic reports in the local and national press now described this space as "A community of neat, freshly painted homes...fronted by well tended lawns...[and] distinctly an asset to the county... Today more than 3500 of the 300,000 depression and Dust Bowl refugees in California live in that community and their record is most reassuring. There is scarcely a case where a migrant...and his family,... has not been able to make the grade. It is a matter of record that migrants into Salinas since 1933 have re-invested more than \$100,000 of their earnings in permanent improvements."<sup>102</sup> By 1935, Alisal residents formed the Alisal Civic Improvement Association adding sidewalks and establishing both a sanitary district and fire district by 1939. The Civic Improvement Association purchased school buses and established a childcare center that year too. By 1946 the population of Alisal increased to over 14,000 and the area included a theater, bank, and post office. Alisal residents also formed their own Chamber of Commerce in 1946 and

---

<sup>102</sup> "Bravo Salinas!" *Salinas Index-Journal*, March 16, 1940, 6.

worked to establish infrastructure in the form of stop signs, more sidewalks, and street lighting.<sup>103</sup>

Alisal became an attractive potential asset to Salinas, which coveted the area to its east, now almost equivalent to Salinas in both in population and business development by 1940. However, also in 1940, Carey McWilliams who was chief of California Housing and Immigration, issued warnings that Alisal's rapid population growth and lack of zoning or regulation that endangered its residents and all of Salinas next door. Alisal, according to McWilliams, was "without a public sewer system... with the corresponding danger to adjacent water wells and to the water wells serving the Salinas public." McWilliams went on to report that many of the houses were still merely "shacks and lean-tos unfit for human habitation."<sup>104</sup> Joining the two communities through annexation became one of the most controversial issues in the politics of this part of Monterey County throughout the 1950s.

The top concern for Alisal residents in considering annexation was how to best and most effectively improve infrastructure, namely the sewer system, which was originally meant to serve a population of only a few thousand but included over 16,000 by 1950. The population needs for efficient waste disposal and clean water outstripped the capacity of the sewer system, but residents debated which entity (county, local residents, Salinas) might be the best choice in addressing the problem. Debate raged on both sides.

---

<sup>103</sup> "Many Improvements—The Alisal—18 Years Old," *The Salinas Californian*, June 1947 and October 1947, n.p. Local History Folder, the Alisal, Folder 2 Steinbeck Library, Salinas.

<sup>104</sup> Carey McWilliams report to Tolan Committee, San Francisco, September 24, 1940, The Alisal, Folder 1, Steinbeck Library, Salinas.

The independence of Alisal schools came in second out of a long list of concerns over annexation with Salinas. Alisal teachers feared that their tenure might be at risk and also worried about representation on the school board. In response, the state attorney general got involved in the tenure issue promising teachers that their tenure status was protected. "Tenure of teachers in the Alisal school district...was assured by the state attorney general and District Att[orne]y Burr Scott, legal advisor to all schools in Monterey County."<sup>105</sup> It is unclear why the state attorney general weighed in on the annexation issue. The same article in the *Californian* assured Alisal residents that their voices would be heard on the school board: "The Salinas city council will propose a charter amendment following annexation to increase the city school board from three to five members in order to assure representation of Alisal taxpayers and parents." The council made clear that elections would be held so that Alisal residents could vote on the amendment and also run for election to the school board.<sup>106</sup>

The triumph of Alisal's school district in remaining independent of Salinas's jurisdiction came about as a result of an unexpected partnership. York Gin and Virginia Rocca Barton led the fight for autonomy for Alisal schools. Fiercely determined to protect Alisal students from being relegated to second-class status, Barton believed that Alisal's schools needed to remain self-governing. She had the full backing and support of York Gin, who had risen to prominence as president both of Alisal's Chamber of Commerce and President of Alisal's School Board. Gin

---

<sup>105</sup> "Tenure Assured for Alisal Teachers in Event of Annexation," *Salinas Californian*, October 5, 1950, 20.

