

Chapter Three: Community At All Costs

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“Salinas citizenry is grounded in the best American soil...and that this blood, mixed with the sterling stream, which is fast making its appearance here, will serve to carry our city far on the path of progress.”¹

“Between the years 1919 and 1925...Filipinos were highly regarded by the people of this community. Their credit was good everywhere because they paid their debts.”²

“Salinas is a hospitable city, where a certain freedom of action prevails. Its people are liberal-minded. That does not mean, however, that it is not alive to the danger of obtaining a reputation of being a city where “everything goes.” During this season of the year our population is more mixed than during the winter, which is another reason for unusual care being exercised.”³

On May 9, 1934, *The Salinas Index-Journal* announced to its readers that a General Strike called by the newly empowered International Longshoreman’s Association shut down ports from Seattle to San Pedro, the “gateways to the Orient.” It brought their respective cities to a standstill. The paper reported that unions were determined to engage in a “fight to the finish for more money and shorter working hours.”⁴

The Salinas Index-Journal placed the story of the General Strike alongside a breathless account of “Salinas Sales Days” on its front pages, which suggested equivalency in importance. Salinas Sales Days celebrated local retailers and encouraged residents to patronize local businesses. The story predicted “merchandising history will be made in Salinas” exuding breathless confidence (with many exclamation marks) that “thousands of visitors from all parts of the

¹ Editorial, *Salinas Index-Journal*, January 10, 1930, p.2

² Unnamed Filipino spokesman, *Salinas Independent*, July 1, 1933 p. 1

³ *Salinas Index-Journal*, Op-Ed, August 3, 1933, p.4

⁴ *Salinas Index-Journal*, May 9, 1934, p.1.

valley” would certainly arrive to shop and support the city’s retailers (rather than traveling to shop in San Francisco or San Jose). “Gay flags and bunting, streamers and banners will be put up to transform Main Street into an inviting Wonderland of Merchandise!”⁵ *The Index-Journal* exclaimed. This event was a two-week shopping spree rather than a one-day affair and all community members were urged to participate, not just by the conservative *Index-Journal*, but also by the *Independent*, the left leaning local newspaper, which was also a self-proclaimed voice for unions and workers in the community. Although 1934 marked a national low point in the Great Depression era, it was a great year for lettuce and Salinas.

What was striking about the juxtaposition of these two opposing stories was that they seemed to reflect completely different realities. The urban centers of San Francisco, Seattle, Portland, and Los Angeles were paralyzed by successful labor union activism that also divided their cities by ethnic group, race, and class. By 1934, big urban centers felt the economic hit of the Great Depression deeply, and many people became desperate in their efforts to survive the collapse of the economy. In the much smaller agricultural environment of Salinas, a lettuce boom coupled with a spirit of communalism blunted the harsher effects of economic downturns and the seasonal walkouts by labor. The sheer diversity of agriculture kept the economy fairly strong. Moreover, laboring people were much needed and valued. Union membership was not only normative but also integrated into community life and supported in public opinion pieces, which routinely

⁵ *Salinas Index-Journal*, May 9, 1934, p.1.

disassociated labor from radical politics.⁶ Thus, it was not only the conservative *Index Journal* that advocated an energetic and activist capitalism but also the left wing *Salinas Independent*, which defined itself as: the Official Organ of the Central Labor Union—AFL Affiliate in its masthead that celebrated capitalist endeavors. Through the *Independent*, union members expressed solidarity with merchants in town and with farmers too, distancing themselves from radical politics and any hint of Communist affiliation.

Yet, like so many other agricultural regions in California, Salinas has been characterized by historians and novelists alike as a place in which mobs violently attacked Filipinos, labor strikes happened regularly and also descended into violence (particularly in 1936), and by a middle class population that expressed collective disdain for the plight of the thousands of impoverished Okies and Arkies fleeing the environmental catastrophe of the Dust Bowl who arrived in the city in the midst of the worst of the Great Depression. This was all true but it is not the whole story. If we really look closely at what was going on during this period we see a lot more nuance, hinted at in the front-page account above that makes for a more complex and ultimately more accurate portrayal both of Salinas and of its infamous labor battles in the 1930s. This was a city whose residents, many of who had family

⁶ Numerous editorials emphasized the value of labor and of unions and sided with them in the multiple strikes of the era. According to an editorial in the *Monterey Peninsula Herald* in 1935 “The most important agricultural union in this section of California is the Fruit and Vegetable Workers Union. ..It is neither red nor pink, but is normal and American. Its leaders are not ‘outside agitators’ or racketeers...but respected citizens of Salinas. That...is the American Way.” Taken from Helen Boyden Lamb, “Industrial Relations in the Western Lettuce Industry,” unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Radcliffe College, 1942, 307.

roots reaching back to the late nineteenth century, fought “in common purpose” for communalism and kinship above all else.

CITY LIFE: 1929-1937

The new twentieth century turn in agricultural innovation and production attracted “desireable horticulturalists” who were also city builders. The *Pacific Rural Press* encapsulated this moment of farming juxtaposed with town life: “One of the most important benefits which will accrue to the State [of California] is the growth of the towns...the cutting up and populating of vast tracts of land and the immigration of the practical farmer to California.”⁷ Importantly, the “desireable horticulturalists” and the “practical farmers” were not all white people, but they arrived as mostly all poor people. They wanted to create communities that took what was best about American urban life, but rejected the congestion and chaos of towns and cities in the East. They built towns that were complicated ethnic, social, and cultural spaces in which stability and getting along with one another prevailed, and they aimed for this in the midst of the worst of the eugenics movement, restrictive legislation against immigrants, and radical labor activism. Salinas was the poster child for just this pattern of town building based in equal measure on agriculture and communalism.

Urban growth interwoven with agricultural development controverts the accepted narrative of industrialized corporate agriculture disconnected from community. That story was first promoted by Carey McWilliams and John Steinbeck, both of whom wrote compelling but not altogether accurate accounts in the 1930s

⁷ “Beet Sugar,” *Pacific Rural Press*, Vol 59, No 13, March 31, 1900, 196.

that suggested small farms had given way almost completely to large-scale industrial agriculture by the turn of the last century, and none of it had anything to do with the establishment of towns or cities. The system of labor that these respective writers depicted treated workers as little more than slaves or peasants in a deeply exploitive system that offered them no way out except through radical politics and government intervention.⁸ The perspectives Steinbeck and McWilliams articulated have remained mostly unchallenged for eighty years, but are currently being re-examined and re-evaluated.⁹ If we look deeply at particular local and regional contexts, however, such as in Salinas, we see evidence of a far more complex history.¹⁰

The yearly summaries of farming for Monterey County tell a story of small-scale farms (rather than industrialized agricultural development) and community building as the order of the day.¹¹ The reports showed the breaking apart massive

⁸ See Carey McWilliams, *Factories in the Field: The Story of Migrant Farm Labor in California* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1939); John Steinbeck, *Grapes of Wrath* (New York: Viking Press, 1939); Dorothea Lange, *An American Exodus: A Record of Human Erosion* (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1939); John Steinbeck, *East of Eden* (New York: Viking Press, 1952);

⁹ See David Vaught, "Factories in the Field Revisited," *Pacific Historical Review*, Vol 66, No.2 (May, 1997), 149-184; Cecilia Tsu, *Garden of the World: Asian Immigrants and the Making of Agriculture in California's Santa Clara Valley* (Oxford University Press, 2013); Linda Ivey, "Ethnicity in the Land: Lost Stories in California Agriculture," *Agricultural History*, Vol. 81, No 1, (Winter, 2007).

¹⁰ David Vaught, "Factories in the Field Revisited," *Pacific Historical Review*, Vol 66, No.2 (May, 1997), 149-184; Cecilia Tsu, *Garden of the World: Asian Immigrants and the Making of Agriculture in California's Santa Clara Valley* (Oxford University Press, 2013); Linda Ivey, "Ethnicity in the Land: Lost Stories in California Agriculture," *Agricultural History*, Vol. 81, No 1, (Winter, 2007); Beth Lew-Williams, "Chinamen" and "Delinquent Girls": Intimacy, Exclusion, and a Search for California's Color Line," *Journal of American History*, (Vol 104, Issue 3, 1 December 2017), 632–655.

¹¹ A.A. Tavernetti, "Summary of Agricultural Crops of Monterey County" (Salinas, California, Monterey County Agricultural Commissioners Office), 1929-1940.

properties formerly owned by large-scale landowners such as David Jacks, Claus Spreckles, the Espinosa family, and J.A. Trescony (all owned over 10,000 acres apiece).¹² Out of a total of 2,131,200 acres of land in Monterey County, 957,692 were designated for agricultural production in 1932 and divided into 1,891 farms.¹³ By 1936 the number of farms had increased to 2,100 and stayed consistent throughout the years of World War II.¹⁴ Rather than only intensive consolidation of small farms into industrialized, corporate agriculture, we see a pattern of small farm persistence as influxes of migrants arrived in Salinas and the Salinas Valley who viewed farming (even tenant farming and field labor) as a way to enter the middle class. They found available land to buy fairly cheaply and produced crops for market that paid off in an era of improved technology and transportation systems that allowed perishable row crops access to markets thousands of miles away. Thus, the numbers of small farmers in Salinas and the Salinas Valley (who were Mexican, Chinese, Japanese, Italians, Portuguese, and Danes as well as Anglo Americans) remained fairly consistent throughout the 1930s, not all swallowed up by big

¹² A.A. Tavernetti, "Summary of Agricultural Crops of Monterey County" (Salinas, California, Monterey County Agricultural Commissioners Office) 1929-1940; Also See William Orville Jones, "The Salinas Valley: Its Agricultural Development, 1920-1940," unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Stanford University, 1947, 312.

¹³ A.A. Tavernetti, "Summary of Agricultural Crops of Monterey County" (Salinas, California, Monterey County Agricultural Commissioners Office), 1932.

¹⁴ A.A. Tavernetti, "Summary of Agricultural Crops of Monterey County" (Salinas, California, Monterey County Agricultural Commissioners Office) 1929-1940; Also See William Orville Jones, "The Salinas Valley: Its Agricultural Development, 1920-1940," unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Stanford University, 1947, 314; Helen Boyden Lamb, "Industrial Relations in the Western Lettuce Industry," unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Radcliffe College, 1942, 55; Rutillus Harrison Allen, "Economic History of Agriculture in Monterey County, California During the American Period," unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, University of California, 1953, 78-84.

corporate agriculture--at least in that era.¹⁵ Most importantly we also see these farmers as engaged, activist members of the Salinas community.

In the decade of the 1930s, all of the defining aspects of Salinas town life that late nineteenth century settler colonialists dreamed about became reality. By the end of this decade, Salinas had become a town made up of horticulturalists (whether they farmed or not), whose shared belief in a vigorous, muscular capitalist economy based on values of land ownership, thrift, hard work, and modest behavior drew them together into a communal pact that even overcame terrible labor conflicts. They collectively resolved disputes over labor issues even when the situation became ugly and tense (as it was in 1936), mostly through cooperative efforts on the part of workers, city leaders, and employers in farming, packing and shipping. Most importantly, they recovered—purposefully, collectively, and quickly from those clashes. Communalism and kinship tempered racism and class conflict as different groups participated in (and benefited from) the booming agricultural industry, most notably lettuce production.

The success of agricultural development was part and parcel of the plan to support the town's economy by industrial and business development and tourism associated both with agriculture and with Salinas's prominence as the county seat, rather than just by taxing its citizenry. The Chamber of Commerce routinely led the way, boasting the highest membership in its history for 1929 with 350 members,

¹⁵ Helen Boyden Lamb, "Industrial Relations in the Western Lettuce Industry," unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Radcliffe College, 1942; Rutillus Harrison Allen, "Economic History of Agriculture in Monterey County, California During the American Period," unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, University of California, 1953, 78-84.

and, among other accomplishments that year, for bringing multiple conventions, meetings, and events to the city. The Chamber created an Advertising Committee in 1926 that reached out to other California municipalities to draw attention to Salinas as a regional tourist and event center. One typical example concerned Salinas's most important annual happening (every July), Big Week or the Rodeo. At the invitation of Salinas Chamber of Commerce in 1929, over one hundred representatives arrived in Salinas "from all over the United States and Canada" in order to organize themselves into an umbrella group: "The Rodeo Association of America" that would coordinate their respective rodeos so as not to conflict on the calendar. The President of the Chamber pointed out "We feel Salinas deserves a just amount of credit in Procuring this National convention and having our secretary, Mr. Fred McCarger (also publisher of the *Salinas Index Journal*), elected to the office of its secretary."¹⁶ In this way, Salinas's leaders through the Chamber routinely patted themselves on the back for their work in ensuring that their city remained a focal point, not just in the region but also in the state. Dr. E. J. Leach, first elected to the city council in 1928 and then mayor for the next twelve years with one interlude, and whose family roots in the region reached back to the 1850s, became intensely involved in the rodeo and served stints as its president until 1956. Leach also became a crucial mediator in most of the labor disputes of that decade.¹⁷ His work for the Rodeo centered on bringing every entity of Salinas into the planning and coordination of Big Week, making it a central part of belonging in Salinas for all.

¹⁶ *Salinas Independent*, November 16, 1929, p. 1.

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The Chamber worked hand in hand with the business community, regular citizens, the Grower-Shippers Association (GSA), which organized in 1930, and the Central Labor Council (CLC--the organization for all unions in town) most of who were also Chamber members to make the Rodeo the significant unifying event for the city. Each year the GSA and the Central Labor Council supported floats in the Big Week parade; the GSA routinely sponsored prizes of several hundred dollars for rodeo championships.¹⁸ The Salinas Chamber of Commerce regularly sent letters that were read aloud at Association and Labor council meetings “requesting...float[s] from the Lettuce Industry [to support various city-wide events].” The GSA and CLC made sure to create a presence at regional, local and state fairs: “Mr. McCargar suggested that the lettuce exhibit used at the State Fair at Sacramento be duplicated for the Monterey County Fair.”¹⁹ Russell Scott, President of the Salinas Chamber of Commerce in 1929 noted “During the year the Chamber of Commerce has had the occasion to work on several projects jointly with the Labor Council of Salinas and I compliment them for a very worthwhile effort in investigating and reporting the conditions of labor” in addition to “saving the merchants of Salinas several thousands of dollars [he did not specify how workers saved merchants money].”²⁰ Further, Scott noted the value of workers in Salinas: “For every man doing labor in Salinas there is employment created thereby for five others,” presumably in terms of supporting the laborers’ housing and living needs. Salinas was a place that prided itself on respect for workers as integral to a thriving

¹⁸ Minutes.

¹⁹ Minutes, Meeting of the Salinas-Watsonville Lettuce Men’s Association, September 16, 1930, Salinas Western Growers Association

²⁰ *The Salinas Independent*, November 16, 1929, p. 3.

agricultural community. As permanent residents and tax-paying citizens, union members' wages contributed mightily to the local economy as *The Independent* underscored under the headline, "Vegetable folk Pour \$2,246,400 Into City Yearly." A few years later, when shippers advertised for 5,000 new workers in 1935 to discourage a strike in the packing sheds, the Chamber "repudiated these ads and launched a counter campaign in support of the Central Labor Council "that there as no labor shortage in Central California...Mr. McCarger...estimated that there were...between two and three men for every job" ready and willing to work.²¹

Most telling, working class people identified as integral members of Salinas's community, as stakeholders who claimed inclusion. They expressed their feelings as community members through the mouthpiece of the newspaper, *The Salinas Independent*. In one special edition in 1935 the paper stated "A New Day Is Dawning: Understanding Prosperity and Peace," which linked labor union organization directly to the maintenance of "industrial peace." Salinas workers established themselves as integral to the economic well-being of their community: "Union workers are, VOTERS and TAXPAYERS here, [and] are rearing families in our community educating their children in our schools and who form a part of our solid citizenry." The report in *The Independent* emphasized just how widespread and important union membership in Salinas had become by 1935:

We have seen the development of the Butchers Union, the Barbers Union...all of the A.F. of L. Unions with almost 100 per cent organizations. The Building Trades too have shown an unprecedented organization and development.

²¹ Helen Boyden Lamb, "Industrial Relations in the Western Lettuce Industry," unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Radcliffe College, 1942, 300.

The Retail Clerks, Bartenders, Musicians, and several others have become strong factors in the economic development of this district. Likewise, the Fruit and Vegetable Workers Union has developed from an organization of lettuce packers into an Industrial Union with a strength almost unequaled in any open shop industry.²²

This last comment on the Fruit and Vegetable Workers Union indicated that although in 1935 Salinas did not yet have the benefit of a closed shop, something other unions fought and won in bigger urban settings, workers absolutely claimed Salinas as a union town.

Small farmers and workers built Salinas right alongside agricultural giants and business people. They all identified as Progressive era women and men (which included both native born and newer immigrants and all ethnicities and classes of people) who envisioned a California (and an America) of small towns and cities that shared attributes such as paved streets and sidewalks, churches, schools, and organizations dedicated to civic improvement and community uplift. These features of town life were built by middle classes, mostly women, and included multiple ethnic groups.²³ Most importantly, they all depended on agriculture, notably lettuce, to sustain their individual and community economic well-being.

²² *The Salinas Independent*, March 25, 1935, p. 1.

²³ See Paul Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820-1920* (Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, 1978); David Vaught, *Cultivating California: Growers, Specialty Crops, and Labor, 1875-1920* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999); Robin L. Einhorn, *Property Rules: Political Economy in Chicago, 1833-1872* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Jon C. Teaford, *The Unheralded Triumph: City Government in America, 1870-1900* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984).

LETTUCE ²⁴

Salinas was first and foremost an agricultural town inhabited (and governed) by women and men tied to agriculture in every possible way, from business dealings to expressions of city culture. Residents paid close attention to strikes, upticks and downturns in the produce market, and disputes with large railroad conglomerates over shipping issues. The daily newspapers routinely reported all of these events on their front pages, as they were central to the economic well being of the city as a whole. A report in *The Washington Post* in 1934 applauded Salinas for its lettuce boom: “It doesn’t seem possible, after hearing nothing but woe from the farm belt for 15 years, but there’s an agricultural boom on here in the Salinas-Watsonville alley—a lettuce boom.” The piece went on to liken lettuce production to the Wall Street of 1929 before the crash. The amazing thing to the reporter was that most of the success for Salinas farmers came without federal help: “Here in the little Spanish-type California town they’re getting rich out of lettuce—and without a penny’s worth of help from AAA. They’ve done it themselves aided by market conditions, to which have been applied some Yankee horse sense.”²⁵

Lettuce drove prosperity beginning in the 1920s, and in so doing, attracted a new farming population that included immigrants from every racial and ethnic group in California. Salinas and Watsonville farmers began experimenting with lettuce production in 1921. Although farmers often failed in growing, packing, and

²⁴ See Burton Anderson, *From Valley to Sea: 25 years with the Coastal Grower* (Salinas, California: Monterey County Historical Society, 2015) for a thorough analysis of the development of the lettuce industry in 1920s and 1930s Salinas Valley.

²⁵ Raymond Clapper, “Town’s Lettuce Boom Revives Days of ’29,” *The Washington Post*, July 27, 1934, np. Source: grower-Shipper Association archives.

shipping this fragile crop at the outset, the success of the lettuce industry created enormous prosperity for the city by the middle of the decade and mostly through the 1930s as well. According to E.L. Kaufman of the federal-state crop reporting service, lettuce was California's most important and most lucrative crop during the 1920s and 1930s and Salinas was the epicenter of that growth. Out of the total \$80,499,000 crop return for California in 1929, for example, \$23,000,000 came from lettuce with Salinas growing (and shipping) 65% of California's lettuce crop.²⁶ An editorial in the local newspaper enthused "While it might be a bit forward on our part to claim the majority of this crop, in view of the wide expanses of Imperial and Pajaro valleys planted thereto, it is NOT beside the question to opine that Salinas as the LARGEST single LETTUCE shipping center in the world and this same salad article being the biggest crop in California might indulge in a slight crow as to her "place in the sun" regarding vegetable crops...Lettuce is king. Rah for King Lettuce! Rah for Salinas valley!"²⁷ He was right—at least for the decade of the 1920s.

Lettuce (and all agricultural production) depended on new technology beginning with irrigation. Claus Spreckels was no city builder, but he had the means to develop new methods of irrigation that effectively utilized canals and wastewater mixed with water from the Salinas River to irrigate 3,000 acres of beets for sugar production and, at the same time, lettuce, cauliflower, strawberries, carrots and other row crops.²⁸ By 1933, in the midst of the Great Depression, Ellis Spiegl, a

²⁶ *Salinas Daily Index* January 9, 1930, p.1

²⁷ Editorial, *Salinas Index-Journal*, January 9, 1930, p.2. Monterey County Historical Society.

²⁸ Burton Anderson, *From Valley to Sea: 25 years with the Coastal Grower* (Salinas, California: Monterey County Historical Society, 2015), 8.

large-scale grower and shipper, invested \$25,000 in technology development. He revolutionized harvesting by developing machinery that “conveyed...lettuce directly from the fields, where the cutters are at work, into large bins on truck trailers reducing labor costs by 75%...In the packing sheds the lettuce is dumped from the bins onto conveyor belts and is conveyed to the trimmers and then the packers. The system eliminates the previously used small field crates, in which the lettuce was often bruised from tight packing.” Spiegl also invented “a new type of shipping crate lid which prevents lettuce bruising.”²⁹

Technology led to prosperity, but prosperity was always mixed with uncertainty. Prices fluctuated, sometimes from minute to minute throughout the growing seasons of the 1920s, but particularly during the Depression years. Growers, packers, and especially shippers exercised little control over profits and found themselves at the mercy of unscrupulous buyers and wildly vacillating commodity markets.³⁰ 1932 was a particularly difficult year.

As a consequence of overproduction and dramatic price drops in 1932, Bruce Church and Whitney Knowlton together with the smaller growers and shippers championed efforts to avoid the chaos of oversupply by creating a committee to “pro-rate” shipments. They faced strong opposition from their cohorts, F. J. McCann and Ellis Spiegl, two of the largest grower-shippers in the region who wanted free rein to ship as they wished. A series of meetings proved contentious with members

²⁹ *Salinas Index-Journal*, April 22, 1933,np, Source: Grower-Shippers Association clipping file, Folder: “Newspaper Clippings, 1933”

³⁰See Francis James Smith, Jr., “The Impact of Technological Change on the Marketing of Salinas Lettuce,” unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, University of California, 1961; *Salinas Index-Journal*, April 22, 1933,np, Source: Grower-Shippers Association clipping file, Folder: “Newspaper Clippings, 1933”

exasperated with one another, “Mr. Storm said that he thought if the shippers could not get together now after all the work that had been done and after such a great majority were in favor of doing so, they were all a bunch of boobs and deserved whatever happened to them.”³¹

Salinas’s residents and business people generally realized the collective economic danger of uncontrolled production and the benefits of strength in organization, union town that Salinas was, and supported Church and McCann’s efforts to organize growers and shippers to pro-rate their crops. In August 1932, *The Monterey County Post* warned that the county faced a possible loss of nine million dollars when “the bottom fell out [of the lettuce market] when shippers found few receivers willing to take lettuce even by simply guaranteeing their freight. The situation came as a shock to all hands. Good lettuce actually could not be given away, even where packing and crates were thrown in for good measure.”³² But Church’s and McCann’s efforts to pass similar measures to “pro rate” lettuce according to actual demand rather than speculation failed in 1932.

