

Lanare, California:

A Brief Narrative History

Anne Bellows

THELTON E. HENDERSON CENTER FOR
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University of California, Berkeley School of Law (Boalt Hall)

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By Anne Bellows
JD Candidate 2013
UC Berkeley School of Law

Author's Note

This impressionistic history, based on interviews with local residents, archived maps, deeds, and public documents, as well as other historical accounts, is intended to document some of the events and forces that have shaped the development of Lanare.

While many residents will know much of this history far better than I can present it, my hope is that by combining historical research with residents' voices this essay can both reflect and inform community narratives. For those outside of Lanare, the essay may shed light on some of the policies, pressures, and needs that have resulted in a network of small, underserved unincorporated communities throughout the San Joaquin Valley. Finally, Lanare has long committed itself to working to improve conditions in the community – the story of those efforts deserves to be told, and I hope this narrative can be part of telling it.

I am deeply indebted to the community members who agreed to be interviewed for this history: Isabel Solorio, Carrie Bonner, Ethyl Myles, Juventino Gonzalez, Alberto Sanchez, Jesús Medina, and Lala Carbajal. Phoebe Seaton, Veronica Garibay, and Juan Carlos Cancino from California Rural Legal Assistance all provided invaluable guidance and insight. All mistakes and omissions are my own.

- Anne Bellows

To outsiders, the community of Lanare might look like it was settled nearly by accident. In this small, unincorporated community in rural Fresno County, modest homes housing the community's approximately six hundred residents are strung along Mt. Whitney Avenue and north along three of its cross streets. Mt. Whitney Avenue is a major county road cutting through farmland to connect the western portion of the county and its large, industrialized agriculture with the cities and amenities in the east along the corridor of Highway 99. The road is designed for getting from one place to another, not for neighborhood foot traffic. Its cross streets are spaced a half mile apart, so that wide vacant spaces stand behind and between the community's thin lines of houses. Lanare has no town center, few amenities, and significant economic hardship. The impression of happenstance is strengthened by the contrast with nearby Riverdale: a compact community of over three thousand residents, boasting a new community center and a little downtown area with little shops and restaurants and even a bank.

It is true that Lanare was settled without the benefit of government planning or investment. The community's existence, however, is far from accidental. Rather, the community of Lanare represents the determination of farmworkers and other low-income families to carve out a toehold in a landscape that was made mostly unavailable to them. Industrial-scale farms in the western part of Fresno County employ a consistent population of farmworkers, but besides fast-disappearing (and historically substandard) employer-provided housing, there's almost nowhere in that part of the county for low-income families to live. Lanare, like other small rural communities in Fresno County, has long provided an important opportunity for autonomy, home-ownership, and community for African American and Latino workers – an opportunity that Riverdale, a historically white community, did not always offer.

Lanare has been shaped not only by its residents' determination to create a lasting home, but also by a background landscape of exclusion and neglect. The county's incorporated cities have a long record of failing to provide sufficient affordable housing to meet the needs of local population, and particularly the needs of farmworkers.¹ In west Fresno County, where many Lanare residents work, the landscape itself is a barrier to housing: most

of the land is locked up by large agricultural spreads, and the few settlements there – Five Points, Tranquility, San Joaquin – are physically too small to house the region’s farmworkers. At only a dozen miles to the east, Lanare presents one of the closest housing opportunities for laborers employed by West Fresno’s industrial scale farms. Additionally, as these communities developed over the last fifty years, racism and poverty posed additional barriers for Latino and African American farmworkers seeking housing in better served – and whiter – towns like Riverdale.²

Lanare residents have also largely been denied any sustained public planning and investment. Fresno County, the local government responsible for planning and service provision in unincorporated areas, has ignored Lanare for most of its history. The growth of the community took place without careful planning or municipal service provision, the product of fast and loose land transactions that, in the early 60s, nearly cost some residents their homes. The area had no running water until the 70s, and poor planning and growth limitations continue to hobble Lanare’s efforts to provide safe drinking water, waste water disposal, and other basic infrastructure today.³

This essay, informed by interviews with local residents, archived maps, deeds, and public documents, and other historical accounts, traces the development of Lanare. The community’s history illustrates the housing challenges encountered by rural Fresno County residents, the risks and poverty faced by Latino and African American farmworkers, and the determination of Lanare residents to build a lasting community for their families. This history also illustrates the destructive cycle of government neglect, where the lack of initial planning has become a rationalization for decisions perpetuating service deficits.

When Carrie Bonner moved to Lanare in the early 1960s, she joined a community of farmworkers living for the most part in shacks and tents. In stark contrast with nearby white Riverdale, the community was al-most entirely African American – with the exception of three Latino families. Like hers, most were farm-working families, so-called “Black Okies” who migrated to California to escape sharecropper poverty in places like Texas, Arkansas, and Alabama.⁴ Against that background, farm work in California paid relatively well. Back then, according to Carrie Bonner, “people used to say that money grew on trees around here – and it probably did seem like it to them.”

Carrie and her husband first came to Fresno County from Arizona to join a migrant farmworker crew that had its base camp near Hub, a handful of miles to the southeast of Lanare near Highway 41. After a few years in the camp, they moved to a house on Elkhorn Avenue, to the north of Lanare, but the building was in bad condition and the landlord repeatedly refused to fix it up. When Carrie was pregnant with their eighth child, her husband was shot in a juke joint in Lanare. Newly widowed and unwilling to keep her children in a deteriorating house, Carrie moved her family to a rental on Garfield Avenue in Lanare.