<sup>106</sup> "Tenure Assured for Alisal Teachers in Event of Annexation," *Salinas Californian*, October 5, 1950, 20

recognized Barton's leadership capacity, plucking her out of the classroom first to appoint her principal then as superintendent of schools.

Barton arrived in Alisal as a newly minted teacher in 1940 where she taught fifth grade and immediately inspired students and families with a combination of toughness and loving support for students who often felt at the margins of society. She embraced Dust Bowl students, "I was up and down the aisle letting them know how good they were...my number one goal was to make students feel important and worth while," she recalled, bristling at the term "dumb Okies," which is how Alisal kids were often referred to during this era. She could be a strong disciplinarian too. After one particularly vicious fight between eighth grade boys, Barton called a meeting of all eighth graders and with hands on hips dared anyone who continued to engage in fist fighting to solve problems to "fight with me." Diminutive and only twenty-four years old at the time, the students responded to her challenge with horror, "We wouldn't fight with you. We love you," one of the students replied. Her angry confrontation didn't end the fights, but it did show the deep sense of caring this San Jose Italian transplant infused in a community struggling with terrible pressures during a transitional era. Later incorporating a new Latinx population into the school system, Barton set up a school for 150 Latinx children in 1950. The children lived in nearby Camp McCallum Labor Camp and she started a school in the camp itself. This included instituting a bilingual education program for students and teachers, which was one of the only initiatives of its kind in California at that time.<sup>107</sup>

---

<sup>107</sup> Interview by Carol McKibben with Virginia Tocca Barton September 2017, Salinas; Teresa Douglass, "Children First" *Salinas Life*, April 25, 2015, 1C, 8C.

Beyond acquiescing to the formidable power of Barton and Gin on the school issue, the Salinas City Council sweetened the deal to “join communities” (as annexation was often advertised), offered up a wide range of city services that Alisal residents might benefit from if they voted to become part of Salinas rather than incorporate as a city unto themselves or remain under county control as an unincorporated space. The language of “joining communities” signified an effort to showcase a changed attitude on the part of Salinas’s residents and leadership; one of equality between Alisal and Salinas despite differences of race, class and ethnicity.

It was good economics too. By 1950, according to reports in the *Salinas Californian* Salinas would receive almost \$100,000 (equivalent of \$1,000,000 in today’s dollars) in state grants and subventions “if the two communities joined forces.” In addition, based on a population increase of approximately 17,000 “the state would grant an additional \$50,000 from the motor vehicle in lieu tax and \$46,000 from the gas tax fund.”<sup>108</sup>

Like Salinas, Alisal was defined as a predominantly white space by numerous reports and observations in the 1940s.<sup>109</sup> However, accounts by residents and former residents emphasized its ethnic and racial diversity. People who settled Alisal created their own version of a multicultural community. In the Spring of 1940, a brand new community newspaper, *The East Salinas Pioneer*, announced its inauguration and motto: “By the People, for the People, and with the People of East Salinas,” indicating that Alisal no longer represented a loose, disordered settlement

---

<sup>108</sup> “State Grants,” *Salinas Californian*, October 5, 1950.

<sup>109</sup> By 1940, *Current History*, *Forum*, *Readers Digest*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, and *Time*, *Look and Life Magazines* all featured stories and articles about the Alisal as one of the earliest and most successful centers for Dust Bowl refugees.



of Okies, Arkies, Filipinos, Chinese, and Mexicans (Japanese residents tended to live among whites in Salinas proper), but a genuine community all its own. The society pages of this community newspaper reflected clear evidence of Alisal as a multiracial space. In one typical announcement for a bridal shower given in honor of “Miss Lois Wilkerson of Juanita Boulevard” the guest list included women whose surnames (Espinola, Miguel, Izora) suggested either Filipino or Mexican descent along with the guests with Anglo surnames, supporting numerous anecdotal accounts of life in Alisal as a congenial multiracial space. Longtime Salinas resident and Vietnam War hero, Everett Alvarez, observed that Alisal circa 1940s and 1950s was a place of real racial mixture: “Growing up was pretty neat in Alisal. It was inclusive. It was a heterogeneous mix. Okies, Arkies, Filipinos, Chinese. There were a couple of Chinese girls in my class.” However, in Alvarez’s recollection, ethnicity and class intersected, with most Chinese people solidly in the middle class by 1940: “The Chinese families were the merchants. The Filipinos and Japanese worked the land.” York Gin, a prominent Alisal merchant, became President of the Alisal Chamber of Commerce when the area voted to join Salinas in 1963.<sup>110</sup>