A year later, representatives from the Monterey County Farm Bureau and members from the Salinas Chamber of Commerce, met to reconsider the issue through support for *The Agricultural Prorate Bill* under discussion in the state legislature. This proposal aimed to provide “compulsory control of produce whenever two-thirds of the producers of that commodity express the desire for that control.” Imperial Valley grape growers initiated the measure, but according to this

³¹ Minutes, Meeting of the Salinas-Watsonville Lettuce Men’s Association, August 12, 1932, Salinas Western Growers Association

³² Pink sheet, August 6, 1932, Source Grower-Shippers Association Collection, folder “Clippings for 1932”

report, small farmers benefited most from controls over supply and demand. This initiative to bring the state in to help growers and shippers deal with unfair market conditions and unscrupulous buyers in the East also failed. By June, 1933 shippers led by Bruce Church, reluctantly abided by a “pro-rate agreement” that suspended shipping until lettuce prices increased sufficiently enough to make it worthwhile. Prices had dropped dramatically that year from \$1.10 per crate to a mere 75 cents. Church led a committee of eleven individuals from the Salinas community that would keep an eye on prices to decide if and when lettuce would be shipped. As the Secretary of the Grower-Shippers Association put it, this was an inclusive community endeavor rather than one that affected only growers or shippers: “All we desire is to get a ready sale of our crop at reasonable prices. We have planned this program for the benefit of the independent growers as well as ourselves and it is vitally important to every one connected with, or dependent upon, the lettuce industry—including Salinas merchants and businessmen.”³³ The pro-rate idea proved unsustainable, however, as not enough shippers signed on consistently to make it workable.

By 1934, lettuce production was back on the path of profitability due to the prescience of one Sam N. Beard a producer broker who established the Growers Exchange. It was not an easy path forward. In 1933, Mr. Beard “addressed the shippers regarding present market conditions and methods necessary to hold it in the face of heavy shipments. He particularly emphasized the fact that shippers could not afford to “get panicky” just because buyers had become a little timid, stating that

³³ *Salinas Index-Journal*, April 22, 1933, np, source: Grower-Shippers Association clipping file, Folder: “Newspaper Clippings, 1933”

“if the former would hold out for \$2.00 and turnover all homeless cars [to him, he] would demonstrate that his plan was more effective and more valuable in times of stress than when things were easy.”³⁴ Although his proposal appeared logical, it was met with suspicion from growers and shippers who rarely agreed on anything and usually preferred to act independently from one another. In one meeting, “Beard... complained bitterly about the lack of support both in cars and financial matters he was receiving from the Shippers...unless the Shippers got behind him he was ready to close out the whole effort...after Mr. Beard withdrew from the meeting the situation was discussed fully and it was decided to appoint a committee to investigate and to decide...advisability of hiring Mr. Beard at his stipulated salary of \$15,000.000 per year as an employee of the Association..all shippers would be assessed about \$3.00 per car out of...the matter should be presented to Attorney Gardner of Watsonville.”³⁵ Still, Beard’s contract was vigorously contested among growers and shippers. “Mr. Beard’s suggestion to advertise or call a mass meeting of independent growers in an effort to hold down plantings for Fall was turned down as...any agitation...would be misunderstood and would result in even greater acreage being planted...Mr. Beard stated that our weekly estimates would be discontinued as the shippers evidently did not know from one week to the next what they would get out...no action taken...Beard feared ruinous situation.”³⁶

³⁴ Minutes, Meeting of the Salinas-Watsonville Lettuce Men’s Association, April 24, 1934, Salinas Western Growers Association

³⁵ Minutes, Meeting of the Salinas-Watsonville Lettuce Men’s Association, April 30, 1934, Salinas Western Growers Association

³⁶ Minutes, Meeting of the Salinas-Watsonville Lettuce Men’s Association, May 8, 1934, Salinas Western Growers Association

By the spring of 1934, the GSA at last agreed to pay Beard 1 cent per crate of lettuce (whether it sold or not), and in exchange, Beard monitored Department of Agriculture market reports every morning to ascertain just how much lettuce “173 consuming markets throughout the country” might already have at their disposal and “how much [these consumers] are likely to eat in a week.” The Growers Exchange circumvented the earlier system when “a city which could consume only two cars of lettuce in a week would have five or six cars in the yards.” The oversupply “beat down the price and the Salinas shippers had to take what they could get” often fighting among themselves and undercutting one another in payments to workers in their efforts to find a path to profit.³⁷ The Association accepted Sam Beard’s marketing agency. Beard thus prevented “Buyers at the other end [from] pil[ing] up shipments contingent on sale. [Instead, buyers] are offered by telegraph cars of a given grade at certain prices. The deal is bargained out and the money is wired here [in Salinas]...When Beard started operating...lettuce was bringing under \$2 a crate...Anything over \$1.35 a crate is profit.” One month later lettuce sold for \$3.31. “Such prices were unheard of.”³⁸

The Chicago based Federal Market News-Service (FMNS), funded by the federal government and controlled in Washington D.C. and Chicago, presented Salinas with another challenge in 1932 and 1933. The struggle over the FMNS not only showed how Salinas as a city depended on lettuce production but also how various groups in Salinas worked closely together to overcome hurdles to

³⁷ Raymond Clapper, “Town’s Lettuce Boom Revives Days of ’29,” *The Washington Post*, July 27, 1934, p.10.

³⁸ Raymond Clapper, “Town’s Lettuce Boom Revives Days of ’29,” *The Washington Post*, July 27, 1934, np. Source: grower-Shipper Association archives.

agricultural success. The FMNS provided Salinas Valley growers and shippers with an essential tool in calculating prices that, in turn, might determine quantity of lettuce worth growing. The *Index-Journal* gave a brief history of its significance for Salinas's farmers: "The FMNS has been considered an integral part of the local lettuce industry for years. It was established only after a long hard fight against selfish interests controlled by big time gamblers on the Chicago Board of Trade and in other centers where speculation on crop futures is rife...it enables the farmer to know each day what the standard price should be for his product. Before installation of the Service speculators jockeyed the market at will. It is feared that there will be a return to this situation...virtually every product of the soil will be affected...Salinas rallied in a desperate effort to protest against this loss."³⁹ The threat of withdrawal of the Market News-Service inspired a delegation from Salinas to travel to Sacramento that included Senator C.C. Baker and Fred McCarger, "McCarger stated appreciation of the lettuce industry as the principal business in the Valley and the desire of the Chamber of Commerce to help it and its operators in every way possible."⁴⁰

We get a sense of the chaos of the market from readings of the Minutes from the Grower-Shipper Association meetings in which anything might derail a crop and send a farmer, packer or shipper into bankruptcy. "H.A. Hunt, County Agricultural Commission...distributed a paper on lettuce pests and their control...increasing ..as the same crops are grown from year to year on the same land... ..A letter from Mr.

³⁹ *Salinas Index Journal* June 20, 1933 p.2

⁴⁰ Minutes, Meeting of the Salinas-Watsonville Lettuce Men's Association, May 10, 1932, Salinas Western Growers Association

O. D. Miller was read suggesting action on reducing rents and further reducing wages of field labor...The Secretary read a wage scale agreed on at Stockton between laborers shippers, and tenants Common laborer 15 cents; cultivating 17.5 cents Other Teamsters 20 cents Celery Planters 25 cents Tractor men \$2.00 per day net or basis 25 cents.”⁴¹ Here we see in one discussion how growers convoluted gradations in wages for workers and tenant farmers, the influx of pests and diseases in crops, to maintain land fertility, and also to control prices of the harvested vegetables and fruit. Controlling labor costs became critically important. Wages for workers might make the difference between success or failure, profit or loss and even bankruptcy for growers, packers, and shippers who tried in every possible way to maintain control and who reacted harshly and immediately to any threat to their hegemony. The lives of workers depended on the willingness of growers to include them in the assessments of profit and loss, which could be capricious. First and foremost, organizing into unions appeared to be one of the best ways to achieve a level of socioeconomic stability that might allow workers access into the world of agricultural entrepreneurship, as precarious as that was. Nonetheless, good wages meant finding the means to buy land, own a home, or create a business. All were an important means to the end of middle class status that meant everything if one was to be accepted into mainstream community life in Salinas.

We see the extreme turbulence in the world of agriculture reflected in the GSA minutes and the efforts of everyone involved to seize whatever advantage they had available. Most of the discussions at the Grower Shipper Association concerned

⁴¹ Minutes, Meeting of the Salinas-Watsonville Lettuce Men’s Association, June 7, 1932, Salinas Western Growers Association

how best to judge lettuce prices and control for volatility of markets and shipping rates. "It was the sense of the meeting that next year's markets may very well be as poor as this year's and that it is quite possible they may get to the 85 cent and 90 cent level of the present market on lettuce from the Southern sections...It was the sense of this meeting that Mr. Knowlton and Mr. Tracy should review the relations between this Association and the Western Growers in either one or both of their meetings in an effort to secure from them more cooperation and greater assistance than has been accorded in the past."⁴² In this way, the Salinas GSA tried to maintain connections and cooperation from other California associations and at the national level too. "General discussion developed...it was agreed to have the Vegetable, Deciduous and Citrous interests prepare briefs of statistics demonstrating the percentage of gross returns paid in freight charged from 1918 to 1932; the increasing volume industry cannot continue to pay the present fixed charges from the standpoint of either the grower or shipper."⁴³ Members of the GSA endlessly debated ways of cutting costs and maximizing profits in a chaotic environment where they had little control. Every spring and summer throughout the 1930s strikes threatened to derail the marketing of lettuce as workers used the urgency of the harvest to do what they could to gain an advantage--just as growers, packers, and shippers did.

⁴² Minutes, Meeting of the Salinas-Watsonville Lettuce Men's Association, December 6, 1932, Salinas Western Growers Association

⁴³ Notes, San Francisco California Office California Growers & Shippers Protective League, in Minutes, Meeting of the Salinas-Watsonville Lettuce Men's Association, December 14, 1932, Salinas Western Growers Association

GSA members worked together more readily to maintain standards: “In August 1928 the fight for reduced and otherwise revised refrigeration rates was started...On motion of H.L. Strobel...this committee was unanimously empowered to represent this District and make the best deal possible...The Salinas-Watsonville Lettuce Clearing House hereby formed as a non-profit association to control the operations ...in harvesting, packing, grading, inspecting and shipping lettuce grown in the counties of Monterey, Santa Cruz, and San Benito...in order to prevent a possible disaster to the industry.”⁴⁴

The GSA kept a close watch on federal efforts to wrest control over prices even as they needed federal support to enforce fair trade. “This meeting was called to order to consider recommendations to make the Federal Government in line with its policy of Industrial reorganization...a meeting between Federal Secretary of Agriculture Wallace...it would be much better for our industry to make recommendations for putting its house in order than to sit by and allow the Federal Government to set up a dictatorship over it.”⁴⁵ The use of the term “dictatorship” and the endless debates about how to utilize state and federal government belied the conflicts going on within the GSA between their need for government action, their fear of interference and governmental control, and their deep-seated belief in their own independent enterprises. Local government, usually led E. J. Leach, who served in various capacities a mayor and city councilman in the 1930s, played an

⁴⁴ Minutes, Meeting of the Salinas-Watsonville Lettuce Men’s Association, May 22, 1933, Salinas Western Growers Association

⁴⁵ Minutes, Meeting of the Salinas-Watsonville Lettuce Men’s Association, June 25, 1933, Salinas Western Growers Association

important role as acceptable government representative and intermediary trusted by all sides.

By 1935, Salinas's residents congratulated themselves on overcoming the volatility of the market and in which "demand exceeded supply" as "The lettuce industry set a new record...after prices climbed to a lofty peak...establishing the highest market quotation in the past three years."⁴⁶ This prompted an editorial that also reported the comments by visiting ex-Governor C.C. Young of Salinas's "enviable position" as a "lettuce metropolis...in good financial condition," based on the fact that there were few vacant homes due to full employment for city residents.⁴⁷ Most importantly, lettuce production generated growth in related industries in Salinas that added to the city's taxable wealth. "Endless ramifications of the lettuce industry are noted. There is the lively 'shook' business—shook are the crates which are delivered knocked down. More ice is produced in the little city of Salinas—for packing lettuce—than in the large cities of San Francisco and Oakland combined."⁴⁸ As a result of lettuce production mostly by small-scale farmers, Salinas exhibited fairly consistent economic growth and stability in both the 1920s and the 1930s, despite the economic turmoil in the rest of the country.

WHAT DEPRESSION?

Between 1919 and 1940, Salinas's wealth more than doubled. The population of Salinas proper increased from 4,308 in 1920 to 11,586 by 1940. Grammar school

⁴⁶ Raymond Clapper, "Town's Lettuce Boom Revives Days of '29," *The Washington Post*, July 27, 1934, np. Source: grower-Shipper Association archives.

⁴⁷ *Salinas Index-Journal*, June 1, 1933, np, Source: Grower-Shippers Association Clipping File, Folder titled: "Newspaper Clippings, 1933"

⁴⁸ Raymond Clapper, "Town's Lettuce Boom Revives Days of '29," *The Washington Post*, July 27, 1934, p.10

enrollment between 1923 and 1929 increased from 596 to 1402, and dramatically in the 1930-1940 decade, which also showed evidence of population expansion well beyond the city's original footprint.⁴⁹

Banks in Salinas showed huge jumps in revenue from \$80,000,000 in 1922 to \$155,000,000 by 1931.⁵⁰ The income Salinas generated just from lettuce production grew to \$11,000,000 in 1930 alone, up from its total earning from agriculture of \$9,593,270 in 1919.⁵¹ One report noted "At the height of the crop season \$100,000 a day in cash comes into [Salinas]. Since the first of the year [1934] approximately \$5,000,000 in good United States cash has been laid down on the barrel head in Salinas, Monterey County, population 12,000 for lettuce."⁵²

It was during this period that "the bustling city of Salinas" was known as "wealthiest community per capita in the United States, busy with industries which are placing [Salinas] as one of the foremost of the progressive middle-sized cities in the world. [Salinas] high school is one of the finest in the country, costing a half million dollars to build. [Salinas's] two grammar schools were also built at enormous cost, and offer the growing boy and girl advantages that cannot be surpassed in any other community."⁵³ Numerous newspaper articles reinforced this positive view of the city throughout the 1930s, documenting the number of money

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⁵⁰ Helen Boyden Lamb, "Industrial Relations in the Western Lettuce Industry," unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Radcliffe College, 1942, 60.

⁵¹ Helen Boyden Lamb, "Industrial Relations in the Western Lettuce Industry," unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Radcliffe College, 1942

⁵² Raymond Clapper, "Town's Lettuce Boom Revives Days of '29," *The Wahsington Post*, July 27, 1934, np. Source: grower-Shipper Association archives

⁵³ Major Rolin C. Watkins, ed., *Monterey and Santa Cruz Counties, California: Cradle of California's History and Romance*, (Chicago: S.J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1925), 379.

orders (22,500) and letters posted (60,000 in three days) every year that consistently gave the city “a first class rating by the United States government.”⁵⁴

Businesses prospered for the most part between 1900 and 1940, and even though the Great Depression infected city life just as it did everywhere else, numerous editorials noted that Salinas’s economic flexibility based on the production of a wide variety of marketable crops protected the entire area from the worst aspects of Depression era America. Experts and common folk alike referred to Salinas as “the white spot” (as in bright spot rather than in the racial designation of that term) amidst the myriad of towns elsewhere decimated by the Great Depression.

Salinas had, in the decades of the 1920s and 1930s, “the largest beet sugar factory in the world (capacity 5,000 tons daily), the largest strawberry farm in the world (124 acres), the largest friezia bulb ranch in the world, and the only goat milk condensary in the world...a large cow milk condensary...[and Salinas farmers raised] practically all the sweet pea seed that is imported to Europe...other crops [grown successfully in the Salinas Valley] are: Lettuce, artichokes, cauliflower, tomatoes, celery, bulbs, apricots, pears, apples, berries, and the famous Salinas-Burbank potato.”⁵⁵All of this agricultural production not only made an impressive list for the entire valley, but also served to enrich the city’s coffers through taxes on industries located within the city and a host of other support services agricultural

⁵⁴ *Salinas Index Journal*, December 30, 1925

⁵⁵ Major Rolin C. Watkins, ed., *Monterey and Santa Cruz Counties, California: Cradle of California’s History and Romance*, (Chicago: S.J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1925), 380,384

prosperity engendered. Those who served in city government from city staff to school board members to elected officials generally came from the increasing population of growers, labor contractors, packers, shippers and also townspeople who were engaged in medicine, law and small retail businesses associated in various ways with agriculture.

Salinas's city leaders needed agricultural development for the continued prosperity of their city, and stayed closely tied to the business of farming, attentive to the lives of both farmers and the spectrum of workers who made up the agricultural community. City leaders such as E.J. Leach constantly initiated various events to bring Salinas's multiple groups into community, relieving the intense stresses of people involved in growing, harvesting, marketing and shipping produce in an era of extreme volatility. The city collectively celebrated the big new innovations in agriculture that meant predominance for Salinas.

The year that the stock market crashed was a watershed for Salinas, ironically, in a good way. One front-page story a week earlier hardly anticipated the disaster to come, announcing the upcoming opening of a new bank "the [result of the] unbounded confidence of a group of agriculturalists and financiers of Salinas and Pajaro Valleys and of Monterey Peninsula."⁵⁶ Alongside this announcement, also on the front page the paper featured a prominent photo of three new businessmen joining Salinas's thriving business community, while the editorial page announced the opening of a new J.C. Penney Store downtown. In fact, every new business opening in Salinas made front-page news, usually attached to a large photograph of

⁵⁶ *Salinas Daily Index-Journal*, October 17, 1929, p.2

the business owner. Salinas's residents found business relocations from rival Monterey particularly satisfying. A large photograph of new Salinas businessman, Dave Schwartz appeared on the front page of the *Index-Journal* accompanied by an article detailing the value it brought to the town: "Taxable property in the value of several thousand dollars and a new business venture was added to the commercial life of Salinas when the Arcade Department store owned and operated by Mr. and Mrs. Dave Schwartz, late of Monterey, opened its doors in the Cominos building."⁵⁷ When interviewed, Dave Schwartz declared "I've long had my eye on Salinas and Salinas valley as the 'coming' community in all of the coast valley region."⁵⁸ Like so many other retailers and entrepreneurs, Schwartz benefited from the wealth generated by agriculture that made Salinas a promising place to engage in business.

Salinas "again took the lead in building permits [for] the Pacific Coast" according to an analysis by W.W. Straus and company in 1929. In the month of December alone, Salinas "granted 33 building permits, the value of which was \$89,215. In the entire year, 1929, Salinas authorities granted 606 building permits having a value of \$1,380,679. During 1928 our building permits were valued at \$1,017,501...San Jose quite naturally, led this region in building permits both in 1928 and 1929. San Jose is a city of 65,000 people whereas the last estimate of Salinas's population ran less than 10,000." This was at a moment in time when nearby Monterey boasted the largest fishing industry in the nation valued at over \$50,000,000 but that economy did not spur an equivalent development for the city,

⁵⁷ *Salinas Index-Journal*, November 1, 1929, p.1

⁵⁸ *Salinas Index-Journal*, November 1, 1929, p.1

which granted only half as many building permits as Salinas in 1928 and 1929.⁵⁹ A series of Pacific Gas & Electric studies during the 1930s showed Salinas's leading the county in electricity and gas sold as well as in statistics that Salinas had the most telephones installed continuously throughout the period that also reinforced the perception of Salinas's economic prosperity and municipal growth in the first year of the Great Depression.⁶⁰By 1935, Salinas celebrated a "A record breaking 79 percent increase over last year for the period 1934-1935 by the City of Salinas in building construction...This years total is \$594,854 as compared with \$332,786 [in 1934], \$177,932 in 1933 and \$281,917 in 1932."⁶¹

One local newspaper editor, Rolin G. Watkins, a tireless supporter of Salinas business and booster for the city, wrote overblown editorials that urged residents to shop locally "If we but center our interests upon Salinas [instead of shopping in San Francisco or San Jose] we are destined to become a great empire—small in acreage it is true but rich in monetary values." He went on to make a case for Salinas as a place of producers: "It is not how much money you have as it is how much money you are producing. The worker bee ever commands more respect than the drone."⁶²This last statement, a shout-out to Salinas's working classes, further reinforced the city's self-image as a place proud that its workers' energy and values sustained the economy of the growing city.

In another piece demonstrating evidence of Salinas's prosperity, Watkins reported "Salinas valley farmers bought \$139,000 worth of automobiles in October

⁵⁹ *Salinas Index Journal*, January 10, 1930, pps 1 & 5.

⁶⁰ *Salinas Index Journal*, January 10, 1930, p.1.

⁶¹ *Salinas Index-Journal*, January 3, 1936, p.1.

⁶² *Salinas Index Journal*, January 11, 1930, p.2.

1929 alone. They have a new car for every 140 people...46 percent better than the state average. Fourteen nationally known chain organizations have retailers in Salinas Valley. The per capita income for the year 1929 was \$831. The average income per farm is \$9400 about 200 percent greater than the state average.”⁶³

There was evidence everywhere of success for Salinas both during the 1920s and during Depression era. Not only was every new business that opened front page news, but also was used to demonstrate proof of full employment in the city and throughout the Salinas Valley, even as unemployment rates skyrocketed in the rest of the United States. One report in 1930 announced that a “New Grocery and Meat Store Opens...\$10,750 week totals for building...five new structures were started this week....Salinas canneries employ 700 people at one local spinach packing plant and put \$210,212.18 into circulation.”⁶⁴ On February 12, 1930, Salinas broke ground for a new six-story bank, The Salinas National Bank, which cost \$260,000 to construct.⁶⁵ When Montgomery Ward bought the locally owned Farmers Mercantile company in downtown Salinas, there was some sympathy for the family that was forced to sell to the big retailer, but it was tempered by enthusiasm for the new business enterprise and how that might add to an already strong local economy: “The transaction is looked upon as one of the most significant in the business history of Salinas...the new store will be much larger than the old one and will occupy...22,000 square feet of floor space.”⁶⁶

⁶³ *Salinas Index Journal*, January 16, 1930, p.2.

