

Cultural Property Designation Form

City of Las Cruces – Community Development Department

700 N. Main St., Las Cruces, NM 88001

For assistance, call (575) 528-3027 or email cbeesley@lascruces.gov

For official use only:

LC CPD No. _____ NRHP _____ SRCP _____ Criteria A B C D

Section 1 – Property Information

1. Name of Property (Usually refers to prominent historical period) Rio Grande Theatre	3. Address/Location of Property (If no mailing address exists, use nearest cross streets; include UTM's) 211 N Main St., Las Cruces, NM, 88001
2. Historic Names (if applicable) (All names, during or following historical period) Fox Rio Grande Theatre	

Section 2 – Property Description

4. Property Type (See below for descriptions) ☒ Building (roof, enclosed walls, occupied) ☐ Structure (roof, walls, unoccupied) ☐ Site/Infrastructure (park, acequia, etc.) ☐ Object (statue, mural, etc.)	8. Identifying photo (Show main façade or other for clear identification) 
5. Original Use of Property Motion Picture Theater Stage Production Theater Community Event Space Specialty Store	
6. Current Use of Property Motion Picture Theater Stage Production Theater Community Event Space	
7. Listing history Has this property previously been listed in a national or state register, either individually or as part of an existing historic district? ☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Unsure NR: Listed 2004 SR: Listed 2003	

9. Construction Date (if known) 1926	10. Building/Structure Occupation Status ☒ Occupied ☐ Unoccupied ☐ Does not apply
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11. Construction History

Has the property been moved?

☐ Yes ☒ No

If yes, date moved:

Describe alterations (with dates, if known):

1933: roof replacement and modifications to the north face following fire damage

1930s-40s: original marquee tower removed

1949: addition of large canopy and marquee to front façade

1950: false front made of a metal screen and stucco fastened to front façade

1998: removal of fronting

1998-2005: large-scale renovations reimplementing some historical features; include: recarpeting, reproduction of original box office, and modifications/additions to support new technology

2018: Further repairs/ renovations to support modern theater technology and maintain building structure

2025: Replacement of roof membrane

2026: Foundation and structural stabilization work

12. Building Condition

(Relative to historical period or occupancy history)

☐ Excellent

☐ Altered

☒ Good

☐ Unaltered

☐ Fair

☐ Deteriorated

☒ Original Site

☐ Ruins/Abandoned

☐ Moved to New Location

☐ No longer standing

Alterations to the exterior have been moderate, with the building retaining integrity of location, design, workmanship, and materials. Although components of its original interior have been altered or are missing, what remains retains sufficient integrity to communicate the historical feeling and association of the theater.

Section 2 – Property Description, cont.

13. Property Description

(Written narrative describing the property's physical attributes and characteristics, no character limit)

Adapted from "Description" in the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form: Rio Grande Theatre, written by Scott A. Green, 2003.

The Rio Grande Theatre is a two-story building, constructed in 1926 out of adobe brick with a fired-brick veneer front façade, molded in the Italian Renaissance style. Located among a block of commercial buildings on N. Main Street in Las Cruces, New Mexico, the building has remained an integral part of downtown life for the last century. It is representative of regional construction methods and classical design aesthetics, and has retained integrity of location, design, materials, feeling and association in spite of moderate alterations to the exterior and interiors. A restoration was undertaken between 1997 and 2005, returning the 422-seat performing arts center to its former glory.

Exterior

The theater is a predominantly adobe-constructed, two-story commercial building with a primary façade facing east onto Main Street. The theater's front facade is faced with red brick with a horizontal brick cornice just below the roofline. A ribbon of arches with cast stone rosettes at the center of each arch and a string of dentils above define the roofline. Small steel rosettes below the roofline and along the arched entry are attached to tie rods, which run to the inside wall that separates the balcony from the projection and office area. These tie rods were set in place in 1949 to reinforce the outside wall in preparation for attachment of a canopy sign onto the front of the theater. Below the cornice, an arcade of round-arched windows with stuccoed heads and brick sills spans the façade. The windows are single-hung in a six-over-one glazing pattern. The area between the arches is finished with white stucco, which stands out against the red brick background. The theatre's iconic red and yellow-trimmed marquee projects from between the two center windows, positioned centrally above the arched entry.

At the center of the facade, an arched entry set within a vestibule serves as the theater's grand entrance. A large rosette is located on each corner of the portal, each supported by a pair of composite capitals atop raised brick shafts joined intermittently by thin concrete horizontal bands. An escutcheon pendant is placed in the center of the arched entry at the same height as the rosettes. The entrance arch is outlined with small terra cotta rosettes, while bas-relief violins, horns and foliage grace the spandrel. A decorative glazed tile pattern ornaments the arch's piers. The base of the entranceway is trimmed with polychrome salt-glazed tiles. During the 1997-2005 restoration, elements of the entablature above the entrance were reconstructed using Styrofoam with a plaster-cast coating painted to resemble stone.

The arched entry is supported by brick free-standing square columns, decorated with alternative bands of stonework above tile-covered bases, and featuring a multitude of colors and various geometric designs. On either side of the arched entry are retail shops. These are nearly identical in design. A white stucco lintel runs from the entrance arch to the outside walls and crowns each shop. Below this lintel is a transom of tall vertical panes of prism glass crowning each of the shop's fixed pane aluminum frame display windows. Polychrome salt-glazed tiles trim the wall at the windows and the corners of the shops. A recessed entry with a glass door provides access to each shop. The shop windows border the theater entrance where advertisements or displayed goods were once visible to theater patrons.

The theater's flat, built-up roof is crowned with a tall parapet wall across its east (front), north, and south elevations; the parapet is capped with a layer of copper coping. The roof's front section is wider at the north and was not part of the initial construction. The original roof was a casualty of a 1933 fire that required the construction of a new roof and wall. The roof over the auditorium area of the theater is higher in elevation with a stepped parapet along its north and south elevations. The rear elevation of the building is undistinguished and consists of a stuccoed wall ornamented with a c. 1970s metal marquee, three mounted lights, a roll-up door above a tall parking bay for moving equipment and stage props, and a rear entrance with associated stair access. The north and south elevations that abut the adjacent commercial buildings are stuccoed adobe brick painted white.

Interior

The Rio Grande Theatre's box office—a tile, glass and galvanized structure—was originally situated just beyond the theater entrance, in the center of the vestibule area. Sometime later, the box office was moved to the north side of the front lobby against the adjacent shop window. During the building's restoration between 1997 and 2005, a reproduction of the 1926 box office was replaced in its original location by the Doña Ana Arts Council. Beyond the vestibule is a wide lobby. Inside, the lobby's south wall ends with a wooden staircase, which leads to the balcony and offices above. The tall ceilings are covered with a modern facsimile of tin ceiling tiles and bordered around the walls with a decorative border featuring an asymmetrical rinceau design in mauve with stylized vines and fruit. A wall was constructed at an unknown date to separate the lobby and the theater; encased inside the wall are columns that support the balcony above.

The rear balcony extends some 15 feet over the auditorium seating area. It is split into an upper and lower seating with a circulation corridor in between. Three evenly spaced terracotta-colored panels with small square-shaped openings and an x-shaped overlay hang above the balcony. The rear of the balcony has a single door that leads to the former projection and office area; this space is still used as office and storage space. Two offices are portioned off against the east wall of the second floor; these offices look out through the front façade's second-story windows onto the street below.

The auditorium seating area consists of a spacious, open hall, originally with wooden trusses exposed 60 feet above the floor; several of these were replaced with metal trusses during the restoration—all are painted black and blend into the black ceiling. Large pilasters, located along either wall perpendicular to the stage and seating, support the trusses. Between the pilasters, the plastered walls are decorated with elaborately stenciled fleurs-de-lis, cartouches, and garlands. Removable tapestries that related the history of Spanish colonization

once hung in the auditorium. They were removed in the late 1940s when the original walls were plastered; their whereabouts are currently unknown. At the west end of the auditorium is the performance stage area. The wooden planked stage is 20 feet deep and recesses to a plastered adobe wall. Portions of the plaster, likely made of lime, have worn away and exposed portions of adobe; the interior plasterwork will be repaired as part of an upcoming project. The theater has seen several proscenium arches and seating fixtures. A restoration of the proscenium arch and orchestral pit was implemented following the Doña Ana Arts Council's early 2000s renovations. The proscenium is painted with interwoven oval and diamond shapes colored in understated blues and reds, lending a Southwestern feel to the otherwise Spanish and Italianate auditorium. A pair of arched decorative windows with tinted lights and white diamond trim are placed at balcony-height on either side of the proscenium wall.

Section 3 – Property Significance

14. Significance Criteria

(Check all that apply, explain answers under 15. Significance Narrative)

☒ (A) Broad cultural, political, economic or social association with community/state/national history

☐ (B) Associated with a historic person or significant events

Or (C)

☒ Distinctive architectural type, style, method, or craftsmanship

☒ Authenticity of materials and historic elements from the most prominent period of the building's history

☒ Notable work of a master builder, designer, or architect

Or (D)

☐ Potential to yield information important in history or prehistory

☐ Subject to encroachment or adverse effects

☐ Threatened with demolition by public or private action

☐ Other qualities significant to local heritage (explain under 15. Significance Narrative)

Integrity Consideration ☒ Yes ☐ No

(Does the property possess sufficient integrity as evaluated for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places)

15. Significance Narrative

(Written narrative describing the history of the property and its importance to Las Cruces, no character limit)

Adapted from "Statement of Significance" in National Register of Historic Places Registration Form: Rio Grande Theatre, written by Scott A. Green, 2003.

The Rio Grande Theatre was constructed in 1926, a peak era of cinema and cinema construction. Named after the region's largest river and lifeblood, the Rio Grande Theatre was designed by the prominent El Paso architect, Otto H. Thorman, of the firm Thorman and Frazer. The theater is historically significant as an important local example of early 20th century Italian Renaissance Revival architecture and for its two-story adobe construction. Furthermore, the theatre is historically significant for its broader relationship to the "Golden Age" transition from silent to sound cinema and its local prominence as a social space and source of pride for the then-small Las Cruces community. After the community shifted towards suburban living and business, the Rio Grande Theatre was closed in 1997. It was soon purchased by the Dona Ana Arts Council, who reopened the theater in 2005 as a performing arts center following an ambitious restoration and renovation project. The Rio Grande Theatre meets eligibility under Criterion A for cultural and social association with community history, and Criterion C in the area of authenticity of materials and historic elements and distinctive architectural style.

Criterion A

The Rio Grande Theatre is a prominent and valued community space for Las Cruces, who have supported its operation as a motion picture theater, performing arts theater, and social event venue throughout the many hardships encountered during its nearly 100-year tenure. For its connection to community identity and activity,

as well as its connection to significant transitions in cinema history, the Rio Grande Theatre is nominated under Criterion A.

Prior to the construction of the Rio Grande Theatre in 1926, Las Cruces boasted several silent movie theaters, outdoor vaudeville theaters and temporary airdomes and several of each were located in what is now downtown Las Cruces between Water and Church Street. C.T. Seale and B.G. Dyne set about constructing a more permanent multi-purpose theater for downtown Las Cruces in the mid-1920s, purchasing and demolishing the Hacker Hotel in 1925 before contracting with El Paso architect Otto Thorman for the design. Thorman produced an Italian Renaissance Revival building, featuring ornate ornamentation around the theater entrance with storefronts to either side. The theater featured a novel “washed air” evaporative cooling system, with a ventilation system that ran beneath the floor and was expelled from vents in the walls.¹

From its opening on July 29, 1926, the Rio Grande Theatre was a gathering place and source of pride for the then-small community of Las Cruces: the *Las Cruces Citizen* boasted the building as being “as modern as has yet been installed in even the larger theaters in the cities.”² Originally, the theater was owned by Central Theatres Corporation of Denver and managed by W.L. Gullett.³ By 1929, the theater launched into the “talkie” era of motion pictures; the first sound picture was shown on October 20, 1929, with new equipment from Fox Theatres, which managed theater operations at the building. Among the many films played in the prolific theater (*Mare Nostrum* [1926] being the first), the premiere of King Vidor’s *Billy the Kid* (1930) stands out for its connection to local history; indeed, the city celebrated the historically significant film with a marching band celebration outside of the Rio Grande’s decorative façade. While primarily used as a motion picture theater, the Rio Grande Theatre has also been a venue for local stage play productions and various community gatherings. The theater’s first year saw live performances of “Jiggs, Maggie, and Dinty,” and a dramatic play written by Frank Craven. It also hosted a variety of other events: amateur nights, free matinee giveaways, community nights with discount tickets distributed by local merchants, American Legion benefits, and baby popularity contests.

The Rio Grande Theatre has encountered its share of hardships throughout its nearly 100-year tenure. In the early ‘30s, the theater survived an earthquake, leading to the installation of tie-in rods, capped with metal rosettes to stabilize the structure. Furthermore, in 1933, a fire forced the theater to close for more than three months. In 1998, the theater was shut down due to competition with newer movie theaters outside the downtown area. In both instances, the community’s eager assistance throughout these events poignantly illustrates the theater’s significance to Las Cruces. Damage done to the theater in the 1930s was quickly repaired despite economic strain from the Great Depression. Following its reopening, a local wrote: “An up-to-date theater which is managed in the efficient way [of] the “Rio Grande” cannot help but be an asset to a town and a great source of pleasure to its citizens.”²

The theater received a new false front in 1949, when management removed the original red and yellow marquee to give the building a new façade and marquee that stretched the length of the building above the arched entrance, which was partitioned off to hide the intricate brick and stone work.⁴ The theater’s façade would remain covered until 1972, when urban renewal activities lead to a replacement of the façade. Photographs published in local newspapers between February and June of that year capture the amazement of the public to see the “intricately decorated” original façade of the theater below the paneling.⁵ A false front remained in place until 1998.

¹ Doña Ana Arts Council, “The Rio Grande Renovation Celebration September 16-18, 2005,” printed 2005, 4-5.

² *Las Cruces Citizen*, July 26, 1926.

³ *Las Cruces Citizen*, July 24, 1926.

⁴ *Las Cruces Sun News*, September 18, 1949, 4.

⁵ *Las Cruces Sun News*, June 20, 1972, accessed October 4, 2025, NMSU archives, Las Cruces Urban Renewal Agency Scrapbook.

In 1982, Allen Theatres took over operation and management of the Rio Grande, running second-run films. The theater ceased operations as a private business in 1997, following which owners Jan Clute and Carolyn Muggenburg, granddaughters of an original owner, C.T. Seale, gifted the building to the Doña Ana Arts Council (DAAC).⁶ A \$2.2 million restoration and renovation project was proposed by the DAAC to restore the theater to its former appearance. The renovations embraced Rio Grande's historic form and purpose as a performing arts center. The project was generously funded by many local community members and businesses—a testament to its centrality to local identity.

The theater reopened in 2005, following a seven-year restoration project. DAAC celebrated the re-opening with a "renovation celebration" between September 16-18, 2005, with a slate of performances from local schools and dance groups, and tours by sponsors and members of DAAC. The accompanying packet produced for the celebration includes a note from the DAAC Board of Directors, writing "In 1998 it was just going to be a weekend project. ... Please don't fault us for our slightly inflated optimism. The glow of this wonderful gift and the dreams of what it could be blinded us temporarily."⁷

Work on the theater continued for the next few years, most notably on the exterior with a project involving reproduction of the tiles on the front entrance. The removal of the false front in 1998 as part of the restoration project revealed a collection of damaged tiles that dated to the construction of the building. An estimated 75% of the tiles were lost or damaged beyond repair, with only a quarter salvaged for the restoration. Glenn Schwaiger, local artist and instructor at Doña Ana Community College, led the tile restoration project, supported by other local artists and educators, including Tim Billman, Spencer Fidler, and Deborah Rindge. Schwaiger researched sample books from the time-period and contacted various vintage tile collectors around the country, ultimately purchasing 30 samples of matching vintage tiles found in the crawl space of a home in San Jose, California, to use for the project. Recreating the sample tiles for application on the Rio Grande Theatre's front was a massive undertaking, with Schwaiger making hundreds of glaze tests over several months to appropriately match the color and design of the historic tiles that remained.

Criterion C

The Rio Grande Theatre is a unique blend of adobe construction, Italian Renaissance Revival design, and Spanish décor; for its distinct style and ornate details unlike any other in Las Cruces, the theatre is nominated under Criterion C of the local register.

A motion picture theater flanked by retail shops, the Rio Grande was built during the "Golden Age" of American cinema construction. It was constructed on the original site of the Hacker Hotel, which was torn down to make space for the theatre. The theater is historically significant as a unique case of two-story adobe construction. The Rio Grande is one of the only adobe movie theaters still operating in the country. Moreover, the theater is an important local example of early 20th century Italian Renaissance Revival architecture. Unmissably distinctive, the theater's flat arches and molded decorations were and remain unique in commercial architecture in Las Cruces. Playing upon the architectural motifs of the Italian Renaissance, the Rio Grande Theatre stood as an exotic attraction amidst the region's more common styles of Southwestern vernacular and Pueblo Revival. The theater's adobe structure and European influences stand as a unique blend of vernacular construction and cosmopolitan style, reflecting Las Cruces' unique face as a blend of historic and modern design.

The building's architect, Otto Thorman, was originally from Missouri, and began his architectural career in Albuquerque, New Mexico, before moving his office to El Paso, Texas, in 1911. Throughout his career, Thorman displayed a talent for eclectic design. His architecturally significant designs in Las Cruces include the 1913 Mission Revival style Goddard Hall (NR, 1998) and the 1918 Prairie-School-influenced University President's House (NR, 1989). Thorman continued to practice architecture in El Paso until his death on March 11, 1964.

⁶ Doña Ana Arts Council, "The Rio Grande Renovation Celebration September 16-18, 2005," printed 2005, 6-7.

⁷ Doña Ana Arts Council, "The Rio Grande Renovation Celebration September 16-18, 2005," printed 2005, 2.

16. References (if any)

(Make note of books, magazine articles, websites, blogs, etc., used in researching the property's history)

Boje, David. "Las Cruces and Mesilla Valley Arts Scene Forgotten History: An Antinarrative Guide to Socioeconomic Growth."

Doña Ana Arts Council. "The Rio Grande Renovation Celebration September 16-18, 2005." Printed 2005.

Ewings, Bob, and Lucinda Silva. *Rio Grande Theatre Oral History*. New Mexico State University Public History Seminar, 2000.

Fargo, Cindi. "Tile Restoration at the Rio Grande." *The Las Cruces Bulletin* (February 29, 2008): B8.

Green, Scott. *National Register of Historic Places Registration Form: Rio Grande Theatre*. 2003.

Hunner, John, and Brian Kord, Cassandra Lachia, Renee Spence. *Images of America: Las Cruces*. Arcadia, 2003.

Kammer, David. *National Register Multiple Properties Documentation Form: Movie Theatres in New Mexico 1906-1960*, 2006.

Las Cruces Blog – News, Photos, History, "Rio Grande Theatre," October 16, 2007.

<https://lascrucesblog.com/las-cruces/2007/rio-grande-theatre/>

Marshall, Sandra L., and John R. Versluis. *Historic Architecture Styles of Las Cruces, NM: Celebrating 150 Years*. Dona Ana County Historical Society and Public History Program, Department of History, New Mexico State University, 2000.

Studio D Architects. "Rio Grande Theater Renovation," n.d. http://www.studio-d.biz/?page_id=236.

Otto H. Thorman Records, 1910-1964. MS 14. University of Texas, El Paso Special Collections. University of Texas, El Paso Library.

Section 4 – Author/Owner information and Certification

17. Author Information

Author name: Jordan Gladstone, HP co-op/NMSU student

Phone: 575-528-3027

Applicant address (if different from property):

Email: CDD@lascruces.gov

Las Cruces City Hall

700 Main Street

Las Cruces, NM 88001

Are you the property owner? ☐ Yes ☒ No

Owner name (if different): City of Las Cruces

Contact (if different):

I certify that the information provided is accurate and complete to the best of my knowledge. I understand this application is subject to review by the Historic Preservation Committee and the City Council.

Applicant Signature:

Date:

Owner Signature (if different):

Date:

Attach the following:

- At least four quality photographs (all sides of the property, streetscape) with captions;
- Historic photographs (if available) with captions;
- Maps or aerials showing property location with descriptions (Google Maps screenshot);
- Supporting evidence (articles, survey records, oral histories);
- Copy of property's building's nomination form to the National Register of Historic Places or New Mexico Register of Cultural Properties, if applicable; and
- Any other documentation relevant to historical, architectural, or cultural significance with descriptions

Photographs of Property



Figure 1: Front of building and marquee tower, facing southwest.



Figure 2: Marquee and front façade illuminated at night.



Figure 3: View of rear of building, facing northeast, capturing an old marquee, still in use. Photo includes non-historical mural.



Figure 4: Rear of building, showing loading dock and back entrance.



Figure 5: Rinceau motifs on the original ceiling of the balcony, visible behind the drop-ceiling of the second-floor offices.



Figure 6: Painted scrollwork and painted vents in the theatre interior.

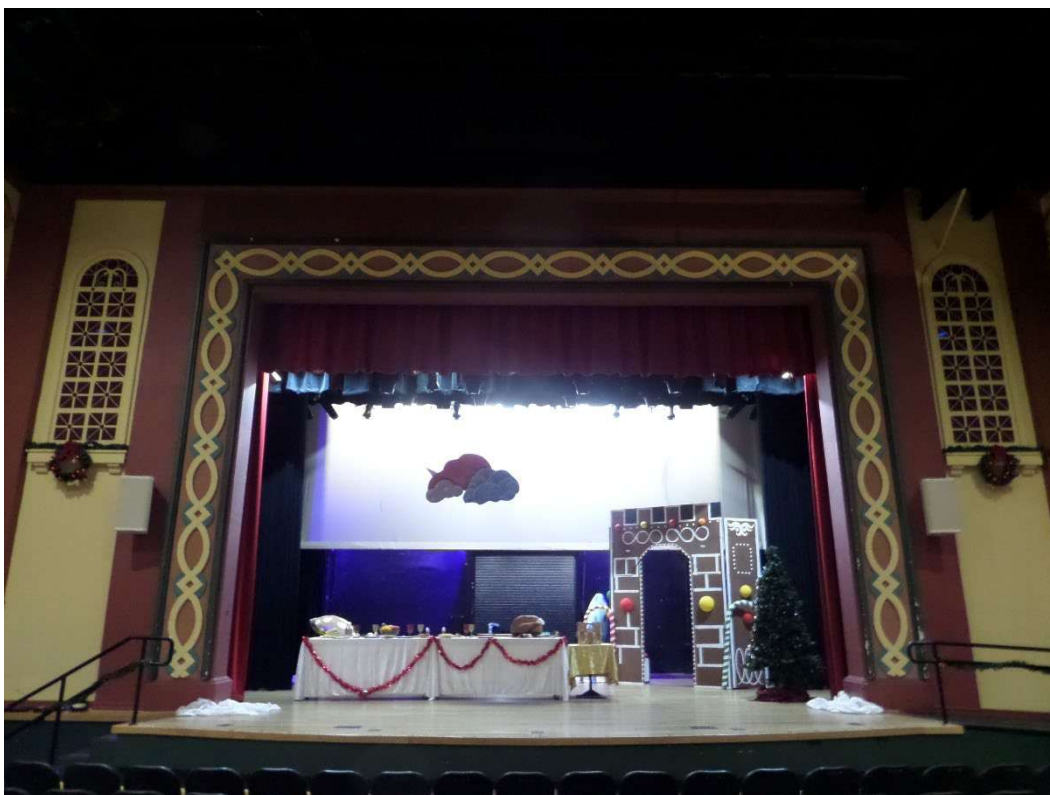


Figure 7: Proscenium, stage, and decorative windows as seen from the house



Figure 8: Theatre auditorium with new seating and shortened balcony.



Figure 9: Original and replicated tiles on the theater exterior.

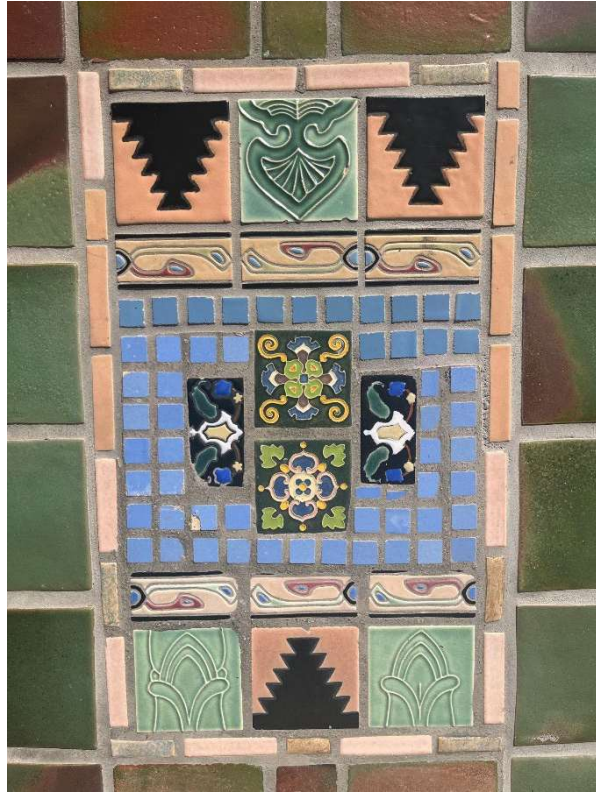


Figure 10: Replicated tiles on the theater exterior.

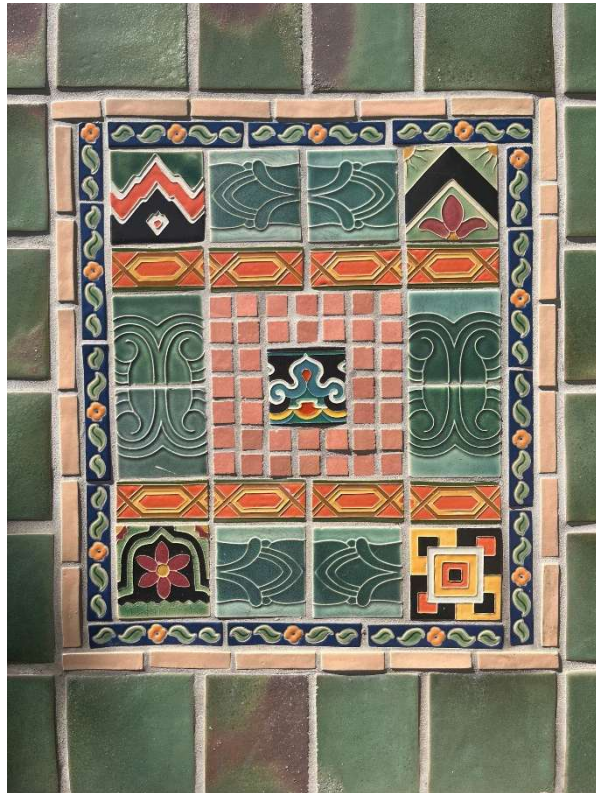


Figure 11: Replicated tiles on the theater exterior.

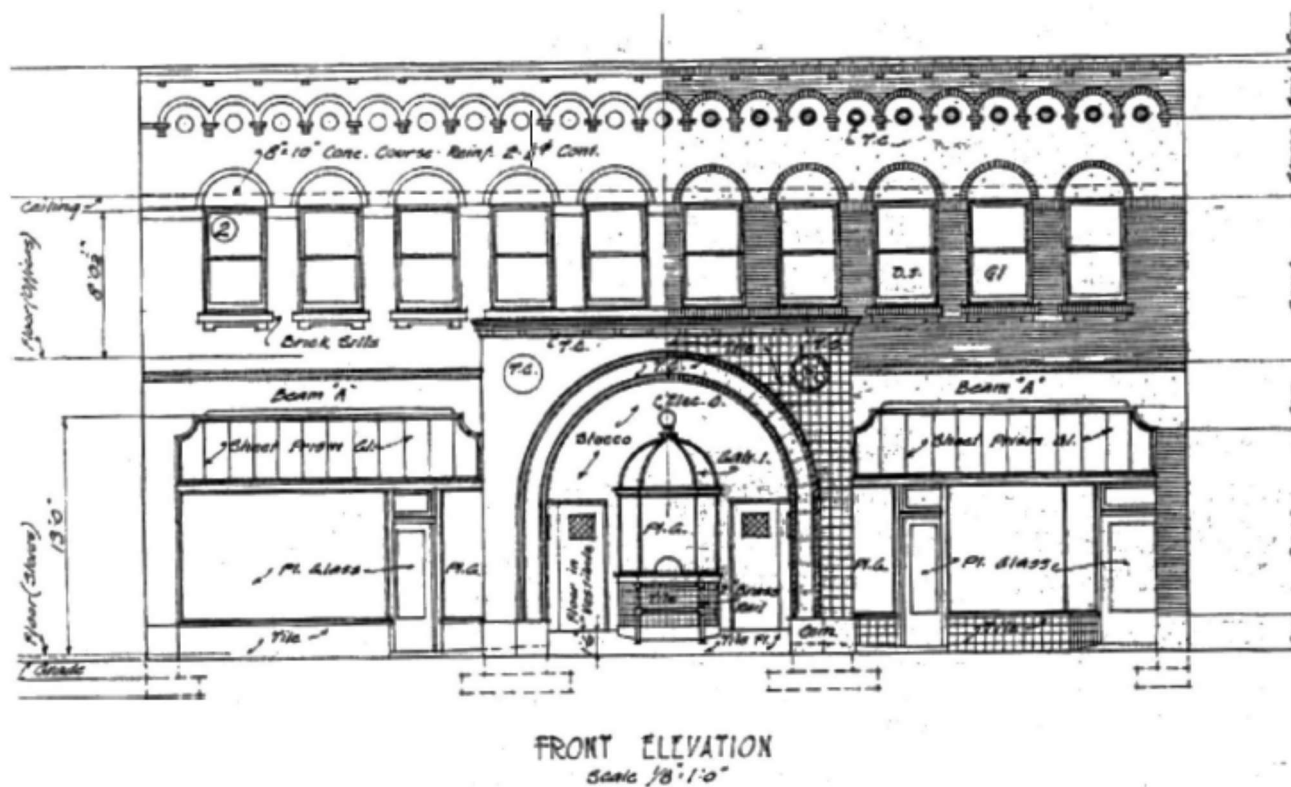


Figure 8: Front elevation initial design; later designs likely included the spandrel ornamentation over the arched entrance to the theatre, along with the banded stonework and tiles on either square column. Courtesy of University of Texas at El Paso Library, retrieved from the National Register nomination form.



Figure 9: Las Cruces Premiere of Billy the Kid (1930).



Figure 10: Photo of the Rio Grande Theatre from the 1940s.



Figure 11: Clipping from the Las Cruces Sun-Times News. NMSU Archives, Urban Renewal Scrapbooks.



Figure 12: Clipping from the Las Cruces Sun-Times News; the Rio Grande Theatre marque from the 1950s is seen in the background behind the "No Fishing" sign. NMSU Archives, Urban Renewal Scrapbooks.



Figure 13: Photo from 1998, during removal of the false front.



Figure 14: Photo of the façade following removal of the false front in 1998.



Figure 15: Photograph of the uncovered tiles on the front of the building, prior to restoration in the 2000s. Photo credit, Las Cruces Blog – News, Photos, History “Rio Grande Theatre” post, October 16, 2007.

