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Eracism: Exploring the roots of Boulder County's Latino population

Part one: How — and why — the first Latino residents came to Boulder County

By Jefferson Dodge and Joel Dyer

Editor's note: The following is part one of Boulder Weekly's Eracism series, inspired by the Boulder County Latino History Project being spearheaded by retired University of Colorado Boulder history professor Marjorie McIntosh. That project, which is documenting the history of Latinos in our community through oral, visual and written forms, is expected to result in a book, a website featuring source materials and curricular materials for local school districts. BW is partnering with the project not just to publicize it, but hopefully expand the boundaries of the field of information collected. We agree that many of these stories have remained untold for too long, and it serves future generations to ensure that this proud heritage of what Latinos have contributed to Boulder County for more than a century is not forgotten.

To fully understand the history of how Latinos originally made their way to Boulder County, one must go back centuries, to the Spanish colonization of North America.

It's a colorful tale, but one that is not always pretty.

At its height, the Spanish empire, or New Spain, included most of the United States west of the Mississippi River. There are accounts of Spanish explorers making it as far north as Pueblo in the late 1600s and looking for gold in present-day Colorado in the 1700s.

After Mexico won its independence from Spain in 1821, the Mexican territory included parts of southern and western Colorado. After the Mexican-American War ended in 1848, the United States swallowed those areas and the rest of the present-day Southwest that had been under Spanish control.

In a span of less than three decades, inhabitants of this area found themselves under the flags of three different countries — without ever leaving home.

As Latino leaders have noted, the families who settled in this region before 1848 didn't cross the border; the border crossed them.

In a move that reflected the Manifest Destiny fever sweeping the country at the time, when the U.S. defeated Mexico, it acquired 500,000 square miles and added more than 80,000 people to its population, according to the 2009 book *Footprints in the Sugar: A History of the Great Western Sugar Company* by Candy Hamilton.

She adds that those living in this territory were given a choice: They could move south of the border or they could agree to become American citizens (those who stayed but refused to become citizens were automatically granted citizenship a year later). Many of them brought their extended families north from Mexico, resulting in the first of several major migrations from Mexico into the United States.

The first installment of the two-part documentary *La Raza de Colorado*, titled *La Historia*, recounts various paths that Latinos took to the state after San Luis, the oldest town in Colorado, was founded in 1851 in the San Luis Valley.

Indeed, it is the San Luis Valley where Colorado's earliest Latino roots can be found, and many of the first Latino residents of Boulder County came from there, looking for seasonal agricultural work.

According to *La Historia*, the U.S. didn't always honor Latino families' historic land grants in areas like northern New Mexico and southern Colorado, contrary to the provisions of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which ended the Mexican-American War. So these Spanish speakers were made to defend their land claims in the American court system, where the judges and attorneys were Anglo, and English was the only language spoken. Not only was their land confiscated when they couldn't satisfy the deed requirements of this new legal system, they were treated as an inferior race, like second-class citizens, Hamilton writes.

According to the documentary, as a result of Latinos' often-unsuccessful attempts to demonstrate their property ownership, white Americans were able to buy huge tracts of land for a song. It was a traumatic shift for many Latino families, in which the cultural understanding was that land was communal and shared, especially when neighboring families were in need.

It was the land, after all, that would bring the first Latinos to Boulder County. Especially the mining and farming of the land.

Turmoil in Mexico

The first real wave of Latinos came to our area in the early part of the 20th century, when growing industries like the railroads, coal mining and agriculture required workers.

In addition to being actively recruited to come to the United States for work and the promise of a better life, another factor driving Mexicans northward was the turmoil in their own country.

When it comes to examining how the first Latino citizens arrived in Boulder County between the late 1800s and the end of the 1920s, it is necessary to consider the push-pull theory of immigration from Mexico during this timeframe.

The theory is that the realities of life in Mexico during this period, with its poverty, political turmoil and general lack of opportunity, created the "push" that drove Latinos north. Conversely, the U.S., with its abundance of jobs and higher standard of living, became the "pull" that drew migrants.

