

Creating a Barrio in Iowa City, 1916–1936: Mexican Section Laborers and the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad Company

Nathaniel Otjen
University of Oregon

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Creating a Barrio in Iowa City, 1916–1936: Mexican Section Laborers and the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad Company

NATHANIEL OTJEN

FROM 1907 to 1932, the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad Company published a monthly magazine for railroad employees and their families. One of the most popular sections in the *Rock Island Magazine* was written by a shop worker in Silvis, Illinois. The column, “Shop Pomes,” featured lyrics about the railroad that were inspired by the Rock Island’s shops and yards located in Silvis. In January 1924 the magazine printed a folk

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ballad titled “*No Sebuyga*” that contemplated a significant labor change occurring within the company. Reminiscent of the Mexican *corridos* popular at the turn of the century, “*No Sebuyga*” describes the work ethic of early Mexican railroaders who were recruited by the Rock Island to work in the Midwest.

Manuel and Tony are Mexican men,
 Short and swarthy and shrewd are they:
 Never so happy they seem as when
 They’re pushing their truck through the shop all day –
 And often, quite often, we hear them say –
 With many a gesture and frown and yawn –
 When another truck blocks the road they’re on,
 “No sebuyga! Keep moving!”

.....

“No sebuyga!” Let’s do our part
 And make the roads what they ought to be:
 Tackle our jobs with an honest heart,
 And give full service ungrudgingly.¹

This ballad emphasizes the industriousness of Mexican railroad laborers; their worth and value are defined by their hard work, docility, and loyalty to the Rock Island. The refrain, “*No sebuyga! Keep moving!*” serves as a mantra for these workers, reminding every railroader to work as hard as the Mexicans.² The song declares that hard work inspires happiness for the Mexican laborers: “Never so happy they seem as when / They’re pushing their truck through the shop all day.” Indeed, Manuel and Tony’s industriousness is linked to the success of the Rock Island itself. Like the conflation of happiness with hard work, this rhetorical move justifies the Rock Island’s use of Mexican workers. From the company’s point of view, it matters little who completes the work, as long as it gets done.

“*No Sebuyga*” shows why the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad Company recruited Mexicans to work in Iowa

1. Leon R. Harris, “*No Sebuyga*,” *Rock Island Magazine*, January 1924, 40.

2. The phrase “*No sebuyga*” represents a poor translation of spoken Spanish into written form. It should read: “*No se buiga*” or “*No se bulle*.” In English, this translates into “Don’t move!” The phrase “*No sebuyga! Keep moving!*” literally means: “Don’t move! Keep moving!”

and the Midwest. The ballad portrays Mexicans as “honest” and “shrewd” laborers who give “full service ungrudgingly.” In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, railroad companies often cited these perceived character traits as primary reasons for hiring Mexican workers.³

Over the course of a half-century, the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad Company hired thousands of Mexican men to work in the shops and on the tracks that criss-cross the Midwest. Following the recruitment strategies of other railroad companies such as the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway, the Rock Island turned to Mexican labor in the early 1900s.⁴ The Mexican workers described in “*No Sebuyga*” who likely lived and worked in Silvis were among the first to settle in the Midwest. They began working for the Rock Island in 1908.⁵ Three years later, the Rock Island recruited its first Mexican *traqueros*, or railroad track workers, to maintain lines in Iowa.⁶ As a primary transportation and immigration conduit, the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad Company played an instrumental role in dispersing the first Mexicans across Iowa and creating many of the state’s earliest Mexican barrios from the early 1910s to the late 1930s.

This article explores how the individual interests of Mexican laborers, the corporate interests of the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad Company, and the communal interests of Euro-Americans competed, converged, and compromised to create an early Mexican railroad barrio in Iowa. In particular, it traces the development of the first barrio in Iowa City between 1916 and 1936, examining the processes of “barrioization,” or the formation of a residentially and socially segregated place in response to racial conflict and discrimination, that transformed this neighborhood.

3. Jeffrey Marcos Garcilazo, *Traqueros: Mexican Railroad Workers in the United States, 1870 to 1930* (Denton, TX, 2012), 48; Dorothy Bertrand, “Vacation in a Box Car,” *Rock Island Magazine*, December 1931, 25.

4. Garcilazo, *Traqueros*, 114.

5. Marie F. Walsh, “Adjusting Themselves to the American Way,” *Rock Island Magazine*, May 1925, 5.

6. Nathaniel Otjen, “Latino Immigrant Gardeners in Iowa: Local Knowledge and the Cultivation of a Twenty-First Century Environmental Consciousness” (honor’s thesis, University of Iowa, 2016), 36, accessible at Mujeres Latinas Collection, Iowa Women’s Archives, University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City.

Sharing Latina historian Lilia Fernandez's understanding of place as both "an imagined position in the local social order and a concrete, physical location," I examine how Mexican immigrant struggles over an ideological and physical place intersected with corporate railroad policies and Euro-American communal discrimination in the early twentieth century.⁷ By following annual shifts in worker composition and housing, this article traces the ways individuals and their practices of placemaking create history both within and external to dominant systems of power.

This article contributes to scholarship in three ways. First, it highlights the Rock Island's recruitment and treatment of Mexican laborers.⁸ Second, it closely examines the lives of section laborers. These men constructed and repaired track and maintained the right-of-way on certain sections of roadbed. Because of the dangerous and physically demanding nature of the work, track labor represented the most unfavorable job in railroad companies. Thus, section laborers composed the "invisible sector of the railroad industry." Although track workers constituted the largest portion of railroad employees in the early twentieth century, their contributions are largely ignored in the existing scholarship.⁹ Finally, this article focuses on the development of a railroad barrio in the Midwest, specifically in a small community in Iowa rather than in the western and southwestern regions of the United States.¹⁰ This article examines what I refer to as a "service

7. Lilia Fernandez, *Brown in the Windy City: Mexicans and Puerto Ricans in Postwar Chicago* (Chicago, 2012), 8. For a discussion of the term *barrioization*, see Albert Camarillo, *Chicanos in a Changing Society: From Mexican Pueblos to American Barrios in Santa Barbara and Southern California, 1848-1930* (Dallas, TX, 2005).

8. While labor historians and Latina/o studies scholars have mentioned the Rock Island in passing, most of the existing scholarship has analyzed the Santa Fe Railway. See, for example, Garcilazo, *Traqueros*; Judith Ann Fincher Laird, "Argentine, Kansas: The Evolution of a Mexican-American Community, 1905-1940" (Ph.D. diss., University of Kansas, 1975); Zaragosa Vargas, "Armies in the Fields and Factories: The Mexican Working Classes in the Midwest in the 1920s," *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* 7 (1991), 71.

9. Garcilazo, *Traqueros*, 34, 63. I use the terms *traquero*, *section laborer*, *section worker*, and *track worker* interchangeably throughout this article. There is some treatment of these workers in Laird, "Argentine"; and Garcilazo, *Traqueros*.

