

Jovita Vallecillo Lobato was born in Fort Collins in 1908. Jovita's parents worked in the sugar beet fields, and encouraged Jovita and her younger brother Salvador to go to college. This was not the reality for most parents in Jovita's community at the time – many children were needed to help support the family and work in the fields rather than go to school.



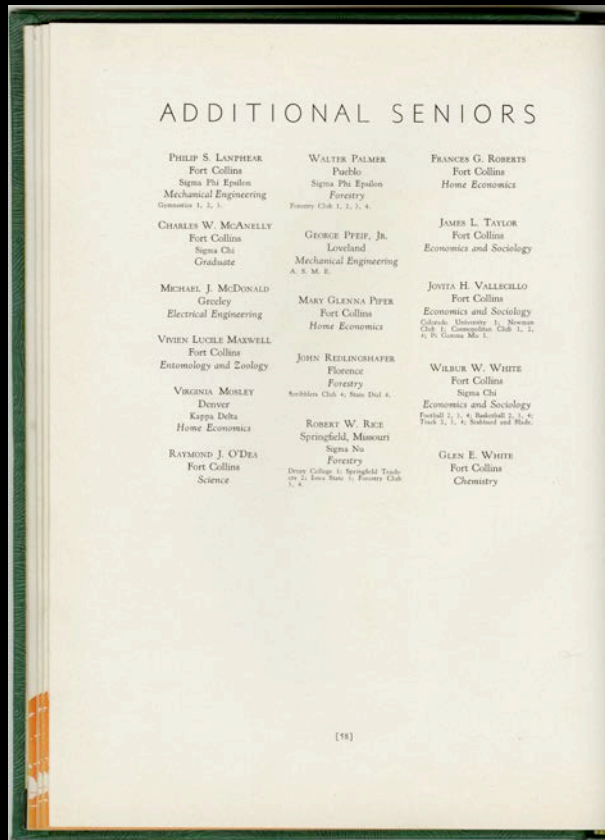
Jovita Vallecillo Lobato
(1908-2005)

Jovita graduated from Fort Collins High School in 1932. She was the first Mexican-American student to graduate from public school in Fort Collins. Following high school, she enrolled at Colorado State University (then Colorado Agricultural College) and became the first Mexican-American to graduate from CSU in 1936, with degrees in economics and sociology, and a minor in education.

Jovita paid for her education by cooking at the Northern Hotel, and still found time to be involved in extracurricular activities such as the Newman Club, Cosmopolitan Club, and Pi Gamma Mu. She graduated mid-term to work and help at home – this also made it easier for her brother Salvador to finish school – the second Mexican-American to graduate from CSU.



There are no identifiable photos of Jovita in either the Fort Collins High “Lambkin” yearbooks, or the CSU “Silver Spruce” yearbooks. The only time her name is mentioned is shown here – she shows up once in the 1937 Silver Spruce as “Additional Seniors.” While there’s no evidence that these omissions of Jovita were intentionally malicious, they do follow a pattern of marginalized people often being invisible or overlooked. Additionally, these omissions made Jovita difficult to research – most of the information we gathered was from more recent newspaper clippings and the small number of materials that her family donated to the Archive.



According to local newspaper articles, Jovita enjoyed school but noted how difficult it was as a person of color in 1930s Fort Collins, and how isolated she often felt at school. Multiple modern newspaper articles reference “White Trade Only” signs that were posted in some downtown business windows. But Jovita persevered. She eventually returned to school, earning her master’s in psychology in 1963 from the University of the Pacific in Stockton, CA. She taught at schools in Colorado, New Mexico, and New Jersey – retiring at 75.



‘White Trade Only’ a bleak memory

By **TONY BALANDRAN**
The Coloradoan

With the end of World War II, men in uniform were returning to Fort Collins as they were to cities and towns across the United States.

They were men who had risked their lives to preserve the principle of individual freedoms.

Yet, in many hometowns, those veterans born with brown skin were denied entrance to local restaurants, barber shops and beer halls.

Their return home was greeted not with parades but with signs: “We cater to white trade only.”

“They were pretty prevalent,” said Harold Warren, 80, a World War II veteran who didn’t like the signs. “They were al-

most like the South was, with the blacks.”

The blatant discrimination provoked a plea from a Denver father in 1945 that the Fort Collins City Council revoke the licenses of any place refusing to serve people on the basis of race or ethnicity after his son — a member of the U.S. Navy — was refused service at a Fort Collins restaurant.

