

Helping and Hurting the Poor

Mexican Americans in the Way of Fort Worth's First Public Housing

By

Peter Martinez
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In 1930s America, urban areas faced a number of challenges as a result of the Great Depression and the resulting migration to the American city. One challenge that cities like Fort Worth, Texas faced was how to provide adequate housing for those with lower incomes. When people could not find safe and clean housing that they could afford, they often settled in run-down slum houses which frequently did not have electricity, plumbing, running water, and/or sufficient space for the number of residents living in the dwelling. Consequently the rise of dilapidated housing led to the rise of slum areas, which often presented deplorable living conditions. These conditions, in turn, contributed to poor health and high crime. In order to combat slum areas and enhance living conditions, the United States federal government along with the help of local municipalities began taking land in order to improve upon existing living conditions in urban areas.

So what happened to the people who formerly lived on the land that the government procured? As a result of Fort Worth's initial public housing venture, scores of low-income, Mexican residents lost their homes for the sake of building quality living quarters for white people.¹ In its attempt to clear a slum area close to downtown Fort Worth and provide affordable public housing for whites, the Fort Worth Housing Authority wiped out a previously existing Mexican community while arguing that this decision was based on what was best for Fort Worth's greater needs. This study investigates the circumstances surrounding the elimination of this Mexican-American neighborhood.

In January of 1938, the Fort Worth City Council passed a resolution allowing for the creation of the Fort Worth Housing Authority (FWHA). The FWHA Board of Commissioners met weekly beginning early in 1938 in order to discuss and decide on public housing matters. The Board ultimately decided who would be contracted to construct the projects, what land would be used for public housing, and how much the FWHA would offer previous land owners for their property among many other responsibilities. Bruno C. Reich, owner of Reich's Bakery, was the first Chairman of the FWHA and John W. Oglesby was the first Acting Executive Director. Oglesby was soon replaced by Herman J. Aston and by August of 1938, Homer A. Hunter took the position of Executive Director.² According to the *Fort Worth City Directory*, Oglesby was a Secretary in the Carpenters Union Local Number 1822 and Hunter was listed as a Secretary – Treasurer and Manager of Texas Air Conditioning Corporation. One might imagine that both the Carpenters Union and an air conditioning corporation could have benefited greatly from the construction of a large number of updated housing units using government funding. This study does not explore how Oglesby or Hunter might have personally benefitted, however neither of these individual's organizations would have had a natural inclination to be particularly interested in Fort Worth's poverty-stricken Mexican residents. Many of these Mexican could not afford air conditioning and those who worked in carpentry most likely did not belong to a union.³ In addition to Reich, Oglesby, and Hunter, other FWHA members included Mabel G. Bennett, an insurance representative for Pacific Mutual Life Insurance Company, Frank B. Edelbrock who

worked for a firm called DuBose, Rutledge, & Miller, and a physician named Dr. Charles H. McCollum, Jr.

In establishing the Housing Authority, Fort Worth leaders hoped to provide “safe and sanitary dwelling accommodations” for low income families.⁴ In order to accomplish their goals, the FWHA first had to decide on the tracts of land they wanted to obtain so that they could construct the proposed public housing. Since one of the purposes of the United States Housing Authority (along with local authorities) was to clear slums and eliminate unsafe and unsanitary housing, the FWHA surveyed various tracts of land where substandard slum housing existed. In an effort to measure “substandard” conditions, the FWHA created a score sheet that could be used to measure a home’s adequacy. Whether or not a home had running cold water, bathing facilities, electricity, and/or indoor plumbing were just a few considerations taken when exploring a structure’s suitability. Moreover, the size of the structure, along with whether or not the home was overcrowded also factored into how poor the housing was deemed.

As a result of the FWHA’s research, two tracts of land, both containing slum neighborhoods, were selected on which to construct public housing. One area was to be used for the Butler Place project which was intended to house low income blacks. The other plot of land was located in the near west side of Fort Worth’s downtown area. This latter strip of land was designated for the white housing project which would eventually be called the Ripley Arnold project. According to the FWHA, “At the time of the purchase of the sites, 819 persons comprising 164 families were living on the white project site on

which was situated 263 dwelling units in 168 buildings.”⁵ Out of the 819 persons and 164 families residing in this area, only seventeen households were that of the property’s owner, leaving 246 rental or vacant units. In other words, if and when the FWHA chose to obtain this area, the Housing Authority would not have to worry about displacing very many property owners, but instead they would simply be displacing tenants who had a minimal financial investment in their homes. On the other hand, according to the FWHA, several units were greatly overcrowded with one small unit housing twenty-four residents.⁶ Although the FWHA did not have to worry about removing many owners from their homes, they did have to face the fact that they were removing large numbers of residents who may not have been able to find housing elsewhere very easily. However, the FWHA had ample reason to select this particular area for developing the first white housing project.