⁶⁴ *Salinas Index Journal* January 17,1930, p.1

⁶⁵ *Salinas Index Journal* June 14, 1930 p.1

⁶⁶ *Salinas Index Journal* August 8, 1933

The H.P. Garin company made Salinas its regional headquarters for operations from Gilroy to Greenfield in 1930 and quickly became another front page news story and subject for an enthusiastic editorial: “[Garin’s company] has a payroll of \$500,000...Did you read Garin’s statement of his unbounded faith in the future of this valley? Then you know how the biggest men in the produce game feel about it.”⁶⁷ [Furthermore] “With 38 building permits listed in Salinas last month calling for structures approximating \$364,000.00 in value this city established a record here for all time...[the city council gave] approval for a new subdivision in the Spring district; [and passed] resolutions directing the opening of a new alley and a new street.”⁶⁸

Even as the Depression deepened in the 1930s, adding distress to other parts of the country, Salinas seemed to withstand its worst effects and even thrive economically because of the power of agricultural production and specifically the success of the lettuce industry: “Two local banks, The Salinas National and the Monterey County Bank today announced they had declared dividends for their stockholders—the third Bank of America reported an increased volume of business.”⁶⁹ The Salinas National Bank’s 1932 business report showed “the most successful year since its organization in 1929. It opens the year 1933 with a very large cash and secondary reserve....The Salinas National Bank starting from scratch October 21st 1929 has enjoyed a most phenomenal growth. Closing its books for the

⁶⁷ *Salinas Index Journal* February 15, 1930 p.2

⁶⁸ *Salinas Index Journal* March 4, 1930 p.1

⁶⁹ *Salinas Index Journal* January 2, 1933 p.1

year 1932, it shows resources of over \$2,100,000.00.”⁷⁰ Headlines such as the following filled the local press throughout the 1930s: “Local Banks Strong, will Pay Profits: financial Institutions End Successful Year After Holding Sturdy Position in Region” and “Integrity held Certain sign of Community’s Strength to Withstand All threats of future”⁷¹ The newspaper accounts of prosperity may have been a bit over the top in their efforts both to reassure (and to rally) Salinas’s residents that they lived in a place that withstood the impact of the Great Depression in spite of the economic collapse in the rest of the country. However, statistics about economic growth backed up their accounts, and also suggested some reasons why California generally (and Salinas in particular), became destination points for Americans trying to escape the worst effects of the terrible economic downturn.

Women played central roles in reinforcing an image of Salinas as an affluent place based on community spirit that favored anyone and everyone willing to adhere to a shared value system. Those values were based fundamentally on love for land and property ownership that cemented residency, modest behavior that defined middle class sensibilities, and full-throated American patriotism. Minutes of the prominent Salinas Women’s Club showed active involvement in everything to do with city life and growth, even before women had the power to vote. Politicians routinely visited the club to garner support for projects ranging from public health initiatives to education to transportation, and encouraged club members to attend Board of Supervisor’s meetings as a show of strength and support for the city’s

⁷⁰ *Salinas Index Journal* January 2, 1933 p.1

⁷¹ *Salinas Index Journal* January 2, 1933 p.1

varied initiatives for infrastructure development, particularly in road building and in the construction of an airport.⁷²

The social sections of contemporary newspapers in Salinas where women's activities took precedence reflected a surprising degree of racial inclusiveness by the mid-1920s and throughout the 1930s rather than focusing exclusively on the doings of white elites as so many society pages in newspapers of the day in California and nationally did. Here, the papers recounted news about the Filipina Women's Club alongside news about the white dominated Business and Professional Women's Club, Danish and Italian social organizations, and Japanese and Chinese Women's Clubs and culturally based organizations, all of which directed efforts at organizing educational and social events, holding events that celebrated ethnic and cultural pride, hosting musicals and theater productions and lectures by scholars from various colleges and universities around the state. Salinas's newspapers also highlighted and promoted lectures by Stanford faculty who were regularly invited by various women's organizations and ethnic associations to enlighten community members about the history and culture of places all over the world, as well as lectures on everything from agriculture to business and to developments in public health and foreign affairs.

Population growth stimulated new real estate developments, the building of new schools and golf courses, the construction of an airport and multiple public parks and recreation centers, all of which were funded mainly (though not entirely) by newly prosperous horticulturalists invested in city building rather than by the

⁷² Minutes, Salinas Women's Civic Club, 1909-1940, Monterey County Historical Society Archives.

state. By 1935, according to the *Salinas Independent*, “All lines of businesses in Salinas flourished, business was good, new enterprises were established, farmers prospered, bank clearings increased, building increased and postal receipts increased, and there were no business failures.”⁷³ The report connected the prosperity of the lettuce industry to fortune for all, including workers, whose employment and wages from labor in the fields and packing sheds were used to support local business.⁷⁴ In short, Salinas was repeatedly described through the 1930s as “one of the chief prosperity ‘white spots’ of California during the depression era.”⁷⁵

Referring to lettuce production as “green gold” Salinas’s residents and civic leaders boasted that the prosperity they enjoyed came from their own efforts without any support from FDR’s New Deal: “Sure it’s a gamble...but we’re winning and we’re doing it ourselves without any help from Washington...[lettuce] means cash money here,” a former inspector for the United States Department of Agriculture (and now lettuce farmer) Earl Wilson claimed in one report. “I got \$175 an acre for 140 acres,” he said, “When I think of those farmers in Iowa and Nebraska I think we are all pretty lucky out here.”⁷⁶ According to the *Washington Post*, “All of this money [from lettuce] has created boom time conditions here. Haircuts are 75 cents. The Cadillac dealer is doing the largest motor business in town. Del Monte, the famous resort less than 20 miles away, has become the playground of Salinas, which

⁷³ *Salinas Independent* January 4, 1935, p. 1

⁷⁴ *Salinas Independent* January 4, 1935, p. 1

⁷⁵ *Salinas Independent* January 4, 1935, p. 1

⁷⁶ Raymond Clapper, “Town’s Lettuce Boom Revives the Days of ‘29” *The Washington Post*, July 27, 1934, p. 10.

was once its poor neighbor...One well know businessman here dropped \$16,000 in a crap game the other night.”⁷⁷

Nonetheless, for all of the prosperity it generated, lettuce production was always a gamble, dependent as it was on weather and competition from growers in Arizona, Washington state, the Imperial Valley and even New York. “You’ve got to remember,” Earl Wilson acknowledged, “that about half the people who go into lettuce go broke.”⁷⁸ Costs such as crates for packing, waterproof paper for packing, workers’ wages, and icing the lettuce to keep it fresh during shipping all had to be paid for and almost always in cash. Moreover, controlling sales and distribution was a real headache and could (and did) bankrupt any given grower in one season, especially the small farmers with few resources to sustain them in lean years.

It was, after all, the Great Depression. The enthusiastic appraisal of economic conditions in Salinas was disconcerting, given that it came in the midst of the worst economic disaster and in one of the most contentious political and social contexts in American history. In most American towns and cities, people faced mass unemployment and widespread home and business foreclosures, losing all of their savings in short order. Salinas’s residents were not oblivious. The good economic news locally may have played out on the front pages of the papers, but it was always alongside more dire reports of turmoil, disastrous economic conditions and radical unionism that characterized the rest of California and the nation in the 1930s.

Internationally, news accounts highlighted stories of the rise of fascist dictators and

⁷⁷ Raymond Clapper, “Town’s Lettuce Boom Revives the Days of ‘29” *The Washington Post*, July 27, 1934, p. 10.

⁷⁸ Raymond Clapper, “Town’s Lettuce Boom Revives the Days of ‘29” *The Washington Post*, July 27, 1934, p. 10.

their aggressive behavior on the world stage. Most importantly, refugees from the Dust Bowl made their collective presence known in Salinas as they flocked to work in the lettuce fields and packing sheds in determined efforts to restore their family economies in the face of the twin catastrophes of environmental disaster and economic collapse.

A NEW WHITE MIGRATION

Entire families lived in tents or built makeshift homes on the outskirts of Salinas in Hebron Heights in Alisal. That section also came to be known in this era as “Little Oklahoma.” Admitting that “poverty is not unheard of here,” and that “poverty is always with us,” an editorial blamed the migrant labor force for that: “The charities are having a heavy load thrust upon their shoulders because of transients, and not because of established...residents,” thus marking a definite line between transient laborers perhaps unworthy of aid and workers who were integral members of Salinas’s community.⁷⁹

The Salvation Army stepped in to help “feeding and providing a night lodging for from 100 to 150 unemployed men who are daily passing through this city,” according to a page one report in the *Monterey County Post* in 1933. The report contained a dire warning to Salinas’s residents: “If due to lack of funds, the Army should be forced to discontinue this work, the resulting conditions only become unthinkable. Can you imagine any worse condition than having these men turned on the streets of Salinas with no place to sleep and nothing to eat? Crime, panhandling and general begging would increase in such proportions that the actual security of

⁷⁹ *Salinas Index Journal* May 4, 1935

our homes and property be in jeopardy.” However, the piece also included a call to citizens to help and a plea for compassion and understanding: “There is also the humanitarian...side of the situation...persons compelled to ask for community aid...purely as a result of the depression...have always hitherto been self supporting. They are normal and stable in their adjustment to society and as little social service problems as the victim of a shipwreck or earthquake. Food clothing and shelter must be provided for them with as little offense to their dignity as possible...During the past six months the Salvation Army has given 19,025 meals, 10, 391 nights lodgings, 2,516 garments, 1,302 pairs of shoes and assisted 591 families (average four to a family)...The people of Salinas heartily and sincerely appreciate this splendid work.”⁸⁰

Reports in the newspapers sounded alarms in 1934 about “indigents coming into this area,” who “drift” exposing a major point of concern for Salinas’s residents. It was not the poverty of Dust Bowlers that bothered them, but their transiency. Although this city welcomed new populations of working people (especially if they were Caucasian), they deeply distrusted people who meant to remain only temporarily. Salinas’s residents directed particular suspicion against migrant field workers who appeared to lack any intention to put down roots. However, newspaper reports made clear that Salinas’s leadership viewed transients as a county problem rather than a difficulty for the city of Salinas to solve by itself.

By 1934, according to county welfare director, W.H. Leach, “Conditions are reaching an alarming state...More than 300 families are now camped in one spot

⁸⁰ *Monterey County Post*, March 21, 1933, p.1

alone along the river road south of Salinas while hundreds more are on private land...These families live in tents under conditions that are far from sanitary...Children of these families attend schools in this county, exposing other children to whatever maladies they might acquire because of the unsanitary environment in which they live." Living conditions were so poor and unsanitary that the Board of Supervisors held a special meeting to consider solutions to the "Transient Problem." Besides fearing a public health catastrophe that might come out of "unsanitary conditions" the other fear expressed by the Board of Supervisors was that "mass trouble is likely to occur if agitators go among indigents."

What to do? One solution proposed by both the Board of Supervisors and promoted by editorials was to force families to return whence they came, providing them "with enough gasoline to reach their homes." Although 50 families were sent back to their original homes by county officials, "daily there are more families arriving than leaving."⁸¹ One editorial argued that government had a responsibility for these Americans, "While they are in the county they must be fed, and if they become ill, they must be treated. They are public charges from every angle and the taxpayers money must be used in keeping them alive." A long-term solution was clearly in doubt as the editorial piece asked rhetorically if these migrants should remain in Salinas and Monterey County, concluding "It is no more right that the communities in which these people spent years should take up the burden of supporting them" advocating that they be forced to return to their collective Dust Bowl origins. Moreover, it was an argument made in the context of widespread local

⁸¹ *Salinas Index Journal* April 13, 1934, p.1

prosperity so felt doubly cruel: "This county is fortunate in having industries which employ practically all of the residents of the county, while other counties, states, and even sections of the country are burdened with caring for a larger percentage of their people...the plan of sending people back to the communities where they are well-known is the best way of meeting the situation."⁸²

The county health and welfare officials discussed another (more concerning) proposal that would place migrant families in "concentration camps."⁸³ This possibility sounds shocking given our post World War II understanding of the meaning of that term. At the time, in 1934, however, it was intended to mean "concentrating families" into "camps" that offered adequate housing, showers, food supplies, and medical care to meet basic needs along the lines currently carried out in San Luis Obispo. Still this plan inferred marginalization rather than the integration of newcomers, which had been the more common settlement pattern in Salinas since the 1850s.

Notwithstanding this mention of transients as a problem population in Salinas, there was little in the contemporary press that made the presence of Dust Bowl settlers visible to the community at large. However, these scary stories about transients in the press were mixed with efforts to provide relief at the local level in the form of paid, sustained employment and efforts to give children access to the same education that everyone else in the city enjoyed. Diverse women's groups came together to provide emergency supplies of food, clothing, and even housing. Again, integration and incorporation of the transient poor all depended on

⁸² *Salinas Index Journal* April 13, 1934, p.4

⁸³ *Salinas Index Journal* April 12, 1934, p.2

perceptions by the larger community that the poverty and transiency were temporary conditions, but that new migrants in Salinas shared community values, first and foremost that of permanent residency, and hoped to become part of the middle class mainstream that defined this agricultural town. The new migrants from the Dust Bowl certainly did. “Everybody became a good citizens,” recalled one former Dust Bowler, “ and we all grew up in a great community.”⁸⁴The emphasis on citizenship and community indicated that poverty alone did not disqualify individuals or families from Salinas’s majority. Salinas’s residents’ perceptions of stability and commitment on the part of newcomers made the difference between persistent marginalization and eventual acceptance of someone into the fabric of city life.⁸⁵

Mary Martha Ramsey Day poignantly recounted the hardships a refugee family from the Dust Bowl faced in the transition from Texas to California. Day recalled her Texas childhood as one of hard work and privation, but also love and adventure. Her story is remarkable for its matter-of fact good nature in the face of truly dire conditions, which might have crushed lesser souls during the Great Depression and Dust Bowl era. Her cheerful acceptance of the most difficult of circumstances likely came from her mother’s example, a woman whom she described as “small” but resolute and fearless. Mary recollected, “I don’t think [my mother] ever backed down from anyone or anything...[she] wasn’t afraid of

⁸⁴ Interview with Bill Ramsey by Carol McKibben, April 12, 2017, offices of Mann Packing, Salinas, California.

⁸⁵ For a thorough analysis of the experiences of Dust Bowl refugees in California see James N. Gregory, *American Exodus: The Dust Bowl Migration and Okie Culture in California* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

anything except lightening [having been struck by lightening as a newlywed].”⁸⁶Like so many other women who arrived as members of the Dust Bowl migration, she faced all the usual travails of motherhood in an era of economic uncertainty, multiple crises, and innumerable outbreaks of illness without access to medical care. On top of all that, she also contended with the incredible challenges of travel with a baby, toddlers, and older children under extreme duress. Still, one would never know that from Mary Ramsey’s account.

The family lived on the edge of subsistence in Texas until economic pressures forced them to abandon Texas for California where Mary’s paternal grandparents had moved in 1929 “because of Grandma Kate’s health. She was an asthmatic.” Mary vividly recalled the moment the family left the Southwest for good:

“In the fall of 1930, we had an auction Sale on our farm and sold everything; household goods, farm equipment, and live stock. We had a new Oakland automobile, but we owed money on it, so Daddy traded it for a Model B Ford. So Frank (14), Mary (12), Chester (10) Claude (8) Ruby (6) Lil (5), Twins Buck and Fern (2) and Tuttie (6 months) and Mama and Daddy, we all piled into that Model B Ford on December 2, 1930 and started for Salinas California.”⁸⁷

Obviously the family lost everything they owned, but instead of dissolving into despair they carried on. She described their harrowing journey West as an

⁸⁶ Mary Martha Ramsey Day, “All of these things happened before I was 12 years old,” written, 1982, courtesy, Bill Ramsey, Salinas, California, 2018.

⁸⁷ Mary Martha Ramsey Day, “All of these things happened before I was 12 years old,” written, 1982, courtesy, Bill Ramsey, Salinas, California, 2018.

adventure, which it may have seemed to her 12-year-old self, but had to have pushed her mother and father to the brink of their ability to cope:

When we got to the mountains in New Mexico the car started getting hot and we had a hard time getting water for the radiator. We often had to buy water and we had to walk from wherever we were on the road to a station or a farm...It was winter time but the cold did not bother us because we were so tightly packed in the car.

We spent the Christmas Holidays in Arizona picking cotton. We lived in a tent and we were within sight of the State Prison at Florence, Arizona. We did our cooking outside...There was a prison break while we were there and the guards came by our place with the dogs and they told us that all women and children had to stay in the tent. I often wondered what protection we had in a tent.

Then again we started out for California. In the mountains in Arizona, all of us older children and my Father got out of the car and pushed because the car would not make it over the mountains...Well, finally we got to San Luis Obispo. That car took a look at the mountain and wouldn't go anymore. Daddy called my Grandfather in Monterey and two of my uncles came to San Luis Obispo to get us. So after two months we arrived in Monterey.⁸⁸

Bill Ramsey, Mary's little brother and the second to the last of the eleven Ramsey children was born in Alisal in 1932. Bill became one of the most prominent businessmen and civic leaders in Salinas. But first he was part of the poorest

⁸⁸ Mary Martha Ramsey Day, "All of these things happened before I was 12 years old," written, 1982, courtesy, Bill Ramsey, Salinas, California, 2018.

population, living in the marginal outskirts of town throughout his childhood and adolescence.⁸⁹

Most of Alisal was “open farmland” but in 1930, “Elton Hebbbron, a farmer who had owned the land for 25 years, subdivided [his] 100-acre hayfield into one acre tracts...For a few years Hebbbron heights was a stagnant development, but around 1934 the Midwestern drouth [sic] became critical and families began to migrate to California from the “dust bowl.”⁹⁰ Alisal may have been sparsely populated, but people had been living there for centuries, as described in Chapter One. Japanese, Chinese, Mexican, and Filipino and Black families intermingled with whites in helter-skelter neighborhoods and scattered farms and ranches.

However, Alisal’s residents worked through the Board of Supervisors to improve conditions. Besides Elton Hebbbron’s efforts to subdivide land for housing, Robert W. Adcock also bought land in Alisal in 1926 not to farm, but to found a water company and create a sewer system in the midst of what was “mostly ranches, dairies and small farms.”⁹¹ As the population of Alisal increased quickly in 1934-1935, Adcock, along with “14 residents of the Alisal district...petitioned the Board of Supervisors to service an additional 90 homes and declared himself willing to pay one fourth the cost of connecting [them] while require[ing] the home owners

⁸⁹ Interview with Bill Ramsey by Carol McKibben, April 12, 2017, offices of Mann Packing, Salinas, California.

⁹⁰ “The ‘Oakies’ Make Good, Too!” *The Daily Oklahoman*, February, 25, 1940, p. 12 courtesy JoAnn

e Adcock Schmidt

⁹¹ Interview with Joanne Adcock Schmidt by Carol McKibben, August 28, 2017, Salinas, California.

to pay three-fourths of the cost of laying the mains.”⁹²Adcock also helped form the Alisal Chamber of Commerce with the aim of making an incorporated town out of the area. His daughter, Joanne Adcock Schmidt, born in 1930 remembered the vast, largely unpopulated landscape that mostly contained scattered farms and ranches but transformed with the new white migration: “Dust Bowlers overran Alisal and that was the fault of the people who sent off all those flyers.” She was referring to advertisements for workers that California growers sent out nationally to supply labor needs when labor activism, strikes, and restrictive immigration policy made threatened harvests. Nonetheless, when a representative of Wells Fargo Bank met with the secretary of the Grower-Shipper Association in an effort to “inaugurate a series of advertising in the papers of Monterey County setting forth the natural advantages of the country in which they lived as evidenced by the prosperity of its industries,” he was discouraged from doing so:

The Secretary had a talk with Mr. Jensen and told him that both the Vegetable Industry which he represented and the Salinas Chamber of Commerce of which he is a Director were unalterably opposed to such a program; that we had nothing to advertise as all of our products were marketed a long way from home and advertising this locality as one exceptional prosperity [sic] would result in an influx of labor, which would become a serious problem which the locality would have to solve, and that our commercial lines were already well supplied and those engaged in them

⁹² *Salinas Independent*, June 14, 1935, p.2.

do not want any additional competition. Mr. Jensen was very nice about all this and agreed that his plan was probably ill advised.”⁹³

Adcock noted that most Dust Bowlers who landed in Salinas found “quick employment” opportunities at Spreckles beet sugar factory or in packing lettuce: “When [Dust Bowlers] came over here they started working in the lettuce sheds and for Spreckels.”⁹⁴ The new migrants put down roots and became integral to the growth and development of Alisal. One report took issue with Steinbeck’s portrayal of Dust Bowlers as itinerant laborers without the wherewithal to restore their family economies: “There’s a book that burns East Salinas right up! The honest working people who own their homes and pay their bills get so mad they sputter” at their depiction by Steinbeck as destitute.⁹⁵ Their reality was more mundane:

If Grapes of Wrath had never been written, there would be no news in East Salinas whether it be called “Little Oklahoma” or not...[rather it was] a typical California rural home settlement...On gently rolling valley land between two ranges of mountains lies this loosely knit community of perhaps 5,000 to 8,000 people who came from everywhere. Estimates of the Oklahoma proportion...vary from 25 to 50 per cent...These migrant families were good lettuce workers, so their employers gladly brought them to Salinas, where the vegetable season is seven months long.

⁹³ Minutes, Meeting of the Salinas-Watsonville Lettuce Men’s Association, August 16, 1934, Salinas Western Growers Association

⁹⁴ Interview with Joanne Adcock Schmidt by Carol McKibben, August 28, 2017, Salinas, California.

⁹⁵ “The ‘Oakies’ Make Good, Too!” *The Daily Oklahoman*, February, 25, 1940, p. 12 courtesy JoAnne Adcock Schmidt

They found Hebbbron Heights a good place to live. The acre tracts were...subdivided into lots about 50 by 120 feet, and they sold for \$200 to \$300. There were no costly building restrictions, the migrants were just getting a foothold and it was an ideal combination. They moved right in, buying lots and building houses and working for wages, an they had found what they came for.”⁹⁶

Admittedly, the people who arrived from the Dust Bowl “weren’t rich.” However they identified proudly and fully as American citizens who shared history with everyone else in Salinas: “Many of their houses were shacks, and others were trailers or tents, as has been true with pioneers from Plymouth Rock days on down through American history. Hebbbron Heights was no contribution to the City Beautiful idea, and its inhabitants ran into tough luck sometimes just as they do in Wall Street.”⁹⁷ Thus, the piece made clear the primary place that Dust Bowlers’ shared as Americans, which gave them all the rights and privileges of belonging, insinuating a stark contrast with other new arrivals--such as immigrant refugees from European states increasingly suffering from extreme economic and political disruption.