Ethyl and Robert Myles had arrived in Lanare only a few years earlier, looking for a better place to raise their growing family than the one room shack their employer put out in Five Points provided. They heard about the opportunity to buy a piece of land in the community, and jumped at the possibility of owning their own place. The place they moved into had an out-house and no running water, but it did have their own name on the deed, and with time they were able to fix it up. For ten years Robert commuted thirty miles daily to his job in irrigation at Harris Ranch. Ethyl would join him for seasonal work like picking cotton.

Since these early years, the economic lifeblood of Lanare has been agricultural work. Women and men alike worked in the fields, chopping and picking cotton, chopping sugar beets, picking peaches, pruning and picking grapes. A warehouse just south of the community, owned by the Powell family in Riverdale, provided seasonal employment for two hundred or more workers packing produce like cantaloupes.

Family after family tells a story similar to the Myles and the Bonners: they came to the region to work the crops, living in labor camps or in housing provided by their employers, often little better than shacks. At mid-century, it was common for a farm in west Fresno to provide a camp with a hundred or more cabins, many in poor conditions and all overcrowded.⁵ Some families moved to Lanare to escape the squalid conditions of the growers' camps, and still more came as regulations tightened and the employers tore down the shacks, leaving workers to find their own housing in a part of the county with few towns and even fewer housing opportunities within their reach.⁶ Families moved to Lanare to own their own place and provide a home for their children. They may not have had a lot of money, but they saved what they could and staked out a small claim in Fresno County.

Lanare takes its name from turn-of-the-century financier Llewelyn Arthur Nares, whose Summit Lake Investment Company in the early 1900s came to control the giant Laguna de Tache land grant stretching along north bank of the Kings River.⁷ (The land grant was a holdover from the era of Mexican colonization, recognized by American authorities under the Treaty of Guadalupe.) L.A. Nares subdivided the grant into agricultural parcels and platted a network of town sites along the Kings River. The towns, in turn, were served by subsidized railroad lines and guaranteed water rights to irrigate their fields. His firm Lanare & Saunders also brought hundreds of families from Europe and the Eastern United States to settle these farming colonies.⁸

The “Town of Lanare” was originally surveyed and platted in 1912, located at the intersection of Mt. Whitney Avenue and the Laton & Western Railroad.⁹ The town was rapidly built up after its founding. A history of Fresno County and its leading characters written in 1919 contains a biographical sketch of a Lanare rancher and dairyman named Joe Prandini. His biographical sketch describes a host of improvements Prandini contributed to the “new town” of Lanare: a garage building, a store building, a meat market building, an ice-cream and confectionery store, a blacksmith shop, and a water tank to supply the community.¹⁰ In 1925 Fresno County approved “Prandini’s Addition to the Town of Lanare,” which subdivided a handful of parcels across Mt. Whitney Avenue from the rest of the town, on the north side of the street.¹¹

What happened to this early incarnation of Lanare remains a mystery. The community platted in the 1912 subdivision map and depicted in Prandini’s biographical sketch disappeared without a trace: the original town site is now an empty field, and the homes that make up the present-day Lanare community are across the street, to the north of Mount Whitney, including the lots subdivided by Prandini’s Addition. None of the current residents interviewed for this history, including some who arrived only thirty years after Prandini’s energetic construction, remember there being any development to speak of on the original site.

The community of Riverdale four miles to the east of Lanare had its formal start in 1911, just a year before Lanare’s original founding. Like Lanare, Riverdale served a local economy with significant emphasis on dairy. Local families had been operating “regular dairy businesses” in the area since the last decades of the 1800s, sustaining a society big enough to support a farmers’ association, a church, and a school.¹² Also like Lanare, the town site

was platted next to a railway: the mainline of the “Hanford and Summit Lake Railway.”¹³ Riverdale expanded rapidly after the county approved its original plat, or subdivision map, in 1911, adding eight new subdivisions within ten years. After that, growth subsided until the late 1940s, when it picked up again and has continued intermittently ever since.

In 1956 the Fresno County Centennial Almanac reported that the Riverdale’s fifteen hundred residents were “about the best housed and served people in the valley.”¹⁴ Riverdale, the Almanac enthused, “is a sort of capital for the great west side empire between Highway 99 and the foot hills to the West.” That empire employed an army of agricultural workers, but few, it appears, were welcome in the empire’s “capital.” According to the 1960 census data, Riverdale was entirely white, save for one resident whose race was listed as “other.”¹⁵ At the same time, more than ten percent of the population in the surrounding areas was African American.¹⁶ The labor camp Carrie Bonner first lived in no doubt accounted for some of the African American population, along with the farmworker families living down the road on the north side of Mount Whitney across from the old town site of Lanare.

If Riverdale residents were the “best housed and served people in the valley,” Lanare’s residents must have been among the worst. Residents who lived there during the fifties and sixties describe homes from that time as “shacks and tents,” or “huts.”¹⁷ There was no running water in the community; to serve their basic needs, residents hauled water in milk cans and jugs from a local warehouse that had water or even from Riverdale.¹⁸ In those years, remembered Ethyl Myles, “it was like you were out in the desert, like you been put out there and forgot about.”

