

SALINAS HISTORY 1930-1939

By 1930 the Salinas population reached 10,263, and would continue to grow given the area's many advantages. Fine weather, an expanding agricultural industry, and later the government assisted building programs and projects drew refugees from the harsh reality of the Depression and the conditions of the Dust Bowl in other parts of the county. New residents were not always welcome.

Dust Bowl Migrants settled in the Alisal area to the east of Salinas, lived in camps and trailers, and worked in the agricultural industry alongside the Filipinos and other laborers. Their arrival concerned many local residents. Some residents opposed the camps because "they didn't want their belongings stolen by encamped transients." Agricultural leaders objected to the establishment of labor camps feeling that such camps were not only an easy target for agitators and Communists, but a focal point for disease.

In an effort to eliminate the roadside camps, Monterey County Supervisors drew up an ordinance giving the government power to regulate sanitary conditions in private camps and to oversee labor camps.

Wage disputes, strikes and anger were surfacing in the Monterey County agricultural industry. In 1933 the local *Philippines Mail* reported violence against Filipino laborers. On September 5, 1935 the *Monterey Herald* revealed Sheriff Carl Abbott had sworn in special deputies for the duration of the lettuce harvest, and listed the thirty-two names of these deputies who were assigned to protect the lettuce sheds. In the paper Abbott stated emphatically that the deputies carried no weapons; were not being paid by the Monterey County Board of Supervisors; and were not members of the Associated Farmers.

However, none of these early incidents had the impact of the virulent and bitter Salinas Lettuce Strike that began on September 4, 1936, when 3,200 members of the Fruit and Vegetable Workers Union walked out of the Salinas-Watsonville lettuce sheds. The *Philippines Mail* of September 7, 1936 reported that a Filipino worker was a casualty of the first day. Editor and Publisher Venerando C. Gonzales warned his readers to "be thoughtful and vigilant in their relations with employers, and also [to] avoid misunderstandings or conflict with the strikers employed in the 70 lettuce sheds of the Salinas Valley."

Art Sbrana, head of the Grower Shippers, conferred with Salinas city officials and local law enforcement in a Cominos Hotel conference room. Colonel Henry R. Sanborn was hired by the employers to coordinate strike defense activities.¹ Growers eventually offered a five cent increase in wages, but refused to grant union preference in the sheds, a critical point for the workers. Growers advertised for shed workers but warned "radicals and Reds" not to apply.

¹ *Grower-Shipper Association of Central California*, Burton Anderson, 2005

Violence erupted on September 15, 1936 at Main and Gabilan Streets and then spread, making National headlines. On September 17, 1936 in *The Salinas Index Journal* Sheriff Carl H. Abbott declared the situation “beyond the ability of the regularly constituted law enforcement agencies.” Citing Penal Code Section 723 Abbott commanded all able-bodied male citizens between 18 and 45 to report to his office and assist him in seizing, arresting, and confining persons. Residents were forbidden to congregate on the public streets and public places of the city. In October, over the protests of the Fruit and Vegetable Union, the Monterey County Board of Supervisors passed an Anti-Picketing Ordinance.

The shippers charged that Communist agitators fomented the strike. The *San Francisco Chronicle* labeled the growers “vigilantes.” The strike was eventually called off with the assurance that as many former workers as could be would be rehired.

The strike may have ended in November of 1936, but the effects were long felt. Even as late as 1974 the *Salinas Californian* observed that this strike, which pitted shed workers from the Alisal against their Salinas employers, raised a formidable psychological barrier between the two communities.

Despite the agriculture turmoil, city leaders actively pursued the New Deal and other government programs available for building and projects. The year 1936 was particularly remarkable. Begun that year were: the Monterey County Courthouse on Alisal Street, with the heads modeled by Jo Mora that jut out from the building and still delight visitors today; Washington Junior High School, still a middle school in 2009; the Federal Building at 100 Alisal still housing a post office, a law library and local offices for area representatives in 2009; and a separate campus for Salinas Junior College on Homestead Avenue, still on the same site in 2009 as Hartnell College.

Other projects of the decade were the following: a second Armory; the addition of a Tubercular Ward at the County Hospital; the Main Street Underpass; and plans for construction of a new Salinas Airport. City Engineer Donald Davies also submitted requests for a municipal golf course, sewers, parks, a swimming pool, storm drains and a jail. Numerous schools were also built.

Salinas made its first annexation to the original city in 1933, a 52-acre addition to the south side along Romie Lane. While out in the Alisal the East Salinas Improvement Club organized with sixty members in 1938. The group began a movement to build sidewalks, plant trees and improve housing and sewage in the Alisal area. By 1940 the Alisal Branch of the Monterey County Free Libraries was opened.

SALINAS HISTORY 1940-1949

If the Thirties were tumultuous, the Forties were cataclysmic. War brought serious upheaval to the City of Salinas which had a population of 11,586 in 1940.

In August of 1940 the Salinas Tank Company, active since 1895, went to Fort Lewis, Washington for induction; and Secretary of War Henry Simpson notified the city that the Army would immediately develop the new Salinas Airport as an Army Air Corps defense base due to "military necessity." After leasing the airport, the government began work on the Salinas Army Air Base. Four two-story barracks plus a control tower, an administration building, a mess hall, and classrooms were ready in 1941.