According to appraisal reports, the land selected for Ripley Arnold makes sense considering Fort Worth’s aforementioned goals. When researching the reports on file in the FWHA archives, one finds that nearly thirty-nine percent of the area’s dwellings had no electricity and over forty-six percent did not have indoor plumbing. These homes were often small and overcrowded, and they did not provide adequate facilities to foster good health and safe community. If the main purpose of public housing was to remove substandard housing and slum areas, then the land chosen for Ripley Arnold makes sense. Moreover, the FWHA annual report from 1938-1939 also cites police records which match higher crime rates in areas like the area that would be used for Ripley Arnold, again giving

credence to the decision to use what would become Ripley Arnold land for the development and improvement of an unwanted slum area, but there were other reasons for choosing Ripley Arnold's location.⁷

During the early years of public housing, cities often used eminent domain to get rid of slum areas that were near the heart of the city. In 1949 George B. Nesbitt, an attorney who spent much of his career defending the less fortunate, wrote that cities often overtook areas that were "near lakes or rivers, (had) good elevations, etc."⁸ Nesbitt claimed that cities took lands that "are close upon or in the central business districts" and that were "too run-down for corrective measures short of clearance."⁹ Prior to settling on the land that would eventually be used for Ripley Arnold, several plots of land were offered to the FWHA but none of them had the central location that the Ripley Arnold land had. In May of 1938, local land owners approached the FWHA offering properties on which the housing authority could construct the proposed public housing. Dan Dupre "proposed to sell the Authority all or any part of a 98-acre site south of Berry Street and east of Pecan Street, outside the city limits."¹⁰ Furthermore, Mrs. Gertrude Martin offered a 25-acre parcel of land a little further south near what is now the intersection of Seminary Drive and Interstate 35-W, while Mrs. S.A Prestridge "offered a site, situated between Camp Bowie Boulevard and Vickery Boulevard, which is laid in lots of 50 x 120 ft."¹¹ Had the FWHA accepted any of these tendered sites, the Authority would not have had to use eminent domain to seize land, yet none of these had the desired central location of which Nesbitt refers. Moreover, at this point it is unknown if slum housing

existed in the alternate sites. Since the United States Housing Authority clearly wanted to remove slum housing areas, and since low class workers often worked in the city and did not have the means to travel long distances, Ripley Arnold's land would have been more likely to have had slum housing than the outlying areas where concentrations of lower class residents would not have been as dense. Nesbitt's article is generally about slum clearance during the 1940s, but specifically he writes about the relocation of black populations as a result of slum clearance. In the case of the Ripley Arnold project, the slum clearance forced many persons of Mexican descent from their homes at a time when Fort Worth did not have a high Mexican population.

Understandably, much has been written about the displacement of blacks through the years for government use of land, but not much has been written about the removal of Mexicans. Up until the past few decades, highly concentrated Mexican areas tended to be located in the southwestern portion of the United States, with a few exceptions like Chicago and parts of Colorado, so there may not have been many cases where high numbers of Mexican families had to be displaced for eminent domain claims. During the first part of the twentieth century, most of the United States' highly populated cities tended to be in the northern and eastern portions of the country. According to 1940 census figures, Los Angeles was the only city out of the top eleven most populated cities in the United States south or west of St. Louis, Missouri, so many of the country's areas in need of public housing would probably not have had high Mexican populations.¹²

Furthermore, Mexicans have historically been considered “white” in United States census data, therefore it is not always easy to look at recorded information and distinguish when Mexicans are affected by change. If one was to look at government records to see what happened to Mexican populations, the records may only show what happened to blacks and whites with Mexicans generally being listed among the white populations. The United States Census Bureau has always distinguished blacks from whites so it is relatively easy to look at census figures and find out if African-Americans were affected by policy and change. Because census figures will not provide much assistance in this study, the utilization of a variety of other sources will be imperative in order to be successful in determining approximately how many Mexicans were affected by the FWHA’s use of eminent domain for the Ripley Arnold housing project.

