



News Release

State of New Mexico
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
October 18, 2011

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Historic Districts in Mora and Lea County Added to State Register

Santa Fe — Two historic districts—one honoring a traditional land grant community in northern New Mexico and another the history of an early twentieth-century ranching and oil town in the southeastern part of the state—were listed in the State Register of Cultural Properties, the New Mexico Historic Preservation Division announced today.

The Cultural Properties Review Committee listed the Guadalupita/Coyote Historic District and the Lovington Commercial Historic District in the Register at an October 14 meeting.

The Guadalupita/Coyote Historic District in Mora County is 8,140 acres of mountains and valleys dotted with small ranches, homes, mines and religious sites dating back to 1851. It was one of the last land grants in New Mexico. To this day, descendants of families that first settled there continue to use nearby natural resources and acequias that divert water from Rio Coyote to irrigate crops for their sustenance.

“It is rare in the modern world to have such a well-preserved cohesive area that has changed little on the ground in over 150 years so that roads, acequias, property lines, and even families are about the same as when ... families first settled there,” wrote Malcom Ebright, of the Center for Land Grants Studies, in the nomination.

Part of the reason the area is well preserved—105 of its 143 resources contribute to the historic nature of the district—is N.M. Highway 434 connecting Mora to Guadalupia was not paved until the late 1960s. The historic remoteness of the three principle communities of Guadalupia, Coyote Arriba and Lucero is seen today in the area’s New Mexico Vernacular style buildings, churches, a *morada* and cemeteries.

“There is modern development, but enough of the rural, agricultural landscape is preserved to make this area worthy of listing,” said Terry Moody, HPD’s State and National Register coordinator.

HPD spent two days documenting historic and nonhistoric sites in the district with Mora County Assessor Frances Torres to strengthen the nomination. Approximately 30 people, many of them landowners who can trace their family’s history on the land back to the 1850s, attended the CPRC meeting. All but two of them strongly supported establishing the district as a way to preserve its traditional qualities.

Mora County Commissioner John Olivas’s family lives in the district. He expressed the sentiments of many attending the meeting when he said there was a strong desire to preserve the area’s resources while recapturing its peak period as the “breadbasket of the Southwest, ” and retaining the community’s traditions.

The CPRC explained the State Register listing provides a measure of protection in preserving the Mexican, Territorial and early statehood elements of the district and its rural cultural landscape. It also makes homeowners with contributing buildings eligible for state preservation income tax credits than can be used to rehabilitate aging homes and structures when preservation standards are followed.

“Queen City of the Plains”

Surrounding a National Register of Historic Places courthouse square are roughly 12 blocks of commercial buildings that speak to Lovington’s roots as a government, agricultural, ranching and oil center on New Mexico’s southeastern plains 20 miles from the Texas border.

Lovington is noteworthy as the only city in New Mexico that remains tightly compacted around its courthouse square, reflecting its identity as a county government seat with southern Anglo-American roots. Of the 72 buildings and structures within the district, 52 complement the town’s period of historic significance, 1918-1960.

Lovington owes its beginnings to the waning days of large scale, open-range ranching, which had depleted much of west Texas’ grasslands. The eastern New Mexico portion of the Llano Estacado, or High Plains region, was known as the “Llano Sea of Grass” and drew Lone Star state residents west. Homesteaders established smaller ranches and farms in the New Mexico territory by the early 1900s. Lovington is named for Texas rancher Robert Florence Love, who filed a homestead claim in 1903 in what now is Lovington.

The nomination was completed by New Mexico MainStreet consultant Heather Barrett. MainStreet has worked with HPD to establish historic districts in Hobbs, Artesia, Carlsbad, Clayton and Raton in the last several years.

Ms. Barrett said the district is significant for its architecture, community planning and development. Isolated, Lovington grew slowly at first. But in the late 1920s when oil was

discovered beneath its rich Pecos Valley lands and the railroad connected Lovington to Hobbs, development picked up. Grocers, pharmacies, dry goods merchants, restaurants and bars opened for business as the town grew around the courthouse square.

“Saturday nights were a good time to park on the square and watch the parade of townspeople go by,” wrote Imogene Hanners whose family moved there in the 1940s. “Sometimes squabbles broke out between tipsy bar patrons. Side arms were not unknown; shoot-em-ups took place sometimes not confined to the movie house on the square.”

Ms. Hanners letter was one of 40 HPD received in support of the nomination, which drew no opposition. All the letters expressed optimism the State Register listing would help preserve the city’s historic fabric.

Primarily one-and-two story buildings, most built of brick and hollow clay tile, are found in the Lovington Commercial Historic District. The centerpiece is the 1937 Art Deco-style Lea County Courthouse, whose surrounding square is graced by heritage evergreen and deciduous trees. Many buildings are designed in the Modernist, Moderne and Decorative Brick Commercial styles.

The Lea County Theatre, also listed in the National Register, is a 1948 standout that at the time was noted for its modernistic painted walls, men’s smoking room and a crying room for women and children. The Commercial Hotel built in 1918 is the oldest building in the district and can be visited today as the Lea County Museum.

The Queen City moniker is still in use. It has been a popular nickname for towns large and small for more than a century.

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