The development of a poorly served, predominantly black community a short distance beyond the borders of a wealthier white community strongly suggests a history of exclusion. Riverdale’s better housing and infrastructure would have made it a natural and likely desirable location for the farmworkers who settled Lanare. While their uncontested poverty may have been enough to shut them out of the Riverdale housing market, the marked racial disparity between the two towns suggests that prejudice likely played a role as well. Elsewhere in the San Joaquin Valley, racial exclusion was effected through deed restrictions forbidding the sale or leasing of property to non-white inhabitants.¹⁹ Even where formal deed restrictions were not present to bar families of color from a community, steering to housing options outside of

town and other expressions of local racism may have been sufficient to advertise that they were not welcome in a place like Riverdale.²⁰

Despite the segregated housing patterns separating the two communities, Lanare nonetheless remained in the orbit of larger, wealthier, and whiter Riverdale. Children from Lanare attended secondary school in Riverdale, and then later primary school as well after the closure of Binder Elementary in the mid 1960s. In Riverdale schools, students likely encountered racism maintained at what one former Riverdale resident described as “subtle levels.”²¹ There is some speculation that the Riverdale Christian Academy, founded in 1978, was created in order to give local families a means of escaping integration.²² (The Academy’s present-day attitude towards race does nothing to discredit the rumor: in 2007 the school hosted a Southern-plantation themed graduation celebration where faculty and staff dressed in blackface and seniors enacted a skit about “bringing home the runaway slave.”²³)

Many of the black and Latino farmworkers who settled their families in Lanare came into the community after buying small parcels of land from a man named Eugene Tomasetti. Introduced in the 1919 Fresno County history as a recent Swiss immigrant leasing a local dairy farm, Tomasetti had by the 1950s moved up to controlling much of the land to the north of the former town site of Lanare.²⁴ Tomasetti sold parcels in Lanare on installment plans – for a typical payment of ten dollars a month until the full price was paid – allowing farmworkers on the wrong side of the socioeconomic and racial divide to get around credit barriers that threatened to lock them out of homeownership. In this way he was similar to other land brokers of the era who subdivided land on the outskirts of cities and in rural areas to sell to Dust Bowl families who for reasons of economics, or race, or both, had difficulty securing credit or finding a place to live in town.²⁵

While installment plans of this sort undeniably offered a valuable opportunity for working class families, in Lanare’s case the scheme tended toward the dangerously informal. By the time Tomasetti was selling off parcels in the nascent farmworker community, he had become a notorious drunk. To make their ten or fifteen dollar payments each month, families would often have to look for him in the bar in Riverdale. When they found him and paid up, he would write up their receipts on whatever was handy, often a scrap of cigarette paper.

Tomasetti didn't formally subdivide the land and create a proper neighborhood, but sold it bit by bit, stringing the parcels along the county roads and partially surrounding large vacant spaces left undeveloped. This thoughtlessness has left a lasting mark: where a formal subdivision map could have created a more compact, better planned settlement, with streets off the main road, and commercial and public space for the community, Lanare grew without the benefit of formal planning – a deficit the County of Fresno has not meaningfully remedied.

The only formal community plan ever drafted for Lanare, adopted by Fresno County in 1977 and amended once in 1982, does little more than describe the community and recite the county's policy of limiting growth in places like Lanare to avoid encroachment onto agricultural land.²⁶ The document does identify two strips along the existing county roads that may be appropriate for further residential development. Otherwise, it included no plans to fill in the substantial vacant areas surrounded on three sides by thin lines of houses, nor to address the lack of sewer that the plan itself identified as preventing denser uses and hindering more substantial residential and commercial development.

In fact the document seems to wish the community away, projecting without explanation that the population would dwindle from 315 residents in 1974 to only 220 by 1990. Such an attitude would not have been unusual for the era: neighboring Tulare County's 1971 General Plan declared an explicit policy of withholding sewer and water service from "communities with little or no authentic future" so that "these non-viable communities would... enter a process of long term, natural decline."²⁷

Whatever the county planners' motivations, the 1977 community plan was a missed opportunity to redress the fundamental planning challenges facing Lanare. As a result, while the population has nearly doubled in the last thirty-five years to nearly six hundred (emphatically disproving the plan's self-serving projections), the community has not become more compact, more walkable, or better served. And the consequences of planning deficits of the 70s and 80s have become present day rationalizations for further county neglect. Recently, residents approached Fresno County Public Works and Planning with a request to update Lanare's specific plan, only to meet a flat refusal. Citing Lanare's lack of density and basic infrastructure that could serve future development, the Deputy Director of Public Works said the County wouldn't do any planning for Lanare because they were short on

money and the community was not a priority. Even if they had the funds, they would use them for something else.

In addition to saddling the community with insufficient planning, the informal land transactions at Lanare's origin threatened the very ownership Lanare families had worked so hard to achieve. In 1961, after Eugene Tomasetti's death, his estate initiated legal action against Lanare residents in an attempt to retake the land.²⁸ One of the legal theories driving this attempt at dispossession was based on the alleged failure of Lanare residents to pay property taxes on their property. Eulalia (Lala) Carbajal, whose family was among those facing the loss of their home, recalled the community defeating the legal action by gathering up all the little cigarette paper receipts that they had saved over the years. Critically, the receipts showed that at each year's end, Lanare families had paid an extra few dollars in addition to their monthly payment, next to which Tomasetti marked "taxes." Retelling how the families had held onto those little pieces of paper throughout the years, Lala commented, "in the end we won because we'd been so hungry to have a little piece of land."²⁹

Fresno County property records contain traces of this struggle over the ownership in Lanare. Over the first three months of 1961, Tomasetti's estate collected "quitclaim" deeds where Lanare residents renounced any ownership of parcels in the community and transferred whatever title they might have to Tomasetti's estate. Twelve deeds in all, the documents represented a potentially permanent loss of land rights for the thirty three Lanare residents who signed them. Yet almost every single one of the residents who signed a quitclaim deed was still in the community eight years later, when a series of "resubdivision" maps finally brought Lanare into compliance with the Subdivision Map Act. Their signatures on those resubdivision maps represent a significant triumph over vulnerability in land tenure. Lanare residents would keep their homes.

