Arbor Terrace: Tracing The History Of A Low-Income, Farm Worker Housing Complex In Molalla, Oregon

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PREFACE

As a little girl, I remember my home just outside of Molalla, Oregon, surrounded by approximately 350 acres of Douglas fir Christmas trees. Each year, starting a week or two after Halloween, Hispanic men would trample through the muddy rows of trees with chainsaws in hand to begin the Christmas tree harvest season. The men did every task involved with the harvest, from cutting down the trees and moving them into piles, to running the trees individually through twine balers and loading them into large trucks. The work was intense while the season lasted; often the men had to endure stormy weather and long hours. The men were very foreign to me, speaking another tongue and only coming around in November and December.

When I entered high school I wished to enroll in Spanish class and did so immediately. It had always been my desire to be able to speak a different language, just as those men did who worked during Christmas tree harvest—I viewed it as access to some sort of secret code. Little did I realize how right my perception was. While growing in understanding of the language, I grew more and more curious about the role of Latino people in my hometown of Molalla, Oregon. I remember the creation of Lorenzo Guel’s mural on the public library wall as it was completed in 1994; for a short time it seemed to be the talk of the town. I knew that Arbor Terrace had been built within the city, but I, like other residents of the area, wondered if the unit had brought the Hispanics to town instead of housing those who were already living there. In reality, during my childhood, I knew very little about the Hispanics of the Molalla area.

Ironically, moving to Helena, Montana, for my undergraduate degree at Carroll
College gave me the opportunity to become more familiar with Molalla's Hispanics and Arbor Terrace. After completing the required courses for a degree in Spanish, I looked to the History department for a second degree. It was here that I was first introduced to social, ethnic, and local histories. In selecting a topic for my honors thesis, I chose the Hispanics of Molalla, Oregon, something that I had been interested in but knew little about. After my initial research, I found that the bulk of available history on Hispanics in the city concerned the building of Arbor Terrace. Thus, my investigation began. It is my hope that, with time, my investigation into Mexican-American history will continue and expand in the form of a dissertation or publishable book. For now, however, as an amateur writer, I offer my undergraduate thesis.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank all those who helped make my work possible, including, but not limited to: Arbor Terrace's first managers, Jena Camp and Lorenzo Güel; Molalla Mayor Mike Clark; those involved with the Molalla River School District past and present—Donna Wendling, Carol Leona, Mari Garcia, Arlene Cousil, Chuck Wilken, Jim Allen, Jim Ferraro, and Dr. Alice Erickson; Maryln Boch; Lucia Alemán of the Oregon Child Development Coalition; farmers of the area with whom I interviewed; Susan Lind, Charlie Harris, and those who aided in my understanding of CASA; Larry Carroll of the Housing Authority of Clackamas County; the staff of the Molalla Pioneer, past and present tenants of Arbor Terrace, including Soledad and José Morales, Summer and Misael Mendoza, Cristina Renaga and Domitila Montoya-Renaga; my mother, Dena Forristall; my grandmother, Marlene Forristall; my readers—Dr. Tomas Graman and Dr. John Hart; and, of course, my director and mentor throughout the creation of this work, Dr. Robert Swartout, Jr.
Figure 1. Sign at entrance of Arbor Terrace.
(Photo by author)
Figure 2. One of Arbor Terrace’s two-story four-plexes.
(Photo by author)
CHAPTER 1
THE HISTORY OF MOLALLA AND HISPANIC MIGRATION MEET

Molalla, Oregon, is located in rural Clackamas County, about 40 miles southwest
of Portland, Oregon. It is positioned between the rich agricultural fields of the
Willamette Valley to the southwest, and the heavily forested foothills of the Cascade
Mountains to the northwest. The town was named after a Native American tribe that
used to roam the prairies of the Willamette Valley, a vast area stretching north to
current-day Portland and south to Oregon’s State Capital, Salem, before the arrival of
the first Euro-American settlers in the 1840s and 1850s. The exact origin of the name
of the Molalla tribe (also written “Molaley” and “Molale”) remains a mystery. There
are several theories about how the tribe received its name, having separated from the
Cayuse natives that lived near current-day Walla Walla, Washington. One speculation
is that their name was derived from the combination of the native words *mulex* (elk)
and *olalla* (berry)—both native to the area and essential to the Molallas’ dietary
needs. Another proposal is that the word molalla means “grassland” in the natives’
language, indicative of the geographical terrain where they used to make their
encampments.

For an uncertain amount of time the Molallas freely roamed the Willamette Valley,
guided by the north-flowing Willamette River and its tributaries (namely the Molalla
River) descending out of the Cascade Mountains. They survived off the lush natural
harvest of nuts, berries, and wild game. However, by 1851, as the first white
Figure 3. Location of Molalla, Oregon, in relation to the state.
(Graphic from Yahoo!® Maps powered by Mapquest.com, Inc™ a product of Desktop Mapping Technologies Inc. copyright © 1999, 2000)
settlers made their homesteads near what is now the town of Molalla, land had already been set aside for these native people. A map drawn that year shows a vacant area to the east of the Molalla River as a reservation for the Molalla tribe. By 1856 most of the tribe, excluding some of its elder members who refused to leave their native hunting grounds, had been convinced by “Indian agents” to move to the Grand Ronde reservation near the coast. This was done in an effort to avoid native-settler skirmishes—not frequent occurrences but a common fear among white settlers—and to make more available the rich Molalla land to the continuously arriving American pioneers.

These pioneers soon took advantage of what the Molallas were forced to leave behind—a land of abundance. A young bachelor by the name of William Vaughan, having arrived in Oregon on one of the first wagon trains to Oregon City in 1843, was the first permanent white settler in the Molalla area. His successful settlement and land claim followed two previous unsuccessful attempts at settlement in the area that were hindered by the presence of the natives. His settlement also encouraged many more people to hoist their wagons beyond the Oregon City bluffs in looking for their own land claims. Vaughan himself was looking for land well suited for farming and grazing livestock that would be “generally flat and free of trees.” He found this land about sixteen miles south of Oregon City.

The land that Vaughan settled was very near to what many sources show as an intersection of two frequently used Native American trails. The crossing, now regulated by a single, flashing, red traffic light at the intersection of Molalla Avenue and Main Street, became the axis for Molalla’s growth. Settlers following William
Vaughan, including William Engle in 1846 and Mathias Sweigle in 1848, still remind Molalla residents of their pioneer settlements through the names of streets which now branch off these ancient trails. Like most pioneer men, women, and children who ventured overland via the Oregon Trail to come to the Willamette Valley, these people were looking to create new lives for themselves and their families. The “four corners” of Molalla did just this for those who chose to settle there. The land of the Molalla tribe became the land of the Molalla pioneers. By 1856 the first schoolhouse had been built and by 1857 Molalla had its first general store.

Like most early, rural pioneer communities, the success of Molalla’s community demanded labor-intensive work. From clearing land and planting seed to tending livestock and harvesting the crop, the people of Molalla were no strangers to hard work. Most of the time the pioneers were able to endure it on their own. However, even the earliest settlers sometimes had to reach outside of their community for help with their economic endeavors. Early Molalla resident A.J. Sawtell, who first arrived in the area in 1859, raised teasel. Even though Sawtell did much of the work on his own, he was required to employ Chinese immigrants to help him with its harvest and production. When the Chinese laborers abandoned the work because of the severity of its danger, Sawtell was forced to seek out white laborers from surrounding towns. The production of the teasel plant could not be done without the help of extra hands.

Although teasel production no longer takes place in Molalla, many labor-intensive industries do. Since its earliest existence, Molalla’s economy has depended upon the success of its timber and agriculture industries. Technology has brought some relief to the loggers and farmers of Oregon’s Willamette Valley, but it has not eliminated the
need for human labor. Because of its rural setting and steady but slow-growing
economy, Molalla, for most of its history, has remained a predominantly white,
conservative, and closely knit community.