10. The few scholars who have studied the emergence of Mexican barrios in the Midwest have examined larger metropolitan areas such as Kansas City, Missouri, or the Quad Cities in Iowa and Illinois. See Laird, "Argentine"; and Janet

city” — a stop along a main railway where a small number of local workers primarily engaged in track maintenance. As such, this analysis redefines the size, composition, and structure of railroad barrios typically studied.

UNLIKE the other major railroad companies that recruited Mexican laborers to maintain miles of track, the Rock Island both originated and was headquartered in the Midwest. The company emerged in Rock Island, Illinois, in 1847 and officially named itself the Chicago, Rock Island, and Pacific Railroad Company in 1860.¹¹ Seeking to link the Midwest to the resource-rich Southwest, the Rock Island connected to Fort Worth, Texas, in 1893, El Paso in 1902, and Dallas in 1903.¹²

That expansion provided both transportation and employment for the earliest Mexican immigrants who came to live in the midwestern United States. The first significant movement of Mexicans into the Midwest occurred from the early 1900s to the 1930s as Mexicans emigrated to escape the violence of Porfirio Díaz and the Mexican Revolution, and as thousands of Mexican men and their families traveled northward to replace workers who joined the war effort during and following World War I.¹³ The Rock Island served as a conduit for those early immigrants.

Weaver, “From Barrio to ‘¡Boicoteo!’: The Emergence of Mexican American Activism in Davenport, 1917–1970,” *Annals of Iowa* 68 (2009), 217. These analyses of “hub cities,” or cities that served as immigration centers tasked with disseminating immigrants to rural regions, have made important contributions to the fields of labor history and Latina/o studies, but smaller communities remain unanalyzed.

11. William E. Hayes, “Rock Island’s 100 Years: An Outline of the History of the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad Company Designed as Background Information for Speakers,” 1, typescript, 1952, box 2, B. R. Dew Collection of Railroadiana (hereafter cited as BRDCR), Special Collections, University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City; Frank P. Donovan Jr., *Iowa Railroads: The Essays of Frank P. Donovan, Jr.*, ed. H. Roger Grant (Iowa City, 2000), 174.

12. Hayes, “Rock Island’s 100 Years,” 7–9.

13. Rogelio Sáenz, “The Changing Demography of Latinos in the Midwest,” in *Latinos in the Midwest*, ed. Rubén O. Martínez (East Lansing, MI, 2011), 35; Dionicio Nodín Valdés, *Barrios Norteños: St. Paul and Midwestern Mexican Communities in the Twentieth Century* (Austin, TX, 2000), 25; Juan R. García, *Mexicans in the Midwest, 1900–1932* (Tucson, AZ, 1996), 6–7.

The Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad Company began employing Mexicans in the Midwest during the first decade of the twentieth century. The company used a wide variety of recruitment strategies to secure those workers. With lines running to major cities in the Southwest, the railroad posted recruiters, or *enganchistas*, and hired independent agents to locate young Mexican men willing to work in the north.¹⁴ El Paso functioned as the primary recruiting hub for the Rock Island.¹⁵ The railroad company also used informal recruitment methods to acquire Mexican workers. For example, it circulated announcements in Spanish among its Mexican employees.¹⁶

Among the company's earliest recruits were the men who arrived in West Liberty, Iowa (a small town located approximately 15 miles southeast of Iowa City) in 1911.¹⁷ Five years later, the Rock Island brought the first Mexican workers to Iowa City. By the start of the 1920s, a vibrant barrio had emerged near the Rock Island's rail yards in Davenport, Iowa.¹⁸ This new labor force led a Rock Island locomotive engineer to declare prophetically, "The Mexican is the 'power behind the pick and the shovel' in the Southwest and West and his influence is advancing gradually toward the Mississippi country."¹⁹

By the start of the 1920s, Mexican workers were a familiar sight among the Rock Island's railroad crews in the Midwest. The ubiquity of these section laborers did not go unnoticed. In 1931 Dorothy Bertrand, the daughter of a railroad carpenter, summarized the standard midwestern experience of working for the Rock Island. "None of the men on our gang [in Kansas] were Mexicans," she wrote in the *Rock Island Magazine*, "but one cannot be a real 'railroader' without associating with Mexicans."²⁰

14. Garcilazo, *Traqueros*, 48.

15. U.S. Congress, *Immigration Commission, Immigrants in Industries, Part I, Immigrant Laborers Employed by Steam Railway Companies in the Pacific Coast and Rock Mountain States* (Washington, DC, 1910), 26.

16. For a discussion of this recruitment method, see Vargas, "Armies in the Fields," 59.

17. Otjen, "Latino Immigrant Gardeners," 36.

18. Weaver, "From Barrio to '¡Boicoteo!'" 217.

19. "Peculiarities of Mexican Labor," *Railway Age Gazette*, September 1912, 529.

20. Bertrand, "Vacation in a Box Car," 25-26.

Indeed, it became standard for Mexican immigrants to work alongside Euro-American railroaders (typically Eastern European immigrants) in the Rock Island's midwestern track crews.

THE MEXICAN BARRIO established in Iowa City demonstrates how the ethnic composition of railroad section laborers shifted during the early twentieth century in a small Iowa town. With a population of approximately 11,000 in 1920, Iowa City functioned as a service city for the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad Company. During the first half of the twentieth century the Rock Island owned and operated a freight depot, a stockyard, and a passenger depot, all within a six-block area immediately north and south of the main railroad tracks that skirted the southern perimeter of town. The Mexican barrio arose in the area where Page Street and South Dodge Street meet (now Oak Grove Park). By 1936, it grew to encompass several city blocks.

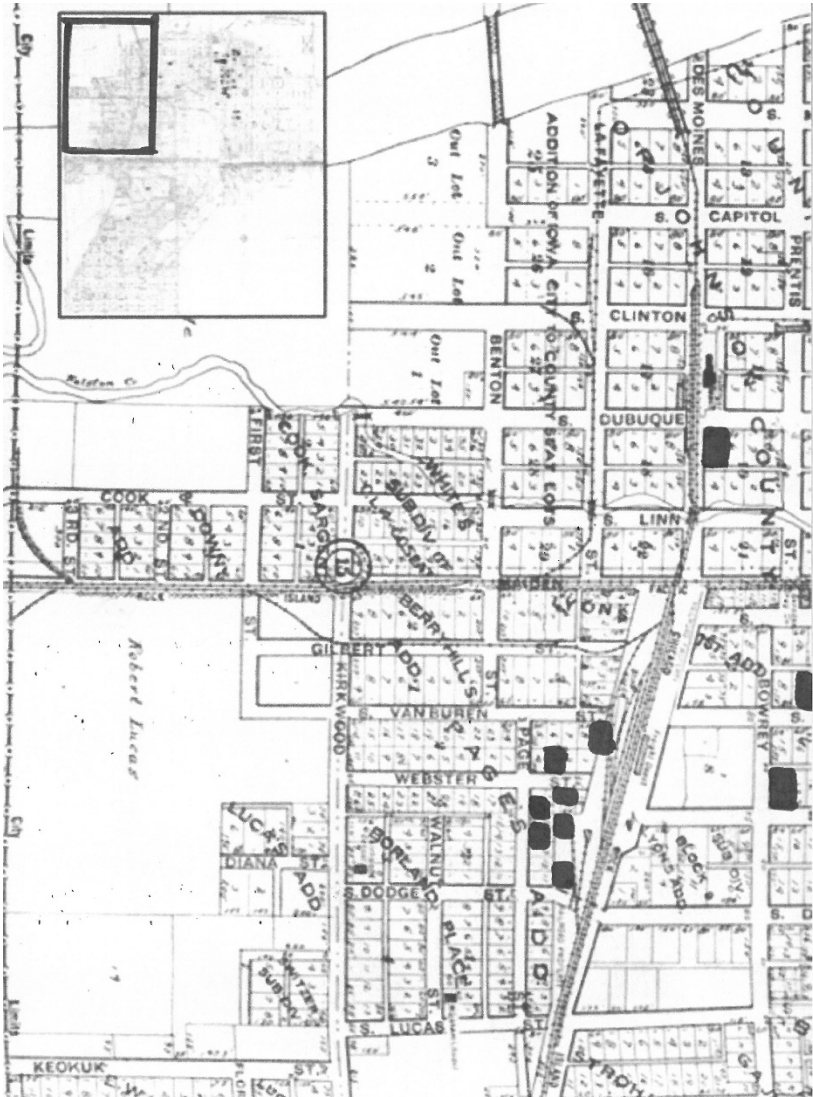
The Mexican immigrants who helped create the barrio worked as section laborers for the Rock Island and lived just several hundred feet from the main tracks. Discriminatory practices prevented them from reaching higher positions within the railroad hierarchy; instead, they worked strictly to maintain the right-of-way along several miles of track that extended east and west out of town.²¹