Using *Fort Worth City Directory*¹³ information along with records from the FWHA archives, it is easy to see that Ripley Arnold land had a high number of Mexican inhabitants. According to the 1937/1938 *City Directory*, recorded information shows that at least 226 Mexicans occupied fifty to sixty dwellings. Furthermore, research to this point has only revealed information for 167 units, and thirty-six of these units were either vacant or the resident was unknown or undiscovered.¹⁴ Six of the thirty-six units were vacant lots with no existing dwelling units on the premises at the time. Considering that the FWHA reported that there were 263 dwelling units on Ripley Arnold land and this research has yet to reveal over 100 dwellings, it is likely that there were far more than 226 Mexicans in this area, which was at the time referred to as “Little Mexico.”¹⁵ In fact,

articles from 1938 and 1940¹⁶ both state that there were ninety Mexican families in Fort Worth's Little Mexico district. If there were ninety Mexican families on Ripley Arnold property then it is likely that there would have been well over 300 Mexicans in this area, which would translate to at least forty percent of the neighborhood's population being Mexican. Bearing in mind that Fort Worth probably had approximately 3000 to 4000 Mexicans out of a total population of just under 180,000 residents (about 2%), the number of Mexicans in Little Mexico in comparison to the rest of the city was considerable.¹⁷ With these facts and figures in mind, one must question how much consideration was given to the fact that so many Mexicans resided in what would become Ripley Arnold's land when the FWHA chose to displace Little Mexico's residents in 1939.

Seeing that Little Mexico was situated so closely to many of Fort Worth's municipal buildings and major business districts, native populations and local leaders would have been very well aware of the Mexican populations that were present in Little Mexico. Social and economic data were researched and studied for various areas when the FWHA deliberated on what lands would be best suited for Fort Worth's first white housing project. Additionally, since persons of Mexican descent were legally considered "white," Ripley Arnold conceivably could have been available to the existing Mexican populations if the criterion was based on race alone. Unfortunately for those residing in Little Mexico where the average Mexican household's income was about \$37.50 per month (\$450 per year) and their rent was often below \$9 per month, the initial rent at Ripley Arnold was between \$17.25 and \$18.50 per month.¹⁸ Moreover, rents went up by

fifteen to twenty percent after the first year due to the fact that the average household income at Ripley Arnold grew considerably after the first year. According to FWHA records, the average household income rose from \$874 per year in 1941 to \$1278 in 1942, almost three times higher than what Mexicans made in Little Mexico just a couple of years earlier, although Mexicans probably would have had higher incomes due to defense industry spending by this time as well.¹⁹ Census figures also show that Ripley Arnold's incomes were comparable to average people in the United States at that time. The median annual wage or salary for a male in a southern urban area was \$868 in 1939. The median income for a female was \$443 but a female was less than half as likely as a man to work and married women only made up about twenty-four percent of the female workforce in Texas in 1939 so it is likely that many of Ripley Arnold's households, at least prior to World War II, were single-income families.²⁰ Conversely, many of Little Mexico's households had multiple wage-earners combining to bring in their miniscule income since several dwellings included multiple families.

In comparison to Texas' median rent in 1940, Ripley Arnold's fees do not seem all that low. According to United States Census information, the Texas' median rent in 1940 was about \$17 per month, which was close to what Fort Worth's white residents had to pay when they moved into Ripley Arnold.²¹ Of course, Ripley Arnold's fees included utilities so the monthly cost may have still been lower than the median rent in Texas, but not appreciably if one considers that one of the purposes set forth for public housing was to provide adequate housing for *low income* families. The FWHA acknowledged that

Ripley Arnold was not designed to help the “very lowest income families” and in fact the Housing Authority declared in 1939, “The projects now under construction will provide dwellings for only about 15 per cent of the white (families)... who now live in unsafe and insanitary dwellings, and whose earnings make them eligible as tenants.”²² This report also states, “Of the families who were moved from the sites 37 per cent will be eligible as tenants in the new projects, 35 per cent do not earn enough money to be eligible,”²³ leaving approximately 28 per cent who may not have been eligible due to other restrictions which will be addressed later in this study. If rental fees were close to the median state rental fee, then the suggestion that Little Mexico’s residents could moved into Ripley Arnold seems to be a bit of a stretch. One of the main reasons people lived in such deplorable conditions was because they could not afford the price of the average home. Arguments can be made that the \$18 per month rate was reasonable since the monthly charge included utilities, but many who lived in Little Mexico did not have to pay for utilities either since they may not have had electricity or indoor plumbing. Although finances were an obstacle that could have prevented Little Mexico’s residents from moving into Ripley Arnold, money was not the only issue that kept prospective Mexican tenants out.