The first pioneers arrived in the area with great farming ambitions; each was
granted 160 acres of land by the Homestead Act of 1862 if he/she promised to develop
the land for five consecutive years. These original land claims created the foundation
for the agricultural community of the Molalla area. Early settlers soon found that the
grasslands of Clackamas County had the ability to grow everything from wheat and
potatoes to caneberries and grapes. The rich soil also provided enough nutrients for
the production of ornamental plants and shrubs which remained common in the area.
This led to the creation of nurseries and eventually large Christmas Tree farms.

Canby, Oregon, located about 10 miles northeast of Molalla, is known as the “Garden
Spot of Clackamas County” because of the land’s ability to produce large fields of
brilliant tulips and daffodils during the spring, which are now grown for seed. A 1998
publication from the Oregon Department of Agriculture claimed that “more than
140,000 jobs are associated with agriculture [in Oregon]... ranking it as one of the
largest employment sectors in the state.” Nearly all work associated with the
agricultural industry requires a great amount of labor, whether it be onsite farm
employment, transportation, storage, or food processing.

Just as A.J. Sawtell had to find adequate sources of labor in order to make his
teasel production profitable, so too did other agriculturalists throughout Clackamas
County during the 20th century. Through time, the farms of the Willamette Valley
have relied on different sources of labor. During the 1930s, as the dust storms
ravaged the Midwest, people flocked to the West in search of work. Although California received the greatest amount of Midwest refugees, the fields and orchards of Oregon also saw an increase in their labor supply. With the onset of World War II, farms across the nation found themselves in desperate need of agricultural workers. After several crises surrounding labor shortages—including the shutting-down of entire communities in Ontario, Oregon, and the enlistment of school children in Marion County, Oregon, to fill the labor needs of sugar beet and strawberry harvests—the United States government reached for a labor supply to the south—Mexico.

Although Hispanic roots in Oregon can be traced back to the arrival of the first Spanish explorers who sailed along Oregon’s coastlands prior to the travels of Lewis and Clark, and to early vaqueros (Spanish-Indian cowboys) who worked in Oregon’s high deserts before and after the acquisition of Mexican territories by the United States in 1848, it was the bracero (day laborer) program, beginning in the late 1940s, that first brought significant numbers of Hispanic agricultural laborers to the fields of Oregon. Because of the vast, nation-wide labor shortages due to World War II, in 1942 and 1943 two agreements were reached between the United States and Mexico for contracting temporary agricultural workers. Called braceros, young single, Mexican males were encouraged to come to work in the United States in an effort to offset the domestic labor shortages experienced during wartime. About three quarters of all braceros were employed in California and Texas, but a significant number were also transported to Oregon and Washington to work in many of the
Figure 4. A *bracero* farm labor camp in Klamath Falls, Oregon, during World War II.
(Courtesy of the Oregon State University Archives)
crops important to the two states' economies. The life of a bracero was not easy and often meant dealing with racial discrimination, homesickness, and less-than-ideal living conditions. Despite these hardships, though, these workers were generally well received in many Northwest communities, especially throughout the Willamette Valley in Oregon and the Yakima Valley in Washington where their labor was especially needed.

As the Second World War came to a close, many of these Mexican laborers of the Northwest either remained in the agricultural areas that employed them, or migrated back to those areas with each crop season. Some sociologists and historians argue that it was these braceros, and the program on a whole, that caused an unprecedented number of legal and illegal immigrants from Mexico to cross the border in search of work beginning in the 1950s. After 1960, Mexico contributed more immigrants to the United States than any other country.

With time, Hispanics began settling permanently in western Oregon and Washington. They remained a vital part of the success of the agriculture industry in the Willamette Valley. Marion County, located immediately to the southwest of Clackamas County, was among the first counties of the Willamette Valley to experience this influx in Hispanic population. Oscar Garcia, a resident of Woodburn, Oregon, in Marion County, and owner of a Mexican import store in Molalla in the year 2000, recalled that his family moved to Marion County in the 1950s. He claimed, "our family was the first Mexicans to live in Woodburn." Woodburn, located about 10 miles west of Molalla, was known for its large Hispanic population during the 1970s and 1980s, far before its neighboring towns noticed changes in their own population.
Marlene Forristall, the supervisor on a raspberry farm in the 1960s located 7 miles northeast of Molalla, recalled that during the most labor-intensive part of the harvest, Hispanics were bussed in from the Woodburn area to work.32

Although Hispanics continued fill the basic need for agricultural labor around Molalla, they were not the sole source of farm help available. Throughout the 1950s, 1960s, and early 1970s, many white children worked in the fields during their summer vacations from school. One youth from Oregon City, who worked in the fields from the summer of 1955 through the summer of 1962, recalled that there were no Hispanics where he picked berries.33 Another young worker from the Molalla area also recalled from her experience as a bean-picker in the late 1960s and early 1970s that there was not great diversity in the ethnicity of the pickers: “most of them were white kids just like me.” Once in a while one might see an entire Hispanic family or an entire Russian family working for one paycheck, but white preteens were the norm on the farms where she was employed.34

However, in 1975 amendments to the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 changed that norm and made it difficult for farmers to employ children under the age of 16.35 There were certain exceptions to these amendments concerning children laboring in agriculture which made it easier for Hispanic children to remain working, but often kept white children out of the fields.36 For example, Oregon Revised Statue 653, General Employment Conditions, states that minors (between the ages of 9 and 12) may be employed in agriculture outside of school hours if they comply with each of the following regulations: (1) they have the consent of their parents; (2) the product picked is sold within the state; (3) the employer is able to prove there are not sufficient
workers in the area for their harvest; (4) the children are paid at the same rate as
others employed doing the same job; and (5) the children's buckets or containers
holding the product are marked to prevent them from entering interstate commerce.  

These regulations, in addition to other codes, often deter financially sound families
from sending their kids into the fields. Because of the high number of Hispanic
workers in the area, it is often difficult to prove there are not sufficient workers.

Hispanic-immigrant families, however, often rely on all members to contribute to their
economic well-being and keep their children employed in the industry. Farmers like
the reliability of entire families working for them and make special efforts to meet state
and federal regulations concerning child labor in order to keep Hispanic families
employed.  

The constant availability of work, and economic problems in Mexico, have
contributed to increasingly high Hispanic migration to the United States. Although the
Mexican economy expanded its social welfare projects in the early 1960s and by 1964
had become self-sufficient in the industries of iron, steel and oil—a huge step for the
historically struggling economy—its explosion in population during that time made it
difficult for the Mexican government to provide for all of its citizens.  

Sufficient, quality employment remained scarce and contributed to the constant movement of
Mexicans north. With many people crossing the border illegally, the United States
government attempted to tighten immigration control in a series of amendments to the
U.S. Immigration and Nationality Act. Beginning in 1965 and continuing through
1980, these attempts to restrict Mexican immigration proved fruitless as the number of
documented immigrants rose from 38,000 in 1964 to 67,000 in 1980 and
undocumented migration, once estimated at 87,000 in 1964, exploded to an estimation of 3.8 million people per year.\textsuperscript{41} By 1980 the Hispanic population of Oregon and Washington numbered 2.7 percent of the entire population, a 76.5 percent increase since 1970.\textsuperscript{42}

This "unique phenomenon"\textsuperscript{43} of hundreds of thousands of people moving from one country to another led to several social issues which will be addressed in the next chapter. However, a political issue of significance is important to mention here. In 1985, President Ronald Reagan gave a speech declaring that "the United States had 'lost control' of its borders" and urged the federal government to treat the issue as one of national security. The speech resulted in the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA) which, among other things, granted amnesty to long-term undocumented workers. Illegal immigrants simply needed to prove their permanent residency in the United States (not having left for more than 180 days) since January 1, 1982, in order to obtain legal residency.\textsuperscript{44} In an effort to slow down the rate of undocumented entries to the United States, IRCA "succeeded in transforming a seasonal flow of temporary workers into a permanent population of settled legal immigrants."\textsuperscript{45} This has happened in Molalla.