While this long-accepted theory is true to some degree, it fails to elaborate on the powers and acts that created this push-pull scenario to begin with.

Following the end of the Civil War, there was a desire among many in the U.S. to take all of Mexico for its own. A debate raged over whether the U.S. should annex Mexico or simply own its precious natural resources and trade. In the end, the latter thinking would prevail due to the actions of wealthy U.S. industrialists and a controversial Mexican president, Porfirio Diaz.





The presidency of Porfirio Díaz is responsible for much of the Mexican migration to the United States in the early 1900s.

Unlike his predecessors, who had always refused to build rail lines north to the U.S. because they believed such access would make U.S. conquest of Mexico too tempting, Díaz did just that. Díaz removed peasants from the land so that he could sell the rights to build Mexican railroads to wealthy U.S. investors. As a result, these investors basically extended the U.S. rail system deep into the heart of Mexico, building more than 15,000 miles of new lines, which made it possible for foreign investors, primarily from the U.S., to acquire ownership of much of Mexico's natural resources and industries, including mining, smelting, oil and gas and agriculture.

In their article titled "Empire and the Origins of Twentieth-Century Migration from Mexico to the United States," which appeared in *Pacific Historical Review*, Gilbert G. González and Raúl Fernández made the following observations:

At the dawn of the 20th century the United States controlled the Mexican economy. According to U.S. Consul-General Andrew D. Barlow, 1,117 U.S.-based companies and individuals had invested \$500 million in Mexico. Railroads were the cornerstone of the modernization process, initiated, designed and constructed by foreign capital. Railroads enabled myriad economic activities, principally those under foreign control, including mining, export of agricultural products and oil production.

Interestingly, the railroads, which had little effect upon industrial development, strengthened the pre-capitalist economic form, the hacienda. However, the hacienda, originally organized for self-sufficiency, engaged in cash crop production on an extended scale to the detriment of staple crops, causing shortages of basic foodstuffs. Corn production fell by 50 percent between 1877 and 1910, and bean production declined by 75 percent, forcing the nation to rely on costly imported staples.

In other words, it was the surrender of control over much of Mexico's economy to U.S. investors by Díaz that led to Mexico's poorest being forced from the land and, to a large degree, being unable to even feed themselves.

These tens of thousands of landless, starving peasants first migrated to Mexico's larger towns and cities from the rural countryside, but there was little opportunity for them there. As a result, the message of the recruiters who promised good jobs to the north resonated with a large segment of this economically deprived populace.

It seems that the same Mexican railroads that were funded by wealthy U.S. investors not only made the Latino migration of 1890 to 1920 possible — as it gave them a way to come north — they were also the cause of the migration due to their negative influence over the Mexican economy. As with any rapid modernization of a nation, the poor are disproportionately impacted to the downside.

In that light, the traditional push-pull Latino migration theory does not hold up. The reality is that both the push and the pull were authored by U.S. capitalists during this timeframe.

So, after growing weary of the decades-long dictatorship run by Díaz in the late 1800s and early 1900s, Mexican citizens — about 90 percent of whom were living in poverty at the time — revolted and overthrew Díaz in 1911. But even after the ouster of Díaz, the Mexican Revolution devolved into civil war, and during this period of unrest, between 1910 and 1920, about 1 million Mexicans fled the country, according to *La Historia*. And Hamilton writes that during the first three decades of the 20th century, more than 10 percent of Mexico's population, about 1.5 million people, migrated to the United States.

According to Hamilton, labor recruiters for the railroad companies brought the first wave of Mexican workers, and in one month, more than 2,000 "traqueros" (season workers) came across the border to El Paso.

La Historia notes that one of the three major railroad lines out of El Paso led to Denver, and during the Mexican Revolution, more than 50,000 new workers from Mexico joined the mining and agricultural industries in Colorado. According to Hamilton, in 1910, the Mexican population in the state was 3,269. By 1920, it was 37,676.