Dust Bowl migrants became Salinas stakeholders as quickly as possible: “They are tearing down their tin can shacks and building neat houses as fast as they can afford to. Salinas stores, which regarded [Alisal] as a joke are putting branches out here...so far as [the reporter] can see, [Alisal/Hebbbron Heights] developed like

⁹⁶ “The ‘Oakies’ Make Good, Too!” *The Daily Oklahoman*, February, 25, 1940, p. 12 courtesy JoAnne Adcock Schmidt

⁹⁷ “The ‘Oakies’ Make Good, Too!” *The Daily Oklahoman*, February, 25, 1940, p. 12 courtesy JoAnne Adcock Schmidt

any other subdivision that starts from scratch.”⁹⁸ Elton Hebbbron noted that he had “gained a new faith in mankind” from his experience with Dust Bowlers: “I’ve never lost a cent on payments or had to foreclose on anybody...The younger generation is practically all at work; some old folks are on relief but not many. The family feeling is strong, and the young people usually keep their old folks off the dole,” he asserted.⁹⁹ “The working man and his family is the backbone of Salinas. They drive trucks or tractors, they work in the packing sheds...and in the fields...Their wives work too and their sons and daughters, and they get ahead because they are determined to get ahead.”¹⁰⁰ The fact that these families moved to the Imperial Valley for a few months of work at the end of the harvest in Salinas Valley did not disqualify them from inclusion in Salinas life, “After April they’ll be back in Salinas, working the ‘long season’ [the vegetable season lasted a full seven months] for the same boss and living at home, putting down more roots, paying taxes.”¹⁰¹

Close inspection of city life showed that Salinas’s residents generally approved of anyone whose background marked them as not just as potential members of the middle class but also as permanent residents willing to put down roots and integrate fully, as the articles in *the Salinas Independent* promoting the

⁹⁸ “The ‘Oakies’ Make Good, Too!” *The Daily Oklahoman*, February, 25, 1940, p. 12 courtesy JoAnne Adcock Schmidt

⁹⁹ “The ‘Oakies’ Make Good, Too!” *The Daily Oklahoman*, February, 25, 1940, p. 12 courtesy JoAnne Adcock Schmidt

¹⁰⁰ “The ‘Oakies’ Make Good, Too!” *The Daily Oklahoman*, February, 25, 1940, p. 12 courtesy JoAnne Adcock Schmidt

¹⁰¹ “The ‘Oakies’ Make Good, Too!” *The Daily Oklahoman*, February, 25, 1940, p. 12 courtesy JoAnne Adcock Schmidt; For a thorough analysis of 1920s and 1930s settlement patterns in California see Becky Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven: Life and Politics in the Working-Class Suburbs of Los Angeles, 1920-1965* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

contributions of workers to the local economy made clear. If they succeeded at showing stability, they were generally welcomed. Class was usually seen as fluid. People defined as working class achieved middle and even elite status through hard work and fair wages that came from union membership, which, in turn, allowed them opportunities to acquire land and property. By contrast, Salinas's residents feared and generally excluded those individuals and groups deemed interlopers (especially labor organizers from outside the community who were suspected of being Communist sympathizers) of whatever race or ethnicity (including whites).

When Okies and Arkies, Japanese, Filipino, Chinese and Mexican residents of Salinas appeared just as patriotic and middle class as everyone else in town and showed that they were inculcated with the same values shared by middle class immigrants of European descent and U.S. born whites, they were integrated into community life in surprisingly seamless ways in the 1930s, as they were in other small rural communities in agricultural regions throughout the state. One editorial in the *Salinas Daily Index* compared ethnically different immigrants favorably with native-born Americans. Under the headline, "Citizenship Club of Japanese Parentage To Be Formed Here," the editor made the case that, "The aim [of the club] would be to see that everyone so qualified exercises the right of the franchise...[and further] people who come here from other lands...are more patriotic than our own nationals...The flag means something to the woman or man who left another land where poverty and oppression was the rule...In wartime they did not hang back but were the first to fight for the land of their adoption...more to the point they register their names with the county clerk and vote in each and every election and that's a

lot more than we can say for a great many people who were born right here in our own United States of America.”¹⁰²

Individuals or groups who might be marginalized and segregated by race, ethnicity, gender, or class in big cities or in towns, attended integrated public schools in Salinas, often lived in integrated neighborhoods, and even moved into business ownership and the professions as permanent and respected residents of the city.¹⁰³ Most notably, Salinas as a community rarely demanded cultural conformity to a white ideal, even as they demanded political loyalty to the nation. In fact, Salinas’s residents routinely celebrated cultural diversity, but notably as part of an expression of American ideals.

THE INS AND OUTS OF RACE RELATIONS IN 1930s SALINAS

An editorial in the *Salinas Index-Journal* summed up white America’s point of view:

“A toll of nine dead in Alabama race riots. People in California cannot understand such things—cannot understand why whites should kill Blacks. But for that matter neither can the people of that region understand why it is that Californians object to the presence of Japanese, Chinese, Filipinos and other Orientals on the coast. And by the same token, neither the Californian nor the Alabaman can understand why the New Yorkers are worried over the problem of the ever-mounting tide of Italian and Russian Jewish immigration into that city. Nor for that matter can either of them understand how come

¹⁰² *Salinas Daily Index*, July 9, 1930, p.2.

¹⁰³

the people of Minnesota and the Dakotas are upset about the presence of the Swede and the Norwegian in their midst.”¹⁰⁴

Yet, if we look closely, we see how Salinas’s residents modified racist ideology to create a very different situational reality. In this and many other California agricultural towns “everyone had to get along with everyone”¹⁰⁵ to ensure the production and marketing of crops, which benefited the city in a holistic way. Therefore, besides the obvious racism in Salinas that came from shared beliefs in racial hierarchy with whites at the top, there was also evidence of active efforts towards communalism that enfolded all groups into Salinas’s society, its collective culture, and most importantly, its economic, social, and political life. Agriculturally based communities such as Salinas had to operate primarily as collectives, as communities of diversity in race, gender, and class in order to flourish.

Numerous opinion pieces and letters to the newspapers reflected Salinas’s residents complicated responses to new migrants of color pulled into the region by the promise of work in agriculture. For example, when Judge D.W. Rohrbach argued for the removal of Filipinos in 1930, the editor of the conservative *Salinas Index-Journal* protested because “in Salinas lettuce and other vegetables could not be grown without the “labor of Filipinos...This paper stands for white labor, when and where it can be had, but it has yet to be shown that white men will do the work in

¹⁰⁴ *Salinas Daily Index*, July 7, 1930, p.2

¹⁰⁵ This specific quotation came from an interview by Carol Lynn McKibben with Ed Moncrief, May 17, 2018 in Salinas, whose book, *Raising the Blackbirds* (Singwillow Publishing, 2016) documented the housing crisis among farm workers in the 1970s. However, it has been echoed in conversations with a variety of Salinas’s residents from all walks of life. For evidence of this in other agricultural towns in California see Linda Ivey, “Ethnicity in the Land: Lost Stories in California Agriculture,” *Agricultural History*, Vol. 81, No 1, (Winter, 2007).

the lettuce fields which now is the lot of the Filipino. We are no great lover of ANY imported labor, particularly not the sort that will become our enemy in a military way...but we submit there are many angles in this case to be considered.”¹⁰⁶ In this way, the editorial upheld prevailing views of race and racial hierarchy along with prevailing anti-immigration feeling, while expressing a clear-eyed understanding and acceptance that agriculture needed everyone’s contribution, regardless of their racial or ethnic origins.

The Salinas Chamber of Commerce showed just how an agricultural town dealt with white racism in an attempt to avoid the open battles against minority groups and working classes that erupted all over California in the new century. According to the Minutes of the Salinas Chamber of Commerce in 1926 members decided purposefully to get along with one another: “The matter of better service and friendly relations between the Filipino labor, Japanese labor and the American farmers was discussed and at the request of Mr. Alcantara and Mr. Agudo, Dr. Wiley Reeves moved that a committee of seven consisting of two Filipinos, two Japanese, two American farmers and one businessman be appointed as such a committee.”¹⁰⁷ Here we have a window into the make-up of the Salinas Chamber of Commerce. It was not all white people and certainly not all elites. Throughout the decades of the 1920s and 1930s, the Chamber included members of unions and minority groups that effectively kept this important organization an impartial broker in disputes, especially ones concerning labor issues. The fact that the two Filipino gentlemen referred to in the above anecdote raised the issue of race relations in the first place

¹⁰⁶ *Salinas Index Journal*, January 16, 1930, p.2.

¹⁰⁷ Salinas Chamber of Commerce Minutes, May 4, 1926

suggested that the Chamber of Commerce provided a safe space for discussing race and race relations in an era when nonwhite groups did not ordinarily participate as equals in civic affairs much less in debates over how people who were defined as nonwhite should be incorporated in the community.

Salinas's residents viewed minorities as essential both to the local economy and to community life, and thought that if they only met congenially with one another all would be well. It was naïve, but also revealing. Unlike larger municipalities as such as San Francisco, Los Angeles, Oakland or even San Jose in these years, Salinas's residents could not just render minority communities invisible by sending them into separate spaces and exclude them from mainstream civic organizations. Smaller, agriculturally based communities had to work and live alongside people of different races, ethnicities and social classes. Salinas's residents believed in inclusion, right alongside their shared belief in the predominant racism of the day.

The Chamber organized their multiracial committee on cooperation just two years after immigration restrictions laid out in the infamous Immigration Act of 1924 (also known as the Johnson-Reed Act), set extreme limits on immigration from entire regions whose populations were deemed racially undesirable and unassimilable, such as the entire continent of Asia, all of the Southern European and Eastern European countries, Africa, and most of the Middle East. As an American possession, migrants from the Philippines were exempted but reviled in most of California and the West. As one of the countries under the umbrella of the Monroe Doctrine and part of the Western Hemisphere, Mexico also was not affected by the

restrictive legislation; Mexican immigrants continued to move in (and out) of California and the Southwest after 1924. However, whites treated Mexicans no better than Filipinos in California and the West. Restrictive immigration based on national origin (race) clearly reflected Americans' widespread belief in eugenics, a movement based on pseudo-scientific racism in which whites were deemed closer to God than anyone else on the planet. Although allowed to enter the U.S., white Americans treated Filipino and Mexican immigrants as racially inferior, even as these workers filled increasingly pressing labor needs in industry and agriculture.¹⁰⁸

The Filipino workers who came to California and to Salinas as “insular subjects” in the first years of the twentieth century did not enjoy the privilege of real citizenship that would have allowed them to send for wives and families as European origin immigrants routinely did. As a result, Filipino (and Mexican immigrant workers too) lived primarily in male only, often run-down and unhealthy, make-shift housing and labor camps usually located outside of the city limits or in boarding houses and hotels in Chinatown during the lettuce harvests in

¹⁰⁸ For an excellent overview of Filipino experience in the United States in this era see Rick Baldoz, *The Third Asiatic Invasion: Empire and Migration in Filipino America, 1898-1946* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2011) and Dawn Bohulano Mabalan, *Little Manila is in the Heart: The Making of the Filipina/o Community in Stockton, California* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013) See Stephen J. Pitti, *The Devil in Silicon Valley: Northern California, Race, and Mexican Americans* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003); George Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) and Lori Flores, *Grounds For Dreaming: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants and the California Farmworker Movement* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2016) for thorough analyses of Mexican and Mexican American experiences in the United States and California for the period of the 1930s.

spring and through the fall seasons.¹⁰⁹ Mexican workers came as part of a labor migration, but were also fleeing the chaos and terror of the Mexican Revolution of 1910s and its aftereffects, and lived in labor camps as well. Those camps were not only isolating, they were breeding grounds for everything from malaria to polio to typhoid and tuberculosis, all widely reported in the local press and the focus of public health initiatives by local women's organizations and both city and county agencies. Numerous front-page reports documented public health efforts to contain and eradicate the various epidemics in labor camps in particular.

On the one hand, we see a great deal of evidence for racism, openly expressed. On the other hand, and at the same time, there is an equal amount of evidence that showed genuine respect and acceptance for so-called nonwhite people from a variety of cultural traditions and ethnic groups. Filipino experiences in Salinas in the 1930s graphically showed how these apparent contradictions played out. Moreover, Salinas's example defied myths about the gendered nature of Filipino communal presence. Men were more numerous, especially single men, but this was decidedly not an all male community.

Historians emphasized the frequency and violence of actions by whites (mostly men) directed at Filipinos in California in the 1930s. It was true. But what is often overlooked is the extent to which local communities denounced the violence. In order to fully understand and appreciate the experiences of Filipinos as well as that of other minority groups, we must look at the way local communities like

¹⁰⁹ See Edwin B. Almirol, *Ethnic Identity and Social Negotiation: A Study of a Filipino community in California* (New York: AMS Press, 1985) 54.

Salinas both interpreted and acted in the wake of these violent actions. Otherwise, we portray a false narrative about what actually happened.

Salinas's press, the first draft of history and the voice of the community, demonstrated their collective sympathy towards Filipinos victimized by racial violence in reports about mob violence in Watsonville in the 1930s. *The Salinas Index Journal* reported "That race riot over at Watsonville last night. We have been informed that the bulk of those leading the attack were naught save pool hall habitués...This paper has ever stood upon the assertion that the crops of Salinas...cannot be successfully grown without some form of "stoop labor" which the white man WILL NOT DO...We welcome any form of labor which will come in to take over its share of our wealth."¹¹⁰ The paper emphasized whites as the aggressors and noted "armed bands of whites were shooting into Filipino houses." The paper announced the death of one of the victims, 22 year-old Fermin Tobera on the front page in huge headlines that condemned the action as a "race riot." The piece noted further that officers under chief of police Robert Hastings "saved 30 Filipinos from being seriously beaten by the mob," which indicated that the Filipinos had the protection of authorities.¹¹¹

That the whites involved were dismissed as a "mob" and "habitués of pool parlors" rather than as respectable community members suggested that even this conservative paper supported the human rights of Filipinos, even though whites attacked in the first place because the attackers objected to Filipinos dancing with white women, a stance the paper agreed with. The paper also emphasized that

¹¹⁰ *Salinas Index Journal* January 22,1930, p.2

¹¹¹ *Salinas Index Journal* January 22,1930, p.2

workers were welcome to “take over its share” of the wealth generated by lettuce production, indicative of the sense that everyone in Salinas had a stake in agriculture and a right to its profits, regardless of class, race or ethnicity. Furthermore, the report praised the police as rescuer heroes for standing up to racist whites at a time when police and sheriff’s departments usually took the side of the white perpetrators rather than the Filipino victims:

“About 8 o’clock a mob of about 500 whites took a Filipino community house on the San José Road by storm. Firing pistols and waving clubs the white men surged into the place...Hurling rocks and firing revolvers they swarmed through the police and administered beatings to the Filipinos...Just as they were preparing to the fire the place Hastings and his forces arrived. Backing up to the house they threatened to shoot the first man who made a move to destroy the property...The mob melted away into the night muttering defiance only to turn up a short time later at [another] Filipino house on Van Ness Avenue. Here some of the islanders made a stand returning the fire of the whites with pistol and revolver shots...Chief Hastings denied that the mob was made up of youths of high school and college age ‘the situation is serious and will result in wholesale murders unless something is done about it immediately...all the Filipinos are in danger.’¹¹²

It is equally notable that the report portrayed the Filipinos’ collective efforts to defend themselves as an act of both necessity and heroism, rather than that Filipinos might be aggressors too.

¹¹² *Salinas Index Journal* January 23, 1930 p.1 & 3.

The American Legion was enlisted to patrol the streets of Pajaro and Watsonville to protect the Filipinos who lived there. The editorial the next day insisted “Salinas has kept aloof from the disgraceful mix-up at Watsonville, Pajaro and now in San Jose, in all of which places there have been inter-racial difficulties,” thus the report condemned the violence as “disgraceful” and made a distinction between Salinas and its neighboring municipalities. Salinas’s residents valued all of its citizens (and noncitizens) without regard to racial difference.¹¹³

Although we are all too familiar with this particular incident of mob violence against Filipinos in Watsonville from numerous contemporary and historical accounts, it is less well known but equally significant that the Salinas community response was not only sympathetic to the Filipino victims, but utilized law enforcement and such stalwart community groups as the American Legion to defend Filipinos. Even more important, the report disparaged the white perpetrators as mobs and lowlifes—wild, uncivil, and not at all representative of Salinas’s citizenry.

In 1935, the local newspapers reported with great sympathy that Fortunato B. Sampayan who was described as a “Filipino ranch worker” was severely beaten by Billy Nissan and Kenneth Dutra both white Salinas residents (but “youth” rather than respectable members of Salinas society and likely Dust Bowlers) who hijacked Sampayan’s car and commanded him to drive them to Los Angeles. When Sampayan refused their demand, they pulled him out of the car and beat and kicked him, injuring him so badly that he had to be hospitalized for several days. The paper showed obvious sympathy to Sampayan, detailed his version of the attack (omitted

¹¹³ *Salinas Index Journal* January 24, 1930 p.2.

the two young men's side of the story), and emphasized that he was "a poor innocent victim." The paper reported that the two young men fled to San Luis Obispo after the assault (in Sampayan's car), but were apprehended and returned to Salinas a few days later to face charges: "[The two men were] brought before Justice Harry J. King...and arraigned. The court fixed bail at \$500 each in default of which they were returned to jail. A date for their trial [was] to be fixed after Sampayan recover[ed] enough...to appear as a witness."¹¹⁴ The newspaper supported the injured Filipino young man and described the white perpetrators described as "unruly youth," who deserved to be jailed for their crime against Sambayan. However, the sympathetic response to the young Filipino victim was not by chance.

J. B. Sambayan, a labor contractor in Salinas and the injured man's brother had filed the initial complaint against the two white men. A labor contractor (unlike transient field workers) had roots in the city, often had a family, including a wife who participated actively in cultural and social events. Filipino contractors' wives became the backbone of middle class Filipino cultural and social life in town that intersected with other middle class women's groups so essential to Salinas's social development.¹¹⁵ Children of labor contractors attended public school along with their Caucasian, Japanese, Chinese and Mexican neighbors and counterparts, as enrollment lists made clear.¹¹⁶ Middle class whites and members of Salinas's varied

¹¹⁴ *Salinas Independent* January 25, 1935, p. 4.

¹¹⁵ See Edwin B. Almirol, *Ethnic Identity and Social Negotiation: A Study of a Filipino community in California* (New York: AMS Press, 1985).

¹¹⁶ Appendix xxx

middle class ethnic and racial groups respected Filipino middle classes generally, even as they ignored or disdained transient Filipino fieldworkers.¹¹⁷

The fact that Sambayan owned a car, even though he lived in the labor camp his brother operated, suggested a loftier class status than that of the two young white men who assaulted him, neither of who were able to come up with the \$500 needed to make bail. Unlike his assailants, Sambayan had roots in Salinas and shared middle class status through his connection to his brother contractor. As such, his class trumped his racial identity when it came to meting out justice both in the court of law and in the court of public opinion.

An attitude of acceptance was also extended to Mexicans through editorials in the press. In one piece, also in the *Salinas Index Journal*, the editor attempted to diffuse stereotypes: “Too often have Americans opinions...of the Mexican people have been solely based on their view of a group of railroad or ranch workers...too many of us go our way without stopping to think that there is charm, courtesy refinement, culture, music, art—all these things and many others among Mexican people, just the same as we have them...[moreover] the Mexican people are more given to sobriety than our own folks...we must not forget their there were horse thieves and cutthroats on the northern side of the international boundary just as there were across the line.”¹¹⁸ In this way, the editor reminded readers that Anglos had every propensity for human frailty and fault as any other ethnic group and also

¹¹⁷ See Edwin B. Almirol, *Ethnic Identity and Social Negotiation: A Study of a Filipino community in California* (New York: AMS Press, 1985); Interview with Ruth Andresen by Carol Lynn McKibben, May 18, 2018, Salinas; Interview with Jen Ventua, May 28, 2018

¹¹⁸ *Salinas Index Journal* February 1, 1930 p.2.

that it was wrong to attach stereotypes to an entire people. The editor's insight and willingness to articulate this challenge to racist thinking showed how living in a diverse community made a difference in the way Salinas's residents thought about race and ethnicity, even in the context of a shared racist worldview.

Yet, alongside these laudable efforts to include, incorporate, and defend groups deemed racially inferior or suspect, Filipino (and Mexican and other Asian) residents often encountered open hostility from white Salinas's residents without the same sympathetic response generated by the attack on Sambayan or by the mob violence in Watsonville. Jimmy Ibarra who arrived in Salinas in 1928 recalled in an interview with a reporter from the *Salinas Californian* in 1974, "It was hard to be a Filipino back then. All Filipinos lived in labor camps and worked in the fields." This was untrue. Although many Filipinos worked as stoop laborers (perhaps even most of them in the 1930s), Filipinos lived as socioeconomically complex a community in Salinas like everyone else.¹¹⁹ Ibarra recalled that he worked for 25 cents and 10 hours a day. "There used to be lots of riots, Ibarra remembered, "Americans would burn down labor camps because Filipinos wanted higher wages. It was a big fight in Salinas in 1935." Again, Ibarra reinforced the myth that all white Americans aligned against Filipinos and supported the violence against them. Ibarra left the fields for a job working at a dry cleaning operation on Market Street in Salinas, which showed that although he felt marginalized as a Filipino, he still took advantage of employment opportunities outside of stoop labor. Yet, he remembered how marginalized he felt at that time. "If I would walk down Main Street, Americans

¹¹⁹ See See Edwin B. Almirol, *Ethnic Identity and Social Negotiation: A Study of a Filipino community in California* (New York: AMS Press, 1985).

would say ‘Home monkey, go back to your island. It was pretty rough...At the Crystal Theater they didn’t want us to sit with them. They made us sit on the sides or the balcony.’ That was hurtful indeed, and it is no surprise that comments such as these resonated even after many years. He had difficulty finding housing. If the apartment owners were “American” they would not rent to him, he said.¹²⁰ His experiences and that of other Filipinos who lived in Salinas in the 1930s (but interviewed in the 1970s), might have also reflected the poverty they experienced in the marginalized and dilapidated neighborhood of Salinas’s Chinatown circa 1970, which most certainly shaped their experience in the present as well as their memories of their past. Salinas could be both welcoming and respectful and also rejecting and hostile, and could be those things simultaneously. Class mattered as well as race. So did the happenstance that left many Filipino fieldworkers isolated, poor, and marginalized in their old age.

