

***Latinos of Boulder County, Colorado,
1900-1980***

**Volume II:
*Lives and Legacies***

**Chapter Six:
*Education***

by

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Chapter 6

Education

Obtaining a good education for their children was a goal of most Latino parents in Boulder County throughout the period between 1900 and 1980. For people who moved here in search of “a better life,” whether from Mexico, New Mexico, southern Colorado, or elsewhere, that life generally included not only improved employment opportunities for themselves and a more secure economic situation for their families, but also a chance for their children to go to school and gain the background and skills that would enable them to prosper as adults. Most parents wanted their children to stay in school as long as possible, until their labor became necessary to help support the household. Latino children faced pressure from teachers and other youngsters to speak English and adopt Anglo practices, and in some cases they experienced active discrimination. We have seen the efforts of local Chicano leaders in the 1970s to lessen racism in schools and improve conditions for all Latino students.¹ Despite the challenges children faced, quantitative evidence between 1905 and 1964 demonstrates a high level of school enrollment. This study does not support the negative stereotype that says that Latinas/os do not value education.

A. The Latino Commitment to Education

Longmont, Lafayette, and Boulder all had public schools by 1900. In none of them were Latino children denied admittance or formally segregated from Anglo ones, as was true in some borderland states.²

¹ See Vol. I, Ch. 7A.

² Acuña, *Occupied America*, pp. 179-180. For Colorado’s state-wide educational policy and the impact of anti-immigration ordinances on equality of educational opportunities for Latinas/os, see Romero, “Of Greater Value Than the Gold of Our Mountains,” and his “No Brown Towns.”

But because all schooling in Boulder County was conducted by Anglo teachers in English until at least around 1970, the ability of Latino children to succeed rested upon their ability to function in that language and conform to unfamiliar cultural expectations. We do not have a full list of early schools in Longmont, but they included Columbine and later Pleasant View Ridge Elementary Schools; older children went to Central or Longmont Junior High and then Longmont High.³ In Lafayette, the elementary school was situated next to the high school. We know more about Boulder's schools due to detailed listings in the School Census records of the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s. In that period, most Latino elementary school children went to Lincoln or Whittier.⁴ If they continued, they went to Northside Intermediate, later renamed Casey Junior High; over time, some started going on to Boulder High School.⁵

Latino children in Boulder and Longmont might have the option of attending a Catholic school. But church-run schools required payment for tuition and uniforms, whereas public schools were free. In Boulder, a handful of Latino families sent their children to Sacred Heart School in the 1930s and 1950s, with a somewhat larger number in the 1940s.⁶ At that time, Sacred Heart went only through eighth grade; if children continued, they moved into the public school system, where most Latinas/os had been right along. Boulder was also the home of Mount St. Gertrude Academy, a school for wealthy Catholic girls, most of them boarders, but local families did not send their children there.⁷ In Longmont, the nuns associated with St. John's Church ran a school from at least the mid-1920s.⁸ Some Latino children went there for the first few years and then transferred into the public schools; a few continued at St. John's for all eight grades. In this town too, however, most children

³ See "Pleasant View Ridge School, 1949, grades 1-4" and "Pleasant View Ridge Elementary, Longmont, 1949, grades 5-8." For Columbine in 2013, see "Longmont, film of places of historical importance."

⁴ See "Lincoln Elementary School, Boulder, Class Pictures," "Lincoln Elementary School, Boulder, Grades 3-4," and "Parents wave goodbye to children."

⁵ See "Casey Middle School, 1943, and Boulder High School, 1937" and "Boulder, film of places of historical importance."

⁶ See App. 6.1.

⁷ The only known exception was Teresa Alvarez, who worked at the school in the late 1940s so two of her daughters could go as day pupils (Alvarez, Teresa, interview, 1976.)

⁸ In the School Census book for Longmont in 1925, 8 of the 52 children with Latino surnames attended the "Sisters" school.

attended the public schools throughout.

Parents' determination that their children should go to school is mentioned in interviews with people who came to this area early in the century as well as later arrivals. Some families chose a place to live in part because of the educational facilities of the area. Boulder was thought to offer particularly good schools, especially at the secondary level. Canuto and Gregoria Martinez left the coal mining areas of eastern Boulder County in the mid-1930s, settling themselves and their ten children in Boulder town, "because of less racial discrimination than in the surrounding communities . . . and for better educational and employment opportunities for their children."⁹ Roy Maestas, who came to Boulder from Lafayette in the late 1930s, said he picked the town because of its beauty and good schools.¹⁰ Six of his seven children went to the public schools, one to Sacred Heart. David Toledo, who had been working for some years as a miner in Erie and Frederick, brought his family to Boulder in the 1940s, where he could earn more money but also help his children get a better education.¹¹ He believed it was the parents' role to have enthusiasm for education and motivate their children to go to school; he disapproved of people who took their children out of school to work in the fields.