But the contributions of the growing Latino population weren't always appreciated. In 1914, the growing Anglo backlash against Latinos was referred to as the "brown scare." It would get worse in subsequent decades, especially during the Depression, when unemployment skyrocketed and Latinos were accused of taking American jobs.

Sugar beets

A variety of crops were being grown in Boulder County during this time, just as they are today, but the sugar beet played a primary role, thanks to a certain factory built in Longmont.

Hamilton says the first reference to Colorado's cultivation of sugar beets, actually came from a Mexican citizen in 1841, before Colorado became a state in 1876. According to the April 1933 issue of *The Sugar Press*, Guadalupe Miranda and Carlos Beaubien petitioned the Spanish governor in 1841 for land in present-day Colorado "for the purpose of cultivating the sugar beet." It was a parcel that would later become Las Animas County. Hamilton notes that the Latino agricultural roots of Colorado stretch back even further. It was a Spaniard who, more than 350 years ago, recorded one of the first descriptions of irrigation, a practice that proved integral to growing crops in the state's arid valleys. The formation of Longmont, like Greeley before it, was the result of a group of prominent businessmen and politicians who sold memberships to Chicago families willing to relocate to this region of Colorado, Hamilton writes. The result was the Chicago-Colorado Colony, or Longmont, named after Long's Peak.

While an 1872 bill to award a subsidy to the first sugar beet factory (also referred to as "beet sugar factory") in Colorado failed, during that period the citizens of Longmont published and distributed a pamphlet about the benefits of having such a factory, according to Hamilton. In 1899, the contract for the state's first sugar beet processing facility was issued to the E.H. Dyer Company of Cleveland, Ohio, for the Grand Valley on the Western Slope. The Great Western Sugar Company was formed in Loveland in 1901, and the Longmont factory was opened within five years.

Hamilton notes that, during the 50 years it operated, the Longmont sugar beet factory was the city's largest and most-respected employer, serving as the backbone of Longmont's economy until the mid-1950s. In 1920, Colorado was the nation's top sugar producer, accounting for one-fourth of all the sugar refined in the country, according to "Mexicans in the Beet Field," a chapter written by Robert McLean in the 1924 book *Spanish and Mexican in Colorado*, coauthored with Charles A. Thomson.

As part of its labor recruitment efforts, Great Western put out a promotional film to recruit workers from Mexico, touting the good pay and lifestyle, according to *La Historia*.

Hamilton says Great Western and three other sugar beet companies set up recruiting stations in cities adjacent to the Mexican border, where they offered prospective workers free transportation and other inducements. They placed ads in newspapers and theaters, distributed posters and handbills, and made sure the trains used to transport the workers were filled to capacity before they left, according to Hamilton. She adds that the conditions on most trains, with the exception of those operated by Great Western, were terrible: There was little or no room to sit; the workers got a single meal of a bologna sandwich, sardines and coffee; and the trains only made one stop on journeys that typically spanned more than 700 miles.


And when the workers arrived, the lifestyle was much different than what they had been promised. Most of the Mexicans who helped make Colorado the leading producer of beet sugar in the nation lived in "colonias," or "barrios," tiny communities near the factory or on the outskirts of town that consisted of tents or shacks that lacked running water or sewer systems. According to the documentary, they were initially barred from using Anglo schools, hospitals or churches.

Hamilton says that the Mexicans who had come to the U.S. before 1900 — or had been absorbed into the country after the Mexican-American War — were, for the most, part, bilingual and had chosen to assimilate into American life, whereas those who came as laborers after 1900 primarily spoke Spanish and continued their way of life in the colonias, conducting Catholic mass, playing traditional Mexican music and eating traditional Mexican food.

Census figures offer insight on growth, occupations

Materials provided by retired University of Colorado history professor Marjorie McIntosh, who is spearheading the Boulder County Latino History Project that inspired this series of articles, shed light on the demographics of the Latino population in several Boulder County cities.