Molalla's Hispanic workforce had been in the area for quite some time, but not until IRCA in 1986 did the traditional, long-established residents of Molalla notice it. Although the overall agricultural and timber production of Clackamas County declined in the late 1980s and early 1990s,\textsuperscript{46} employment in the county has continued to explode—"more rapidly that the state and the nation" claimed Oregon's Employment Department in 1999.\textsuperscript{47} Legal Hispanic immigrants have taken advantage of the
population and employment growth. In 1990, figures showed 3,651 people living in
the city of Molalla; this number includes a Hispanic population totaling 232. All but
eighteen of these Hispanics listed themselves as being of Mexican descent.48 By 1999
Molalla’s population was estimated at 4,523 people; 378 of those people referred to
themselves as Hispanic.49 These numbers show that, during those nine years, Molalla
increased in overall population by 23.88 percent, while its Hispanic population made a
startling jump of 62.93 percent. The upsurge in the number of Hispanic people in the
city of Molalla working in the agricultural industry during the 1990s eventually created
the need for a low-income, farm-worker housing project in Molalla—the focus of this
thesis.
NOTES—CHAPTER 1


7 Lynch, 48.


9 Chelson.

10 McCormick, 35.


12 Sam Engle, “Molalla Yesterday and Today 1927,” TM (photocopy), Molalla Public Library, Molalla, Oregon.

13 Teasel is an herb that grows with prickly stems into a cone-shaped flower. The fibers of the plant were used in making material used in durable clothing.

14 McCormick, 127.

16 Lynch, 393-395; Caneberries are widely grown in the Willamette Valley, which has also been called the “caneberry capital of the world.” They include all types of berries which form their seed cells around a core, or cane. This includes raspberries, several varieties of blackberries but excludes blueberries and strawberries.


18 Lynch, 416.

19 Brent Searle, ed., Agriculture: Oregon’s Leading Industry: From Farm to Table (Salem, OR: Oregon Department of Agriculture, 1998).


22 The term “Hispanic” was first used by the United States Census Bureau in 1970 to classify people originating from the tip of Tierra del Fuego to the Mexican-American border into one single ethnic category. In Molalla, the term “Hispanic” refers primarily to farm workers who are Mexican. This is not meant to imply that all Hispanic people residing in Molalla’s community are farm laborers, nor that all Hispanics of the area are Mexican. In this paper various terms will be used in reference to these people of Molalla’s community, including “Hispanic,” “Chicano,” “Latino,” and “Mexican” where appropriate.


24 Bob Boyd, “Vaqueros on the High Desert Rangeland,” in Nostros: the Hispanic People of Oregon, eds. Erasmso Gamboa and Carolyn M. Buan (Portland, OR: The Council for the Humanities, 1995), 31-39; The first vaqueros to work in what is now the United States appeared in California in the late eighteenth century. Franciscan missionaries would recommend young Indian converts who would then be specifically trained to become expert horsemen by Spanish landholders called hacendados (landholders). As expert horsemen, these vaqueros dedicated their entire lives to working on large ranches under Spanish authority. Although the nineteenth century brought the fall of the Franciscan missions and Spanish landownership in California, the vaqueros continued their ranch work for Anglo-Americans settling in the West, spreading beyond the Sierra Nevada and eventually into the rangelands of eastern Oregon.


31 Oscar Garcia, interview by author, August 2000, Molalla, Oregon, in author’s personal collection.

32 Marlene Forristall, interview by author, August 2000, Beaver Creek, Oregon, in author’s personal collection.


34 Dena (Gibboney) Forristall, interview by author, August 2000, Mulino, Oregon, in author’s personal collection; During the 1960s many traditional, Russian immigrants also immigrated to the Willamette Valley to fill Oregon’s agricultural need for labor, although not in as great of numbers as the Hispanics. They were distinguished by their customary dress and heavy accents.

35 Christie Hammond, Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries, interview by author, 1 August 2000, Mulino, Oregon, in author’s personal collection.

36 Steve Hoffman, interview by author, August 2000, Beaver Creek, Oregon, in author’s personal collection.


38 Kristi Moorhouse, interview by author, 11 October 2000, Molalla, Oregon, in author’s personal collection.

40 Samora, 9.


43 Samora, 4.


CHAPTER 2
A PROJECT ‘FALLS’ INTO PLACE

As the Hispanic population across the United States increased in the 1960s and 1970s, so did the awareness of social and political issues surrounding farm workers' settlements. From the time of the braceros, agricultural laborers have had a difficult time organizing for their rights. While many other industries dealt with unionization during the first few decades of the twentieth century, agricultural employers paid little attention to the nation's social and political labor legislation. In Organized Labor and the Church: Reflections of a "Labor Priest," a man used to dealing with labor issues, Msgr. George G. Higgens commented, "Congress had carved out an exemption for the agriculture industry." However, by the early 1960s the number of Hispanic farm workers was climbing and so was concern for their social welfare. In 1962 a Hispanic man who was born in Arizona and had grown up in a migrant family, founded the Farm Workers Association—a farm workers' union—now known as the United Farm Workers. The man was César Chávez.

Chávez's farm-worker movement inspired many concerned people across the nation to spring into action—including those in Oregon. By 1964, Migrant Ministry, which had been organized by the Oregon State Council of Churches in 1955 to minister to Hispanic farm workers, changed its name to Oregon Friends of Migrants. The Oregonians who were part of this organization began addressing some of the "key issues" of farm laborers—issues of "health, housing, food, wages, and working
hours. In 1965 the Valley Migrant League (VML) was created—the first organization of its kind in the Willamette Valley—adding education to the Hispanic social agenda.

Bilingual education for Hispanic children in the public schools of Oregon became more common in cities such as Woodburn, where many farm workers first settled. In 1973 the Colegio (College) César Chávez was founded, located in Mount Angel, Oregon—a town about halfway between Molalla and Woodburn. As the first four-year Latino college in the United States, Colegio César Chávez ran on federal grants and worked to reach Hispanic students in non-traditional ways. However, after ten years of financial struggle it was forced to close its doors. Even though Colegio César Chávez no longer exists, it remained, as historian Erasmo Gamboa put it, the “nucleus of the Chicano Movement in Oregon.”

Hispanic grassroots organizations in Oregon continued to grow throughout the 1970s and 1980s as the farm-worker population increased, in particular in counties that were part of the Willamette Valley. Although many of their agendas extended to non-social, non-political issues—such as maintaining Hispanic cultural pride and working for affirmative action in non-agricultural employment—many of Oregon’s farm workers still needed advocates who attended to basic social issues. One of those issues was housing.

By 1980 the city of Forest Grove, located in Washington County, Oregon, faced a shortage of affordable homes available to farm workers and their families. This was recognized by a task force organized by the Washington County Community Action Organization (WCCAO), which conducted a study during that time. The results of the
study showed that 85 percent of Washington County’s farm laborers lived in labor camps or barns. In response to the study’s findings, WCCAO created the Housing Development Corporation of Washington County in 1981. This non-profit organization immediately set about remedying the pressing need for farm-worker housing with funds available through such national agencies as the Farmer’s Home Administration.

The designers of the Forest Grove project—an apartment complex that would be made affordable to Washington County resident farm workers—eventually encountered a city charter that prohibited low-income housing in the city. Prior to this charter, which was proposed and passed as Measure 51: Charter Amendment Prohibiting Certain Types of Housing with the City in the November election of 1982, the citizens of Forest Grove had taken several other measures to prohibit efforts to build farm-worker housing in their city. At a time when an estimated 2,000 to 4,000 Hispanic farm workers resided in Washington County, the Housing Development Corporation realized that the need for adequate, affordable housing could no longer be ignored. Oregon State’s Legal Aid was assigned to the case and lawyer Charlie Harris took up the battle. With Harris’s help, the case was won by the Housing Development Coalition of Washington County. As a result, state legislative action was taken in 1983 limiting city and county ability to make charters that prohibited special housing and in 1984 Elm Park—a 50 unit farm-worker apartment complex in Forest Grove—was finished.

