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HOMESTEADING ON THE PAJARITO PLATEAU, 1887–1942

Judith Machen, Ellen McGehee, and Dorothy Hoard

Homestead Certificate No. 1793
Application 2727

Whereas, There has been deposited in the General Land Office of the
United States a Certificate of the Register of the Land Office at Santa Fe New Mexico
Territory, whereby it appears that, pursuant to the Act of Congress
approved 20th May, 1862, "To secure Homesteads to actual Settlers on the Public Domain,
and the acts supplemental thereto, the claim of Juan Luis Garcia

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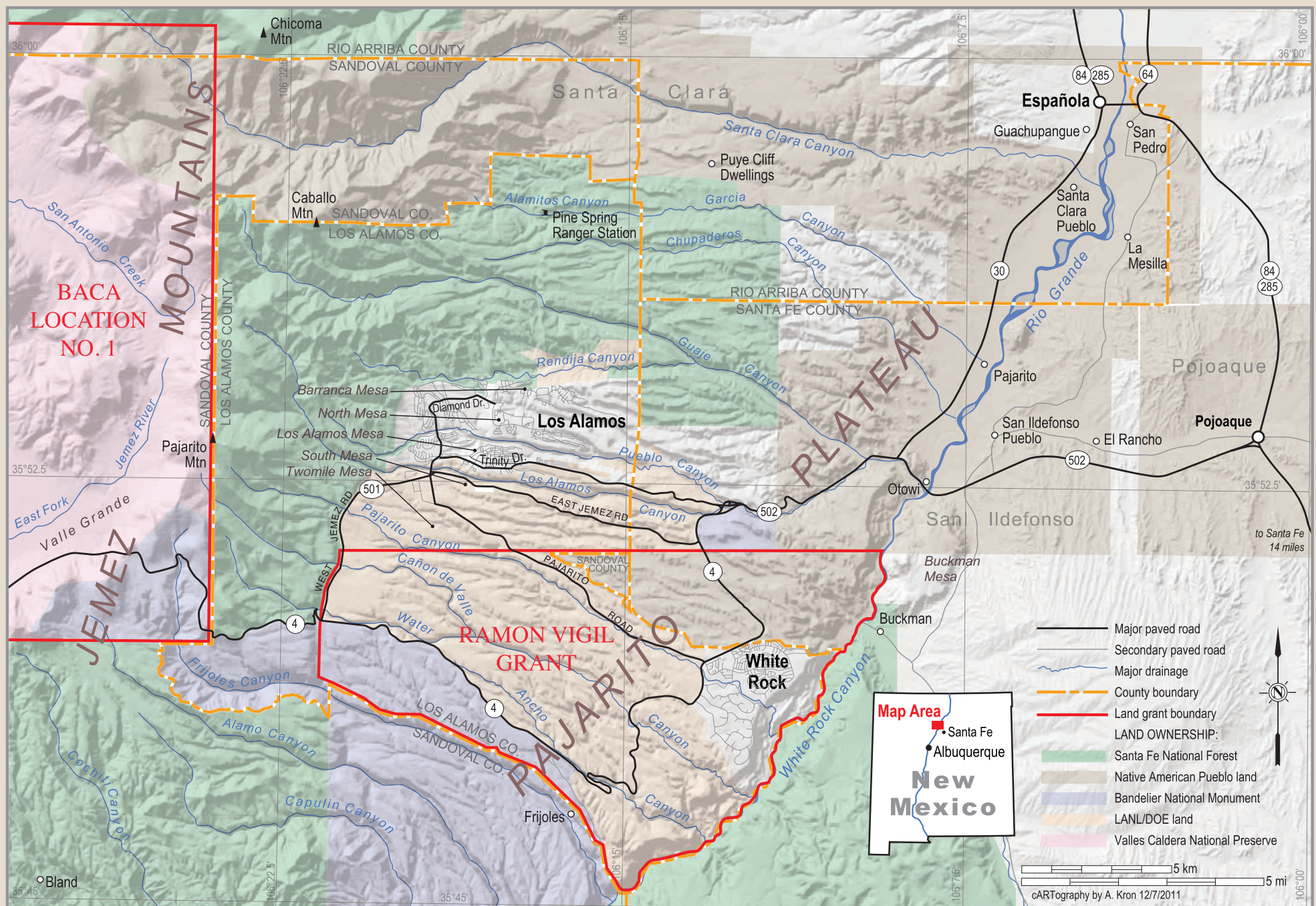
This edition of *Homesteading on the Pajarito Plateau, 1887–1942*,
is dedicated to our colleague Dorothy Hoard.
Her unquenchable passion to discover, to understand, and to share
what she learned has contributed to almost every page of this book.