Everett Alvarez’s family’s story, which emphasized the easy way Alisal was settled by folks who arrived in Salinas between 1929 and the 1940s, transient workers, members of an aspiring working class who found space, place, and an opportunity to become stakeholders in this agricultural setting; a part of the city that made room for them. According to Alvarez,

---

<sup>110</sup> “Gin and Cislini Give C of C Statements on Alisal Consolidation,” *Salinas Californian*, June 12, 1963, p. 1.

The homes [in East Salinas] were basically put up by migrants who came and worked there [in the 1930s]. Some of them had corrugated tin roofs. These were families who came out in the Dust Bowl phase, who moved from Camp McCallum into permanent residency in East Salinas.”<sup>111</sup>

Throughout the 1930s, both packing shed workers and field laborers settled first in labor camps and then in makeshift tents and shacks as they acquired the means to do so. The labor camps became suspect during the 1930s and 1940s as centers for radical politics through union organizing and remained a permanently marginalized space to house transient laborers throughout the 1960s, including entire families who were forced to live in squalid conditions there.<sup>112</sup>

By contrast, residents of Alisal may have been poor and transient to begin with but quickly settled in, building homes and businesses in short order as they aspired to permanent life in Salinas, where land was cheap and abundant and economic opportunities beyond fieldwork and constant migration beckoned. Jim Gattis’s story provided a perfect example of this common family trajectory: “I just have memories of numerous places we lived. Each season we moved to a different place. Then we would go back to Arkansas. We lived in a rental house roughly 600 sq. feet with a couple of bedrooms. Nobody had a room to themselves much less a bed to themselves,” he remembered. “There were 34 of us, 1935 to 1941.” Most importantly for the Gattis family, Salinas offered them a chance to end the pattern of migratory life and settle down. In this, Gattis did not feel unique in Alisal: “Everyone

---

<sup>111</sup> Interview with Everett Alvarez by Carol McKibben, by phone, August 24, 2018.

<sup>112</sup> See John Steinbeck, *The Harvest Gypsies* (San Francisco: The San Francisco News, 1936)

lived pretty much the same. It was rough in those days [the 1940s and 1950s] in Hebbbron Heights and Alisal.”

Gattis vividly remembered the new economic opportunities available during the 1940s and 1950s for anyone and everyone willing to work in agriculture because of a dire need for labor during (and immediately after) the war: “A lot of people weren’t finishing school [because] you could go drive a lettuce truck and make a hundred dollars a week. That was a lot of money. I was working in the packing sheds before that so we could make money during high school.” Gattis felt class conscious only on visits to Salinas proper: “[It was] literally the other side of the tracks...When I went to a friend’s house [in Salinas] I was really impressed. I had never been in a house like that before.” Bill Ramsey echoed Gattis’s experience, remembering how his family first lived in a tent in the Lunsford Labor Camp and were grateful for the bags of groceries that the Salvation Army left for them when they returned from church on Sundays. Ramsey also recalled the quick ascent to stability because of the opportunity available in Salinas in those years: “People were making money. It was a small world and the common denominator was lettuce.” Ramsey remembered his father and uncles traveling to the Imperial Valley to follow the harvest, but always returned to Salinas. By 1940, “My Dad bought a home on Midway Avenue. Alisal was a step up for us,” he remembered. Also importantly, Ramsey recalled Alisal as an interracial space with “a whole bunch of Chinese and Japanese. My sister’s boyfriend was Mexican. There was a lot of dating.”<sup>113</sup>

---

<sup>113</sup> Interview with Bill Ramsey by Carol McKibben, October 15, 2018, Salinas.