In addition to financial constraints, other rules applied that could have eliminated Mexican families from applying for residence at Ripley Arnold. First, a family who wanted to live at Ripley Arnold could have no more than 2 adults residing in the dwelling. Furthermore, the FWHA defined an adult as a person who was sixteen years of age or

older, therefore, if a sixteen year-old child in the household worked in order to contribute toward the family's living expenses, that particular household would not have been eligible for residency in Ripley Arnold. This rule directly affected several of Little Mexico's households since out of the fifty-two dwellings in which someone with a Mexican surname was found in the 1937/1938 *City Directory*, at least eleven of those dwellings housed more than 2 adults. Multiple or extended families often lived together in one dwelling in Little Mexico. The City Directory does not always list all parties residing at a particular location either so it is possible that there were many more dwellings with more than two adults in the household.

The FWHA not only placed a limit on the number of adults in the household, but they also capped the overall number of occupants per unit at Ripley Arnold. The FWHA allowed a maximum of seven individuals in a single unit, and the maximum number was only allowed in the largest and most expensive unit. Again, many of these Mexican dwellings had multiple incomes and often times households consisted of multiple nuclear families. Each of these households would not have been allowed to live their same condition in Ripley Arnold. Out of the aforementioned fifty-plus Little Mexico dwellings, at least eleven dwellings contained eight or more residents and research reveals at least another five dwellings with six residents or more. Six of the eleven households that had eight or more residents did not list more than two adults in *City Directory* information so at least seventeen Mexican households would not have been able to move into Ripley Arnold under their previous living conditions.

Furthermore, Ripley Arnold was intended to house families, so unmarried individuals with no children were also prohibited from taking residence at Ripley Arnold. The *City Directory* does not always provide totally accurate or all-encompassing household information, but six of the fifty-plus Mexican dwellings found in Little Mexico list only one person with no spouse and no children. If this information is accurate then at minimum twenty-three Mexican households and thirty families in Little Mexico to this point would not have been able to directly transition to Ripley Arnold (see Table 1 in Appendix).

Another rule that could have eliminated Mexicans from living at Ripley Arnold was that families had to live in Fort Worth for at least the previous thirty-six months prior to the date of application. Most of Little Mexico's homes were rentals which lend themselves to a more temporary home than if one were to own their residence, but during the Great Depression, in an area where many, if not most, of the residents are blue-collar laborers, there was a good chance that some of the residents may not have lived in the City of Fort Worth for the preceding thirty-six months. However, one article written in 1938 indicates that many Mexicans in Little Mexico had been long-time residents in that area.²⁴ The article references various residents such as Maria Gomez, Tony Zapata, and Santos Morales who each lived in the area for several years, or several decades in some cases. Furthermore, Reverend G.A. Walls ran the Mexican Presbyterian Mission in Little Mexico which in itself indicated that the Mexican population in Little Mexico may have been a fairly permanent establishment since the Presbyterian Church

probably would not have invested thousands of dollars in a mission that would only assist transient and revolving populations. The Mission provided religious services, a school, and an arts center as well as raised money to send Mexican children in Little Mexico to college.²⁵ While Mr. Walls focused on helping Mexicans, rules developed for Ripley Arnold did not.

Given that the United States Housing Authority intended on helping low income Americans and renewing American cities, non-citizens were left out of the picture. The FWHA mandated that the head of household had to be a United States citizen. Mexican immigration was heavy during and following the Mexican Revolution during the 1910s and 1920s and not all Mexicans came to the United States legally, so it would have been quite possible that some of Little Mexico's Mexican residents may not have been naturalized. Though as the previous paragraph mentions, many Mexicans in this area lived in Little Mexico for a long time so there may not have been an abundance of aliens, but the citizenship rule would have been more likely to affect a person of Mexican descent than an Anglo. Crossing into the United States from south of the border, would have been much easier than crossing an ocean illegally. Moreover, the United States passed various immigration restrictions during the 1920s which affected Eastern Hemisphere immigration greater than that of Western Hemisphere immigration.