By the time land rights in Lanare were finally settled, the place had grown into a robust, if small, community. A man named Willie Brown operated a grocery store there. A little restaurant – Lina's – served Mexican food to the agricultural workers. There was a bar with gambling and dancing, and there was the Calvary Baptist Church, built on a parcel bought from Tomasetti in 1958.

Housing in the community slowly improved through piece by piece investments made by Lanare residents. The shacks and tents that Carrie Bonner saw on her arrival transformed into trailers and even houses. Sometime around 1970, an organization called Self Help Enterprises made contacts in the community. Self Help, as the organization is commonly known in the area, was started by the Quakers in 1965 to assist farmworkers and rural communities in building and improving housing in the San Joaquin Valley. Self Help recruited eight households in Lanare to participate in building a first wave of community-constructed homes. Carrie Bonner, the single mother of eight, was in that first group. “They just came around knocking on doors,” she recalled. People were resistant at first, but eventually they started meeting every week to plan the construction. Self Help brought in the materials, and the families went to work doing the building themselves. Their labor was to be their down payment on a housing loan from the USDA Rural Housing Service. “We’d work a little on one house, then a little on another,” Carrie recalled. The idea was to finish up all the houses at the same time, each family helping out the others until they were all ready to move in. Even community members who weren’t participating in the program helped out.

News about the housing program spread. Alberto Sanchez and Jesús Medina, farmworkers living with their families in cramped cabins on Diener Ranch out in West Fresno, found out about the opportunity from a co-worker who lived in Lanare. “My wife decided she wanted the parcel and the house before we’d ever even seen Lanare,” Jesús recounted. The Sanchez and Medina families each bought a parcel through Self Help, and the wives went to work building the houses while the men continued their jobs on the ranch. When Alberto and Jesús could get a day off on a weekend (never guaranteed – often they worked seven days a week), they would join their wives and future neighbors in Lanare to help out with the construction. Friends and co-workers from Diener Ranch joined them as well, adding hours the families could count towards their down payment.

In 1969, with funding from the Fresno County Office of Economic Opportunity residents formed the Lanare Community Organization.³⁰ The initiatives started under the auspices of this group were nothing short of impressive. Through the efforts of the Lanare Community Organization and the assistance of Congressman B.F. Fisk and then congressional aide Tony Coehlo, the community was able to access federal funding to install a community water system and provide Lanare households running water for the first time.³¹ The Lanare Community Organization purchased property and

renovated a house for use as a community center – and the community center became a hub for anti-hunger and anti-poverty programs like the summer lunch program, a community-run preschool, and a seniors' macramé and ceramics program.

Among the most significant initiatives of this era was the farming cooperative started with a federal grant in 1973 and headed by Eddie Nolen, who remained a significant leader in Lanare for decades.³² The cooperative planted and harvested forty acres worth of crops – barley in 1973 (the proceeds of a bumper crop paid off the mortgage on the community center), cherry tomatoes in 1974 (lost to nematodes), and then an increasingly diversified crop of vegetables.³³ The cooperative built a greenhouse, then built another one after the first was destroyed by vandals.³⁴ In articles showcasing the cooperative, Nolen was definitive about his measure of success: "Our goal...is to employ as many people as we can, and in this way raise the economic level of the area."³⁵ By that measure, the program was a remarkable success. In 1976, thirty-two families were working year round with the cooperative, and an addition 240 people were employed "in various other aspects of the project."³⁶ That same year the cooperative started a greenhouse program to employ elderly members of the community.³⁷

Articles on the cooperative uniformly describe it as an integrated endeavor, involving both African American and Latino members of the community. One Fresno Bee article pictures the African American director Eddie Nolen standing next to fellow resident Arthur Carbajal as the two look over the 40 acres. Another shows elderly Lanare residents Andrea Quesada and Edith Martin working together in the greenhouse. But some Latino residents remember that not all the Lanare Community Organization's programs were integrated, and that Latino residents (Spanish-speaking or not) were not always welcome at the meetings. Juventino Gonzalez describes a program serving food to seniors, but only to African American seniors. And he recalls a Latino couple being turned away from a meeting at the Lanare Community Organization, even though the wife spoke English.

For years, the Lanare Community Organization (and later the Lanare Community Services District) was run by Reverend E.P. Davis, along with Eddie Nolen and Erwin Bingham, Jr. Originally from Alabama and a veteran of World War II, Davis was an agricultural laborer like others in the community, working at Russell Griffin Farms. Like many, he had signed a quitclaim deed in 1961, but was able to remain in the community and signed a resubdivision map as a record title holder in 1966. A retrospective article by

Eddie Nolen in 2005 gives Davis credit for the original installation of the community water system in 1972 and a second well dug in 2006, describing Davis as a “modern day hero” devoted to his “beloved community.”³⁸

While the initiatives Davis oversaw were certainly impressive, current residents report that Davis’ tenure also involved regrettable corruption. Documentation of the corruption is scarce, but rumors and frustration abound. Residents indignantly report that Davis and the other officers stopped working independent jobs and paid themselves a salary out of the Community Services District’s scanty budget. According to one resident, when the Lanare Community Organization bought the land for the farming cooperative, an additional ten acres each went to E.P. Davis and an associate of his. According to another, when new families moved into the community and started to build on their lots, Erwin Bingham would ask for payment, promising to ensure that the county would turn a blind eye to non-conforming structures. If the newcomer didn’t pay, County Code Enforcement would soon be on their doorstep.