Everett Alvarez also described family migration patterns that ended with settlement in Salinas, and like other former residents, emphasized both diversity and fluidity of interaction among groups in Alisal. He felt accepted as an equal member of Salinas's citizenry. He traced his family roots to Mexico and the Southwest, linking his personal history to such events as the Mexican Revolution and the Great Depression:

My grandparents came from Mexico around the turn of the century. On my father's side, around the time of the Mexican revolution. Somewhere between 1900 and 1910. My mother's father worked on the railroad. My mother and my aunt were both born in Colton near San Bernardino. After my grandfather died, my grandmother and the two girls moved with other families and worked in agriculture. They were in Castroville when my mother met my father. My father was born in Arizona. His father worked in the mines. My father was born a hundred years ago. He lived with Sanchez relatives who moved around looking for work. The Sanchez family lived in Castroville when Mom and Dad met. My grandmother had been awarded some money. She was in a car accident. So she bought land in Alisal. Around 1937, around the time my parents were married.<sup>114</sup>

A chance collision with a milk truck (sometime in the late 1930s), led to a fortuitous break in the fortunes for Alvarez's family. They had migrated from Arizona and Southern California to take advantage of available work in agriculture in Watsonville and Salinas Valley in the 1920s, but struggled to gain a foothold in the area. However, fate intervened. The milk company settled with Simona for enough money to allow her to purchase land in Alisal. They built a home for themselves and units that they rented to the new Dust Bowlers flooding into the area. Simona's daughter, Soledad, lived in one of those units with her husband, Everett Alvarez. In 1937, just a year after the contentious lettuce strike in Salinas, Soledad and Everett

---

<sup>114</sup> Interview with Everett Alvarez by Carol McKibben, (by phone), August 24, 2018.

welcomed Everett Alvarez Jr. into their large extended family that included a network of aunts, uncles, and cousins throughout the area. “My grandmother owned property maybe half an acre at the most with three cabins. We lived in one of them.” Thus, unlike so many other Asian and Mexican families relegated to neighborhoods well outside white areas in 1940s urban and suburban California, the Alvarez family became landlords to whites and lived among a diverse population in this agricultural community in Salinas.

With the outbreak of World War II, the Alvarez family interrupted their lives in Alisal to take advantage of opportunities for employment in the lucrative defense industries springing up in larger municipalities such as San Francisco, Oakland, and Los Angeles. The entire Sanchez and Alvarez clan moved to San Francisco’s Mission District to take advantage of good jobs in defense:

When the war broke out my father and all his cousins packed the families up to move to the Bay Area to get jobs...My father learned a trade. He was a welder right off the bat. We lived in a small apartment in San Francisco just up the hill from City Hall. He worked at Bethlehem pipe and steel in their shipyard. One or two families got jobs later across the bay at Kaiser shipyards. They all went to work as welders. I don't remember any blacks. We moved to the Mission District and I started school with all the Italian and Irish kids.<sup>115</sup>

The family returned to Alisal at the end of the war and Everett began school: “We moved down to Salinas midway in the third grade...we grew up with the Grapes of Wrath kids.” Alvarez again emphasized the diversity of Alisal (and Salinas) that appeared to him to happen surprisingly smoothly, and, at least in his view, with little conflict or rancor over issues of racial or ethnic identity. He recalled that “[he]

---

<sup>115</sup> Interview with Everett Alvarez by Carol McKibben, (by phone), August 24, 2018.

didn't feel anything [racism directed at him for being Mexican] because I didn't know any better. Joe [Kapp, Alvarez's best friend and famous football star] was Mexican [on his Mother's side] and [his] father was Anglo. I never noticed anything. That was our world."<sup>116</sup>