Before the first Mexicans arrived in Iowa City to work for the Rock Island, the railroad had relied on first- and second-generation Eastern Europeans to maintain the tracks. Those track workers were primarily Czechoslovakian, Austrian, or German, although a first-generation Irishman and several Euro-Americans also worked as section laborers during that time. This type of mixed European nationality workforce had existed in Iowa City since the first train arrived in 1856 and since the Rock Island officially took command of the tracks, stations, and employees in 1866.

A man by the name of Rafael Villafán holds the distinction of being the first Mexican section laborer, and perhaps the first Mexican individual, to live in Iowa City. As a young man in his mid-twenties, Villafán moved from Paracho, Michoacán, to Iowa

21. For the racist employment practices among railroad companies, see Valdés, *Barrios Norteños*, 81.

MAP



Map depicting the locations of boxcars, shanties, and residential homes inhabited by Mexican track workers, 1916–1936 (see darkened rectangles). The base map is derived from Atlas of Johnson County Iowa (Iowa City, 1917).

City in 1916 to work for the Rock Island. Once in Iowa City, he rented an apartment just one block north of the freight depot. Villafán worked for the Rock Island until 1918, when he returned to Michoacán to retrieve several family members. On February 17, 1919, he reentered the United States with his family at Laredo, Texas. On the border crossing form Villafán indicated that he was moving directly back to Iowa City, probably to begin track work in the early spring. Villafán stayed in Iowa City through 1919, but he disappeared from all state and federal records after that.²²

Just one year after Villafán's initial visit, in the spring of 1917, the Rock Island brought at least nine Mexican section laborers to Iowa City to begin maintenance work in *enganches*, or extra gangs. Usually such workers were *solteros*—young bachelors—who signed a contract to work through the spring and summer in exchange for an hourly wage and a return train ticket to Mexico. Once their work contract expired, they rode the Rock Island south to the border and then returned to their homes in Mexico, where they usually stayed with family through the winter. In the early spring they crossed the border into El Paso or Laredo to visit a recruiter's office if they wanted to continue track work.²³

The majority of the *traqueros* who emigrated to Iowa City were from the Central Plateau region of Mexico.²⁴ Most were from three states: Guanajuato, Jalisco, and Michoacán. This migration pattern occurred for two reasons: first, those were the most densely populated states in Mexico at that time, and second, the major railways connecting Mexico to the United States ran through the Central Plateau region.²⁵

22. U.S. Selective Service System, "World War I Selective Service System Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918," National Archives and Records Administration, microfilm publication M1509 roll IA53, Rafael Villafán; NARA, "Manifests of Statistical," Rafael Villafán.

23. There is also evidence that individuals would often move immediately from one short-term contract to another farther down the line. Single Mexican men frequently traversed the Rock Island's line across Iowa to work consecutively in places such as Bettendorf, Davenport, West Liberty, Iowa City, and Des Moines.

24. In fact, the majority of Mexican immigrants who moved to the Midwest in the early twentieth century were from this geographic region. Valdés, *Barrios Norteños*, 25-26.

25. Laird, "Argentine," 80.

These early recruits who worked as extra gang laborers in 1917 were tasked with constructing new track and maintaining the right-of-way on existing sections of road in Iowa City. With the Rock Island's preference for new workers, they were probably all "greenhorns," or inexperienced railroaders. Their daily tasks included replacing work ties and rails, repairing roadbeds, weeding and trimming plant growth, repairing switches, and tightening bolts. They also oiled joints, fixed fences, cut and burned weeds, and cleared drainage ditches.²⁶ In 1917 these temporary *traqueros* worked alongside European immigrants and Euro-Americans who were employed for the duration of the year.²⁷ The Mexican men lived together near the freight depot in a camp that was probably composed of one or two bunk cars (boxcars fitted with several sleeping bunks).²⁸

Several incidents during 1917 reveal the resistance and hostility that Euro-Americans directed toward these newcomers. At the start of the annual work season in March 1917 the *Iowa City Daily Citizen* published its first account of an encounter with Mexican railroaders: "Two Mexicans, Francisco Aabana [*sic*] and Maximino Rodriguez, were arrested at the stockyards of the Rock Island railroad today by Chief of Police Miller, for fighting." Those names do not appear in federal, state, or local census records, so they were probably single-season workers employed by the Rock Island.²⁹

About two weeks later, the *Daily Citizen* ran another article about the young barrio. Late on a Saturday night in early April, two Mexican section laborers — "Jesris Rodsizues and Joseph Bielma [*sic*]" — were robbed by two men on the Rock Island tracks

26. Garcilazo, *Traqueros*, 37, 170; E. W. Arnold, "How a Section Foreman Plans His Work," *Rock Island Magazine*, November 1924, 21; Marshall M. Kirkman, *Building and Repairing Railways: Supplement to the Science of Railways* (New York, 1901), 324.

27. No city directory was compiled for Iowa City in 1917, but the 1918 directory notes that two Euro-American men — Charles Klomford and William G. Swatchesue — were section laborers for the Rock Island. Those men probably worked year-round, and they may have also been employed in 1917. *Smith's Directory of Iowa City and Johnson County, Iowa for 1918*, vol. 6 (Dorchester, MA, 1918).

28. The 1918 city directory noted a section foreman living in a bunk car by the railroad tracks. A similar bunk car likely housed the nine Mexican laborers who came to work on the tracks in 1917. See *Smith's Directory for 1918*.