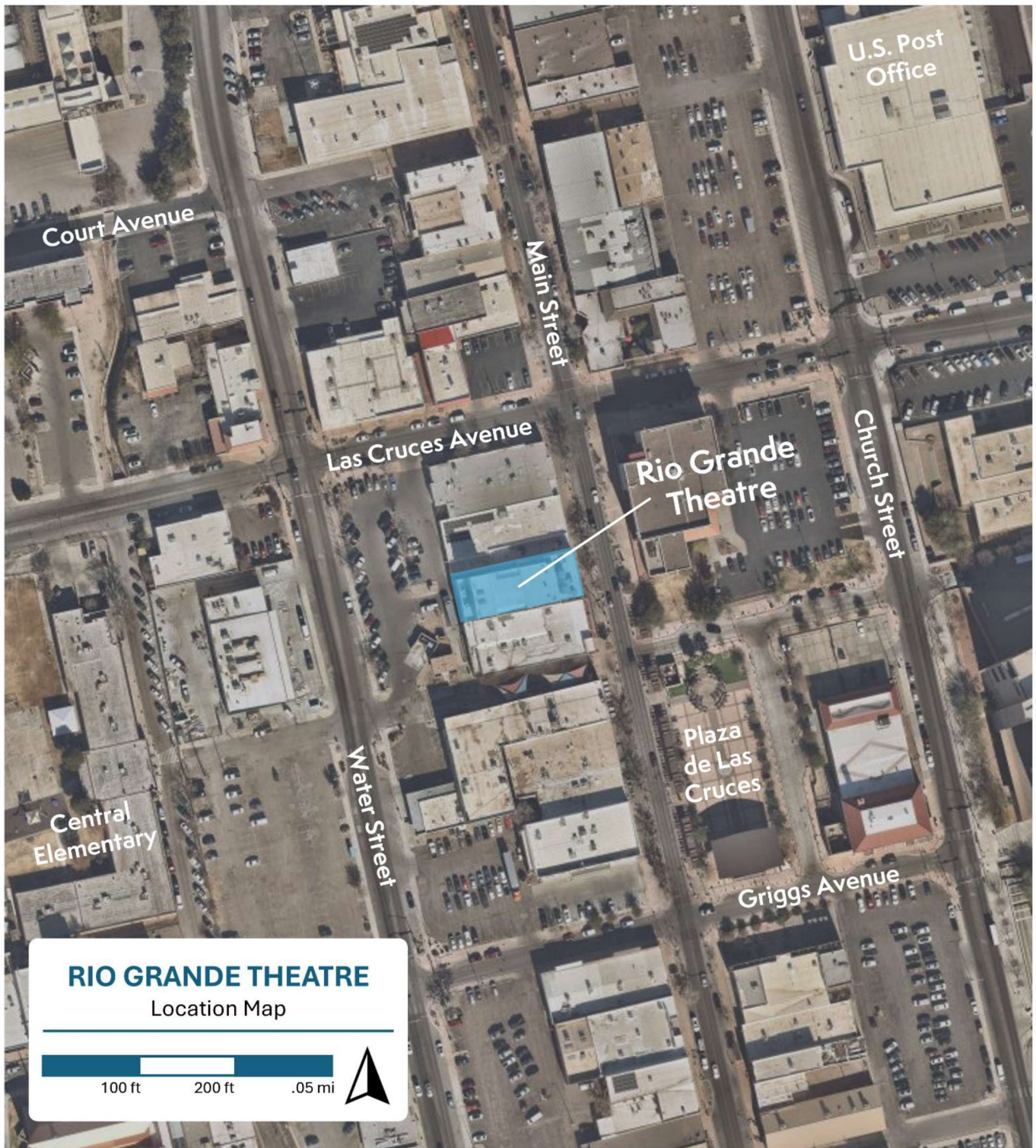


Figure 16: Original scrollwork and cooling system ducts on the interior of the theatre, taken in 1998 as part of the restoration.



Figure 17: Rear of the theatre during the 1998 restoration.

Location Map



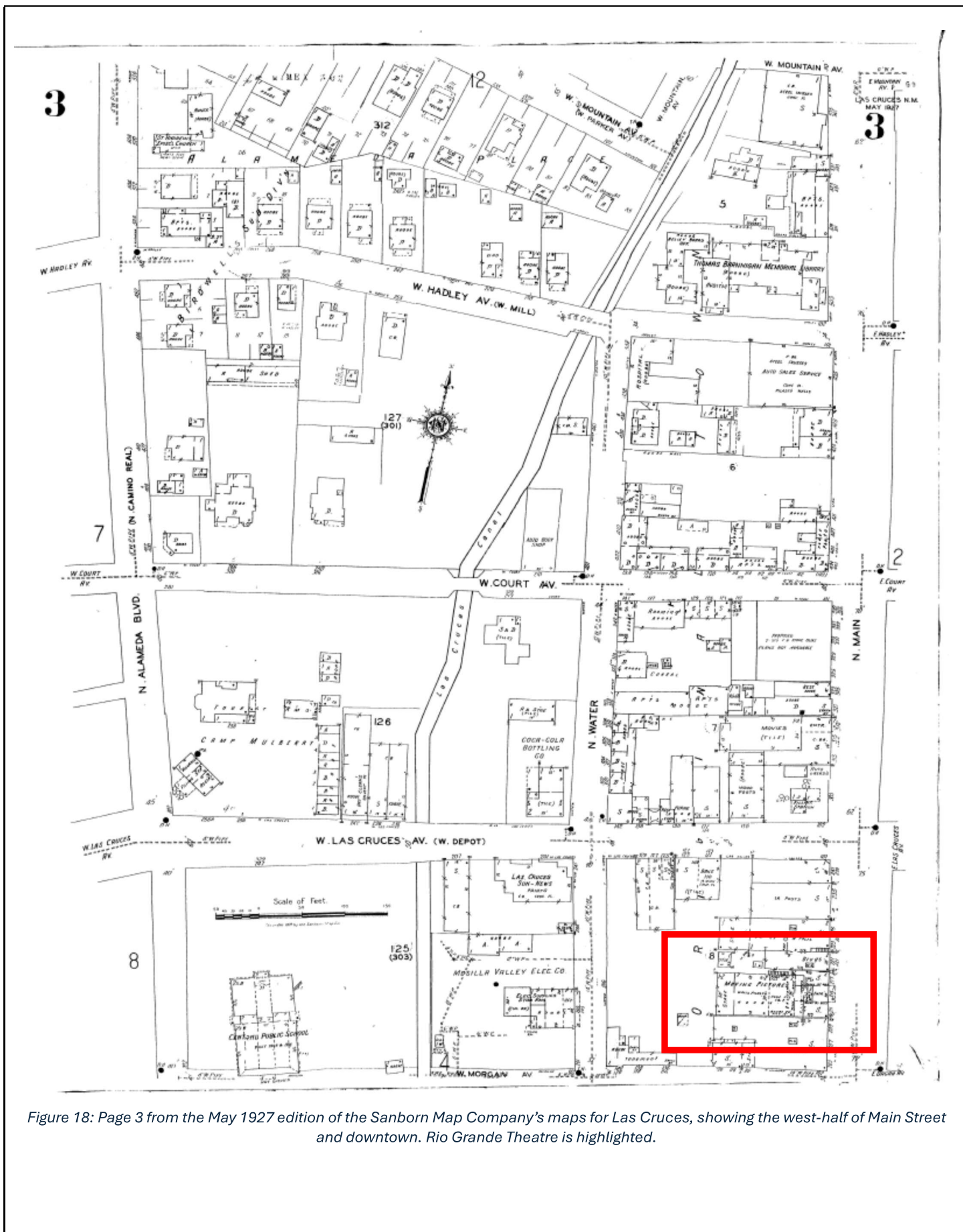


Figure 18: Page 3 from the May 1927 edition of the Sanborn Map Company's maps for Las Cruces, showing the west-half of Main Street and downtown. Rio Grande Theatre is highlighted.



Supporting Evidence

"At last we are privileged to announce the definite opening date of the new Rio Grande Theatre built by Seale and Dyne and operated by the Central Theatres Corporation of Denver as Thursday July 29th with the powerful Sea Drama "Mare Nostrum" as created by the masterful director, Rex Ingram with Alice Terry and Antonio Moreno in the leading roles. Mr. Ingram has directed such notable successes as The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, and may others. Mare Nostrum is conceded to be one of the outstanding successes of the year and the management was indeed fortunate in securing an attraction of this caliber as an opening production. A treat indeed is in store for those who have anxiously awaited the opening of this truly wonderful institution, which is a great credit to the Southwest, the builders who have had the foresight to visualize the future in their enterprise and the operators for the confidence they have placed in the community in the manner they have equipped the theatre. Replacing the old style painted scenery, the stage is to be hung and decorated in a lavish manner with velvet drapes and curtains as is the Auditorium proper. The foyer and aisles are carpeted in a rich red and the lightning [lighting] is as modern as has yet been installed in even the larger theatres in the cities. A washed air-cooling system maintains any desired temperature with its clean pure air as distributed scientifically throughout the house, the mammoth organ will be operated by Miss Elsie Dean Bristol who comes direct from one of the corporation's Denver theatres, which assures all lovers of accurately played pictures a treat in store for them."

From "Rio Grande Theater Opens July 29" The Las Cruces Citizen, 24 July 1926.

RIO GRANDE THEATRE (Operated by the Central Theatres Corp'n. of Denver) Presenting A Week of Unsurpassed Entertainment TONIGHT Tom Mix in "Hard Boiled" Pathe Review Van Bibber Comedy	
Sunday VERA REYNOLDS SUNNY SIDE UP Screen Snap Shots Ben Turpin, Three Foolish Weeks	Monday-Tuesday GENE STRATTON PORTER'S "Keeper of the Bees" Comedy-News-Topics
WEDNESDAY ROD LA ROQUE "RED DICE" SPORT REVIEW COMEDY	
Thursday-Friday "THE VOLGA BOATMAN" A SUPER FEATURE OUTCLASSING EVEN THE TEN COMMANDMENTS 15c, 30c, 40c. Other Days 15c, 25c, 40c	
ELSIE DEAN BRISTOL, Organist	COMING BUSTER KEATON "THE BATTLING BUTLER"

Figure 20: Advertisement from The Las Cruces Citizen, July 31, 1926.

ANNOUNCING
THE OPENING OF THE
RIO GRANDE
THEATRE

(Operated by the Central Theatres Corp'n. of Denver)

THURSDAY, JULY 29th, 7:30, 9:30

Presenting .

"MARE NOSTRUM"
 REX INGRAM'S MASTERPIECE
 A Powerful Story of the Sea

With
ALICE TERRY and ANTONIO MORENO

ADDED ATTRACTIONS

Pathe News	Aesop's Fables
Topics of the Day	- Elsie Dean Bristol, Organist

PRICES

Main Floor . . . 40c	Balcony . . . 30c
Gallery . . . 15c	Children . . . 15c

Figure 21: Advertisement from The Las Cruces Citizen, July 24, 1926.

RIO GRANDE THEATRE
 (Operated by the Central Theatres Corp'n. of Denver)
 "Coolest Spot in the Valley"

TODAY SATURDAY AUG 7

BUCK JONES
 IN
LAZY BONES

Pathe News	Clyde Cook Comedy
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Matinee 2:45 **SUNDAY** Night 7:30, 9:30

MADGE BELLAMY--HARRISON FORD

S-A-N-D-Y

Mutt and Jeff "In Mexico"	Charlie Chase Comedy
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MONDAY -- TUESDAY DEMILLE'S SILENCE H. B. WARNER, VERA REYNOLDS PATHE NEWS HARRY LANGDON COMEDY	WEDNESDAY MALCOM McGREGOR PAULINE GARON "Flaming Waters" "THREE WISE GOOFS" FOX VARIETIES
--	---

THURSDAY -- FRIDAY
 BUSTER KEATON'S
 LATEST AND GREATEST FEATURE LAUGH RIOT
"THE BATTLING BUTLER"
 SENNETT COMEDY PATHE NEWS AESOP'S FABLES

NEXT WEEK'S FEATURE ATTRACTION
LA BOHEME
 JOHN GILBERT--LILLIAN GISH
 Special Music Score Played by
 ELSIE DEAN BRISTOL

Figure 22: Advertisement from The Las Cruces Citizen, August 7, 1926.

"Where
Happiness
Costs
So Little"

RIO GRANDE

MOVIE NEWS

See the BIG
PICTURES
FIRST at the
Rio Grande

LAS CRUCES, NEW MEXICO MAY 7, 1942

Lombard - Benny In Film Here Thursday

New Andy Hardy To Be Seen Sunday And Monday



Andy Hardy finds a new romance and successfully gets out of it to become a free man again in **"THE COURTSHIP OF ANDY HARDY,"** latest picture of the popular family series which comes Sunday and Monday only.

Not only does Andy meet a new girl, but he also rescues his sister from a dramatic "scrape," gets into trouble with the police, and barely escapes the clutches of Polly Benedict, who returns to further complicate his young life.

More Laughter, More Suspense In Outstanding Comedy Event



Melodrama and comedy are skillfully blended in the new film production, **"TO BE OR NOT TO BE,"** which opens Thursday at the Rio Grande with Jack Benny and Carole Lombard in the top stellar roles.

The setting of the picture is Warsaw at the time of the German invasion, and the chief characters are a bunch of "ham" actors of the Teatr Polski, who are forced to give up their theatrical roles for real life ones that are far more exciting than any they have ever played in the theatre.

The story reaches a high point of dramatic action when the "ham" actors—Jack Benny, Carole Lombard, Lionell Atwill, Felix Bressart, Tom Dugan and George Lynn—become involved with the invaders and find themselves impersonating every important Nazi figure from Hitler on down. After a series of startling complications, the members of the troupe are delivered out of the very jaws of the dread Gestapo.

Sneak Preview Again Thursday

Rio Grande patrons attending Thursday evening's opening of **"TO BE OR NOT TO BE"** will again be given the privilege of enjoying the advance showing of a coming hit picture, when another of the popular Sneak Previews will be presented. Each of these are big shows which will enjoy regular engagement but are shown in advance to those who "like to be first."



Rio Grande movie fans attending the opening night of **"TO BE OR NOT TO BE"** will also be given the opportunity of seeing the Sneak Preview, a weekly Thursday night feature, which gives local fans an advance showing of a coming big hit. During the past several weeks, pictures such as **"The Lady Has Plans," "Sullivan's Travels,"** and **"The Fleet's In,"** have been shown. Much interest is being evidenced in this week's presentation, but the title of the hit show remains a **SECRET**.

Second feature of the program co-stars Russell Hayden, formerly of the **Hopalong Cassidy** series, and his new "side-kick" Charles Starrett, in a fast-moving outdoor story, **"WEST OF TOMBSTONE."**

Continuous Shows Daily—30c 'till 6:P.M. Except Sunday

Figure 23: Historically, the Rio Grande Theatre produced a newsletter, circulated to highlight events, movies, and information about the wider world of cinema.

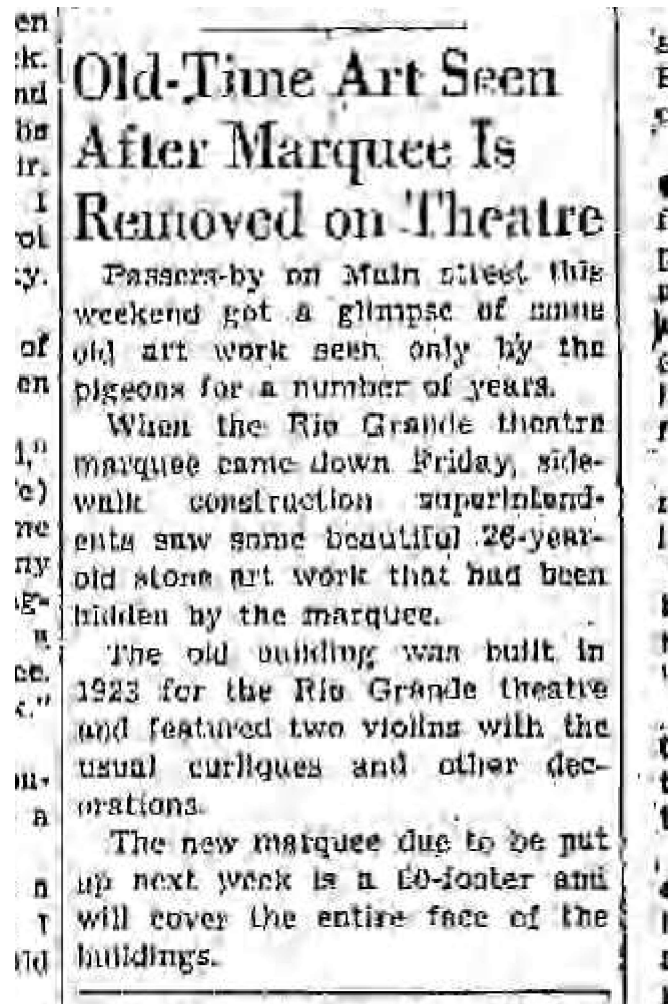


Figure 24: Newspaper clipping from page 4 of the September 18, 1949, edition of the Las Cruces Sun-News, regarding the remodel of the Rio Grande Theatre.

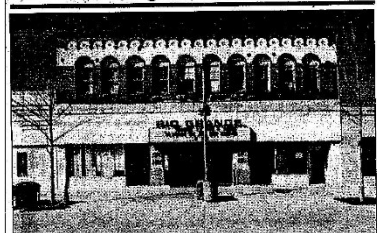


Figure 25: Advertisement for the theater from page 3 of the October 9, 1949, edition of the Las Cruces Sun-News.

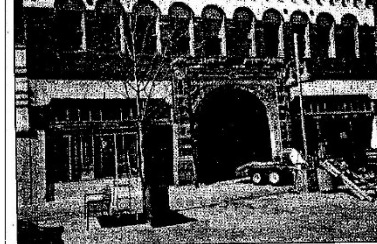
Rio Grande Theatre opens doors once more

New life being breathed into 70-year-old centerpiece of downtown Las Cruces as Arts Council begins renovation

By Lynn McKinley



WHAT WERE THEY THINKING? Renovators have discovered much of the original facade (below) of the Rio Grande Theatre still intact despite the "modernization" (above) which obscured the ornate relief and recesses which once gave the old theater its life.



Little children once stood at the foot of her stage, awed as their imaginations came alive. Adults, too, were in the Rio Grande Theatre to enjoy the work of actors, singers and other performers who turned the building into a place where art met life.

Located on the Downtown Mall, the 70-year-old building was a performance theater and then movie house until 1936, when Allen Thomson showed its final curtain and locked the doors for what seemed the last time.

But thanks to the generosity of individual donors and the Rio Grande Theatre Steering Committee, the building is being brought back to life. The council fully acquired the building in September 1996.

The timetable for the restoration is three to five years, says arts council executive director Nancy Meyers. The first phase of the project includes making sure the structure is stabilized and then redoing the entry way, rest rooms and the upstairs offices, which will become the new home for arts council staff. They hope to occupy the space by December 2000.

"The theater will change our future," says Meyers. "It gives solidity in the direction of the arts council."

"We're taking an old movie house and renovating it to become a theater performing arts space. We'll have films, dramatic theater arts, literary readings, music and dance."



STRINGS AND ROSETTES: A detail of the relief carvings uncovered after the more recent facade was removed.

praise, says Jim Billings, Rio Grande Theatre Steering Committee co-chairman. Billings, a set and lighting designer with the Theatre Arts department at New Mexico State University, is working alongside architect Dan Rios to oversee the restoration project.

The balcony will be re-tiled so that patrons can see the deepest stage. There will be side aisles on the balcony and wheelchair-accessible seating at the ends of rows. The theater will utilize "American" seating, which features more leg room, and will seat 400 people.

"I think it's a really exciting project," Billings says. "When the stage is extended, it will be comparable to the community theater or (NMST) at Harbel Zohn. If all the remodeling were pulled in, it will be as perfect as we can make it."

Billings speculates that cost was the reason the building was abandoned. "At the time it was built, adobe was a very cheap building material. Now, it's extremely labor intensive. But labor was really cheap then."

The existing walls are about one foot thick, he speculates, while current adobe buildings utilize walls about twice as thick. "Now, an adobe wall has to taper as it goes up. It's like building a pyramid."

Back inside, Billings' vision is to

New life for old theater

Continued from Page 1

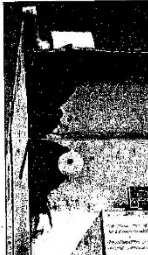
beams in the ceiling to allow for overhead and stage lighting. The entire booth for lighting rigging will be placed where the ceiling was. The stage and audience areas will be placed where the ceiling was. The stage and audience areas will be placed where the ceiling was.

"We're taking people that the theater and the lobby will be a nice building period piece," Billings says. "But as far as the performance space, it will be state-of-the-art. We're not looking to spend money on gold-plated curtains. We want to have the stage in right proportion."

As work began on the building's facade, the architectural details emerged from behind the facade that had been covered by a modern facade. A number of hand-carved relief carvings were discovered in the light-colored stone at the arch's base. The bas-reliefs, Meyers learned, belonged to a young man who died in the theater before going off to fight for the forces of the United States.

With each new discovery hidden behind a wall, with each new phase of the project, Meyers says, she is amazed at the beauty of the building. The project, she says, is a labor of love. The project, she says, is a labor of love.

"I feel very positive about it. This theater is so important to the community in terms of performance space and for educational programs. The theater will not just be open when someone's stage. We want this to be a long, meaningful, active center."



NO GRANDE MAD — A crack in the stone of the theater flung the stone which was used to construct the wall.

ment will be \$75,000. The response from the community has been that they don't get the idea that the theater will be renovated. Meyers says, "There are a lot of wonderful memories, and they want to see it open. This is a real economic development for the Downtown Mall."

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WALLS OF THE PAST — It is difficult to see the original facade (photo) and wonder how many of the walls of Las Cruces are still among our neighbors.

Figure 26: Article in The Bulletin, unknown date (1998).

Old theater brings hope downtown

By Erich Ducker-Hoppen

By moving forward with the renovation and restoration of the historic Rio Grande Theatre, Dona Ana Arts Council has taken a first step toward revitalizing Las Cruces' downtown area and transforming it into a cultural corridor. Toward that end, DAAC is launching on a major campaign to raise \$100,000 for the completion of the project. The organization is committed to restoring the seventy-three-year-old adobe theater as a permanent performing arts center that will serve the regional community for many years to come.

"When people come to see even this about," explained DAAC president Kevin McHenry, referring to the theater's status following renovation, "they leave with the same excitement we feel."

Every time I open the door, someone comes in and tells me a story about their experience here, related to DAAC president Kevin McHenry. "I usually they are about a first class."

Inspired by gifts from local families and businesses, DAAC became the sole owner of the Rio Grande Theatre in 1998. Renovations are planned to restore the theater and create a state-of-the-art performing arts center to serve as a venue for national and international touring groups and for the presentation of plays, musicals, dance, literary readings, visual arts displays and more. The theater will be a site for collaborative projects and programs by community organizations. As an educational facility, the theater will serve as a site for artists in residence, internships and youth arts activities. DAAC has a long-standing partnership in Education with Las Cruces Public Schools, supported through the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. The Rio Grande Theatre is within walking distance of three elementary schools.

Operating the restoration project is McHenry Sullivan. Sullivan brings valuable experience to the project. After directing educational programs for the Santa Fe Museum of International Photography, he moved to Las Cruces with his family. He and his husband were looking for a community that was growing and artistic. Sullivan got involved with arts programming at Santa Fe Youth Center, working with Irene Oliver Lewis. Last school year, she coordinated the arts integration program for the Santa Fe Youth Center. Sullivan has also been assisting with the Regional Educational Technology Assistance, working to expand teachers' access to cultural materials by linking classrooms with the Museum of New Mexico.

Because of her background, Sullivan views DAAC as a vehicle for arts integration in the community. "Developing partnerships and connections for the common good," she takes this same approach to the Rio Grande Theatre project, building a new foundation for the landmark on solid relationships with both the arts community and the community at large. In this spirit, DAAC is in the process of conducting a series of roundtable discussions at the Rio Grande Theatre to share visions of the facility's future form and function with donors, educators and supporters. The theater's renovation was selected by representatives of New Mexico State University and



Kevin Sullivan, Kevin McHenry and Jim Billings in front of the Rio Grande Theatre. Bulletin photo by Erich Ducker-Hoppen.

American Southwest Theatre Company, as well as the Santa Fe Youth Center and the Santa Fe Museum of International Photography. The theater's renovation was selected by representatives of the NMST Art Gallery, Las Cruces Arts Association, Las Cruces Youth Center, ArtForum Artists Association and Redwood Cultural Center. The restoration is scheduled to begin in the fall of 1998. The project is a labor of love. The project is a labor of love.

All construction is at 1:30 p.m. in the theater. A final community gathering will take place Tuesday, March 27, 2000, at 7 p.m. for the opening of the film "Love, Newman, A Powerful Story of the Arts." A silent movie with accompanying music will be shown by John E. Ebb.

Serving the Mesilla Valley Since 1969 Oct. 18 - 24, 2001

Las Cruces, New Mexico

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Figure 27: Article in The Bulletin, October 18-24, 2001

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L White and Ray Luchini looked up into the late afternoon sky Monday and flashed faint smiles. They and other members of the China-Burma-India veterans association had just retired the garrison-sized U.S. flag that flew at Veterans

II comrades who served in the China-Burma-India Theater from 1942 until 1945. "It's super," said Hackenberg, starting to become emotional, about the 6-foot aluminum monument. "It's long, long overdue."

Hackenberg, a highly decorated

"It's an honor," Hackenberg finally said. "It's something that we've been wanting to do for so long to all of our comrades, all of the fellows that passed. Too bad they couldn't see it."

See PARK, page 9A

"It's not a guilt or innocent thing, it's a safety issue like an air bag or seat belts," he said. "I think it's constitutional."

Other House members opposed a bill which they said mirrored a George Orwellian society of Big Brother.

"This legislation is taking over personal responsibilities," said Rep. James Rogers Madalena, D-Jemez Pueblo. "I don't know if we're at this point to have this kind of legislation."

Rep. Donald Brattin, R-Hobbs, agreed. "How far are we going to carry this? Next year we'll have small cameras above the driver's side window to see if a person blinks too much," he said. "Let's not punish all the citizens of the state of New Mexico."

Lawnmowers, responding to Gov. Bill Richardson's challenge for them to pass tough DWI laws, said they want New Mexico to be known as the Land of Enchantment and not the Land of the Drunken Driver. There were more than 200 DWI deaths last year in the state.

"The only place we can solve this problem is through citizens,"

See BILL, page 9A

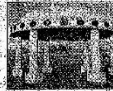
Veterans Park monuments

Some of the more prominent memorials at Veterans Memorial Park include:

Bataan Memorial Monument: Dedicated in April 2002, this one-of-a-kind U.S. monument pays tribute to U.S. soldiers who died during the Bataan Death March in April 1942, during World War II. Many of the Americans who



were in Bataan were members of the New Mexico National Guard. **Ramada:** The Ramada at Veterans Memorial Park includes the insignias of all the military veterans organizations in Dona Ana County. It has been the primary gathering point in the park for ceremonies to honor veterans since the park opened in 1999.



Marine Corps Monument: The hand-made wrought iron monument was dedicated in November 2002, on the 227th anniversary of the U.S. Marine Corps. El Porro, Diablo Detachment of the Marine Corps League in Las Cruces, was responsible for getting the monument built and erected in the park.



Theater named to national register

By Christopher Schurtz
SUN-NEWS REPORTER

The historic Rio Grande Theater, a centerpiece of downtown Las Cruces revitalization, has been named to the National Register of Historic Places.

The theater, built on Main Street in 1926, is one of the oldest theaters in the state and the last surviving two-story adobe theater in the country, according to the building's owner, the Dona Ana Arts Council. Being named last month to the national registry means the theater will be eligible for certain federal grants, tax credits and assistance in developing programming.

It also brings a measure of prestige and legitimacy to the theater, not to mention the city.

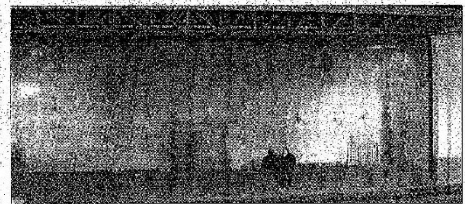
"We were very excited to get on the national registry. To be recognized as a historic building really should help in getting people interested in renovating the theater," Arts Council executive director Amy Johnson said.

In October, the theater was named to the State Historic Register. It joins 77,000 other sites already on the National Register, as well as 13 other structures or places in the Las Cruces area.

Christopher Schurtz can be reached at cschurtz@sun-news.com.

Other sites

- Area sites on the National Historic Register:
- ▼ Air Science Building, NMSU
- ▼ Alameda Depot Historic District, Las Cruces
- ▼ Astor Armory House, Las Cruces
- ▼ Stephen Blake Ingleton House, Dona Ana County
- ▼ Fort Filmore, Dona Ana County
- ▼ Fort Salazar, Bland, Springs
- ▼ Foster Hall, NMSU
- ▼ Cooker Hall, NMSU
- ▼ Haskay-Ludwick House, Las Cruces
- ▼ Mesquite Plaza, Mesquite
- ▼ Mesquite Street Original Townsite Historic District, Las Cruces
- ▼ Santa Fe Chapel C.M.E. Church, Las Cruces
- ▼ Rio Grande Theater, Las Cruces
- ▼ University President's House, NMSU



Amy Johnson, executive director of the Dona Ana Arts Council Inc., stands on the gutted stage of the Rio Grande Theater downtown Thursday, which has been named to the National Historic Register.

Las Cruces Sun-News
February 17, 2004

Figure 28: Article in the Las Cruces Sun-News, February 17, 2004.

Tile Restoration at the Rio Grande

CINDI FARGO
Executive Director of
Las Cruces Downtown



Beautiful tile patterns once graced the façade of the historic Rio Grande Theatre. Over the years, 75 percent of the tiles were covered, damaged or destroyed, leaving only a patchwork of ceramic and mortar remaining. Glen Schwaiger, a local artist and arts instructor at Doña Ana Community College has dedicated the last nine months of his life to recreating those historic tiles and restoring colorful details to the Rio Grande Theatre entry.

In late 2005, Schwaiger and Tim Billman, an educator/curator at the Las Cruces Museum of Fine Art shared ideas about the Rio Grande's historic tiles and the need for restoration work. Before any restoration could occur, plenty of detective work had to be done. By May 2007, with funding approved by the Doña Ana Arts Council, Schwaiger began cleaning and assessment of the tiles.

Investigation showed that the tiles resembled those created in the 1920s and 30s by ceramic manufacturers in California. Research took a local turn when Schwaiger visited the home of NMSU art professor Spencer Fidler, and his wife Deborah Rindge, a family member of the original Malibu Potteries in California (1926-1932). Using texts from the Fidler library, the artist was able to identify prominent California tile makers working in the

heyday of decorative tile manufacturing. Four tile makers have been identified at the Rio Grande Theatre – Claycraft Potteries (California), Kraftile (San Francisco area), Cambridge Faience (Kentucky) and Malibu Potteries (California), along with a few others. A network of vintage tile collectors throughout the country helped Schwaiger refine his knowledge, and the artist's wife LeAnn made a chance E-Bay discovery of a box of vintage tiles found in the crawlspace of a San Jose, Calif., home about to be demolished. The artist purchased 30 samples from the collection, which became the basis for the Rio Grande tile restoration plan.

Despite his background as a student of glazes, Schwaiger was challenged by the trade secrets of Southern California's ceramic industry. Potteries kept tight reins on their glaze chemists, who retained their employment by keeping glaze secrets to themselves. As a result, most of the summer of 2007 was spent making 600 glaze test samples and developing a range of possible colors and firing temperatures that would be appropriate for the project. Schwaiger has spent the last few months handcrafting tiles to match the original tile patterns, testing drying and shrinkage of clay, constructing molds for each of the tile designs and refining the multi-colored glazes used to complete the process.

Schwaiger is a true craftsman and artist and revels in the fact that his discovery highlighted the hand-made nature of the original tiles.

"As a ceramic artist I can appreciate the process and nuances of the human hand in the tiles, then and now," said Schwaiger. "I envision myself applying the same skills and techniques as the artisans of the day while I create these contemporary pieces."

Schwaiger noted the enthusiasm and support from the community, including the Doña Ana Arts Council, the vintage tile-collecting community, Spencer Fidler and Deborah Rindge, NMSU Art Department, the Las Cruces Museum of Fine Art and the locals who stop by to comment while he is at work. "Often times, people with no

" I like the idea that this project brings people together ... "

GLEN SCHWAIGER,
Artist

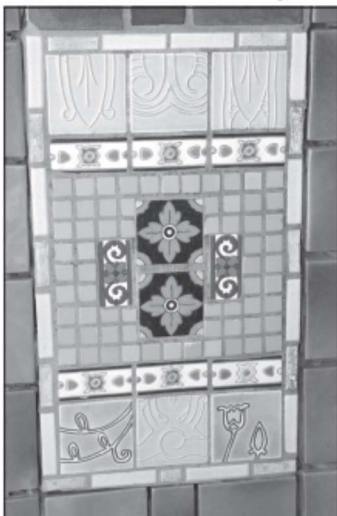


CHRIS MITCHELL / The Las Cruces Bulletin

Glen Schwaiger, now a 20-year resident of Las Cruces, came from Central Illinois to study ceramics at New Mexico State University under Professor Amanda Jaffe. Schwaiger works from his home studio and is available for commission. The artist can be reached at agavearts@zianet.com.

special interest in art stop by while I am working, just to give support and admire the work", said the artist. "I like the idea that this project brings people together and helps keep them thinking about both our history and our future downtown."