CU undergrad and Latino History Project intern Emmanuel Melgoza used old city directories to compile three snapshots of families with Latino surnames for Longmont and Lafayette over a two-decade period in the early 1900s. In 1916, his analysis shows three such households in Boulder, 25 in Longmont and 18 in Lafayette. By 1936, those numbers had risen to 85, 175 and 132, respectively. The rise in the Boulder numbers may be explained at least partially by accounts of Latinos moving to Boulder to escape the discrimination and racism they experienced in eastern parts of the county.

Another compilation provided by the Latino History Project, prepared by CU undergrad and Latino History Project volunteer Abi Peters, features profiles of Latino households for the year 1930 based on Census records and ancestry.com. There were only three such households listed for Boulder, 29 in Lafayette and 37 in Longmont. When the heads of those households were asked to provide their occupation, 15 listed "coal miner" and 36 listed farm work of some sort, including 18 who identified themselves as beet field laborers. 

Industry growth

The sugar beet industry exploded in the first decade of the 20th century, thanks in part to a hefty tax on imported foreign cane sugar passed in 1897, and from 1900 to 1906 the country's acreage of sugar beets more than tripled, according to Hamilton. Great Western turned to Mexican workers during strikes and after German, Russian and Japanese beet workers increasingly became discontent with being stoop laborers, demanded higher wages, and began acquiring their own farmlands.

"In no place but Fort Collins was there any report of [Latinos] becoming farm tenants or owners," McLean wrote in 1924. "There the labor manager stated that 10 or 12 were farming beets for themselves. He said, 'I do not look for them to buy land. They are not thrifty like the German-Russians. But the farmers may come more and more to turn the beets over to them and let them farm them. This work, you know, is adapted to the Mexican temperament. They take life easily and don't mind being idle a part of the year.'" He went on to ask a Mr. Kaspar, manager of the Holly Sugar Company, "what they would do without the Mexican." Kaspar "threw up his hands and said, 'We would be out of luck. We'd have to close up our factory and the farmers would lose the crop. You can't get white labor to do this work. We are absolutely dependent on the Mexican.'"

Similarly, an official with the American Beet Sugar Company told McLean, "The Mexican is a good worker, if treated right. If not, he won't work.

He is very loyal or very mean. The trouble is, we haven't known how to treat him. Too many have thought they could beat the Mexican and they would be that much ahead. If any farmer beats the Mexican now, he has to talk to us."

McLean acknowledges that child labor was an issue that was being studied, but dismisses it because "the children, with rare exceptions, work with and under the supervision of their own parents, and except where

the parents are ignorant and cruel, may not suffer physically from overwork. The greatest evil seems to be that they are kept out of school, especially in the fall, and thus retarded in their advancement."

According to Hamilton, from 1909 to 1927, the number of Mexicans employed by Great Western increased from 1,000 to 14,300, going from 9 percent of the company's field laborers to 59 percent.

And Latinos proved integral to industry nationwide. By the conclusion of the first World War, despite public anti-Mexican sentiment, leaders of American companies testified before Congress about the importance of Mexican labor in agricultural and industrial businesses, according to *Mexican Americans: A Historical Perspective* by Richard Ahlborn. During this period, about 40 percent of the nation's vegetables, fruits and truck-delivered crops were being grown in the Southwest, and Mexicans accounted for 75 percent of the labor force, Ahlborn writes.

'Los betabeleros'

At Great Western, they were known as "los betabeleros," or the beet field workers. And they endured grueling work. Using short hoes and beet knives, Hamilton says the laborers spent much of their time on all fours, cutting out undesirable plants and removing all but one plant from a cluster. It was known as "blocking" and "thinning," McLean explains, and the latter was typically performed by children. Next came four to five weeks of hoeing, he says.

And when it was time to harvest, Hamilton says, workers would have to lift each three- to five-pound beet, grip it between their thighs or knees, and chop off the large, leafy top.

They were paid \$15 to \$80 a month (McLean estimates it at \$21 to \$23 per acre), which was less than the prevailing wage, but they were unaware of what they should have been paid, and Great Western never bargained with its field labor, taking advantage of their Mexican workers' docility, Hamilton writes.