In August of 1941 thirty-nine members of the Tank Company were home on a visit before being transferred to Angel Island and deployed to the Philippines in September of 1941. As part of the 149th Tank Group, the 194th Tank Company defended central Luzon and then the Bataan Peninsula, engaging the invading Japanese 14th Army.

That October ground was broken for the construction of the first permanent USO building in the United States. The \$93,000 facility, opened just two days after the attack on Pearl Harbor, has been in continuous use since, first as a USO, later as a recreation center and for a while, a children's library. The first blackout in Salinas was that same December.

On February 19, 1942 President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 which allowed exclusion of any or all persons from a declared military area and permitted removal and internment of the Japanese living in the Central Coast. Public Law 503, signed on March 21, 1942 made it a criminal offense for a person excluded from a military area to refuse to move.

When Bataan fell in April of 1942, the Salinas Tank Battalion was one of the units captured and subjected to the infamous march of death. Only 47 of the original 107 who left Salinas would return, but Salinas did not forget its heroes. An M-5 tank is now at the Garden of Memories in their honor,² and the Monterey County Historical Society dedicated a Bataan Memorial on April 8, 2006 at their site.

That same April 600 Salinas residents were sworn in as air wardens. Some residents volunteered as plane spotters, scanning the skies with binoculars for enemy aircraft. Virginia Hosford sometimes accompanied her mother on her shift. She described the location of the tower as east and north of Salinas on a ranch. The building was four sided with windows all round and a telephone. The top where pictures of enemy planes were posted for reference was reached by ladder.

The Salinas Rodeo Grounds were appropriated for use as the Salinas Assembly Center. Some 3,586 Japanese Americans from the Monterey Peninsula, Watsonville, Salinas,

² The Salinas Tank Battalion used the lighter M-3 Tank.

Gilroy and San Benito County were detained there before being transferred to internment camps away from the coast. Many held at the Salinas Assembly Center were sent on to the Poston internment camp in Arizona. Following their transfer, the rodeo grounds became the Salinas Garrison of Fort Ord.

The internment of Japanese residents was particularly difficult for the Salinas High School Class of 1942. Forty-six seniors were unable to attend their own commencement ceremonies. Two faculty members, Gertrude Waterman and Ruth Wing, traveled across town to see that the seniors detained at the Assembly Center received their diplomas. Though appreciated, one graduate later said it did not make up for being “in prison.”

In August of 1942 the United States and Mexico entered an agreement setting forth conditions for recruitment of Mexican labor for wartime employment in agriculture. Workers were paid transportation and subsistence en route; they were provided with better camps than in 1918, as well as given medical care, accident insurance, and minimum earnings. Ten percent of a worker’s earnings was deducted by the government and transmitted to Mexico City for deposit in an account for that worker. The FSA was in charge of the program through July 1, 1943 and the agency scrupulously followed all terms of the agreement.

However, when the program was transferred to the War Food Administration, Carey McWilliams found the wage guarantees “farcical.”³ On the other hand, McWilliams felt the agreement was an improvement over the 1918 “experiment” when the Mexican government investigated complaints of the Mexican workers about labor rights abuses.

After the war, the first of the Japanese-American families to return to Salinas found their once beautiful Yamato Cemetery overgrown with weeds and with goats tied to the few remaining cherry trees. By 1948 ten to fifteen percent of the original Japanese returned to the area.⁴ They reactivated the Salinas Valley JACL⁵ with James Abe as its first post-war president. The JACL proceeded to act upon land escheat cases and to restore the cemetery.

The close of World War II brought other changes to Salinas. Discharged soldiers returned to town and with the help of the G.I. bill many veterans attended Hartnell College. Returning veterans also sparked a building boom in the greater Salinas area.

Other Salinas milestones following the armistice were: closure of the Salinas Army Air Base and return of the airport to the city; repair and return of the Salinas Garrison to the Rodeo Grounds in time for the 1947 Rodeo, though without Sgt. Fitz Truan, the Salinas cowboy champion killed at Iwo Jima; the 1947 opening of the first store at the first planned shopping center in California, the Valley Shopping Center; the end of the farm labor importation program on December 31, 1947; the opening of the Skyview Drive-In; and the visit of Marilyn Monroe to promote diamond sales for Carlyle’s Jewelers at 362

³ *North from Mexico: The Spanish-Speaking People of the United States*, Carey McWilliams, 1948, 1990.

⁴ *Yamato Cemetery History: 1908-1976*, James Y. Abe, [1976].

⁵ Japanese American Citizens League

Main Street. Some 1,000-1,400 photographs of Miss Monroe were given out over the week of her 1947 visit. The crowds were so large that the Salinas Police Department assigned two patrolmen in order to direct traffic in front of the store.

In 1948 Salinas Junior College was officially named Hartnell College, and the *Salinas Californian* moved to its new building on West Alisal Street. Sculptured bucking broncos above the newspaper building's main entrances are a tribute to the town's long association with the California Rodeo. In 1949 the Alisal area voted "no" on annexation to Salinas, while the Airport and Rodeo tracts in the north part of town launched another annexation drive.