Like the Chinese, Japanese, and the nineteenth century whites who arrived before them, Filipinos generally came to Salinas by means of a circuitous route from their homeland, usually first by being recruited from the islands by Hawaiian plantation owners. Although Philippine schools taught English and American history and encouraged emigration, Filipinos were often disappointed at the treatment they received by white Americans. According to Gregorio Aquino, “When we were [in the United States] we found it was different than what they told us. We had to paddle our own canoe so to speak. We could not speak English very well. We did not know

¹²⁰ Dioscoro R. Recio, “Filipino community remembers immigrants,” *The Californian*, June 12, 1993, 1A

where to go.”¹²¹ Many people, racially marginalized or not, felt the same way when in these years when urbanization and industrialization left hundreds of thousands of people, Americans and immigrants alike, adrift in a harsh environment without social safety nets.

Like so many of his compatriots in 1928, Philip Ben left the Philippines to work as a sugar technician in Hawaii. He wanted to attend San Jose State College, but the stock market crash ended his dream and so he worked in the fields of Salinas instead and lived in a labor camp nearby. “I just came here to see what was going on,” he remembered. Adelia Cacas arrived in Salinas also to attend school at what was then Salinas Junior College (now Hartnell Community College). She was ambitious: “I like to better myself. Usually when you were in the Philippines and you graduate from the U.S. you’re somebody.”¹²² Filipino immigrants, both women and men, aimed for upward mobility, just like their white, Mexican, Japanese and Chinese counterparts. Young Filipino women and men encountered an educational system in Salinas that welcomed them, even as they often felt disengaged from Salinas’s society as young people, alone in the alien environment of America. Their individual and collective experiences depended on class, luck, educational attainment (to some extent), and even to their individual maturity and marital situation. Racism always factored into their experiences, but it was not the only element and it was not something everyone encountered in the same way.

¹²¹ Rick Rodriguez, Filipino community recognition grows,” *Salinas Californian*, September 30, 1974, p. 11

¹²² Rick Rodriguez, Filipino community recognition grows,” *Salinas Californian*, September 30, 1974, p. 11

Interracial dating and marriage was an important arena where race usually trumped class in determining whether or not one might be an accepted member of Salinas's social order or were treated with disdain and hostility. Interracial dating and marriage prompted many acts of violence against Filipino men in California and in the Salinas Valley. This situation, in turn, stimulated the revision of the multiple anti-miscegenation laws in California and throughout the West to include "Malays" as one of the groups expressly prohibited from intermarrying with whites.¹²³

Many Filipino immigrants wanted to become labor contractors like their Japanese contemporaries as a way to move up the socioeconomic ladder and out of fieldwork and stoop labor. Filipino labor contractors offered their countrymen a model. However, relationships between contractors and the men they employed for fieldwork were complicated at best, and reflected clear divisions by class within Filipino society.¹²⁴

Pablo Abarquez had the means to travel to Stockton to collect workers and claim a place in Salinas's agricultural world that enabled him to escape fieldwork. His daughter, Estelle Ben, recounted her father's method of acquiring a labor force made up of his compatriots, "My father would go down Chinatown on Alvarado Street in Stockton and in an hour's time, sometimes less he'd have that flatbed truck

¹²³ Beginning in 1850, California prohibited marriages between whites and persons deemed nonwhite amended in 1880 to include Asians: "Negro, mulatto, or Mongolian." Amended again in 1901 and in 1909 to include in the prohibitions for whites "Persons of Japanese descent" This was amended again in 1931 to generally "Prohibit marriages between persons of the Caucasian and Asian races." In 1933 the statute specifically targeted Filipinos, echoing the hysterical reaction of the Salinas Index-Journal's editorial outlawing marriages between "whites and Malays."

¹²⁴ See Edwin B. Almirol, *Ethnic Identity and Social Negotiation: A Study of a Filipino community in California* (New York: AMS Press, 1985).

full with 20-25 men a cot bed and a blanket their only possessions.” Most Filipinos lived in labor camps, which contractors owned and controlled.

Even educated Filipinos often found life difficult in Salinas: “A Filipino could not do anything...and that was the only place we could go,” said Paul Olivete, who left Salinas in 1924 for Chicago where he graduated from Blackstone School of Law, but could find no opportunity to practice as a lawyer and returned to field work in 1934. He nonetheless became a field supervisor for one of the biggest agricultural growers in the Salinas Valley, Bud Antle. “What is the use of bragging about your diploma if you do not practice it,” he reasoned. His educational level gave him the chance to move out of the fields, but it still did not allow him access to Salinas society, even though other educated middle class labor contractors and supervisors found that access, especially through the social activities of women in their lives.

Felipe Sun arrived in San Francisco in the 1920s. He recalled how easy it was for Filipino men to be recruited by unscrupulous labor contractors. He joined a group that worked in fish canneries in Alaska before he found his way to Salinas to attend school and graduate from Salinas Junior College (Hartnell). Ambitious Filipinos like Sun utilized educational opportunities in order to move out the fields become part of Salinas’s increasingly vibrant Filipino cultural and social community.¹²⁵

Many Filipinos knew English (and usually Spanish too), but struggled with strong accents that made it difficult for American English speakers to understand them. More proficient English speakers were likelier to become labor contractors.

¹²⁵ See Edwin B. Almirol, *Ethnic Identity and Social Negotiation: A Study of a Filipino community in California* (New York: AMS Press, 1985).

Non-English speakers had to trust their more fluent counterparts “some were honest, some not so.” Moreover, they were often left vulnerable, without pay or the means to collect wages because their positions as fieldworkers dependent on contractors complicated by language difficulties and lack of full citizenship status made them feel helpless. Their vulnerability increased when they worked for smaller farmers. “There were so many independent American farmers...And so there were times the farmers would not pay us...We could not insist, we could not sue them. We did not know how,” recalled Aquino. Filipino workers blamed Filipino labor contractors: “This may not sound good, but most of the contractors here were Filipinos vying for work. Some of them would cut the throats of each other by undercutting in wages. Then fights between one crew member and a Filipino would start...That more or less divided workers here.”¹²⁶

In one particularly bitter dispute that ended with a lawsuit, the United States courts held labor contractors responsible for payment to workers, whether the growers paid the contractors or not. “Labor contractors who employ men to work in the lettuce fields are responsible for the payment of their wages, not the grower whose crops the contractor has agreed to plant, thin, cultivate or harvest,” ruled Justice Harry J. King in the case of one Clementa Bautista. Bautista sued Leon de Asis, a Filipino labor contractor, after Asis failed to pay his wages.

Apparently, this contractor hired Bautista to work for a vegetable farmer, but some time late in the harvest the farmer went bankrupt (a common occurrence) and the contractor never received payment, so in turn, could not pay Bautista or the rest

¹²⁶ Rick Rodriguez, “Filipino community recognition grows,” *Salinas Californian*, September 30, 1974, p. 11

of the crew Asis had hired to complete the harvest. The contractor blamed the grower. However, the judge thought otherwise, and in doing so provided a window into the precarious place even Filipino contractors held in the city and the state in the 1930s. By making the contractor solely responsible for workers' wages, the court positioned Filipinos outside the realm of labor law, which gave workers power to sue in criminal court when employers did not pay wages due them. For field workers however, there was no direct link between themselves and the farmers who employed them so the contractor (who depended on the farmer for workers' pay) was liable. The interdependency highlighted the precarious nature of farming. Fieldworkers counted on contractors to pay them. Contractors depended on growers for remuneration. Growers, in turn, were at the mercy of packers and shippers to buy their crops and they, in turn, depended on precarious, always volatile commodities markets in Chicago and New York to make profit. Yet, the willingness of the Filipino worker to bring his suit to court indicated that he believed that he held the same civil rights as anyone else, and the courts supported him.

Contractors used their English speaking skills and permanent residency as a means for upward mobility and acceptance in Salinas in the 1930s, just as Japanese contractors did. But they may have failed to appreciate their perilous position in society as this case made clear. The court ruled that the contractor had to pay Bautista because Bautista actually worked for the contractor, not the farmer. The contractor had to wait for his own moneys due when the bankruptcy proceedings were settled. This test case was a portent of things to come in the labor conflicts of

the 1930s, which just as frequently set laborers against contractors of their own ethnic group as pitted workers against growers or shippers. Although Filipino workers lost wages amounting to thousands of dollars because contractors did not pay them, contractors lost too when farmers went bankrupt, and farmers lost when their crops failed to sell in the market. Nonetheless, it did not matter whether this was because of unscrupulous contractors or because growers defaulted contractors. The contractors “b[ore] the brunt of the losses.”¹²⁷The complexity of these relationships led to misunderstandings and recriminations that had a direct bearing on labor relations throughout the 1930s and became the catalyst for the infamous 1936 lettuce strike.

However, there is a counter-narrative to the Filipino story in Salinas that goes well beyond labor, male field workers, or mob violence. From the 1920s to the post World War II era, the entire city of Salinas shut down for several days in December to honor Filipino war hero and martyr, José Rizal. The local Filipino Women’s Club organized the event in partnership with the City of Salinas Chamber of Commerce, the Business and Professional Women’s Club, the Salinas Women’s Civic Club, and a multitude of other local organizations.

Every year this celebration made front-page news in the local papers. Selected orators chosen from among the best Filipino students from Salinas High School and Hartnell College enthusiastically depicted the life and heroism of Rizal in theater productions, musical performances, and displays of oratory. Numerous local and regional newspapers publicized all of these events, which were well attended by

¹²⁷ *Salinas Independent*, February 9, 1934, p. 1

thousands of residents from every part of the city and the state.¹²⁸ City leaders encouraged local merchants to “remove Christmas trees from the sidewalk curbs and supplant them with American flags” for the duration of the celebrations, which lasted several days. Prominent speakers and city officials lauded Rizal as “the greatest man of the Malay race.”¹²⁹ The papers reported “In addition to the large number of Filipino societies, with floats and marchers, a number of Salinas fraternal societies, will take part, as will also the Salinas fire department.”¹³⁰ The multiple stories over the course of several days described delegations of Filipinos numbering

¹²⁸ The two main newspapers in town, *Salinas Daily Index-Journal and the Independent* featured this event every year in great detail and on the front pages.

¹²⁹ See Reynaldo C. Ileto, "Rizal and the Underside of Philippine History," in *Filipinos and their Revolution: Event, discourse and Historiography* (Quezon City : Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1998). Jean Ventua, President of Salinas's Asian Cultural Center summarized Ileto's analysis of Rizal and his place in Filipino lore as follows: "Ileto described Rizal as a charismatic figure. Aside from the fact that he was handsome, an intellectual, a novelist and polymath, he was also viewed as something of a seer and healer. [Rizal] was a European-educated ophthalmologist, a vocation mostly unknown in the Philippines at the time, which, when he returned to the Philippines and set up a practice seemed to confer almost miraculous healing powers upon him. (See Ileto, 308-311). He also (according to Ileto) made use of the Philippine obsession with Christ's passion, or passion play (the *pasyon*) by playing up his role as a self-sacrificing Christ-like figure during his imprisonment and execution: "When Rizal was brought back to Manila and thrown into prison on November 1896, one of the first things he did was to design and send to his family a little sketch of 'The Agony in the garden,' beneath which he wrote, 'This is but the first Station.' More significant than his feelings about his impending death is the fact that by sending to his family the Biblically-inspired sketch and note, which would later come to the attention of more and more people, Rizal was shedding signs of an impending reenactment of the Pasyon" (317). In fact, when he was taken to his place of execution, he insisted on walking, rather than being taken in a wagon, as was the usual procedure, and was heard to say "I forgive everyone from the bottom of my heart," and "consummatum est!" before being shot (also recounted in Ileto). Whether or not all this was true, it has remained in the popular view of him as a Philippine hero. I think this Christ-like feeling about Rizal was still present among Filipinos of the 1930s, and may have accounted for some of the tone of reverence and emotion surrounding that play, which, in way, was also a *pasyon*."

¹³⁰ "Merchants Display National Flags in Honor of Filipinos" *Salinas Daily Index*, Wednesday December 30, 1925

200 arriving in Salinas from all parts of California cities including Los Angeles, Stockton, Oakland, San Francisco, Sonora and others throughout the state to celebrate Rizal Day with a “big parade” down Main Street. The parades highlighted California’s Filipino representatives:

Each of the Filipino organizations carried flags and banners, and a large number of them escorted beautifully decorated and illuminated floats, depicting historical events, scenes in the islands, and expressing the hopes and aspirations of the Filipinos for ultimate independence under a just form of government such as that of the United States. There were in all fifteen such floats, several presided over by goddesses.

Seventeen local organizations routinely participated in the parades with a Grand Marshall presiding including the Elks Club, the Salinas Band, The American Legion, Salinas Rotary, the Chamber of Commerce, the Exchange Club, Fire and Police Departments, the Farmers Association and many, many others from neighboring towns in the Salinas Valley. As the event was always held in December and concerns over weather conditions limited choices for venues that could hold all of the residents and visitors, Salinas High School gymnasium was selected (over the outside rodeo grounds) to hold “indoor baseball and volleyball that were played by Filipino athletes [who had traveled from the Philippines expressly for this event].”¹³¹

The Salinas Daily Index reported the “Mayor of Salinas, Frank S. Clark, personally welcomed the delegations of Filipinos... Dr. David Starr Jordan of

¹³¹ *Salinas Daily Index*, December 29, 1925 p. 1

Stanford University and Abdon Llorente, commercial attaché in San Francisco were among the prominent speakers at Salinas Union High School.” The paper went on to report “The committee has completed a program for the entertainment of 2000 visitors. Athletes from the Philippines participated in competitions in baseball and volleyball. “Events programmed include[d] a formal Ball in Foresters Hall in honor of the city’s guests....the award of prizes will be made by Miss Milicia Villamor of Stockton who reign[ed] as queen during the celebration.”¹³² The Salinas Filipino String Orchestra entertained the crowds, and numerous individuals from Salinas’s Filipino community gave speeches including “Miss Eugenia S. Filomena [who] recited Dr. Rizal’s [original] farewell address.”¹³³ The celebration of Rizal in Salinas climaxed with the singing of both the Philippine and American national anthems. That a Filipina woman rather than a prominent Filipino man was chosen to recite the farewell address was evidence that Filipinas were present, valued, and honored publicly in 1930s Salinas.

It was striking that there were so many Filipino cultural organizations in existence in Salinas in the 1920s and 1930s and that they were so clearly accepted as part of the normal fabric of Salinas’s cultural and social life at this time in history when almost all that we know about Filipino experience was that Filipino people were being targeted by mobs and vilified for their ferocious labor activism throughout California.¹³⁴ Filipinos in other areas such as Stockton were being

¹³² *Salinas Daily Index*, December 26, 1925 p. 1

¹³³ *Salinas Daily Index*, December 31, 1925 pps. 1 and 5.

¹³⁴ See Rick Baldoz, *The Third Asiatic Invasion: Empire and Migration in Filipino America, 1898-1946* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2011); Dawn Bohulano Mabalon, *Little Manila is in the Heart: The Making of the Filipina/o*

treated with a shocking level of disrespect and marginalized into neighborhoods in which conditions might be described as deplorable.¹³⁵ Much closer to home, Filipinos in nearby Watsonville and also Monterey were beaten by mobs too, activities roundly condemned by the local press as shown above.

In Salinas, the entire effect of the celebration of Rizal, like the treatment of Sambayan and the responses to the mob violence nearby, went beyond a mere show of tolerance for Filipino people, but reflected a collective willingness to include Filipinos into the mainstream of Salinas society--as long as they presented themselves as solidly middle class and demonstrated that they shared the values of the rest of Salinas's residents such as patriotism, economic independence based on land and property ownership, educational and cultural achievement, and adherence to family life as it was defined in strictly nuclear terms. Salinas made room, as a community, for anyone who displayed these attributes and beliefs, even in the dark days of the 1930s when racial violence against people considered by whites as racially inferior was commonly accepted, not just statewide but nationally and internationally as well.

The tone and tenor of the celebration honoring Rizal consistently was one of respect and appreciation for Filipino people and immigrants generally.¹³⁶ According to one report on the Rizal event, "the most inspiring program ever presented...It was the 37th anniversary of the heroic death of Dr. Jose Rizal, beloved Filipino

Community in Stockton, California (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2013).

¹³⁵ See Dawn Bohulano Mabalon, *Little Manila is in the Heart: The Making of the Filipina/o Community in Stockton, California* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2013).

¹³⁶ See the Steinbeck oral history event., articles, oral histories...

patriot...The program was arranged by the Filipino Women's Club. Senator C.C. Baker delivered the principle address a glowing tribute to the idolized Filipino martyr...there were many highly entertaining short talks as well as vocal and instrumental music." The article went on to describe in detail the performers, lecturers, and in keeping with tradition, the crowning of a Queen for the event. It ended as they all did with "the singing in chorus of the national anthems of the United States and the Philippines."¹³⁷

Beyond this celebration, there is evidence everywhere in the local press of Filipino incorporation in Salinas. When Bernard L. Iazars died suddenly, his obituary emphasized his stature in Salinas as "businesslike, hard-headed, progressive, and enterprising," all characteristics valued highly by Salinas residents. Moreover, he played the important role of benefactor for the poor in Salinas, whether or not they were part of the Filipino community: "Whenever he saw a case of distress his hand readily reached down into his pocket...to relieve it. This was for anybody and everybody whether Filipino or not." Within the community, the obituary noted that Iazars "gave liberally to Filipino charities. He encouraged Filipino dinner parties and sent [Filipino students] flowers when they graduated." Most importantly, Iazars demonstrated a keen business acumen: "He made money abundantly...as a leading Filipino pioneer and businessman [who] had arrived in Salinas [in 1916] owned a Filipino club on Market Street and managed the Manila Hotel on Main."¹³⁸ This put Iazars squarely within the circle of an approved and full member of the Salinas community.

¹³⁷ *The Salinas Independent*, January 5, 1934, p.3.

¹³⁸ *The Salinas Independent*

Salinas's residents applauded themselves for their embrace of diverse ethnic and racial immigrant groups, if they showed that they conformed to American middle class values. The conservative *Salinas Index-Journal*, routinely described Filipino people as decent and honorable although they just as routinely reported crimes and arrests by noting the racial and ethnic identity of the alleged perpetrator if she or he was nonwhite. Still, this kind of racially discriminatory reporting was balanced by stories that attempted to show positive aspects of racial identity such as the following one that ran on the Editorial page of the *Salinas Index-Journal* in 1934:

This is the story of an unnamed Filipino who is the kind of friend we all wished we had...A Filipino named San Juan died of spinal meningitis, far from his native land and without any relatives to ease his last painful hours. All of his worldly possessions consisted of about \$87 dollars in a local bank. This friend of San Juan's paid more than \$250 out of his pocket for funeral expenses, and made every effort to clear up the dead man's business affairs. The normal person would have applied for the man's bank account as reimbursement for his expense and trouble, but not in this case. When the public administrator filed his petition for letters of administration of San Juan's estate, his surviving father and mother were named legatees. This friend, believing San Juan's family would need the money more than he, had willingly passed up any share he would have received out of kindness for the bereaved parents. If this man was half as good a friend to San Juan's while

that unfortunate was alive as he was when he died, then truly he had something which few of us can honestly claim.”¹³⁹

The piece thus challenged racial stereotypes with evidence that people marked as racially inferior were good, kind, and even morally superior to their white counterparts. Community leaders attempted to accomplish the same myth busting for other immigrant groups.

Immigrants (including Filipinos) found mobility in retail business ownership and entrepreneurship in Salinas. When we look at the ethnic make-up of Salinas’s business community, we see evidence that Salinas’s entrepreneurs included Japanese, Chinese, Filipino and other members of ethnic groups ostracized in the East, such as Jewish and Italian merchants and professionals.¹⁴⁰

The pages of the local newspapers included speakers and events encouraging “internationalism” and “courtesy to strangers” with ongoing plans for luncheons and dinners to acclaiming the benefits of ethnic diversity in the city, reflecting Salinas’s residents’ collective desires to attain a “liberal mindedness” with regard to racial and cultural relations.¹⁴¹ There were well advertised events and meetings celebrating every conceivable ethnic immigrant group in Salinas, such as this one honoring Greek independence (although the Greek population of Monterey County

¹³⁹ Op-ed *Salinas Index Journal* January 13, 1934 p.2

¹⁴⁰ Source: Business licenses issued to Sam Ahtye for a cigar and soda shop, Fuji Drug Store and Pharmacy, Kotick’s furniture store (Jewish), Feldman’s menswear among many others. Monterey County Historical Society. Also Minutes of the Salinas Chamber of Commerce reflected diversity of ethnicity in the surnames of its members to include anyone who wished to join this booster organization without discrimination as to race or ethnicity; City directories showed both mixed race neighborhoods and business ownership, Appendix xx

¹⁴¹ *Salinas Daily Index*, January 13, 1930, p.4.

was negligible in the 1930s): “Gathering here last Sunday ...more than 300 Greeks from various parts of central coast section joined with Salinas Chapter of Old Order of Ahepa celebrating the 113th anniversary of the freeing of Greece from Turkish domination...[when] March 25, 1821 Greece threw off the shackles of the Ottoman Empire.”¹⁴²

Both local newspapers routinely announced meetings of the newly organized chapter of B’nai B’rith and its Women’s Fidelity Auxiliary as the first indication of Jewish community presence in Salinas. Jack Kasavan, President of the Organization, presided over a meeting installing officers of both groups.¹⁴³ David Schwartz, featured on the front-page of the *Index-Journal* for opening a new department store in Salinas, shared his life story with the paper, which honored him as a man “whose career is the romance for which any American might be proud—a yarn which any American boy or girl might read with profit.” Identified as a Romanian and likely of Jewish ancestry, Schwartz “turned his eyes towards America” at age fifteen. He arrived in New York City around 1905 and studied both the English language and “Americanization.” Like so many other immigrants to California at the turn of the last century, Schwartz meandered through Texas and the American South, working at odd jobs. He joined the U.S. army around 1910 and spent time in the Philippines before he returned stateside to Monterey where he met his wife and began his career as a retail businessman: “Today all his resources are centered in Salinas valley—kingdom of ‘green-gold’—which Dave asserts is the promised land of the

¹⁴² *Salinas Independent*, March 30 1934 p 1.