The problem was, at least initially, most of the Mexican workers would return home at the end of each season, and Great Western found itself shelling out too much money on transportation, so the company started deducting amounts from their pay -- amounts that would be paid only if they agreed to "winter over" after the season ended in November, according to *Footprints in the Sugar*. Eventually, the company created additional substandard housing in the colonias as further incentive to keep the Mexican workers in the area year-round. (The workers would reimburse the company for the cost of the home and land in payments over a five-year period.)

When Great Western built its first colonia in Greeley in 1923, it consisted of 12 adobe homes and 70 residents, according to Hamilton, but later that decade, most of the "housing" around the area's beet factories consisted of temporary shacks or boxcar-like wooden shanties that sat on the ground with no foundation. She says most of the communal toilets were located outdoors and had no doors, much less a seat.

In his quaint 1924 account, on the other hand, McLean offers a rosier characterization of the colonias: "Ground is furnished for a garden if desired, with sufficient water for irrigation. It is planned to set out trees, and make these colonies really pleasant little communities."

In her descriptions of life in the colonia, Hamilton says there was much emphasis on family, and it served as a safe haven in a strange country. Meals, prepared by the women, typically consisted of seasoned chicken or turkey served with the spicy chocolate sauce called mole, rice, beans and "picadillo," or minced onions, tomatoes and spices.

And the men would provide homebrewed beer or another type of alcohol.

At weekend dances, whoever in the colonia had the beer brewed first would host the fiesta, Hamilton writes, and while home brewing was illegal in Colorado at the time, the colonias were never policed.

Among the materials collected during the Latino History Project is an undated interview with Emerenciano Bernal and his wife, identified in the transcript only as "Mrs. Bernal." In describing the conditions while working the beet fields from 1919 to 1934, Mrs. Bernal says most workers' homes in the Broomfield and Lafayette area were made of wood and "about to fall down." They used a wood-burning heater and a wood-burning stove to stay warm, and had oil lamps for light.

The couple said they went to school only briefly as very young children, "and all I knew after that was work," Mrs. Bernal says. After telling the unidentified interviewer that he only went to school for one week, Emerenciano Bernal was asked whether he liked school.

"Yes, I did, but I had to take care of my father's goats," he replied.

According to Mrs. B, there were no doctors or hospitals available to them at that time, so they relied on herbs, including "osha" for cuts, "mariola" for the stomach and "volcanic oil" for broken wrists. She also described going dancing at family parties and driving all the way to Denver on Sunday mornings to attend a church that had a Mexican priest.

Coal mines play pivotal role

At the end of the 19th century, coal mining in Boulder County was a growing enterprise. It all started in 1859 when two brothers began mining a seam of surface coal they had discovered between Boulder and Denver. They sold their coal to gold miners in the area.

Over the next 80 years, more than 100 coal mines would be tunneled beneath Boulder County and the western edge of Weld County (see sidebar page 24). The mines ranged from Marshall road just south of Boulder to Superior, Louisville, Lafayette, Erie, Frederick, Firestone, Dacono and Fort Morgan. These mines were collectively known as the Northern Fields, and they would play an important role in Colorado history as well as in early Boulder County Latino history.

Colorado's coal mines were divided into two fields, the Northern Field, in Boulder and Weld Counties, and the Southern Field, to the west of Trinidad and Pueblo.



Many of the mines were owned by some of the nation's wealthiest industrialists, including John D. Rockefeller, Jr.

It was no coincidence that the men who owned the railroads, steel mills and oil companies also controlled the coal fields that fed those other industries. It was a time of monopolies and vertical integration. The only threat to these wealthy aristocrats was labor, either the lack of it or the organization of it by the unions. It is here in the labor market and unionization of the coal fields that the Latino population would play an important role.

Latino coal miners were always present in large numbers in Colorado's Southern Fields and in the mines of New Mexico and Arizona.