Many Latino families in Boulder's Water + Goss Streets area wanted their children to graduate from high school. David Herrera was one of the first, completing Boulder High in 1935 with an emphasis on science; Frank Madrigal graduated in 1939.¹² After that, the number of Latino graduates rose for several decades: an average of 2 or 3 per year in the 1940s, 4 per year in the 1950s, and 5 per year in the 1960s. Other graduates lived elsewhere in the town.¹³ For at least a few young people, the importance of education was heightened by relatives who had been teachers. Tom Abila's grandfather was a school teacher in Walsenburg during the 1930s and 1940s, fluent in both Spanish and English.¹⁴ As an older man he liked to take out his books and teach his grandchildren. Patrick Arroyo's father, the son of a wealthy and educated family in

⁹ "Biographical sketch, Emma Gomez Martinez."

¹⁰ Maestas, Roy, interview, 1978.

¹¹ Toledo, David, interview, c. 1978.

¹² "Graduates of Boulder Prep (High) School" and, for this and below, "Latino graduates from Boulder High School, 1935-1980."

¹³ "Latino student graduates High School, 1956," "Latino student graduates High School, 1962," and "Latino students graduate High School, 1964, Pts. 1 and 2."

¹⁴ Abila, Tom, interview, 1978.

Jalisco, Mexico that owned an import-export business, initially entered a seminary to become a Franciscan priest but then decided not to pursue that career.¹⁵ Instead he ran a small school before moving to Colorado, where he worked as coal miner. His granddaughter described in 1977 how intelligent and well informed he was, always reading and happy to answer questions about any topic.

Yet teenagers from the Water + Goss Streets families sometimes found it hard to reconcile their parents' emphasis on doing well in school and preparing for a better future, which might mean accommodating themselves to Anglo ways and minimizing their distinctiveness, with the ongoing warmth and vitality of the Latino culture they experienced at home and in their neighborhood.¹⁶ The ethnic identity that started to emerge among these young people in the 1950s and early 1960s struggled with these inherent contradictions.

During the second half of the century, many Latinas/os were still determined to pursue an education, whether they came from established families or were newly arrived.¹⁷ Edwina Salazar, later the executive Director of the OUR Center in Longmont, was born in Denver in 1948 to a family from the San Luis Valley.¹⁸ Her father was a barber, and her mother cleaned houses. When Edwina was only four years old, her mother—who had had to leave school in eighth grade to help support her family—began to insist that she had to finish high school. “She told me that she washed floors for wealthy people for a quarter a floor, 25 cents, and that she wasn’t going to have a daughter of hers end up without an education. That was always a vivid memory of mine.” Her mother became ill when Edwina was 11 and died when she was 14, leaving her daughter with that insistence that she had to get an education. And so she did. After high school Edwina worked in the defense industry in California and then attended Colorado State University where she obtained a Bachelor’s degree and a Master’s degree in Social Work. When Olga Melendez Cordero’s father and uncle brought their families to Longmont from Mexico in the 1960s, Olga, her four sisters, and her six cousins all went to school, where “our teachers loved us. We knew how to behave and how to treat people because our parents had taught us

¹⁵ Arroyo, Candace, interview, 1977.

¹⁶ See Vol. I, Ch. 5C.

¹⁷ For a belief in education among some young immigrants in 2013, see the Epilogue below.

¹⁸ Salazar, Edwina, interview, 2013.

how to be.”¹⁹ After getting a college degree, Olga worked as a counselor at Skyline High School in Longmont. In 2009 two of her sisters had their own businesses and another was a teacher; among her cousins were a physical therapist, a physician’s assistant, and a speech therapist.

Some Latinas/os obtained or completed their education only as adults.²⁰ Elvinia (“Bea”) Martinez Borrego was never able to attend school as a child in New Mexico in the 1910s, because she had to help her father and stepmother with their work.²¹ But although she had no formal education at all, as an adult she taught herself to read and write (enjoying especially the *Longmont Times-Call* and reading aloud to her grandchildren), as well as how to drive, bank, and take care of the family finances. Opportunities for adult education expanded as the result of Office of Economic Opportunity programs in the later 1960s and 1970s.²² Diana Arroyo of Boulder, aged 45, who had previously run a daycare center at her house and babysat children, was enrolled in a Manpower training program run by the OEO in 1977. She was taking courses in secretarial skills and accounting that would qualify her for work in a bank.²³

Mary Martinez, who lived with her grandparents in Milliken after her mother died, said in a 1988 interview that she had always wanted to be a nurse, from the time she was a child.²⁴ But while working in the fields, she asked herself, “How can I ever become a nurse?” for she knew you had to have a high school degree and she had only gone through eighth grade. She married at age 19, and when her children were older, she decided to prepare for some kind of job. She saw a notice in the Longmont newspaper saying, “Would you like to be a nurse?” and looked into it. She found that you could become a nurse’s aide with only 100 hours of training; within one month she had completed those hours at what is now Longmont United Hospital. Although she loved going to work every day and made friends with the people she helped, she realized after a year that she was almost doing the work of a Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN). When she commented that she would like to gain that

¹⁹ Cordero, Olga Melendez, interview, 2009.