All the while, Lanare continued to grow as farmworkers and their families looked for a place they could afford to buy that would split the difference between their farm labor jobs in West Fresno County and the amenities and services in the cities along Highway 99. In the early 1990s, when Isabel and Gerardo Solorio heard about the opportunity to buy a piece of land and get out of employer housing in Five Points, they jumped at it. The seller was none other than Louis Tomasetti, son of the late Eugene. Erwin Bingham, Jr. arranged the deal.

Isabel and Gerardo came to look at the parcel, located across from the community center. It was strewn with debris (Lanare, like other disadvantaged unincorporated communities, struggles with illegal dumping in the community). They agreed on a purchase price, and Louis Tomasetti signed over the deed. The Solorios cleaned up the trash themselves and made plans to build a house.

What the Solorios didn’t know was that Louis Tomasetti was only one of four record owners of the parcel – the other three, his sisters, were not involved in the sale. When Isabel and Gerardo went to the bank to apply for a loan to build a house on their new piece of land, they offered up the deed as collateral. The bank informed them about the missing signatures and gave them the addresses of Louis’ sisters, who all lived in the area. Isabel took an

English-speaking friend with her and went to each house. “They almost didn’t want to open their doors to me,” she recalled. But when they did, and when she and her friend explained why they were there, the sisters each signed the documents, completing the transfer of ownership. Now Isabel and Gerardo have an attractive house set back from the road, and Gerardo is one of the new directors on the Community Services District board.

The community of Lanare continues to confront significant challenges today. The well installed in 1971 pumps water with arsenic levels sometimes nearly twice the legal limit. Between 2000 and 2006, the community received Community Development Block Grant funds to develop a solution to the arsenic contamination. After new wells failed to turn up potable water, the engineering company contracted to support the project, Boyle Engineering, recommended that Lanare build a treatment plant. Unfortunately, there were significant holes in the analysis conducted by Boyle: it did not document water connection lines or consumption levels, nor did the analysis consider affordability in the context of Lanare’s low-income population. The treatment system was built and put into operation at an initial cost of \$1.3 million dollars. Very quickly, however, it quickly became apparent that it was fiscally unsustainable – the volume of water treated, and the cost of the chemicals, far outstripped the revenue to the water district. In March 2007, just five months after it began operation, the treatment plant was permanently shut down. During its design, construction, and operation, the Lanare Services District accrued over \$100,000 of debt.

Shortly after the treatment plant shut down, Eddie Nolen brought in a man from Fresno, Ken Souza, to provide some professional support to the Lanare Community Services District (CSD). While seeking out professional expertise for the CSD may have been a good idea in theory, particularly in light of the financial mess caused by the treatment plant and fresh memories of Boyle Engineering’s complete lack of due diligence, Ken Souza turned out to be yet more bad news for Lanare. He was hired with a salary of \$5,000 a month, even though the CSD, behind in its debts, clearly did not have that kind of money. Souza also hired three employees, but never filed any paperwork or paid payroll taxes for them.

Souza operated almost entirely without oversight or accountability until Gerardo Solorio joined the Board of the CSD in 2009 and began to ask for documentation of Souza’s administration. Slowly, a number of under-the-

table deals began to come to light, such as agreements to provide water to local agricultural users – in total contravention of the water system’s community and residential purposes – in exchange for payments that never made it into the CSD’s books, much less its treasury. Souza even began discussions with a local grower and the owner of the Riverdale Swap Meet to sell them the water system, a transaction that was unquestionably illegal in light of the public nature of the water system. As these reports began to surface, discontent sharpened. Juventino Gonzalez, a long time resident well known for his outspoken character, confronted Souza at one CSD meeting with evidence that Souza had failed to deposit the full amount of a check made out to the district.

With the aid of California Rural Legal Assistance (CRLA), Don Juventino brought suit to stop the illegal sale and preserve community control over Lanare’s water. The same lawsuit charged Souza with breach of contract and misconduct causing damage to the water system. Souza conceded defeat, agreeing to forego \$30,000 in salary owed to him by the CSD, share all financial documents related to his ill-fated management, and resign his post. The water system is now in receivership. Lanare residents pay significant water bills each month (at a minimum of \$54), and since the tap water remains contaminated with arsenic, many households also shoulder the costs of buying bottled, potable water.³⁹

In other respects, Lanare has a stark lack of core municipal services. There is no sewer in the community, meaning that households rely on aging and often failing septic systems. There are no sidewalks or streetlights, and no speed bumps or other efforts to counter the danger posed by cars speeding along the county roads.

Despite these struggles, the Lanare residents remain active and determined to push ahead. At the heart of this determination is a group calling themselves Community United in Lanare, which works closely with CRLA’s Community Equity Initiative. The group meets regularly to discuss issues confronting the community and often goes before the Fresno County Board of Supervisors to ask for funding, planning, or policy changes that might help address community needs. They also work with the food bank to organize a monthly food distribution, serving more than two hundred families at their last count.