With the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, Oregon’s Hispanic farm-worker population fluctuated greatly during the mid-1980s. While the law granted
amnesty to many undocumented, long-term Hispanics, it also created much confusion regarding immigration enforcement. Because of these concerns, Oregon’s 1987 harvest season experienced a shortage of laborers, particularly within the strawberry crop. One estimate put the loss between 18 and 20 millions pounds of fruit which remained unpicked due to lack of pickers during that season. However, by 1988, much of the original confusion surrounding IRCA had passed, and farm workers began flooding into Oregon as early as February. By the summer of 1988 social concerns for the exploding migrant population in the Willamette Valley reached an all-time high. As a result, the Oregon State Joint Legislative Committee on Labor held hearings which addressed critical migrant social issues. One of the heaviest concerns surrounded the need for adequate housing. Author Daniel Santos wrote, “Reports were received about workers and families living in chicken coops, barns, and garages; on river banks; and crammed into apartments or rented houses.”

All facets of the state became aware of the immigration crisis facing Oregon with the new arrival, and potential long-term residency, of an unprecedented number of Hispanic farm workers. The State Housing Agency offered a large quantity of money for the creation of an organization that would provide technical assistance to other organizations in building low-income, farm-worker housing in the state of Oregon. Having served on a state-organized task force created in 1985-1986 in response to the potential problems of IRCA, Charlie Harris possessed just the experience that this type of project would demand. Along with a few others who were interested, Harris took up the State Housing Agency's offer.

In the summer of 1988, Harris helped to write a proposal for the potential
Figure 5. Migrant housing conditions in Washington County in 1990.
(Courtesy of the Oregon Council for the Humanities)
organization which was then granted state and federal funds in the creation of CASA—the Community And Shelter Assistance Corporation of Oregon. The organization’s mission statement read,

... the mission of the Community and Shelter Assistance Corporation of Oregon (CASA) works to improve the quality of life for farm workers in Oregon by constructing, rehabilitating and managing housing and related facilities for farm workers and their families.

From their original location in Hillsboro, Oregon, CASA started out with four employees. The success of the organization and the demand for its services led it to a new location in Newberg, Oregon, an agricultural hub of the Willamette Valley. From there, CASA’s employees set out to assess the housing needs for Hispanic laborers employed in agricultural communities across the state. Sometimes the need of a specific area was obvious; other times people would come directly to CASA having concerns of their own for the farm-worker housing in their particular community. Once a need for livable housing in a specific area was recognized, the employees of CASA would then take the procedures that were necessary to build the proposed housing project. One of the organization’s first target areas, having a largely ignored, heavy farm-worker population, was Clackamas County, Oregon—which included the city of Molalla.

For some time Molalla’s Hispanic farm-worker population had been steadily increasing, along with the population of the rest of the city. While the early 1990s brought a steady decline in the timber industry, a scare for those that felt Molalla ran solely on a timber-dependent economy, the agricultural part of the city’s economy still demanded a sufficient labor source. As of 1991, articles in Molalla’s local
newspaper, the *Molalla Pioneer*, continued to describe labor-intensive industries as important to the local economy—including strawberries, Christmas trees, and ornamental nursery stock. Although official census statistics reported only 232 Hispanics in the city of Molalla in 1990, there are many reasons that would lead one to believe that the true number of Hispanics present in the area at the time, especially during certain harvest seasons, was much higher. Molalla resident Jesse Luna, a recruiter of Hispanic labor for the National Forest Service in Oregon and Washington throughout the 1970s and 1980s, and very knowledgeable regarding local Hispanic residency, explained that many fears and misunderstandings keep newly arrived immigrants from filling out census information, even if they were legally residing in the United States. It was these Hispanics who continued to filter into Molalla during the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Molalla’s Latino population, however, remained largely overlooked during this time. Although evidence points to the fact that more and more Hispanics were settling in Molalla, the non-Hispanics of the city seemed to disregard these changes in the ethnic population of their community. A good example of this can be found in Molalla’s school system. Bilingual school teacher Arlene Cousil, hired to work at Molalla Primary School in 1990, recalled that she used to substitute for the district the year before she was officially hired in Molalla. When she inquired about teaching in Molalla full-time, there was a general sentiment that no bilingual teacher was needed in the school district. After Cousil was hired, however, a survey conducted during the 1990-1991 school year recognized that at least 45 children spoke Spanish fluently in Molalla’s elementary school. Carol Leona, another Molalla elementary school
teacher who was hired in 1988, also recalled that during her first years at Molalla Primary Mexican children were pushed aside in the classroom. The children could not speak English and the teachers could not speak Spanish, so they would be seated away from the other children to color pictures on their own. Students in the high school also found it difficult to assimilate into the classroom during this period if they did not speak English. Often Hispanic parents would send their children to school only to take them out again because their needs could not yet be met by the Molalla school system.29

Other small pieces of evidence can be found indicating that Molalla's Hispanic population was, indeed, increasing. An article written in 1991 in the Molalla Pioneer regarding the construction of a family resource center near the city admitted that "... 80 percent of the new entrants into the work force [in the future] will be women, minorities and immigrants."30 An announcement in the same newspaper, appearing in September of 1991, showed that a Spanish class was offered at the Molalla Senior Center Monday and Wednesday evenings.31 Molalla's school system was also gradually recognizing the population change. In the Molalla Pioneer's review of a meeting with the school board in July of 1991, Assistant State School Superintendent Robert Hutton commented on the influx of Spanish-speaking children in the area: "The language barrier and general educational lack poses a real challenge to this district."32 Clearly, Molalla was experiencing diverse population growth and slowly coming to terms with it.

Taking this change into consideration, one might think that CASA would immediately aim to bring a farm-worker housing unit to Molalla as soon as it could.
However, in searching for a location for the project, CASA did not specifically focus on finding a site in Molalla. Instead, it attempted to find a site anywhere throughout a number of rural Clackamas County towns where the Hispanic population was rapidly increasing and yet remained virtually ignored. Consequently, one of the first sites proposed happened to “fall into CASA’s lap,” according to CASA’s project director, Susan Lind. A local resident brought a piece of property, located at 127 N. Cole Street in Molalla, Oregon, to the attention of the Housing Authority of the County of Clackamas (HACC). The Housing Authority then suggested the property to CASA. Located within the Molalla’s city limits, this piece of land had access to city facilities such as water and garbage pickup, and also happened to be zoned as multi-family residential. In short, this site had everything that CASA’s staff was looking for.

Because the site fit every qualification needed for CASA’s project, the official needs assessment, created as part of the application for rural development monies from the federal government, was created with 127 N. Cole Street in mind. However, this document, titled “Clackamas Labor Housing Needs Assessment,” did not specifically focus on the city of Molalla. The city itself lacked the statistical, farm-worker population data that the document required. Instead, it gave an overall summary of the farm-worker population and its housing needs in Clackamas County using estimated county-wide data from 1989 through 1991. The document found that approximately eighty percent of Clackamas County’s farm workers were Hispanic. Although many of these Hispanics were considered migrant laborers—that is, they lived within Clackamas County only for the duration of certain seasonal employment—the document indicated that a surprising number of these Hispanics were year-round
residents and in need of affordable housing. The report specifically called for affordable housing in each of the Clackamas County cities of Gladstone, Estacada, Milwaukie, Molalla, Oregon City, Sandy, and Wilsonville. Eighteen pages in length, the document concluded: “all too often, the net result finds farm workers [of Clackamas County] forced into occupying substandard, overcrowded, overpriced housing.”

With their needs assessment approved by the Farmers Home Administration, the visionaries of Molalla’s farm-worker housing project were granted enough federal funds to continue with their project. Once this had been done, and the location of an appropriate site had been secured, the project was proposed to the City of Molalla in order to gain unofficial—and technically unnecessary—approval for the project. In the summer of 1990 HACC, having received and approved CASA’s housing proposal, submitted a letter to Molalla’s city council asking for a “recommendation,” a precautionary step taken by HACC to let the city know that it would soon be receiving a low-income housing complex on Cole Street. Molalla Mayor Paul Murphy explained that the council returned the letter with “no comment.” City Council members reasoned that if they were to oppose construction of the units, “they could [possibly] jeopardize any future allocation of grant monies from the federal government for capital improvements.”