29. *Iowa City Daily Citizen*, 3/21/1917.

near the South Dodge Street viaduct. The robbers brutally beat the Mexican men and secured \$65 in cash along with an Elgin gold watch that belonged to "Rodsizues." Jesús Rodríguez, one of the men robbed during the scuffle, actually spent several years working for the Rock Island in Iowa. He was born in the mid-1880s in Mexico and emigrated to the United States in 1913. He may have worked intermittently for the Rock Island before arriving in Iowa City in 1917.³⁰

Three months later several Mexican *traqueros* were arrested for gambling in the railroad yards. In July 1917 the *Daily Citizen* reported that five men were engaged in a crap game and were subsequently arrested; however, the reporter only listed the names of four individuals: "Louis Hermandes, Salvador Vasquey, Romand Gollardo and Jose Villura [*sic*]." Of these men, only "Salvador Vasquey" spent additional time in the United States. His real name was Salvador Vázquez, and he grew up in the small town of Santa María del Valle in Jalisco, Mexico. He entered the United States through El Paso in 1914 at the age of 18. Like Rodríguez, he was probably directly recruited by the Rock Island.³¹

Taken together, these early news stories reveal the high turnover among extra gang laborers. Of the nine known Mexican men who worked for the Rock Island in Iowa City in 1917, only two stayed in the United States after their contracts expired. The rest probably gave up section work and returned to Mexico because of the difficult and unfavorable work conditions. In addition, and perhaps most obviously, the *Daily Citizen* both discriminated against and exposed the discrimination affecting these individuals. The misspelling of names operated as a form of language violence enacted against the Mexican newcomers. Euro-Americans generally considered early Mexican barrios to be a "health hazard and a nuisance," and the *Daily Citizen* reiterated such opinions.³²

30. *Iowa City Daily Citizen*, 4/2/1917; U.S. Bureau of the Census, Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930, Des Moines, Polk, Iowa, Family History Library (hereafter cited as FHL) microfilm publication 2340410 roll 675, 11B.

31. *Iowa City Daily Citizen*, 7/2/1917; Salvador Vázquez, Sr. "U.S., Find a Grave Index, 1600s-Current." *Find a Grave*, findagrave.com; NARA, "Manifests of Statistical and Some Nonstatistical Alien Arrivals at El Paso, Texas, 1905-1927," Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, 1787-2004, Record Group 85, microfilm roll 124, Salvador Vázquez.

32. Garcilazo, *Traqueros*, 129.

Reporting on fights, gambling, robberies, and arrests, it portrayed the barrio as a place pervaded by violence and danger.³³

In many ways 1917 was a watershed year for the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad Company. The change was reflected in the sudden recruitment of the nine Mexican laborers in Iowa City. Several factors caused this increase of *traqueros* in 1917. First, after the United States entered World War I in 1917, the nation's railroad tracks quickly became stressed with extra wartime shipments. More trains carrying larger loads required more track upkeep. Unable to locate enough local men to fill track work positions, the Rock Island turned to Mexican labor. Second, the federal government took command of the railways in 1917 and quickly established wage rates, which increased section laborers' pay. The better pay made track work more attractive and subsequently expanded the railroad workforce. Finally, the 1917 Immigration Act curtailed European immigration, thus reducing the number of workers available for hire on the railroads. Mexicans, however, were still allowed to migrate to the United States, so railroads such as the Rock Island filled new positions with Mexicans instead of Europeans.³⁴ These three changes ensured that *traqueros* would be a constant presence in Iowa City for the next five decades.

ANTICIPATING the future contributions of Mexican laborers to the Iowa City lines, the Rock Island ordered the construction of three single-room homes, or wooden "shanties," in 1919. For nearly two decades those shanties housed only Mexican section laborers.³⁵ They stood within the city block bordered by Webster and South Dodge streets on the west and east and the railroad tracks and Page Street on the north and south (see map). The buildings—716, 718, and 720 Page Street—were owned and managed by the Rock Island, and they were constructed on railroad property less than a block from the freight depot and main tracks

33. For an account of commonplace gambling and fighting in many barrios, see *ibid.*, 80–81.

34. *Ibid.*, 54, 168; Laird, "Argentine," 136.

35. There is one exception: in 1928, a Euro-American section laborer named William Walker temporarily lived in one of the shanties. See *Smith's Directory of Iowa City and Johnson County, Iowa for 1928*, vol. 11 (Dorchester, MA, 1928).

where the *traqueros* worked. Indeed, "Rule 80" for the Maintenance and Construction Department specifically stated, "Section men will be expected to board at section houses, where they are provided for that purpose. Where section houses are not provided, or where . . . the men are excused from boarding at same, the section foreman must . . . have no difficulty in reaching them if . . . they are wanted . . . outside of regular working hours."³⁶ Therefore, according to company policy, section laborers were required to live within or near housing provided by the Rock Island. In short, company policy dictated the location and early form of this barrio.

Corporate policies also governed the appearance and use of the shanties. In an attempt to keep costs low, the Rock Island likely instructed Mexican laborers in Iowa City to construct these buildings from railroad scrap material such as discarded sheet metal, tin, and boards.³⁷ Described by Iowa City historian Irving Weber as "small garage-like structures," the buildings were approximately 14' x 20'; they lacked electricity and running water; and they contained a kerosene lamp for light and a small stove for heat. A woman who grew up less than a block away from the barrio recalled that vertical-running slat wood boards composed the external walls. Many people in Iowa City found the shanties aesthetically unappealing; in fact, several federal census recorders refused to assign home numbers to the buildings, instead noting the addresses as "CRI and P R.R. and Page Street." The shanties were probably located several blocks east of the passenger train depot to prevent travelers from viewing them.³⁸

36. "Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific Railway Company [CRIPRC] Rules and Regulations: Maintenance and Construction Department," 33, folder "Rock Island Rules and Regulations for the Maintenance of Way Structures 3 (1901, 1940, 1951)," box 2, BRDCR.

37. Garcilazo, *Traqueros*, 76. The Santa Fe, in particular, encouraged workers to construct dwellings from scrap material. Because the Rock Island closely imitated the Santa Fe's housing policies, it is likely the Iowa City shanties were built from railroad scrap. See L. C. Lawton, "Mexican Laborers' Houses on the Santa Fe," *Railway Age Gazette*, August 1911, 344.

38. Irving Weber, "Mexican Community Began Here over 50 Years Ago," *Iowa City Press-Citizen*, 4/30/1983; Vincent Cano, interview with author, 4/4/2016; Mary Buchanan, interview with author, 6/26/2016; U.S. Bureau of the Census, Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930, Iowa City, Johnson, Iowa, FHL microfilm publication 2340396 roll 661, 30B.

These buildings soon formed the nucleus of the barrio. In 1919 a man named "Antonio Dioh [*sic*]" lived in the 716 Page Street shanty; Trinidad Alvarado lived at 718 Page Street; and Rafael Villafán lived at 720 Page Street. Of these single men, we have already met Villafán, "Dioh" cannot be located in state or federal records, and Alvarado worked temporarily for the Rock Island in Iowa until 1921.³⁹ As the physical center of the barrio, the shanties represented a permanent form of housing for the Mexican workers. They could not be destroyed easily, and their structural resilience implied that Mexican section laborers would become a permanent fixture of the railroad community. Indeed, when the *Daily Citizen* reported in 1919 that a boxcar home of Mexican track workers located less than a block away had caught fire, the headline accompanying the article proclaimed: "FIRE IN MEXICAN QUARTER SATURDAY."⁴⁰ Labeling the neighborhood along the tracks a "Mexican Quarter" suggests that by 1919 this area of Iowa City was already well known and publicly recognized as the Mexican barrio.