Access to potable water, of course, has been one of the highest priorities for Community United in Lanare. When a new arsenic treatment plant was proposed for Riverdale, Lanare residents and CRLA asked that the

feasibility study consider the possibility of a connection with Lanare's water system. Riverdale's manager Ron Bass opposed consolidation with Lanare, saying flatly, "those people won't pay." Lanare residents perceive his attitude as the continuation of years of racism and prejudice that have colored Riverdale's treatment of Lanare. The California Department of Public Health, which is funding the feasibility study, initially refused to consider Lanare in the study, telling advocates they were only interested in solving Riverdale's problems through this project, and that Lanare's water issues weren't on the table.⁴⁰

Lanare residents persisted. Consolidation of the two communities' water systems through a shared arsenic plant was endorsed by the Fresno County Local Agency Formation Commission as a way to achieve "operational efficiencies and economies of scale that would improve service, water quality and affordable access to clean water for both communities."⁴¹ Drawing support from this analysis, Community United sought media attention regarding their water struggles and the resistance they faced from Riverdale and the Department of Public Health. In the spring of 2012, Assembly Member Henry Perea (D-Fresno) introduced a bill that would force the consolidation of the two communities' water systems. On three separate occasions Lanare residents, including Isabel Solorio and Juventino Gonzalez, traveled to Sacramento to testify in support of the bill. Although the legislative effort was ultimately dropped, Perea and Lanare residents succeeded in highlighting the harm caused by institutional barriers erected by the Department of Public Health. After withdrawing the legislative proposal, Perea wrote a letter to the Department asking that they reconsider combining arsenic treatment efforts in Lanare and Riverdale. The Department responded with a \$500,000 grant to fund a feasibility study for Lanare, and an agreement that Riverdale's treatment system would include one plant on the west side of the community that would be designed to allow for an easy and feasible connection to Lanare's water system.

Water is not the only pressing issue facing the community, nor is it the sole focus of Community United's efforts. In 2012, two community members were killed in hit-and-run accidents on Mt. Whitney Avenue. After the first death, members of Community United in Lanare asked the county to look at the issue of pedestrian safety along Mount Whitney. The County Public Works and Planning Department did a brief analysis, returning a couple weeks later to say that they had not identified any significant hazards. The county agreed to put Lanare on a list for sidewalks if money ever became

available. Together with CRLA, Community United in Lanare identified an alternative funding source through the California Department of Transportation that could provide resources to support planning for improved streets and measures to protect pedestrian safety. The county, however, declined to support the grant application, explaining that Lanare was not prioritized for road improvements because of the lack of density in the community.⁴² Within a few months of the county's refusal, another resident, this time a 24-year-old woman, was killed in a hit and run on Mount Whitney. The regional transportation planning agency, the Fresno County Council of Governments ("Fresno COG"), agreed to step in, but significantly cut back the proposal and failed to address resulting inconsistencies in the application. The application was denied, but continued advocacy has secured a commitment from the state to work with Fresno COG to ensure a grant application for the next round of funding is adequate.

Lanare continues to provide a crucial housing opportunity for farmworkers and working class households. Families continue to follow in the footsteps of the Solorios, moving into the community seeking the autonomy of their own home, and splitting the distance between farm labor jobs in West Fresno and stores and services in the eastern part of the county. Isabel counts nearly a dozen homes on her street, Mount Whitney Avenue, and the next street over that were not there when she and Gerardo arrived in the 1990s.

With no meaningful county planning or oversight of residential development, the lines of trailers and modest houses have passed beyond the boundary of the Community Services District, unchanged since 1975. Connections to the water system have followed suit, outstripping the District's technical jurisdiction. This mismatch between service and boundary went largely ignored in the 2007 review of the Community Services District. Taking the same "see no growth, hear no growth" tack as the 1977 community plan, the authors of the review wrote, "[i]t is not known when or even if new development will occur in the District." The agency responsible for the services review has no planning or land use authority with regard to Lanare, but county planners have given similarly scant attention to the need or potential for further housing development in the community.

Some residents blame the county's willful blindness to continuing housing demand in Lanare not only for the lack of services, but also for the substandard conditions of some new residents' trailers. "The government has us totally forgotten," remarks Juventino Gonzalez. "They're letting people

bring in trailers that a chicken would refuse to nest in.” Although his worry sounds like any homeowner’s concern about home value, Juventino had his own experience with substandard living conditions during the early years of his family’s residence in Lanare: the county condemned the living quarters they rented from a neighbor, and for a while, as he describes it, he and his wife had a hard time figuring out where they and their eight children could live. They bought their own parcel in Lanare in 1978, and in 1984 they were able to build their house through Self Help.

The principal solution put forward by Juventino and others in the community isn’t code enforcement or barriers to newcomers, but rather planned affordable housing development. Difficult anywhere with current market conditions, planned affordable housing development is a particularly ambitious dream for Lanare due to its lack of sewer and potable water, both predicates for development in Fresno County’s General Plan.⁴³ There’s precious little political will at the county or state level to finance those services, however. “We’re too small to face those costs ourselves,” Juventino concedes, “but if they just added twenty houses a year for a few years, in time we would be able to confront any cost or challenge, no matter how significant.” His view is widely shared. Residents point to the thirty or forty empty acres in the middle of the community as an opportunity for infill development. Although the lands are owned by a rancher, they’re lying idle. “People want to buy land and move here,” Isabel Solorio says. She points out that it’s a convenient location for many families dependent on agricultural work, and immigrants like her from small Mexican towns feel a strong connection to the rural lifestyle.