Although the Molalla City Council did not directly oppose the construction of the project, some citizens of Molalla did. After receiving notification from the city that HACC’s project would soon be realized, concerned citizens organized to protest. On March 16, 1992, a group of approximately fifty people showed up at a city council
meeting to voice this protest. Susan Lind of CASA and Gary Dicenzo of HACC were both present to discuss the issue with the concerned people. Future plans were made between the mayor and group representatives to discuss the group's concerns further.39

An article printed in the March 21, 1992, edition of *The Oregonian* also raised concerns surrounding the building of the project. A neighbor to the two-acre lot designated as the site of CASA's development, Don Swan, commented that he would have to "tie down everything he owned" if Hispanic farm-laborers were to move next door to him. Another local homeowner, Darren Kluth, felt that the building of the project was unfair to timber workers who had recently been laid off and also needed financial assistance. Not all neighbors were as upset by the idea, however. In the article, neighbor Linda Crabtree said she would have no problem with the apartments if they were well maintained.40

By April of 1992, concerned Molalla citizens gained enough public attention that the editors the *Molalla Pioneer* dedicated a front-page article to the ordeal. In this article, the group of local people, led by future mayoral candidate Al Isley, stated its opposition to the project. Isley himself claimed in the article that his opposition was not based on the race of people who would be residing at 127 N. Cole Street, but rather on the city's incapacity to deal with a growing population. His main concerns included the strain that such housing might put on city utilities and an already-crowded school system. The author of the article also reported that a petition of organized resistance was circulating through Molalla, with "hundreds of people [having] signed." The group had posted around town several flyers objecting to Arbor Terrace and its
Figure 6. Don Swan with son, William, next to Arbor Terrace's undeveloped lot. (Photo by Ross Hamilton, courtesy of The Oregonian)
construction to encourage other concerned citizens to come forward. The anger that Molalla’s non-Hispanic residents displayed throughout these protests seemed to be fueled by confusion and long-established biases which made it difficult for them to deal with change in their community and economy. One local woman summed it up well, saying at the city council meeting in March, “we can’t afford to take care of our own and here we’re gonna import more.”

Amidst the apprehension of many of Molalla’s citizens, the project progressed. In June of 1992 a public notice was released in the *Molalla Pioneer* asking for bids on the construction of the units which had been designed by Matteson Architects. The notice described the construction of eight buildings: a manager’s unit—including a community room and management office, a laundry/storage unit, and six two-story four-plexes. The site on 127 N. Cole Street totaled 2.47 acres, and the construction would include landscaping and asphalt parking. Bids were to be made directly to HACC or the Farmers Home Administration. Silco Construction won the bid and construction began immediately. By the summer of 1993 Quantum Residential, a housing management company from Vancouver, Washington, had been contracted to manage the apartments.

Prior to opening day, word had spread to Hispanic farm workers throughout Clackamas County that they could apply for housing at Molalla’s new apartment complex. Much of the units’ popularity can be attributed to those groups organized by employees of the Mount Hood Council of Campfire. In 1991, employees of the council proposed a position to be funded by Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA). This position would specifically focus on the needs of poor Hispanics in a
Figure 7. Arbor Terrace site plan.
(Courtesy of Matteson Architects of Portland, Oregon)
three-county area in Oregon, including Clackamas County. Jena Camp, a cultural anthropologist and graduate of Reed College in Portland, was hired for this VISTA position and was in charge of the organization of county-wide Hispanic projects, including the Molalla Hispanic Project. These “projects” involved bringing together Hispanic people and addressing issues they faced as they tried to settle into their communities. Camp was actively involved in several of these small-town, “mutual-support-group” projects across Clackamas County when it came to her attention that HACC was building a farm-worker housing unit in Molalla.

Camp reported that, in each of her four support groups, the issue of decent, affordable housing for the average Hispanic farm laborer and his/her family repeatedly surfaced as a top concern among Hispanics. Camp held a few housing forums in nearby Canby, Oregon, at the request of the members of her support groups about a year before the building of Molalla’s project had been approved. Once Camp became aware of the project, she turned over her list of community members requesting more information about affordable housing to CASA and HACC representatives. Later, Mark McCrae, the first property director of 127 N. Cole Street, working for Quantum Residential, cooperated with Camp in what she called “a big outreach effort.” Their efforts included putting on “how-to” workshops that aided farm workers in understanding the complex paperwork that needed to be completed in order to qualify for low-income housing. McCrae and Camp also made sure that bilingual radio and newspaper announcements were available throughout the area, advertising the opening of a farm-worker-designated housing unit in Molalla. Camp became so involved with the project itself that she and her husband, Lorenzo Güel, eventually decided to
apply for Quantum Residential’s onsite management position.\textsuperscript{51} By October of 1993, they had been hired and their new jobs had officially begun.

After much preparation, the opening day for the new apartment complex finally came. It was named Arbor Terrace. Camp recalled being present first thing that October morning, working at one of the paperwork stations set up in the newly-built community room of the apartment complex. The job was to process the applications of several farm workers and their families. “Many, many families lined-up [even before the doors were open]. . . I’d estimate over thirty,” Camp recalled. She said that each of the employees working that day with Quantum Residential had to write down, by the minute, the order in which applicants applied. Since Arbor Terrace was only built with twenty-five units, one of which would be occupied by its onsite managers, only the first twenty-four applicants who met all federally-regulated qualifications would be guaranteed housing. All others were placed on a wait list. According to Camp, the apartments were filled immediately: “Occupancy was very, very close, if not identical to, rent-up day.”\textsuperscript{52}

All of the people who qualified to live in Arbor Terrace were Hispanic. Their nationality was largely Mexican, including a number of people from indigenous communities of the southwestern Mexican states of Oaxaca and Michoacán.\textsuperscript{53} According to federal law, these people were agricultural laborers, all of whom had incomes from jobs that qualified them as renters in the apartments.\textsuperscript{54} Although all individuals living at 127 N. Cole Street had to prove their legal residency in the United States and their financial need for housing assistance, they continued to encounter outright resistance to their residency in the city. Because of their economic, social,
and cultural differences from Molalla’s traditional, non-Hispanic community, the residents of Arbor Terrace first struggled for their rightful position within the community. However, that struggle would eventually prove advantageous in bringing social and cultural awareness to those citizens who originally protested Arbor Terrace’s existence.
NOTES—CHAPTER 2


4Gonzales, 173.

5Brenda Turner and Mary Wood, “Migrant Agricultural Labor,” Hispanics in Oregon’s Workforce (Salem, OR: Oregon Employment Department, 1998), 15-17.


7Turner and Wood, 16.


11Charlie Harris, interview by author, 11 January 2000, Portland, Oregon, in author’s personal collection.

12Housing Assistance Council, internet site.

13Harris interview.

14Limitation on City and County Authority to Prohibit Certain Kinds of Housing, Oregon Revised Statute 197.312, section 1 (1983).

15Charlie Harris, <charlie.harris@lasoregon.org> “RE: questions” 29 January 2001, personal e-mail (February 2001).


18 Santos, “Improving the Lot of Migrant Farm Laborers: National and State Legislative Reforms of the 1980s,” 63.

19 Harris interview.

20 Ibid.


22 Harris Interview.

23 Susan Lind, interview by author, 11 October 2000, Newberg, Oregon, in author’s personal collection.


26 United States Bureau of the Census, 22.

27 Jesse Luna, interview by author, 9 October 2000, Beavercreek, Oregon, in author’s personal collection.

28 Arlene Counsil, Mari Garcia, and Carol Leona, joint interview by author, 11 October 2000, Molalla, Oregon, in author’s personal collection.

29 Ibid.


Harris Interview.

Susan Lind, <slind@casaoforegon.org> “RE: a few questions for my paper,” 6 November 2000, personal e-mail (December 2000).

Lind interview.

Susan Lind, “Clackamas County Labor Housing Needs Assessment” (Newberg, OR: Community and Shelter Assistance Commission, 1990-1991, typewritten); The assessment found the number of Hispanic farm workers and their families residing in Clackamas County to be 15,917. When assessing farm-worker wages, the document claimed that ninety-five percent of farm workers surveyed in 1989, working in the strawberry, caneberry and cucumber harvests, were paid less than the prevailing minimum wage of $3.35 per hour at least once during the season. The document elaborated on the unavailability of housing in Clackamas County by tying in these two factors with the average price of housing in the area.