An example of the tilework at the Rio Grande Theatre.



Tiles found in a crawl space of a San Jose, Calif., home have become the basis for the tile restoration plan.

Developing BUSINESS ON MAIN STREET

Las Cruces Downtown - A Certified New Mexico Main Street Community in partnership with the City of Las Cruces and New Mexico MainStreet, New Mexico Economic Development Department

Invite you to a
Public Forum: Community Economic Assessment
Featured speaker: Dr. Jeffrey Mitchell, University of New Mexico
Bureau of Business and Economic Research

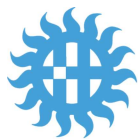
will present
Las Cruces Downtown Community Economic Assessment

Thursday, March 6, 2008
5:30 - 8:30 p.m.
City Council Chambers
City of Las Cruces

1. Hear an overview of Downtown Las Cruces' economic strengths and weaknesses
2. Explore demographic, data, market data and trade area statistics
3. Learn how the Downtown Las Cruces economy stands in relation to neighboring communities and the State
4. Analyze trends and how the economy has changed over years
5. Consider key findings and recommendations for MainStreet business development
6. Pose critical questions to the author and community leaders
7. Discuss MainStreet revitalization strategies with fellow community members
8. Offer guidance to year MainStreet program about priority initiatives

Light refreshments will be served.
Please RSVP
Las Cruces Downtown
200 North Administrative Assistant
525-1955 or info@lasrucesdowntown.org

Figure 29: Article on Glenn Schwaiger's tile restoration project in The Las Cruces Bulletin, February 29, 2008, page B8.



CITY OF LAS CRUCES

TO: Historic Preservation Committee

FROM: Caitlin Beesley, MHP, Historic Preservation Specialist

DATE: May 1, 2026

SUBJECT: Case CPD2026-001

Case CPD2026-001: A nomination to the City of Las Cruces Register of Cultural Properties for the Rio Grande Theatre. Property is owned by the City of Las Cruces and is listed in the New Mexico State Register of Cultural Properties and the National Register of Historic Places.

BACKGROUND

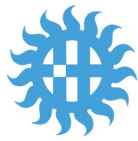
The Rio Grande Theatre was constructed in 1926, a peak era of cinema and cinema construction. Named after the region's largest river and lifeblood, the Rio Grande Theatre was designed by the prominent El Paso architect, Otto H. Thorman, of the firm Thorman and Frazer. The theater is historically significant as an important local example of early 20th century Italian Renaissance Revival architecture and for its two-story adobe construction. Furthermore, the theatre is historically significant for its broader relationship to the "Golden Age" transition from silent to sound cinema and its local prominence as a social space and source of pride for the then-small Las Cruces community. After the community shifted towards suburban living and business, the Rio Grande Theatre was closed in 1997. It was soon purchased by the Dona Ana Arts Council, who reopened the theater in 2005 as a performing arts center following an ambitious restoration and renovation project. The Rio Grande Theatre meets eligibility under Criterion A for cultural and social association with community history, and Criterion C in the area of authenticity of materials and historic elements and distinctive architectural style.

The Rio Grande Theatre is currently nominated to the City of Las Cruces Register of Cultural Properties, which comprises buildings, structures, sites, objects and districts that have historic or cultural significance to the Las Cruces community.

DECISION CRITERIA

To ensure the designation of eligible properties to the City of Las Cruces Register of Cultural Properties, HPC shall evaluate and make a final recommendation to the Las Cruces City Council for final approval. Nominated properties must be recommended and approved following standards established in Chapter 35, Section 2-D of the City's Development Code. An eligible building must meet the following requirements:

- a) Located within the corporate boundaries of the City; and



CITY OF LAS CRUCES

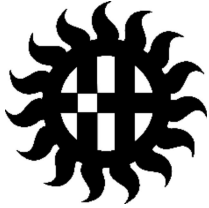
- b) At least 50 years old, in whole or in part, or else of exceptional significance; and
- c) Possesses integrity of design, materials, workmanship, setting, location, feeling, and association, as defined for listing in the National Register of Historic Places; and
- d) Embodies such other qualities and characteristics as is in the judgement of the Committee should be considered for designation as a cultural property; and
- e) Possess one or more of the following demonstrations of significance:
 - i) A broad cultural, political, economic, or social association with the historic development of the community, the state, or the nation; and/or
 - ii) Identification with a historic person or with important events in local, state, and/or national history; and/or
 - iii) Possesses distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type inherently valuable for the study of a period, style, method of construction, or use of indigenous materials or craftsmanship; and/or
 - iv) Possesses authenticity of its period of significance as evidenced by the survival of its characteristics, historic fabric, and architectural elements from that period; and/or
 - v) Is a notable work of a master builder, designer, or architect; and/or
 - vi) Possesses or may likely yield information important in prehistory or history; and/or
 - vii) An improvement embodying all or part of the above characteristics which is subject to encroachment of detrimental influences or potential adverse effects; and/or
 - viii) An improvement of historical, architectural, or cultural significance that is threatened with demolition by public or private action; and/or
 - ix) Possesses other qualities and characteristics that, in the judgment of the Committee, should be considered for designation as a cultural property.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff have reviewed this nomination and recommend **APPROVAL** based on the following finding:

1. The building is currently listed in the National Register of Historic Places and the State Register of Cultural Properties.
2. The building retains sufficient historic integrity, and its significance is apparent to the general public.
3. Staff assisted in the completion of the nomination.

NOTE: Recommendations by the Committee must be based on “findings.” Findings for *DENIAL* of the nomination should be articulated by the Committee and may be based on policies found in the City of Las Cruces Development Code, and/or other City plans and policies. Findings may also be based on information presented at the public hearing or information obtained through a site inspection.



Cultural Property Designation Application Form

City of Las Cruces – Community Development Department

700 N. Main St., Las Cruces, NM 88001

For assistance, call (575) 528-3027 or email cbeesley@lascruces.gov

For official use only:

LC CPD No. _____ NRHP _____ SRCP _____ Criteria A B C D

Section 1 – Property Information

1. Name of Property (Usually refers to prominent historical period) Thomas Branigan Memorial Library	3. Address/Location of Property (If no mailing address exists, use nearest cross streets; include UTM's) 501 N Main St. Las Cruces, NM 88001 106 E. Hadley St. Las Cruces, NM 8801 (historic)
2. Historic Names (if applicable) (All names, during or following historical period) Branigan Cultural Center	

Section 2 – Property Description

4. Property Type (See below for descriptions) ☒ Building (roof, enclosed walls, occupied) ☐ Structure (roof, walls, unoccupied) ☐ Site/Infrastructure (park, acequia, etc.) ☐ Object (statute, mural, etc.)	8. Identifying photo (Show main façade or other for clear identification) 
5. Original Use of Property Library Municipal Building	
6. Current Use of Property Museum and Auditorium	
7. Listing history Has this property previously been listed on a national or state register, either individually or as part of an existing historic district? ☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Unsure NR: Individually listed 2004; contributing to the Alameda-Depot Historic District, listed 1985 SR: Individually listed 2003; contributing to the Alameda-Depot Historic District, listed 1980	

9. Construction Date (if known) 1935	10. Building/Structure Occupation Status ☒ Occupied ☐ Unoccupied ☐ Does not apply
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11. Construction History Has the property been moved? ☐ Yes ☒ No If yes, date moved: Describe alterations (with dates, if known): 1973: Building is reroofed, new ceiling tiles installed, with lighting modifications and the installation of two public restrooms 1979-1980: Library departs for a new location, building is re-designated a cultural center 1981: Extensive remodel to accommodate new programming 2019: Long-Term Maintenance Plan established 2021: Master Plan established 2023: Majority of exterior woodwork is restored as part of Phase 1 of a preservation project	12. Building Condition (Relative to historical period or occupancy history) <table border="0"> <tr> <td>☐ Excellent</td> <td>☒ Altered</td> </tr> <tr> <td>☒ Good</td> <td>☐ Unaltered</td> </tr> <tr> <td>☐ Fair</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>☐ Deteriorated</td> <td>☒ Original Site</td> </tr> <tr> <td>☐ Ruins/Abandoned</td> <td>☐ Moved to New Location</td> </tr> <tr> <td>☐ No longer standing</td> <td></td> </tr> </table> Alterations to the exterior have been minimal, with the building retaining integrity of location, design, workmanship, materials, and feeling. The interior has been significantly altered to accommodate new exhibit space and other programming. The building retains sufficient integrity to communicate its historic significance.	☐ Excellent	☒ Altered	☒ Good	☐ Unaltered	☐ Fair		☐ Deteriorated	☒ Original Site	☐ Ruins/Abandoned	☐ Moved to New Location	☐ No longer standing	
☐ Excellent	☒ Altered												
☒ Good	☐ Unaltered												
☐ Fair													
☐ Deteriorated	☒ Original Site												
☐ Ruins/Abandoned	☐ Moved to New Location												
☐ No longer standing													
Section 2 – Property Description, cont.													
13. Property Description (Written narrative describing the property’s physical attributes and characteristics, no character limit) <i>Adapted from “Description” in the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form: Thomas Branigan Memorial Library, written by Peter A. Friesen, 2003.</i> Designed by Percy Wear McGhee, Jr. and constructed in 1935, the Thomas Branigan Memorial Library is a two-story stucco, Pueblo Revival style building built at the northern tip of the Las Cruces’ Downtown sitting at 501 North Main St. The South facing building occupies the width of the block, fronting the former Hadley Avenue, now a callecita or walking lane, and extends between the western Water Street to Main St. on the east. The building retains a very high degree of integrity despite minor alterations to the exterior and significant changes to interior spaces and continues to be a major center of activity for the community. The building was originally designed to be multipurpose, with its rectangular floor plan comprising of three main components: a large auditorium for public meetings or performances; an open area for stacks or bookshelves that included reading rooms and the main lobby; and an area comprising the children’s section, employee workspaces, lavatory, and other offices. Each programming component comprises its own external massing and roof line, which give the overall building the appearance of a larger amalgamated complex, the desired effect from the Pueblo Revival style; an ornamental bell tower forms an interior corner of the building and is the tallest constructed element and completes this look. The building’s Pueblo Revival style is accentuated by several decorative details. Notable elements include: the vigas that project beneath various rooflines; a number of portals or portales, a stylistic awning, constructed over several entrances, one of which is comprised of exposed latillas and vigas; a prominent window affixed with a wooden-spindled grille; arched openings along the bell tower; and a large clay vessel which serves as a chimney pot. The building’s plaster features a distinctive texture known colloquially as bananitas or little bananas, the signature stucco finish of a local craftsman; the texture is visible on several other Pueblo-Revival style buildings around town, including the former county courthouse (another McGee building). Beneath the stuccoed exterior, the building is constructed out of several different materials including hollow clay or ceramic tile, cinderblock or concrete masonry units (CMU), and fired brick.													

The windows throughout the entire architectural composition are all protected by wrought iron gates and are recessed into the walls of their façade; in one instance, on the south elevation, a prominent window is covered by wooden grill and milled spindles. The south façade has three vertical windows lining the children's reading room with one lintel running across the top of all three. These three windows feature stained glass scenes depicting characters from children's stories as part of the original design. The south wall of the office wing contains a window with stucco hood above it.

The principal façade and main entrance to the building faces south towards Hadley Avenue, bounded by the west wing of the complex and enclosed with a courtyard, listed as "Patio" on the original floor plans. Within this courtyard lies a brick path leading to the entrance of the library on the South facing side of the building. This entrance is covered by a portal with exposed latillas resting atop vigas. The portal is supported by six columns with capitals formed from double-ended carved wood corbels. To the right of the library entrance is the bell tower, accentuated by four arched openings at its top and triangular windows just below the three vigas on each side of the tower.

The east façade of the Branigan fronts Main Street and has a portal above the eastern entrance which is also covered by latillas resting atop vigas supported by 4 columns and corbels. The two windows on the northern side contain storybook-character-themed stained-glass scenes.

The north façade, facing a parking lot that stretches from Main Street to Water Street, is dominated by two large cubic masses that define the library's stack room and a reading room. One segment of wall is crenelated by five tall and narrow windows. Adjacent to the parking lot is a high walled service court that was constructed at an unknown date, it houses the building's mechanical systems in addition to the building's dumpster.

The west façade consists of two concrete staircases: one leads up to the stage in the auditorium, and the other down into the boiler room. The stage within the north end of the lecture room is indicated by a lift in the roofline. Four embedded buttresses extend out of the west wall and rest on either side of three corresponding windows. An additional buttress also projects out of the south wall at the southern end of the façade. Two smaller buttresses also extend out of the lecture room's lobby. The lecture room's lobby also has a small vertically casement window on its west facing wall.

The building's interior features a notable mural, sponsored by the WPA and painted by El Paso artist Thomas Lea; situated above the circulation desk, the mural depicts the Franciscan Friars introducing books to the region. In the center of the mural are two conquistadors, one sitting and one standing, both to the right of a Friar who is addressing a group of 18 indigenous people. On both sides of the central painting lies a cartouche. The mural also honors Gaspar Pérez de Villagrà, author of Historia de la Nueva México. The mural's reputation within the community is a conflicted one, but the city has no plans to remove it and has insured it against potential damage, commensurate with its provenance.

The library stacks, which served a programmatic as well as structural purpose, have been removed. In some places they were replaced by large metal beams for support. Other changes to the interior include the introduction of a drop ceiling during an unknown project, likely after the building became a cultural center.

Section 3 – Property Significance

14. Significance Criteria

(Check all that apply, explain answers under 15. Significance Narrative)

☒ (A) Broad cultural, political, economic or social association with community/state/national history

☐ (B) Associated with a historic person or significant events

Or (C)

☒ Distinctive architectural type, style, method, or craftsmanship

☒ Authenticity of materials and historic elements from the most prominent period of the building's history

☒ Notable work of a master builder, designer, or architect

Or (D)

- ☐ Potential to yield information important in history or prehistory
- ☐ Subject to encroachment or adverse effects
- ☐ Threatened with demolition by public or private action
- ☐ Other qualities significant to local heritage (explain)

Integrity Consideration ☒ Yes ☐ No

(Does the property possess sufficient integrity as evaluated for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places)

15. Significance Narrative

(Written narrative describing the history of the property and its importance to Las Cruces, no character limit)

Adapted from "Statement of Significance" in the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form: Thomas Branigan Memorial Library, written by Peter A. Friesen, 2003.

For almost 100 years since its initial construction in 1935, the Thomas Branigan Memorial Library building has served a critical role within the community of Las Cruces and remains an important cultural landmark. It meets Criterion A as the first dedicated library in Las Cruces and the only privately funded library constructed in New Mexico during the Great Depression. It is also significant under Criterion C as a representative of Pueblo Revival Style architecture, and for its association with Percy Wear McGhee, Jr., a notable regional architect.

The origins of a permanent library in Las Cruces go back to the turn of the 20th century and begin with the establishment of local club in Las Cruces, most notably the Women's Improvement Association (WIA) and the Las Cruces Library Club. For several decades after their incorporation in 1894, the WIA sponsored informal libraries in the homes of various association members before setting up a subscription library located in the Farm Bureau's Temple of Agriculture, located in what is now the Arid Club Building at 334 W. Griggs Avenue. In 1906, the Las Cruces Library Club set up a bare-bones library in room 26 of the now demolished Don Bernardo Hotel, in advance of obtaining a Carnegie grant to construct a separate facility; the club's grant aspirations were ultimately unsuccessful, and plans for a dedicated library languished for 20 years.

In the 1920s, Alice Montgomery Branigan—wife of Captain Thomas Branigan, a civil war veteran of Scottish ancestry—was elected as the president of the New Mexico Federation of Women's Club's Fourth District and with her, the WIA was successful in fundraising and opening a more permanent subscription-based library, housed in the WIA's new clubhouse on Raymond Street, constructed in 1927. Charge for use was an annual fee of \$1.

When Branigan died in 1932, she left nearly \$2 million to the City of Las Cruces—\$35,000 of which was earmarked for the construction of a new library with another \$10,000 being earmarked for the purchase of books. This bequest allowed for the full realization of the WIA's and Las Cruces Library Club's desire to build a free public library. Branigan's primary stipulation for the donation was that the new library be named in memory of her husband.

The commission for the new library was awarded to El Paso architect, Percy Wear McGhee, Jr. (1889-1971), who had designed several buildings for the New Mexico State University campus; he later completed plans for the old Dona Ana County Courthouse at the other end of Main Street from his library building. Keeping with the Carnegie Library Construction Program tradition of "[Expressing] the best architectural tradition of the region which can stand the test of time," McGhee chose the wildly-popular Pueblo Revival style for the exterior design.

McGhee designed the building to consist of three different programmatic areas. First was the library proper, which made up the central part of the complex and consisted of a children's reading room, an adult reading room, a foyer called the delivery room that separated the two reading rooms, the periodicals room, and the book

stack room. Second was a large auditorium called the lecture room, positioned on the west side of the complex; intended to operate separately from the library space, the lecture room featured its own separate entrance. Third, on the east side of the complex, were several offices intended to be used by city officials. The library was made with the most modern of design, recreating recommendations from the American Library Association, which put an emphasis on practicality, efficiency, and futureproofing. Interior lighting and sound were immediately identified as two critical aspects of the library that must be regulated to create the ideal environment for the buildings many uses. Following its construction, the Branigan Library was lauded for its unique architecture and successful library design. In 1938, The American Library Association Committee on Library Architecture and Building Planning commemorated the Branigan library in *Small Public Library buildings*, a publication that showcased designs around the country – the Branigan Library was the only building selected to represent library architecture in the Southwest and Rocky Mountain regions.

Thomas Lea, a prominent regional artist raised in El Paso and based in Santa Fe, was commissioned to paint an interior mural. The painting, located in the front foyer of the library, depicts the coming of the Franciscan Friars to the Southwest, who brought the first books of the region with them. Additionally, the mural commemorates New Mexico's first poet, Don Gaspar de Villagra. The bookplate was created by Mrs. E. G. Shannon.

The building has undergone several renovations since its opening in 1935. In 1961, a new roof was added, several of the offices on the east side of the complex were converted to children's areas and added to the children's reading room; also in 1961, the city converted the lecture room into a large reading room. In 1973, the library would once again undergo renovation, receiving another new roof and additional public restrooms among other changes.

In 1979, the Thomas Branigan Library relocated to a new building at 200 E Picacho Ave, and the former library building was renamed the Brannigan Cultural Center, becoming the city's first municipal-run museum. James E. Richardson III, known by his nickname "Junior," was the cultural center's inaugural director, overseeing the building's transition from library to museum beginning in 1979 until the center officially opened in 1981; his tenure as director ended with his passing in June 1986. A talented local artist, some of Richardson's artwork is kept in the museum's archives.

To accommodate its new programming, the building underwent several changes. The main stack area and reading rooms were turned into smaller spaces: two exhibit rooms and an enclosed space for storage. The auditorium retains its stage and larger footprint but is also used for exhibit space. While the interior spaces have been reorganized, the exterior of the building has largely stayed the same. The majority of wood elements on the exterior have been restored since 2023 as part of a long-term maintenance plan, accepted in 2019; the next phase involves restoration of the exterior stucco, with care paid to the appearance of the bananitas in the plasterwork.

While the building now serves as a museum and gallery, it remains an active community space open to the public and continues to follow the vision of Alice Branigan who, through the library, wished to improve Las Cruces through public access to knowledge.

16. References (if any)

(Make note of books, magazine articles, websites, blogs, etc., used in researching the property's history)

AOS Architects and MASS. Design Group. "Branigan Cultural Center Exterior Wood Preservation Assessment." January 4, 2023.

Friesen, Peter A. *National Register of Historic Places Registration Form: Thomas Branigan Memorial Library*. 2003.

Fulton, Jean. "Condition Assessment and Maintenance Recommendations for the Branigan Cultural Center."
November 2009.

Section 4 – Author/Owner information and Certification

17. Author Information

Author name: Kenneth Podhajecki, HP co-op/NMSU student
Applicant address (if different from property):
Las Cruces City Hall
700 Main Street
Las Cruces, NM 88001

Phone: 575-528-3027
Email: CDD@lascruces.gov

Are you the property owner? ☐ Yes ☒ No

Owner name (if different): City of Las Cruces

Contact (if different):

I certify that the information provided is accurate and complete to the best of my knowledge. I understand this application is subject to review by the Historic Preservation Committee and the City Council.

Applicant Signature:

Date:

Owner Signature (if different):

Date:

Appendix – Supporting Documentation

Attach the following:

- At least four quality photographs (all sides of the property, streetscape) with captions;
- Historic photographs (if available) with captions;
- Maps or aerials showing property location with descriptions (Google Maps screenshot);
- Supporting evidence (articles, survey records, oral histories);
- Copy of property's building's nomination form to the National Register of Historic Places or New Mexico Register of Cultural Properties, if applicable; and
- Any other documentation relevant to historical, architectural, or cultural significance with descriptions

Photographs of Property



Figure 1: Front of building, facing north.



Figure 2: Photo from the sidewalk on Main Street, looking northwest at the east façade of the building.



Figure 3: Rear of the building, facing south.



Figure 4: West façade of the building, service entrance behind the stage in the former auditorium.

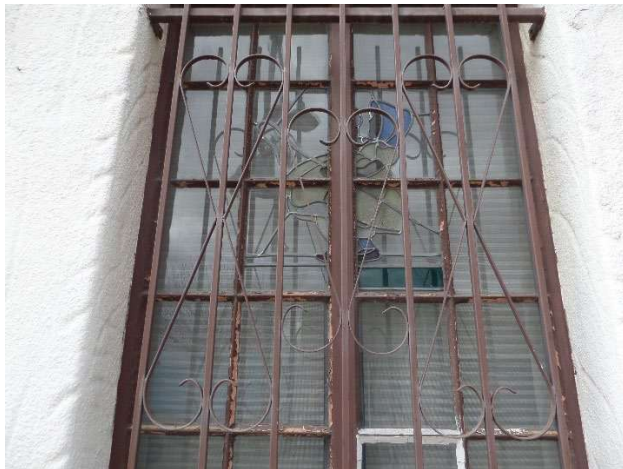


Figure 5: Stained glass window on the east side of the building.



Figure 6: Stained glass on the south side of the building.



Figure 7: Southwest corner of the building, featuring a distinct window decorated with extended hood and sill, supported by ornamented wooden doweling.

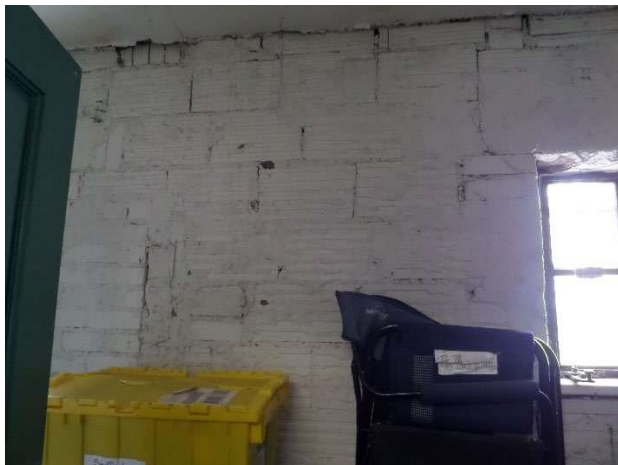


Figure 8: Photo of the building's interior, documenting use of hollow clay tile and brick in construction.



Figure 9: Photo of the plaque commemorating the building's dedication in 1935.

Historic Photographs

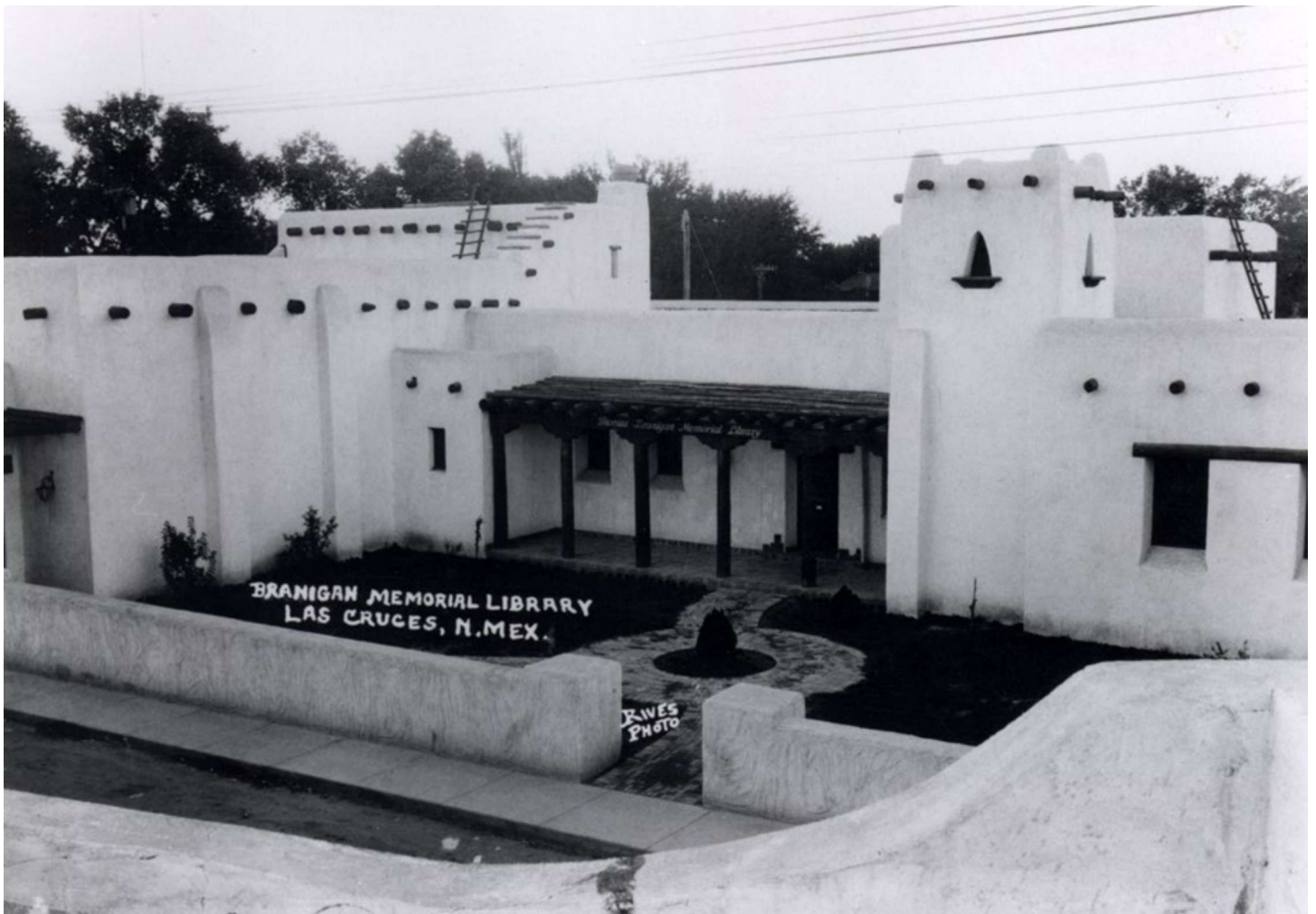


Figure 10: One of the earliest photos of the Branigan Memorial Library, circa 1930s. NMSU Archives, Rio Grande Historical Collections.



Figure 11: Another undated photo of the building, likely late-1930s.



Figure 12: Photo of the building, dating to the 1960s. NMSU Archives, Rio Grande Historical Collections.

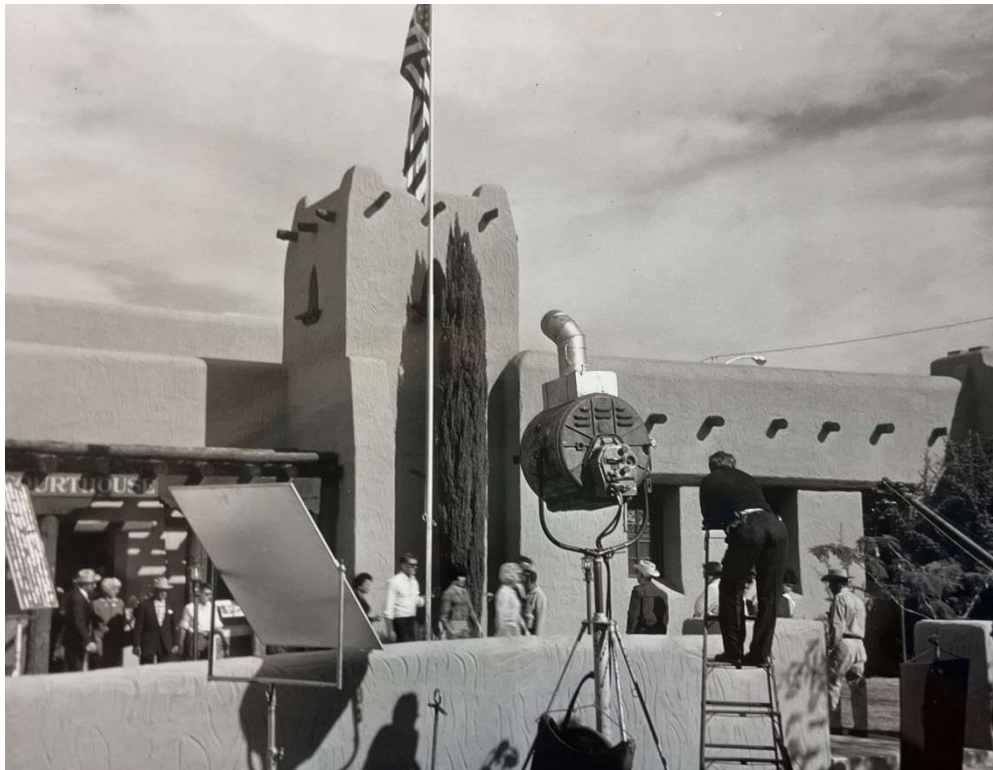


Figure 13: Photo of the Branigan Memorial Library during the filming of an un-aired TV pilot for Calhoun: Country Agent, from 1964.



Figure 14: Actor Jackie Cooper photographed at the Branigan Memorial Library, the set of Calhoun: County Agent, in 1964.

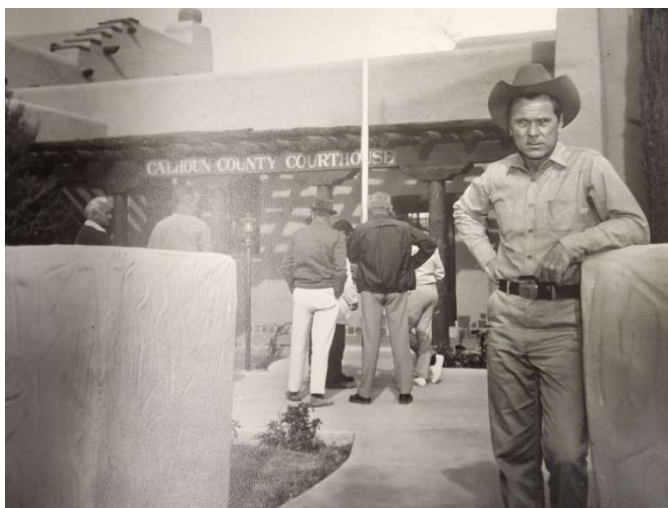


Figure 16: Cooper in a still frame from Calhoun: County Agent, in 1964.



Figure 15: James E. "Junior" Richardson III, first director of the Branigan Cultural Center, photographed outside the building at an unknown date. Richardson spearheaded the building's transition from library to museum; his tenure as director ended with his death in June 1986.