The comment above suggested ambiguity, however. Alvarez admitted there might have been racism at work in Salinas, but that he was oblivious to it because he did not feel that it was in any way directed at him. His parents might have felt differently. Indeed, his parents were active members of the Salinas Community Service Organization (CSO) an early civil rights group that Cesar Chavez also belonged to in the 1950s.<sup>117</sup> Albert Fong, current president of the Chinese Association of Salinas and vice-president of the Chinese American Citizens Alliance Salinas Chapter, whose family dated their settlement in Salinas to the late nineteenth century, noted that although Salinas and particularly Alisal was a multiracial space, racism was evident: "My family and friends were this group that had to get along with the Whites and the Mexicans...Yes, there was discrimination but you do what you can do to survive." His family, like the Alvarez's, were property owners and landlords: "We [bought] properties in Alisal and the older parts of Salinas."<sup>118</sup>

Alvarez believed that sports served as a great equalizer for youth in Alisal: "We were athletic. I became part of the guys that played football and ran track. We were pretty much integrated. We all played sports, basketball, clubs, I hung out with

---

<sup>116</sup> Interview with Everett Alvarez by Carol McKibben, (by phone), August 24, 2018.

<sup>117</sup> Vicki Ruiz, email to Carol McKibben, October 4, 2018.

<sup>118</sup> Interview with Albert Fong by Carol McKibben, March 7, 2019, Salinas.

the kids who played sports. We are friends to this day.” Although he acknowledged, “There were some parents who didn’t let somebody date somebody,” he insisted that exclusion based on racism was unusual and not the norm for the era. He offered the example of his friend, Jerry Sun, “[who] was part Filipino. He was athletic [and] the student body president. Mr. Popularity. I never thought twice about it. Married a white girl from Alisal.” Again, there is some ambiguity in suggesting that racism could be overcome in sports, but also that it was part and parcel of life in Alisal, just as it was everywhere else in America. The racial interactions Alvarez emphasized that happened over sports in particular may have been more common for boys than for girls who were generally excluded from team sports until Title IX passed in 1972.<sup>119</sup>

Class mattered, however, and Alvarez was hardly oblivious to those boundaries. In Alvarez’s telling, just as in Jim Gattis’s and Bill Ramsey’s experiences, the kids growing up in Alisal felt their own lower status when they ventured into Salinas proper: “We knew of a different world downtown [in Salinas proper]. In the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade we would walk two to three miles from Pearl Street to downtown. Walking on Alisal Road, I crossed a slough and passed a flat lettuce field. Once you got past the railroad tracks there were sidewalks and gutters. Salinas was upper scale.” He recalled his junior high school years in which the Salinas “kids had nice

---

<sup>119</sup> Interview with Everett Alvarez by Carol McKibben, (by phone), August 24, 2018.

cashmere sweaters and dockers [whereas he and his cohorts from Alisal] had one set of Levis and you'd wear them all year."<sup>120</sup>

Alvarez made a clear distinction between the settled families who populated Alisal and the transient farmworkers who lived in the labor camps: "If you continued going out East on Alisal Road it went out to a camp that had been built as a camp for Japanese families. After they had moved Japanese families [to Poston, Arizona] they converted the camp to housing for farmworkers. It was different from the kids at camp McCallum. The kids from camp McCallum may have been discriminated against but we were not." He recalled teenage girls placed in elementary school for the short period of time they lived in Salinas, working in the fields with their families and marrying young with little or no education. Many other Salinas residents with roots in Alisal echoed Alvarez's account of racial and ethnic communalism but class divides between Alisal and Salinas.

Alvarez shared the perspective of so many longtime Salinas residents in which race and ethnicity counted but did not disqualify anyone from community membership. Transiency and class mattered more in the era, according to residents who recalled the 1940s and 1950s. Their collective memories of life in Salinas in the postwar era as breezy multiracial camaraderie overlooked the persistence of restrictions in housing linked to race that created distinct but complicated patterns in neighborhood settlement as the city expanded its footprint.

---

<sup>120</sup> Interview with Everett Alvarez by Carol McKibben, (by phone), August 24, 2018. Although "Dockers" were not introduced by the Levi-Strauss company until much later, Mr. Alvarez referred to the slacks worn by Salinas boys as "dockers".