SALINAS HISTORY 1950-1959

Salinas, the brash town that eclipsed the earlier settlement of Natividad by luring in the railroad, incorporating, and winning the right to be the county seat, all in the 1870's, was still growing eighty years later. Between 1950 and 1956 the council began a long series of annexations that brought 43 separate additions to the city, doubling the area. The additions were made on all sides of the city. Home construction was on the rise, and the population went from 13,917 in 1950 to 18,957 in 1960.

On the downside, the widespread use of vacuum cooling and refrigerated railroad cars by the agricultural industry put hundreds of packing shed workers out of work, though eventually many would find employment at Salinas Valley Memorial Hospital as well as in other industries new to the area.

The drive to build a bigger, better-equipped, non-profit community hospital in Salinas began with a group of doctors that met at the Jeffrey Hotel in 1941. At that time there were two private hospitals in Salinas, Dr. Rollin Reeves' Salinas Valley Hospital at Monterey and San Luis Streets, and the Park Lane, owned by Dr. Murphy. The Monterey County Hospital then only served indigent patients. In any case, patients needing serious surgery were usually sent to San Francisco or San Jose.

Building the hospital took time and dedicated community effort. Residents joined area leaders to vote for a hospital district, raise money, and pass two bonds to get the hospital built. The project was on hold during World War II and later slowed by weather conditions as well as cost increases that were partly a result of the onset of the Korean War. But committed residents and city leaders like Bruce Church, L.W. Joe Wing, William L. Steward, Fred Rianda and Andrew H. Christensen persevered in helping to build the hospital.

The State of California enabling act of 1947 allowed the formation of a taxation district for the hospital. Funds were still not sufficient to build an adequate hospital so a bond issue was developed in 1949. A supplemental bond issue was found to be necessary and the Salinas Junior Chamber of Commerce was active in passage of the second request for a supplemental \$500,000.

Groundbreaking to dedication took three years. On November 27, 1950 Roy L. Diaz, a staff sergeant with Company C of the 194th Tank Battalion and former prisoner of war, turned the first shovel of dirt for the hospital named as a memorial to those who served in World War II. The hospital was dedicated on Sunday, March 30, 1953 in the presence of more than 2,000 valley residents.⁶ In 2009 the Salinas Valley Chamber of Commerce would rate the Salinas Valley Memorial Healthcare System as the sixth largest employer in the Salinas area with 2,200 employees.

⁶ *History of Salinas Valley Memorial Hospital*, Theodore D. Englehorn, SR., M.D., F.I.C.S., 1993.

Dr. Garth Parker, celebrating his fiftieth year in the medical profession, spoke at the dedication, tracing the history of hospitals in the area. The first private hospital was in Castroville, followed by the Salinas Valley Sanitarium, which had operating and delivery rooms, unlike the hospital in Castroville. Later came the Jim Bardin Hospital, the Park Lane, and the Salinas Valley Hospital.

Jobs also came to the area through the efforts of the Monterey County Industrial Development, Inc., better known as the MCID, which received its charter of incorporation from the State of California on December 10, 1951. Its purpose was to bring industrial development and jobs to the Monterey County area. Much of that development would be in and around the city of Salinas. Between 1954 and 1958 a number of businesses opened providing jobs for residents, The St. Regis Paper Company and Cochran Equipment opened in Salinas in 1954. Kuhlman Electric opened in 1955. Universal Match Corporation in Prunedale and Wilder Manufacturing both opened in 1957. Streater Industries, Growers Frozen Food and J.M. Smucker all opened in 1958.

As the *Carmel Pacific Spectator Journal* of 1955 noted, Salinas was truly a “city in a hurry.” Already at the center of Salinas Valley agriculture, the city’s new Valley Center shopping hub and the Sherwood Gardens center which opened in 1956 made Salinas the major merchandising center for the Valley and the nearby Monterey Peninsula as well.

The Salinas Public library also expanded to meet the demands of a growing population. A room in the Lincoln Street Recreation Center, the old USO, was remodeled to house library services for children in 1951. In 1952 the North Salinas “book station” opened at the firehouse on Laurel Drive. By 1959 the city was building a new main library building to replace the Carnegie building on Main Street.

Another development that improved life in Salinas was the completion of the Nacimiento Reservoir dedicated in 1958 which, along with the San Antonio Reservoir that opened in 1967, lessened the impact of the periodic flooding in the city as well as the valley. Without the protection provided by the reservoirs rancher Jim Bardin estimated that about six feet of water would have flooded the courthouse on Alisal Street during a “500-Year Flood” in early 1969.

Salinas closed the decade prosperously. The first compilation of Standard Rate and Data Service for the twelve month period ending in July of 1959 showed that Salinas retail merchants exceeded gross business totals of the previous year by 11.8 percent, a remarkable increase. Salinas residents also had a net spendable income of \$54,534,000 after taxes. That figure was up from \$52,793,000 in the previous year. Salinas had about \$6,523 in disposable income per household, more than the national average of \$6,082. The *Salinas Californian* concluded that the good times would continue: employment would remain high and wages would increase.

SALINAS HISTORY 1960-1969

The sixties were a time of unmatched growth for the city of Salinas. When the decade opened, the Salinas census count was 28,957. In 1963 when the Alisal District voted to become East Salinas, Salinas' population nearly doubled overnight to about 50,000.