Location Map



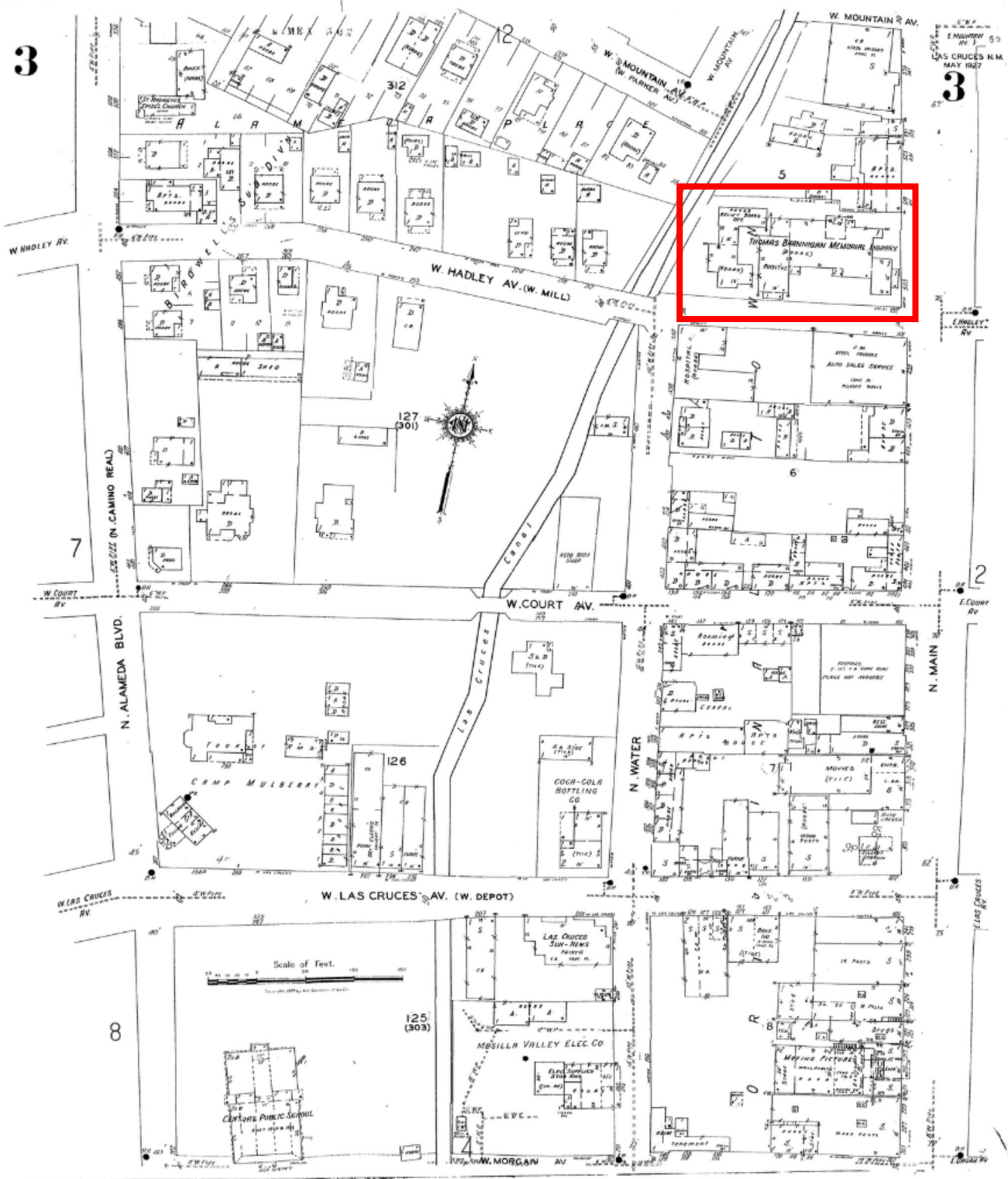


Figure 17: Page 3 from the May 1927 edition of the Sanborn Map Company's documentation of Las Cruces, showing the west-half of Main Street and downtown. The Thomas Branigan Memorial Library is highlighted in red.

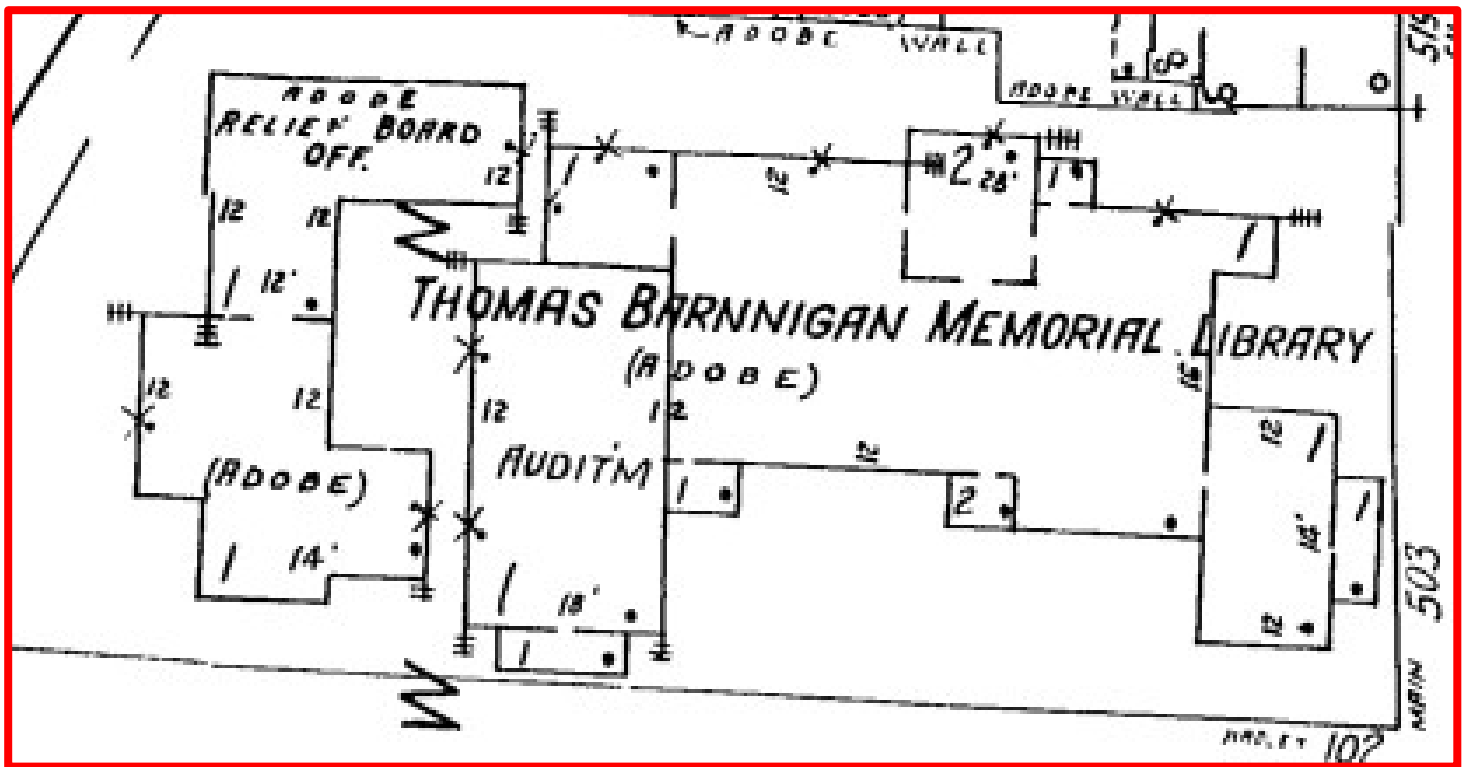


Figure 18: Thomas Branigan Memorial Library identified in the Sanborn Map Company's 1927 edition of Las Cruces. The map erroneously identifies the building as adobe construction.

Branigan Library Gets National Recognition

The Thomas Branigan Memorial Library has received national recognition in two library publications recently.

In "Small Public Library Buildings," prepared by the American Library Association Committee on Library architecture and building planning committee, which is headed by John Adams Lowe, librarian of Rochester New York Public Library, the Branigan library is one of 24 buildings recommended as examples of beauty and efficiency.

The twenty-four buildings displayed in this attractive book have been recently completed in various parts of the United States and Canada. The illustrations are of the Branigan library, show floor plans and exterior view of the building.

The reason for publication of this book is the great demand for small, efficient, public library buildings. The demand has increased with stimulus of building activities, fostered by the Federal Government.

The other publication which has featured the Branigan library is "The Pioneer," published by the Library Bureau Division of Remington Rand, Inc. This little folder shows the patio and southern view of the building as a front page cover. Three views of the inside are shown, and a letter from Mrs. Effie Carmichael, describing

the library is published.

Mrs. Carmichael weaves the historic background of Las Cruces into the structure of the description.

"This charming library at Las Cruces, New Mexico is so different from other buildings we have described in 'The Pioneer,' that we asked the librarian, Mrs. Effie Carmichael, to tell us about it," writes the editor.

Since the publicity has been accorded the Branigan library through these mediums, Mrs. Carmichael has received a number of inquiries for further information. One was from the director of the School Library Service, Simmons College, Boston, Mass. The writer declared that he was much interested in the building and plans as described in the John Adams Lowe book.

Figure 19: Newspaper clipping from page 1 of the Las Cruces Sun News, March 23, 1939.

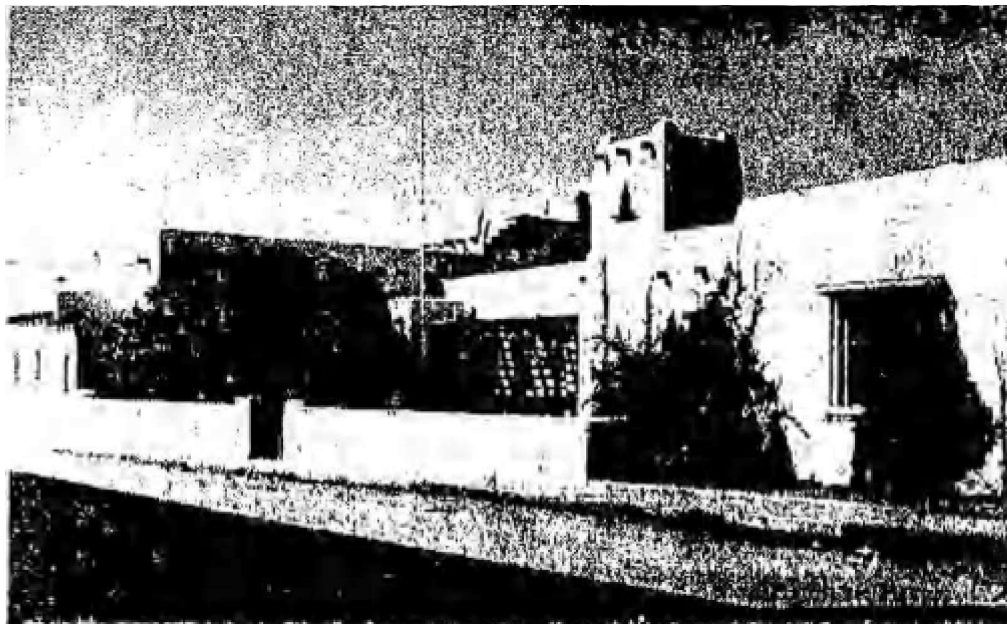
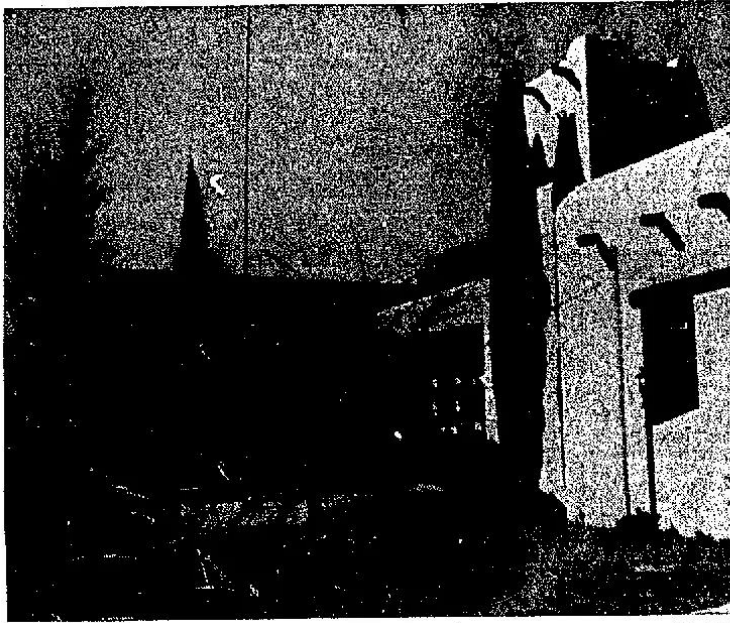


Figure 20: Thomas Branigan Memorial Library, south elevation, from the front page of the Las Cruces Sun News, October 9, 1949.



PUBLIC BUILDING AWARD — Thomas Branigan Memorial Library, 106 W. Hadley, was cited by Dona Ana Historical Society for a special award for a public building adhering to traditional regional architecture. (Miera)

Historical Society Cites Architecture Of Region

Two area buildings — one public and one private — have been singled out for special awards from the Dona Ana Historical Society for their noteworthy adherence to traditional regional architecture.

The society commends the

an Stew Ladled
: -- Unappetizing

careful planning that went into the construction of the Thomas Branigan Memorial Library, 106 W. Hadley, of pueblo design and the Ernst Artschwager territorial style home, 520 Brown Road.

Shannon Selects

E. G. Shannon, chairman of the board of trustees, received the award for Branigan Library. Fittingly it was Shannon who was responsible for the selection of the building's pueblo design.

It was his guiding influence that led Las Cruces into a building period that has been called the renaissance of pueblo design. Shannon's own home is considered a gem of that style of architecture.

Guiding Influence

He was successful in having the pueblo design selected not only for Branigan Library, but for the Dona Ana County Court house, City Hall, Court Junior High School and others. His in-

(See Page 14)

Figure 21: Newspaper clipping from page 13 of the Las Cruces Sun News March 5, 1967, edition.



Branigan Memorial Library

Renovated Library Ready For Showing

Dona Ana County residents will have the opportunity to see the results of the renovation at Branigan Memorial Public Library next Sunday, Jan. 6, from 1 to 5 p.m., Librarian Don Dresp announced.

The library is located at 106 W. Hadley Ave., just off the downtown mall. This will be the formal open house and showing of the renovation work in the library.

One of the open house highlights will be the designation of the Southwest books as the Helen P. Caffey Collection. This part of the program is scheduled for 3 p.m.

The collection will be contained in a specially designed room. Miss Caffey was Branigan librarian for several years prior to Dresp's appointment.

The renovation got under way in the later part of June. At one period during the project most of the book stacks were placed in the west reading room and entry was through a small entry in the wing. But, in spite of the inconveniences, Dresp and his staff were able to keep the library operating on its regular schedule of 66 hours a week.

Figure 22: Newspaper clipping from page 4 of the Las Cruces Sun News, December 30th, 1973, edition.



ALL FICTION BOOKS are now being held in the Shannon Room, a change made during renovation in Brangan Memorial Public Library. Steel stacks

seen at the left were moved into the reading room to handle the extra volumes. (Tessner)

City Library Ends Year 'Of Change, Revolution'

By MARVIN TESSNER
Sun-News Staff Writer

The year of 1973 was a time "of change and renovation" at Brangan Memorial Public Library, according to the annual report by Librarian Don Dresp.

Other additions that came with the project were a second copy machine and a rental typewriter. The copy machine cost is five cents. The typewriter is rented for 10 cents per 20 minutes or 25 cents for an hour.

The exterior also was completely sandblasted and given a fresh coat of bluing white paint which has made the library such an outstanding building throughout the years.

Crews also tore down the old Red Cross Building on Water Street and recently started to build a 12-place parking area for the library.

The renovation project also gave Dresp the opportunity to add an entrance to the Southwest Collection and to rename it the Helen P. Caffey Collection in honor of the former librarian who had held the position for so many years.

During fiscal year 1972-73, Dresp and his staff added 5,254 volumes to bring the total to 51,131. The library also has 405 records and 231 talking books offered for circulation.

Dresp contends, however, that according to the American Library Standards, Brangan Library should have 64,000 volumes to meet the community's needs.

Circulation for the fiscal year totalled 191,732. This is broken down into: Adult, 113,817; juvenile, 78,944; records, 3,564, and talking books, 857.

This represents a 15 per cent increase over the previous period, or 28,226 books. The per cent increase is among the highest in public libraries in the nation, Dresp noted.

A decrease in circulation was noted during the renovation period, July 1973 to January 1974, of six per cent for the same span of time the previous year. But Dresp considers this a success when the difficulties his staff had to overcome are taken into account.

The library was able to remain open 66 hours a week in spite of renovation.

Services cover a large span. Children's activities include special Easter, Halloween and Christmas story hours.

The Christmas program consisted of 14 events and drew an attendance of 900. The highlight was the Girl Scouts Yuletide decoration event with handmade ornaments, which won the library first place in the Chamber of Commerce decoration contest.

Services cover a large span. Children's activities include special Easter, Halloween and Christmas story hours.

The Christmas program consisted of 14 events and drew an attendance of 900. The highlight was the Girl Scouts Yuletide decoration event with handmade ornaments, which won the library first place in the Chamber of Commerce decoration contest.

The library's second annual Summer Reading Program was a success even with the renovation project interruptions. More than 1,000 children participated in the "Wild Horse Reading Roundup," which was designed to encourage and develop good reading habits.

Another estimated 2,500 young readers attended children's program and activities during June, July and August. And films were presented every Monday throughout the summer.

During the entire year, story hours are offered 10:30 to 11 a.m. every Thursday for children by the State College Story League and the Las Cruces Story League.

Recently, weekly story hours were developed at Little Playmates Nursery and Kindergarten and Eastside Community Center.

It was just a year ago when the Homebound Services was started under the sponsorship of the Las Cruces Junior Women's Club. Members see that books and material, that have been ordered from the library, are delivered to the homebound.

Currently, eight patrons, either handicapped, homebound or elderly, are being served through this program. Dresp said he hopes to expand it during 1974.

Prior to the renovation work, the Inter-Library Loan Service was started at Brangan. Through this service, Dresp can contact the New Mexico State Library in Santa Fe to obtain books that are not available at the city library.

The loan service also makes more than 650 films available to community organizations and clubs. During the 1972-73 fiscal year, 48 films were obtained for county patrons.

Special collections have been undergoing expansion. The library subscribes to more than 150 magazines and plans to improve the magazine and newspaper selections this year.

In fiscal year 1972-73 talking books and magazines for the visually handicapped in English and Spanish were checked out to about 25 people using the service. Recently, \$900 were spent on large print books.

The paperback collection has reached approximately 3,000 books. The expanding Spanish collection includes two encyclopedias, reference books, and fiction selections.

The special table with free material, including narcotics and teen-age bibliography, also has proved a success. Other special events included the monthly art exhibits, featuring local authors and exhibits to observe Black Week, Chicano Week, Native American Week and Book Quiz Week.

The remaining staff members are: Carmen Alvarado, Patricia Greathouse, Sara Johnson, Terry Johnston, Maria Clara Martinez, Wilma F. Powell, Vera Schrader, Phyllis Segura, Mary Lou Serna, Jean Canble, library page, and Pete Pedraza, custodian.

Expanded City Computer Facilities Allows More Work, Better Economy

Special To The Sun-News
In light of inflation and a recession that some say isn't a recession, consider this statement:

"This new system not only enables us to build a broader base for the future but allows us to still do the work in one shift rather than going to two...and for about the same amount of money."

Where is this unusual business that's able to build down costs so well in an era of rapidly rising prices?

It's tucked away in a well-lit corner at 200 N. Church St. The sign on the door says Management Information Services.

half times the disc storage space, is one third again faster and takes up about a third less space," said Zalzo, comparing it to the older model Century 100 computer the City had been using.

The old computer was operating at 95 per cent of its capacity. Thus the 101, which is leased for about the same amount of money (\$3,000 a month) will actually save the city money. If you think that \$3,000 is high, remember that if people were doing the work the 101 does, the cost figures would be many times over that.

"We had gotten to the point in the development of new

puter (resulting in better operation), and to provide a separate office for the programmers.

In addition to a wide range of regular functions from utility billing to a fixed assets inventory system to a data bank from a city-wide housing survey, several new systems were added in 1973.

Developed last year was a vehicle maintenance system, which provides the finance department and each user department with monthly and year-to-date reports and mileage and cost distribution for each city vehicle.

These reports also reflect

lost year. This program also provides timely reports on shop revenues by individual shop. The city auto shop input is also used as input to the vehicle maintenance system.

The department also developed a system for the Parks and Recreation Department to provide rapid statistics for the city softball leagues during its summer tournaments.

A program for the city engineering department was also added in 1973. This program is used in calculating traverse closures (used in surveying and calculating plot sizes).

Besides carrying on all this work, Management Infor-

language for the 101.

Zalzo said several major new systems are being developed now for addition to the 101 in 1974. These include a warehouse inventory system; a personnel and payroll system; and a cost accounting system for utilities, being designed in conjunction with the city's major utility consultants.

A program for the city engineering department was also added in 1973. This program is used in calculating traverse closures (used in surveying and calculating plot sizes).

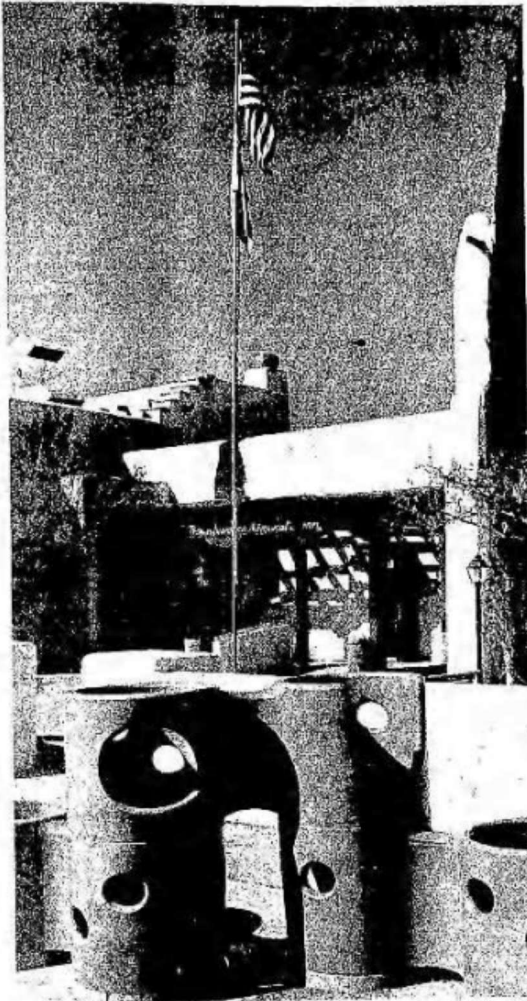
Besides carrying on all this work, Management Infor-

Professional Janitor Continues Expansion

The Professional Janitor service, located at 650 N. Miranda, has grown to more than 10 times

In the past five years, the company has acquired government contracts with Holloway

Figure 23: Newspaper clipping from the Las Cruces Sun News, Progress Edition-Section C, page 2, published February 24, 1974.



THOMAS BRANIGAN Memorial Library marked 1974 with the completion of renovation in last January. An open house was held Jan. 6, 1974 with an estimated 1,500 persons attending the dedication of the New Mexico Collection and observing statehood day. Then, during the summer, a patio was installed with five park benches "for those who like to read outdoors," according to Librarian Don Dresch. (Davis)

Bustling Branigan Growing

The year of 1974 at Branigan Memorial Public Library can be summarized as a year of growth in services and activity, according to the annual report prepared by Librarian Don Dresch.

Under the heading of public service, the library installed a New Mexico Information System teletype and telecopier with the help of a \$2,583 grant. The unit is in contact with public libraries in Alamogordo, Roswell, Santa Fe, Farmington and Los Alamos.

Parties on either end of the line can send or receive instant copies of information with the special system, Dresch explained.

From August to December last year, Branigan received 221 books from and sent out 185 to other libraries to serve patrons better with the assistance of interlibrary loans.

More than 500 films are available in community organizations which are on loan from the New Mexico State Library. During fiscal year 1973-74, 26 films were loaned out throughout Dona Ana County.

Once a day, the library posts a United Press International stock market report. And during 1974, 2,641 reserves were placed on books at the library. Library loans are given upon request, and last year the library staff was born to 64 loans.

One especially successful service at the library has been the two copy machines which provide reproductions at five cents per copy. Just a year ago a rental typewriter also was made available for a cost of 10 cents for 30 minutes and 25 for 60, Dresch pointed out.

And more than 2,300 reference questions were researched and answered during the fiscal year 1973-74.

In January 1974, Branigan held an open house to dedicate the new renovations. The annex to the west also was demolished to make way for badly needed parking space.

One of the dedication highlights was the designation of the New Mexico Collection as the Helen P. Coffey Collection in

honor of the library's former librarian. Approximately 1,500 people attended the open house.

In July, the new patio was installed, installing five benches for resting or reading in pleasant weather.

Several children's programs were presented during 1974. The Christmas program presented 13 events and drew an attendance of 868 people. Once again the Girl Scouts decorated the library with handmade ornaments.

An estimated 2,406 youngsters attended the annual summer reading program, with more than 1,800 participating in the Wise Old Owl Reading Program.

For the special Multi-Culture Program, events were presented to inform youngsters about the Southwestern culture.

Films were presented for the children every Monday. And 205 boys and girls received their reading certificates for completing a specified reading program.

During the entire year, story hours were sponsored by the State College Story League and the Las Cruces Story League. Weekly story hours also were presented at the Little Playmates Nursery and Kindergarten, Eastside Community Center, Mary Noppels and with the Head Start program and the Early Childhood Development Program.

And in November, Gen. Hugh Milton was featured in a special Bicentennial.

Special features at Branigan are led by Homebound Service which is conducted in cooperation with the American Red Cross. Thirteen patrons, who are homebound or handicapped, are reached by this service.

Each month, art exhibits are sponsored by the Las Cruces Arts and Crafts Association.

Special exhibits that were held during 1974 included Family Life, Las Cruces Concert Association, Black History Week, Cuzcoan Week, Native American Week, Older American Month, American Bookless Week, Empty the

Handicapped Week, National Literary Week, Children's Book Week, League of Women Voters, New Mexico State Fair, Carlsbad Caverns and White Sands.

The circulation for 1973-74 was reported at 186,180, or 3,572 less than the previous period.

This is not serious, Dresch pointed out, when the Statistien for Branigan for renovation period is considered.

The circulation breakdown is 117,835 adult, 68,101 juvenile, 4,143 stereo records and 1,061 talking books. The four highest circulation days in the library history occurred in 1974, July 8, 1,327 items; July 15, 1,309; June 17, 1,297, and June 24, 1,188. Statistien for Branigan for fiscal year 1973-74 are: 56,722, number of volumes in library; 7,722, number of volumes added; 51,255, number of book titles in library; 7,120, number of bank titles added; and 360, number of stereo records.

Let's not kick it around.



NATO works. Something else might not.

The Allied Council of the United States for further support of NATO in the Atlantic Ocean. 1974-1975, N.S. Washington, D.C. 2000

Working toward a more

PROGRESSIVE LAS CRUCES IN '75'

THE ENERGY CRISIS

Here's what you can do about it!

18 important ways to help you conserve energy and save on your electric bill.

- ☒ Stack dishes in your dishwasher until you have a full load.
- ☒ Wash and dry full clothes loads. Use correct cycle and water temperature setting for the type of clothes to be washed. And, never use more detergent than specified — your laundry can get so sudsy it can take rinse after rinse to get it clean.
- ☒ If you've got your oven piping hot for tonight's supper, why not pop in a casserole or a pie for tomorrow's? Or, cook a

Figure 24: Newspaper clipping from the Las Cruces Sun News, Progress Edition-Section C, page 7, of the February 23, 1975, edition.

Branigan Library Move Proposed

By BILL CASEY
Sun-News Staff Writer

If you are one of the persons using Branigan Library who thinks it is too small, what would you think of moving it to the present Municipal Building?

Jim Brown, assistant to the city manager, thinks it is a good idea, and he recommended it in a study he just finished.

Brown's study is just the first step in a long process of getting a new, larger library, which the city commission has promised to do.

Brown recommends the city put the new library in the Municipal Building because it would be cheaper than building a new building. It can be expanded and the city would not have to buy the land for it.

Also, according to his report, the building now is too small for all the city offices, and they

could move to the City-County Building.

His report, however, is only a beginning proposal, so it includes several other recommendations.

He considers six possible places to put the new library. The first is City Hall, and the others are a lot on the Downtown Mall; the land in front of Maag Park on Solano Drive between Hadley and Las Cruces Avenues; the block bounded by Solano, Chapparo Street and Amador and Lohman Avenues; the tract bounded by Amador, Solano, Espina Street and Bowman Avenue; and the land bounded on three sides by Main and Campo Streets and Picacho Avenue.

The city owns the spots by Maag Park and Amador and Solano, according to the report, so it would not have to buy the land. The other lots the city would have to buy at prices ranging

from \$50,000 for the mall lot to \$350,000 for the site bounded by Amador, Espina, Bowman and Solano.

The cost of the library itself would depend on whether it will be a city library or city-county library. A new city library big enough to serve the projected Las Cruces population ten years from now would cost about \$1.8 million. A city-county library would cost about \$2.7 million.

Brown notes, however, that remodeling the Municipal Building to make it into a library would cost only about half a million dollars.

To pay for the library and possibly the land to put it on Brown offers two possibilities: bonds and revenue sharing money.

He wrote that at the present rate the city is spending revenue sharing money, it could have \$600,000 each year to use for a library. Approximately another \$343,000 will be received and has not been budgeted, and this

also could be used for a library, according to Brown's study. He wrote that these combined amounts could build and pay for a library within three years.

Bonding for a library would use most of the city's capacity for bonding; according to the study, that capacity was about \$2.5 million as of June 30, 1976.

The report takes into consideration that the library should have enough room for parking, community meeting rooms, adult and children reading rooms, and enough staff office space. The square footage requirement for the projected population ten years from now is 37,560 for a city library and 56,640 for a city-county library. Branigan presently has 7,600 square feet of floor space, well below the American Library Association standard of at least 27,960 square feet for Las Cruces' present population.

Figure 25: Newspaper clipping from the front page of the Las Cruces Sun News, December 9, 1976, edition.

City Designates Library Site

By BILL CASEY
Sun-News Staff Writer

A site for the proposed new city library has been chosen by the Las Cruces City Commission.

If negotiations work out, the city will buy about six acres at Picacho and Main, across from the Public Safety Building. The commission chose this site at a work session Tuesday night. At the same session, it assured the library board that the city would keep the present Thomas Branigan Memorial Library building, and would not tear it down. Commissioners have not decided,

however, how to use the building; that decision will come only after "much discussion," Mayor Albert N. Johnson said.

Deputy City Attorney Ray Riordan, at the commission's direction, will try to work out details of purchase of the land with Lee Stryker. He owns part of the property, and represents the persons who own the rest. Stryker is asking about \$1.25 a square foot, or a total of \$328,000, for the lot.

The commission told the city staff to get a firm price from Stryker; after that, the city will have the land ap-

praised. State law requires an appraisal on land the city buys and the local government cannot pay more than the appraisal price. Most commissioners feel, however, that the appraisal price will be higher than Stryker's.

A spokesman for the library board said members were pleased with the choice. Also, city librarian Don Dresp said, "I'm just very pleased; I really believe this is an ideal site." Dresp has been active in helping draw up guidelines not only for the site but also for building, space and parking requirements of a new library.

The commission earlier had decided to set aside revenue

sharing money to pay for the new library.

In a related matter, commissioners decided not to sell a piece of the Branigan estate that Whitfield Properties, Inc., had offered to buy. Instead, they directed Riordan to try to negotiate a lease.

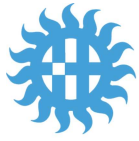
The matter is related because the will on the Branigan estate requires that the city use any money from the estate for library books. Commissioners at the work session discussed the best way to handle the property to give the best benefit to the library. They decided on the lease to be able to keep the property as a source of income, rather

than selling it and spending the money at one time.