When considering the restrictions and cost of Ripley Arnold living, one must ask what kind of consideration, if any, was given to the existing Little Mexico population? The FWHA first met early in 1938 in order to plan and develop Fort Worth's first public

housing projects. As early as February 7, 1938, members of the FWHA were already addressing the “Mexican situation” and the “Mexican district” with the Reverend G.A Walls, one of Little Mexico’s established community leaders.²⁶ According to the minutes, Mr. Walls was invited to speak again but research was unable to uncover any other discussion regarding the “Mexican issue” until October 17, 1938.

In October of 1938, FWHA Board members expressed “some interest in an additional white project and a Mexican project”²⁷ with hopes that additional ear-markings might be made available if housing projects are successful across the country. Two weeks later Dr. A. L. Porterfield, a sociology professor at Texas Christian University, “presented to the Board a map showing the number of Mexican families to be moved from the White Project and commented on the limited sections of the city in which they can locate.”²⁸ These meetings occurred nearly two years prior to the Ripley Arnold’s completion showing that the FWHA was aware that they would be displacing a disproportionate number of Mexicans. Shortly thereafter Dr. Porterfield and Mr. Walls again attended a regular meeting of the FWHA Board of Commissioners where they “presented figures and facts regarding the Mexican families... located in the site proposed for the White Project.”²⁹ In response to the presentation, the record reads, “Mr. Walls and Dr. Porterfield were assured by the Board that there would be no discrimination against Mexican families and that Latin Americans would not be eliminated from consideration as tenants.” This statement may have been the first time the terminology “Latin Americans” was used in meeting minutes and the idea of non-discrimination against Mexicans seems

to be separate from the declaration that “Latin Americans would not be eliminated from consideration as tenants.” The differentiation in wording could indicate that the Board was aware that existing low income Mexican populations on Ripley Arnold land would not be able or eligible to live in public housing that was intended to provide a safe and sanitary environment for low income families. Latin Americans may have been welcome in Ripley Arnold but Little Mexico’s population may not have been so fortunate.

Consequently, Mr. Wall responded to the dire situation in a newspaper article when he was quoted as saying, “If the 90 families must get out, the chances are that we will be forced to set up another quarter which will be a worse slum than the one the Federal Housing Authority is trying to eliminate.”³⁰ Homer A. Hunter, FWHA Executive Director, responded to the plea for Mexican assistance by saying, “We are trying to handle the housing program in a manner to serve the greatest need. There are 3000 whites and 4500 colored families in Fort Worth who live in sub-standard houses, while there are only 400 Mexican families.”³¹ Hunter’s statement indicates that helping Mexicans was an afterthought since they made up such a small portion of the population. Unfortunately, Hunter’s statements seem to disregard the fact that the area that was to be used for white public housing was heavily Mexican. Moreover, Hunter’s assertion that housing was needed for whites and blacks but that Mexican’s needs should be put on the back-burner indicates that people of Mexican descent were not necessarily considered “white,” even though legally Mexicans were considered white.

Although FWHA Board meeting minutes and Mr. Hunter's comments do not appear promising towards the prospects of admitting Mexican families into Ripley Arnold, the FWHA insisted all along that displaced families were welcome in the new projects. An article printed about four months prior to Ripley Arnold's opening states, "Preference will be given to families who were moved from the two project sites before construction began."³² Given all of the sociological and economic conditions that existed prior to Little Mexico's clearance, it would be difficult to imagine that many Mexicans who lived in Little Mexico would have been able to live in Ripley Arnold. Of the fifty-plus Mexican family units and dwellings, this study has already deduced that at least thirty households would not have been eligible for public housing if they maintained their existing structure, leaving less than thirty households to research. Logically there would be some reason for the pre-existing living arrangements, whether the reason was to care for friends or family-members, or perhaps multiple family member or individuals lived together for financial reasons. Thus, it may not have been feasible for residents to alter their circumstances, especially if housing was going to be more expensive, as opposed to less expensive, than when multiple families lived together. Furthermore, since the average rent in Little Mexico was under \$9 per month, one might also construe that homes that had neither electricity nor plumbing would most likely have been cheaper than units that had both. If this is true, then there would have been at most eleven households that *might* have been able to move into Ripley Arnold when it opened in 1940. Out of these eleven households, two of these households had five members and one had six members

so all three of these families would have had to pay at least \$18 per month for rent at their new home since they would not have been eligible to live in the least expensive units. In order to evaluate whether or not these conclusions are accurate this research will again turn to the *Fort Worth City Directory*.