The energetic efforts of the Monterey County Industrial Development, Inc. (MCID) continued to bring industrial companies into the area: Nestle Chocolate Company opened in 1960; Firestone Tire and Rubber in 1963; Peter Paul, Incorporated in 1963; Fusion Rubbermaid Corporation in 1964; Green Giant (land purchase) in 1965; Fearn Foods, Incorporated (land purchase) in 1965; McCormick & Company, Inc., Schilling Division, in 1965; Thor Electronics in 1966; Mount Eden Nursery (Salinas area) in 1967; and Ashworth Brothers, Inc. (land purchase south of Salinas) in 1967.

There were many large construction projects. North Salinas High School opened for classes in January 1960 and was dedicated in April that same year. Notre Dame opened in 1964. Alisal High School opened in 1965 with freshmen, sophomore and junior classes. Two new library buildings opened to the public: the Salinas Public Library on Lincoln Avenue in 1960 and the El Gabilan Library on North Main Street in 1966. The new Salinas City Hall Rotunda emerged in 1964. A large Emporium Shopping Center north of Salinas was also proposed in the latter half of this decade.

Growth and prosperity were not without significant drawbacks. Numerous Salinas landmarks like the Carnegie library building, parts of Chinatown, and the old city hall, to name a few, disappeared. The Carnegie library building, built in 1909 by the efforts of dedicated citizens, was leveled in August of 1960. The site is now a bank building. In 1961 homes and businesses in Chinatown were demolished under the federal Urban Renewal Program. In 1964 the old city hall was razed with difficulty, taking workmen two days to destroy the picturesque cupola. That site is a parking lot on Salinas and Gabilan Streets. Some Salinas residents still regret these losses.

Decaying buildings on Main Street, a concern mentioned by the City Council in 1957, was still being discussed in 1966, and revitalization of the downtown area of Salinas became a key issue. Meanwhile the established merchants expressed concern about the impact of the proposed Emporium Shopping Center, later called Northridge.

In addition to being an important Industrial complex and a retail center, Salinas maintained its position as the "Hub of Vast Agricultural Area" as noted in the *Salinas Californian* of February 28, 1966. Though the Monterey County crops brought in a record \$212,732,800 in 1969, signs of labor related problems increased in the sixties. For example, a tragic event on September 17, 1963 focused attention on the safety of the Bracero field worker. On the afternoon of September 17, 1963, a 71-car Southern Pacific freight train sheared through a light-bodied labor bus killing 28 of the 57 Mexican national field workers. Eventually the death toll reached 32. The *Salinas Californian* of

September 18, 1963 called it the worst bus tragedy in the state and in United States history.

The injured were taken to Alisal Hospital. Strangers, area residents and Mexican national workers all responded to the Salinas Valley Red Cross Chapter appeal for blood donors. A requiem high mass for the dead was held in the Palma High School Auditorium. Right Reverend Monsignor Thomas J. Earley, V.F., estimated there were six thousand people in the auditorium itself for the service, and three thousand more outside. Five government agencies investigated the crash. But questions remained. Many residents never forgot the disaster. Twenty some years later Cesar Chavez referenced it in the opening of his November 9, 1984 speech to the Commonwealth Club of California:

“Twenty-one years ago, this last September, on a lonely stretch of railroad track paralleling U.S. Highway 101 near Salinas, 32 Bracero farm workers lost their lives in a tragic accident. The Braceros had been imported from Mexico to work on California farms. They died when their bus, which was converted from a flatbed truck, drove in front of a freight train. Conversion of the bus had not been approved by any government agency. The driver had tunnel vision. Most of the bodies laid unidentified for days. No one, including the grower who employed the workers, even knew their names.”

Undocumented workers were an issue for established laborers in an area. Local workers felt the undocumented workers took away their jobs and kept the pay low. Then in 1964, United States Public Law 78 authorizing the 1951 Bracero Program expired, and there was a mad scramble for an adequate labor supply. Strawberry production had to be cut back because growers couldn't find workers who could pick fast enough. In 1965 the National Farm Workers Association, led by Cesar Chavez, joined the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee (AWOC) and called strikes against selected grape growers in the San Joaquin Valley. Their success caused great concern among California growers and would have implications for Central Coast agriculture in the following decade.

National and international events and sensibilities also made a mark in Salinas. The sixties were a time of heightened social conscience. Locally in 1961, Milton Emery started the Victory Mission in an old, steel-lined gambling hall at 43 Soledad Street to “bring hope to the hopeless.” The only other such institution, the Rescue Mission, had been founded in 1943 by Mr. and Mrs. Fred Villa, but was later supported by the Community Chest. Both offered a night's rest for those down on their luck.

Although Khrushchev's 1960 train stop in Salinas created no stir (the premier was reportedly asleep at the time), the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis did cause fallout shelters to be built in some new homes in north Salinas. John Steinbeck also visited the area in 1960. His account of the journey across country was published in the book *Travels with Charley* (1962) wherein he expressed his pique and his nostalgia about the visit:

“...I felt resentment toward the strangers swamping what I thought of as my country with noise and clutter and the inevitable rings of junk.” (*Travels with Charley*, p. 148)

And as he gazed on his country from Fremont Peak he wrote:

“I printed it once more on my eyes, south, west, and north, and then we hurried away from the permanent and changeless past where my mother is always shooting a wildcat and my father is always burning his name with love.” (*Travels with Charley*, p. 158)

That same year Steinbeck was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature and the Salinas Public Library named their browsing room for him. In 1964 Jack Patton, a retired *Salinas Californian* newspaper editor donated his first editions of Steinbeck's works to the Salinas Public Library, laying the foundation for the Steinbeck Archives.