²⁰ For another example, see Esther Blazón in Vol. I, Ch. 6C.

²¹ “Borrego, Albert and Elvinia (“Bea”) Martinez, biography.”

²² For the OEO and its impact, see Vol. I, Ch. 6C. For programs at the University of Colorado, see Vol. I, Ch. 7B.

²³ Arroyo, Candace, interview, 1977.

²⁴ Martinez, Mary, interview, 1988, for this paragraph.

training, her supervisor came to her and encouraged her to join the LPN course offered by the Boulder Valley School District. Shortly thereafter the President of the Lions Club, who worked at the hospital, called her into his office and said that his group had awarded her a scholarship for LPN training. Thrilled, Mary went to sign up for the course but was told she needed a high school diploma. A school counselor encouraged her to take the GED test, which she did and passed, at age 42. She then completed the nurses' training course, becoming the first Latina in the county to graduate as an LPN. She worked at the Longmont hospital for many years, teaching Latino and Anglo parents about child health and putting on an annual Mexican dinner; later she served on the Colorado State Board of Volunteers.

B. Racism and Discrimination at School

The eagerness of Latino parents to send their children to school, and the willingness of children to stay there, becomes more impressive when one recognizes the special challenges these youngsters faced in an Anglo educational system. Some of the problems stemmed from where families lived and the regularity with which children could attend school, but others resulted from the expectations and assumptions of their teachers. While some teachers were described in interviews as having been sympathetic and helpful to children from a different cultural background, the narratives provide many accounts of racist attitudes and sometimes active discrimination on the part of Anglo teachers and children.

Some obstacles that confronted Latino children were practical. The children of farm workers often lived some distance from the nearest school, and there were no school buses.²⁵ Shirley and Angela Vigil walked 2 miles each way to get to Hygiene elementary school from the farm where they were living in the late 1940s.²⁶ Other agricultural families moved to different farms within a given area over the course of the growing season. Virginia Maestas went to several schools each year as a young child in the late 1930s.²⁷ She and her brothers walked to school, regardless of the weather, and they ate their lunches outside since they

²⁵ For the special problems faced by migrant workers' children, see Vol. I, Ch. 6B.

²⁶ Vigil, Jennie, and others, interview, 2001.

²⁷ Maestas, Virginia, interview, 2013.

were the only Latino children.

More serious problems grew out of language and cultural differences. One arose the minute children enrolled in school: what were their names? Many children had Spanish first names that were at least unfamiliar and sometimes religiously uncomfortable for their teachers. When they entered school, therefore, they were normally given an Anglo equivalent, which often stuck with them for life. Jennie Vigil, born in 1919, was originally named Juanita, but when she started school the teachers changed her name.²⁸ Jessie Velez Lehmann, who was baptized Jesus, was told that it was a boy's name and not appropriate on religious grounds anyway, so she was enrolled as Jessie.²⁹ Sally Martinez, who started school at the Serene camp near the Columbine Mine in the 1920s, did not even know that her baptismal name was Celenez until many years later, when she needed to get a copy of her birth certificate for a passport.³⁰ When one looks down the list of first names of Latino-surnamed children in School Census records, it seems highly likely that names like Tom, Joe, Frank, and Susie had not been awarded at the child's birth. Although teachers probably felt that they were helping the children assimilate to American patterns, which would make it easier for them to succeed, some Latinas/os felt in retrospect that having been required to change their names was an attack on their cultural identity.

Language was often a barrier. Communication with teachers was difficult for parents who did not speak English and who did not know how local schools functioned and what their expectations were. Dora Bernal of Boulder spoke only Spanish though she had lived in Boulder County for many years. When asked in 1978 if she had ever been invited to school to talk with her children's teachers, Dora replied, "Yes, they invited us. But I never understood why. I never went."³¹ Notes sent home in English were meaningless to her. When parents did to go to conferences with teachers, their children often had to act as interpreters, not an ideal situation.

Language problems were more severe for the children themselves. Many Latino youngsters knew little if any English when they started school. Until around 1970 and in some cases long after that, the standard

²⁸ Vigil, Jennie, and others, interview, 2001.

²⁹ "Los Inmigrantes."

³⁰ "Salazar, Jose Benito and Isabelle, biography." For the Columbine Mine, see Vol. I, Chs. 3B and 4A.

³¹ Bernal, Dora, interview, 1978, a translated version.

approach was that children were prohibited from speaking Spanish, even on the playground, so as to learn English most quickly. Until they could function in English, teachers made no attempt to teach them in their own language. That policy—and the penalties used to enforce it—were remembered with considerable bitterness by many Latinas/os. Emma Gomez Martinez later wrote that her parents enrolled her and her sister Julia in school together in Erie in the early 1930s, when they were aged five and six. The girls did not speak English, and their parents “knew discrimination was strong and we could support each other.”³² After having their hands slapped with a ruler for speaking Spanish, Emma and Julia quickly learned not to use their first language at school. Cleo Estrada, who grew up in the San Luis Valley, was upset by an even stronger punishment: “Some Latino boys were lined up in front of the class one day and spanked for speaking Spanish.”³³ That made Cleo decide to stop speaking Spanish herself. It “left such an impression on me that I’ve had to struggle to maintain my level of Spanish expertise since.”