Not that Lanare couldn’t do with some additional amenities. Isabel has a ready wish-list: sewer and safe drinking water, of course, and also a grocery store selling Mexican foods, street lights and sidewalks, and regular visits from mobile dental and medical services. Getting there, of course, won’t be easy. But Lanare is a community that began as shacks and tents and literally built its way into better housing, that moved from residents hauling water in milk jugs to installing a community water system and now fighting for adequate treatment facilities, and that has for decades had a rich tradition of community involvement; such a community needs no lessons in patience and persistence.

End Notes

¹ Sarah Ramirez & Don Villarejo, "Poverty, Housing, and the Rural Slum: Policies and the production of Inequities, Past and Present," *American Journal of Public Health*, Vol. 102, No. 9 (July 2012) pp. 1664 – 1675 discusses housing shortages in the San Joaquin Valley in midcentury, particularly as affecting farm workers, and describes local officials refusal to build new public housing by erroneously claiming a lack of need for such housing. See also Fresno County Housing Element (2003) at pp. 7-39 to 7-40, discussing the "critical shortage" of affordable housing in Fresno County, particularly for farmworkers; Ellen Kersten & Joe Tayag, "San Joaquin Villas: Health Impact Report" (Greenlining Institute, 2007), describing zero percent vacancy rate in the west-side Fresno city of Firebaugh, high rates of "overpayment" where housing costs outstrip family incomes, and rates of overcrowding far above county, state, and national rate. For historical examples, see Walter Stein, *California and the Dust Bowl Migration* (Westport, Connecticut, 1973) at pp. 35-53, describing the inability of Valley communities to absorb Dust Bowl migrants in the 30s, leading to ditch-bank settlements and "Little Oklahomas" outside of Valley towns (the Mexican laborers preceding them had also been unable to find a permanent toehold in Valley towns); Paul Prasow, "Agricultural Labor in the San Joaquin Valley: Final Report and Recommendations," The Governor's Committee to Survey the Agricultural Labor Resources of the San Joaquin Valley (1951) at p. 211, describing the development of shacktowns in unincorporated areas as a result of agricultural laborers seeking to settle in the area.

² Ramirez & Villarejo (2012) at pp. 1666-67.

³ Veronica Garibay, "Lanare, California: A Case Study," California Rural Legal Assistance (2012), document on file with the author.

⁴ Carrie Bonner is from Texas, the Myles are from Arkansas, and EP Davis was from Alabama. Interviews, Feb & March 2012.

⁵ Chester F. Cole, "Rural Occupance Patterns in the Great Valley Portion of Fresno County, California," University of Nebraska Libraries, Thesis Manuscript (1951), at p. 202.

⁶ According to Don Villarejo "The Challenge of Housing California's Hired Farm Laborers," in David Marcouiller, Mark Lapping, and Owen Furuset, eds., *Rural Housing, Exurbanization, and Amenity-Driven Development: Contrasting the "Haves" and the "Have Nots,"* (Burlington, 2011), pp. 193-206, California has seen a dramatic decline in employer provided housing, from 5,000 labor camps in the mid 1960s to only 1,000 in the early 1990s – and likely even fewer today. *Id.* at pp. 193-94.

⁷ Ben Walker, *The Fresno County Bluebook: Containing Facts and impressions for the Better Understanding of Fresno County Past and Present*, Arthur Cawston Ed. & Pub., Fresno, California (1941).

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ Map of the Town of Lanare, Fresno County, California (1912), R.S. Bk. 7, p. 52. This document and other maps cited are available from the Fresno County Recorder's Office with the noted citation.

¹⁰ Paul E. Vandor, *History of Fresno County, California with Biographical Sketches of the Leading Men and Women of the County Who have been Identified with its Growth and Development from the Early Days to the Present* (Los Angeles, 1919), p. 2592.

¹¹ Map of Prandini's Addition to the Town of Lanare, Fresno County, California (1925), Plat Bk. 10, p. 50.

¹² Charles W. Clough and William B. Secrest, *Fresno County – The Pioneer Years: From the Beginning to 1900*, (Fresno, 1984), at pp. 164-65.

¹³ Map of the Town of Riverdale, Fresno County, California (1911), R.S. Bk. 6, p. 45.

¹⁴ Fresno County Centennial Committee, *Fresno County Centennial Almanac: A Compendium of Interesting and Useful Historical Facts & Old Tales Gathered to Mark the 100th Anniversary of the Founding of Fresno County*, 1956.

¹⁵ US Census, 1960. Riverdale, at 1,012 residents, just barely passed the bar for inclusion in specific demographic tabulations, as the smallest profiled communities were those with populations between 1,000 and 2,500. Of Riverdale's 1,012 residents, 1,011 were white, none were black, and one was listed as "other." While it is possible that some of the white population in Riverdale would be considered Latino, community recollections suggest that it would not have been a significant proportion. By 1980, when Census tables began to include persons "of Spanish origin," only 13.2 percent of Riverdale fell in that category.

¹⁶ US Census, 1960. The Riverdale county division (a unit designated by the census) had a population of 3,245, of which 250 were black. Once the population of Riverdale is taken out, 11.2 percent of the population in the division was black.

