

Los Colonias' Agriculture Roots



By Kathy Jordan

Los Colonias has been a neighborhood since 1899 when the sugar beet factory was built on Twelfth Street about three-quarters of a mile south of Main Street. After it opened, many families moved to the area to work in the factory.

This close-knit neighborhood is bound by Third Avenue and Struthers Avenue on the north and south and S. Seventh Street and S. 12th Street on the west and east.

The owners of the factory provided housing for some of the workers who were lucky enough to move into one of the 20 “units” that made up Los Colonias.

Larry Garcia’s family moved to Grand Junction and into one of the units when he was two years old.

Larry described the units as one room divided into two rooms with a curtain, making a kitchen eating area in one end and sleeping quarters in the other. There was a wood-burning stove in the kitchen and a coal-burning stove, which could be removed in the summer, in the sleeping room. Each unit had an outhouse, and residents fetched their household water from a hand pump in the yard outside.

The units were located at the east end of Struthers Avenue. There were two groups of 10 units running east to west, separated by an alley-like street, which ran north to south.

Larry lived with his family until he married Patsy Hernandez, and the newlyweds moved into another of the units.

Shortly after Larry returned from World War II, he and his family moved into new units built by the factory owners on South 12th Street just north of the factory. The old adobe units were then demolished.

Working in sugar beets was seasonal work, so when Larry had the opportunity to change jobs and work fulltime, he and his family moved to a house on Fourth Avenue.

After the sugar beet factory shut down, the 12th Street units were also torn down.

As time went on, houses began to spring up in the surrounding blocks and more families moved into the area.

Frances Chavez was one of those who moved as a young woman with her parents into this bustling neighborhood in the 1940s. They, too, lived in one of the units at La Colonias.

After arriving in Grand Junction Frances worked as a nurse at St. Mary's Hospital, then located between 11th and 12th Streets on Colorado Avenue. Her parents were working on a farm thinning sugar beets. At her father's request, she quit the hospital job and went to work on the farm.

When Frances married Joe Chavez they first made their home in the Los Colonias neighborhood.

About a year after their wedding, Joe and Frances purchased one of the newly constructed individual adobe homes. Their new home consisted of the standard two rooms with the dirt floors associated with the adobes.

Frances laughed when she said that there were lots of children around, and everyone watched out for them. As she put it "there were lots of kids, and they had lots of fun."

She recalled the lot across the street from the Chavez home, which was the perfect baseball field because the street dead-ended in front of their house. The field was always in use unless the weather was bad or until the sun went down.

Frances chuckled when she recalled making peanut and jelly sandwiches--or sometimes just jelly sandwiches-- for two dozen or more neighborhood children on a daily basis.

According to Frances several people worked in the sugar beet factor or on the railroad

Frances said the neighborhood was self-sufficient. They had a grocery store with a soda fountain, and a store which sold eggs wholesale but would sale them to the neighbors. In the late 1960's

Pauline and Augie Reyes opened the well-known Los Reyes restaurant which is still serving great Mexican food today.

There were two churches, the Zion Assembly of God Church at the corner of S. Ninth St. and Noland Ave., and the Pentecostal Holiness church at 760 Winters Ave., where the Latin Anglo Alliance is now located.

This was a well-populated neighborhood. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, my husband, Teddy, had a Daily Sentinel paper route with more than 60 customers.

When the city was seeking a name for the new park created when the Riverside Parkway was built, the neighborhood suggested Los Colonias because the area had been the gathering place where so many of the sugar beet factory workers made their homes.

Today more than 25 homes remain, with some of the residents being the fourth generation to live in the great neighborhood.