Lack of competence in English could be read by teachers as lack of intelligence. Virginia Maestas learned only minimal English in the first schools she attended, nor did she learn to read, for there were no bilingual programs.³⁴ When she entered a two-room school east of Boulder on a more regular basis, she had a lot of headaches, due to the pressure of trying to function in English. “I’m sure I knew some very fundamental, basic kinds of things like ‘Good morning,’ or ‘I got to go to the bathroom.’ But it wasn’t until fourth grade that a teacher finally decided that since I could reason numbers, I must also be able to function in other ways mentally, academically.”³⁵ That teacher brought Virginia home and told her mother that Virginia and her brother were not stupid, they were just hampered by lack of English. The teacher then “took it upon herself to teach my younger brother, who is two years younger than I am, and myself to read.”

An assumption that Latino children, even those who spoke English, were not smart enough to function well in regular classrooms was still present in the second half of the twentieth century. In 1967, while Emma Gomez Martinez was working for the Office of Economic Opportunity

³² “Martinez, Emma Gomez, letter to her children.” For Emma’s history, see Vol. I, Ch. 6C.

³³ “Estrada, Cleo, autobiographical information.”

³⁴ Maestas, Virginia, interview, 2013. For Virginia’s later career, see Vol. I, Ch. 6C.

³⁵ Maestas, Virginia, interview, 1978.

in Boulder, she enrolled her youngest daughter and a niece, both of whom were fluent in English, in the kindergarten at Lincoln Elementary School.³⁶ When Emma was at the school a few days later, helping other Latino parents to enroll their children, “I looked into the classroom and didn’t see the girls. I asked, ‘Where are they?’ I was escorted to another classroom and informed that the class was for emotionally and learning disabled children. They had placed them in that federally funded class without testing or parent notification.” Within days, Emma had arranged for the kindergarten class—including her girls—to be bused to a different school, where they were all treated as regular students. When Carmen Ramirez and her husband, both professional people, moved to Longmont in 1991, her nine-year-old daughter, who spoke good English and Spanish and was doing well in school, was put into a Special Education classroom.³⁷ Carmen was told it was standard practice for all Latino children coming from Texas or Florida. Only after vigorous objection from Carmen was her daughter moved into a regular classroom. Being treated as intellectually inferior must have damaged many children’s self-esteem and confidence, weakening their ability to do well academically.

Another common assumption was that Latino children were dirty and likely to carry head lice. When Emma Gomez and her sister were in second grade, the school nurse checked for lice.³⁸ Emma and Julia were not examined, however: the nurse instead pinned a note on their clothes and sent them home. In a later letter, Emma described what happened next:

The note informed my parents that Julia and I had lice and could not attend school until we were inspected by a doctor who said we were clean. My mom took a look at the note; she whipped off her apron and called the neighbor to watch the baby. She took us each by the hand and walked us back to school, up the west steps and through the hall to the principal’s office. She then confronted the principal and the nurse and told them, “I will sit on this chair and any lice you find on my girls, I’ll eat right here!” Apologies were all over the place. I am so proud of my mom to this day.

An equation between Latino children and head lice emerged a

³⁶ “Martinez, Emma Gomez, letter to her children.”

³⁷ Ramirez, Carmen, interview, 2013.

³⁸ “Martinez, Emma Gomez, letter to her children,” for this and below.

generation later in the nearby town of Frederick.³⁹ When an outbreak of lice occurred in 1976, only the “Mexican” girls and boys were checked at first. Secundino Herrera, a member of the Parents Committee for Equality of Education in the district, acted as a mediator between parents and school officials. He went to the administrators, whom he regarded as “narrow minded and inconsistent,” and asked them to show him the lice, which they had in a little box. He then challenged them to say which of the lice were Mexican. “They couldn’t answer me. I told them that there were *piojos* [lice] in the school alright—there was no doubt about it, but that they shouldn’t just blame the *mejicanos* for that.”⁴⁰

Another stereotype on the part of some school staff was that Latinas/os were unambitious and unlikely to succeed. Patsy Cordova remembered that when she was in junior high school in Longmont in the early 1960s, a counselor pulled her aside, thinking she was an Anglo. He told her

I was never going to get anywhere running around with riffraff. When I asked him what he meant, he said, “Mexicans. The Mexicans are underachievers, they’re lazy, they don’t care, and you stick around with them and you’ll never get anywhere. They’ll pull you down to their level. So, Pat, I’m giving you a piece of advice. Don’t hang around with the Mexicans.”⁴¹

Patsy recalled, “I was confused because I was raised a Mexican, and this man was telling me how terrible we are. It hurt, because I could never see my mom and dad in that light.”