The property in question is a narrow strip along Valley Drive just north of Amador. Whitfield owns the property behind the strip, which is why that piece would be valuable to the firm. Riordan has pointed out that the strip is so narrow it would be of little use to anyone else.

Riordan will try to negotiate a lease "with an escalation and de-escalation clause," as Johnson said. Commissioners realize a business will want a long-range lease, but want to be sure the city is able to raise the rate of the lease as inflation dictates.

Figure 26: Newspaper clipping from the front page of the Las Cruces Sun News, June 8, 1977, edition, detailing the public library's move to its current location at Main and Picacho.



CITY OF LAS CRUCES

TO: Historic Preservation Committee

FROM: Caitlin Beesley, MHP, Historic Preservation Specialist

DATE: May 1, 2026

SUBJECT: Case CPD2026-002

Case CPD2026-002: A nomination to the City of Las Cruces Register of Cultural Properties for the Branigan Cultural Center, historically the Branigan Memorial Library. Property is owned by the City of Las Cruces and is contributing to the Alameda-Depot Historic District, listed at the state and national levels; it is also listed individually in the National Register of Historic Places.

BACKGROUND

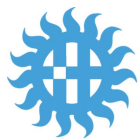
Designed by Percy Wear McGhee, Jr. and constructed in 1935, the Branigan Cultural Center (originally the Thomas Branigan Memorial Library) is a two-story Pueblo Revival style building at the northern end of Las Cruces' downtown sitting at 501 North Main St. The south-facing building occupies the width of the block, fronting the former Hadley Avenue, now a *callecita* or walking lane, and extends between the western Water Street to Main Street on the east. The building retains a very high degree of integrity, despite minor alterations to the exterior and significant changes to interior spaces, and continues to be a major center of activity for the community. It has served a critical role within the community and remains an important cultural landmark as the first dedicated library in Las Cruces and the only privately funded library constructed in New Mexico during the Great Depression, as a representative of Pueblo Revival Style architecture, and for its association with Percy Wear McGhee, Jr., a notable regional architect.

The Branigan Cultural Center is currently nominated to the City of Las Cruces Register of Cultural Properties, which comprises buildings, structures, sites, objects and districts that have historic or cultural significance to the Las Cruces community.

DECISION CRITERIA

To ensure the designation of eligible properties to the City of Las Cruces Register of Cultural Properties, HPC shall evaluate and make a final recommendation to the Las Cruces City Council for final approval. Nominated properties must be recommended and approved following standards established in Chapter 35, Section 2-D of the City's Development Code. An eligible building must meet the following requirements:

- a) Located within the corporate boundaries of the City; and
- b) At least 50 years old, in whole or in part, or else of exceptional significance; and



CITY OF LAS CRUCES

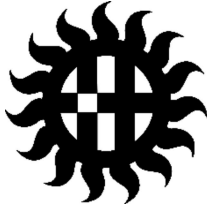
- c) Possesses integrity of design, materials, workmanship, setting, location, feeling, and association, as defined for listing in the National Register of Historic Places; and
- d) Embodies such other qualities and characteristics as is in the judgement of the Committee should be considered for designation as a cultural property; and
- e) Possess one or more of the following demonstrations of significance:
 - i) A broad cultural, political, economic, or social association with the historic development of the community, the state, or the nation; and/or
 - ii) Identification with a historic person or with important events in local, state, and/or national history; and/or
 - iii) Possesses distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type inherently valuable for the study of a period, style, method of construction, or use of indigenous materials or craftsmanship; and/or
 - iv) Possesses authenticity of its period of significance as evidenced by the survival of its characteristics, historic fabric, and architectural elements from that period; and/or
 - v) Is a notable work of a master builder, designer, or architect; and/or
 - vi) Possesses or may likely yield information important in prehistory or history; and/or
 - vii) An improvement embodying all or part of the above characteristics which is subject to encroachment of detrimental influences or potential adverse effects; and/or
 - viii) An improvement of historical, architectural, or cultural significance that is threatened with demolition by public or private action; and/or
 - ix) Possesses other qualities and characteristics that, in the judgment of the Committee, should be considered for designation as a cultural property.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff have reviewed this nomination and recommend **APPROVAL** based on the following finding:

1. The building is currently listed in the National Register of Historic Places and the State Register of Cultural Properties.
2. The building retains sufficient historic integrity, and its significance is apparent to the general public.
3. Staff assisted in the completion of the nomination.

NOTE: Recommendations by the Committee must be based on “findings.” Findings for *DENIAL* of the nomination should be articulated by the Committee and may be based on policies found in the City of Las Cruces Development Code, and/or other City plans and policies. Findings may also be based on information presented at the public hearing or information obtained through a site inspection.



Cultural Property Designation Form

City of Las Cruces – Community Development Department

700 N. Main St., Las Cruces, NM 88001

For assistance, call (575) 528-3027 or email cbeesley@lascruces.gov

For official use only:

CLC CPD No. _____ NRHP _____ SRCP _____ Criteria A B C D

Section 1 – Property Information

1. Name of Property (Usually refers to prominent historical period) Las Cruces Railroad Depot Las Cruces Railroad Museum	3. Address/Location of Property (If no mailing address exists, use nearest cross streets; include UTM's) 351 N Mesilla St., Las Cruces, NM, 88005
2. Historic Names (if applicable) (All names, during or following historical period) Las Cruces Railroad Depot Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe (ATSF) Railway Depot	

Section 2 – Property Description

4. Property Type (See below for descriptions) ☒ Building (roof, enclosed walls, occupied) ☐ Structure (roof, walls, unoccupied) ☐ Site/Infrastructure (park, acequia, etc.) ☐ Object (statute, mural, etc.)	8. Identifying photo (Show main façade or other for clear identification) 
5. Original Use of Property Railway Depot	
6. Current Use of Property Museum	
7. Listing history Has this property previously been listed on a national or state register, either individually or as part of an existing historic district? ☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Unsure NR: Contributing to the Alameda-Depot Historic District, listed 1985 SR: Contributing to the Alameda-Depot Historic District, listed 1980	

9. Construction Date (if known) 1910	10. Building/Structure Occupation Status ☒ Occupied ☐ Unoccupied ☐ Does not apply
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while under the city's ownership, part of the eastern-façade on the southern portion was encapsulated by a shed-roofed hall intended as a circulation corridor; prior to the addition, museum visitors had to exit and enter the building at various points to reach different rooms. The addition uses sympathetic materials and was constructed with limited alterations to the original building beneath; it is ostensibly removable.

Section 3 – Property Significance

14. Significance Criteria

(Check all that apply, explain answers under 15. Significance Narrative)

- ☒ (A) Broad cultural, political, economic or social association with community/state/national history
- ☐ (B) Associated with a historic person or persons
- Or (C)
- ☒ Distinctive architectural type, style, method, or craftsmanship
- ☒ Authenticity of materials and historic elements from the most prominent period of the building's history
- ☐ Notable work of a master builder, designer, or architect
- Or (D)
- ☐ Potential to yield information important in history or prehistory
- ☐ Subject to encroachment or adverse effects
- ☐ Threatened with demolition by public or private action
- ☐ Other qualities significant to local heritage (explain under 15. Significance Narrative)

Integrity Consideration ☒ Yes ☐ No

(Does the property possess sufficient integrity as evaluated for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places)

15. Significance Narrative

(Written narrative describing the history of the property and its importance to Las Cruces, no character limit)

The Las Cruces Railroad Depot, constructed in 1910 as a replacement for the city's first railway station, represents the most consequential period of development in the city's history and has been a distinguished addition to the community since its construction. Notable in the areas of transportation history, architectural significance, and the settlement of the Mesilla Valley, the property is the most important building in the Alameda-Depot Historic District—perhaps in the entire city; it is contributing to both the National Register of Historic Properties and the New Mexico State Register of Cultural Properties. The building is significant under Criterion A, as a representative of Las Cruces development and residential expansion, and Criterion C, for its design in the Mission Revival style; it is further significant for its role in physically bringing new construction materials and knowledge of new architectural styles to the burgeoning Mesilla Valley, as evidenced by the assorted variety of residential architectural styles that were produced in the railroad's wake and the immediate vicinity of the depot.

Criterion A

The railroad and associated depot spurred economic growth with the influx of goods and people from the east. As an obvious representative of the railroad's central role in the community, the depot was the heart of industrialization for the Mesilla Valley. It was also a source of community pride and congregation. Following the railroad's arrival, Las Cruces grew so quickly that the town's infrastructure, previously insufficient for the modern demands of a transportation hub, picked up a substantial pace to accommodate the demands of newcomers and new business. The neighborhood around the depot, now identified for its associations with the building, was established; the railroad brought modern construction materials and new construction methods, producing buildings that broke with the earlier vernacular styles used in other areas of town and instead looked to popular architecture elsewhere for inspiration.

The extension of Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe (ATSF) Railroad into New Mexico in the mid-1800s followed the historical Santa Fe Trail overland, with branches proposed south towards El Paso and a southern east-west artery by the 1870s. ATSF agents, under the direction of company president Cyrus Kurtz Holliday, first approached Mesilla, the then-county seat and largest community in the Mesilla Valley, regarding the extension of the rail line through the valley, complete with a supporting depot; Mesilla residents balked at the offer, unwilling to give up profitable farm land to the railroad. Sensing an opportunity, prominent Las Cruces businessmen, led by William Rynerson, Henry Cuniffe, Simon Bolivar Newcomb, and Jacinto Armijo, created the New Mexico Town Company (later referred to as the Las Cruces Town Company) and purchased farmland west of the original Las Cruces townsite to be set aside for the railroad as a gesture to the ATSF, with far-reaching implications. The ATSF accepted the small town's offer and construction work on the line began.

The first train rolled into Las Cruces on April 26, 1881, with much pomp and celebration as the entire town of 1,600 people turned out. The *Daily New Mexican* in Santa Fe reported "the event was made an occasion of great rejoicing by the people of Las Cruces and the Mesilla Valley."¹ The construction of a depot in June 1881 provided a hub for the train's commercial and transportation activities; the original depot, a two-story wood structure with prominent side gables, quickly became the center of industry as cotton gins, canneries, freight houses and machine shops rose around it. Hotels such as the Amador, the Rio Grande, and the Don Bernardo all had coaches ready to chauffeur passengers from the depot into town.

With the arrival of the railroad depot and line came several significant facets of modernization for the small farming community. The most long-lasting for Las Cruces was a significant rise in population and subsequent building boom. As train arrivals and departures increased, land speculators began parceling and selling some of the former farmland between the depot and the original townsite. For several decades after establishment of the depot, and during the transition from the first depot to the current building, farm agents sold parcels of land by advertising how close the properties were to the depot, illustrating the building's importance to trade and the local economy.² The preceding development resulted in a 42-block residential area now known as the Alameda-Depot neighborhood, a National Register-listed historic district. The depot's placement influenced the layout of the new residential neighborhood, given a prominent place at the end of the stately Las Cruces Avenue, originally named Depot Avenue and lined by elegant homes in various architectural styles and newly-planted trees. In 1923, this street was one of the first in the town to be paved (macadamized), so that visitors entering Las Cruces from the train station might receive a favorable first impression.

In addition to establishing the neighborhood, the railroad was also responsible for the introduction of varied architectural styles and construction materials to the new neighborhood. As the best-built representative of railroad expansion, the Las Cruces Depot is closely tied to the new neighborhood and previously unseen architectural styles. Prior to the arrival of the railroad, most architecture in New Mexico was a vernacular style that took some aspects of Federalist and Greek Revival Styles in hand with traditional building techniques, creating a new style referred to today as Territorial. Territorial continued to dominate residential construction around Las Cruces for several decades after the arrival of the railroad, but the railroad's influence gradually picked up steam and by the early 1910s was dominating the construction and architectural styles of the community. The multiplicity of styles ranged from Italianate to Folk Victorian to the later Craftsman Bungalow typology, initially constructed with adobe bricks but later using lumber or fired bricks imported on the railroad. These buildings, primarily residential, began to appear side-by-side along the streets of the new neighborhood around the depot; their appearance and their placement on larger parcels of land set them apart from the traditional one-story adobe rowhouse that characterize the original town site. This phenomenon was statewide, as summarized by New Mexico architectural historian Bainbridge Bunting: "since few New Mexicans had any notion of what easterners considered fashionable, the thing that mattered to them was that both manners were fresh from the States and therefore desirable."

¹ Christopher Schurtz, "Historic Las Cruces; The Story of Las Cruces & The Mesilla Valley" (2012), 12.

² *Rio Grande Republican*, "Bargains in Farms," June 26, 1914, 4.

In addition to all the goods and materials that passed through the depot to transform the community, the building also hosted various community functions, sometimes featuring prominent guests from out of town. President William H. Taft briefly stopped at the depot in October 1909 as part of a presidential trip to El Paso. Former President Theodore Roosevelt made a campaign stop on March 15, 1911, to proclaim his support for New Mexico statehood. Less formal events occurred in or around the depot as well. Prior to the creation of designated ballfields, baseball and football games were played in a field to the north of the depot and tracks. El Paso businessmen occasionally visited the city via the rail-line for regional booster meetings, with one such event in 1917 including a military band welcome.³

While early Las Cruces expressed pride in their railroad connections, that didn't prevent them encouraging the rail-line at different times to improve the appearance of the depot building and grounds. The construction of the current depot building followed community-wide disappointment in the shabbiness of their building during the 1909 visit by President Taft. Two years later, a new, more attractive building was constructed in time to greet President Roosevelt. The success of the building, designed by a railroad architect and constructed by Albuquerque contractor A.W. Anson, reportedly influenced the look of other depots around the state.⁴ Later, complaints were lodged against the larger landscape around the depot. "(B)eautilification," one article from 1921 reads, "of station grounds and other places in town and county is a public asset."⁵

The railroad radically changed the built landscape of Las Cruces, but it also led to the upheaval of previous political and social dynamics around the region. Within the Mesilla Valley, Las Cruces deposed Mesilla, historically the larger community, as the county seat in the wake of the first depot's construction. Meanwhile, wealthy and influential Las Cruces families began migrating from the original townsite to the fashionable new neighborhood surrounding the depot, establishing a demographic trend that would continue into the mid-1900s and are still somewhat reflective today. Yet another long-term effect of the railroad's arrival is represented by the city's continued interest in new development. An openness to progress and modernity, hinted at by the New Mexico Town Company's deal with the railroad, has cemented Las Cruces' hold on regional power, but it has also led to the demolition of much of early Las Cruces' built history and heritage at various times, most notably during Urban Renewal in the 1960s; conversely, Mesilla, by rejecting the railroad, has avoided much of the destruction and heartache that accompanied Urban Renewal activities in Las Cruces. The existing railroad depot building creates a direct throughline for this aspect of the community's history.

Passenger service at the Depot ended in 1968, although freight service continued until 1988 when the building officially closed. In 1992 the city of Las Cruces acquired the depot from ATSF and converted it into a museum, which opened in 2004. Its function may have been fundamentally altered, but the building continues to act as an extension of the railroad by telling its history of thousands of visitors annually.

Criterion C

While the depot's most significant contribution to Las Cruces is its influence on the construction and design of other buildings, it remains a significant example of pure and non-vernacularized Mission Revival architecture – one of the only in the valley remaining after Urban Renewal. Best identified by the extended gable ends and façade projections that break the roofline to form parapeted dormers with prominent pediments, the building is also typified by a red terracotta tiled roof and stuccoed exterior. The depot retains all of its character-defining features which display detailed and expert craftsmanship, specifically the unique wood brackets that support the extended eaves on west and east facades.

³ *Rio Grande Republican*, "Pep, Push and Progress; Special Tendered Ovation," March 27, 1917, 1.

⁴ Schurtz, "Historic," 13.

⁵ *Rio Grande Republican*, "May Beautify Depot Grounds; Santa Fe Railroad Asked to Cooperate in Improving Property in Valley," September 22, 1921, 2.

The name of the building's architect is currently unknown, however it is highly likely that a designer employed with the AT&SF produced the building's formal plans as this was typical of depots produced by the company elsewhere. While it is similar in appearance to any number of other Spanish Mission Revival depots produced elsewhere in New Mexico and the Southwest, it is significantly smaller and better maintained. Following the decline in rail travel, numerous depots around the southwest were significantly altered or demolished—most notably, Albuquerque's famous Spanish Mission Revival train depot and hotel configuration, built in 1902 from designs by Charles Frederick Whittlesey and Mary Colter and known as the Alvarado Hotel, was demolished in 1970. The rehabilitation and continued use of Las Cruces' depot has prevented its demolition from neglect or speculative development.

Timeline

- April 26, 1881: The first train arrives in Las Cruces.
- June 1881: First Las Cruces depot opens for travelers.
- October 1909: President Howard Taft stops briefly at the depot during his presidential trip to El Paso. City leaders urge the AT&SF to replace the depot, which appears shabby during the visit.
- 1910: The current building, stuccoed brick in the Mission Revival-style, is constructed.
- 1911: Former President Teddy Roosevelt stops his train at the depot while on a supporting tour of New Mexico; he does not embark but speaks of the benefits for statehood for the territory from the caboose.
- 1968: Passenger service to the Las Cruces depot ends.
- 1988: The railroad's local freight service ends deliveries direct to Las Cruces, due to cheaper rates from truck and air transport. Freight trains continue to use the tracks west of the depot, currently owned and operated by the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad Company.
- 1992: City purchases the depot.
- 2004: City opens the depot as a railroad museum.
- 2006-2007: The city cuts through several walls to in the interior layout of the building to allow for circulation through the north-half of the building. An exterior ramp is added to the east façade of the building to connect the museum with a larger freight room that features a higher loading deck – this freight room is now used as a meeting room/classroom.
- 2008-2010: A city-lead project replaces the wood decking on the southern and western platforms with ChoiceDek, a composite decking produced by Lowe's. Additionally, a new reception desk is installed at the museum as an extension of the original counter, constructed by inmates at the county detention center's woodshop. Its attachment to the original counter does not damage the original woodwork.
- 2025: A prospective project intended to restore all wood windows and doors is planned for an undefined future date.

16. References (if any)

(Make note of books, magazine articles, websites, blogs, etc., used in researching the property's history)

Alameda-Depot Historic District (National Register, 1984 OMB #1024-0018). Form prepared by Betsy Swanson, Las Cruces Planning Department. Nomination certified, 1985.

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Bryant, Keith L. Jr. *History of The Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway Company*. Macmillan Publishing Co, 1974.

Bunting, Bainbridge. *Early Architecture in New Mexico*, University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, 1976.

Dona Ana County Historical Society banquet programs, essays on "Buildings Designated as Worthy of Preservation", Thomas Branigan Memorial Library, Rynerson House, Louis E. Freudenthal House, Santa Fe Railway Depot, Numa Frenger House, St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, Woman's Improvement Association Clubhouse, Rio Grande Historical Collections/Hobson-Huntsinger University Archives, New Mexico State University Library, Las Cruces.

Schurtz, Christopher. *Historic Las Cruces; The Story of Las Cruces & The Mesilla Valley*. Historical Publishing Network and the City of Las Cruces Museums System, 2012.

Section 4 – Author/Owner information and Certification

17. Author Information

Author name: Judy Berryman, PhD

Phone: (575) 571-1556

Applicant address (if different from property):

Email: judyberryman48@gmail.com

Are you the property owner? ☐ Yes ☒ No

Owner name (if different): City of Las Cruces

Contact (if different): (575) 528-3027

I certify that the information provided is accurate and complete to the best of my knowledge. I understand this application is subject to review by the Historic Preservation Committee and the City Council.

Applicant Signature:

Date:

Owner Signature (if different):

Date:

Appendix – Supporting Documentation

Attach the following:

- At least four quality photographs of property (all sides of the property, streetscape) with captions;
- Historic photographs (if available) with captions;
- Maps or aerials showing property location with descriptions (Google Maps screenshot);
- Supporting evidence (articles, survey records, oral histories);
- Optional: copy of property's building's nomination form to the National Register of Historic Places or New Mexico Register of Cultural Properties, if applicable; and
- Any other documentation relevant to historical, architectural, or cultural significance with descriptions

Photographs of Property



Figure 1: Photo of the Las Cruces Railroad Depot, taken from the northeast on February 12, 2026.



Figure 2: Photo of the main entrance to the railroad depot, with its symmetrical façade, taken from the intersection of Mesilla Street and Las Cruces Avenue.



Figure 3: Photo of the main entrance to the depot, with the high clerestory window visible just below the AT&SF symbol in the extruded dormer.



Figure 4: Entrance addition on the east façade, allowing for the circulation between interior spaces.



Figure 5: Entrance addition on the east façade of the building, photographed from the south.



Figure 6: Ornately carved wooden brackets support the building's extended roof eave, photographed on the west side of the building.



Figure 7: The single-hung window for the station's newsstand, with a matching lite configuration on top of the movable frame.



Figure 8: An intricately framed arched window, affording a wide view out towards the rail line from where the railroad's operating office was originally located.

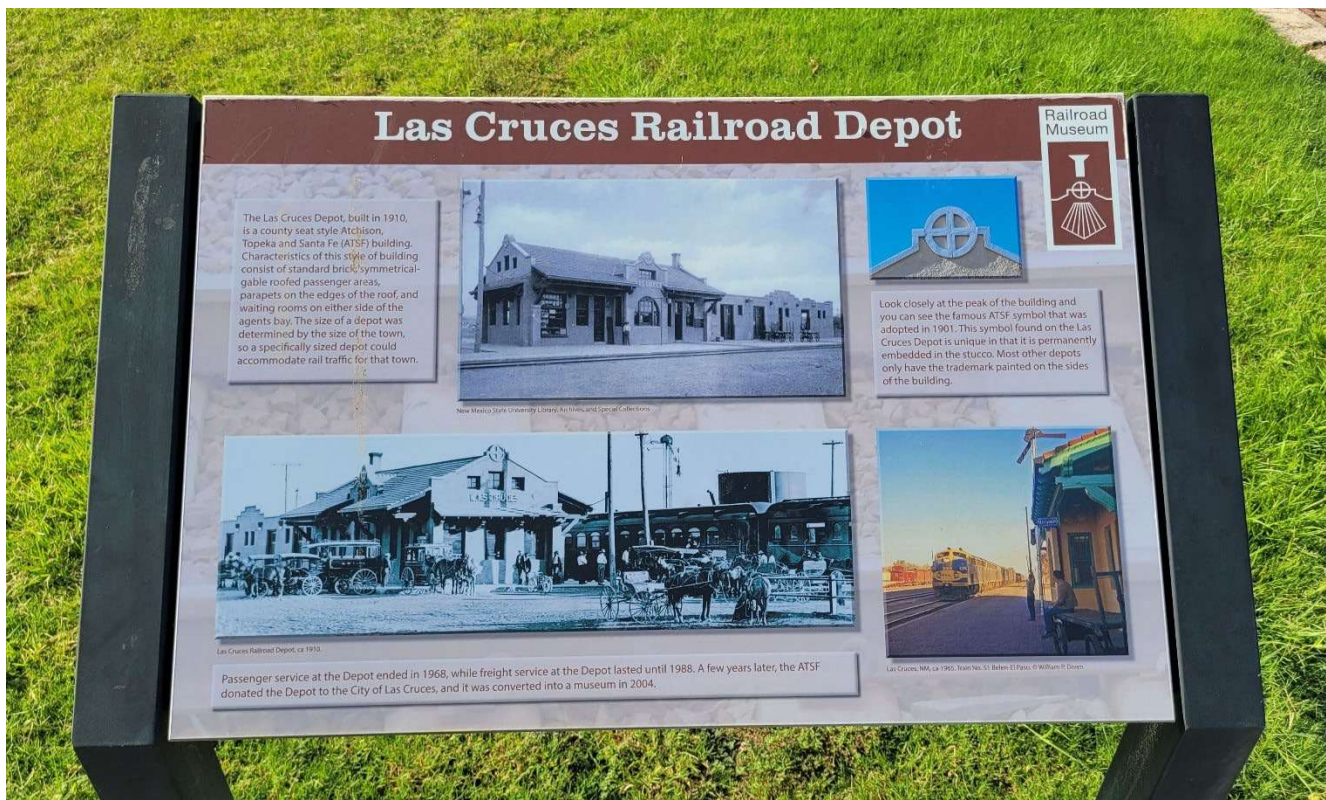


Figure 9: Image of an interpretive sign, produced for the museum after its opening in 2004.

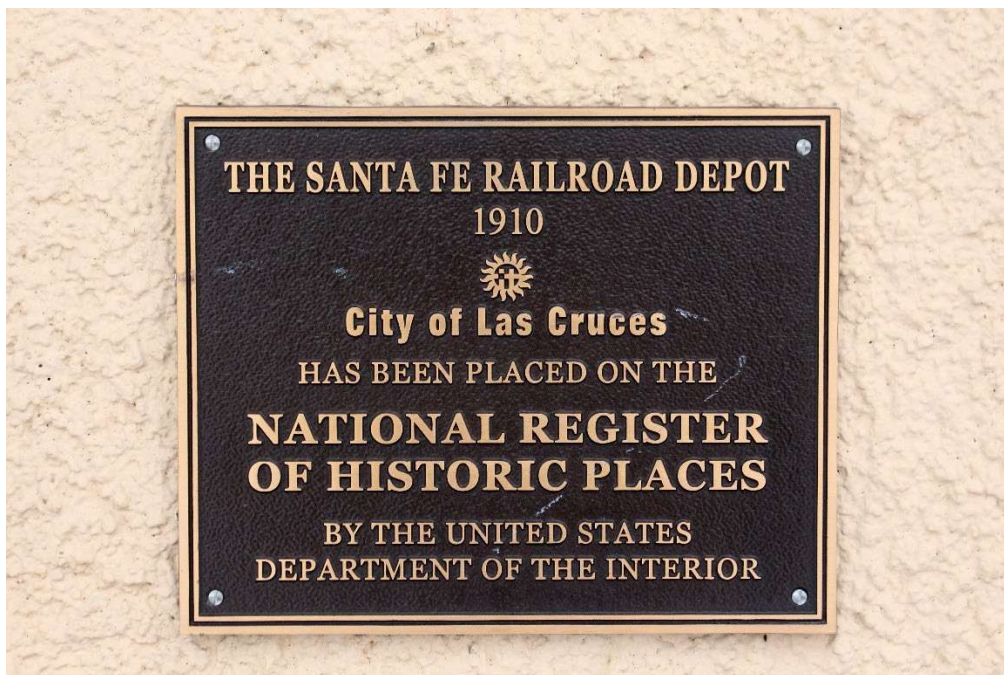


Figure 10: Photograph of the building's National Register plaque, located on the east façade next to the main entrance.

Historic Photographs



Figure 11: The first Las Cruces Railroad Depot, built 1881 (courtesy of NMSU archives, Rio Grande Historical Collections).



Figure 12: The depot, circa 1910 (courtesy of NMSU archives, Rio Grande Historical Collections).



A. T. & S. F. Las Cruces, New Mexico

Figure 13: The depot from the west, across the railroad tracks, circa 1910 (courtesy of NMSU archives, Rio Grande Historical Collections).

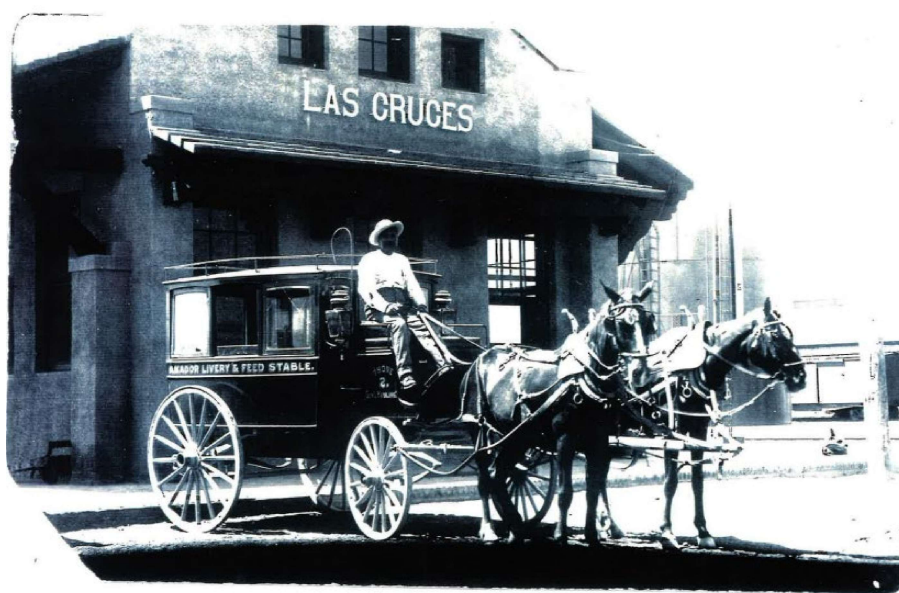


Figure 14: The depot from the northeast, circa 1910 (courtesy of NMSU archives, Rio Grande Historical Collections).



Depot Street. Las Cruces, New Mexico

Figure 15: Photo of Depot Street, now W. Las Cruces Avenue, looking west towards the Railroad Depot, taken 1911 (courtesy of NMSU archives, Rio Grande Historical Collections).



Victoriano Eres

Figure 16: The Amador Hotel's stagecoach in front of the depot (courtesy of NMSU archives, Rio Grande Historical Collections).



Figure 17: Then-Las Cruces Mayor R.L. Young with former president Theodore Roosevelt on the caboose of a train, stopped at the Las Cruces Depot, in 1911 (courtesy of NMSU archives, Rio Grande Historical Collections).



Figure 18: A secondary photo of Roosevelt and Las Cruces Mayor Young, during Roosevelt's tour of New Mexico in 1911. While Roosevelt gave remarks to the crowd he never disembarked from the train (courtesy of NMSU archives, Rio Grande Historical Collections).



Figure 19: The depot from the north, circa 1960 (courtesy Las Cruces, New Mexico – Old and New Facebook page).

