



Energy Blog



La Colonia Independencia: Anaheim Independencia Family Resource Center Unique History (P 1 of 3)

This month's blog series shines a light on Orange County sites of resistance and justice. I'd like you to please read along each week to learn about how social, environmental, and housing movements shaped Orange County. This week, we will cover how the San Onofre became a site of resistance in Orange County.

“The People’s Guide series was born from the conviction that we need a different kind of guidebook: one that explains power relations in a way everyone can understand, and that shares stories of struggle and resistance to inspire and educate activists, students, and critical thinkers,”

— Elaine Lewinnek, Gustavo Arellano, Thuy Vo Dang

The land now known as Orange County has a rich and diverse history, from being stewarded by the Tongva and Acjachemen, to being under colonial rule, to being transitioned to US ownership. This unique set of history has left a legacy on current day Orange County.

In his 1994 study, Professor Gilbert González of UC Irvine identified three different types of Mexican American communities that developed post-Mexican Revolution. The colonia tracts were a form of de jure segregation, having been specifically laid out for and marketed to the county’s growing Mexican American population. This was done in an era where systemic racism and segregation restricted sales to whites only. This form of segregation and community planning led to these colonias

Fri, Nov 8, 2024

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forming close, yet away from existing towns, surrounded by orange groves and vegetable farms, which provided their source of income.

Many unincorporated areas in Orange County are the former colonias of Mexican American citrus workers. The Colonia Independencia between Anaheim and Garden Grove, El Modena near Tustin, and Olive in Orange are all barrios, or neighborhoods, home to generations of Latino residents.

La Colonia Independencia

The Colonia Independencia, translating to the Independent Neighborhood, was laid out in 1923 at the northwest corner of Katella Avenue and Gilbert Street, between Anaheim and Stanton. Today, La Colonia Independencia stands as a site of resistance amongst Chicanos and Mexican Americans. The neighborhood is situated within unincorporated Orange County, known as an 'island'. County islands are usually surrounded by land that is incorporated into a municipality.

This neighborhood has withstood the test of time, resisting being incorporated into Anaheim, and for good reason. La Colonia has a rich history, home to civil rights activist Gloria Lopez. After World War II, Southern California experienced a boom in urban development and Orange County's orange groves gave way to suburban development. This, in addition to systemic discrimination (i.e. white-only housing) led to segregated communities developing. Gloria Lopez played a crucial role in the de-segregation of Magnolia No. 2 High School, one of the last "Mexican" high schools to be integrated in Orange County.

Invigorated by the success, Gloria began to host community events in an effort to build a larger church. The Sacred Heart Mission church, now larger than ever, opened its doors on July 1st, 1968, becoming one of the only Spanish Mass sites amongst all of Orange County. With the new chapel opened, the old building sat unuse. This is when the then president of Community Action Partnership of Orange County, Ray Villa, approached Gloria and ask about opening a community center within La Colonia. Gloria, after some thought, agreed the center would be beneficial

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to La Colonia. After some searching and discussion, the unoccupied church reopened as the Anaheim Independencia Community Center in 1967. Gloria served as the center's first director.

Gloria's vision grew the center, bringing families together and building a sense of community that soon outgrew the center. By this time, Magnolia No.2 had gone and what was left was an empty plot of land. This is where the Anaheim Independencia Family Resource Center you know, stands today. The new center was built in the 80s with the help of CAP OC and Community Service Block Grant Funds. Although Gloria has now passed, Community Action Partnership of Orange County honors her legacy and hard work by managing and operating the Anaheim Independencia Family Resource Center. Without her work and advocacy, the center would not be what it is today.

Sources:

(1) [Early Orange County Colonias](#)

(2) ['Island' in O.C. seeks to honor its past](#)

(3) [Gloria Lopez's Legendary Activism Began With the Integration of an Anaheim Mexican School](#)