The Southern Fields were developed in close proximity to Colorado's already existing largest population of Latinos, who lived from the San Luis Valley to Pueblo and Trinidad. As a result, it only made sense that large numbers of the coal miners in that area would be Latino. By some estimates, 60 percent of miners in the Southern Fields were Latino.

Still, there were not enough miners to fill the needs of the owners, and immigrants from around the world were brought in to fill the jobs in both the Northern and Southern Fields. Italians, Greeks, Russians, Poles, Welsh, Croats, Bulgarians and Latinos — you name a country and it's likely they came to work the coal fields of Colorado (see sidebar below).

The Northern Fields of Boulder County were a different story when it came to Latino miners. There was virtually no preexisting Latino population in the area. Latino miners were recruited to Boulder County from at least two sources.

As a result of the U.S. conquest of the Mexican economy under Diaz, by the early part of the 20th century, a rail line ran from deep in the Mexican interior all the way north to stops at Trinidad and Denver. At both of these Colorado stops, Latino laborers were literally sold to companies in need of hired hands, whether that need was in the sugar-beet or coal fields. The labor trade was big business.

Coal mining brought diversity to Boulder County

In 1920, 12,799 men were employed by the coal mining operations in Colorado. In that year, a poll was taken in an effort to determine the nationalities of the miners. By this point, Latinos had become the second largest ethnicity employed by the mines. The following are the results of the Colorado mining survey of 1920:

Colorado coal miners in 1920 by nationality

Americans, 3,651
Mexicans, 2,325
Italians, 2,292
Croats, 857
Greeks, 405
Slavonians, 369
Neaeroes, 258

Bulgarians, 245
English, 223
Austrian Germans, 221
Scotch, 210
Poles, 176
Germans, 153
French, 148
Spaniards, 122
Russians, 116
Irish, 104
Hungarians, 93
Serbians, 72
Bohemians, 63
Swedes, 53
Finlanders, 54
Rumanians, 38
Japanese, 18
Montenegians, 18
Belgians, 16

In his article titled "The 1903 'Mexican Affair' at Clifton," which was published in the *Journal of Arizona History* 18 (Summer 1977), Joseph Park described the process of bringing Latino labor to Colorado:

American agents preferred crews imported from the interior of Mexico to those picked up by chance along the border. The agent worked through his Mexican counterpart, the enganchador, the "hooker," who enlisted workers largely from the tramp population around cities. ... In some cases, the gangs of workers were placed aboard a northbound train in charge of a boss who held the tickets. The cost of transportation was passed on to the American agent, who deducted it from the workers' salaries once they were placed on a job. ... On delivering a group of workers to the border, the enganchador was paid off by an American labor contractor, who either delivered the recruits directly to an employer and collected his commission or sold them to another agent. At Tucson and at Trinidad and Denver, Colorado, large agencies handled a considerable number of Mexicans.

The Department of Commerce published a report by Victor S. Clark in 1908. Clark's report was the first study concerning the migration of Latino laborers to the U.S. His report confirmed the unlawful, immoral activities of the labor contractors working both sides of the border at the turn of the last century. He described locked rail cars and guards at stops along the way to prevent the laborers from attempting escape.

Despite the preference of Latino laborers from deep in the interior, recruiting Latinos who had recently crossed into the U.S. was also common practice by the Colorado mining companies.

In testimony before the U.S. House of Representatives Subcommittee of the Committee on Mines and Mining in 1914, mine representatives said that they would go to the Mexican border in Texas to recruit laborers for the coal mines in Colorado.

It is also possible that as violent labor strikes hit the Southern Fields in 1903, some Latinos may have ventured to the Northern Fields of Boulder County to seek work under less volatile circumstances, though this is speculation.

The United Mine Workers union had been organizing the Colorado coal mines, and in 1903 they called a strike in the Southern Fields. At first the strike was going well, but eventually the owners shipped in large numbers of Latino laborers by rail and used them as strikebreakers to defeat the union.