Just a few years before his death, John Steinbeck's syndicated dispatches from his travels in Vietnam and Southeast Asia appeared in the *Salinas Californian*. Then on December 20, 1968 following a period of ill health, John Steinbeck died in New York City. His remains were buried in the Salinas Garden of Memories. The decade closed with the naming of the Salinas Public Library building on Lincoln Avenue as the John Steinbeck Library in honor of the Salinas born author.

SALINAS HISTORY 1970-1979

In 1970, the Salinas population was 61,978. Revitalization of the downtown area of Salinas continued to be a hot topic in the local paper and with the business community. Merchants approved the central city revitalization study even though businesses were slated to pay a surcharge for the consultant. In 1973 the city's Center City Authority decided to focus on the development of a shopping and tourist oriented "oldtown" that would reflect the community's rodeo and western heritage. The planning commission approved the plan in November of 1973.

In April 1974, the Salinas City Council agreed to a \$1 million investment in municipal funds for the revitalization of the city's deteriorating downtown core. Despite some lively opposition, the city council approved the downtown revitalization plan in July of the same year.

Throughout 1975 the project was of great interest to the community. *The Oldtown Gazette* published the first issue of central city revitalization news in May. Roger Anderman, Director of Community Development, and Russ Hoss, Chief of Redevelopment co-hosted a weekly 15 minute radio talk show, "Downtown," on Radio KKEE 1570 AM at 8:15 and 10:15 on Sunday mornings.

The revitalization efforts were considered a success. The January/February 1976 *Oldtown Gazette* reported that some downtown area businesses experienced a forty percent increase in business over the previous Christmas season.

But merchants remained concerned about the Northridge Shopping Center. The mall opened on October 25, 1972 amid much fanfare and, as the *Salinas Californian* remarked in a 1991 article, retail business in Salinas was never quite the same. Northridge was the largest climate-controlled retail development between San Jose and Santa Barbara. The enclosed weatherproof mall with a park-like environment was still a draw in the early nineties. According to the *Salinas Californian*, Northridge became the leading shopping center in Salinas and throughout the Central Coast.

In 1977, the downtown merchants opposed an expansion of Northridge that would accommodate Sears, then a mainstay of the Valley Center Shopping Center on South Main Street. Property owners in the "Oldtown" area were also perturbed when the city, prompted by an earthquake report, proposed that downtown buildings in the core of Salinas be brought up to two-thirds of city code or be demolished. Opposition killed the earthquake ordinance in 1979, which then had unfortunate consequences in 1989 when a 7.0 magnitude earthquake struck the area.

Meanwhile in East Salinas, residents and community leaders voiced concerns about their own area. The Salinas Community Development Advisory Committee responded in 1975, giving priority to Hebron Heights to build a community center, to clear out and replace substandard housing, and to initiate a community-wide improvement program.

Salinas Mayor Henry Hibino officially opened Hebbbron Heights Park on June 1, 1975. Among the attendees was John Ramos, a young member of the community group that in 1973 requested recreational facilities for the blighted “pork chop hill”⁷ area in East Salinas. On October 24, 1976, Mayor Hibino dedicated the Hebbbron Neighborhood Center, a remodeled appliance repair shop at 725 E. Market Street, and vowed a Hebbbron upgrade. Some residents worried that proposed city “improvements” would price them out of a home.

Residents of North Salinas had their own concerns. In January of 1975, at neighborhood meetings in North Salinas, residents indicated that housing, recreation, and jobs were key issues for them in spending city Housing and Community Development Act funds.

On the agricultural front unionization dominated the news during the first part of the decade. After efforts to organize grape workers in Delano, Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee (UFWOC) began organizing activities in the Salinas Valley. Concerned about the events in Delano, some local growers had signed backroom contracts with the Teamsters Union for their workers, without the workers’ knowledge.

Protesting this failure to involve workers in the negotiations, Cesar Chavez held a rally at a teen center “on the Mexican side” of Salinas in July of 1970. A temporary UFWOC headquarters was set up inside the Salinas Office of the Mexican-American Political Association. Early in August more than three thousand farm workers gathered on the Hartnell College’s football field showing support for his efforts. By late August the UFWOC called for strikes against many local firms. Eventually InterHarvest, Fresh Pict and Pic N Pac signed with the UFWOC.⁸

Cesar Chavez called for a boycott of all non-UFWOC lettuce companies. In December a judge placed Chavez in the Monterey County Jail then on Alisal Street, indefinitely, until he complied with an order to stop boycotting Bud Antle Lettuce. Chavez made the most of his solitude in jail, reading mail and books. While in jail he was visited by Ethel Kennedy, widow of Robert Kennedy. A crowd of two thousand Chavez supporters greeted her, but a hostile mob also appeared. Coretta Scott King, widow of Doctor Martin Luther King visited Chavez as well. On Christmas Eve 1970 Chavez was released pending the outcome of an appeal.⁹

By 1971 Chavez and the farm workers union had won key contracts. In 1976 California’s passage of the Agricultural Labor Relations Act set up the means for workers to petition for a union representation election. Nonetheless labor disputes continued throughout the period. After his death in April of 1993, community leaders said the key to Chavez’s success was his non-violent approach and his willingness to sacrifice.