Location Map



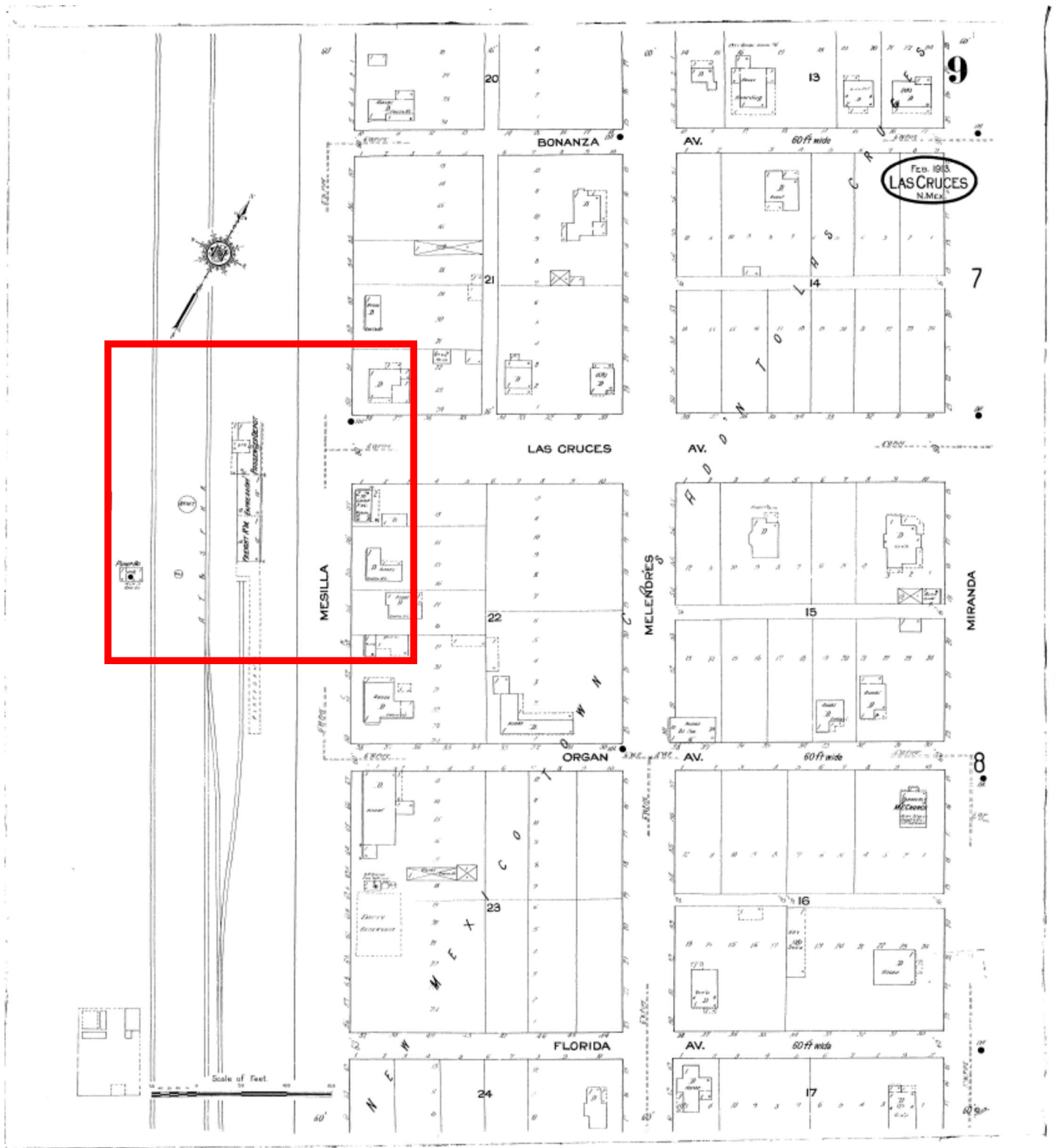


Figure 20: Page 9 from the February 1913 edition of the Sanborn Map Company's maps for Las Cruces, showing the west-edge of the Alameda-Depot Neighborhood with the Railroad Depot and railroad tracks. Depot is highlighted

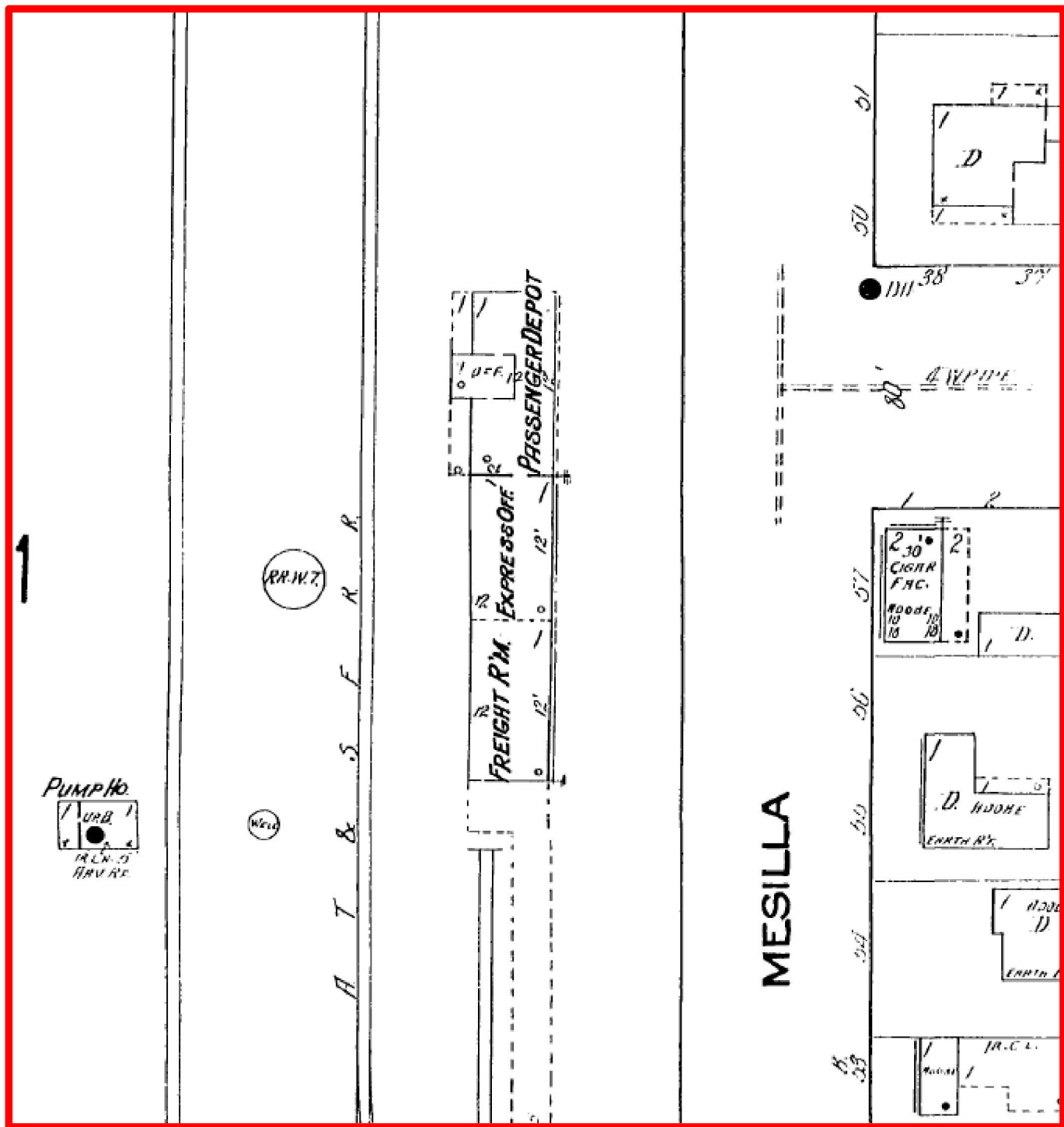


Figure 21: Railroad Depot identified in the Sanborn Map Company's 1913 edition of Las Cruces.

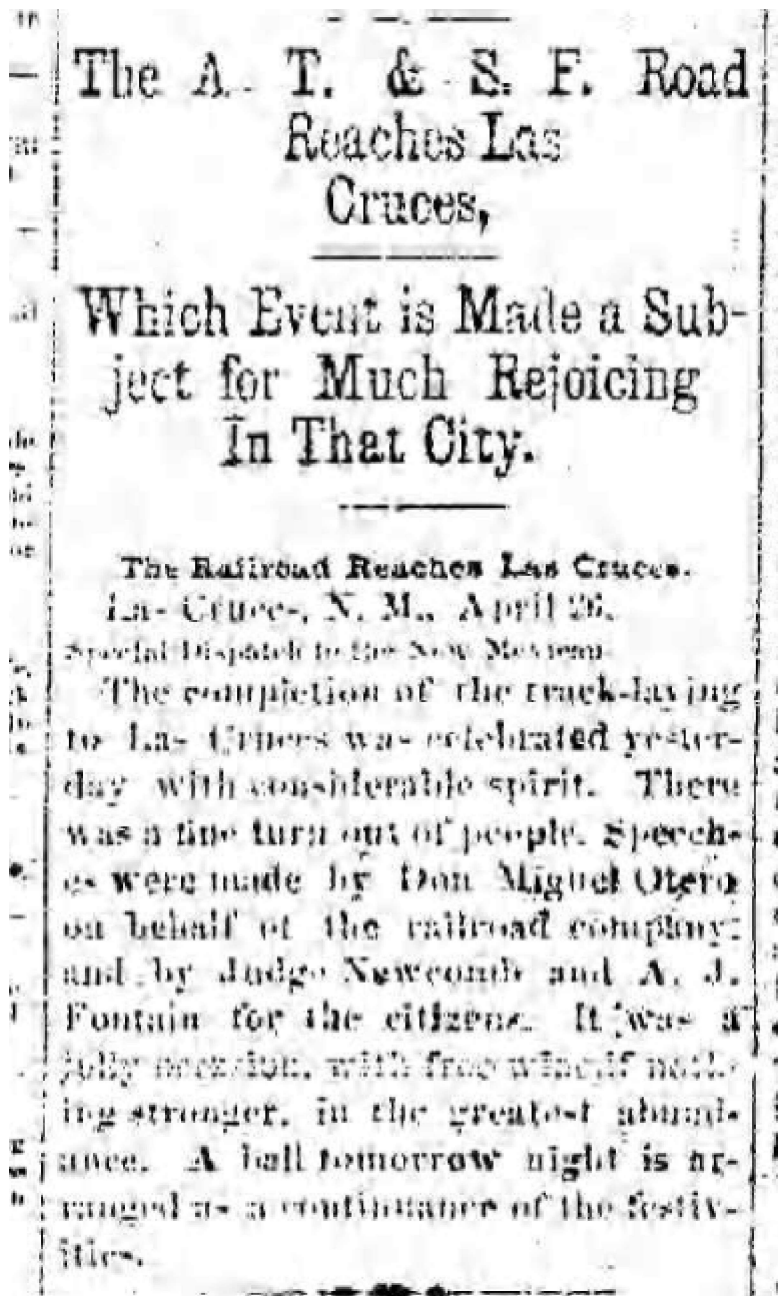


Figure 22: Clipping from the front page of the April 27, 1881, edition of the Santa Fe Daily New Mexican, proclaiming the arrival of the railroad to Las Cruces.

THE ATCHISON, TOPEKA AND SANTA FE RAILROAD
The Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe railroad is now beyond Las Cruces, N. M., a point about thirty-five miles north of El Paso. The Mesilla valley, of which Las Cruces is the most important town, is the greatest grape and fruit-growing section in New Mexico, but in the past, the the transportation facilities did not warrant any exportation of its surplus products. Now, however, the situation is changed; they have direct communication by rail with all the great marts of the United States, and New Mexican grapes and the juice of that fruit will soon be found in all parts of the Union.

Figure 23: Clipping from page 2 of the April 28, 1881, edition of the Santa Fe Daily New Mexican, discussing the extension of the line to El Paso and the impact to the local agricultural industry.

A Passenger Depot Needed.

Las Cruces deserves and ought to have a better passenger depot. The present accommodations are miserable and this station is of sufficient importance to the Santa Fe road for it to recognize the demand. At present passengers of all sexes, caste and nationalities have to crowd into a room not more than 8x16 feet in size, which is not overly clean and always uninviting. The Santa Fe road by doing for Las Cruces can do for itself. The way to remedy the evil cited is to build a neat and respectable passenger depot for the accommodation of the increasing travel from this place and to convert the old one into a freight depot. Its grounds are ample and at the same time the park which has for such a long time been under contemplation should be added. Las Cruces has a good feeling for the Santa Fe, its only railroad, and the new management should reciprocate by complying with this modest request.

Figure 24: Clipping from page 2 of the November 30, 1889, edition of the Rio Grande Republican.

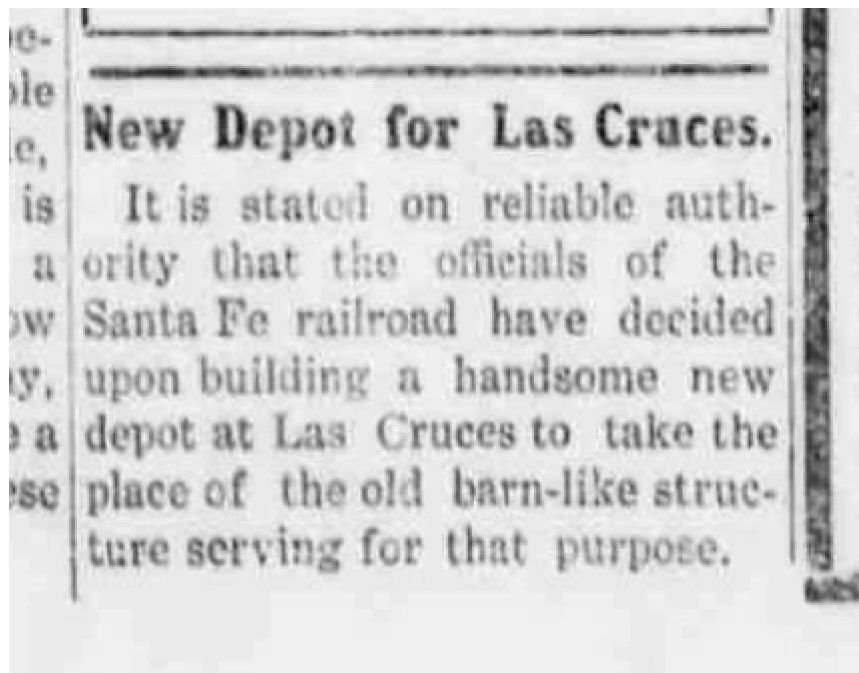


Figure 25: Clipping from page 1 of the November 20, 1908, edition of the Deming Graphic.

Bargains in Farms

The Palmer-Hess Realty Company

Designated Agent Water Users Association.

25 acres 3 miles north of Las Cruces, cultivated land, some alfalfa, \$75 an acre.

160 acres 2 miles from Mesilla Park, all in alfalfa. The most highly improved alfalfa tract in the valley. One man can irrigate in a day. Will cut 7 tons per acre. \$170 per acre.

5, 10 and 20 acre tracts $\frac{1}{4}$ mile from Las Cruces Depot. \$135 an acre. Terms.

21 acres 3 miles from Las Cruces, all in cultivation. \$75 an acre.

300 acres 8 miles from Las Cruces, 2 miles from station. Level but not cleared. Water rights. \$60 per acre.

56 acres one mile from Station, close to State road, partly cultivated. Good soil. \$50 per acre.

28 acres 3 miles north of Las Cruces on State Highway. Mostly alfalfa. A snap at \$110 an acre.

36 acres four miles from Las Cruces. Exceptionally good land and all in good condition. Price \$125 an acre.

225 acres 2 miles from Las Cruces, all in cultivation, mostly alfalfa, good house, orchard and buildings. Price for quick sale \$135 per acre.

Come in and let us show you these. If you have land to sell list it with us.

THE PALMER-HESS REALTY CO.,
Las Cruces, N. M.

Figure 26: Clipping from page 4 of the Rio Grande Republican's June 26, 1914 edition. The third item from the top describes the location of the farm land, and identifies it as \$135 an acre, more expensive than tracts further away from the depot.

MAY BEAUTIFY DEPOT GROUNDS

SANTA FE RAILROAD ASKED TO
COOPERATE IN IMPROVING
PROPERTY IN VALLEY

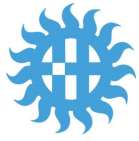
Preliminary steps were taken at the meeting of directors of the Las Cruces Chamber of Commerce last Monday evening to encourage the Santa Fe Railway company to beautify the grounds at its station in Las Cruces, Mesilla Park and other points in Dona Ana county.

The plan was brought to the attention of the directorate by R. P. Porter, who said the beautification of station grounds and other places in town and county is a public asset.

N. C. Frenger said that any definite plan looking to make the town and district more attractive may be viewed as a permanent and dividend paying investment.

The matter was referred to the civic committee with instructions to make a report at an early date.

Figure 27: Clipping from page 2 of the September 22, 1921, edition of the Rio Grande Republican.



CITY OF LAS CRUCES

TO: Historic Preservation Committee

FROM: Caitlin Beesley, MHP, Historic Preservation Specialist

DATE: May 1, 2026

SUBJECT: Case CPD2026-003

Case CPD2026-003: A nomination to the City of Las Cruces Register of Cultural Properties for the Railroad Museum, historically the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe (ATSF) Railroad Depot. Property is owned by the City of Las Cruces and is listed in the New Mexico State Register of Cultural Properties and the National Register of Historic Places as a contributing property to the Alameda-Depot Historic District.

BACKGROUND

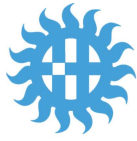
The Las Cruces Railroad Depot, constructed in 1910 as a replacement for the city's first railway station, represents the most consequential period of development in the city's history and has been a distinguished addition to the community since its construction. Notable in the areas of transportation history, architectural significance, and the settlement of the Mesilla Valley, the property is the most important building in the Alameda-Depot Historic District—perhaps in the entire city; it is contributing to both the National Register of Historic Properties and the New Mexico State Register of Cultural Properties. The building is significant as a representative of Las Cruces development and residential expansion, and for its design in the Mission Revival style; it is further significant for its role in physically bringing new construction materials and knowledge of new architectural styles to the burgeoning Mesilla Valley, as evidenced by the assorted variety of residential architectural styles that were produced in the railroad's wake and the immediate vicinity of the depot.

The Railroad Museum is currently nominated to the City of Las Cruces Register of Cultural Properties, which comprises buildings, structures, sites, objects and districts that have historic or cultural significance to the Las Cruces community.

DECISION CRITERIA

To ensure the designation of eligible properties to the City of Las Cruces Register of Cultural Properties, HPC shall evaluate and make a final recommendation to the Las Cruces City Council for final approval. Nominated properties must be recommended and approved following standards established in Chapter 35, Section 2-D of the City's Development Code. An eligible building must meet the following requirements:

- a) Located within the corporate boundaries of the City; and
- b) At least 50 years old, in whole or in part, or else of exceptional significance; and



CITY OF LAS CRUCES

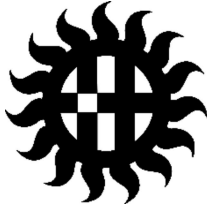
- c) Possesses integrity of design, materials, workmanship, setting, location, feeling, and association, as defined for listing in the National Register of Historic Places; and
- d) Embodies such other qualities and characteristics as is in the judgement of the Committee should be considered for designation as a cultural property; and
- e) Possess one or more of the following demonstrations of significance:
 - i) A broad cultural, political, economic, or social association with the historic development of the community, the state, or the nation; and/or
 - ii) Identification with a historic person or with important events in local, state, and/or national history; and/or
 - iii) Possesses distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type inherently valuable for the study of a period, style, method of construction, or use of indigenous materials or craftsmanship; and/or
 - iv) Possesses authenticity of its period of significance as evidenced by the survival of its characteristics, historic fabric, and architectural elements from that period; and/or
 - v) Is a notable work of a master builder, designer, or architect; and/or
 - vi) Possesses or may likely yield information important in prehistory or history; and/or
 - vii) An improvement embodying all or part of the above characteristics which is subject to encroachment of detrimental influences or potential adverse effects; and/or
 - viii) An improvement of historical, architectural, or cultural significance that is threatened with demolition by public or private action; and/or
 - ix) Possesses other qualities and characteristics that, in the judgment of the Committee, should be considered for designation as a cultural property.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff have reviewed this nomination and recommend **APPROVAL** based on the following finding:

1. The building is currently listed in the National Register of Historic Places and the State Register of Cultural Properties.
2. The building retains sufficient historic integrity, and its significance is apparent to the general public.
3. Staff assisted in the completion of the nomination.

NOTE: Recommendations by the Committee must be based on “findings.” Findings for *DENIAL* of the nomination should be articulated by the Committee and may be based on policies found in the City of Las Cruces Development Code, and/or other City plans and policies. Findings may also be based on information presented at the public hearing or information obtained through a site inspection.



Cultural Property Designation Application Form

City of Las Cruces – Community Development Department

700 N. Main St., Las Cruces, NM 88001

For assistance, call (575) 528-3027 or email cbeesley@lascruces.gov

For official use only:

LC CPI No. _____ NRHP _____ SRCP _____ Criteria A B C D Integrity Consideration ☐ Yes ☐ No

Section 1 – Property Information

1. Name of Property

(Usually refers to prominent historical period)

Clara Belle Williams Property

2. Historic Names (if applicable)

(All names, during or following historical period)

Clara Belle Williams House

3. Address/Location of Property

(If no mailing address exists, use nearest cross streets; include UTM)

722 N. Mesquite Street, including 734 N. Mesquite Street

Section 2 – Property Description

4. Property Type

(See below for descriptions)

- ☒ Building (roof, enclosed walls, occupied)
☐ Structure (roof, walls, unoccupied)
☐ Site/Infrastructure (park, acequia, etc.)
☐ Object (statue, mural, etc.)

5. Original Use of Property

Residential

6. Current Use of Property

Residential

7. Listing history

Has this property previously been listed in a national or state register, either individually or as part of an existing historic district?

☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Unsure

SR: 722 N. Mesquite, contributing to the Mesquite Street-Original Townsite Historic District, listed 1980; 734 N. Mesquite, noncontributing.

8. Identifying photo

(Show main façade or other for clear identification)



9. Construction Date (if known)

722 N. Mesquite: c. 1910

734 N. Mesquite: 1945

10. Building/Structure Occupation Status

☒ Occupied ☐ Unoccupied ☐ Does not apply

11. Construction History

Has the property been moved?

☐ Yes ☒ No

If yes, date moved:

Describe alterations (with dates, if known):

All alternations are undated but were captured in the building's description by authors of the 1980 state register nomination and historical building survey.

Unk: front porch infilled

Unk: front tripartite wood window replaced with metal configuration, other windows facing street similarly replaced with metal windows

Unk: Carport constructed to south-rear of building

Unk: original lattice gable vent on front facade replaced with double louvered vent

12. Building Condition

(Relative to historical period or occupancy history)

☐ Excellent

☒ Altered

☐ Good

☐ Unaltered

☒ Fair

☐ Deteriorated

☒ Original Site

☐ Ruins/Abandoned

☐ Moved to New Location

☐ No longer standing

Alterations to the exterior have been moderate, removing much of the character-defining features that identify the building with its most prominent occupant, Clara Belle Williams. This has resulted in a significant loss of integrity with the historic period associated with Williams – however, these changes reflect the later ownership of Arturo Chavez, a notable chile broker in Las Cruces, who purchased the building from Williams with wife Marcelina. An evaluation of integrity will differ depending on which historic period the building is assessed under.

Section 2 – Property Description, cont.**13. Property Description**

(Written narrative describing the property's physical attributes and characteristics, no character limit)

The property located at 722 N. Mesquite Street consists of a main house and additional duplex situated on a corner lot at the intersection of Mesquite Street and Augustine Avenue in the Mesquite Street-Original Townsite Historic District; the duplex's mailing address is 734 N. Mesquite Street. The lot sits at a noticeably elevated grade above street level, with the rock retaining wall along the sidewalk reinforcing the raised terrain. The parcel is enclosed by a low, coursed rock wall, with a rock-landscaped front yard featuring mature shade trees. The front grounds are further distinguished by decorative aluminum statues, including a large bison, a tiger, a deer, and a figure intended to represent a Plains-styled indigenous man wearing a war bonnet and holding a spear and rawhide war shield.

The main residence at 722 N. Mesquite is accessed by steps leading up to the enclosed porch or from an uphill driveway covered by a carport, which was added by the current owners, the Chavez family. It was originally constructed as a modest bungalow with regionally-informed accents in place of more traditional craftsman woodwork; the bungalow building type is unusual in the Mesquite Street-Original Townsite Historic District. The building features a front gable with distinct nestled gable that signifies the original front entrance. The nestled gable was originally above the building's front porch, however this has since been enclosed with the house's entrance door moved to the north side of the building; the nestled gable and support columns are still evident on the façade of the house. The front façade features a predominant picture window on the first floor and ventilation grill inside the gable under the eave. The building composition includes a concrete-block addition, visible to the north side of the building from the street.

The duplex at 734 N. Mesquite Street features similar construction, with a front gable and small, centered gabled porch supported by simple wood brackets. The façade includes original multi-pane windows with painted trim and two doors, reflecting its history as two apartment units. The stucco exterior visually complements the 722 residence.

Section 3 – Property Significance

14. Significance Criteria

(Check all that apply, explain answers under 15. Significance Narrative)

- ☐ (A) Broad cultural, political, economic or social association with community/state/national history
☒ (B) Associated with a historic person or significant events

Or (C)

- ☐ Distinctive architectural type, style, method, or craftsmanship
☐ Authenticity of materials and historic elements from the most prominent period of the building's history
☐ Notable work of a master builder, designer, or architect

Or (D)

- ☐ Potential to yield information important in history or prehistory
☐ Subject to encroachment or adverse effects
☐ Threatened with demolition by public or private action
☐ Other qualities significant to local heritage (explain)

Integrity Consideration ☐ Yes ☒ No

(Does the property possess sufficient integrity as evaluated for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places)

15. Significance Narrative

(Written narrative describing the history of the property and its importance to Las Cruces, no character limit)

The Clara Belle Williams Property comprises two buildings owned by the Williams family for most of the 20th century: 722 N. Mesquite, constructed sometime between 1924 and 1933 for the family, and 734 N. Mesquite, constructed around 1945. Both buildings are located in the Mesquite Street-Original Townsite Historic District, with the earlier building registered as a contributing property to the historic district's state register listing. The property's importance stems firstly from its association with Clara Belle Williams, a longtime resident of Las Cruces who is regionally significant as the first African American student to graduate from New Mexico College of Agricultural and Mechanic Arts, now New Mexico State University. Williams endured racially segregated schools as a college student and an educator, teaching African American students across Texas and New Mexico. She passed away in 1994, leaving behind a legacy as one of the most renowned educators in New Mexico, having spent decades teaching reading, writing, and arithmetic to Black students in public schools. In 1974, the property on Mesquite Street where she lived with her family was purchased by Arturo and Marcelina Chavez. Arturo was well-known at the local level for roasting and selling Hatch green chile beginning in the 1970s; he died in 2021, leaving the property to his widow, Marcelina, who still lives in 722 N. Mesquite.

The house at 722 N. Mesquite currently reflects the influence of its later occupants, a common trend in the life of historic buildings which creates difficulty in interpreting integrity beyond the local level. It does remain publicly identified with Williams, leading to its nomination under Criterion B for association with significant individuals who helped shape local history. Together, the two structures reflect the layered history of the property, first as the home of Clara Belle Williams and, later, the Chavez family. The site demonstrates a continuity of residential use, vernacular design traditions, and evolving family stewardship within the Mesquite Street neighborhood.

Clara Belle Williams

Williams was born on October 29, 1885, in Plum, Texas, to sharecroppers, Isaac and Malinda Drisdale. The Drisdales, who taught themselves to read and write, stirred Clara's interest in education. In 1901, Clara won a four-year scholarship to Prairie View Normal and Industrial College in Prairie View, Texas, now Prairie View A&M University. She attended classes in the morning and worked in the school laundry room in the evenings to afford room and board. In 1905, she earned a teaching certificate and the role of valedictorian of her graduating class of forty-three students. Her first teaching position was in Cameron, Texas, where she had taught 35 students in first through fourth grades. She also earned extra income by sharing her home economics knowledge with women in the neighborhood. In 1909, Williams moved to Austin, Texas, where she taught for two years and then moved back to Prairie View, where she became the head of the domestic art department.

While working at Prairie View, Clara began dating Jasper Williams, a courtship that lasted ten years. They married in 1917 and moved to El Paso, Texas. There, Clara gave birth to three sons: Jasper (born 1919), James, and Charles (both born in 1923). In 1917, Jasper got a job with the United States Custom Office. Two years later, he lost this position and opened a drugstore. In 1924, a fire destroyed the Williams' drugstore, and without insurance the family was nearly bankrupt. The family's finances were further strained when their third son, Charles, was born with a foot ailment, which required casts, a brace, and the constant care of a maid. The family moved to Vado, a small, mostly African American community near Las Cruces, New Mexico. The Williams' homesteaded 640 acres of land, planting beans, corn, and cotton and raising livestock.

Life in Vado provided Clara with an opportunity to teach. The school superintendent of Doña Ana County needed an educator with at least two years of college education, who would be paid \$100 each month for nine months to teach the African American students in the Mesilla Valley. The job was a result of statewide legislation in 1924 that permitted school districts and municipalities to establish separate and equal educational facilities for white and Mexican students and for Black students. The position required a Black teacher to teach Black students who transferred from city schools to Vado. Black students in Las Cruces were forced to attend Lincoln High School, which operated inside the Phillips Chapel Christian Methodist Episcopal Church. For the first four months of her new job, Williams taught only her two eldest sons and three boys from another family at Lincoln High School. In 1934, the school district constructed Booker T. Washington School, a one-room adobe schoolhouse specifically for Black students. It was initially intended to accommodate as many as thirty students, but the over-crowded conditions resulted in the enrollment of 100 students over the next few years. Williams was the first teacher at Booker T. Washington School, where she taught elementary students; her husband, Jasper, served as principal and taught the secondary grades, fifth through eighth.

In the fall of 1928, Williams decided to finish her degree and enrolled at New Mexico College of Agriculture of Mechanic Arts, now called New Mexico State University, where she took primarily summer courses in order to continue teaching full time at Booker T. Washington School. Unlike her classmates, Williams was not allowed to sit in classrooms or lecture halls; university administrators and professors required her to sit in the hallway, where she could only listen to lectures. In 1937, at the age of 51, she became the first African American student to obtain a bachelor's degree, in English, from New Mexico State University. The university did not permit her to attend the graduation ceremony, reportedly because white students threatened to boycott the ceremony if she was allowed to sit through commencement; instead, Williams received her diploma from the registrar's office. After graduation, Williams enrolled in graduate courses from the university; later, she continued her education through correspondence and extension courses from the University of Chicago.

During this time, the Williams family lived in the vernacular bungalow at 722 N. Mesquite Street. *The Las Cruces Historic Buildings Survey*, compiled by Mary B. Steeb, Michael Romero Taylor, and Anthony C. Pennock and published in 1985 by the Doña Ana County Historical Society, notes that the building was constructed for the family by Ignacio Ogaz. Williams resided at the house from 1933 to 1974. A photo from the 1930s, included in the survey and this document, captures Clara, Jasper, and their three sons standing outside the house. The duplex at 734 N. Mesquite is even less understood – with a construction date of 1945 unconfirmed; as the building was included in the property sale in 1974, it has likely been retained as part of the larger parcel since its construction, suggesting that Williams rented the property out.

Williams continued to teach at Booker T. Washington until 1951, following more than 40 years in the classroom, 27 of which were spent in New Mexico; her retirement came just before segregation was banned from public schools in New Mexico in 1953, later declared unconstitutional with the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling in 1954. Jasper died in Las Cruces in 1946, leaving the Mesquite property to Williams. She continued to live along Mesquite Street until 1974 when she sold the property and moved to Chicago to be near her three sons, all of whom had entered the medical profession and jointly operated the Williams Medical Clinic on Chicago's South Side; middle son James served for a time as personal physician to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and met with President John F. Kennedy in 1963, as part of a national group seeking to end discrimination in hospitals. Clara passed away in Chicago on July 3, 1994, at the age of 108.

The Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s led to a reckoning within American society involving the treatment and experiences of Black Americans. Clara Belle Williams' achievements in education, along with the racial subjugation she was forced to endure through social fiat during her teaching and academic careers, were at long last recognized and acknowledged. NMSU awarded Williams the title of outstanding alumnae of the year for 1961 and renamed an avenue on campus after her. In 1966, she was honored with Outstanding Mother and Businesswoman Award from the Fine Arts Guild in Chicago. Several years later in 1969, the New Mexico Education Association elevated her into their hall of fame; she was later inducted into the National Education Association of New Mexico's Southwest District Hall of Fame by the Southwest District Hall of Fame Committee. In 1980, the university awarded her an honorary Doctor of Laws degree for her "overall service to mankind;" she was the first African American to receive this honor. In 2005, after her death, the university declared February 13 as Clara Belle Williams Day and renamed the English building Clara Belle Williams Hall in her honor. Her legacy at NMSU is also preserved by the university through a scholarship in her name available to African American students.

The house at 722 N. Mesquite, reportedly constructed for her and her family in the early 1900s and where she lived for 50 years, remains a monument to her perseverance of the lasting impact she left on the whole of Las Cruces. Upon her retirement, Ms. Williams remarked: "There is no alternative to optimism. The only choice we have is to prepare ourselves so we can go as far as possible. Otherwise, we will have betrayed the precious breath the Lord has given us."

Arturo and Marcelina Chavez

Prior to her move to Chicago, Clara Belle Williams sold the property at 722 N. Mesquite to Arturo S. and Marcelina Chavez, as documented in a warranty deed (found at the end of this document); their tenure at the property represents its continued residential use and role as a place of family life.

Born in Delicias, Mexico, in 1945, Arturo arrived in Las Cruces as a Spanish-speaking child and entered an English-only classroom at Fairacres Elementary, then known as West Picacho School. Determined to succeed in new surroundings, he taught himself English and took to new activities, becoming New Mexico State Marble Champion at age eleven. He went on to serve two tours in Vietnam with the U.S. Marine Corps and became a naturalized U.S. Citizen; he retired from White Sands Missile Range after 35 years of employment. Marcelina, a lifelong Las Cruces native, dedicated her career to nutritional services in the Las Cruces Public Schools.