J. Morgan Kousser examined real estate advertisements in Monterey County, from the 1940s through the 1970s in order to find out the extent to which cities in the County restricted housing by race.<sup>121</sup> He found evidence of systemic, purposeful racial restrictions that led to the creation of politically, socially and economically unequal spaces. According to Kousser, Anglos settled primarily in Monterey, Carmel, Pacific Grove, and Pebble Beach, and enjoyed a high degree of socioeconomic mobility and political power. Nearby Marina and Seaside struggled at the lower end of the political and economic spectrum as primarily places where Blacks, Asians and Mexicans lived. Isolated from these communities, Salinas presented a more complicated, even haphazard settlement pattern. In Salinas, Kousser found evidence both of multiracial tracts and neighborhoods and also racially restricted subdivisions, even in Alisal. He also found plenty of neighborhoods and subdivisions in Salinas, even in wealthier parts of town that were unrestricted by race and that increasingly made room for people of Asian and Mexican descent if they could afford to live there. There was only a tiny population of African Americans in Salinas, confined as they were to Seaside and Marina. The county was most definitely segregated by race, according to Kousser's exhaustive analysis, but the city of Salinas was less so, giving it the opportunity to move towards greater cohesion along racial lines at mid-century.

---

<sup>121</sup> J. Morgan Kousser, "Racial Justice and the Abolition of Justice Courts in Monterey County," unpublished report, September 9, 2000(Unpublished) <http://resolver.caltech.edu/CaltechAUTHORS:20130913-160303883>

In Kousser's study of Salinas, homes are advertised as "beautiful" or "attractive" and "modern" when they are located in a "restricted subdivision" or a "restricted district or tract." One Salinas realtor asked Californian readers, "Would you like a really nice five bedroom modern home, located on a corner lot in a restricted district in Alisal surrounded by other nice homes?" Over and over again in Kousser's study realtors emphasized the attractiveness of homes located in all white neighborhoods, tracts, and subdivisions, including in the so-called multiracial space of the Alisal.<sup>122</sup>

By contrast, places that were not racially restricted were advertised in much less glowing terms as "a good buy" that "Can be sold to any nationality." One realtor offered a "4 room furnished house" for sale in the Boronda district of Salinas for a "small down payment." She was specific that "Mexicans and Filipinos can buy," indicating that these were the populations most restricted from neighborhoods in Salinas. Another realtor advertising lots in Alisal that might be subdivided [without] restrictions to Filipinos, Chinese or Mexicans." But in an ad for a new subdivision in the "beautiful Mission Park" subdivision of Salinas the promotional literature promised, "The same restrictions will prevail here as in any other high class subdivision in the city [Salinas], racial restrictions, etc." By the 1950s, Anglos began to make room in neighborhoods for some prominent Chinese and Japanese families,

---

<sup>122</sup> J. Morgan Kousser, "Racial Justice and the Abolition of Justice Courts in Monterey County," unpublished report, September 9, 2000(Unpublished) <http://resolver.caltech.edu/CaltechAUTHORS:20130913-160303883>, 45-46.

even as they continued restrictions against Mexicans, Blacks, and to some extent, Filipinos as shown above.<sup>123</sup>

Thus the battle over the annexation of Alisal took place in this racially confusing context. The area was obviously multiracial, but also following a certain pattern of development in Salinas that included racially restrictive neighborhoods. In response, Salinas residents were urged to address the problem of racism and segregation: “Salinas residents concerned with the problem of housing racial minorities have been invited to attend a meeting...sponsored by the Interracial Council of Monterey County.” The meeting included the showing of a Frank Sinatra film, “The House I Live In,” that challenged racial restrictive covenants. Local realtors were specifically invited as part of the consciousness raising campaign in Salinas.<sup>124</sup>

The annexation of Alisal encapsulated the fluid intersections of class and race in Salinas, which finally happened in a 1,748 to 648 vote on June 11, 1963. It marked the moment that Salinas defined itself as a metropolitan center too. “We couldn’t remain so close to Salinas and not be part of an incorporated city,” argued Sally

---

<sup>123</sup> For an in-depth analysis of the ways Anglos made room for Asians in segregated neighborhoods in California see Charlotte Brooks, *Alien Neighbors, Foreign Friends: Asian Americans, Housing and the Transformation of Urban California* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), Carol Lynn McKibben, *Racial Beachhead: Diversity and Democracy in a Military Town* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), chapters 3 and 4; J. Morgan Kousser, “Racial Justice and the Abolition of Justice Courts in Monterey County,” unpublished report, September 9, 2000(Unpublished) <http://resolver.caltech.edu/CaltechAUTHORS:20130913-160303883>, 46.