¹⁴³ *Salinas Independent*, March 30 1934 p 4.

future.”¹⁴⁴ Salinas’s residents along with other Californians showed a clear admiration for immigrant entrepreneurs in a decidedly anti-immigrant America in the 1920s and 1930s.

When Victor Barlogio was elected mayor in 1933, the editorial board of the *Salinas Index-Journal* applauded the victory as evidence of Salinas’s atmosphere of inclusion and conflated this event (inappropriately) with the rise of Mussolini and the Italian fascists. An enthusiastic Op-Ed piece proclaimed “Salinas’s New Mayor, Italy’s Glory” and described the mayoral election as on the same scale as a boxing championship and the “triumph” of Mussolini and Italian fascism:

The *Index-Journal* joins with the rest of Salinas in extending congratulations...to Vic Barlogio..it is doubtful if there is anybody here who has a larger personal following...with Primo Arnera the new heavyweight champion of the world and the next championship battle ...to be held in the ancient Roman Coliseum, with Voliva predicting that Mussolini will be dictator of this country at the time when wheat sells for \$48 a bushel, and with Vic Barlogio mayor of Salinas, anybody can see with half an eye that the former glory of Italy, when Rome was the capital of the world, has been most vividly renewed.¹⁴⁵

Vic Barlogio started out as police commissioner, served out his term as mayor then became Salinas’s city manager and served on the city council throughout the 1930s. The Italian story in Salinas not only included the mayor, but also showed how integration into Salinas’s social life followed uneven paths for

¹⁴⁴ *Salinas Index-Journal*, November 1, 1929, p. 3

¹⁴⁵ *Salinas Index Journal* July 1, 1933 p.2

immigrant newcomers, with the outcomes uncertain but with agriculture and its opportunities for economic entrepreneurship playing a central role in making that mobility and acceptance possible.

Salinas continued to make room for Japanese immigrants in the 1930s too. Japanese cultural events were reported prominently and positively in Salinas's newspapers even though in the rest of California Japanese people often were as vilified as Filipinos.¹⁴⁶ When Japanese community members wanted to build a new Presbyterian Church, they solicited funding from all of the Salinas community, which rallied to support them: "A financial campaign was opened this week by the Salinas Japanese Presbyterian church in an endeavor to raise \$3000 from American friends and business houses of Salinas and the Salinas Valley which will be devoted to the construction of a new Sunday school building and gymnasium [for the purpose of improving] the physical, moral and spirited education of American born Japanese young people of Salinas Valley...Although the Sunday school now has 100 pupils and eight teachers twice that number will be enrolled within a few years...In closing their appeal the members said 'We desire that the coming Japanese generation practice the teaching of Christ Jesus and so become good American citizens.'"¹⁴⁷The efforts of Japanese residents to blend into the American mainstream through religion and culture appeared to resonate with the wider Salinas community, which embraced them.

The Monterey County Post referred to Usuke Uribe as a "prominent and highly respected resident of Salinas for 35 years," in a front-page article that announced his

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¹⁴⁷ *Salinas Index-Journal*, October 31, 1929, p.1.

death in 1933. The report emphasized that his death was a loss for Salinas, not limited to the Japanese community. "His death brought grief to his many friends of both races in this city...Throughout his residence in this city he was active among the people of his own race...But Urabe's interests were not entirely devoted to the Japanese. He not only gained the respect of all his white friends for his outstanding integrity, but he was civic minded and he was always ready to help in any community project." ¹⁴⁸ In Salinas this last ranked as the highest praise. As in the case of Salinas's Filipino residents we see evidence of both racism and widespread acceptance and incorporation in Salinas.

Japanese sponsored events routinely made front-page news in a positive way in the 1930s. *Salinas Index-Journal* headlined that "The Japanese Association Maps Activity Program For the Year," and reported that "more than a hundred members" attended the meeting in downtown Salinas on Lake Street. First, a celebration of the origin of Japan in 2594 was planned...[and] a projected park for the Japanese section of the city [was also projected]."¹⁴⁹ This last indicated both that Japanese people were accepted in Salinas but also that they lived somewhat apart "the Japanese section," which might have suggested unease about their presence or a need on the part of Japanese residents to coalesce for protection in what might have felt like a tricky and uncertain environment for them.

Japanese people revealed indications of continued affiliation with Japan, perhaps also in response to perceived Anglo ambiguity about their presence.

Japanese dignitaries visited Salinas regularly in the 1930s. Salinas Japanese

¹⁴⁸ *Monterey County Post*, July 25, 1933, p.1.

¹⁴⁹ *Salinas Index-Journal*, January 5, 1934, p.1.

residents showed a consistent allegiance to their country of origin too: "Under the auspices of the Salinas Japanese Association the sons and daughter of Nippon in Salinas and vicinity held a celebration in the Lake street theater...to jointly celebrate the advent of the New Year and the recent arrival of a crown prince in the royal palace of the Emperor and Empress of Japan."¹⁵⁰ Although many of these events were listed in society pages, it is notable just how often they were deemed important enough to make front-page news.

The Minutes of the Grower-Shippers Association meetings revealed further evidence of inconsistency in the treatment of Japanese people in ways similar to Filipino experiences. For example, H. K. "Harry" Sakata was a prominent lettuce grower, seed producer, and a full-fledged member of the Grower-Shipper Association in Salinas in the 1930s. But in a Grower-Shippers Association meeting in 1932, a discussion over tenancy targeted Japanese farmers to keep them from competing with whites over lettuce:

"Land rentals were discussed...It was pointed out by Mr. Harden that some 6000 acres now in sugar beet would probably be thrown in the market next year owing to the probability that sugar companies would not guarantee a minimum price, and that this land would be open to lettuce growers, which should result in a more unfavorable condition for the landlords. Mr. Sears said it was most likely that the Japanese would take all such lands, as well as lettuce given up by shippers...Mr. Harden suggested that a general investigation of the legality of Japanese leases might eliminate some of the

¹⁵⁰ *Salinas Independent* Jan 5 1934 p.1

competition from that source and asked for an expression of opinion... A discussion of the advisability of trying to have the Alien Land law enforced in this District, resulted in President Wing's agreement to consult the District Attorney in the matter and report his findings."¹⁵¹

The minutes did not reveal a follow up to that conversation, but even a consideration of enforcement of the Alien Land Law to preclude Japanese tenant farmers from competition indicated the precarious nature of Japanese settlement in Salinas, a portent of what was to come a decade later. Like Filipinos, Japanese faced both racial exclusions and acceptance as they negotiated a place in Salinas's mainstream.

Above all, Salinas's residents considered assimilation through public education as the best way to strengthen community and absorb new populations. The local Salinas newspapers routinely ran front-page stories about school improvements and enrollments. *The Salinas Daily Journal* reported that a "representative meeting of fathers deeply interested in the welfare of high school boys and girls...we have all ages in the high school from thirteen to twenty-two. There is great difference here in the physical [and] intellectual range of students...a further problem is the difference in training these pupils have had, for they come from seventeen different grammar schools. Out of the 309 students in school, 147 come from the city of Salinas and the rest from outside...it is no small problem to

¹⁵¹ Minutes, Meeting of the Salinas-Watsonville Lettuce Men's Association, September 27, 1932, Salinas Western Growers Association

mould them together and direct them under one system...aiming at the proper character training for the best citizenship.”¹⁵²

The article went on to report that the advent of a new system of compulsory education “forces many to go to high school. This has caused an increase in attendance from 174 in 1918 to 309 the present enrollment.” The increased need for competent teachers was urgent in Salinas, this father argued, because so many residents were new immigrants. He advocated training “the foreign element in the community in citizenship, which means training the parents themselves. Train the children to love English if you want good citizens.” He [identified as Mr. Burchell] urged the need for an educated citizenship on the soil. ¹⁵³ To this end, in 1930 Salinas created an Evening School offering “Courses for the Foreign Born” with a curriculum that included levels of English language reading and writing and American history, American Institutions and also a class on Americanization “a course to give knowledge of standards, principles, and ideals of our government.”¹⁵⁴ By 1934, School enrollment at Salinas High School “is now 739 with the freshman class leading as the largest, having 253 students,” indicating both the impact of compulsory education through high school during these decades and also a clearly increased population in the city. ¹⁵⁵

¹⁵² *Salinas Daily Journal* Tuesday March 1, 1921, front page Steinbeck Library Collection.

¹⁵³ *Salinas Daily Journal* Tuesday March 1, 1921, front page Steinbeck Library Collection.

¹⁵⁴ Salinas Evening School “Description of Courses” 1938-1939, Monterey County Historical Society.

¹⁵⁵ *Salinas Index-Journal* January 8, 1934 p.3

Nonetheless even with increased enrollments, the impact of the poor lettuce harvest in 1932 affected city funds for education, "School tax[es] were slashed...wage cuts for teachers and "economies" [were implemented in schools]." ¹⁵⁶ This policy was reversed two years later when teachers' wages were reinstated to their former levels as a result of greatly improved local economy that lettuce generated, "One third of the salary reductions given Salinas teachers was restored," announced the school board on May 11, 1934. "The board authorized the increase because of the rising living costs and because of the policy of the administration to increase buying power [in the context of the Great Depression]. " In the same board meeting, the board decided "not to employ any more married women teachers...[and] three teachers [presumably married women] now on a probationary basis would be released and no married women will be employed in the future as teachers, except those whose husbands are incapacitated from earning a living." ¹⁵⁷ Education was the primary means of assimilation of new populations in Salinas and as such played a central role in the life of the city, but women clearly faced discrimination in one of the few professional occupations (teaching) available to them at the time.

Taken altogether, race relations in Salinas depended on the need for diverse populations in agricultural communities to get along together. Certainly Filipino stoop laborers (and poorer people in other ethnic communities) generally experienced life in Salinas less well than their counterparts who were middle class

¹⁵⁶ *Salinas Index-Journal* July 8 1933, p.1

¹⁵⁷ *Salinas Index-Journal* May 11, 1934, p.1

and positioned higher up in the agricultural pecking order, such as labor contractors, fluent English speakers, and business people.

Farming required close interaction and interdependence that brought ethnically and racially different individuals, families, and communities not just into close working relationships, but also into close living relationships too. This often (but not always) led to greater cultural understandings and camaraderie that was generally missing in large urban spaces and smaller towns dependent on industry or manufacturing that separated groups by race and ethnicity both in workplaces and neighborhoods.¹⁵⁸ In these larger municipalities, some groups may have worked along side each other, but neighborhoods were strictly segregated by race and ethnicity by the 1930s, whereas in Salinas and the Salinas Valley, workers, tenant farmers, and owners lived and worked in close proximity to one another regardless of race or ethnic background.¹⁵⁹

In Salinas race relations were anything but clear or simple, most often complicated by class division within and between groups. Neighborhoods roughly segregated by race, but not rigidly as was the case emerging in so many other towns

¹⁵⁸ See Scott Kurashige, *The Shifting Grounds of Race: Black and Japanese Americans in the Making of MultiEthnic Los Angeles* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008) 1-35; Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003), 135-149; Shirley Ann Wilson Moore, *To Place Our Deeds: The African American Community in Richmond, California, 1910-1963* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 2000); George Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); *Racial Propositions: Ballot Initiatives and the Making of Postwar California* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 2010).

¹⁵⁹ Appemdix City Directories, Tavernetti Ag reports, Voting Rolls

and cities in California in this period.¹⁶⁰ Communalism remained the ideal, if not always the reality.

Racial boundaries remained porous in Salinas and allowed middle class people of any race to enter and reside alongside whites. Salinas's capacity to accommodate and absorb groups deemed racially and ethnically different, corresponded to that of other communities in agricultural regions in California even as white residents simultaneously embraced ideologies that marked these very groups as inferior, led to the development of a stable and peaceful city made up of middle classes (many of whom belonged to unions) that founders aimed for when they first incorporated Salinas in the late nineteenth century.

As a result, Salinas's residents were completely unprepared for the notoriety they received as a community during the lettuce strike of the 1936, believing as they did that they were a racially and ethnically diverse population and that they were "liberal minded and fair;" a middle class community that embraced unions and working classes into the mainstream.¹⁶¹ As well, the middle classes in white (native born and immigrant), Filipino, Japanese, and Chinese communities identified as part of the Salinas social mainstream, siding as a community against working class laborers in the strike actions of the 1930s. The labor battles that took place in this

¹⁶⁰ See Carol Lynn McKibben, *Racial Beachhead: Diversity and Democracy in a Military Town, Seaside California* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012); Stephen Pitti, *The Devil in Silicon Valley: Northern California, Race, and Mexican Americans* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003); Charlotte Brooks, *Alien Neighbors, Foreign Friends: Asian Americans, Housing, and the Transformation of Urban California* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2009); Scott Kurashige, *The Shifting Grounds of Race: Black and Japanese Americans in the Making of a Multiethnic Los Angeles* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

¹⁶¹ *Salinas Daily Index*, January 13, 1930, p.4.

era did not pit one ethnic group against another, but showed clear class divides that often crossed racial and ethnic lines.

LABOR RELATIONS IN COMPLEX CONTEXT

The most important developments in Salinas in the 1930s had nothing to do with labor issues. The city raised \$350,000 in bonds in the depth of the Depression to finance a new sewer system, of which it was most proud. A hard fought battle to reorganize transportation led to the construction of an underpass in 1936 at a cost of \$140,000 to the city but with subsidies from federal and state government that allowed better flows of traffic through Main Street, along with the construction of thirty-three miles of new street and the paving of thirty-five more. The city enlarged the city jail, and created a new Parks and Recreation Commission in the 1930s, adding numerous parks and playgrounds to support the increasing population, many of who had numerous, young children. The newly formed City Planning Commission instituted zoning ordinances that separated commercial and industrial areas from neighborhoods and preserved agricultural space, but also and ominously aimed to “protect both our fine residential and business districts against undesirable encroachment,” which, in Salinas’s case, signified a fear of the Dust Bowlers in Alisal. While all of this building and expansion continued throughout the period of the 1930s, the battles over labor relations, particularly the 1936 strike, became the one event Salinas was noted for in contemporary media accounts and subsequent historical narratives that followed, largely as a result of the famous La Follette Congressional Hearings that investigated the matter, Steinbecks novels,

particularly *Grapes of Wrath*, and articles in the San Francisco Chronicle highlighting the worst excess of mobs who attacked strikers. It began with women.

The mostly white women lettuce trimmers in the packing sheds went on strike in 1930 and in so doing, became catalysts for both labor organizing and the grower-shippers responses to it. The women packing house workers were upset about their earnings--five cents less an hour than men who did the same job. They continued to be upset throughout the 1930s, and in fact, equal pay became the central issue in the numerous labor actions of the decade. According to minutes of the Growers-Shippers Association, "The heart of the [1933] strike had been the demand for the same pay for women as for men in an organization in which the former constituted 70% of the membership."¹⁶² Some (but not all) Filipino fieldworkers supported the women workers in the walkout, against the admonitions of their contractor-employers, thus threatening the lettuce crop and triggering growers' concern about the dependability of the labor force.

Growers and shippers from all over the Salinas Valley came together on August 4, 1930 over dinner at the Santa Lucia Inn in Salinas in response to the actions of women packing shed workers and Filipino stoop laborers, and organized themselves into the Salinas-Watsonville Lettuce Men's Association (later changed to The Grower Shipper Vegetable Association of Central California or GSA). The group elected a seven man Board of Directors with H. L. Strobel serving as first President. They focused much of their collective energy on wage controls. Wages were one of the only areas that growers and shippers believed they exercised control in a

¹⁶² Minutes, Meeting of the Salinas-Watsonville Lettuce Men's Association, October 16, 1933, Salinas Western Growers Association

chaotic context in which markets, transportation systems and even the weather determined whether or not any given grower or shipper made a profit or faced bankruptcy: "Shippers could exercise little control over price [of lettuce]. In the , market...shippers were highly successful in putting down labor uprisings, which occurred rather frequently...field labor was the one factor market in which shippers were in virtual full control."¹⁶³ Organizing and working together in association seemed a logical response to the volatile market environment.

The initial meeting of grower-shippers also produced "a letter by the Secretary from Santa Maria urging a cut [in wages for fieldworkers] to 30 cents. E.H. Spiegl recommended that the cut not be made against Filipinos but to cut field labor to 35 cents. Some objection was made by those who employed by the day or only employed for work for two or three hours. Bud Storm moved that those present go on record favoring a 35 cent hour wage for common field labor regardless of nationality, and that no commissions be paid [to labor contractors], but to not include laborers working by the day, or under labor contract...Thomas Snell, President of the Salinas Chamber of Commerce made an appeal that no cut be made on jobs that white men are doing and urged that no Filipinos be employed on a job that can be efficiently done by white men."¹⁶⁴ The discussion revealed reluctance to cut wages too much and also pushback by growers against racist policies that would disadvantage Filipino workers. It was also evidence of the lack of consensus among

¹⁶³ For a thorough analysis of profit, loss, and power in the lettuce industry in the 1930s, see Francis James Smith, Jr. "The Impact of Technological Change on the Marketing of Salinas Lettuce," unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, 1961, 241.

¹⁶⁴ Minutes, Meeting of the Salinas-Watsonville Lettuce Men's Association, August 4, 1930, Salinas Western Growers Association.

growers and shippers and the extent to which the Salinas Chamber involved itself in labor issues.

The Association members agreed to hold regular, weekly meetings at the downtown Jeffrey Hotel (by 1928 the tallest, most impressive building in Salinas) as a way to “cooperate with each other” over contentious issues such as “shipping conditions... wage cuts...and bad publicity.” H.L. Strobel advocated that they “stand together in any of their problems and [in doing this] they would benefit greatly.” With one exception all of the original twenty-two original members agreed to pay five dollars a month as “an admission fee.”¹⁶⁵

Charles Moore was elected Secretary, a position he held throughout the tumultuous 1930s. He took meticulous notes at every meeting, and reported even minor comments and disputes. In this early gathering, Moore “urg[ed] that shippers stand together...He outlined activities of the third international and its effect on labor conditions in the Imperial Valley...general discussion on the effect of the wage cut and all stated that it had not materially affected them, that they had been able to secure all the help necessary...The question of the bad effect of wrong publicity was discussed.¹⁶⁶ Thus, organization of growers and shippers came about in the context of their acute awareness of the labor battles going on elsewhere in California agriculture and the “bad publicity” this generated against them as a group.

Yet, the members did not include even discussion of an enforcement protocol setting the stage for how difficult it would become later for the organization to

¹⁶⁵ Minutes, Meeting of the Salinas-Watsonville Lettuce Men’s Association, April 10, 1934, Salinas Western Growers Association

¹⁶⁶ Minutes, Grower-Shipper Association Meeting, Jeffrey Hotel, Salinas, August 12, 1930.

function effectively as a representative arm for growers, shippers and packers to act on anything, particularly in negotiations with labor union representatives. Growers and shippers might agree in a meeting to support a policy on wages or marketing, for example, but afterwards acted as they pleased without penalty or even censure.

Thus the decision in 1930 to cut wages because of a lowering of demand for lettuce not only prompted vigorous debate but also showed growers and shippers undercut one another when they agreed about a course of action in meetings but failed to carry them out in unison in practice. "Thomas Chung stated that 43 out of 96 [workers] had left and that he had kicked out all the trouble makers...[many reported no trouble] Mr. Harden reported every man had quit but all going back to work...It was reported that there were rumors that certain shippers had been paying 40 cents...some of them were [paying higher wages] through their foremen although the shipper did not know it. [Bruce] Church reported that McLaren changed his mind and will now pay 35 cents...Mr. Spiegl believes that no man is big enough to get along without the assistance of the others and the Association is too large to ignore the smallest shipper. Mr. Moore urged the members to cooperate because if they did not now the battle would start and there would be no reason that they would be forced to pay 50 or 60 cents an hour for field labor."¹⁶⁷ There was a heated discussion in which "various shippers accused others of paying 40 cents [rather than the agreed upon 35 cents] either directly or indirectly...Mr. Church and Mr. Farley expressed grave doubts that a 35 cent wage could be maintained on

¹⁶⁷ Minutes, Meeting of the Salinas-Watsonville Lettuce Men's Association, August 19, 1930, Salinas Western Growers Association

account of the inability of the shippers to stitch an agreement among themselves.”¹⁶⁸

The Minutes provided a window into how debates unfolded within the organization brought on both by competition among the members and also by the lack of any kind of mechanism that might have been used to enforce policy once agreed upon.

Bruce Church played a crucial, but largely overlooked role in the 1930s as he sometimes single-handedly worked to bring disparate groups of laborers, union representatives, contractors, and small and large growers and shippers together to negotiate over contentious issues regarding wages and working conditions.

“Everybody around here knows Bruce Church. He used to work in a real estate office for \$100 a month. He decided to go into lettuce and found a partner with \$4,000. [By 1934] Bruce Church cashed in lettuce heads to the value of \$150,000,” reported the *Washington Post* in 1934.¹⁶⁹

The Sheriff’s department and leaders from the City of Salinas were deeply involved in negotiations as they were in all of the other labor disputes of the decade. The September 23rd meeting included Police Commissioner Vic Barlogio, and D.P. McKinnon from the Sheriff’s Office. In the September 23 meeting in 1930, according to the Minutes of the Grower-Shipper Association, “Mr. D.P. McKinnon of the Sheriff’s Office stated that the Filipinos recognized the fact that the Shippers would win their stand at a 35 cent wage...and that they considered that Valesques had skipped with their money and left them in the lurch,” which indicated growing

¹⁶⁸ Minutes, Meeting of the Salinas-Watsonville Lettuce Men’s Association, September 23, 1930, Salinas Western Growers Association

¹⁶⁹ Raymond Clapper, “Town’s Lettuce Boom Revives Days of ‘29,” *The Washington Post*, July 27, 1934, n, p. 10. Source: Grower-Shipper Association archives

mistrust among the ranks of fieldworkers for the contractors who were supposed to represent their interests and were responsible for their wages.

In spite of their awareness that contractors were losing the trust of field workers, GSA members met with “Filipino labor contractors at...the Chamber of Commerce...to discuss the situation with them...It was finally decided by all present that they would pay no more than 35 cents at least until such time as they notified the secretary that they intended to pay more.”¹⁷⁰ We see here again evidence of the deep interconnections between the City of Salinas, the Chamber of Commerce, and the world of agriculture, represented by growers and shippers.