In order to examine Little Mexico's existing populations prior to the FWHA's decision to use their land, this research utilized information gathered from the 1937/1938 *Fort Worth City Directory* since the FWHA began searching for prospective lands early in 1938. Ripley Arnold opened at the end of September in 1940 with 252 units, however the FWHA archive does not include a list of Ripley Arnold's first residents, so again City Directory information was employed to examine who Ripley Arnold's first residents included. The white project was bordered by North Henderson Street to the west, Valley Street and Franklin Street to the north, North Taylor Street to the east and West Belknap Street to the south. The street addresses found that matched Ripley Arnold's property were found on North Henderson, West Belknap, North Cherry, West Bluff Street, and West Peach Street. The 1942 City Directory was the first edition that provided substantial information concerning Ripley Arnold residents and their corresponding addresses. Using addresses that match the geographical description provided by the FWHA archives, the 1942 Directory provides data for 231 corresponding Ripley Arnold addresses while the 1943 Directory discloses another 12 addresses, leaving only 9 units for which no information was found. Out of the 243 addresses found, eight were vacant, leaving 235

surnames listed in the *City Directory*, but how many of those surnames were Spanish and how many of those residents previously lived in Little Mexico?

According to *City Directory* information, Mrs. Willie W. Calderón at 627 West Bluff Street was the only person with a Spanish surname who resided at Ripley Arnold. The directory describes Mrs. Calderón as a widow and mother to one child. We also know that Mrs. Calderón was a mail clerk in 1942. Unfortunately, not a single Mexican person who lived in Little Mexico can be found at Ripley Arnold using the information gathered for the 231 units in the 1942 *City Directory* or 12 units in the 1943 directory. Aforementioned inferences appear to be correct in that it was highly unlikely that many, if any, Mexicans from Little Mexico would move into Ripley Arnold. The fact that there was only one Mexican surname out of 235 names does create a bit of a conundrum though. In 1938 Homer Hunter claimed that there were 3000 whites and 400 Mexicans living in substandard housing. If Mexicans were considered white and were welcome to live in white public housing, which was stated all along through the Authority and newspaper clippings, then one might assume that the percentage of Mexicans at Ripley Arnold would have been more proportionate to Hunter's statistical figures. In this case, Mexicans living in substandard housing made up about 11.8% of all whites in substandard housing, so out of the 235 listed surnames, there should have been around twenty-seven or twenty-eight Mexican surnames, not just one.

Instead of transitioning into Ripley Arnold's newly constructed homes, Mexican Americans were forced to find new housing which was not necessarily an easy task

considering the aforementioned familial and financial constraints. At least eight of Little Mexico's Mexican families lived in different homes in 1940 and 1941. Furthermore, many families could not be located in the *City Directory* in 1940 but were located in 1941 and vice-versa. Three families could not be located in either 1940 or 1941, but were located in 1942. Out of the fifty-nine family units, thirteen could not be located in any of the directories from 1940 to 1942. Only twenty-four families - or just over forty percent of those families of which information is available - lived in the same addresses in 1940 and 1941. Previous articles state that Little Mexico residents had lived in the same place for years so this instability and uncertainty must have been difficult to overcome, especially if the families were extremely poor since affordable housing may have been hard to find.

When Mexicans were forced from their homes, many of them did not go far. At least thirty-three families stayed in the downtown area with many of them moving within four or five blocks, if not closer, of Ripley Arnold. Many of these families did not have much of a choice on where live for a few reasons. One obvious reason, which has already been stated, is that the household had to be able to afford their new home. Secondly, most of these families probably could not afford an automobile which meant these workers would need to live close to wherever they worked. In researching the *City Directory*, jobs could be found for twenty-nine households.³³ Nine of these households are listed as being employed in either the restaurant and/or hotel industries. The restaurants were often in hotels and the main hotels were the Blackstone Hotel and Hotel Texas, both of which were located on Main Street in downtown Fort Worth. Another nine

households are listed as “laborers.” In order to be a successful laborer with no listed permanent place of employment, the laborer would have had to be close to a busy area where people who could afford to pay for labor might pass by. This would then require the laborer to remain close to a bustling area like the downtown area in order to make a living.