¹⁷ Interview with Carrie Bonner; interview with Ethyl and Robert Myles; *see also* Michael Eissinger, *African Americans in the Rural San Joaquin Valley, California: Colonization Efforts and Townships*, Masters Thesis, CSU Fresno (2008), p. 103.

¹⁸ Interview with Ethyl and Robert Myles; the part about "milk cans and jugs" comes from Eddie Nolen, "Lanare: An Evolving Town," *Twin City Times*, Oct. 25, 2005. Eissinger (2008) reports that people hauled water from Powell's Warehouse.

¹⁹ Interviews with Paul Boyer and Mark Arax. Paul Boyer purchased a property in Farmersville had been subject to racially restrictive covenants; Mark Arax's grandfather purchased a property in the City of Fresno that had a racially restrictive covenant that included Armenians in its restrictions. *See also* Mark Arax and Rick Wartzman, *The King of California*, (New York, 2003) at p. 271.

²⁰ The history of virulent racism in the San Joaquin Valley has been well documented elsewhere. *See e.g.* Devra Weber, *Dark Sweat, White Gold: California Farm Workers*,

Cotton, and the New Deal, (Berkeley, 1994); Arax & Wartzman (2003), pp. 278-281 (describing a black graduate of a police academy shut out from employment as a police officer in San Joaquin Valley towns due to his race in the early 1960, socially enforced segregation in private establishments like swimming pools and restaurants, and racist comments in schools and movie theaters experienced by one black resident); Sarah Ramirez & Don Villarejo (2012).

²¹ Eissenger (2008) at p. 105.

²² *Id.*

²³ Carmen Van Kerkhove, "Riverdale Christian Academy celebrates graduation with blackface party mocking slavery," blogpost, Jun. 11, 2007, available online at <http://www.racialicious.com/2007/06/11/riverdale-christian-academy-celebrates-graduation-with-a-blackface-party-mocking-slavery/>

²⁴ Vandor (1919), p. 2595.

²⁵ See Arax & Wartzman (2003) at pp. 270-272; see also, Prasow (1951) at 211-218 (describing shacktowns or "working men's tracts" that sprang up in unincorporated areas to house Dust Bowl farmworker families).

²⁶ Fresno County, *Lanare Community Plan* (1977) (amended in 1982), document on file with the author.

²⁷ County of Tulare General Plan (1971) at 2-1, quoted in Michelle Wilde Anderson, *Cities Inside Out: Race, Poverty, and Exclusion at the Urban Fringe*, 55 UCLA L Rev. 1095, 1148, n 182 (2008).

²⁸ Interview with Eulalia Carbajal, March 2012. A 1959 court order authorized the administrator of Tomasetti's estate to proceed with filing subdivision maps "of certain of the lands held by the decedent." The order was recorded with the County Recorder's office in February 1961, coinciding with the recordation of quit claim deeds from some Lanare residents renouncing their title to parcels in the community. The order can be found at Bk. 4512, p. 287. The quitclaim deeds can be found at Bk. 4529 p. 337 et seq.

²⁹ Interview, March 23, 2012. Translated from the original Spanish.

³⁰ Undated community newsletter show-casing the timeline of accomplishments of the Lanare Community Organization. On file with the author.

³¹ Eddie Nolen, "Lanare: An Evolving Town," *Twin City Times*, October 25, 2005.

³² The federal funding is mentioned in Joe Bigham, "A Success Story for Farming Cooperatives," *San Francisco Chronicle Business World*, Nov. 1, 1976, p. 57.

³³ John Crowe, "Lanare Co-Op Raises Hopes on 40 Acres," *The Fresno Bee*, Apr. 6, 1975, p. C1.

³⁴ Id.

³⁵ Quoted in Fresno County Economic Opportunity Commission's Community Action Program, "Lanare Farm Cooperative," CAPSule, Vol. 2 No. 5, (April 1, 1976).

³⁶ Id.

³⁷ The date is taken from an undated newsletter containing a timeline of the Coop's accomplishments on file with the author. A Fresno Bee profile of the senior training program, John Crowe, "Elderly Battle Poverty: 'Operation Green Thub' in Lanare Offers Them A Chance For A Better Life," undated, is also on file with the author.

³⁸ Nolen (2005).

³⁹ Garibay (2012).

⁴⁰ Details regarding Lanare's efforts to connect with Riverdale's water system are drawn from personal communications with Veronica Garibay, community worker for the Community Equity Initiative.

⁴¹ Cited in New America Media, "Dying for a Glass of Clean Water in CA's San Joaquin Valley," August 22, 2011, available online at <http://newamericamedia.org/2011/08/dying-for-a-glass-of-clean-water-in-cas-san-joaquin-valley.php>

⁴² Personal communication with Phoebe Seaton, Director of the Community Equity Initiative of California Rural Legal Assistance, and Veronica Garibay, community worker for the Community Equity Initiative.

⁴³ See, e.g., Public Facilities section of Fresno County, "Draft Revised 2000 General Plan Policy Document," p. 2-114: "The County shall limit the expansion of unincorporated, urban density communities to areas where community wastewater treatment facilities can be provided."

BerkeleyLaw

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Thelton E. Henderson
Center for Social Justice

897 Simon Hall, #7200
Berkeley, CA 94720-7200
Phone: 510-642-6969
Fax: 510-642-3728
Email: henderson.center@berkeley.edu
Website: <http://www.law.berkeley.edu/HendersonCenter.htm>