Together, the couple made the house at 722 N. Mesquite Street their family home; it was also the center of Arturo's entrepreneurial activities as a "chile broker" around Southern New Mexico, beginning in the early 1980s. The term "chile broker" is a colloquial one defined by Hatch-native Javier Vargas as an individual who purchases the produce in bulk to sell wholesale to restaurants or stores. In addition to selling chile, Arturo roasted and sold packaged, ready-roasted chile at a time before green chile roasting was common in grocery stores or commercial settings. He even welded his own rolling roasters using as precedence those made in Hatch by chile growing families, indirectly helping to expand and establish what would become an iconic New Mexico cultural activity; initial roasters had to be operated manually, with roasters like Chavez later adding a motor for efficiency. Additionally, newspaper ads from the period solidify his role in the establishment of green chile selling and roasting around the Mesilla Valley and Alamogordo. While Arturo traveled around Southern New Mexico, buying and selling chile, the house at 722 N. Mesquite acted as headquarters for his operation. Chavez's death on November 12, 2021, followed a final chile roasting season, with the Chavez family congregating in the backyard of the Mesquite Street property for their annual gathering.

The Chavez family's time at the property at 722 N. Mesquite Street is documented for Arturo's part in the establishment of chile roasting in the Mesilla Valley, best identified through newspaper ads and photos. Remaining family members also consider the legacy of ownership and shared perseverance passed from Clara Belle to Arturo and Marcelina as intimately valuable, finding meaning in connections between the two families that lived in the home.

History Continues

History and the honoring of stories and memories that make up the emotional material of buildings does not end with one person; it continues through the lives that follow. The layering of stories at 722 N. Mesquite Street serves as a reminder that sites are not always historic to a single moment in time but living spaces that are shaped by different generations. Clara Belle William's story resonates with modern readers because it reflects themes of struggle, perseverance, discrimination, family, and the belief that actions can shape a broader community. Those same values were carried forward by the Chavez family, linking past and present life.

Clara Belle William's home is undoubtedly historic because of her extraordinary life and her lasting legacy; for this connection, the property at 722 N. Mesquite Street is deserving of designation at the local level. The home was next occupied by the Chavez family, who participated in the expansion of chile roasting, one of New Mexico's most prized cultural pastimes, around the Mesilla Valley and nearby communities. In light of this, recognition should be given to the simple fact that this property's history continued past its initial period of significance. Encouragement should also be made to view all properties, regardless of historic significance, as bridges that connect generations, families, and ongoing stories—a reminder that history continues.

16. References (if any)

(Make note of books, magazine articles, websites, blogs, etc., used in researching the property's history)

CAF Rise Above. "James B. Williams." September 25, 2024. <https://cafriseabove.org/james-b-williams/>

Chavez, Alice, and Steven Moffson. *Additional Documentation form*, Application for Registration, New Mexico Register of Cultural Properties. New Mexico Historic Preservation Division, August 13, 2021.

Coltharp, Richard. "Black history is also Las Cruces history," Desert Exposure, February 9, 2023. <https://www.desertexposure.com/stories/black-history-is-also-las-cruces-history,31067>

New Mexico State University. *Clara Belle Williams*, NMSU Library Exhibit webpage. Accessed March 6, 2026. <https://libexhibits.nmsu.edu/onlineexhibits/cbwilliams/index.html>

Steeb, Mary M., and Michael Romero Taylor, Anthony C. Pennock. *The Las Cruces Historic Buildings Survey*. Doña Ana County Historical Society, 1985.

Villa, Elizabeth. "Open Stacks: History of Segregation in Las Cruces Public Schools," *Las Cruces Sun News*, December 11, 2021. <https://www.lcsun-news.com/story/life/2021/12/11/open-stacks-history-segregation-las-cruces-public-schools/6454984001/>

Section 4 – Author/Owner information and Certification

17. Author Information

Author name: Alice Chavez, with Norma Chairez-Hartell
Applicant address (if different from property):
906 Lenox Avenue, Las Cruces, NM

Phone: (575) 639-4130
Email: schoolhouse62@hotmail.com

Are you the property owner? ☐ Yes ☒ No

Owner name (if different): Marcelina Chavez

Contact (if different): (575) 644-8600

I certify that the information provided is accurate and complete to the best of my knowledge. I understand this application is subject to review by the Historic Preservation Committee and the City Council.

Applicant Signature:

Date:

Owner Signature (if different):

Date:

Appendix – Supporting Documentation

Attach the following:

- At least four quality photographs (all sides of the property, streetscape) with captions;
- Historic photographs (if available) with captions;
- Maps or aerials showing property location with descriptions (Google Maps screenshot);
- Supporting evidence (articles, survey records, oral histories);
- Copy of property's building's nomination form to the National Register of Historic Places or New Mexico Register of Cultural Properties, if applicable; and
- Any other documentation relevant to historical, architectural, or cultural significance with descriptions

Appendix – Supporting Documentation

Photographs of Property



Figure 1: The two buildings that make up the Clara Belle Williams property from Mesquite Street; the Williams house, 722 N. Mesquite, is at the left, with the duplex at 734 N. Mesquite on the right.



Figure 2: Photo of the front facade of the Williams home at 722 N. Mesquite Street.



Figure 3: Photo of the front entrance to the Clara Belle Williams home, showing changes made to the front entrance. Photo by Miranda Cyr, taken from a Las Cruces Sun-News article about the property, published November 26, 2021.



Figure 4: Photo of the rear of the property, depicting an “EL GATO” moniker accompanied by cat figurines in honor of Arturo Chavez, known as “El Gato” by his family and friends. Photo by Miranda Cyr, taken from a Las Cruces Sun-News article about the property, published November 26, 2021.

Historic Photographs



Figure 5: Historic photo of the Williams family in front of their house at 722 N. Mesquite Street (retrieved from “The Las Cruces Historic Buildings Survey”).



Figure 6: Undated photo of the property at 734 N. Mesquite Street, north of 722 N. Mesquite Street (partially captured to the right of the building).



Figure 7: Recreated photo of the earlier historic photo, framing the duplex at 734 N. Mesquite Street from the intersection of Mesquite Street and Augustine Avenue. Significant changes to the property's setting include the paving of Mesquite Street and the construction of the stone retaining wall around both buildings. Two mature pine trees also dominate the property as of 2026.



Figure 8: Undated portrait of Clara Belle Williams.



Figure 9: Undated portrait of Clara Belle Williams (courtesy of NMSU library exhibits).



Figure 10: Undated image of Clara Belle.



Figure 11: Arturo Chavez (right) with his mother (center) and brothers in a photo from the 1950s.



Figure 12: Chavez photographed in the early 1980s, putting together a Chile roaster.



Figure 13: Arturo and Marcelina Chavez roasting chile in the backyard of the Mesquite property in 1991.



Figure 14: Arturo Chavez and his brother, Jose Luis, in the backyard of the Mesquite property in 1991.



Figure 15: The Chavez family (from left, Arturo, Alice, Lisa, Marcelina, and Arturo Jr.), photographed in the front room of the Mesquite property in the late 1990s.



Figure 16: Arturo Chavez, background, photographed at the Mesquite property during his last chile roasting season in 2021.

Location Map



Supporting Evidence

1576F

SP-1 SHORT FORM WARRANTY DEED—Rev. 11-59—New Mexico State Notary Form

WARRANTY DEED

Clara B. Williams, a widow _____, for consideration paid, grant...

to Arturo S. Chavez and Marcelina R. Chavez, his wife, as Joint Tenants with
Right of Survivorship

the following described real estate in Dona Ana County, New Mexico:

Being a tract of land situate in Dona Ana Bend Colony Grant, City of Las Cruces, Dona Ana County, New Mexico, and being in Lot 82 of the Old Town of Las Cruces, to-wit:

Commencing at the Northwest corner of this lot, and thence South on the Western side 139 feet along the Eastern Boundary of Mesquite Street; thence Easterly along the Southern Boundary of this lot 136 feet, bounded on the South by the property formerly of Juan Lopez; thence Northerly 26 feet; thence Easterly 5 feet; thence Northerly 110 feet; bounded on the East by a lot formerly of Juan Lopez; thence Westerly along the Northern Boundary of this lot and along the Southern Boundary of Augustine Street, formerly Spruce Street, to the point and place of beginning.

Subject to restrictions, reservations and easements of record.

with warranty covenants.

WITNESS my hand and seal this 30th day of March, 1974.

Clara B. Williams (Seal)

NOTARY PUBLIC STATE OF ILLINOIS
 MY COMMISSION EXPIRES FEB. 14, 1978
 ISSUED THRU ILLINOIS NOTARY ASSOC.

(Seal)

NOTARY SEAL

ACKNOWLEDGMENT FOR NATURAL PERSONS

STATE OF NEW MEXICO

COUNTY OF Dona Ana

The foregoing instrument was acknowledged before me this 6th day of April, 1974.

by Arturo S. Chavez and Marcelina R. Chavez
 (Name or Names of Person or Persons Acknowledging)

My commission expires FEB. 14, 1978
 ISSUED THRU ILLINOIS NOTARY ASSOC.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT FOR CORPORATION

STATE OF NEW MEXICO

COUNTY OF _____

The foregoing instrument was acknowledged before me this _____ day of _____, 19____.

(COUNTY CLERK SEAL) (Name of Officer)

(Title of Officer) (Name of Corporation Acknowledging)

(State of Corporation) corporation, on behalf of said corporation.

My commission expires: _____
 (Seal) Notary Public

FOR RECORDER'S USE ONLY

State of N. Mex., Co. of Dona Ana: RECEPTION NO. 7621 I hereby certify that this instrument was filed for record and duly recorded on:

APR 27 1974

at 1:41 o'clock P.M. on April day of April, 1974
 Book 227 Page 661 of the records of _____ County, RITA 140, 220 Clerk
 BY: [Signature] Notary

Figure 17: Warranty Deed, signed by Clara Belle Williams and dated to March 20, 1974, passing ownership of property at 722 N. Mesquite Street to Arturo and Marcelina Chavez.



Figure 18: Arturo and Arturo Jr. captured in a photograph published in the Las Cruces Sun-News on August 22, 1989.

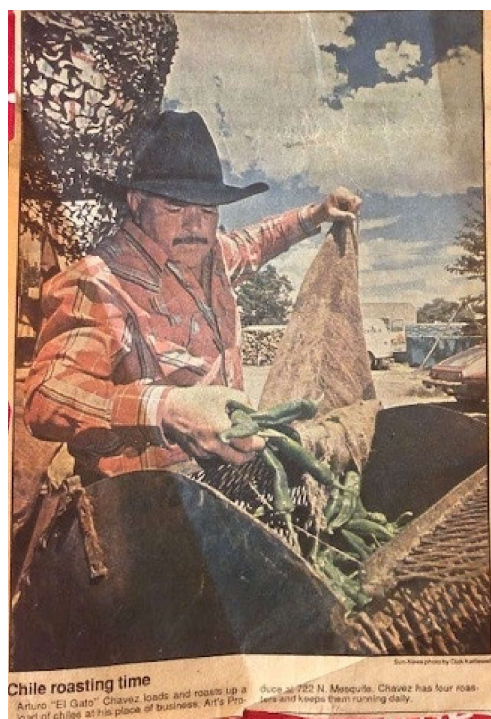
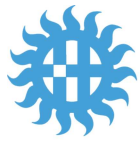


Figure 19: Arturo photographed in the Las Cruces Sun-News in 1991.

CHILI - Mild, Hot, Extra hot.
You Bag - 19¢ lb. Jalapeno - 30¢
lb. ONIONS - White 40 lb. sack,
\$2.90. TOMATOES - Machine
picked - specially for canning.
You Bag - 15¢ lb. Cataloupe 3-
\$1.00. We Roast Chili - \$5 per
sack. Call A Friend. Weekends
starting August 11 - All Day
Saturday & Sunday - 7:00 a.m.
to 8:00 p.m. - While Quantity
Last. Also soon we'll have Red
Chili. Dry - 30 lb. Box \$1.25 lb.
Under 30 lbs \$1.50 lb. Dry own -
Save Money. You Bag - 18¢ lb.
1st Across from Gibson. 524-
9101, Arturo Chavez. 175-7tp

Figure 20: Classified in the Alamogordo Daily News from July 29, 1984.



CITY OF LAS CRUCES

TO: Historic Preservation Committee

FROM: Caitlin Beesley, MHP, Historic Preservation Specialist

DATE: May 1, 2026

SUBJECT: Case CPD2026-004

Case CPD2026-004: A nomination to the City of Las Cruces Register of Cultural Properties for the Clara Belle Williams Property, consisting of two buildings on a double lot in the South Mesquite Overlay. Property is owned by Marcelina Chavez and was documented as contributing to the New Mexico State Register of Cultural Properties listing for the Mesquite Street-Original Townsite Historic District.

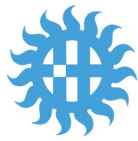
BACKGROUND

The Clara Belle Williams Property comprises two buildings owned by the Williams family for most of the 20th century: 722 N. Mesquite, constructed sometime between 1924 and 1933 for the family, and 734 N. Mesquite, constructed around 1945. Both buildings are located in the Mesquite Street-Original Townsite Historic District, with the earlier building registered as a contributing property to the historic district's state register listing. The property's importance stems firstly from its association with Clara Belle Williams, a longtime resident of Las Cruces who is regionally significant as the first African American student to graduate from New Mexico College of Agricultural and Mechanic Arts, now New Mexico State University. Williams endured racially segregated schools as a college student and an educator, teaching African American students across Texas and New Mexico. She passed away in 1994, leaving behind a legacy as one of the most renowned educators in New Mexico, having spent decades teaching reading, writing, and arithmetic to Black students in public schools. In 1974, the property on Mesquite Street where she lived with her family was purchased by Arturo and Marcelina Chavez. Arturo was well-known at the local level for roasting and selling Hatch green chile beginning in the 1970s; he died in 2021; his widow, Marcelina, retains ownership and continues to live in 722 N. Mesquite.

The Clara Belle Williams Property is currently nominated to the City of Las Cruces Register of Cultural Properties, which comprises buildings, structures, sites, objects and districts that have historic or cultural significance to the Las Cruces community.

DECISION CRITERIA

To ensure the designation of eligible properties to the City of Las Cruces Register of Cultural Properties, HPC shall evaluate and make a final recommendation to the Las Cruces City Council for final approval. Nominated properties must be recommended



CITY OF LAS CRUCES

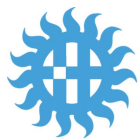
and approved following standards established in Chapter 35, Section 2-D of the City's Development Code. An eligible building must meet the following requirements:

- a) Located within the corporate boundaries of the City; and
- b) At least 50 years old, in whole or in part, or else of exceptional significance; and
- c) Possesses integrity of design, materials, workmanship, setting, location, feeling, and association, as defined for listing in the National Register of Historic Places; and
- d) Embodies such other qualities and characteristics as is in the judgement of the Committee should be considered for designation as a cultural property; and
- e) Possess one or more of the following demonstrations of significance:
 - i) A broad cultural, political, economic, or social association with the historic development of the community, the state, or the nation; and/or
 - ii) Identification with a historic person or with important events in local, state, and/or national history; and/or
 - iii) Possesses distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type inherently valuable for the study of a period, style, method of construction, or use of indigenous materials or craftsmanship; and/or
 - iv) Possesses authenticity of its period of significance as evidenced by the survival of its characteristics, historic fabric, and architectural elements from that period; and/or
 - v) Is a notable work of a master builder, designer, or architect; and/or
 - vi) Possesses or may likely yield information important in prehistory or history; and/or
 - vii) An improvement embodying all or part of the above characteristics which is subject to encroachment of detrimental influences or potential adverse effects; and/or
 - viii) An improvement of historical, architectural, or cultural significance that is threatened with demolition by public or private action; and/or
 - ix) Possesses other qualities and characteristics that, in the judgment of the Committee, should be considered for designation as a cultural property.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff have reviewed this nomination and recommend **APPROVAL** based on the following finding:

1. The buildings were documented as part of the State Register of Cultural Properties nomination in the late-1970s, with 722 N. Mesquite Street initially designated as contributing to the district, and 734 N. Mesquite Street noncontributing because its construction date fell outside the district's Period of Significance. Since this time, alterations to the exterior of 722 N. Mesquite Street have been carried out, removing some of the character-defining features that identify the building with its most prominent occupant, Clara Belle Williams. This has resulted in a loss of integrity of Design, Workmanship, Feeling, and Association with the district's Period of Significance and with the historic period associated with Williams, making



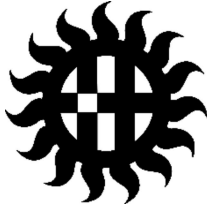
CITY OF LAS CRUCES

its continued contributing designation and individual eligibility using evaluation standards accepted at the state and national level uncertain. However, these changes reflect the later ownership of Arturo Chavez, a notable chile broker in Las Cruces, who purchased the building from Williams with wife Marcelina. An evaluation of integrity will differ depending on which historic period the building is assessed under. By comparison, the building at 734 N. Mesquite Street has not been significantly altered since its construction and retains integrity to either period of property ownership.

2. Regarding the property's eligibility for the local register: while the building at 722 N. Mesquite Street does not retain sufficient historic integrity as evaluated for listing in the National Register of Historic Places through a connection with Clara Belle Williams, it is well-known to the community as Williams' home for reasons beyond the sign erected outside the house by the Chavez family; the building also represents the Chavez family, who are themselves notable at the local level for their role in expanding chile sales and chile roasting in Las Cruces. This loss of integrity impacts the building's eligibility and evaluation under future surveys at a higher level than that of the local one, however, Staff feels that the building's local recognition, combined with the cultural impact of both its owners and its continued use, is enough in this instance to nominate it.
 - a. In 2024, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation published a report promoting a consideration to interpret those standards used at the national or the state level differently at ground level, primarily because the restrictions placed on the National Register or State Registers cannot always be applied at the local level. "Maybe we've made the perfect the enemy of the good," the report concludes, writing that the way preservation professionals conduct evaluations or apply standards impacts not only how buildings are preserved, but whether they are preserved at all.¹
3. Staff assisted in the completion of the nomination.

NOTE: Recommendations by the Committee must be based on "findings." Findings for *DENIAL* of the nomination should be articulated by the Committee and may be based on policies found in the City of Las Cruces Development Code, and/or other City plans and policies. Findings may also be based on information presented at the public hearing or information obtained through a site inspection.

¹ Sara C. Bronin, "Report and Recommendations on the Application and Interpretation of Federal Historic Preservation Standards," Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, published March 1, 2024, 63.



Cultural Property Designation Form

City of Las Cruces – Community Development Department

700 N. Main St., Las Cruces, NM 88001

For assistance, call (575) 528-3027 or email cbeesley@lascruces.gov

For official use only:

CLC CPD No. _____ NRHP _____ SRCP _____ Criteria A B C D

Section 1 – Property Information

1. Name of Property

(Usually refers to prominent historical period)

Phillips Chapel Christian Methodist
Episcopal Church

2. Historic Names (if applicable)

(All names, during or following historical period)

Colored Methodist Episcopal Church
(CME)

Lincoln High School

Christian Methodist Episcopal Church

3. Address/Location of Property

(If no mailing address exists, use nearest cross streets; include UTM)

638 N. Tornillo St., Las Cruces, NM 88001

Section 2 – Property Description

4. Property Type

(See below for descriptions)

- ☒ Building (roof, enclosed walls, occupied)
☐ Structure (roof, walls, unoccupied)
☐ Site/Infrastructure (park, acequia, etc.)
☐ Object (statue, mural, etc.)

5. Original Use of Property

Church

6. Current Use of Property

Church

7. Listing history

Has this property previously been listed in a
national or state register, either individually or
as part of an existing historic district?

☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Unsure

NR: Listed 2003

SR: Listed 2003

8. Identifying photo

(Show main façade or other for clear identification)



9. Construction Date (if known)

1911

10. Building/Structure Occupation Status

☒ Occupied ☐ Unoccupied ☐ Does not apply

11. Construction History

Has the property been moved?

☐ Yes ☒ No

If yes, date moved:

Describe alterations (with dates, if known):

1960s: A larger gas flame heater was installed to replace the small gas heater.

1970s: The ceiling was lowered and covered with white tile panels.

1990s: The roof was re-shingled with asphalt shingles.

2001: Removal of an original rear window to provide for a handicap entrance to the church and a modern restroom facility; ceiling fans/lights added.

2010-2014: Removal of the cementitious stucco; stabilization and restoration of the walls; application of multiple coats on lime plaster; window repair and reglazing; original doors replaced with replications.

12. Building Condition

(Relative to historical period or occupancy history)

☒ Excellent

☐ Altered

☐ Good

☒ Unaltered

☐ Fair

☐ Deteriorated

☐ Original Site

☐ Ruins/Abandoned

☐ Moved to New Location

☐ No longer standing

Alterations to the exterior have been minimal, with the building retaining integrity of location, design, workmanship, setting, and materials.

Section 2 – Property Description, cont.**13. Property Description**

(Written narrative describing the property's physical attributes and characteristics, no character limit)

Adapted from "Narrative Description" in the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form: Phillips Chapel C.M.E. Church, written by Terry Moody, 2003.

Phillips Chapel Christian Methodist Episcopal Church is a one-story, adobe building with buttresses at the front elevation, and is representative of vernacular architecture in New Mexico, showing a modest influence of local Spanish/Hispano building traditions. The chapel is located on the southeast corner of N. Tornillo Street and E. Lucero Avenue in a barrio northeast of the Downtown Mall and within the Mesquite Street Original Townsite Historic District (NRHP, 1985), in an ethnically mixed neighborhood of Hispanics, African-Americans, and Caucasians. The block where the chapel is located includes the Iglesia Sinai del Concilio Latino Americano de Iglesias Cristianas church, several single-family residences, several uninhabited buildings, and several vacant lots. The surrounding architecture is a mixture of adobe buildings dating from the early 1900s, typically New Mexican vernacular in appearance.

Phillips Chapel is of a simple, one volume rectangular plan, measuring approximately 29 feet by 38 feet, with a hexagonal apse extension at the rear (east) measuring 8 feet long. Buttresses extending on each side of the façade are its most distinctive architectural features. A pediment-shaped board-and-batten gable rises to meet the medium pitched roof. The roof was re-shingled with asphalt shingles. Open eaves extend slightly over the north and south exterior walls. On either side of the sidewalk is a desert willow tree. The concrete sidewalk leads to wooden doors that are reproductions of the original 5-panel double doors. Two narrow two-over-two windows set within wood frames are situated to either side of the front entrance. Similar windows are situated along the side elevations. Two small, two-over-two, double-hung windows set in wood frames are located on the north and south faces of the apse, which encloses the pulpit and choir loft.

In 2001, an addition measuring approximately 9 feet by 13 feet was built along the southeast corner of the building. At that time, an original rear window was replaced to serve as an interior entrance way and exit. This addition provides for a handicap entrance to the church and a modern restroom facility. The addition is identifiable as new to the original construction, but it is compatible with the overall building design.

The modest interior measures 28 by 44 with a ceiling height of approximately 11 feet. The interior wall surfaces are plaster with pine wainscoting and are original to the building; in 2012 the wainscoting was refinished. The wood window frames, rectangular four-light wood sashes, and pine plank flooring are original. In 2012 the pine floors were refinished by Stout Flooring. In 2013 all the windows were repaired, repainted, and reglazed with new glass; fluted glass in the lower frames and clear glass in the upper frames.

The chapel seats approximately fifty people. The original wood benches, which stood on either side of the center aisle, were replaced in the 1940s with five rows of upholstered, wood-and-iron theater chairs purchased from the Del Rio Theater, Las Cruces. A raised platform to the rear (east) of the church serves as the altar and pulpit, with a small choir loft behind. Each area is defined by two-foot wood partitions for liturgical cloths. An area for kneeling is located to the front of the pulpit area and is padded with a red carpet, an extension of a center aisle runner that begins at the entrance. Northwest of the pulpit area is a German-made piano, imported in the 1880s and donated to the church in the 1940s by Mr. and Mrs. George W. Frenger. In the late 1960s, a larger gas flame heater, situated in the southwest corner of the building, replaced a small gas heater that was centrally located in the chapel. The suspended ceiling, now covered with white tile blocks, was lowered in the 1970s, and ceiling light/fans were installed in 2001.

Except for modernizing updates, such as heating and electrical fixtures and the rear entrance and restroom addition, the chapel remains true to its original design and, therefore, retains integrity of location, design, workmanship, setting, and association.

Section 3 – Property Significance

14. Significance Criteria

(Check all that apply, explain answers under 15. Significance Narrative)

- ☒ (A) Broad cultural, political, economic or social association with community/state/national history
- ☒ (B) Associated with a historic person or persons
- Or (C)
- ☐ Distinctive architectural type, style, method, or craftsmanship
- ☒ Authenticity of materials and historic elements from the most prominent period of the building's history
- ☐ Notable work of a master builder, designer, or architect
- Or (D)
- ☐ Potential to yield information important in history or prehistory
- ☐ Subject to encroachment or adverse effects
- ☐ Threatened with demolition by public or private action
- ☐ Other qualities significant to local heritage (explain under 15. Significance Narrative)

Integrity Consideration ☒ Yes ☐ No

(Does the property possess sufficient integrity as evaluated for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places)

15. Significance Narrative

(Written narrative describing the history of the property and its importance to Las Cruces, no character limit)

Adapted from "Significance Description" in the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form: Phillips Chapel C.M.E. Church, written by Terry Moody, 2003.

The Phillips Chapel C.M.E. Church, a simple one-room adobe church located on the southeastern corner of N. Tornillo Street and E. Lucero Avenue, was placed on the New Mexico Register of Cultural Properties and the National Register of Historic Places in 2003. It is eligible for inclusion in the City of Las Cruces Register of Cultural Properties under the following categories: (A) Broad cultural, political, economic or social association for its association with the Black community in Las Cruces and southern New Mexico; (B) association with a historic person or persons, specifically the prominent Hibler family whose descendants have shaped and documented the Mesquite neighborhood's history; and (C) authenticity of materials and historic elements from

the most prominent period of the building's history, namely its adobe construction and vernacular New Mexican design.

(A) Broad cultural, political, economic or social association with community/state/national history:

As the oldest African American church in Las Cruces and one of the oldest churches dedicated to an African American congregation in New Mexico, the Phillips Chapel C.M.E. Church remains a significant part of history for Las Cruces and the Southwest; the building is also identified with the State of New Mexico's segregation policies, being used as a center of education for African American families whose children were removed from public schools during the first half of the 20th century.

African Americans have been significant to the history of Southern New Mexico since the 1860s. The earliest African Americans to spend more than a short period of time in the New Mexico territory were troops of black soldiers, the famous Buffalo Soldiers, sent by the government near the end of the Civil War.[1] After a series of Indian raids against White settlers, the government sent four black regiments and their white commanders to protect the settlers, defeat the Indians, and then gather them on to reservations. Fort Selden, approximately 20 miles north of Las Cruces, was the station for many black infantry regiments from 1867 to 1891, when the fort was decommissioned.[1] None of these soldiers settled in Las Cruces, but a number of soldiers stayed on and worked as cowboys on area ranches.[2] Many soldiers, upon returning to homes in the south shared their experiences of life in the New Mexico territory with family and friends. These stories possibly influenced some black individuals and families to migrate to the New Mexico Territory in the late 1800s. The black migration to New Mexico Territory is reflected in the population records of the United States Census. These records indicate that in 1850 only 22 blacks were living in the New Mexico Territory. These numbers grew gradually to 85 blacks in 1860, and then 172 in 1870. By 1880 the number expanded dramatically to 1,015, reaching 1,956 in 1890.[3]

A number of forces caused the migration of black families to the Southwest.[4] In 1876, federal troops were withdrawn from the south, leaving Freedmen to cope with "Black Codes" enforced by many southern states. Freedmen had little opportunity to make a living as laborers and tenant farmers, as wages were low and rent for housing and land high.[5] Future crops were often collateral to pay for immediate subsistence needs.

After the Atchison-Topeka & Santa Fe Railroad was built in the 1890s, public service jobs opened up to many African Americans in New Mexico. When the railroad extended to El Paso, African Americans who earned their income from the rail service moved to Las Cruces, some taking positions in local hotels as chefs, waiters, and maids. Moreover, a number of African Americans migrated with white farmers and their families as their servants. Reconstruction of the early migration of African-Americans to Las Cruces has been gleaned from early census records dating from 1900 to 1920, city directories, and a few church documents. Some migration stories have been passed down to family members, and have been recorded in oral histories, or shared during interviews with Las Cruces historians.

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, a number of African Americans and their families migrated to Las Cruces. Many African Americans made their home in Las Cruces as servants of migrating white families. A few black families became tenant farmers for white landowners. A handful of entrepreneurs established businesses. The 1910 census lists 54 blacks living in Las Cruces, many of them newcomers. Doña Ana County is recorded as having a population of 65 blacks and 12,817 Caucasians.[6] A number of blacks had migrated from Texas and other newcomers came from Eastern and southern states. Many came to work as waiters, cooks, truck drivers, laborers, porters, and ranch hands. Emory Douglas Williams, who had tuberculosis, moved from St Louis, Missouri, to Las Cruces in 1896, bringing his wife, Annie.[7] Annie nursed her husband back to health in a tent she erected on the banks of the Rio Grande River.[8] After regaining his strength, Mr. Williams opened the Star Barber shop behind the Murillo House at 818 North Mesquite Street. Williams also invested in property including a farm on Idaho Street, north of Wyatt drive, and he and Annie farmed their 640 acres of highway frontage.[9] Daniel Hibler moved from Texas to Las Cruces to work as the chef for the Don Bernardo Hotel, on North Main Street, owned by the Freudenthal Family.[10] His wife, Ollie, worked as a maid for the Don Bernardo Hotel. In 1909, Ollie gave birth to a baby girl, Gertrude, the first black child born in Las Cruces. Mr. Toney worked as a

manager of the Park Hotel. J. B. Levy originally from Tennessee owned Levy Barber Shop. John Hughs, originally from England, came with his wife Ellen from Louisiana. Mr. Hughs owned Hughs Barber Shop and his wife Ellen, worked as a cook for Dr. McBride. The 1920 census reported that 78 blacks (43 males, and 35 females) were living in Doña Ana County.[10] Other families listed in the 1920 census included Amos J. Brooks, who owned a grocery store and ice cream parlor on North Church Street. His wife, Georgia, was a teacher for black children at the East Mesa School. Initially W. T. (Bill) Anthony was the only blacksmith in Las Cruces, and he owned the Valley Welding Service, on the corner of Hadley Avenue and Church Street. William de Groff owned a tailoring business and lived with his housekeeper, Mrs. Mary Edmond on Water Street. In the 1920s, the Homestead Act also brought a number of African Americans to the Las Cruces area, where they established homesteads approximately 6 to 10 miles north of Highway US 70, east of Las Cruces. Homesteaders included John Henry Sweet, George Holsom, Edward Strait, Robert Anderson Pettes, Lu Ella Hibler, and Jasper Williams. Jasper Williams filed for 640 acres near Las Cruces. His wife, Clarabelle (aka Clara Belle), was hired to teach African American children at Phillips Chapel and Booker T. Washington School when Las Cruces schools became segregated.[11] The Williams raised three sons who all became physicians.[12] When Robert and Ella Pettes move to Las Cruces they worked as sharecroppers for a farm on El Paseo Road, now called El Paseo Street, where Las Cruces High School is now located. Later, the Pettes family homestead at 640 acres that proved to be a valuable source of water. The Pettes' also played an important role in establishing the community cemetery for African Americans in the 1940s.

Phillips Chapel was constructed in 1911, primarily for use as a worship space by the growing Black community in Las Cruces. Many of the African-American migrants who settled in the valley had ties to the C.M.E. Church, which had been founded in 1870 by formerly enslaved peoples and members of Methodist Episcopal Church; wishing to establish a church for themselves separate from the institution of slavery, the fledging organization named themselves the Colored Methodist Episcopal (C.M.E.) Church. In 1954, the church changed their name in 1954 to Christian Methodist Episcopal (C.M.E.) Church to avoid being identified within a racial context. The building is named after the Right Reverend Charles H. Phillips, the first presiding Bishop of the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church in America.