⁷ Reverend E. G. Valverde of the Church of Jesus Christ in East Salinas referred to the park area as “pork chop hill.”

⁸ *The Fight in the Fields*, Susan Ferriss and Ricardo Sandoval, 1977.

⁹ *ibid.*

There was another agricultural landmark in 1975. Hearings were held in Salinas and San Diego in March of 1975. An overflowing crowd of farm workers and growers filled the Salinas City Rotunda to discuss the pros and cons of “el cortito,” or the short handle hoe. Workers testified to the crippling effects caused by extended use of the hoe. Shortly thereafter in April the State of California banned its use in the fields of California.

The Seventies also brought the rise of several organizations working for the betterment of the Latino Community, MEChA and LULAC among them. A chapter of Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan, or MEChA, formed at Hartnell College in the spring of 1970. In June, Hartnell College trustees approved the appointment of a special student services officer, Paul Nava, as a first step toward meeting the requests of MEChA to address the needs of Mexican American students. In January of 1973, the local chapter of the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) was formed. Over time LULAC would challenge practices on many fronts. Both organizations still exist in 2009 as a strong presence for Latinos in Salinas.

On the homelessness front, a ninety day task force survey determined that an average of fifty people wandered the streets or slept in their cars every night in Salinas. The Swinging Door, a day facility for the homeless primarily intended to get the transient population off the 100 block of Main Street, opened in 1974 at East Market and Pajaro Street. The police considered the program a success.

Mrs. Beverly McIntyre also opened the Home for the Homeless to assist women and families in difficulty. Other institutions in the area providing accommodations were Sunrise House and Victory Mission, while the Salvation Army, present in Salinas since 1894 and known for its quiet competence, offered food, financial help, and referrals.

There were other milestones for the city. In 1973, the Soroptomists gave a statue of John Steinbeck by artist Tom Fitzwater to the Salinas Public Library on Lincoln Street. Placed on the lawn of the library, the statue was visited by thousands of visitors to Salinas, Steinbeck’s birthplace.

In March of 1973, Salinas native Lt. Cmdr. Everett Alvarez, who was captured August 5, 1964 and held by the North Vietnamese for eight years and six months, was honored with a “Welcome Home” day in Salinas that included presentation of a salad bowl, the traditional symbol of the Salinas Valley. An account of his experience, *Chained Eagle*, was published in 1989. In 1995 a new high school was named in his honor.

The Valley Guild, organized in 1971, opened the Steinbeck House on Central Avenue as a restaurant in 1974 to authentically preserve John Steinbeck’s childhood home and also to generate new revenue for local charities.

Finally, in June of 1978 Proposition 13 was passed limiting property taxes. Despite talk of closing Salinas libraries, the new East Salinas Santa Lucia Library, later renamed for Cesar Chavez, finally opened in October of 1978. After passage of the proposition, the

thrust of the Downtown Revitalization program was changed, and the city council decided that all development must pay for itself. A new era of government for Monterey County and its cities had arrived.

SALINAS HISTORY 1980-1989

The eighties brought plant closures, countywide water concerns (including water pollution from the old Firestone plant), and an earthquake, but the residents in this town of 80,479, with 49.52% non-white and 39.68% of that portion Mexican American, showed a determination to succeed despite adverse events.

In the early eighties, Salinas suffered closure of major industrial plants: Firestone (1,800 jobs) closed in 1980; Spreckels Sugar, an area mainstay since just before the turn of the century, (400 jobs) closed in 1981; and Peter Paul (165 jobs) closed in 1981.

At closure the Firestone manufacturing plant occupied 43 of its 256 acres located at 340 El Camino Real South, an area that is now an industrial park surrounded by agricultural land. During Firestone's stay south of Salinas, chlorinated solvents and other chemicals were released into the soil and groundwater from its site.

With oversight of the California Department of Toxic Substances Control and the California Regional Water Quality Control Board, Firestone conducted interim cleanup measures. Nonetheless in February 1987, based on a scoring process that rates current or potential health impact, the site was added to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's National Priorities List, making it a Superfund site.

Firestone expanded the existing groundwater cleanup system to address deeper levels of contamination. In June 1992, positive cleanup levels were achieved in all hydrological zones. It was then decided that the remaining contaminant levels did not constitute a significant risk to human health or the environment. It was deleted from the Superfund list April 21, 2005. But it should be mentioned that in 2005 a law firm placed an ad in the *Salinas Californian* seeking former employees who developed leukemia or non-Hodgkins lymphoma from exposure to rubber solvents containing carcinogens.

Despite the controversies surrounding the cleanup, the Firestone site was purchased in the mid 1980's by businessmen Carini and John Panattoni who partitioned the sprawling space into 20,000 square feet of storage blocks that were then leased to manufacturers and warehouse interests. In 2003 it was assessed for tax purposes at \$21.7 million.

Revitalization and building continued elsewhere in the city. Developers Bruce Pierson and Doug Gustafson bought the deserted thirty-one year old Sears building in the Valley Center to renovate as the Quadrangle. And on the other side of town, the Northridge Shopping Center addition opened featuring guest celebrities.