With the recognition of the barrio as a uniquely Mexican space came a series of disturbing encounters between *traqueros* and the gatekeepers of Iowa City's public identity. One event in 1920 displays the tensions that permeated and often defined the relationships among the press, police, Euro-American residents, and the Mexican men in the barrio. Quoted in its entirety, this December 1920 news article reads:

A Mexican, working on the Rock Island Railway company's sections, near the Wright street station, and bunking in a boxcar down that way, may have been robbed of a couple of hundred dollars, the other night, while under the influence of liquor.

He visited a certain amusement place, it is said, and was 'touched' while incapacitated to say 'no' in Mexican, or to translate his objections into 'Englis' [*sic*].

The swarthy son of the Montezumas, it is reported, then went back to his boxcar palace, and induced a gang of his brother-countrymen to accompany him up town, anticipating a 'roughhouse' attack

39. *Smith's Directory of Iowa City and Johnson County, Iowa for 1919-20*, vol. 7 (Dorchester, MA, 1919), 323. In 1921 the Des Moines city directory listed Alvarado as a laborer for the Rock Island. See *Polk's Des Moines City and Valley Junction Directory, 1921* (Des Moines, 1921).

40. *Iowa City Daily Citizen*, 1/13/1919.

on the store, in order to wreak havoc, vengeance, or something else, and to recover the money.

Officers, it is said, intervened, and saved the trouble, recovering the cash, perhaps, for the complaining Josef Pedro Sancho Panzo Rodriguez [*sic*].

At the police station, however, the officers deny knowledge of this thrilling tale, evidence concerning which is not at hand, in the shape of the Mexican affidavit.

It is believed, that if anything happened in the way of a hold up, the recovery of the money by the dark-skinned foreigner, and possibly a bit of golden ointment for his bleeding heart, washed away the stain of his indignation, and paved the way to forgiveness and 'quashing' the case.⁴¹

Again, the *Daily Citizen* enacted language violence by assuming that the man spoke "Mexican" and by pointing out his struggle to speak "Inglis." This reveals both the English-speaking reporter's ignorance of Spanish and the racial and linguistic hegemonic position held over Mexican immigrants. Furthermore, the use of "Sancho Panza" – the famed protagonist of Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quixote* – in the individual's name cruelly mocks the track worker, associating him with the Spanish name most recognizable to Euro-Americans, a moniker that connotes blind obedience and peasant illiteracy. Indeed, the article teems with derisive language: "complaining Josef" is the "swarthy son of the Montezumas" who lives in a "boxcar palace." He is racialized as a "dark-skinned foreigner" whose identity as an immigrant is wedded to his appearance.⁴²

The article also comments on the geographic and social positioning of neighborhoods in Iowa City at that time. The "up town" area of Iowa City where this man reportedly was drinking was associated with amusement and fun. In comparison, the man's "boxcar palace" was geographically and imaginatively positioned opposite the "up town" part of Iowa City. In addition, the article portrays the Mexican men living in the barrio as violent mobsters

41. *Iowa City Daily Citizen*, 12/9/1920. See also "Rodriguez Sancho Panza Pedro Pesetas ...," *Iowa City Daily Citizen*, 7/20/1920.

42. For a detailed discussion of how Mexicans were racialized in Iowa during the first decades of the twentieth century, see Omar Valerio-Jiménez, "Racializing Mexican Immigrants in Iowa's Early Mexican Communities," *Annals of Iowa* 75 (2016), 1–46.

and pits them against the civilized and innocent uptown Iowa Citians. As a group, the Mexican laborers are criminalized and portrayed as dangerous outsiders who came to “wreak havoc, vengeance, or something else” on the good people of Iowa City.

This view starkly differs from the Rock Island’s view of Mexican immigrants as docile and obedient. These divergent perspectives reflect the conflicting interests of the Rock Island and the *Daily Citizen*. While the railroad viewed these Mexican laborers as a useful and practical labor source, the local newspaper and Euro-American residents viewed them as a threat to white hegemony. As a medium that crafts an “imagined community” and acts as a gatekeeper of local identity, the *Daily Citizen* did not see these Mexican *traqueros* as contributors to Iowa City.⁴³

THE RAILROAD WORKFORCE in Iowa City underwent a major transformation during the 1920s, when the Rock Island introduced several Mexican families to the barrio. Their individual stories about dislocation and settlement reveal how Rock Island policies and recruitment practices shaped the development of this neighborhood.

The Gutiérrezes hold the distinction of being the first Mexican family to settle in Iowa City. They arrived in 1921 and moved into the shanty at 720 Page Street, where they would live for a decade-and-a-half with their five children. “John” and Aurelia Gutiérrez both migrated from the state of Guanajuato in 1917. John worked for a railroad company (probably the Rock Island) in Laredo before coming to the Midwest. In 1918 the Gutiérrezes moved to Des Moines to be near Aurelia’s brothers. John briefly worked for the Rock Island in Des Moines and then transferred to Silvis, Illinois, where he worked for three years before moving to Iowa City.⁴⁴

In 1925 Lawrence and Thelma Alcalá moved to Iowa City with their two children and Lawrence’s brother Charlie. They lived in the shanty at 716 Page Street, where they raised five children.

43. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 1991).

44. Weber, “Mexican Community”; NARA, “World War I Selective Service Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918,” microfilm publication M1509 roll IA52, John Gomez Gutiérrez.

Born in Mexico City in 1890, Lawrence was among the first 150 Mexican men recruited by the Bettendorf Car Company to work in the company's foundry in Bettendorf, Iowa, in 1918. Thelma was born in New Boston, Illinois—a small town located on the Mississippi River—and she was Euro-American. In the mid-1920s, the Rock Island recruited Lawrence to work on a section gang in Iowa City.⁴⁵

Another family joined the barrio three years later. Originally from Rancho Botija, Guanajuato, Magdaleno (Leno) and María Cano arrived in Iowa City with their young family in 1928. The Canos entered the United States through Laredo in 1927 and traveled north to Crookston, Minnesota, where Leno worked in the sugar beet fields. When the beet season concluded, Leno, María, and their three young daughters sought work in Chicago. While awaiting a train in West Liberty, Leno befriended Selso and Guadalupe Ponce—the first Mexicans to settle in that town. Selso, who worked as a section laborer for the Rock Island, encouraged Leno to pursue that work. With Selso's help, Leno secured employment three months later on the Rock Island line in Keokuk. In March 1928 a family friend located a job in Iowa City, so the Canos relocated, settling into an open boxcar along the railroad tracks near the South Dodge Street viaduct. Within a year, the Great Depression struck and the *traqueros* in the barrio struggled to make ends meet. In a tangible show of support, several Mexican railroaders gave up a day of work every week to save Leno's job and enable his family to survive the Depression. That solution to both the failed economy and the Rock Island's inability to generate new jobs reveals the collective autonomy of these immigrants.⁴⁶

45. Iowa, State Census Collection, 1836–1925, Ancestry.com, Lawrence Alcalá; U.S. Bureau of the Census, Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940, Iowa City, Johnson, Iowa, NARA microfilm publication T627 roll 1171, 10A; Lawrence Alcalá, "U.S., Find a Grave Index, 1600s-Current," findagrave.com; NARA, "World War I Selective Service Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918," microfilm publication M1509 roll IA52, Lawrence Alcalá; Certificate of Marriage, Lawrence Alcalá to Thelma Robes, 5/4/1928, Johnson County, Iowa, State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines.