The expectation among teachers and counselors that Latino children would not get ahead led to lack of encouragement for them to stay in school, much less to think about higher education. Absence of guidance and support contributed in turn to a high dropout rate, which was also fueled in some cases by a practical need to start working to help their families. When Emma Gomez was in elementary school in the 1930s, about half of the children were Spanish speakers.⁴² By eighth grade, however, there were just three Spanish-speaking girls, one Spanish-speaking boy, and Emma and her sister Julia. Of the six, only the Gomez girls and one other completed high school. “In those 12 years of school, not once were we counseled to higher grades.” But because Emma’s parents valued education highly, she and her five siblings all graduated

³⁹ Herrera, Secundino, interview, c. 1987.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Cordova, Patsy, interview, c. 1987.

⁴² “Martinez, Emma Gomez, letter to her children.”

from high school. In Boulder, Dixie Lee Aragon, who later had a long career as a court administrator and businesswoman, was at Casey Junior High in 1961-2. Her counselor insisted that she go to the Vocational-Technical School next ("that was where all Mexicans went"), even though Dixie told her she planned to go to college.⁴³ Dixie took the paperwork home, erased what the counselor had marked, added her own plans, and had her mother sign it. She then entered the college preparatory course at Boulder High and graduated with a scholarship to the University of Colorado.

Nor was the experience of Latino children in the parochial schools always positive. In Longmont during the 1930s, the seven children of Adela and Benjamin Vigil, who were being raised by their grandparents, attended St. John's School.⁴⁴ But the children were sent as recipients of charity and suffered for it.

Despite their generosity of pocketbook, the benefactors lacked a generosity of spirit. They never let it be forgotten that the children attended St. John's because of them. The nuns, too, constantly reminded them that they were wards of charity. For example, the benefactress would bring clothes to the children and announce before the classroom, "These are for the Vigil children."

Phil Hernandez, when describing Sacred Heart School in Boulder during the 1950s, talked about the discrimination he and the few other Latino children had experienced at the hands of Anglo nuns, priests, and students.⁴⁵ He could not remember a single time when any of the teachers had spoken out against racism.

Some Latino children had parents who were willing to resist discrimination or at least advise them on how to deal with it. Emma Gomez's mother fought successfully against the sixth-grade teacher who was charging 10 cents from Spanish-speaking students to get their report cards, but nothing from English speakers.⁴⁶ When Eleanor Montour was in secondary school, she resented the discrimination she experienced on the part of some of her teachers, but her family kept telling her, "Don't play into their hands, don't let them make you quit

⁴³ "Racism in the school system," "Dixie Lee Aragon, honor award," and "Dixie Lee Aragon receives Gambill Scholarship."

⁴⁴ "Cortez, Jose Hilario ("J. H.") and Maria Sabina, biography," for this and below.

⁴⁵ "Boulder, film of places of historical importance."

⁴⁶ "Martinez, Emma Gomez, letter to her children."

school!"⁴⁷ At one point, when she was having trouble with a particular teacher, she went home and told her mother, Alicia Sanchez:

"I'm not going back there anymore. I refuse to be ignored. I refuse to be treated the way I am being treated. I don't want to go to school anymore." My mother just said, "Well, you have a choice. You can either go to school by yourself, or I can go with you and sit next to you if you feel like you need that." So of course I returned to the school the next day by myself!

Challenges seem to have been greater for Latino children in junior and senior high school than when they were younger, in part because of social tension with their peers. When describing her experiences in Lafayette in the 1950s and early 1960s, Eleanor Montour said,

There was a lot of racism, a lot of discrimination, and by junior high you learned what you should do and what you should not do, and survival skills. You had teachers that when you raised your hand and had an answer to a question would not acknowledge you. Not being invited to the sleepovers, not being part of many of the social things that were going on at the schools. So I had two different lives. I had my life at high school where I went and I studied and I did what I was supposed to. And then I had a life with Latinos who had dropped out of school—many of them because they had to work to help their families. So I was like two different people.⁴⁸

Peer interactions across ethnic lines could indeed be difficult, even when other children were welcoming. Virginia Maestas described the culture shock she experienced when her family moved to Boulder in 1945, having previously been farm workers. She went from small rural schools to Casey Junior High, where she was overwhelmed by its size, large classes, and her ongoing handicap at functioning in English.⁴⁹ But the social component was equally problematic. When she was in eighth grade, she was invited to a slumber party for the birthday of an Anglo girl whose father was a judge. Virginia had never been to a slumber party before, and her mother bought her a pair of pajamas, another first. (Her mother was obviously willing to have Virginia participate in Anglo social

⁴⁷ Montour, Eleanor, interview, 2013, for this and below. Alicia Sanchez was the founder of the Clinica Campesina (see Ch. 3B above); Sanchez Elementary School in Lafayette is named in her honor ("Lafayette, film of places of historical importance").