In May of 1981, the *Salinas Californian* and Hartnell College sponsored the second annual Chicano Conference. Dr. Armando Navarro, of Californios for Fair Representation, was the keynote speaker. In 1988, Salinas voters adopted district elections of city council members by a thin margin of 103 votes. Encouraged by this,

Simon Salinas ran for the city council, and became Salinas' first Mexican-American city council member in 1989.

Another institution serving the disadvantaged was born on April 7, 1982 when Salinas native Robert Smith began serving lunch to the homeless in Salinas' Chinatown. He said his life was changed when he read a book about Saint Francis at the John Steinbeck Library.

The Salinas Public Library System continued to serve the community in a productive manner. In 1983, the Salinas Public Library Steinbeck Archives received recognition in *The American Studies International Newsletter*, along with the collections at Stanford and the Pierpont Morgan Library. People came from around the world to visit the Steinbeck Library Archives, the Library's Steinbeck Room, the Steinbeck statue on the library lawn, and the library's Steinbeck Festival. In 1982 the *Salinas Californian* photographed Debra Winger, who was a star in *Cannery Row* and in town for the premier of that film, kissing the Steinbeck statue on the library lawn.

In 1984 the Salinas Public Library was one of 27 public libraries in California to receive seed money from the California Literacy Campaign. With the guidance of Maria Roddy it became one of the most successful literacy programs in the state.

The decade closed with the 7.0 magnitude Loma Prieta Earthquake on October 17, 1989. The most serious destruction occurred to the north of Salinas. However, some of Salinas' oldest buildings downtown sustained serious damage. The 105 year-old Cominos Hotel was among the first to be razed, along with the building housing the Western Bible Store, both on Main Street. Even the John Steinbeck Library closed for a month while cracks in the beams and the floor were repaired. Damage estimates for Salinas reached at least \$10 million.

SALINAS HISTORY 1990-1999

The Salinas population took another leap in the last part of the century. In 1990 it reached 108,777, 50.6% of whom were in the category of Hispanic Americans. Salinas residents continued to experience the benefits as well as the disadvantages of a growing city.

In 1992 another shopping center, the Harden Ranch Plaza, opened in North Salinas. Everett Alvarez High School opened in Northeast Salinas in August of 1995. The closure of Fort Ord in 1994 was a cause for concern, but the opening of California State University, Monterey Bay on that site the same year was cause for celebration. Many Salinas students found the proximity of a four-year university an advantage.

Nineteen ninety four was also the year Proposition 187 was passed, denying medical and educational benefits to illegal immigrants. An explosive issue in the entire Salinas Valley, the proposition's force was considerably weakened by court challenges throughout the decade.

One of the great floods of the century raged through Monterey County in March of 1995. Within three days homes and businesses were flooded, roads and bridges were destroyed, and 75,000 acres of crops and farmland were ruined.

A year later the *Salinas Californian* of March 9-10, 1996 reviewed the disaster toll.

- Ten percent of the county's agricultural land was affected by the flood, and agricultural losses were estimated at \$310 million. Total flood damage in Monterey County reached more than \$500 million.
- More than 175 government, public safety, private, non-profit and commercial agencies responded to the emergency. The Monterey County Chapter of the Red Cross alone spent \$1 million in supplies, used the services of 550 volunteers and paid workers. The Chapter provided shelter for 1,768 people.
- Some 63 roads and 15 bridges were closed. More than 1,500 homes were affected and 60 were declared uninhabitable.
- One hundred and ten businesses and more than 11,000 county residents suffered.

In 1996 President Clinton stopped in Salinas to recognize the city for its efforts to halt youth violence. The gang problem began in the 1950's with the formation of protection gangs in the prisons. In the mid 1960's the *Nuestra Familia*, a splinter group of the Mexican Mafia, targeted Bakersfield, Stockton, Fresno, San Jose and Salinas as its recruiting grounds. In the late 1970's and early 1980's Salinas was also seen as an area where a regimental-like gang hierarchy with parolees could be established.

Since that time, street gangs have splintered and branched off into numerous factions. The major divisions are between those who affiliate with Northern California, *norteños*, and those who come from Southern California and Mexico, the *sureños*.¹⁰ Despite accolades for programs and vigilance against organized crime and violence, the gang problem would continue to plague the city.

There were other notable events in the nineties. Thanks to the efforts of Senior Librarian Patricia Oliverez, the Chicano Cultural Resource Center was dedicated in 1992 at the Santa Lucia Library, later renamed for Cesar Chavez in 1993. In 1997 the Victory Mission celebrated thirty-seven years at 43 Soledad Street, and on October 9, 1999 Dorothy's Kitchen served its one millionth meal.

Anna Caballero became Salinas' first female and first Latina Mayor in 1998. That same year, after many years of effort by the Salinas Public Library and the community to build a facility to house and display the Steinbeck Archives, the National Steinbeck Center opened at number 1 Main Street.

September 1998 saw Leo Piper and Ron Freiburg celebrate the start of construction on the \$45 million Salinas Auto Mall on North Davis and Boronda roads. Early in 1999 Councilman Fernando Armenta welcomed the opening of La Plazita, a commercial center on East Alisal. It was the first large commercial space opened in at least five years in East Salinas. As the *Monterey County Herald* of 21 February 1999 remarked, shopping centers had "popped-up" all over Salinas during the last ten years except in East Salinas "where the commercial district is stretched along main avenues in buildings that are at least three decades old."