46. NARA, "Nonstatistical Manifests and Statistical Index Cards of Aliens Arriving at Laredo, Texas, May 1903–November 1929," Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, 1787–2004, Record Group 85, microfilm roll no. 009, Magdaleno Cano; Otjen, "Latino Immigrant Gardeners," 32–34; Weber, "Mexican Community"; Cano interview. Laird, "Argentine," 130, describes similar actions

The final newcomers, the Ramírez and Sánchez families, moved to Iowa City in either 1929 or 1930.⁴⁷ Louis and Isabel Ramírez, along with their four children, moved into the vacant shanty at 718 Page Street. Louis was born in the late 1880s in Mexico and emigrated to the United States with his wife and first-born daughters in 1918.⁴⁸ José and “Angeleta” Sánchez initially moved into a boxcar in Iowa City, but within a few months they settled into a rented home two blocks north of the freight depot. José was born in Mexico in 1895 and emigrated to the United States in 1910. Eight years later he lived in Des Moines and worked for the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad Company as a section laborer. By 1930, José lived and worked in Iowa City.⁴⁹

At some point in 1931 or 1932, the Rock Island disrupted these settled families, removing all of the boxcars because it deemed it unsafe for families with young children to live beside oncoming trains.⁵⁰ The Canos abandoned their boxcar home and moved into a temporary structure at 9 Page Street. Charles Alcalá, Lawrence’s son, moved into a second temporary building at 15 Page Street—beside the Canos. Charles and the Cano family lived in those structures for approximately one year. In 1933 the Ramírezes moved out of the shanty at 718 Page Street and the Canos moved in behind them.⁵¹ Charles either relocated to another

taken during the 1921 recession when Mexican section workers in Argentine, Kansas, divided the available work among one another to weather the economic downturn.

47. Both families are recorded in federal census records and in the city directory for 1930; however, they may have moved to Iowa City a year earlier. (Iowa City did not publish a city directory for 1929.)

48. U.S. Bureau of the Census, Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930, Iowa City, Johnson, Iowa, FHL microfilm publication 2340396 roll 661, 30B.

49. *Ibid.*, 2A; *Smith’s Directory of Iowa City and Johnson County, Iowa for 1930*, vol. 12 (Dorchester, MA, 1930); NARA, “World War I Selective Service Draft Registration Cards, 1917–1918,” microfilm publication M1509 roll IA52, Joseph Sánchez; “Draft Registration Cards for Fourth Registration for Iowa, 04/27/1942–04/27/1942,” NAI no. 598910, Record Group 147, Joe H. Sánchez, National Archives at St. Louis.

50. Weber, “Mexican Community.” See also *Polk’s Iowa City (Iowa) Directory, 1932, Including Johnson County* (Des Moines, 1932).

51. *Polk’s Iowa City (Iowa) Directory, 1932*; Cano interview; *Polk’s Iowa City (Iowa) Directory, 1934, Including Johnson County* (Des Moines, 1934).

home or left Iowa City entirely. These five “core” families defined the barrio during the 1920s and ‘30s, fundamentally altering the composition and dynamics of the neighborhood.

The steady arrival of Mexican families throughout the 1920s signaled a shift in the Rock Island’s recruitment practices. During the 1910s, ‘20s, and ‘30s, railroad companies actively encouraged *traqueros* to bring their families with them to live rent-free on company property. Companies recruited Mexican families to reduce the regular turnover among *solteros* that cost roads significant money and time. They aimed to “create a stable and permanent work force,” and families promoted stability and continuity. Many Mexican workers viewed the new recruitment policy as a boon: “Traqueros considered jobs that required year-round service in the yards to be choice jobs because they could find housing in the nearby barrio and return home on a daily basis.”⁵²

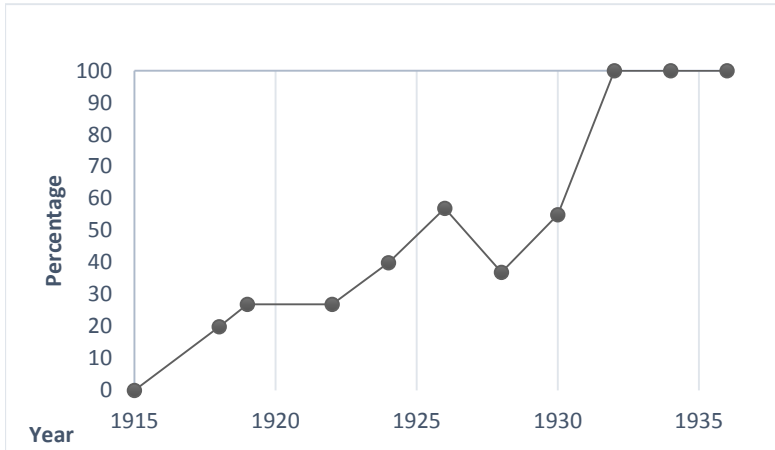
The new policy had a far-reaching effect on the workforce in Iowa City. As Mexican families moved into the barrio, they replaced the *solteros* and the Euro-American workers, reducing the annual number of extra gangs required to maintain the tracks. By 1932, Juan Gutiérrez, Lawrence Alcalá, Leno Cano, Louis Ramírez, and José Sánchez – the husbands from each of the five families – composed the entirety of full-time section laborers employed by the Rock Island in Iowa City. As these individuals replaced much of the Rock Island’s transient workforce, they also helped establish a core identity for the barrio. Without annual turnover, the barrio could finally sustain itself as a viable neighborhood.

The recruitment of families had an additional effect on the process of barrioization in rural midwestern communities that scholars often overlook. In short, the Rock Island’s housing and recruitment practices promoted docility among the workforce. As historian Omar Valerio-Jiménez argues, Mexican *traqueros* had to maintain good relationships with their employers when they lived on company property.⁵³ If workers did not cultivate positive relationships with their superiors, they risked losing their “free” housing. Marie F. Walsh, the author of a 1925 article in the *Rock Island Magazine* that describes the company’s attempts to

52. Garcilazo, *Traqueros*, 116, 75.

53. Valerio-Jiménez, “Racializing Mexican Immigrants,” 24.

PERCENTAGE OF MEXICANS IN TRACK WORK GANGS,
IOWA CITY, 1915-1936



Note: Data collected from Iowa City directories. The data for 1928 is an anomaly. City directory recorders counted 16 section laborers in 1928; the average was 6. The count may have occurred in the early spring when extra gangs were employed on the tracks.

transform the Mexican colony in Silvis into a “livable place,” captures this passive form of control. “The Mexicans at this point in return for the co-operation of the railroad, are expressing their gratitude [for ‘free’ housing] by a strict obedience to the law.” This constant, oppressive control of the Mexican workforce promoted a culture of servitude in the Iowa City barrio, a state of domestic subjugation intended to bring Mexican laborers under the railroad’s command. In fact, in places such as Silvis, the Rock Island performed periodic inspections of the shanties to ensure that Mexican workers did not vandalize their homes.⁵⁴ Such inspections may have also been performed in Iowa City throughout the 1920s. The constant regulation of housing stripped away illusions of privacy and corporatized the household, thereby forcing Mexican laborers and their families to adopt a culture of servitude. Securing housing and raising families were activities negotiated between Mexican residents and railroad companies.