The mine owners also exploited the anti-Mexican sentiment that developed from the strike to prevent the union from being able to organize the newly arrived Latino replacement workers and to drive a wedge between the native Latino miners and their European immigrant counterparts.

Eventually the Union would recognize that the Latinos were very good at forcing concessions from ownership, and by the next strike in 1915, the labor war that led to the Ludlow Massacre, it was the Latinos, Italians and Greeks who stood fast in the face of unbelievable violence against them.

In her autobiography, famed labor activist Mother Jones reflected, "The strike in the southern fields dragged on and on. But from the moment the southern miners had been deserted by their northern brothers, I felt their strike was doomed. Bravely did those miners fight before giving in to the old peonage. The military had no regard for human life. They were sanctified cannibals. Is it any wonder that we have murders and holdups when the youth of the land is trained by the great industrialists to a belief in force, when they see that the possession of money puts one above law.

"No more loyal, courageous men could be found than those southern miners, scornfully referred to by 'Citizens' Alliances' as 'foreigners.' Italians and Mexicans endured to the end. They were defeated on the industrial field but theirs was the victory of the spirit."

The miners in the Northern Fields of Boulder County had accepted better housing in exchange for not joining the strike in the south.

According to Barron B. Beshoar in his book *Out of the Depths: The Story of John R. Lawson, a Labor Leader*, when the owners tried to ship in Latino strikebreakers again, Mother Jones headed to El Paso, Texas, intending to cross the border to meet with Pancho Villa and ask for his help in stopping the flow of strikebreakers from that area of Mexico into the coal fields of Colorado.

Eventually the union and the strikes would come to the coal fields of Boulder County in the 1920s, where another slaughter of miners would occur at the hands of the owners' thugs, with support from the state government. The Columbine Mine massacre took place just outside of Lafayette in the mining camp at Serene.

The massacre is an incredible story that sheds much light on the lives of our county's early Latino citizens, and as such, we will be doing a separate story on that subject later in our Eracism series.

We know from the historical mine accident reports that Latinos worked in a number of Boulder and Weld County mines (see sidebar above). But by examining these records we can also see that certain mines employed large numbers of miners of the same nationality; this was for the purpose of improving communication and therefore safety.

Coal mining accidents involved first Latino families in Boulder County

Due to the fact that the early Latino history of Boulder County was never recorded well and is therefore largely missing, it is important to unearth any information regarding the identities of early Latino residents in the county, in our effort to discover the identities of some of the first families in the area. *Boulder Weekly* examined the coal mining accident records in the Western History and Genealogy section of the Denver Public Library.

These records covered all reported mining deaths in the state of Colorado between the years 1884 and 1943. The following is a list of Latino coal miners who died in mining accidents in the northern coal fields, which spanned Boulder and Weld counties from the southern edge of Boulder near Marshall Road east to Superior, Louisville, Lafayette, Erie, Frederick, Firestone and Dacono.

In some cases, these names represent some of Boulder County's first Latino families.

Mine Name	Name	#Children	Year Died
Columbine	Francisco Acosta	3	1922
Columbine	Porfirio Agire	0	1925
Columbine	Louis Assala	2	1938
Boulder Valley	James Avila	0	1932
Columbine	E. Chavez	0	1925
Puritan	Jesus Chavez	3	1929
Puritan	Salvador Cruz	2	1930
Columbine	Frank Gonzales	1	1926
Columbine	Joe Gonzales	3	1922
Puritan	Paul Hernandez	0	1929
Monarch No. 2	Joe Jaramillo	3	1936
Hacia No. 1	Joseph Lalla	2	1893
Boulder	Ezequiel Lopez	2	1952
{Boulder County?}	Gabriel Lucero	2	1927
Columbine	Benjamin Martinez	2	1928
Puritan	Blaz Martinez	0	1922
Parkdale	Fidele Montoya	2	1911
Columbine	Frank Montez	6	1934
Columbine	Benjamin Moya	2	1945
Boulder Valley	Joe Ortega	0	1922
Puritan	Joe Ramirez	0	1934
Standard	David Salazar	0	1917

More miners per capita died in Colorado coal mines than in any other coal mines in the nation. Investigators during state hearings on mine safety determined that one of the problems stemmed from having so many languages spoken in the mines. "Fire in the hole" sounds different in every language.