Lind e-mail.


Molalla City Council Minutes: March, 16, 1992” (Molalla, OR: City of Molalla, 1992, typewritten).


Lind e-mail.

Lind interview.

Jena Camp, <el_puente_clc@excite.com> “RE: some questions I have,” 1 November 2000, personal e-mail (November 2000).

VISTA is a federally funded program that was created during the 1960s in an effort to provide services to the poor of the United States. It is often referred to as the “domestic Peace Corps.”

48 Jena Camp and Lorenzo Güel, interview by author, 4 October 2000, Helena, Montana, in author’s personal collection.

49 Camp e-mail.

50 Ibid.

51 Camp and Güel interview.

52 Camp e-mail.

53 Camp and Güel interview.

54 The USDA Rural Development qualifications for programs related to farm workers and farm labors can be found in Title 7 of Federal Code Regulations, section 1944.153.
The opening of Arbor Terrace brought with it change to the little town of Molalla, Oregon. Wary, non-Hispanic citizens worried that their community would be changed forever by the building of a designated, low-income, farm-worker residence. Although many people would have liked to have kept their little town in a timeless existence, as a result of Arbor Terrace’s construction the community of Molalla was transformed forever. The town’s traditional, long-time residents continued to grapple with these changes, sometimes through unwelcoming and violent acts towards Molalla Hispanics. At the same time, the Hispanic residents of the city, especially those of the Arbor Terrace apartment complex, had to find a way to look beyond those acts and fit in with their surrounding community.

Jena Camp, as Arbor Terrace’s first onsite manager, recalled that on their opening day there was a “gauntlet of trucks and cars . . . with people hurling insults at [potential Arbor Terrace tenants]” as they waited in line.1 Although her report was never filed with the police, threats from those with blatant, anti-Hispanic attitudes were not uncommon in Molalla. During their time as the apartments’ managers, Camp and her husband, Lorenzo Güel, witnessed many appalling activities. Their first few years at 127 N. Cole Street forced them to deal with everything from graffiti to anonymous threats of arson on the premises. Outside of Arbor Terrace, rumors spread among non-Hispanic residents that gang activity festered within the complex’s
boundaries. It seemed that the city itself was dividing. There were those who lived in Arbor Terrace, or allied themselves with its residents, and then there were those who remained obstinate against accepting Molalla’s growing Hispanic population. Once in a while the two sides would meet in confrontational situations. In one instance a very angry, non-Hispanic man raced into the complex’s parking lot in his full-size pick-up truck. With his wife in tow, he shouted to anyone within earshot frustrated, and unsubstantiated, accusations toward the Hispanic tenants. This was not an isolated incident, and continued concerns of anti-Hispanic behavior caused the Molalla Police Department to recognize and take an active role on issues of racial conflict that faced Molalla’s newest community members.

Before the Cole Street complex was ever built, a Hispanic liaison committee had formed in late 1992 to help promote dialogue between Molalla’s Hispanic community and the city’s police force. The hope was that Molalla’s Hispanics would not become segregated from the rest of Molalla’s community as they had in other small Oregon towns. An article written about the committee appeared in the November 25, 1992, edition of the Molalla Pioneer. The author reported that, according to Police Chief Rob Elkins, many Hispanic people were not familiar with a fair legal system, which often contributed to a lack of trust between Hispanic community members and police officials. A group was scheduled to meet consisting of three Hispanic members and two other community members that would address those issues of trust.

With the development of Arbor Terrace, concerns about the Molalla Hispanic community heightened. Chief Elkins remembered dealing with a problematic group of youths who called themselves the “South Side Locos (Lunatics).” This Hispanic gang
had originated in Woodburn, Oregon, and was a concern for Molalla police between 1993 and 1996. Although gangs such as this one did exist within the city, they were unsuccessful in penetrating Arbor Terrace; certainly they did not originate there.

Camp recalled in one instance that she had encountered a Hispanic youth from Canby, Oregon, attempting to sell drugs on the property. After she sat to speak with the youth about his activities and the danger in which he put himself and his Hispanic community, she instructed him to leave and made it clear that any such activity was not welcome at Arbor Terrace. When commenting on the residence as a whole, Elkins reported, “they [were] our quietest apartment complex in the community.”

As the apartments’ managers and city police became increasingly aware of the fears Molalla’s citizens had concerning Hispanics, they also realized the immediate need for community dialogue. In an effort to bring Hispanic and non-Hispanic community members together, Camp and Elkins worked in the formation of an advisory committee, an idea probably influenced by Elkins’ previous liaison committee. This group met on a regular basis in the winter of 1993-1994 in the community room of the Arbor Terrace complex. Specific vocal members of the community were invited to come and talk openly about their concerns regarding Arbor Terrace. Their questions were answered by Camp, Elkins, Molalla Mayor Rick Lefever, and by Hispanic tenants themselves. These group sessions helped to dispel rumors surrounding Arbor Terrace, and, by doing so, helped bring non-Hispanic members of the community to a better understanding of the changing ethnic population in their town.

Another series of projects implemented by Camp, in an effort to strengthen ties
between Arbor Terrace residents and the larger community of Molalla, were her co-

learning sessions. Starting in 1993, these meetings were also held in the community

room of Arbor Terrace during the fall and winter school season. Camp worked
carefully to avoid scheduling these classes at the same time as certain courses offered
at nearby Clackamas Community College or those held by other organizations that
taught Spanish or English for adults in the Molalla area. Her goal continued to be the
break-down of barriers which separated Arbor Terrace’s community from other
Molallans—this time with mutual English and Spanish instruction. At the time, this
method of learning for adults was unique to Arbor Terrace. Bringing the two
languages together, in a mutual setting, would eventually find its way into the Molalla
Primary School in a “dual immersion” program set up by Carol Leona. The key to its
success was the fact that, instead of simply learning a foreign language, students were
exposed to a new culture while learning. The classroom structure of these sessions
avoided the typical teacher-student atmosphere; the co-learning sessions demanded
student-student interaction. This interaction naturally brought with it dialogue. The
much-needed discourse was so popular to those who participated in Arbor Terrace’s
co-learning sessions that by 1997, the group decided to continue meeting past their
normal twenty-week session for a serious of bilingual video nights, followed by
Spanish and English discussion. A small notice in the Molalla Pioneer, dated
November 22, 1995, stated that some of the participants in the program included local:
furniture makers, artists, students, educators, firefighters, librarians, beekeepers and
farm laborers.

These co-learning classes were successful and marked a transition for Arbor
Terrace. Gradually, the people of 127 N. Cole Street gained acceptance in Molalla and began working within the community instead of defending themselves against it. For them, Arbor Terrace became “more than just a place to live.”¹⁴ The people of Arbor Terrace were not just tenants in the eyes of their managers; they were people seeking new lives for themselves in a foreign country. Many others in Molalla realized the Hispanic residents were not people looking for sympathy or a “free ride.” In many ways, they were not unlike their neighbors and fellow citizens around town. As the Molalla community began to understand this reality, Arbor Terrace was allowed to grow. Although the literal size of the complex remained 25 units, the spirit of the Hispanic community of Arbor Terrace spread throughout Molalla. The people’s strength was first nurtured through the building of their own community within the complex’s property limits.