54. Walsh, “Adjusting to the American Way,” 5-6.

FROM 1932 TO 1936 the barrio in Iowa City flourished. Recollections from Leno and María Cano's children underline the individual and communal agency practiced by these Mexican residents in their daily lives in the face of corporate control. By 1932, the stockyards had moved one block east from 810 to 824 Page Street.⁵⁵ That relocation placed the stockyards on the perimeter of the barrio and subsequently improved the health of the neighborhood's residents. At that time the section gangs were composed exclusively of Mexican men from the five families, and each family lived within a block of each other.⁵⁶ That close housing arrangement facilitated regular gatherings. For example, in 1933, the Canos sought help from their neighbors to construct an addition onto their shanty because they were tired of the difficulties associated with daily life in their inefficient, company-sanctioned home. Barrio residents built a kitchen to give the family enough space to prepare meals. Elena Cano, Leno and María's daughter, recounted, "Once the word spread of their project, nearby Mexican neighbors showed up with hammers and nails and began to nail boards together to form their new kitchen."⁵⁷ The very act of constructing an addition onto their inadequate home displayed individual agency and choice. That deliberate action by the barrio's residents demonstrates that Mexican workers and their families were far from passive victims of the Rock Island.

Throughout the early and mid-1930s, physical labor characterized much of the daily lives of the Canos and other Mexican families living in the barrio. Vincent remembers his mother being "very talented in sewing and knitting. . . . [She] would make and patch all our clothes." María also spent several hours each week

55. *Citizen's Ptg. and W. H. Hoffman's City Directory of Iowa City, Iowa 1914* (Quincy, IL, 1914); *Polk's Iowa City Directory, 1932*. Throughout the 1930s, the Farmers Livestock Marketing Association and the Armour & Co. Hog Buyers occupied 822 and 824 Page Street, respectively. Sanborn Map Company, "Sheet 15: Iowa City, Iowa," *Insurance Maps of Iowa City, Iowa, Johnson County* (New York, 1933); *Polk's Iowa City Directory, 1934*.

56. *Polk's Iowa City Directory, 1934 County; Economy Advertising Co's Iowa City (Johnson County, IA) Directory, 1936, Including Johnson County* (Des Moines, 1936).

57. Elena Cano, quoted in Mona Morley, "The Journey That Built New Generations: 85 Years in the United States of America 1927-2012 - In Memory of Magdalena and María Rodríguez Cano," typescript, 2013, privately held by the Cano family.

washing laundry by hand in a tub set up in their yard.⁵⁸ By performing such domestic tasks, women “represented an informal and unpaid labor force.”⁵⁹ Omar Valerio-Jiménez adds that Mexican women, as wives and daughters, “participated in a gendered division of domestic labor,” doing work that was “essential for Mexican communities to flourish.”⁶⁰

Leno was in charge of bringing water home every day from the stockyards. Elena recalled that during the early 1930s, “Dad had to carry two buckets of fresh water daily from three blocks away from the stockyards’ faucets by attaching each one to the end of a large pole that he balanced on the back of his shoulders. This water would have to last . . . for the entire day as it was used not only for laundering but for bathing, drinking and cooking. If more was needed, he would make another trip in the afternoon when he returned from work.” Sharing a communal faucet was common in railroad barrios at that time. In addition to carrying water, Leno also helped fuel the tall cast-iron woodstove that kept the family warm during the winter. He collected used railroad ties and cut them into pieces that were then burned to heat their home. According to the official Rock Island rules and regulations, workers had to get permission from the roadmaster to use old ties. Therefore, Leno and his coworkers must have established a positive relationship with the roadmaster in Iowa City. Also, during the 1940s the Cano children would walk along the railroad tracks, pulling a wagon loaded with buckets. As they walked along, they filled the buckets with coal that had spilled from the trains, which they used for heating and to fuel the cook stove. The Cano family’s resourcefulness helped to mitigate their poverty.⁶¹

For food, Mexican families raised small animals and grew their own vegetables and fruits in gardens behind their homes.⁶²

58. Cano interview.

59. Garcilazo, *Traqueros*, 118.

60. Valerio-Jiménez, “Racializing Mexican Immigrants,” 19.

61. Elena Cano, quoted in Morley, “The Journey”; “CRIPRC Rules and Regulations: Maintenance and Construction Department,” 30; Cano interview. See also Garcilazo, *Traqueros*, 44.

62. Garcilazo, *Traqueros*, 127–28; Laird, “Argentine,” 96, 167–68; and Valerio-Jiménez, “Racializing Mexican Immigrants,” 18, all mention the ubiquity of gardens among Mexican immigrants in the early twentieth century. For a more detailed analysis of Mexican gardens in Iowa, see Otjen, “Latino Immigrant Gardeners.”



Leno Cano cultivates his garden at 1300 South Linn Street in 1939. Today this location is just south of Gilbert Street and Second Street. The fair-grounds were located on the other side of the secondary tracks seen in the background of this photograph. Leno's son Vincent still has his father's wheel hoe. Photo courtesy Vincent Cano.

The Canos, for example, planted a large garden to help reduce the cost of food. They grew sweet corn, onions, squash, potatoes, tomatoes, and *verdolagas* (purslane). They also raised chickens and pigs in their backyard.⁶³ Other Mexican families raised goats; José Sánchez took care of two goats in 1941, for example.⁶⁴

Mexican families also obtained food at Means Grocery, a small grocery store located at 219 South Dubuque Street. The store had a decades-long relationship with railroaders. In the 1920s *traqueros* “would come to the store, order their needs, and have them delivered to their box car homes.” During the 1920s and ‘30s Mexican section laborers traded with the storeowners and opened charge accounts. According to Irving Weber, the section laborers “received their pay every two weeks and as soon as it arrived, they would come to the store and pay their bill.”⁶⁵ This system of

63. Cano interview.

64. *Iowa City Press-Citizen*, 9/1/1941.

65. Weber, “Mexican Community”; Cano interview.

borrowing and repaying indicates that while *traqueros* had little disposable income, they found ways to negotiate their poverty. Unlike railroad barrios in hub cities, the Iowa City barrio lacked Mexican-run stores and shops, probably because, with such a small population, Mexicans in Iowa City were unable to develop the clientele necessary to support formal businesses.