⁴⁸ Montour, Eleanor, interview, 2013. She said that the Latino students sat together at lunch for defense. "If we were together as a unit then we couldn't be bothered, we couldn't be hassled."

life.) When Virginia walked into the girl's house, she was amazed to see how many things they had in it. Further, the other girls had brought their own sleeping bags, but she did not have one. She felt totally out of place and asked to go home. When she was later asked by that girl to another event, she did not accept. "I didn't want to be among white people again." Her two older brothers had so much trouble adjusting to Boulder and its overwhelmingly Anglo culture that they spent much of their time in the southern San Luis Valley with their grandparents.

Tom Abila described a similar transition. His family moved to Boulder in 1947 from a small farming community that was almost entirely Spanish-speaking. He enrolled in Casey Junior High, where he had to take English language classes after school. When asked in 1978 what Casey had been like, he replied: "I felt lost actually. Not only coming from a Chicano family, the community itself. You know, I was brought up on a farm and I wasn't used to a lot of people, big buildings, and big places, stuff like that. I was completely lost, really."⁵⁰ He said the few other Latino children (he remembered only five other families) were helpful to him, as were two or three of his teachers, but he had trouble communicating with most of the staff. Of the Anglo children, "Some were nice, some were not so nice, and some were hateful. It took me a year or so to get over that."

Even without a rural-urban transition, economic and cultural contrasts between Latino and Anglo families could be painful for young people. A participant in the Boulder Hispanic Families project of 2012 who had grown up in the Water + Goss Streets neighborhood, wrote, "It was difficult to sit in a classroom at Boulder High School and listen to your classmates talk about their parents' business trip to Sweden, when your father is the custodian at the middle school and only has a third grade education. The disparity was obvious, but the contributions and value of my father were not appreciated. How do you make a community aware that one man's hard work and sacrifices were the building blocks for a better future for his children?"⁵¹

By the 1960s and 1970s, Latino young people were becoming more accepted and integrated in some schools, thanks in part to sports. Linda Arroyo-Holmstrom painted a positive picture of Boulder High in those decades.⁵² The school had "a place for everybody," with Latinos well

⁴⁹ Maestas, Virginia, interview, 2013.

⁵⁰ Abila, Tom, interview, 1978.

⁵¹ An unidentified statement in a draft application for funding for the project.

⁵² "Boulder, film of places of historical importance," which also shows the school in 2013.

represented in clubs and organizations. Although there were few Latino students (only 5–10 graduated each year), they included some successful athletes who went on to state level competitions. Some were even chosen as “Club Sweethearts” at dances! Linda was, however, atypically well acculturated to Anglo society: not all Latinas/os in Boulder County would have described their high school experiences in such rosy terms.

Even in the later twentieth century, third- or fourth-generation Latino children were sometimes caught in the middle between two cultures. Arthur Perez, born in 1981 to a family that had lived in Boulder County since the 1930s, was challenged as a child after moving to Italian/Anglo Louisville, “What are you doing in this playground? You don’t belong here. Your kind doesn’t belong here.”⁵³ He commented in 2013, “It was very shocking. Even as an eight-year-old, you just don’t even know what to say. Or do. A very uncomfortable feeling—to have hatred towards you for no reason.” Yet as a young adult he was sometimes criticized by “my own culture because I don’t speak Spanish. Or I don’t talk with an accent, a thick accent, a lot of times. Or with a Chicano twang all the time. I’ve definitely been ridiculed for that.” Functioning well within Anglo society while still being accepted by Latino peers could be difficult.

C. Quantitative Information

In addition to the quantitative information presented in Volume I about immigration patterns of Latino-surnamed school children and their parents, we have some evidence about the literacy and educational levels of adults and the grades and ages of children between 1905 and 1964. Rebecca Chavez’s detailed analysis of the U.S. Census records for Longmont, 1920–1940, shows a higher level of literacy and ability to speak English among these early arrivals than might have been expected, though some respondents may have shaped their answers to sound as anglicized and educated as possible.⁵⁴ In 1920, the first year in which more than a few Latinas/os lived in the town, 64% of the men and 48%

⁵³ Perez, Arthur, interview, 2013. In Louisville, unlike Lafayette, people from Italian backgrounds came to be regarded as white, whereas Hispanics were brown and more heavily discriminated against (see Vol. I, Ch. 1A).

⁵⁴ Calculated from figures produced by Rebecca Chavez—and generously made available to the BCLHP—for her “Making Them Count.” See “U.S. Census Records for Longmont,” 1920, 1930, and 1940 for the raw data.

of the women for whom information was recorded said they were able to read and/or write; by 1930, the figures had risen to 72–73% for both sexes. In 1920, 69% of the Latinos and 51% of the Latinas spoke English, as did 80% of the men and 73% of the women in 1930. The U.S. Census for 1940 provides different information, reporting the highest grade of school that people had completed. An interesting feature of these figures is that they were quite similar for Latino men and women, rather than showing a strong educational advantage for males:

	Men	Women
No formal schooling at all	25%	28%
Grades 1–3	24%	19%
Grades 4–6	28%	30%
Grades 7–8	18%	16%
Grades 9–12	5%	7%
1–2 years of college	1%	--- ⁵⁵