At the apartment complex itself, community meetings were held once a month. Led by Güel and Camp, the meetings gave tenants of Arbor Terrace a chance to voice concerns about their community. Agenda items ranged from simple maintenance issues to elaborate plans for activities hosted by the residents of the apartments.¹⁵ Rules and regulations were also established at these meetings. In one of their first gatherings, Arbor Terrace residents requested that a bread vendor from out of town be allowed to sell on the premises once a week; many were unable to find the bread they were used to purchasing in Mexico sold anywhere in Molalla. Although Quantum Residential had a policy against all solicitation at any of its facilities, the suggestion was discussed and eventually approved.¹⁶ These meetings also contributed to the creation of a neighborhood watch within the complex, a community garden shared by
all tenants, a lending library of English and Spanish books for children and their parents available in the community room, English instruction offered weekly on the premises, and countless other activities for the residents of the units. Each meeting was documented and monthly notices in Spanish were distributed to each household explaining key points, updates, and announcements since the previous meeting.¹⁷

A large concern for Hispanic parents that surfaced in one of Arbor Terrace’s monthly gatherings was the lack of reliable childcare for parents who worked in the agriculture industry.¹⁸ Because a farm worker’s income is limited, often times there is no money available for daycare. As a result, family friends or relatives, such as older siblings and grandmothers, are left in charge of young children without any kind of compensation. Recognizing this, the managers of Arbor Terrace made special efforts to work with the Oregon Child Development Coalition and Oregon’s Migrant Head Start programs in order to make available federal funds for the organization of childcare home providers.¹⁹ By 1995 a solid program had been set in place in Arbor Terrace.²⁰ Women like Soledad Morales, an original tenant of Arbor Terrace, were paid by the government to stay at home to look after her neighbors’ children while the children’s parents went to work.²¹ With traditional care-takers relieved of their duties, they were left to pursue other endeavors that also helped aid the growth of the Arbor Terrace community.

Young people, pre-teens and teenagers, were encouraged to organize themselves in their free time. Although some rumors continued to circulate surrounding gang activity, the city’s police worked with Arbor Terrace families to deal with at-risk kids. Police Chief Rob Elkins recalled meeting with specific parents, one-on-one, to discuss
gang-related issues surrounding their particular child. Although the organization of Latino youth was sometimes difficult, in 1996 a group emerged from Arbor Terrace calling itself "Jóvenes latinos de Molalla" (Latin Youth of Molalla). Despite some opposition to the exclusive group, it continued to meet and organize activities. Some of their efforts resulted in a dance in the name of Mexican Flag Day in February of 1996 and a very successful basketball tournament held at Arbor Terrace.

Camp and Giiel tried very hard to make available programs helpful to the adult residents of the complex also. Arbor Terrace resident Summer Mendoza recalled that things were kept extremely orderly with Jena Camp and Lorenzo Güel in charge. Former resident Domitilia Montoya-Renaga remembered that organizations like PCUN (Pineros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste—United Treeplanters and Farmworkers of the Northwest) were invited to speak at public gatherings held on the premises. Such gatherings kept residents informed of issues that immediately affected their lives. Courses in driver’s education and United States citizenship were also made available to the residents in Spanish or English, as well as to any interested members of the outside community. Nearly all programs that took place on site found their origination as a topic in one of Arbor Terrace’s regular, monthly community meetings.

As Arbor Terrace grew, projects that originally were meant to deal with interracial tension were expanded to projects that ended up bringing the whole of Molalla’s community together. For example, during its first few months, the complex was vandalized by graffiti by unknown culprits. To combat the vandalism, Lorenzo Güel painted several murals over the graffiti itself. His efforts paid off as the graffiti
Figure 8. Güel's mural outside of the Molalla Public Library. (Photo by author)
stopped and his murals continued. In 1994, through a summer reading program organized by Marlyn Boch, Molalla’s children’s librarian at the time, an outside mural on the south wall of the public library was created with the help of Güel’s artistry. The project took three days to complete. The children who participated in the program discussed what was to be painted and then actively participated in its creation. Many of those children in the summer reading program that year lived at Arbor Terrace. As beautiful as the mural turned out to be—illustrated with Hispanic- and Euro-American children framed by a setting representing Molalla, including farm workers in a field, a log truck, the flag of the United States, the Mexican flag, and a blue-green earth in the background—it was not accepted by all of Molalla’s non-Hispanic citizens. A letter to the editor in the August 24, 1994, edition of the Molalla Pioneer sneered at the artists lack of respect for the American flag. The complaint that was that it had not been drawn in “the place of honor,” instead the Mexican flag had been placed in its spot. Despite criticisms, the mural’s presence on the outside wall of the library remained a lasting symbol of what Molalla was beginning to experience for the first time since the completion of Arbor Terrace—an active, positive, and diverse cultural integration of people.

As the spirit of Arbor Terrace grew, evidence could be found in the local newspaper that the non-Hispanic community of Molalla was trying to make more of an effort to welcome their Hispanic neighbors. In August, a soccer clinic sponsored by the Campfire Boys and Girls of America—co-hosted by Molalla High School’s head soccer coach Jeff Jessel—provided nearly 70 Hispanic children with the opportunity to learn and play soccer in town. In a question and answer session, published in the
Figure 9. Hispanic children in Molalla participating in a soccer camp in 1994.  
(Photo courtesy of the Molalla Pioneer)
Molalla Pioneer in October of 1994, candidate for mayor Al Isley raised a concern for getting Hispanics involved in the town through City Council and Kiwanis. The newspaper itself did its part by printing a Spanish section about once a month from September through December of 1994 that it called “El vecino hispano” (The Hispanic Neighbor). Unfortunately, even with so many positive measures being taken in Molalla to welcome Hispanics, deep-rooted prejudices could not be entirely removed from the community. Shortly after the first publication of “El vecino hispano” a letter to the editor was printed from an angered Molalla citizen. His own words show best his struggle in dealing with the changing community, “I can not believe my eyes . . . why do we have a Spanish section in our Pioneer? . . . Isn’t is bad enough that the taxpayers support the migrant workers with new housing? . . . Let’s get real. Either learn to write and read English, or go back to where you don’t have to.”

Gradually, however, Molalla citizens generally accepted the idea that Arbor Terrace and the city’s overall Hispanic population was not going to “go back to [Mexico]” or even fade into the background of the community. Efforts continued to be made throughout the town to accommodate these new neighbors. In 1994 and 1995 the local Catholic church extended its hand to Molalla Hispanics by offering a variety of different activities, including a partially bilingual Mass for the first time in the parish’s history, a Christmas piñata party, a chili roast, and the organization of a family-to-family program which matched Spanish-speaking families with English-speaking families within the parish community. Molalla’s schools also began to directly address the needs of their Hispanic students in 1994-1995. Elementary
ATENCION
ESTA ENTRANDO EN UNA AREA RESTRINGIDA. ES UN CRIMEN LLEVAR UN PISTOLA CUCHILLO U OTRA CLASE DE ARMA MAS ALLA DE ESTA ENTRANDA A NO SER QUE SEA UN OFICIAL DEL DEPARTAMENTO DE POLICIA

ATTENTION
YOU ARE ENTERING A SECURE AREA AND WILL BE SUBJECT TO SCREENING. IT IS A CRIME, FOR ANYONE OTHER THAN A LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICER TO CARRY A FIREARM, KNIFE, OR OTHER WEAPON BEYOND THIS POINT.

Figure 10. Bilingual signs in front of Molalla City Hall.
(Photo by author)
school teacher Carol Leona, middle school teacher Jim Allen, and high school teacher Chuck Wilken took up the earliest tasks of equipping the Molalla River School District with Migrant Education funding as well as ESL (English as a Second Language) and bi-lingual curriculums. Their efforts were eventually aided by additional administrative and staff support within the district throughout the late 1990s. Molalla’s closest college, Clackamas Community College, also responded to the needs of the growing Hispanic community in 1995 by organizing ESL curriculum into its own department.

With all the efforts made by Molalla residents living outside of Arbor Terrace, the housing unit was given the confidence and support it needed to become an active, instead of reactive, part of the community at large. The Hispanics of Molalla, namely those of Arbor Terrace, found their place through the complex’s Dia de los muertos (Day of the Dead) celebration. This feast day is a tradition for Hispanics in many parts of Latin America. The celebration, which takes place the first few days in November, includes elaborate decorations, large amounts of food, and community time together through remembering beloved family members that have died. As Jena Camp recalled, in one of the first community meetings, less than one month after people had moved into Arbor Terrace, she and her husband asked the tenants about what kind of activity they would like to do to help bring their new community together. When she suggested a celebration of the Day of the Dead, people became very excited about the idea. It was something many of them had not done since leaving Mexico.