<sup>124</sup> *Salinas Californian*, September 26, 1946, 5 quoted in J. Morgan Kousser, “Racial Justice and the Abolition of Justice Courts in Monterey County,” unpublished report, September 9, 2000(Unpublished) <http://resolver.caltech.edu/CaltechAUTHORS:20130913-160303883>

Gutierrez, one proponent of incorporation and organizer of the “Right Way, Alisal” campaign. However, Juan Martinez, resident of Salinas and a Red Cross worker, characterized the relationship between the two places as class based, “It seemed like it was the haves and the have-nots,” he recalled, echoing the sentiments of Alvarez, Gattis, and Ramsey above. The culmination of the annexation campaigns by 1963 signified that the struggle for common purpose prevailed because it meant so much to this population, in spite of the conflicts over labor, the dislocations of war and the persistence of racial animosities so prevalent in American life at mid-century.

## RESISTANCE

Annexations and the subsequent development came with a cost to the environment, which sparked environmental activism led by Ruth Andresen. She emphasized that support for unbridled growth and industrial development ended in the early 1960s with a general awareness of the severe consequences of pollution, brought about by such publications as Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* (1962). In a tongue in cheek description, Andresen recalled,

“When you get up in the morning, you had the most delightful chocolate wind [largely emanating from the Nestlé and Peter Paul plants]. We had a very good air pollution control district here and they were working very hard to get the information out but a lot of times people don’t read newspapers and they don’t read reports. The air pollution people [tried] to get industry to clean up but it costs money to put filters and scrubbers...undoubtedly the managers and the businessmen all understood the need for filters but to get excess money out of the budget when it wasn’t absolutely required...well that’s a business decision so you don’t do it if you are going to keep your profit margin. At that same time, everybody had an incinerator in their backyards and so the air pollution control district got rid of that. They did a wonderful job. They really did. These agencies were all doing a good job but they didn’t have any enforcement arm.”<sup>125</sup>

---

<sup>125</sup> Interview with Ruth Andresen by Carol McKibben, November 6, 2018, Salinas

It was in the context of rapid industrialization and growing awareness of its pitfalls that an oil refinery generated a wave of controversy in Salinas and on the entire Monterey Peninsula by 1965. According to Andresen, "The Humble Oil Company decided to build the refinery near Moss Landing. That was the first time Salinas became aware of its environment." When asked, "Who made Salinas Aware of its environment? Andresen replied, "You're looking at it. The vocal chords," referring to herself. "I don't know how I had the courage." As a geologist, Andresen was well prepared to explain such complex processes as wind and ocean currents and how an accidental oil spill at sea might damage community life drastically. Andresen helped organize groups of women to oppose the refinery even as their husband members of MCID supported it:

"That was the first moment of division," she remembered. "The business community was MCID. That must've included the city fathers probably. It was homemakers that didn't want to live in a soiled environment. So many of these people had come from Eastern cities where they had coal and they had refineries and they remembered in their childhood what the condition of those cities was like. I remember sulfur dioxide and the smell of rotten eggs from Tulsa. The ones from Pennsylvania and those urban areas just were beside themselves with the threat of refineries coming right here. [However, the men in families] were just coming back from war. After the wartime experience it was a hiatus. They went from war and distress to all of a sudden their first home.

It was an educational process. People did not relate that the smoke coming out of Firestone had anything to do with dirty curtains. Then there was always this idea that if you wanted to get rid of something you dumped it in the ocean. The fact that these currents sometimes just turn around and bring everything back on shore came as a big shock.