Quantitative evidence about Latino children’s participation in Boulder County’s schools has been gathered from the annual Census reports required of every school in Colorado from sometime in the late nineteenth century through 1964.⁵⁶ The School Census books give each student’s name, birthdate, and grade, sometimes with additional information, including their ethnicity or nationality. The BCLHP’s volunteers analyzed a sample of School Census records for Longmont, using the middle year of each decade, 1905–1955, plus the final year of these books. For Lafayette and Boulder, whose surviving records are spottier, we have information for only three or four decades. Included in the databases are children with Latino surnames (or whose names were known to belong to local Latino families) and those whose nationality or ethnicity was said to be “Spanish” or “Mexican” in years when it was stated. This quantified information is unusual: the potential of School Census records for studying children from under-represented groups has not been generally recognized.⁵⁷

We may start with Longmont, where an early Latino commitment to education is clearly visible. In 1925, 52 children from 27 Latino families were enrolled in local schools.⁵⁸ Because the 1920 U.S. Census for

⁵⁵ Calculated from “U.S. Census Records for Longmont, 1940.”

⁵⁶ See Vol. I, Ch. 2D and Apps. 2.2, 2.3, and 2.4 for a description of these records and the information they provide about immigration.

⁵⁷ For exceptions, see Taylor, *Mexican Labor*, e.g., Tables 4-5, and Donato, *Mexicans and Hispanos*, e.g., Table 4.2.

⁵⁸ See Vol. I, App. 2.2. For Census figures, see Vol. I, App. 3.2.

Longmont includes only 31 households with any Latino residents, this suggests that the great majority of them were already sending at least some of their children to school. Then as later, more girls were in school than boys, presumably because within a population composed primarily of agricultural workers, the labor of young males was more valuable to the family than that of females. That sex distribution contrasts with the more even number of boys and girls within the student body as a whole.

Similar proportions are seen later. By 1935, 72 Latino families in Longmont had children in school, in comparison to the 79 households listed in the U.S. Census for 1930.⁵⁹ In 1945, just over 100 families had school children, as compared to 103 households in the U.S. Census for 1940. The proportion of Latino children in the Longmont schools was also rising. In 1935, the 162 Latinas/os constituted 6% of the total enrolment; between 1945 and 1964, the 228–550 children formed 10% of the total. This evidence indicates that right from the start, Longmont's Latino parents wanted some children to receive an education even when they could have been useful in the fields.

The figures look rather different for Boulder and Lafayette.⁶⁰ The Latino percentage of all children enrolled in Boulder was tiny: not more than 3% even in 1955. If only a small fraction of all the students were Latino, the children may well have felt conspicuous and marginalized among a large mass of Anglo children. In Lafayette, by contrast, the proportion of Latino children rose steadily from 1915 onward: 12% in 1925, 22% in 1935, and 31% in 1944. When one out of every three or four children was Latino, they went through school with lots of peers and the emotional support gained from being with students from similar backgrounds.

In turning to the grade levels of Latino school children, we see a gradual increase in the percentages that went beyond sixth grade.⁶¹ A rising level of education across time was common among many immigrant groups in the United States. In Boulder County, the fraction of Latino children in seventh and eighth grades increased first, followed by the fraction in senior high school. As early as 1935, 12%–13% of Latino children in Lafayette and Boulder public schools were in grades 9–12, with a much lower proportion in Longmont. By 1945, Longmont had risen to 12% of Latino students in senior high school, and Boulder had

⁵⁹ See Vol. I, Apps. 2.2 and 3.2, for this and below.

⁶⁰ See Vol. I, App. 2.3.

⁶¹ See App. 6.1.

reached the startling level of 53%. The latter figure suggests that the small number of Latino families in Boulder were determined that their children should take full advantage of the access to a good education offered by the university town. In Longmont in 1955 and 1964, the proportion of Latino students in grades 9–12 was 18%–20%, but they did not all complete high school and graduate.⁶²

The ages of Latino school children show several interesting features.⁶³ The increase over time in the percentage of those children who were older than 12 years suggests that more parents could now afford to allow their children to continue their educations, rather than having to start work as soon as possible. Quite surprising is the proportion of Latino children in school who were aged 16 years and older. Since the official minimum age for leaving school in Colorado was no more than 15 until 1971, these older children were not legally required to stay in school. Some of them were in senior high school, but others were in lower grades, suggesting that they had not been able to go to school when they were younger and were now trying to catch up. In 1935, 26%–30% of Longmont and Lafayette's Latino school children were aged 16 or more, as were 18% in Boulder. Ten years later, the proportion of these young people was around a third in both Longmont and Boulder. The fraction dropped a little in Longmont in the mid-1950s but reached 55% in Boulder, with virtually identical proportions for both boys and girls. Some of these older students may have intended to go on to some kind of post-secondary training. In Longmont, the fraction of Latino children aged 16 or more had dropped to under a quarter by 1964, suggesting either that more children were now both starting and finishing school at the normal ages or that older teens no longer saw education as useful.