While carrying water, cutting wood, and procuring food were three primary responsibilities associated with daily life in the barrio, Leno spent most of his time during the week working for the Rock Island. Vincent, who worked as a section laborer during the summer, distinctly remembers his father's job. "It was during my first time on the railroad gang did I get knowledge of how hard Dad worked to support us," he recalled. He outlined the *traqueros'* daily work schedule.

There was a geographic territory of track for which each section gang was responsible. During the summer, a gang of about nine men including boys would load up on a flatbed cart called a 'put-put' by eight o'clock with a lunch pail and a large can of ice water.

The foreman knew ahead of time what tracks needed maintenance. If you put your face down on a track and looked down at it, you could see where the tracks had become crooked from the ground shifting—a defective railroad tie or from a defective track. Ideally, you want the tracks to be as parallel to each other and level as possible.

Where the foreman marked a spot, the worker would go to that spot, sit a jack under it, and jack it up while another worker would machine tap small stones [also known as 'riff-raff'] under the railroad tie supporting that track. This was part of my job too. This process could go on for miles. If the foreman marked a railroad tie that was spent, the spikes would have to be pulled from the railroad tie, [the tie] slid out, and a new one slid in. The railroad ties could weigh as much as 90 pounds.

At this point, the more experienced workers, like Dad, would pound the spikes into the tie with a sledgehammer with rhythm and accuracy you would not believe. There were two workers on each side of the tie so you had to be in sync with each other lest lose a finger or get a broken hand or forearm. In some cases a complete section of a rail needed to be replaced and once again only the veterans could do that.⁶⁶

66. Cano interview.

The work was grueling, especially during the summer and winter. "During the winter," Vincent recounted, "Dad would get calls [at] all hours of the night to report to the depot to remove the snow and ice from the tracks for trains scheduled to come in." Leno's hard work, dependability, and skill made him a valuable employee for the Rock Island. According to Vincent, "Dad was very respected by all of the workers."⁶⁷

The *traqueros* on the Iowa City lines worked Monday through Friday, every week of the year, averaging just over 40 hours per week.⁶⁸ They received modest salaries in return for their work; in 1928, for example, the Rock Island paid Leno \$35 every two weeks, or \$840 annually.⁶⁹

The barrio dissolved in 1936 when the Rock Island compelled the Alcalás, Canos, and Gutiérrezes to relocate. Aiming to rid the area of visible signs of poverty, the railroad demolished the three wooden shanties. According to Vincent, "The railroad . . . clear[ed] out the living quarter . . . due to eminent domain and . . . the complaints of the Iowa City citizens."⁷⁰ Lacking other options, the families were obliged to rent houses nearby. Through careful budgeting, the Gutiérrez family was able to purchase a home on the northwest corner of Kirkwood Avenue and Maiden Lane.⁷¹ The Alcalá family moved into a house located at 309 Maiden Lane, which they rented.⁷² The Canos, by then a family of nine, moved just a few blocks away to the 600 block of Dubuque Street, where they shared a home with the Ramírezes, by then a family of six, for half a year.⁷³ Leno searched for places to rent immediately following the move, but Iowa City homeowners

67. *Ibid.*

68. In 1940, for example, Lawrence Alcalá reported working an average of 48 hours per week for 52 weeks. U.S. Bureau of the Census, Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940, 10A.

69. Vincent P. Cano, "Leno and María: A Success Story," typescript, 1985, 44, Mujeres Latinas Collection, Iowa Women's Archives, University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City. In today's currency, Leno's annual income amounts to about \$12,033. See www.usinflationcalculator.com.

70. Cano interview.

71. *Ibid.*; Weber, "Mexican Community."

72. U.S. Bureau of the Census, Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940, 10A; Cano interview.

73. Cano interview.

refused to rent to him. As Elena recalled, "He faced closed doors . . . due to his race and the fact of having seven children. The owners were not confident that he'd pay the rent and they feared the wear and tear that seven children might have." Local Euro-American residents discriminated against Leno by racializing him, questioning his class position, and casting doubt on the behavior of his children. Finally, Charlie Miller, one of Leno's coworkers, convinced a man named Harry Abbott to rent one of his properties on Walnut Street to the Canos. Abbott agreed to rent the property on the condition that he could enter the house at any time to check on its wear.⁷⁴ Perhaps accustomed to the Rock Island's inspections and culture of servitude, the Canos accepted the terms.

The 1936 moves destroyed the barrio, pushing the Canos, Gutiérrezes, and Alcalás into the Euro-American working-class neighborhood that bordered the tracks on the southern part of town. While a loosely defined Mexican community still existed in the immediate area south of the freight depot, families were no longer next-door neighbors to one another.

SEVERAL INTERSECTING FORCES and interests contributed to the processes of barrioization in Iowa City and in smaller towns across Iowa and the Midwest during the first decades of the twentieth century. The railroad barrio in Iowa City resulted primarily from the cooperating and competing relationships of the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad Company, the Euro-American community, and the Mexican immigrants. In their study of "Latino urbanism" in contemporary Iowa, Gerardo Sandoval and Marta Maldonado argue that "placemaking is a relational and contested process." They point out that "efforts to understand and engage Latina/o placemaking must also attend to the rural realm, and to the interconnections between urban, suburban and rural spaces."⁷⁵ The multiscalar tracing and untangling of these complex intersections practiced in this article should encourage scholars to theorize and conceptualize barrioization in

74. Elena Cano, quoted in Morley, "The Journey"; Cano interview.

75. Gerardo Sandoval and Marta Maldonado, "Latino Urbanism Revisited: Placemaking in New Gateways and the Urban-Rural Interface," *Journal of Urbanism* 5 (2012), 216, 193.

Iowa and the Midwest in both generalizable and site-specific ways. The barrio in the service town of Iowa City, for example, uniquely featured permanent housing several years before families began to settle in the area. And, as in other railroad barrios during that time, this neighborhood changed as company policy dictated the replacement of *solteros* with Mexican men who had families.

Analysis of the Mexican neighborhood that formed in Iowa City between 1916 and 1936 offers valuable insights into the processes of barrioization that occurred across the Midwest. Ultimately, the Rock Island was responsible for both the creation and destruction of Iowa City's first Mexican barrio. As Vincent Cano points out, "It was the railroad that gave [Dad] . . . employment to raise his family and that gave us the opportunities to better ourselves."⁷⁶

It also must be remembered, however, that the railroad often mistreated these families, subjecting them to challenging living situations while making use of their labor. In addition, the local press and Euro-American residents discriminated against the community by criminalizing the barrio. When confronted by mistreatment, *traqueros* asserted agency through support networks.

The processes of barrio formation created, sustained, and buttressed ties among familial and friend networks. As Jeffrey Garcilazo argues, "The common experiences of immigration, track work, racial ethnic discrimination, and segregation in housing reinforced Mexican cultural and linguistic boundaries" in railroad barrios.⁷⁷ The pattern of migration, settlement, and placemaking facilitated by railroad companies in the early twentieth century created spaces of belonging for thousands of Mexican immigrants across Iowa and the Midwest.

76. Cano interview.

77. Garcilazo, *Traqueros*, 170.