She went on to explain:

The proposal was for a major refinery [which would produce 50,000 barrels of oil a day]. The oil was a heavy crude to be transported by oil tankers across Monterey Bay and transshipped by heated pipe to the refinery on the

shore. Now can you imagine how many oil spill potentials there were? That's number one. Number two. The air circulation in the Salinas Valley is the wind blows down the valley during the day and at night when the ground cools the wind blows up the valley and out to the ocean. With that unfiltered smoke coming out of the refinery the Salinas Valley would never have had a clean breath of air. We were already having smog...from Firestone...from the south, Pacific Gas & Electric (P G & E) and the petroleum industries.<sup>126</sup>

The battle lines were sharply drawn between MCID and housewives. The refinery needed the approval of the Monterey County Board of Supervisors, which led to a bitter and angry exchange at the meeting held on September 3, 1965 after a marathon 13 and ½ hour session that lasted until 3a.m. Ruth Andresen described women's activism and the meeting in detail:

We had a terrible fight to deny the refinery. The League of Women Voters were very active. The Salinas Women's Club. AAUW. The Medical Auxiliary for the Monterey County Medical Society. They did most of the calling to get people aware of the fact that there would be a hearing at the Board of Supervisors and to come state their mind if they didn't want a refinery. The Planning Commission turned down the application to develop [a refinery] and then it went to the Board of Supervisors and that's when we got all the people out to testify. We hired a lawyer to present the testimony in a factual legal way. The hearing went on for thirteen hours and it didn't break until 3 o'clock in the morning. They put loudspeakers around the whole courthouse so everybody could listen. You couldn't get into the Chambers it was so mobbed.

The Board of Supervisors approved [the refinery] 3 to 2. Andresen continued,

Then we immediately started collecting names for a referendum to take it back to appeal. And then we had everybody cut up their credit cards for the gas company and send them to Standard Oil. We decided that this same lawyer, Bill Bryan, had a big plan that what we would do next would be to send letters to all of the Board of Directors and stockholders of Standard Oil which would have been a colossal task. The incentive was to be a nuisance and it was successful. So [the refinery] ended up at Benicia where they have had continual trouble ever since. So we won. We were such a deterrent that

---

<sup>126</sup> Interview with Ruth Andresen by Carol McKibben, November 6, 2018, Salinas

when the EPA started enforcing the smoke scrubbers to be put on P. G. & E. they did it because they knew they would get protests if they didn't.

Although the Board of Supervisors overruled the mostly women environmental activists and voted to allow the Humble plant to establish a refinery in the Bay, the women had made their point that the industrial development so unquestionably sought by Salinas city leaders could not occur without attention to environmental conditions that made Salinas a desirable place for families in the first place.<sup>127</sup>

Once enthusiastic supporters of industrial growth, Salinas's housewives effectively put the breaks on unbridled development. It might have made sense for activist white women to partner with other activists in Salinas such as the Mexican American CSO organizers because they shared concerns over quality of life issues. However, the environmentalists focused on the issue of environmental degradation of air and ocean without linking arms in any kind of cooperative engagement. Air pollution and water issues surely affected the poorest communities most of all, but CSO activists perceived opportunity in the establishment of an oil refinery in the form of job growth so desperately needed to make stakeholders out of temporary agricultural workers and generally supported the plant. CSO organizers addressed public health, education, and conditions in labor camps as these affected people of Mexican descent without looking into broader environmental problems

## CONCLUSION

---

<sup>127</sup> See <https://futureoftheocean.wordpress.com/2015/08/31/1965-the-future-that-might-have-been/>

The era of the 1940s through the mid-1960s might be described as a moment of transition and opportunity. On the one hand, this era defined Salinas differently than most other cities of its size in California. Although Salinas shared commonalities such as racially restricted housing in a context of emerging civil rights activism and the common bond of the World War II years (defined by a shared hatred of Nikkei), the agricultural economy and geography of this place set it off as distinctive. Salinas became a place notable for its collective ability to overcome differences over ideology, class, and race and ethnicity and find a common communal purpose. And yet, a glimpse into the battles over environment, labor, and development portended a rough two decades ahead.