It is even more unexpected to see how many Latinas/os were still enrolled in school at ages 19–21. Their presence suggests a serious dedication to getting an education on the part of young adults as well as sufficient economic resources to free them from full-time work. As early as the mid-1920s, nearly a third of the Latina students in Longmont were aged 19 or more, with figures between 8% and 20% common for male students then and in all three towns during the following decades.⁶⁴ But

⁶² Donato found only two Mexican/Hispano graduates of Longmont High School in 1935, three in 1950, two in 1955, and one in 1960, with none in the 1920s or 1940s (*Mexicans and Hispanos*, p. 84).

⁶³ See App. 6.2.

⁶⁴ See App. 6.2.

in Boulder in 1955, 42% of the male Latino students and 34% of the females were in this older age bracket. Many of them were probably preparing to apply to the University of Colorado. Even marriage did not necessarily stand in the way of continuing one's education. Two sets of Longmont records indicate whether female students were married. In 1925, 5 of the 8 older girls were married, as were 11 of 64 in 1964.

Access to formal education had the potential to undermine traditional family relationships. Although many Latino immigrants saw the education of their children as an opportunity to be seized as fully as possible, schooling often meant that young people gained certain kinds of knowledge and social experience beyond what their parents possessed. Children who went past a lower elementary education must have been able to read and write at least basic English and do simple mathematics. They had also learned how to survive socially within classrooms controlled by Anglo teachers and filled mainly with Anglo peers, settings that promulgated Anglo values. Many parents apparently felt they could still maintain their own position within the family while valuing the skills that enabled their children to operate more successfully in an Anglo-dominated world.

Some parents obviously wanted their daughters to be educated, not just their sons. Female education introduced the possibility of even greater dislocation within Latino families. Young women who had been to school were better positioned to function in the wider community than were those fathers and husbands who were comfortable only in Spanish and might be no more than minimally literate. By the 1940s, some women were taking paid employment that required skills gained at school. But here too, female education and the doors it opened seem to have been accepted in at least some cases as a contribution to the well-being of the family as a whole, rather than viewed as a threat to male dominance or the control of older relatives.

It should be noted, however, that although many first- and second-generation Latino families in Boulder County were committed to education as a way to help their children live effectively in the new setting, a belief in the value of schooling was not always equally strong in the third and fourth generations. Later in the twentieth century, although most Latino youngsters went to school until they were 16 or 17, as required by Colorado law from 1971 onward, they did not all graduate. In the 1970s, the dropout rate was higher among Latino

children than among Anglos in both of the county's school districts.⁶⁵ For some young Latinas/os, continuing in school was no longer viewed as the pathway to a better future.

The information presented here flies in the face of the assumption that Latino immigrants did not care about education. A determination to get children educated—seen among parents and young people themselves—seems especially admirable in light of the discrimination experienced by many Latino children in school. As we shall see, the young interns who worked with the BCLHP in 2013 shared the assumption that a good education was a necessary prerequisite to the adult lives they hoped to lead. The primary difference between them and earlier arrivals was that access to higher education was now available even to first-generation immigrants, whereas previously that level was rarely attained before the third generation.

⁶⁵ See Vol. I, Ch. 7A. In 2012, only 67% of Latino students in the St. Vrain Valley School District and 78% in the Boulder Valley School District graduated from high school within four years; for Anglo students, the comparable figures were 86% and 93% (*Boulder County TRENDS 2013*, p. 23).

Sources

Explanations

Most of the items listed below are hyperlinked to their original online sources. They can be viewed by clicking on the underlined blue text at the end of each entry.

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BCLHP references.¹ These provide the ID number for items accessible on the Boulder County Latino History website, bocolatinohistory.colorado.edu. It contains hundreds of other sources, which can be searched in various ways.

If a given item contains multiple pages on the website, only the initial ID number is shown here; the following pages are linked to that one.

Carnegie Library. Carnegie Branch Library for Local History, Boulder Public Library

LM. Longmont Museum

LPL. Lafayette Public Library

MROHP. Maria Rogers Oral History Program, Carnegie Branch Library for Local History, Boulder Public Library

Information cited as from a conversation with Marjorie McIntosh on a stated date has been confirmed in writing and approved for use in this book by the authors of those statements.

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¹ For entries with a BCLHP reference:

- Items labelled as FP are family photographs loaned by community members and digitized by the BCLHP. The photographers are unknown unless specified.
- Items labelled as LHS are photos loaned to the Longmont Hispanic Study in 1987-8 by a relative or descendent of the people shown. They were converted into slides by Oli Olivas Duncan for use in public presentations associated with the 1988 publication of *We, Too, Came to Stay: A History of the Longmont Hispanic Community*, which she edited. In 2014, the BCLHP was given permission to make digital copies of the slides, many of which showed unidentified people. The dates, locations, and photographers of these photos are unknown unless specified.

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