The civil penalty for discrimination in restaurants and other public places at the time was a seldom-levied fine of \$50 to \$500. According to accounts in *The Coloradoan*, council members said they could do nothing about the signs because they knew of no remedy except civil lawsuits brought by the person offended.

Thus, in the wake of the great war, a

quiet battle began in Fort Collins to convince businesses the signs were wrong and should be removed.

Standing together, Hispanics — such as Lee Martinez and William Lopez, both highly respected leaders in the community — and non-Hispanics such as Warren saw their efforts bear fruit when the signs disappeared.

“We would just go to the individual business and talk to them and try to reason with them,” Warren says. “It was quiet. We never formed a committee and there was little publicity on the whole effort.”

It was simply the right thing to do.

“They were Americans and they fought for the same things that we all did,” Warren says. “God made us all.”

Summer 1997

M Fort Collins Museum

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visit our new website at www.ci.fort-collins.co.us/arts_culture/museum

La Gente:

The Hispanics of Fort Collins

On May 2, emotional speeches drew roaring applause from the more than 200 people who crowded into the Museum to celebrate the opening of *La Gente: The Hispanic People of Fort Collins*. The exhibit honors the history and contributions of Fort Collins' Hispanic community and will be open until August 30. The show examines the origins of *La Gente* in Fort Collins, their unifying cultural elements as well as their struggle for civil rights. The exhibit concludes with a look at the people and families that have left an enduring legacy of hard work and community spirit.

The show is the Museum's first effort to produce a prototype exhibit that will be part of a complete renovation of the permanent galleries. The Museum received a \$45,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to plan new permanent exhibits featuring people and the environment.

An exciting result of this project has been the outpouring of stories, photographs and artifacts from the Hispanic community. The Museum's ongoing effort to accumulate these important historical items has begun to fill a void in our collections. Upcoming exhibits on the environment, Native Americans and Germans from Russia will promote more community dialogue.

We are deeply indebted to the members of the Hispanic Advisory Committee for their contributions to this exhibit and the NEH project. The committee members include Sam Blanco, Angie Blanco, Frank Blanco, Isabelle Carrillo, Gil Carbajal, Manuel Córdova Delphine García, Vi García, Dan Martínez, John Miranda, Belinda Ortez, Rick Ramirez, Deborah Romero, Rick Salas, Lee Saliega, Rose Thompson and Amy Cota.

On April 5, 1996, Jovita and her brother Salvador were honored at the 13th annual El Centro Achievement Awards Ceremony, hosted by CSU. El Centro is an organization that works to reduce poverty and discrimination in Latino populations.



Jovita's perseverance and dedication are mirrored in her personal philosophy: "Tie your wagon to a star. Otherwise you might not get anywhere."



Rich Abrahamson/The Coloradoan

FIRST GRAD: Flowers were presented to Jovita Vallecillo Lobato, 88, right, at Colorado State University's Lory Student Center on Thursday night. Lobato was the first known Mexican-American to graduate from CSU in 1936.

Bio- Lobato, Jovita

WELCOME TO THE 13TH ANNUAL EL CENTRO ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS CEREMONY

APRIL 5, 1996

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COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY**

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INVOCATION	Ms. Yesenia de Robles
DEDICATION SONG	Ms. Myrrose Valera Song: "Colors of the Wind"
MASTER OF CEREMONIES	Mr. Jim Chavez
MISTRESS OF CEREMONIES	Ms. Denise Maes
WELCOME AND TRIBUTE TO DR. JULIAN SAMORA	Dr. Albert C. Yates President, CSU
SLIDE SHOW: EL CENTRO AT COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY	Ms. Myrrose Valera
RECOGNITION OF GRADUATING SENIORS	Ms. Guadalupe Salazar Director of El Centro
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ENTERTAINMENT	Mr. Frank Rivera Song: "Impossible Dream"
SPECIAL RECOGNITION TO JOVITA LOBATO AND SALVADOR VALLECILLO	Ms. Guadalupe Salazar Mrs. Michella McKim Executive Director of Alumni Relations, CSU
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CLOSING SONG	Ms. Myrrose Valera Mr. Frank Rivera "Love In Any Language"

Learn more about local history by visiting the Archive at Fort Collins Museum of Discovery, visiting the Poudre River Public Library District, and by checking us out online at the Fort Collins History Connection.