Monterey County closed the decade in 1999 as the third richest agricultural county in California, just behind Fresno and Tulare with county crops in the amount of \$2.3 billion, according to the agricultural commissioner's report.

¹⁰ Theodorou, Naomi. "Gang Roots Go Back Decades," *Monterey County Herald* 16 January 1994.

SALINAS HISTORY 2000-2009

In 2000 the census numbered 151,060 in Salinas. According to the *Dun & Bradstreet Market Profile Analysis*, there were 112,965 Salinas households in 1990. The 2001 update showed 130,610 households. By 2003 most of the city's construction of single family homes during the past decade had been in northeast Salinas, south of Boronda Road and east of North Main Street. Major developments included Harden Ranch, Creekbridge, and Williams Ranch, with various affiliated subdivisions.

Salinas continued to add attractions to the venerable old Main Street area. In 2005 the Maya Cinemas opened in the Oldtown area on Main Street near the National Steinbeck Center. On the north side of town the new Salinas Sports Complex with its many programs including the annual California Rodeo at Salinas, served as a draw for that end of town.

Despite new building construction, the first decade of the twenty-first century would prove economically difficult. Salinas residents faced several ballot measures that would drastically alter basic city services. In 2002 Measure O was placed on the ballot to cut the city utility tax in half. Five former Salinas mayors joined Mayor Anna Caballero in opposition to Measure O, which was defeated by 66% of the votes. Then in 2004 The Salinas Valley Chamber of Commerce, the Grower-Shipper Association and other community leaders urged residents to pass Measures A, B, and C to increase revenue for the city and cover a projected \$9.2 million deficit projected for 2005.

The financial bind was largely driven by the loss of property taxes and vehicle-license fees seized by the State of California to cover its own budget crisis. This was made worse by a sluggish local economy, and a shift in payments and reimbursements by Monterey County. Measures A and B failed. The city manager recommended that the city council close the city library system and four recreation centers, as well as approve cuts to police and fire services.

However, money from Rally Salinas, Mayor Caballero's plan to raise funds, kept the Salinas Public Library open limited hours until Salinas citizens passed Measure V, a general sales tax increase of .025% in November of 2005. Eventually Measure V sales tax money would fund the Salinas Public Library System entirely.

In July of 2003 Dorothy's Kitchen faced closure due to a \$35,000 debt, but the Salinas area residents rallied to support the institution. In April of 2005 California State University Monterey Bay and Dorothy's Kitchen presented a vision for redevelopment in Chinatown.

The Salinas Planning Commission approved a women's shelter at Dorothy's Kitchen in January 2006 and in December the Commission extended the permit for Dorothy's Kitchen indefinitely. Some members of the community were not in favor, feeling that the kitchen continued to draw to the neighborhood some of the 1,570 counted in a 2005

Homeless Census of Monterey County. Nonetheless, Dorothy's Kitchen celebrated "25 years of compassion" on May 4, 2007, while the city continued work on the area's Chinatown Renewal Project.

Natividad Medical Center was another institution that was kept from closing its doors. In 2004 County Supervisors considered selling the center which serves the county's poorest residents. However, in 2006 both Salinas Valley Memorial Healthcare System and Community Hospital of the Monterey Peninsula agreed to chip in a collective \$8 million over two years to keep Natividad afloat, in exchange for a say in how to run the medical center. In April of 2009 Harry Weis was named Natividad Medical Center's new CEO, and gave residents hope that the medical center would continue to provide service.

The Monterey County agricultural industry also faced a nightmare when a deadly E. coli outbreak was linked to Central Coast fresh spinach in 2006. Across the nation supermarkets removed bags of Salinas Valley spinach from their shelves. Salinas Valley producers were forced to lay off employees.

The disaster prompted industry leaders and federal officials together to establish tougher food safety standards. Some growers expressed the hope the United States Department of Agriculture would issue a mandatory marketing order that all salad producers must follow. Currently California growers have higher costs stemming from practices required by the marketing agreements.

On May 1, 2006, thousands of people (estimates of 13,000-25,000) in the Salinas Valley took Monday off to march through Salinas on the National Day of Action called by immigrant rights activists and their supporters. The marchers converged at the corner of Alisal Street and Sanborn Road as part of a "Day without Immigrants."

As a final agricultural note: in October of 2007 Agribusiness giant D'Arrigo Brothers and the United Farm Workers Union quietly signed a three-year contract, ending a thirty year dispute.

Despite the longest recession since World War II, the Salinas City Council began looking at redevelopment of the downtown area's city owned property in 2008. This included turning aging properties like the police department, the city hall, the John Steinbeck Library and several parking lots into mixed use developments. Mayor Dennis Donohue called for input from residents about how the downtown should be redeveloped in a series of "charrettes". At the end of the January public meeting, the Mayor observed the closure of Gadsby's Music Store, a fixture in Salinas for 73 years, but asked residents to look ahead to the future:

"It's all part of change" he said; "the old begins to give way to the new, and we begin to imagine that great city anew."¹¹

¹¹ Jack Foley. "Planners Hear Salinas' Redevelopment Ideas," *Salinas Californian*, 9 January 2009.