After restaurant/hotel employment and laborer, the next most popular method of employment was tailor/seamstress with three households. Six of the remaining eight households are mostly more specific types of laborers and cooks. These titles include blacksmith, wood worker, mechanic, and cement worker as laborers and confectioner and tamale vendor as cooks. The last two employment types were clerk and musician.

Most Mexicans who did not stay in the downtown area moved to Fort Worth’s North Side. One household (Eualio and Eva Galván) initially resided in Little Mexico in the rear portion of 211 and 213 North Burnett, moved to the North Side area in 1940 and moved back to downtown in 1941. At least eight families settled in the North Side, but there may have been many others. Thirteen households could not be located between 1940 and 1942, and as was mentioned much earlier, there could have been dozens of families left out of the *City Directory* in 1938. This supposition is supported by the fact that the FWHA Appraisal Reports list numerous occupied dwellings for which the *City Directory* was not able to provide corresponding residents or addresses. Furthermore, there are a number of parcels that do not appear to be on records in the archive. The FWHA “Appraisal Reports” and records of “Warranty Deeds and Insurance Titles” show

that there may have been up to or more than ninety-one parcels of land purchased by the FWHA, but records exist for only about two-thirds of those parcels. Those missing parcels could represent many others affected by Ripley Arnold.

Most of the displaced Mexicans in Little Mexico, that research has been able to track down, stayed in the downtown area, but many did move to the North Side area which even today has a high Mexican population. Of course the North Side area of Fort Worth is only about two miles from the northwestern downtown section where Little Mexico residents previously resided, so even this move was not a geographically drastic one. Although only eight families have been tracked to the North Side with any degree of certainty, evidence suggests that there may have been appreciably more. An article written in 1939 reports that the Fostepco Heights Civic League wanted the FWHA to construct public housing for Mexicans in the North Side area of Fort Worth. The article reads, "The housing proposal is a result of efforts to settle in the Fostepco Heights area the Mexican families forced to move from the site of the white housing project northwest of the Criminal Courts Building."³⁴ It is doubtful that eight families moving to an area would cause organized groups of people to ask for public housing so most likely either several families who either could not be located after they were displaced, or more probable, many families who were unaccounted for prior to Ripley Arnold's construction may have moved to North Side in 1939 after residents were cleared to make way for construction. Those affected by the public housing construction wanted public housing's benefits.

In conclusion, the FWHA initially set out to clear slum areas and build better housing for low income whites and blacks. Unfortunately, the needs of Fort Worth's Mexican communities were not only ignored, but they were worsened by the development of the Ripley Arnold housing project. Hundreds of low-income Mexican-Americans were uprooted from their homes and forced to find new housing with no guarantee that their new quarters would be any better or cheaper than their old slum homes. The local Authority claimed that Little Mexico's previous dwellers would be welcome to apply for residence at the newly constructed project, but with all of the data presented by appraisals and community leaders, the Authority had to know that it was unlikely that many, if any, of Little Mexico's Mexican residents would have had the ability or inclination to move into Ripley Arnold. Fort Worth's first attempt at public housing may have been effective at clearing dilapidated structures in downtown Fort Worth, but along with the buildings, Fort Worth destroyed a Mexican-American community.

¹ For the purposes of this essay, the term "Mexican" will be used to account for people of Mexican descent regardless of whether or not they are American citizens.

² R.L. Polk & Co. *Fort Worth, (Tarrant County, Texas) City Directory*. Dallas: R.L. Polk & Co, 1900s, 1938/1939.

³ *City Directory* information often lists jobs and employers and no Mexican workers were listed as skilled carpenters. Most who may have worked in carpentry were simply listed as laborers.

⁴ Fort Worth Housing Authority. *Report on the Housing Authority of the City of Fort Worth, Texas: 1938-1939*. (Fort Worth: Fort Worth Housing Authority, 1939), 6.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 16

⁶ *Ibid.*, 16

⁷ *Ibid.*, 13

⁸ Karen Rivedal, "George B. Nesbitt," *Chicago Tribune*, March 23, 2002.

<https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-2002-03-23-0203230094-story.html>.

Accessed July 16, 2020.

⁹ George B. Nesbitt. "Relocating Negroes from Urban Slum Clearance Sites." *Land Economics* Vol. 25, No. 3 (Aug., 1949): 27.

¹⁰Information gathered from FWHA Board of Commissioners Meeting Minutes from May 16, 1938.

¹¹Ibid.

¹² United States Bureau of the Census. "Population of the 100 Largest Urban Places: 1940." <http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0027/tab17.txt> (Accessed November 17, 2008).