The celebration was a success its first year, held on November 2, 1993, and became an “open house” for those community members unfamiliar with Arbor Terrace to come celebrate and learn about the people who lived there. The celebration grew
each year and became a popular attraction for not only the Molalla community, but for Hispanic communities all across Oregon. A flyer distributed in preparation for the 1997 gathering gave directions from both of the closest interstates, each about ten miles away from the city. The event had gained so much popularity that anyone who might want to experience and share Molalla’s cultural diversity did. Despite all the cultural, socio-economic, and ethnic differences of its residents, Arbor Terrace made huge steps in fitting in with its community and becoming part the lives of even many non-Hispanic people.

For the working Hispanic families of Molalla and the surrounding agricultural area, Arbor Terrace filled a great need for affordable housing for farm workers and their families. Its impact on those people was immediate. Arbor Terrace resident Ernestina Mendoza in an 1998 interview reported, “So far, we’re better off. We have a place for the four of us—my husband, son, brother, and me—to live. Before, my husband, son and I didn’t even have our own room to sleep in.” Another tenant, Jovita Giron, an active member in many of Arbor Terraces activities, reported similar relief, “A lot has improved since we moved here. When I first came [to Molalla] I had no money. Some ten of us lived together. . .” There is no doubt that Arbor Terrace has changed these people’s lives in more ways than simply through its aid in affordable housing.

To many of the complex’s residents, the construction at 127 N. Cole Street was life-altering. Domitila Montoya-Renaga recalled that living at Arbor Terrace was like living within one big extended family where neighbors looked out for each other all the time. Domitila’s daughter Cristina Renaga became the first in her family to graduate from high school in the United States and pursue higher education. The stability and
support Cristina received while living at Arbor Terrace probably allowed her to become one of the first successes of Molalla River School District’s migrant education program. Other tenants also have had educational opportunities that they may not have had living somewhere else. Residents Summer and Misael Mendoza have raised their four young children while living in Arbor Terrace. While her husband remained employed at Scott’s Hyponex, a potting soil factory in Molalla, Summer had the opportunity to go to school part-time in the pursuit of a language degree. Other families, including Soledad and José Morales and their children, lived in Arbor Terrace for a period of time which facilitated financing the purchase of their own home. These are just a few examples of how Arbor Terrace directly affected so many people’s lives—those living inside and outside of its walls.
NOTES—CHAPTER 3

1Camp e-mail.
2Camp and Güel interview.
5Camp and Güel interview.
6Elkins interview.
7Camp and Güel interview.
8Camp and Güel interview; Elkins interview.
9Jena Camp, “Community-based Educational and Cultural Work at Arbor Terrace” (Molalla, OR; Arbor Terrace management office, 1997, typewritten).
10Counsel, Garcia, and Leona joint interview.
11Camp and Güel interview.
12Camp, “Community-based Educational and Cultural Work at Arbor Terrace.”
14Camp and Güel interview.
15Domitila Montoya-Renaga, interview by author, 12 January 2001, Molalla, Oregon, in author’s personal collection.
16Camp and Güel interview.
17Camp, “Community-based Educational and Cultural Work at Arbor Terrace.”
18Camp and Güel interview.
19Lucia Alemán, Oregon Child Development Coalition, interview by author, 11 October 2000, Wilsonville, Oregon, in author’s personal collection.
20Camp, “Community-based Educational and Cultural Work at Arbor Terrace.”
21 Soledad Morales, interview by author, 12 October 2000, Molalla, Oregon, in author’s personal collection.

22 Elkins interview.

23 Camp, “Community-based Educational and Cultural Work at Arbor Terrace.”


26 Montoya-Renaga interview.

27 Camp, “Community-based Educational and Cultural Work at Arbor Terrace.”

28 Camp and Güel interview.

29 Marilyn Boch, Molalla Children’s Librarian, interview by author, 13 October 2000, Molalla, Oregon, in author’s personal collection.


31 Boch interview.


37 Ibid.

38 Fr. Edward Altstock, Ashland, Oregon, to author, Helena, Montana, 3 October 2000, handwritten, in author’s personal collection; Fr. Edward Altstock, <altstedw@connpoinet.net> “answer to questions,” 14 October 2000, personal e-mail (14 February 2000); Jesse Luna interview; “A Family to Family Gathering,” Molalla Pioneer, 7 December 1994.

40 Ferraro interview; Jim Allen, interview by author, 9 October 2000, in author’s personal collection; Donna Wendling, interview by author, 10 October 2000, in author’s personal collection; Counsil, Garcia, Leona interview; Dr. Alice Erickson, Superintendent for Molalla River School District, interview by author, 12 October 2000, in author’s personal collection; Chuck Wilken, interview by author, 13 October 2000, in author’s personal collection.

41 Caroline Cate, Clackamas Community College, interview by author, 9 October 2000, in author’s personal collection.


43 Camp and Güel interview.


47 Montoya-Renaga interview.

48 Cristina Renaga, interview by author, 12 January 2001, Molalla, Oregon, in author’s personal collection.

49 Wendling interview.

50 Mendoza interview.

51 Morales interview.
CHAPTER 4
CONCLUSION

The building of Arbor Terrace challenged the identity that Molallans had long held regarding their community. Even though Molalla's citizens knew that their economy depended heavily upon agriculture and timber—factors that they took pride in during their annual July 4th Buckeroo celebration—many of them still questioned the need for a farm-worker housing unit within the city. Although the city had been the location of other low-income housing units built before 1993, the challenges that CASA, HACC, and Arbor Terrace tenants themselves faced was something of a new phenomenon in rural Clackamas County, challenges having to do with ethnic tensions more than anything else. To the reader, it may seem obvious that a town so content with its rural setting and conservative values would welcome this addition to the community—something that would reaffirm the success of its agricultural industry. However, socioeconomic and racial differences between Hispanic farm workers and middle-class white citizens of Molalla caused the latter population to keep the former at a distance, socially and geographically.

As has been the case for immigration in America throughout its existence, new arrivals to the country are usually left to form their own communities as they struggle for a place in their new country. The Hispanic farm laborers of Oregon are not unlike Chinese immigrants who laid thousands of miles of the American West's railroads in the nineteenth century or Eastern European immigrants who worked in factories in
northeastern cities during the early twentieth century. All of these groups of people were limited by their status as new arrivals to America; each collection of immigrants formed its own separate community, often settling for less-than-ideal employment and housing, and sought that which was culturally familiar. With time, however, new arrivals were no longer considered “new” and found themselves better assimilated into their surrounding community. Depending on the rate of continued immigration, the economic well-being of recent immigrants, and the acceptance of non-immigrant citizens, this cultural integration can occur rather quickly or take a lengthy period of time. Arbor Terrace addressed a few of these issues that have faced immigrants in America for generations and sped up this incorporation of diversity within the town of Molalla, Oregon.

Although long-established prejudices were not completely eradicated from the town, much was done overall to help bring about a better understanding between the Hispanic and non-Hispanic communities despite socioeconomic and racial differences. Simply by being built, Arbor Terrace caused the people of Molalla to recognize Mexican immigration in their community, the issues it created, and the importance it held in the economic well-being of their community. By becoming an active part in Molalla’s community, the management and residents of Arbor Terrace brought people of different backgrounds together in order to create a better understanding of each other. The once feared, low-income, farm-worker housing project brought celebrations of diversity to a relatively small, conservative town.

Most of all though, Arbor Terrace helped those people who needed financial assistance; they benefited from the advantages low-income housing provided. New
Hispanic immigrants who were lucky enough to get an apartment at 127 N. Cole Street were affected personally; their lives were changed forever. Arbor Terrace provided for them a community which nurtured their own traditions while helping them achieve the American dream—education for their children, financial security, stability at home and at work, and a safe place to live.

Arbor Terrace and the history surrounding its existence is just a piece of what is currently happening in many small, rural, agricultural communities across the Northwest. As the United States continues to grow in population and diversity because of continued immigration, especially from Latin America, it is important to understand how change is handled in examples like Molalla. The realization of what has taken place in Molalla with respect to Arbor Terrace will prepare us to work better to promote multicultural understanding within similarly changing communities in the future.
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