In the 1920s, as a result of a political climate influenced by newly arrived land holders from states where Jim Crow laws had been the norm, some small communities of the Southwest established segregation laws and removed African American children from the public schools.[13] Clarence Fielder, historian for the Las Cruces African American community and grandson of Ollie and Daniel Hibler, pointed out that not all school districts in New Mexico became segregated; only schools in the southern part of the state, east of Deming became segregated during the 1920s. These included Las Cruces, Hobbs, and Alamogordo.[14] In 1925, the state of New Mexico passed legislation regarding segregation of schooling.[15] Section 1201 of the legislation states: "That where, in the opinion of the county school board or municipal school board and on the approval of said opinion by the State Board of Education, it is for the best advantage and interest of the school that separate rooms be provided for the teaching of pupils of African descent, and said rooms are so provided, such pupils may not be admitted to school rooms occupied by pupils of Caucasian or other descent. Provided further, that such room set aside for teaching of such pupils of African descent shall be as good and as well-kept as those used by pupils of Caucasian or other descent, and teaching therein shall be as efficient. Provided further, that pupils of Caucasian or other descent may not be admitted to the school room so provided by those of African descent."

Las Cruces School District proceeded to segregate in 1924, where 30 to 35 children were removed from Central Elementary School to receive educational instruction at Phillips Chapel C.M.E. Church.[16] Gertrude Hibler Fielder, daughter of Ollie and Daniel, and the first black child born in Las Cruces, recalled being moved from Central Elementary School to attend "classes with other black children at the little Methodist Church her father had built".[9] The only formal notation that Phillips Chapel was serving as a school for "colored children" is found in school board minutes of August 24th, 1924. In reference to the hiring of janitors, the minutes state that "no arrangements [have been] made for the care of the colored church." The next reference made in regard to a separate school for African American children is found in the school board minutes dated June 1, 1925. The board "moved that Mrs. Williams at a salary of \$900.00 be elected to fill position as negro teacher."

After Phillips Chapel begins serving double duty as a school and church, two small rooms, mere “tar paper shacks”, were moved to the intersection of North Tornillo Street (two blocks to the north) and Pinon Avenue.[17] The small structures at North Tornillo Street and Pinon Avenue represent the first construction of Booker T. Washington School and are no longer in existence.

Phillips Chapel, under the title of Lincoln High School, continued to serve in the education of young African American adults until 1934.[18] School board minutes of May 10, 1926, list the hiring of teachers and salaries. The singling out of certain teachers identifies who taught at the segregated school, with “Mrs. Gertrude Terrell (col) be paid \$990.00 and Mrs. C. B. Williams (col) at \$945.00,” likely serving as instructors at the newly moved colored schools and the Phillips Chapel school. Gertrude Hibler Fielder recalled Mrs. Terrell as one of her teachers when she was a student at Lincoln High School. Thirty students graduated from Lincoln High School, and their teachers were Ms. Treveland, Ms. Gertrude Terrell, and Ms. Willie Moses.

In 1934, the new Booker T. Washington School was built on Solano Street. The new school consisting of four adobe rooms served both the elementary and secondary educational needs for African American children until integration occurred in 1954 following the Supreme Court ruling of Brown versus Topeka Board of Education. The original structure of Booker T. Washington has since been replaced by a modern structure. Phillips Chapel C. M. E. Church is therefore the only extant building associated with the history of segregation of African American school children in Las Cruces. While the Las Cruces Public Schools were once segregated, the African American population was not forced to live in segregated neighborhoods. The African American community has always lived in a mixed African American and Hispanic neighborhood close to downtown Las Cruces throughout the historic period. Some members of the community farmed homestead acreage in the East Mesa area.

Since its construction in 1911, Phillips Chapel has served as a civic and social center for the African American community throughout its history, holding Easter programs, providing Christmas treats, and sponsoring Children's Day. Clarence Fielder remembers attending various social activities when he was a child and speaks fondly of "youth groups, ice cream socials, and hobo parties where we'd go house to house dressed as hobos and come back to have picnics with the food and goods we collected". Many African American couples were married in the chapel, and their children "sprinkled" (christened) there. Other activities, such as plays, dramas and song fests, were also held inside the chapel. In recent years, Phillips Chapel has hosted the annual Martin Luther King service in January, sponsored by the Southwest Ministerial Alliance and a Black History Month service in February.[18]

(B) Associated with a historic person or significant events:

The Hibler Family, mentioned above, were among the first African American pioneers to move to Las Cruces in the early 1900s. The family played a primary role in the construction of Phillips Chapel and descendants have remain intimately tied to the building since its construction. Daniel Hibler moved to Las Cruces around 1909, taking work as a chef in the Don Bernardo Hotel, before he was joined by his younger brother, Cortez, several years later. Later on, the brothers owned and operated the Jitney Café, located on Main Street in Las Cruces. Daniel, along with his wife, Ollie, were active in the C.M.E. Church and often hosted the C.M.E. District Conferences at their home. Daniel and Ollie had five children; their son Daniel died as a child, but Gertrude, Irene, Alma, and Rosalee grew up in Las Cruces and attended Phillips Chapel all their early lives.[19]

The Hibler brothers were originally from Waco, Texas, born and raised with six other siblings and two cousins by their parents, John and Margaret (Jackson) Hibler, who were both born enslaved in the mid-1840s in Alabama and Texas, respectively; as most freed slaves adopted the name of their enslavers, it is considered likely that John was enslaved by W.H. Hibler in Sumter County, Alabama. John and Margaret Hibler were married and living in Falls County, Texas, around 1870, when their family, including ten children, was documented by the U.S. Census.[20]

Daniel's and Cortez's move to New Mexico introduced them to a small but growing community of African Americans in Las Cruces, all of whom were members of the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church. Daniel's wife,

Ollie, was originally from Denton, Texas; Hibler descendants recount that Daniel, who moved to Las Cruces alone, later sent for Ollie (Berry), who arrived with Black community's first minister, Reverend T.C. Cook, also from Denton, Texas. Led by Reverend Cook, the African American congregation in Las Cruces first worshiped in Daniel and Ollie's home.

Cortez and his wife, Lou Ella (Fields), married in 1899 in Texas; Lou Ella eventually moved to Las Cruces in 1918, where census records show the couple living in a rented house with another lodger while Cortez worked as a general laborer. Cortez and Lou Ella homesteaded on 640 acres northeast of Las Cruces (Sec. 9, T. 22S, R. 2E, New Mexico Prime Meridian); the homestead is now within city limits, and was sold to developers in 2004, with portions of the Red Hawk Golf Course and adjoining residential development constructed on the former-Hibler homestead. [21]

The Hibler families, along with James Dykes, A.J. Brooks, and Priscilla and John Hibler, later rented a building at the corner of Campo Street and East Court Avenue, where the African American community worshiped, prior to the construction of Phillips Chapel in 1911. As the African American population of Las Cruces continued to grow a permanent place of worship was needed. Daniel Hibler purchased the land on which Phillips Chapel C.M.E. Church was built for \$45.00 and had it deeded to the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church in America on May 1, 1911.

The Hibler brothers' descendants number many citizens in Las Cruces and around New Mexico. Gertrude Hibler, Ollie and Daniel's first child born in Las Cruces, married Henry Fielder and they had five children: Clarence, Veola, Alfred, Gertrude and Cleo.[21] Clarence Henry Fielder was a teacher with the Las Cruces Public School and professor at New Mexico State University. Clarence, who passed away in April 2015, was responsible for researching and documenting local history, capturing voices and stories which may have otherwise been lost. His work represents his and his family's long involvement around the Mesilla Valley. Clarence's sister Gertrude married Hobart Boyer. The Boyer family founded Blackdom (1903) and then later moved to Vado (1921) which for many years was New Mexico's only predominantly African-American community.[22]

(C) Authenticity of materials and historic elements from the most prominent period of the building's history:

Phillips Chapel C.M.E. Church was constructed using traditional techniques and features adobe brick construction. These bricks are a vernacular building material composed of a mixture of mud (earth), water, and organic binding materials like straw or grass, which are then sun-dried. Residents in Mesquite made the adobe bricks for Phillips Chapel on site by mixing clay-rich soil, water, sand, and an organic binder—typically straw or manure—to form a thick mud. This mixture was packed into molds to create the blocks, which are then removed and sun-dried for several weeks. The straw helps the bricks dry evenly, preventing cracks, while the clay binds the materials into a durable, solid block. The wood window frames, rectangular four-light wood sashes, and pine plank flooring are original. Except for modernizing updates, such as heating and electrical fixtures and the restroom addition, the chapel retains the majority of its original appearance both in its interior and exterior and, therefore, maintains its National Register integrity of location, design, workmanship, setting, and association.

As time went on, Phillips Chapel fell into a state of disrepair, even while members of the Black community continued to worship in the building. Because of a lack of funding and knowledge of adobe construction, the building was covered in cementitious stucco, which led to deterioration of the adobe structure. While these efforts are recognized today as having caused some damage to the building, the intent of the church's members and caretakers was unquestionably that of maintenance and preservation; their efforts represent the dedication and affection that community members retained for the building in the decades between its construction and restoration in the early 2000s.

In 2010, under the tutelage of adobe expert and local resident Pat Taylor, students of a Doña Ana Community College (DACC) Historic Conservation and Restoration course began to restore Phillips Chapel. These students worked on stabilizing and restoring the building for three semesters. After the course was discontinued, a core group of 10-12 volunteers finished the complete restoration in 2014. Adobe bricks were made to replace

damaged or melted ones; all the cement stucco was removed and replaced with traditional lime plaster; the original windows were sanded, repaired and then reinstalled; the original pine floors were refinished.[23]

Timeline of restoration work between 2010 and 2014

2010

- Wall investigation and chapel assessment by Pat Taylor
- Removal of cement plaster on the south and rear east walls
- South wall had extensive wall and subfloor damage
- Digging out under the subfloor to shore it up with 2x6 support system with cinder block pads
- Steel pole shoring placement for roof support inside chapel to safeguard south wall collapse
- Numbering and removal of interior wainscot to access the south wall and repair its extensive damage
- Installation of roof supports where a previous roof repair had removed them
- Mud plaster infill and placement of *rajuelas* (small rocks) to hold the lime plaster
- Re-installation of the wainscoting
- Adobe stabilization of interior north wall
- Poured concrete window slabs on east wall
- Applied several coats of lime plaster to the south and east walls
- Spring and summer work was done by DACC students; fall work by volunteers and former students

2011

- Continued wall restoration of the outside north and west walls
- Mud plaster infill and insertion of *rajuelas*
- Exterior painting of bathroom addition
- This Place Matters event
- Spring work was done by DACC students; summer and fall work by volunteers and former students

2012

- All work was done by community volunteers and former students
- Final rough lime plaster coats completed to all walls
- Poured north and west window sills
- Painting of inside of chapel by Doña Ana Community College students
- Start of application of final sugar plaster coat to walls with extensive help by Larry Limon
- Repair of window frames and lintels
- Started re-glazing of windows under the guidance of Jean Fulton
- Started repairing chapel seats
- Re-staining of all wainscoting
- Re-finishing of interior floors by Stout Hardwood Floors (gratis)

2013

- All work was done by community volunteers and former students
- Final applications of sugar plaster coat
- Completed re-glazing chapel windows
- Finished all chapel seat repair and staining
- Re-stained all window frames
- Painted interior bathroom wall

2014

- Installation of new hand-built doors constructed after the original design

16. References (if any)

(Make note of books, magazine articles, websites, blogs, etc., used in researching the property's history)

1. Monroe Lee Billington, *New Mexico's Buffalo Soldiers, 1866-1900*. University Press of Colorado: Niwot, Colorado. 1991.
2. Barbara Richardson (compiled by). *Black Directory of New Mexico*. Panorama Press: Rio Rancho, New Mexico. 1976. pp. 66-67.
3. *Negro Population 1790-1915*. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Sam L. Rogers, Director. Government Printing Office.
4. Diedre Mullane (editor). *Crossing the Danger Water: Three Hundred Years of African-American Writing*. Doubleday: New York, New York. 1993. pp 455-456.
5. Steart E. Tolnay and E. M. Beck. "Rethinking the Role of Racial Violence in the Great Migration". In *Black Exodus: The Great Migration from the American South*. Edited by Alferdteen Harrison. University Press of Mississippi: Jackson, Mississippi, 1991. pp. 20-21.
6. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States taken in the year 1920*. Volume III. William C. Hunt, Supervisor. Government Printing Office. Washington, D.C. 1922.
7. Euola Cox and Barbara Richardson, Editors. *Noteworthy Black Women of New Mexico, Past and Present*. Published for International Women's Year Conference: Albuquerque, New Mexico, 1977.
8. Charlotte K Mock. *Bridges: New Mexican Black Women, 1900-1950*. New Mexico Commission of the Status of Women: Albuquerque, New Mexico, 1985. p. 11.
9. In 1920, the Williams' are listed as residing on the Old Fuller Road. In 1940 their residence is 1101. S. Alameda Street. 1920 Census Records, Doña Ana County. Microfiche; Las Cruces City Directory. 1940. Branson Library, New Mexico State University.
10. "Composition and Characteristics of the Population by State". p. 668.
11. Delia Kilcrease. "Sentiments of black history preserved." *Las Cruces Sun-News*. February 12, 1986.
12. Las Cruces School Board Minutes 1925 and 1926; O'Brien, Claire. "When schools segregated: former students remember Booker T. Washington School" *Las Cruces Sun-News*, Feb. 17, 2002, Section C-8.
13. Claire O'Brien. "When schools segregated: former students remember Booker T. Washington School" *Las Cruces Sun-News*, Feb. 17, 2001, Section C-8; Barbara Richardson (compiled by). *Black Directory of New Mexico*. Panorama Press: Rio Rancho, New Mexico. 1976. pp. 66.
14. Debra Dominquez. "Church wrestles with wilting congregation.: *Christian Index*. June 2002, pp. 26-27; Claire O'Brien. "When schools segregated: former students remember Booker T. Washington School" *Las Cruces Sun-News*, Feb. 17, 2001, Section C-8.
15. Ikeva Berry. *Segregated Schools of Alamogordo, New Mexico*, N.P., 1991; Las Cruces School Board Minutes 1925 and 1926; Barbara Richardson (compiled by). *Black Directory of New Mexico*. Panorama Press: Rio Rancho, New Mexico. 1976. pp. 66-67.
16. Soledad C. Chacon, Secretary of State (prepared by). *Laws of the State of New Mexico*. Valliant Printing CO.: Albuquerque, New Mexico, 1925. p. 109.
17. Claire O'Brien. "When schools segregated: former students remember Booker T. Washington School" *Las Cruces Sun-News*, Feb. 17, 2001, Section C-8.
18. Claire O'Brien. "When schools segregated: former students remember Booker T. Washington School" *Las Cruces Sun-News*, Feb. 17, 2001, Section C-8; Las Cruces School Board Minutes 1925.
19. Claire O'Brien. "When schools segregated: former students remember Booker T. Washington School" *Las Cruces Sun-News*, Feb. 17, 2001, Section C-8.
20. Clarence Fielder in conversation with Terry Moody.
21. Marcia Boyer, personal conversation, April 2026.
22. Dr. Rick Adkisson and Terry Moody. "Cortez and Lou Ella Hibler," National Park Service, Homestead National Historical Park. Last updated April 5, 2022.
23. J. Fulton, report for NM Historic Preservation Division, "African American Segregation in New Mexico, November 2021. p. 590.
24. Personal notes of Faith Hutson, a student and volunteer working to restore Phillips Chapel from 2010-2014.

Section 4 – Author/Owner information and Certification

17. Author Information

Author name: Faith Hutson

Phone: (575) 635-1608

Applicant address (if different from property):

Email: lcgarden64@gmail.com

706 S. Mesquite Street, Las Cruces, NM 88001

Are you the property owner? ☐ Yes ☒ No

Owner name (if different):

Contact (if different):

I certify that the information provided is accurate and complete to the best of my knowledge. I understand this application is subject to review by the Historic Preservation Committee and the City Council.

Applicant Signature:

Date: April 3, 2026

Owner Signature (if different):

Date: April 5, 2026

Appendix – Supporting Documentation

Attach the following:

- At least four quality photographs of property (all sides of the property, streetscape) with captions;
- Historic photographs (if available) with captions;
- Maps or aerials showing property location with descriptions (Google Maps screenshot);
- Supporting evidence (articles, survey records, oral histories);
- Optional: copy of property's building's nomination form to the National Register of Historic Places or New Mexico Register of Cultural Properties, if applicable; and
- Any other documentation relevant to historical, architectural, or cultural significance with descriptions



Figure 1: Phillips Chapel C.M.E. Church Sunday School Class, 1930. Zelma D. McCarrell with children. (Courtesy of Mary Bishop).



Figure 2: Rosalee Hibler, graduation 1934. (Courtesy of Clarence Fielder).



Figure 3: Cast of Black Drama with Reverend R. W. Green, 1940s, at Phillips C.M.E. Church (Courtesy of Clarence Fielder).



Figure 4: Photo taken in front of Phillips Chapel C.M.E. Church. 1950 Baccalaureate Service for Booker T. Washington High School. Graduates: Jesse Lee Alexander, Allene Baker, Eustace Boyer, Jr., Cleo Davenport, Dora Ruth Pettes, and Julia Lee Richardson. (Courtesy of Allene Baker Stephens).



Figure 5: Mary Bishop, daughter, and baby. Possibly her husband is baptizing the infant. The photo is circa 1960s or 70s. (Courtesy of Mary Bishop). The movie theater chairs are seen to the right.

Category B – Associated with a historic person or significant events:



Figure 6: Ollie and Daniel Hibler. (Courtesy of Clarence Fielder).



Figure 7: Daniel and Cortez Hibler in front of the Jitney Café. (Courtesy of the National Park Service).



Figure 8: Ollie Hibler and daughters, Gertrude, Irene, and Rosalee. (Courtesy of Clarence Fielder).



Figure 9: From back to front - Daniel, Ollie, Irene, Rosalee, Gertrude Hibler. (Courtesy of Clarence Fielder).



Figure 10: Irene Hibler, doing schoolwork (Ca 1930s). Figure 11: Clarence Fielder's parents, Gertrude Hibler Fielder and Henry Fielder. (Both photos courtesy of Clarence Fielder).



*Figure 12: Henry Fielder with one of his sons, either Alfred or Cleo, at the home construction site, 642 E. Court Street, date unknown.
(Courtesy of Clarence Fielder).*



Figure 13: Henry Fielder at Rio Grande Motor, date unknown. (Courtesy of Clarence Fielder).

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Separates Spring Leaves
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NO EXTRA COST!

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for your



Figure 14: Rio Grande Motor Advertisement featuring Henry Fielder. (Courtesy of Clarence Fielder).



Figure 15: Clarence Fielder as a newborn in 1928. (Courtesy of Clarence Fielder).



Figure 16: The boy on the left is Clarence Fielder with his arm bend talking to his sister Gertrude or Veola, the other boy on the right is either his brother Alfred or Cleo, date unknown. (Courtesy of Clarence Fielder).



Figure 17: Gertrude Hibler Fielder as a Student Aid. (Courtesy of Clarence Fielder).



Figure 18: Front, left to right: Henry Fielder, Gertrude Fielder, and Daniel Hibler; Back, left to right: Alfred and Clarence Fielder. (Courtesy of Clarence Fielder).

Category C - Authenticity of materials and historic elements from the most prominent period of the building's history:



Figure 19: Phillips Chapel and Parsonage, c 1940s. (Courtesy of NMSU Library Rio Grande Archives).



Figure 20: 2002 photograph submitted with the New Mexico Register of Cultural Properties and National Register of Historic Places nomination. (Courtesy of Terry Moody).



Figure 21: West side entrance, February 2010. (Courtesy of Faith Hutson).

Restoration work 2010 with DACC students and volunteers:



Figure 22: Basal wall deterioration at the Apse. (Courtesy of Faith Hutson)



Figure 23: Basal wall deterioration inside. (Courtesy of Faith Hutson).



Figure 24: February 2010 removal of cement stucco south side of Chapel. (Courtesy of Faith Hutson).



Figure 25: Application of rajuelas on the south side wall April 2010. (Courtesy of Faith Hutson).



Figure 26: Inside wall repair April 2010. (Courtesy of Faith Hutson).



Figure 27: Apse wall repair Summer 2010. Pat Taylor is on the scaffolding, Dominic Fiumara is to the left. (Courtesy of Faith Hutson).



Figure 28: Application of lime plaster and rajuelas to the apse wall by David Chavez, Spring 2010. (Courtesy of Faith Hutson).



Figure 29: North Wall repair by Fred Apodaca Summer 2010. (Courtesy of Faith Hutson).



Figure 30: Community Work Day Fundraiser, May 2010. Volunteers making adobe bricks. (Courtesy of Faith Hutson).



Figure 31: Community Work Day Fundraiser, May 2010. Volunteers making adobe mud. (Courtesy of Faith Hutson).



Figure 32: Christmas concert fundraiser, 2010. Santa and Mrs. Claus with Clarence Fielder. Santa was Bob Hutson and Mrs. Claus was Wilma Hutson. Bobbie Green and her Choir are in the background. (Courtesy of Faith Hutson).

Restoration work 2011 with DACC students:



Figure 33: Clarence Fielder and Terry Moody, 2011. (Courtesy of Darla Matthew).

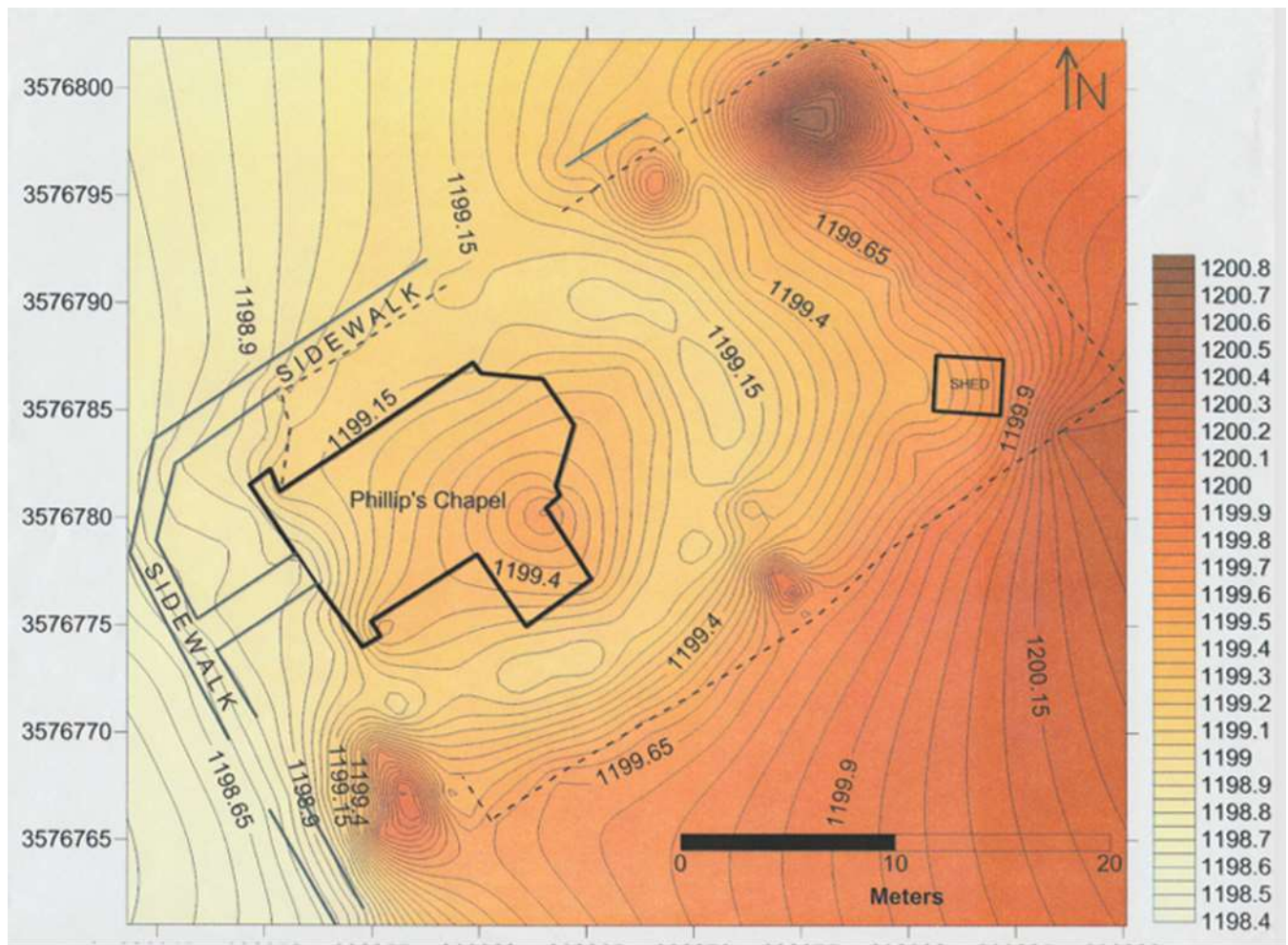


Figure 34: FS 196 Student topographical map of Phillips Chapel. (Courtesy of Department of Anthropology, NMSU Dr. Rani Alexander).



Figure 35: Removal of cement stucco on the front of the church, February 2011. Instructor Keven Gall, left with students. (Courtesy of Faith Hutson).



Figure 36: Basal wall damage to front of the church, Spring 2011. (Courtesy of Faith Hutson).

Restoration work 2011- 2014 with volunteers after the DACC stopped their adobe restoration courses.



Figure 37: John Hyndman applies mud mortar to set rajuelas, 2011. (Courtesy of Faith Hutson).



Figure 38: Stacia Fine mixing a volcano of mud mortar, 2011. (Courtesy of Faith Hutson).



Figure 39: Faith Hutson mixing lime for a scratch coat application, 2011. (Courtesy of Darla Matthew).



Figure 40: Dr. Beth O'Leary with Clarence Fielder, 2011. (Courtesy of Faith Hutson).



Figure 41: Front Façade of the Church, 2011. (Courtesy of Darla Matthew).



Figure 42: Applying another application of scratch coat lime plaster to the apse, 2012. Left on ladder David Chavez. On top of scaffolding L - R: Faith Hutson and Dan Carter. Bottom of scaffolding L-R: John Hyndman and Dominic Fiumara. (Courtesy of Faith Hutson).



Figure 43: John Hyndman working on window restoration, 2012. (Courtesy of Faith Hutson).



Figure 44: Wilma Hutson scraping old paint from window frames, 2012. (Courtesy of Faith Hutson).



Figure 45: Interior plaster repair by Dominic Fiumara, 2013. (Courtesy of Faith Hutson).



Figure 46: Lime Plaster application to front façade. John Hyndman in the window opening, Larry Limon on the scaffolding, 2013. (Courtesy of Faith Hutson).



Figure 47: Church with final coat of line plaster called the sugar coat. Note the completed windows cover with paper, 2013. (Courtesy of Faith Hutson).



Figure 48: Replica doors made by Watson McKennon on left, with help from John Hyndman, on right 2014. (Courtesy of Beth O'Leary).



Figure 49: Replica doors made by Watson McKennon, 2014. (Courtesy of Beth O'Leary).

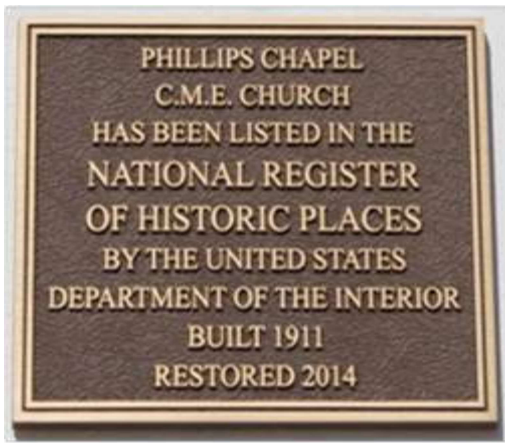


Figure 50: National Register of Historic Places plaque mounted on the front façade of Phillips Chapel C.M.E. Church (Courtesy of Faith Hutson).



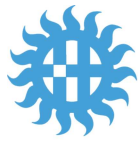
Figure 51: Pat Taylor preps the wall for the National Register of Historic Places plaque. (Courtesy of Faith Hutson).



Figure 52: Dedication of the National Register of Historic Places plaque, July 5, 2016. (Courtesy of the Sun-News, article by Minerva Baumann).

Location Map





CITY OF LAS CRUCES

TO: Historic Preservation Committee

FROM: Caitlin Beesley, MHP, Historic Preservation Specialist

DATE: May 1, 2026

SUBJECT: Case CPD2026-005

Case CPD2026-005: A nomination to the City of Las Cruces Register of Cultural Properties for Phillips Chapel C.M.E. Church. Property is owned by the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church and is individually listed in the New Mexico State Register of Cultural Properties and the National Register of Historic Places; it is also a contributing property to the State Register boundaries of the Mesquite Street-Original Townsite Historic District.

BACKGROUND

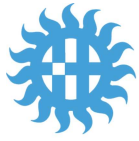
The Phillips Chapel C.M.E. Church, a simple one-room adobe church located on the southeastern corner of N. Tornillo Street and E. Lucero Avenue, was placed on the New Mexico Register of Cultural Properties and the National Register of Historic Places in 2003. It is eligible for inclusion in the City of Las Cruces Register of Cultural Properties for its association with the Black community in Las Cruces and southern New Mexico; for its association with a historic person or persons, specifically the prominent Hibler family whose descendants have shaped and documented the Mesquite neighborhood's history; and for authenticity of materials and historic elements from the most prominent period of the building's history, namely its adobe construction and vernacular New Mexican design.

Phillips Chapel C.M.E. Church is currently nominated to the City of Las Cruces Register of Cultural Properties, which comprises buildings, structures, sites, objects and districts that have historic or cultural significance to the Las Cruces community.

DECISION CRITERIA

To ensure the designation of eligible properties to the City of Las Cruces Register of Cultural Properties, HPC shall evaluate and make a final recommendation to the Las Cruces City Council for final approval. Nominated properties must be recommended and approved following standards established in Chapter 35, Section 2-D of the City's Development Code. An eligible building must meet the following requirements:

- a) Located within the corporate boundaries of the City; and
- b) At least 50 years old, in whole or in part, or else of exceptional significance; and



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- c) Possesses integrity of design, materials, workmanship, setting, location, feeling, and association, as defined for listing in the National Register of Historic Places; and
- d) Embodies such other qualities and characteristics as is in the judgement of the Committee should be considered for designation as a cultural property; and
- e) Possess one or more of the following demonstrations of significance:
 - i) A broad cultural, political, economic, or social association with the historic development of the community, the state, or the nation; and/or
 - ii) Identification with a historic person or with important events in local, state, and/or national history; and/or
 - iii) Possesses distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type inherently valuable for the study of a period, style, method of construction, or use of indigenous materials or craftsmanship; and/or
 - iv) Possesses authenticity of its period of significance as evidenced by the survival of its characteristics, historic fabric, and architectural elements from that period; and/or
 - v) Is a notable work of a master builder, designer, or architect; and/or
 - vi) Possesses or may likely yield information important in prehistory or history; and/or
 - vii) An improvement embodying all or part of the above characteristics which is subject to encroachment of detrimental influences or potential adverse effects; and/or
 - viii) An improvement of historical, architectural, or cultural significance that is threatened with demolition by public or private action; and/or
 - ix) Possesses other qualities and characteristics that, in the judgment of the Committee, should be considered for designation as a cultural property.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff have reviewed this nomination and recommend **APPROVAL** based on the following finding:

1. The building is currently listed in the National Register of Historic Places and the State Register of Cultural Properties.
2. The building retains sufficient historic integrity, and its significance is apparent to the general public.
3. Staff assisted in the completion of the nomination.

NOTE: Recommendations by the Committee must be based on “findings.” Findings for *DENIAL* of the nomination should be articulated by the Committee and may be based on policies found in the City of Las Cruces Development Code, and/or other City plans and policies. Findings may also be based on information presented at the public hearing or information obtained through a site inspection.