¹³ R.L. Polk & Co. *Fort Worth, (Tarrant County, Texas) City Directory*. Dallas: R.L. Polk & Co, 1900s, 1937/1938.

¹⁴ This information is based upon findings from a combination of the FWHA Appraisal Reports, 1938-1940 found in the Fort Worth Housing Authority Archive and from *City Directory* data. Further research that led to the publication of Peter Martínez, "Colonia Mexicana: Mexicans Subject to Modern Empire in Fort Worth, Texas," *The Journal of South Texas*, Volume 33 No 1, Spring, 2019.

¹⁵ Unknown Author. "'Where Do We Go?' Little Mexico Asks as Housing Project Plans Ouster Move," This article is from a newspaper clipping dated November 18, 1938. The clipping can be found under "Newspapers and Scrapbooks, 1939-1980" in the FWHA archive.

¹⁶ The 1938 article is the previously mentioned "Where Do We Go..." article and the second article is Edith Alderman Guedry. "Good Neighbor Policy with Latin-America Should Begin With Those at Our Door" *Fort Worth Press*, July 22, 1940.

¹⁷ United States Bureau of the Census. "Population of the 100 Largest Urban Places: 1940." <http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0027/tab17.txt> (Accessed November 17, 2008); United States Bureau of the Census. "Historical Census Statistics on the Foreign-born Population of the United States: 1850-1990." <http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0029/twps0029.html>. (Accessed November 17, 2008). "In the 1930 census only, Mexican was defined as a race." According to United States Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930. Population*. Vol. II, Fort Worth had a "Mexican" population of 3955. The 1930 Census distinguishes between "Mexicans" and "Persons Born in Mexico." Further information regarding the number of Mexicans in Fort Worth is referenced in a newspaper article dated April 26, 1939 entitled "Urges Aid for Latin-Americans in Fort Worth." This article states that the "Spanish speaking residents number only 3000 of the city's 185,000." This article was obtained from a newspaper clipping in the FWHA archive and it does not reference what newspaper published the article.

¹⁸ Two articles from 1940 reference the monthly income and rent paid by Mexicans in Little Mexico. The previously referenced "Good Neighbor Policy..." article from July 22, 1940 and an article entitled "New Project Ousts Families" *Star-Telegram* from August 8, 1940. The latter article's author is unnamed and this article can also be found in the FWHA archive.

¹⁹ Fort Worth Housing Authority. "A Report and Analysis of the Operations of the Low-Rent Slum Clearance Projects in Fort Worth, Texas," (Fort Worth: Fort Worth Housing Authority, April 15, 1944), 6.

²⁰ United States Bureau of the Census. "Marital Status of Employed Females." <http://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/33973538v3p5ch05.pdf>.

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http://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/41236810p1_ch7.pdf. (Accessed December 8, 2008)

²¹ United States Bureau of the Census. "Historical Census of Housing Tables: Gross Rents." <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/housing/census/historic/grossrents.html> (Accessed November 17, 2008)

²² Fort Worth Housing Authority. *Report on the Housing Authority of the City of Fort Worth, Texas: 1938-1939*. (Fort Worth: Fort Worth Housing Authority, 1939), 27.

²³ *ibid.*, 16.

²⁴ "Unknown Author." "Where Do We Go? Little Mexico Asks as Housing Project Plans Ouster Move." Unknown newspaper but again this article can be located in the FWHA Archive.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Information obtained from Board of Commissioners Meeting Minutes from February 7, 1938.

²⁷ Meeting Minutes from October 17, 1938.

²⁸ Meeting Minutes from October 31, 1938.

²⁹ Meeting Minutes from November 7, 1938.

³⁰ "Where do we go..."

³¹ This statement was obtained using newspaper clippings from the FWHA Archive. The article entitled "Officials Will Assist Mexicans" lists no author and does not indicate what newspaper published the article.

³² This quotation is from a newspaper clipping in the FWHA Archive and was published by *Fort Worth Press* in Fort Worth Texas in May on May 14, 1940. The clipping does not list an author or a title.

³³ This portion of research combined information from each directory from the 1937/1938 volume to 1942 to get the most accurate information since not all families can be found each year.

³⁴ This brief article entitled "Mexican Housing Projects Urged" dated May, 1939 (no specific date can be deciphered) does not include the publishing newspaper's name or the author's name.

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