There was clearly a conflict going on between contractors and fieldworkers that led to an impasse in the short-lived strike and an indication that workers, just like their counterparts in the new GSA, hardly made up a monolithic group. Contractors may have had working agreements with individual growers and shippers, but found themselves at odds with the workers they were supposed to be representing and with growers too when it came to enforcement. “Thos. Chung spoke of intimidation of his men by Filipinos in Salinas...The contractors made repeated [appeals] to humility and inferiority and said they were merely the agents of the shippers and unable to influence the workers in their refusal to accept 35 cents per hour.”¹⁷¹ If labor contractors could not enforce an agreement over wages with growers and shippers, then they were of limited value to both groups. As a result, contractors insisted on their importance as go-betweens in numerous

¹⁷⁰ Minutes, Meeting of the Salinas-Watsonville Lettuce Men’s Association, September 23, 1930, Salinas Western Growers Association

¹⁷¹ Minutes, Meeting of the Salinas-Watsonville Lettuce Men’s Association, September 23, 1930, Salinas Western Growers Association

meetings with GSA Director during the 1930s: “Mr. Canete said that the Union had 1100 members and was formed by him so that the Contractors would be able to keep in touch with the thoughts of laborers and would be in a better position to control the labor in this district.”¹⁷²

The minutes of GSA meetings showed the growers and shippers collective frustration over their inability to agree and on the contractors’ inability to compel workers to follow through on wage agreements. After much discussion, the growers and shippers took matters into their own hands: “The meeting was reconvened at the Jeffrey Hotel at 9:30 where discussion included offers from F.J. McCann and H.L. Strobel to subscribe \$5,000. And \$500. Respectively to a fund for the purpose of breaking the strike. Mr. McCann also offered to hold out if Messers Harden and Storm would stand with him.”¹⁷³

During this first strike action, Bruce Church emerged as a mediator and conciliator, a position he would maintain, often under the radar of the media, throughout the tumultuous 1930s. “On motion of Mr. Church...it was decided 18 to 7 to grant the strikers demand and pay 40 cents immediately...Right after adjournment the shippers went back to the office of the Chamber of Commerce where President Strobel announced their decision to Filipinos, but with the explanation that 40 cents was granted for a limited time only and that it was not done through necessity but for the purpose of continuing the pleasant relations that have always existed between the Shippers and the laborers in the lettuce

¹⁷² Minutes, Meeting of the Salinas-Watsonville Lettuce Men’s Association, March 13, 1934, Salinas Western Growers Association

¹⁷³ Minutes, Meeting of the Salinas-Watsonville Lettuce Men’s Association, September 23, 1930, Salinas Western Growers Association

industry.”¹⁷⁴ This last comment was telling, indicating as it did that those who worked in agriculture in Salinas aimed for a relationship that was more cooperative than adversarial. In this way, the first walkout in 1930 ended. It had served as one of the important vehicles for organizing the Grower Shipper Association in the first place.

By 1932, it was clear that association members were reluctant to act as a body to enforce labor agreements. They shared a deep-seated independence that made it difficult if not impossible to prevent the numerous strikes that occurred almost every season not just pitting shippers, packers, and growers against workers, but against one another as well. Some believed in coordination and collective action and others wanted to go it alone, even as they identified loosely with one group or another. We see this played out in the failure of the 1930 strike as workers refused to conform to agreements contractors made and in the build-up to the 1933 and 1936 strikes as growers and shippers opted for a policy of independence from association agreement: “The request presented by Ray Sheeoe of some 25 Philipino labor contractors for consultation with this Association on the matter pertaining to field labor was denied on the grounds that this Association had last year refused to recognize an organization of the Packing house workers and that it is our policy to allow each shipper to work out his own labor arrangements independently of this Association.”¹⁷⁵ As an alternative, GSA members advocated bringing in a new labor force from Mexico: “Mr. Moore suggested that it would be a good idea for our

¹⁷⁴ Minutes, Meeting of the Salinas-Watsonville Lettuce Men’s Association, September 23, 1930, Salinas Western Growers Association

¹⁷⁵ Minutes, Meeting of the Salinas-Watsonville Lettuce Men’s Association, February 28 1933, Salinas Western Growers Association

members to encourage Mexican labor to come to this section because of the growing restlessness of the Philipinos and their tendency toward organizing to dictate wages.”¹⁷⁶ Some growers even attempted to bring in Chinese workers to replace the predominantly Filipino work force: “Mr. Nutting reported that his experiment with Chinese labor was entirely unsatisfactory, that out of forty odd men he probably had ten or a dozen good hands...he said that the experiment probably cost him \$500.00 and that he had abandoned it.”¹⁷⁷ Nonetheless, the tumult of the early 1930s encouraged growers to actively seek to replace Filipino with Mexican workers. By 1935 construction of a labor camp for Mexican workers was well underway, a precursor to the Bracero Program, in effect from 1942 through 1964.¹⁷⁸

Thus GSA ignored Washington D.C.’s suggestion for wage “curtailments” and instead, published support for “Mr. Spiegel’s statement that he had raised the wages of all his employees 5 cents per hour ...and the recent activity of both field and Packing house workers in organizing themselves,”¹⁷⁹ which indicated a modicum of acceptance by the GSA that workers needed to organize and form unions in lettuce just as they had done in Salinas generally. Still, the minutes of GSA meetings also showed conflicts over wage rates and representation: “The question of the recent demands by the Philipino Labor Council for an increase of from 20 cents to 30 cents per hour for field labor was discussed and the President and the Secretary gave an

¹⁷⁶ Minutes, Meeting of the Salinas-Watsonville Lettuce Men’s Association, April 3, 1933, Salinas Western Growers Association

¹⁷⁷ Directors Meeting, Grower-Shipper Association Minutes, October 23, 1934, Grower-Shippers Association vault, Salinas.

¹⁷⁸ Minutes, Meeting of the Salinas-Watsonville Lettuce Men’s Association, February 7, 1935, Salinas Western Growers Association

¹⁷⁹ Minutes, Meeting of the Salinas-Watsonville Lettuce Men’s Association, July 17, 1933, Salinas Western Growers Association

account of their talks with the various representatives of the Philipinos. After much discussion it was decided to appoint a committee to meet with the Philipinos...at the present time these people are divided as between their contractors and the individual laborer element. The former group are [sic] represented by the Labor Supply Association and the latter by the Philipino Labor Council. The leaders of the two groups are R. Canete and Carongay respectively....The Contractors are the conservative element and the others the radical group.”¹⁸⁰The GSA continuously attempted to sort out and understand the messy politics within the complicated ranks of the labor force, which made it difficult to identify who or which group actually represented which workers. Individual growers obviously preferred to negotiate with laborers directly rather than deal with an organized and more powerful unions, either in the fields or in the packing sheds.

An incident between the Sheriff, District Attorney and labor organizers from outside Salinas set the stage for new tensions in early 1933. In February, Sheriff Abbott had been called to investigate a stabbing at the Vierra Ranch labor camp. Apparently, Abbott (who arrived with District Attorney Harry Noland) “overheard a white man [identified a Lawrence Newell] talking...in what they believed to be seditious talk.”¹⁸¹ The two men listened as Newell apparently “urged the Filipinos to refuse to work unless they were paid 40 cents an hour, urging them to oppose the capitalists.”¹⁸²More concerning, Newell and the two boys who accompanied him “had been peddling papers carrying red propaganda. Both admitted they belonged

¹⁸⁰ Minutes, Meeting of the Salinas-Watsonville Lettuce Men’s Association, August 8, 1933, Salinas Western Growers Association

¹⁸¹ *Monterey County Post*, February 10, 1933, p.1

¹⁸² *Monterey County Post*, February 10, 1933, p.1

to an organization which wished to prevent war and which feared the capitalists were planning a war.” Newell was quoted by Noland’s stenographer, who was also present, as stating to the Filipino workers, “We have spies in every branch of the United States—aerial forces. We got harbors, ammunition, everything...I want all of you in the organization. When the time comes for you to go and take everything...I belong to the socialist government of the whole world. I carry the red flag wherever I go and until the flag flies in the American flag Americans will not be free...and if there is no organization by April 1 [1933] we are going to have a revolution. We may have to take guns on our shoulders and fight for what rightfully belongs to us. Workers must organize to establish a system supporting the workers.” Newell was duly arrested. “Noland said the matter was a serious one and that he planned to prosecute to the fullest extent.”¹⁸³

Abbott and Nolan may have exaggerated or even invented Newell’s pitch to the Filipino workers (in spite of the presence of a stenographer). However, this exchange showed how reactive City leaders were in the 1930s, and how they conflated labor organization with radical politics, which led them to fear, distrust, and overreact to labor actions throughout the decade. This, in turn, led to a pattern of cooperation among local law enforcement agencies that was justified by them as protection of American democracy and capitalism and was also normalized--long before the 1936 strike.

By the 1933 season Bruce Church took the lead in the attempt to reach an agreement and prevent another walkout. Lettuce prices had drastically declined in

¹⁸³ *Monterey County Post*, February 10, 1933, p.1

the 1932 season, but rebounded in 1933. Nonetheless, markets remained precarious and the Great Depression impacted consumer demand for lettuce, a luxury food item for most Americans. The GSA as a group cut wages, which led to yet another round of protests and walkouts by workers who felt the effects of the economic crisis deeply. "President Church referred to our agreement with the Filipino labor-contractors and stated that he thought all shippers should go to 25 cents an hour on September first."¹⁸⁴ By October 10, 1933 a meeting of a few GSA directors (Church, Grainger, Harden, Nutting, Vertin, Eaton, Barkelew, Spiegl, Grande, Moody) considered a plan of action to deal with the predictable refusal of workers to accept wage cuts in the middle of the Depression:

"[The] walkout of lettuce workers...occurred in the Salinas Valley at 2:00pm yesterday the 9th, and was slated to take place in the Pajaro Valley at the same hour on the same day...Mr. Moody [George Moody Labor Commissioner] gave a general outline of of the general labor conditions in the country with particular reference to labor. He said that his Department of the State Government was interested in keeping people at work but that he had no arbitrary authority to make any settlement of disputes but that he hoped to act as a mediator and help effect a settlement of the differences between the employer and the employed...Mr. Moody had no criticism to offer of the wages now but thought the wide range between the amounts earned being paid by the packers on piece work and the trimmers was a bad condition and should be changed. A suggestion was made by Mr. [Bruce]

¹⁸⁴ Minutes, Meeting of the Salinas-Watsonville Lettuce Men's Association, August 29, 1933, Salinas Western Growers Association

Church that the workers on each shed select by vote a representative and that these selected constitute a Committee, which the shippers would meet and confer with. This plan would ensure meeting with actual workers rather than with those who had no jobs as it was pointed out that the present trouble was fomented almost entirely by the latter element in the Union.¹⁸⁵

Here, again, the meeting showed both the involvement of government in the person of Moody but the limitations of government action, which “had no arbitrary authority to settle disputes.” Once again, the Minutes of the GSA showed growers and shippers willingness to accept labor organizing (promoted here again by Bruce Church), and also a clear resistance to labor organizers who came from outside of the Salinas community. GSA members expressed deep resentment and suspicion for labor organizers from San Francisco or the Imperial Valley whom they referred to condescendingly as “those who had no jobs.”

Later that evening, the GSA held yet another meeting with an attendance of 53 growers and shippers. Church again played the role of diplomat. “He stated that it appeared to him that some of the shippers do not object to increasing wages while some were indifferent to the situation because of market conditions.... conditions here were better than any other localities and that the wages we were paying would compare favorably with those paid anywhere else for comparable labor; that the harm caused by a layoff of a few days would be negligible but that the situation would probably become very serious if allowed to run on for any length of time...That the field workers were already being drawn into the trouble and that

¹⁸⁵ Minutes, Meeting of the Salinas-Watsonville Lettuce Men’s Association, October 10, 1933, Salinas Western Growers Association

continuance with the strike would involve all labor connected with the industry...Moody suggested the shippers offer a counter proposal...the idea of a closed shop was objectionable to all...Mr. Moody stat[ed] that that was no longer demanded by workers...[Church appointed] three committees one each to represent Salinas and Watsonville Lettuce Shippers and one of Tomato packers with instructions to confer with the strikers and agree if possible on a solution of the trouble and report back.”¹⁸⁶Again, we see struggle and conflict amongst members of GSA, as they attempted to come to an agreement about labor issues.

Two days after the committees formed to meet with strikers, workers’ insistence on the creation of a closed shop and GSA equivalent rejection of the idea derailed further discussion or compromise. “The strikers refused to allow the Shippers to meet with a committee composed of a representative worker from each of the sheds...The condition that all shippers seemed to fear most was the closed shop ambition of the strikers.” Representatives from the National Labor Relations Board offered to become “involved and offered to negotiate but that time was necessary...and the public should not expect too much in the way of immediate efficiency.”¹⁸⁷ The federal government simply had no power to enforce an agreement and workers continued their 1933 strike to force grower-shippers to recognize a closed shop once and for all: “The strikers telephoned that they had

¹⁸⁶ Minutes, Meeting of the Salinas-Watsonville Lettuce Men’s Association, October 10, 1933, Salinas Western Growers Association

¹⁸⁷ Minutes, Meeting of the Salinas-Watsonville Lettuce Men’s Association, October 12 1933, Salinas Western Growers Association

turned down our arbitration proposal...they felt that they could not be satisfied with anything less than what they were asking for.”¹⁸⁸

At this point, GSA changed course, consolidated, and instead of meeting strikers’ desperate demand for a closed shop as Church suggested they do, they began to think about ways to break apart the union altogether:

“Mr. Jordan explained that his Company had never lost a strike and never would because they adhered to the principle that it was always necessary to start operations even in the sketchiest way...[shippers decided to pool product and resources as much as possible splitting costs and profits—just to get things going again]. To that end “Several suggestions were made as to what kind of labor to bring in and where to get it. Mr. Arena made tentative arrangements for upwards of 50 Mexicans from the San Joaquin Valley. Mr. Spiegl suggested bringing in a gang of professional strike breakers from San Francisco...No action was taken.”¹⁸⁹

Three days later, George Creel, District Manager of National Recovery Administration negotiated a settlement: “The strikers had been very self confident and had decided to stand pat for their demands but that at an afternoon meeting with Mr. Creel...both shippers and the labor [agreed] to return to their respective orgs and to sell the proposition not as arbitration but as a compromise agreement...All workers to return to their jobs with the assurance that they would not be discriminated against except s was necessary for shippers to protect their

¹⁸⁸ Minutes, Meeting of the Salinas-Watsonville Lettuce Men’s Association, October 13, 1933, Salinas Western Growers Association

¹⁸⁹ Minutes, Meeting of the Salinas-Watsonville Lettuce Men’s Association, October 13, 1933, Salinas Western Growers Association

present workers...That all reference to a closed shop was dropped.” Wages increased to 65 cents for packers and 40 cents trimmers, but women still received less pay, which was contested. Once again arbitration and negotiation worked effectively to settle the labor disputes and get through the season. However, growers and shippers continued to disagree and even undermined one another: “Mr J.H. Grande [of Crown Packing] said that he would not be a sacrifice to the avarice of such shippers as Harden, Bruce Church, and Garin and served notice that he would repudiate his agreement to cooperate.”¹⁹⁰ Workers also complained about lack of consistency by growers and shippers in satisfying the agreed upon terms, especially when it came to rehiring striking workers. In particular, workers identified GSA members Gerrard, Sers, Sawdey & Hunt, Crown, McCann and Ice Kist had not lived up to the agreement “that shippers had agreed to fire practically all workers in favor of strikers.”¹⁹¹

By 1934, the GSA called a special meeting to find ways of utilizing the locally unemployed better in the lettuce fields and packing sheds. As usual, however, growers and shippers remained divided. They decided to partner with “Wm Murray, chairman of the National Employment Commission of Monterey County...to classify the unemployed, especially those with dependents and to place them in employment...he requested that the vegetable people give his commission as much co-operation as possible to the end that the local people be given preference and thereby reduce the demand for local relief...the Government money the Board of

¹⁹⁰ Minutes, Meeting of the Salinas-Watsonville Lettuce Men’s Association, October 16, 1933, Salinas Western Growers Association

¹⁹¹ Minutes, Meeting of the Salinas-Watsonville Lettuce Men’s Association, October 25, 1933, Salinas Western Growers Association

Supervisors have been expending for relief is about gone and that no other source of funds has been found to take its place...it has been pointed out that the Shippers employing as much local help as possible reduc[ed] the strike likelihood, [and] the discouragement of transients whose presence in the community is a potential social menace.”¹⁹² However advantageous it might have been for GSA members to hire workers out of the pool of local (white) unemployed people rather than transient Filipino laborers, Bruce Church reminded his cohorts in 1934 “this Association was under obligation to the Filipino Labor Supply Association to negotiate with them...and that the Filipinos felt they should have an increase in wages due to the increased cost of food and clothing.”¹⁹³ Moreover, Church persuaded his reluctant colleagues to support the creation of an “arbitration board” as a means to settle disputes before tensions reached a breaking point and workers called another strike. Church, Ellis Spiegl, and “a cannery man from Monterey,” served on the first Arbitration board. The GSA clearly was not a unified force determined to undermine Filipino workers, but a loose collection of individuals many of who, such as Church, worked creatively and constructively to come to terms with workers and deal fairly with them, although everyone consistently ignored or minimized the urgent demands for equal pay for women.

The back and forth negotiations in 1934 included women workers at the bargaining table. “Miss A. Millan and Mrs. M. Durrart” joined their male counterparts to argue for “time and a half for holidays, sick leave pay during layoffs, hourly wages

¹⁹² Minutes, Meeting of the Salinas-Watsonville Lettuce Men’s Association, March 13, 1934, Salinas Western Growers Association

¹⁹³ Minutes, Meeting of the Salinas-Watsonville Lettuce Men’s Association, March 13, 1934, Salinas Western Growers Association

instead of piecework [and for employers] to furnish clocks in conspicuous places in packing houses," so that women could keep track of time at work on their own.¹⁹⁴ The shippers did not agree to any of these demands "except that instead of time and a half for Sundays and Holidays...any employee [could] decide for himself whether he would work on those days without prejudice to his future employment." Two months later, the shippers voted to increase wages by five cents because "it was understood that shipper W. B. Grainger had already increased wages," and also that a small increase in wages might reduce the power of unions because "it would convince workers that the shippers would, of their own initiation, do the right thing."¹⁹⁵

By the time of the August harvest season in 1934, shippers expressed trepidation over the organizing efforts of Filipinos in the Santa Maria Valley who demanded "35 cents an hour which was compromised at 30 cents." A Mr. B. O'Brien of Santa Maria sent a warning letter to the GSA that Filipino organizers were on their way to Salinas: "[O'Brien gave] the 1934 License number...of two Communistic agitators as well as the names of Canete, Agudo and Mertulo who were also agitators in the trouble...The Secretary [of Salinas Grower-Shippers Association] reported he advised the Sheriff and Highway Patrol of the names and number of their machine [and] the Communists involved, viz. Pedro Satuno and Amila Shanzek."¹⁹⁶ Although no evidence showed follow-up to this report from the GSA meeting, the discussion

¹⁹⁴ Minutes, Meeting of the Salinas-Watsonville Lettuce Men's Association, April 24, 1934, Salinas Western Growers Association

¹⁹⁵ Minutes, Meeting of the Salinas-Watsonville Lettuce Men's Association, May 21, 1934, Salinas Western Growers Association

¹⁹⁶ Minutes, Meeting of the Salinas-Watsonville Lettuce Men's Association, August 22, 1934, Salinas Western Growers Association

itself showed clear concern in Salinas over labor union activism from outside the local area.

Salinas's residents accepted labor unions as another interest group in support of capitalism, but many (though not all) panicked when labor appeared to be under the umbrella of the larger political movements of the 1930s. Both the Monterey Board of Supervisors and the City of Salinas passed Anti-Picketing legislation in 1934 and again in 1936 in reaction to what they perceived as radical labor activism. The Fruit and Vegetable Workers Union with the support of The Central Labor Council, the Salinas Chamber of Commerce, and the *Salinas Independent* vehemently opposed those ordinances and tried to soothe overly reactive voices that American labor was first and foremost devoted to democratic ideals, which included a capitalist economy. Under this combined pressure, both the Salinas City Council and the Board of Supervisors rescinded the measures within days. However, these ordinances demonstrated the extent to which labor issues intersected with local governments in the 1930s and also the extent to which some overreacted to labor organizing when it appeared to come from outside their communities or was perceived as a challenge to American democracy and capitalism.

Again and again, Bruce Church tried to soften the extremism from both labor and grower-shippers by enlisting neutral agencies created by the federal government's New Deal to manage disputes and prevent the strikes that might lead to huge losses and even violence. He often enlisted the aid of Mayor Leach who also served as an arbitrator on the Monterey Industrial Relations Board: "Bruce Church

suggested that [grower-shippers'] offer be made to the Filipino Labor Union and the Vegetable and Fruit Packers Union [through negotiation] with the Industrial Relations Board of Monterey County [ILRB, which] had been legally set up for exactly this purpose...[and that all parties] should agree to abide by the decisions of the ILRB...[Also] that we should confer with Dr. E. J. Leach...as he had been appointed the seventh disinterested board member and chairman of the ILRB.”¹⁹⁷

The 1934 lettuce strike took place in an environment of back and forth negotiations between Filipino workers, Filipino contractors, mostly white (and some female) Dust Bowlers from the Fruit and Vegetable Packers Association Union (FVPA), and the Grower-Shippers Association under the auspices of the ILRB led by Dr. E. J. Leach. In spite of Leach’s and Church’s strenuous efforts to reach consensus, negotiations ultimately failed in part because FVPA’s demands extended beyond wage rates to work conditions, which varied widely from plant to plant and because packers and shippers could not agree on any overarching policy. GSA also had no way of enforcing any agreement amongst themselves: “All present agreed not to raise wages in either packing houses or fields except Tom Bunn who said that he would pay whatever he had to in order to move his lettuce...It was again explained [to Filipino Labor Union and VPA] that the shippers would not delegate their authority to leave a decision to a committee or anyone else...After lengthy discussion...Chairman Leach said that [labor] demands could not be met...Sheriff Abbott called and stated that he would lend every assistance possible to preserve peace and protect those who desired to proceed about their business in an orderly

¹⁹⁷ Minutes, Meeting of the Salinas-Watsonville Lettuce Men’s Association, August, 28, 1934

manner, ” and so he did.¹⁹⁸ Abbott deputized citizens and brought in “sixty additional officers [from] the California Highway patrol. As tempers flared and negotiations came to a standstill, Bruce Church once again stepped up to urged cooperation: “[Church] spoke in favor of mediation...he had prepared an agreement whereby both unions [Filipino and VPA] would return to work...and points under discussion [including setting up a grievance committee] would be submitted to the Monterey County Arbitration Board.”¹⁹⁹ Church and attorney Joe Bardin tried to make a compelling argument for both sides to agree to support arbitration over conflict: “A prolonged period of indecision would fill the community with Communists at a time when there is danger and definite trend toward radicalism as evidenced by the large vote for Upton Sinclair in the recent primary.”²⁰⁰

In the wake of the General Strikes in 1934 up and down the coast of Washington, Oregon, and California, Salinas’s residents (including workers) recoiled in horror from the threats of Communism, authoritarianism, and fascism that some labor organizers from outside the area personified to them. The Representatives from the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) prompted harsh retaliation just by their presence in the community. One opinion piece in the union newspaper, *The Independent*, titled “Organized Labor Vs. Communism” made the point in no uncertain terms that working people in Salinas despised Communist ideology and

¹⁹⁸Minutes, Meeting of the Salinas-Watsonville Lettuce Men’s Association, August, 28, 1934

¹⁹⁹ Minutes, Meeting of the Salinas-Watsonville Lettuce Men’s Association, August, 30, 1934

²⁰⁰ Minutes, Meeting of the Salinas-Watsonville Lettuce Men’s Association, August, 30, 1934

distanced their union activism from any organization that might link labor organizing with Communism:

“To those ignorant of the matter let it be said now that some of the public...refers indiscriminately to members of organized labor as Reds. Nothing could be further from the truth...there is a direct effort, especially among the Fruit and Vegetable Workers...to weed out the Communists and would-be agitators.