At the imperial mine in Boulder County, for instance, a large number of the miners were from Russia. At several mines near Lafayette, Italians were the dominant nationality, which explains the long history of Italian Americans in the Lafayette community.

As for the Latino miners, it appears that the Columbine Mine owned by the Rocky Mountain Fuel Company and the Puritan mine owned by National Fuel employed the largest numbers of Latino miners in the area. It is not clear from the historical record if Latino strikebreakers were brought in to the Columbine Mine at the time of the Northern Field's 1927 strike, but it is noteworthy that the Columbine was the only mine in the field still producing coal during the strike, which is why the strikers went there the day of the Columbine Massacre.

Eventually the unions realized the need to knock down all race barriers, and Latinos would go on to become some of the most important labor organizers in the Southwest, organizing both the mining and sugar-beet industries. It was a strike of 2,000 Latino miners at a copper mine owned by U.S. investors in Cananea, Sonora, that led to yet another slaughter of more than 20 miners in 1906 at the hands of Sonoran authorities, with the help of Arizona Rangers. When word of the slaughter spread in Mexico, it helped to finally topple the Diaz presidency by ushering in the Mexican Revolution.

Coal mining brought some of the first Latino families to Boulder County more than 100 years ago. And those same Latino citizens helped to organize labor unions and ultimately bring a greater degree of fairness and safety to the mining industry.

Americans' willingness to import Mexican labor began to fade in the 1920s, and the Immigration Act of 1924 put new regulations in place governing how many immigrants — and which ones — were allowed to enter the U.S. The Act also established the U.S. Border Patrol, and after 1924, the peak year for Mexican immigration, the terms "illegal" and "Mexican" became synonymous, as those who snuck over the border were treated like criminals, Hamilton says.

And as we will see in subsequent installments in our Eracism series, in Boulder County the mistreatment of Latinos — this imported workforce that served as the backbone of our early mining and farming industries — was just beginning.

The coal mines of Colorado's northern fields

The northern coal fields operated between 1859 and roughly the early 1960s. These early mining operations were one of the primary drivers of Latino immigration to Boulder County at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century.

At one time, there were more than 100 coal mines spanning the region, from the southern edge of Boulder near Marshall Road east to Superior, Louisville, Lafayette, Erie, Frederick, Firestone and Dacono.

A search of the Western History and Genealogy section of the Denver Public Library revealed the names of the following coal mines in Boulder and western Weld Counties.

Coal mines in Boulder County

Acme
Archer
Big Lake
Black Diamond
Boulder
Boulder Valley
Caledonia

Cannon
Capitol
Centennial
Columbia
Cracker Jack
Fox
Gladstone
Globe
Gotham
Hacia
Hi-way
Industrial
Jewell
Leader
Marshall
Marshall No. 2
Marshall No. 3
McGregor
Mitchell
Monarch No. 1
Monarch No. 2
Montgomery
New Baker
New Centennial
New Morrison
Nonpareil
Paramount
Parkdale
Pittsburg
Pluto No. 1
Pluto No. 2
Red Ash
Regal
Rex No. 1
Rex No. 2
Simpson
Standard
State
Stewart
Sunnyside
Vulcan

Boulder County mines that may have mined coal or other minerals, such as gold

B&M
California
Cardiff
Crown
Eclipse
Glendale
Hartman
Ingram
Logan
Matchless
Summit
White Crow

Coal mines in Weld County

Baum
Clayton
Columbine
Eagle
Eureka
Evans
Farmers
Firestone
Galeton
Golden ash
Graden
Grant
Imperial
Morrison
Puritan
Russell
Shamrock
Sterling
Washington
Wellington
Witherbee