The vow taken by Communists which includes the destruction of government, the spreading of discontent and their methods of ingratiating themselves into organized groups in order to ‘wreck the machinery’ has been known for a long time.

To erase their effort the workers have...become direct actionists. More than one person with wild soviet ideas found himself the target of a well-directed fist...These skunks advocate violence...some of these radicals were pitched bodily down the labor temple stairs after they ‘shot off’ in meeting.

For the past few years the Reds have looked upon labor camps as ideal places in which to sow the seeds of warped minds.”²⁰¹

To many (but not all) of Salinas’s residents, anything politically radical (especially if outsiders championed it) was a clear and present danger to their cherished way of life. They had only to read daily press reports on the rise of dictatorships in Europe and Asia and the atrocities happening in those places to find evidence that their fears were well-founded and required immediate, even brutal

²⁰¹ *Salinas Independent*, June 14, 1935, p. 2

response if they were to avoid the fates people in those places. The union newspaper, *The Salinas Independent* marked 1935 as “the greatest lettuce year [that] poured into the channel of trade of the district \$50,000 weekly,” and emphasized that everyone benefited from the good lettuce economy, not just growers and shippers: “Everyone profited in some degree from the small boy in Chinatown who carried a shoe shining kit to the big merchant on the main thoroughfare.”²⁰² Thus, 1935 marked another year of prosperity for Salinas but also threats to strike that ultimately ended with successful negotiations led by Church, Leach, and other city leaders. The Fruit and Vegetable Workers Union boasted “several 100 per cent sheds” by June 1935.²⁰³

The 1936 strike happened in this particular and complicated context. Salinas’s residents enjoyed unprecedented good fortune due to the success of the lettuce industry in the midst of the Great Depression. They focused on developing the city’s transportation systems, adding new housing and important infrastructure, notably a new sewer system. They expanded communal activities around the central event of the year, Big Week or the Salinas Rodeo, and provided new educational opportunities for all as a way to effectively absorb multiple native-born and immigrant populations into a communal identity as a successful agricultural town. They became a union town too, and although they experienced turbulence in terms of labor relations every year, they resolved issues peacefully through arbitration that involved city leaders and parties on all sides, including women workers in the packing sheds (who almost never got their way).

²⁰² *Salinas Independent* January 4, 1935, p. 1

²⁰³ Minutes Central Labor Council Minutes, *The Salinas Independent*, June 7, 1935, 5.

As with all of the other strikes in this decade, deeply divided interest groups drove debates on all sides. The 1936 deadlock began with a meeting on September 1 between GSA committee members Bruce Church, Glen Simmons, and E.M. Seifert, the Associated Farmers,, Art Sbrana and Secretary Charles Brooks, and the Filipino Labor Supply Association contractors J. B. Sampayan, Pablo Tangonan, Angel Malendres, and John Cacas. Bruce Church expressed discomfort at negotiating wage rates behind the back of the FVWU, and “suggested that...consideration be delayed until after negotiations with the Fruit and Vegetable Workers Union were finished.”²⁰⁴The Filipino contractors had little interest in including the FVPWU and responded that negotiations with contractors representing fieldworkers needed to happen at once: “Mr. Sampayan said that a wage increase now was needed in order to bring the best grade of Filipino labor into the valley to replace the inefficient work now done, particularly by Mexicans and white people.”²⁰⁵ This meeting exchange showed the willingness of the Filipino contractors to undercut both packing shed workers and Mexican workers and Dust Bowlers in an effort to claim predominance for Filipino labor. It also revealed that the GSA in the person of Bruce Church was careful not to acquiesce to such a scheme.

Besides controversy over a closed shop or “preferential hiring” supported by packing house workers but opposed by growers and shippers, equal pay for women trimmers in the packing shed remained the main issue of debate in the fall of 1936. Although In early August, the GSA decided to “leave the question of equal pay for

²⁰⁴ Grower-Shipper Vegetable Association of Central California, Minutes, September 1, 1936.

²⁰⁵ Grower-Shipper Vegetable Association of Central California, Minutes, September 1, 1936

men and women trimmers to the union,”²⁰⁶ By the beginning of September, the GSA decided to support equal pay, but with peculiar rationale: “After full discussion of the union’s proposal to pay men and women trimmers the same rate, in which it was brought out that this might work a hardship on the women, it was decided unanimously...that this request be granted as long as the women seemed to want it.”²⁰⁷ Women workers clearly did not consider equal pay a “hardship” since they had been demanding such a measure for the past six years. GSA also agreed to “allow overtime at time and one-third after 8:00 P.M. if a shipper was not delayed by rain or frost in which case overtime should start at 10:00P.M.”²⁰⁸ Bruce Church suggested that wages ought to be raised even higher, to 65 cents “and thus nullify to some extent at least, the main argument of the union in soliciting members.”²⁰⁹ No one agreed with him, however.

Within a few days, September 4, 1936, it had become clear that resolution was impossible and workers would strike: “President Sbrana stated briefly the present situation being a strike condition,” and advocated that shippers fight back and break the union by “dry pack[ing] the lettuce to [its] destination or to some other point in California to be packed with ice.” But in a moving effort to bring his fellow GSA associates into more understanding with their workers, Bruce Church disagreed and argued in favor of allowing the strike to proceed peacefully, even

²⁰⁶ Minutes, Meeting of the Salinas-Watsonville Lettuce Men’s Association, August, 12, 1936

²⁰⁷ Grower-Shipper Vegetable Association of Central California, Minutes, September 1, 1936

²⁰⁸ Grower-Shipper Vegetable Association of Central California, Minutes, September 3, 1936

²⁰⁹ Grower-Shipper Vegetable Association of Central California, Minutes, September 3, 1936

blaming the GSA for the current impasse: “[Church said] he was generally not in accord with the majority and his opinion was that much of the trouble was our own fault; that we waited until concessions were forced from us; that the placard in his shed was a turning point in the attitude of the crew towards himself; that he will not ask his help in a futile effort to break the strike; that he thinks it is wrong to risk bloodshed with the resultant loss of public opinion; that he feels the best course is to take no action whatever, letting the sheds remain closed until the workers get ready to come back under a reasonable contract.” W.B. Grainger of W.B. Grainger Packing Company agreed with Church: “It is just as brave to sit tight as to fight.”²¹⁰ However, the discussions among association members indicated that unlike Church they viewed the entire effort by F & V W U as a Communist plot that needed aggressive action: “American [sic] was never developed by lying down,” argued F. V. Birbeck. Walter Farley agreed that the GSA “should not lie down before Revolutionaries...the issue is Communism.” E.E. Harden claimed “This situation is part of a statewide plan to make Salinas closed shop.”²¹¹ The Central Labor Council tried to intervene and find a way out of an increasingly polarized situation. The Council had credibility with GSA “It was established that the Central Labor Council does in fact represent all of the labor unions in Salinas and particularly the more conservative craft unions [associated with the A F of L].” The GSA worried about the CLC joining forces with strikers in the fields and packing sheds, breaking apart a decades long, hard-won, and cherished alliance between union members, the

²¹⁰Grower-Shipper Vegetable Association of Central California, Minutes, September 4, 1936

²¹¹ Grower-Shipper Vegetable Association of Central California, Minutes, September 4, 1936.

business community, city leaders, and agricultural interests in Salinas community life. 3200 members of the Fruit and Vegetable workers union went on strike September 4, 1936.

On September 11, 1936, the editor of *the Salinas Independent* admonished growers, shippers, packers, field workers, and packing shed laborers to submit to arbitration to resolve their disputes as they had done in previous years, or risk economic disaster for everyone in town:

“We have in the Salinas district today an untenable situation. There is not one man woman or child in this entire area who is not affected directly or indirectly by the closedown of the huge lettuce industry.

Soon this cessation of business will hurt; sweep cupboards bare; cause forfeit on payments of homes; lose thousands of dollars in a rising market; dig into small businesses that can ill afford such prolonged losses.”²¹²

The editorial ignored women’s demands for equal pay and argued that the strike was based on the misunderstanding that “preferential hiring” meant that the union wanted a closed shop, which growers and shippers refused: “The bone of contention is the preferential hiring clause of the Fruit and Vegetable workers proposal. The Growers-Shippers association claims this clause means closed shop. This allegation the union denies.” Citing a “definite and American precedent” in 1934 in which a board of arbitration made up of “the two disputing groups and their complement of neutrals” settled the conflict without resorting to lengthy cessations of work, the editor advocated “the machinery for arbitration be set up and put in motion swiftly;

²¹² *The Salinas Independent*, September 11, 1936, p.1.

that an understanding be reached promptly which would permit immediate resumption of operations...and that without further procrastination [the strike] be settled along true American principles in the unemotional atmosphere of the council chamber.”²¹³

In this way, the *Independent's* editor brought almost all of the ingredients together in the vegetable stew of labor and lettuce in September 1936, omitting women's rights however. He made clear that agricultural production, particularly lettuce; involved everyone in town and that all would be adversely affected by the strike. Therefore, it behooved all sides to end the dispute quickly, which, he argued, was all due to a mere misunderstanding anyway. It was not to be.

Just five days after the editorial in *The Independent* called for an end to the misunderstanding, crates of lettuce that shippers attempted to send to market fell off a truck and were then destroyed by striking members of the Fruit and Vegetable Packers Union. The following day strikers were met with “grenades and projectiles [that] spurted gas onto the grounds of the Central Labor Council temple as strikers gathered to partake of their evening meal in the soup kitchen...The gas barrage of hungry strikers climaxed a day of deputizing scores of citizens and arming them with pick handles, gas bombs and other weapons.” An apparently intoxicated “special deputy” shot two male strikers in the legs. Another striker, Rose Lloyd, suffered a lacerated knee, and also required hospitalization. In response, strikers attacked Henry Strobel, president of the Farmers Association and the two deputies who tried to defend him. All were hospitalized with serious injuries and nine other

²¹³ *The Salinas Independent*, September 11, 1936, p.1.

strikers were arrested. The violence got the attention of Secretary of Labor, Francis Perkins, who sent an emissary, Walter G. Mathewson, to attempt to resolve the dispute. Mathewson finally left Salinas over a month later without an agreement. It also prompted outrage statewide among union members and organizers who advocated a general strike for all of Salinas.²¹⁴

These events were widely reported at the time, but what was left unreported was the role of the Japanese farmers and packers not only in supporting GSA during the strike, but also in offering packing sheds for Filipino strikebreakers to use to trim the lettuce that was subsequently loaded onto the trucks that created such controversy as they traveled through the lines of pickets in Salinas for shipment to market.²¹⁵ Filipino contractors (Sampayan, Tangonan, Malendres, and Cacas) had agreed to a wage increase with GSA on September 9 (behind the backs of the FVWU), which demonstrated the complexity of the strike, which did not so easily align along either class or ethnic lines as contemporary accounts and later historical analysis might have us believe.²¹⁶

After planning was underway for Filipino strikebreakers to work in the sheds, Walter Farley complemented H.K. Sakata in a directors meeting for a “splendid job” in supporting the fencing off of packing sheds to safeguard the Filipino strikebreakers: “During this period a fence was constructed in Watsonville around the J.G Marinovich and Travers and Sakata sheds. This fence...was of double

²¹⁴ *The Salinas Independent*, September 18, 1936, p.1.

²¹⁵ Grower-Shipper Vegetable Association of Central California, Minutes, September 9, 1936

²¹⁶ Grower-Shipper Vegetable Association of Central California, Minutes, September 9, 1936

construction, the outside of the fence being barbed wire and the inside of the fence of solid wooden construction ten feet high. Delivery of dry pack lettuce put up in the fields [and] shipments have gone forward.”²¹⁷ A week later, the GSA reported that “On the morning of [September] 29th a concerted attempt was made to drive the Filipinos from the fields by intimidation on the part of striking shed workers,” indicating further that Filipinos were involved both as strikers and activists but also on the opposite side, aligned with GSA as strikebreakers.²¹⁸

Both Japanese packing firms, Sakata Farms (Travers & Sakata) and Matsura & Marui remained active members of GSA throughout the 1930s, fully supporting GSA efforts to control workers and wages as well as the Chinese owned firm, Sing Wo Kee & Co representd by Joe Gok.²¹⁹ Furthermore, during the September 13 GSA meeting, Art Sbrana “reported the cooperation of the Japanese Association” as a community in supporting growers and shippers.²²⁰

Further, the contemporary reports of riots were disputed by local news organizations. The editor for the union newspaper, *The Independent* deplored the sloppy reporting from San Francisco that oversimplified and exaggerated events in Salinas: “The fight seems to have developed into a dispute between the metropolitan newspapers of San Francisco...and the Salinas people, including the strikers, the shippers and the community at large who have been the sufferers.” The issues were

²¹⁷ Grower-Shipper Vegetable Association of Central California, Minutes, September 20, 1936

²¹⁸ Grower-Shipper Vegetable Association of Central California, Minutes, September 29, 1936

²¹⁹ Grower-Shipper Vegetable Association of Central California, Minutes, September 13, 1936

²²⁰ Grower-Shipper Vegetable Association of Central California, Minutes, September 13, 1936

complex, according to this editor and “cannot be gone into in a brief statement...As an example of some of the wild rumors which have been developed...was the story that Salinas was in the possession of a group of vigilantes, who were using gas bombs from which babies had died, and that men were beaten, left lying in the streets and were blinded by the gas...and that the strikers had violated the truce and cut the ropes on a lettuce truck, dumping same. On investigation it was proven that the rope broke...and the lettuce unloaded of its own accord.”²²¹

Although utilized by historians to portray Salinas’s residents as hysterical and intent on subduing workers and crushing the labor movement, this explosive narrative from San Francisco overlooked a key part of the story. That is, by 1936 Salinas was a union town as much as it was an agricultural community. Some of Salinas’s citizens joined forces with the sheriff’s department to contain the strike and act as special deputies, but several hundreds of other Salinas residents and citizens held a mass meeting at Salinas high school condemning the violence and supporting the right to unionize and to strike: “An impromptu mass meeting of [800]citizens [calling themselves the Citizens Welfare League and led by George Pollock] who said ‘they were not connected with the lettuce industry’ [meaning that they were neither growers/shippers nor workers on strike] meeting at [Salinas] high school launched vigorous protests against officers and special deputies,” thus showing their collective disdain for the actions of those who bullied striking workers. They called themselves “The Citizens Welfare League” and brought City Manager Vic Barlogio into discussions with both sides in order to avoid a repeat of

²²¹ *The Salinas Independent*, September 26, 1936, p.1.

what was beginning to be termed “bloody Wednesday.”²²² They met repeatedly during the entire strike advocating “Equal protection for everyone instead of a few,” and launched their own investigation looking into use of excess force against strikers by the sheriff’s department and its recently deputized citizens.

As the strike deepened in early October 1936, both the County Board of Supervisors and the City of Salinas City Council passed anti-picketing ordinances “with penalties for 6 months in jail or \$500 fine or both” that the Central Labor Council and the *Salinas Independent* strenuously contested.²²³ Notably, the GSA objected just as strenuously to the anti-picketing ordinance as “contrary in plan to the American traditions [and] so extreme as to curtail, if not deny the right of free speech and the right of assemblage.”²²⁴ Both contemporary press reports and later narratives of the dispute portrayed the growers and shippers as villains in the strike, but it is noteworthy that they did not support these kinds of repressive reactive measures that county leaders advocated.

By October 23 with no settlement in sight, The F & V W U narrowly defeated one final offer proposed by the GSA, much to the chagrin of many members who had become weary of the strike and depleted financially. According to *The Independent*, “The action came as a decided blow to a number of F & VW U members, who though staunch supporters of organized labor, feel that the strike...was theoretically lost,

²²² *The Salinas Independent*, September 18, 1936, p.1.

²²³ *The Salinas Independent*, October 9, 1936, p.1

²²⁴ Grower-Shipper Vegetable Association of Central California, Minutes, October 5, 1936

and feel that men with homes to maintain and families to support should be allowed to return to their jobs without the stigma of 'rat' being applied to them."²²⁵

Distinguished California historian Kevin Starr characterized the Salinas Valley lettuce strike as a "lockout rather than a strike...a form of syndicalism or parafascism in which the public and private sectors coalesced in resistance [against workers on strike]."²²⁶ According to Starr, "By the time the lettuce workers [members of Fruit and Vegetable Workers Union of California, No. 18211] were locked out of the packing sheds, and a large strikebreaking workforce was brought in, the entire city...had come under the control of Henry Sanborn, a colonel in the infantry in the army reserve who coordinated the resistance of the growers with military precision."²²⁷ Starr, like every other historian who wrote about the 1936 Salinas Valley lettuce strike, supported his view of the strike (or lockout) with references to Carey McWilliams' work, *Factories in the Field*, John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, and a series of reports in *The San Francisco Chronicle* written by Paul Smith. Smith described the strike as a real life version of Sinclair Lewis's dystopic America, *It Can't Happen Here* in articles Smith titled "It Did Happen in Salinas."²²⁸

Starr situated the strike in the context of widespread labor activism in the 1930s in which working people throughout the nation and the state of California organized under the banner of Communism and other radical political ideologies on

²²⁵ *The Salinas Independent*, September 23, 1936, p.1.

²²⁶ Kevin Starr, *California: A History* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2005) 213-215.

²²⁷ Kevin Starr, *California: A History* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2005), 214

²²⁸ Kevin Starr, *California: A History* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2005), 213.

both the right and the left. In fact, according to Starr, it was sometimes difficult to distinguish between left and right extremists in Depression era America. He described the “Ham and Eggers” pension plans and Townsend movements (among others) as incorporating elements of both radical right and radical left with some Hitler-inspired fascism thrown in for good measure.²²⁹ Still, Starr’s argument that the strike was “a triumph for the Associated Farmers of California, Inc.” gave credence to the view that all-powerful and unified growers and shippers in collusion with either misguided or compromised citizenry formed an impenetrable power block that effectively relegated workers to little more than cogs in the wheel of industrialized agriculture.²³⁰

The Federal government agreed. “The National Labor Relations Board held hearings on April 12, 1937, and accused the Growers-Shippers Association, Associated Farmers of Monterey County, the Salinas Valley Citizens Association, the Western Growers Protective Association, law enforcement officers from the cities of Salinas, Monterey, Watsonville, and the state of California, of twenty-nine charges of “anti-labor practices.” These included “Unlawful searches and seizures, use of secret headquarters from which a reign of terror was directed, unnecessary use of tear gas and nauseating gas, tear gas bombing of the Labor Temple, use of deputized vigilantes...restraint of trade, and extensive blacklisting after the strike.”²³¹ These were harsh words and strong accusations indeed.

²²⁹ Kevin Starr, *California: A History* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2005) 213-214

²³⁰ Kevin Starr, *California: A History* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2005) 215

²³¹ *Western Worker* March 27, 1937, Source: Scrapbook, “Clippings, National Labor Relations Board Meeting,” Grower-Shippers Association collection, Salinas.

Although most historians concurred with Starr's assessment, their (and his) characterizations of the infamous lettuce strike in Salinas missed one of the most crucial aspects of the entire episode, plucked as it was out of its local context. The strike occurred after decades of effort on the part of all of Salinas's residents to build a city central to the regional political economy, and in common purpose, to create and maintain community at all costs ; a struggle that was carried on from all sides and included virtually everyone in town. Salinas's residents made constant and determined efforts to bring workers from every ethnic group and at every skill level together in kinship with merchants, city leaders, growers, packinghouse owners and workers, ice producers and other tangential businesses related to agriculture, and shippers throughout the 1930s.

Acting collectively, no one wanted to crush labor. They wanted to create community, to make agriculture work to benefit Salinas's citizenry—all of them. The union newspaper, *The Salinas Independent* brushed off the 1936 strike as a minor irritant instead of a game changer in industrial relations: "The Fruit and Vegetable Workers Union has had its trials, suffering two strikes of short duration," according to an editorial reported in 1937 (just a few months after the violence in the streets). Instead, the report focused on the investment in the city by union workers and their value to the community: "More than two and a quarter million dollars are spent in the Salinas district every year by the fruit and vegetable workers connected with the lettuce industry alone." Furthermore, the report broke down spending by workers "In a general division among 500 business houses...a conservative estimate this immense payroll put into circulation \$4,493 to each merchant [in Salinas] during the

season.”²³²Once again, labor in the form of unions asserted their right as integral members of Salinas’s community. Most importantly, ethnic and racial lines remained fuzzy during and after the 1936 strike. Not all Filipino stoop laborers supported the strike, most strikers were whites, Japanese residents overwhelmingly supported the GSA and some were members in good standing.

By 1937 (and throughout the contentious La Follette Civil Liberties Committee hearings), Salinas’s residents, embarrassed and shocked by the harsh national spotlight, wanted to move on. The major story dominating the local news had nothing to do with La Follette or labor and everything to do with development, namely the construction of an underpass that facilitated easier access to Salinas for visitors and locals alike. The increasing population of Alisal also generated attention as city leaders and residents created infrastructure and supported better housing in the area, hoping to encourage Alisal residents of the benefits of annexation into city boundaries.

Anyone outside of Salinas might be surprised at how quickly labor conflicts receded into the background of Salinas’s community life. No one inside Salinas anticipated the events to come in the next decade that exiled the now esteemed Japanese population of the city and made them pariahs in a place they considered home.

²³² *The Salinas Independent*, March 25, 1935, p. 1.