Dorothy Hoard, 1932–2014

“We have lived up to all the rules etc of the homestead law....Possibly if you knew some of the hard ships of a homesteader you would be more lenient... There is no justice or anything else in it, and I hope you will see it your self.”

Pajarito Plateau homesteader Mrs. R. G. McDougall
to the U.S. Secretary of the Interior,
December 29, 1913.





The Pajarito Plateau and its environs. In 1953, Edgar L. Hewitt explained how the plateau was named: "Some years ago, I proposed the name Pajarito Plateau for the eastern side of the watershed of the Jemez mountain range. (The larger term, Jemez Plateau, embraces both sides of the watershed.) It was generally accepted and was applied to the region lying east of the foothills, limited on the east by the Rio Grande, north by the Rio Chama, and south by the Canada de Cochiti. It varies from ten to twenty miles in width, is about forty miles long and roughly crescent-shaped. It is boldly defined on all sides." — Edgar L. Hewitt, *The Pajarito Plateau and its Ancient People*. UNM Press; School of American Research; 1953; p. 7. (Map: cARTography by Andrea Kron)

Dedicated to the memory of those original homesteaders
who took the risks, made the effort, met the challenges, and
gave up their land “for the good of the nation.”

Contents

Preface.....	i
Acknowledgments.....	iii
Introduction.....	v
Chapter 1: Homesteading in the United States.....	1
Chapter 2: Homesteading in Northern New Mexico.....	5
Chapter 3: Homesteading on the Pajarito Plateau	7
Chapter 4: The Homesteaders.....	51
Chapter 5: Conclusion: Success or Failure?	105
Notes	108
References.....	113
Name Index.....	120





Preface

This book has been written primarily for the descendants of the families who homesteaded the Pajarito Plateau in northern New Mexico beginning in the late 1880s. It is intended to serve as a record of a lifestyle now long gone that spanned just over half a century. During the fifty-five years between 1887—when the first official application for a homestead on the plateau was made—and late 1942, when the United States government began the condemnation process to acquire privately owned properties as part of the Manhattan Project's secret Project Y, about thirty-six individuals, mostly Hispanic farmers and ranchers, established homesteads and used the resources of the plateau to supplement a subsistence-based way of life.

Although the homesteaders were compensated financially for their land and the improvements they had made, they received less than an eighth of the total amount paid by the government to the major Anglo landowners on the plateau. The largest payments went to the Los Alamos Ranch School and the nearby Anchor Ranch. Decades after the government appropriated the land on the plateau for the war effort during World War II, the descendants and heirs of the displaced homesteader families took legal action to remedy the disparity. In 2004, the U.S. Congress approved the creation of a \$10 million compensation fund to be divided among claimants who could prove kinship to the evicted homesteaders.¹ As part of the settlement, the Department of Energy agreed to write, for the claimants, a history of homesteading on the Pajarito Plateau.

This book is that history. The authors—Judith Machen, Ellen McGehee, and Dorothy Hoard—hope that readers will become as fascinated with the story of homesteading on the Pajarito Plateau as the writers did. It is a story relevant not only to the families of the homesteaders but to a much larger audience as well. Homesteading embodied some of the most deeply held values of our

nation: individual independence; the right to own land and to enjoy the privileges that come with it; the belief that the land and the farmers who worked it were the basis of the nation's wealth, prosperity, and virtues. Thomas Jefferson wrote to James Madison that “our governments will remain virtuous for many centuries as long as they are chiefly agricultural; and this will be as long as there shall be vacant lands in any part of America.”

The people who homesteaded those vacant lands can be considered heroes, although not in the commonly used sense of the world. They lived their lives far from the spotlight—lives that were filled with privations and hardships, with failures as well as successes. But surely their accomplishments, in the difficult and challenging environment of the Pajarito Plateau, can be considered heroic. On an individual level, homesteaders supported themselves and their families by the sweat of their brow and the labor of their hands. On a national level, they helped push the American frontier westward by settling in remote areas, and they increased the value of raw land by cultivating and improving it.

The history of homesteading on the Pajarito Plateau, as particular as it is to its specific location, is nonetheless imbedded in our national history. It occurred not only in the apparent peaceful isolation of a rugged section of northern New Mexico but in the midst of turbulent national and international events as well. As remote as the Pajarito Plateau was from the centers of power and wealth, its inhabitants did not escape the effects of the coming of the railroads, the two world wars, the Depression, the rise of an industrial America, or the transition from subsistence to cash economies. The homesteaders' response and adaptation to these events is as much an integral part of their story as is their response and adaptation to the harsh conditions on the Pajarito Plateau.





Acknowledgments

The authors extend their grateful appreciation to the many people who unstintingly gave us the benefits of their knowledge and experience. Vicki Loucks of the Los Alamos Site Office and John Isaacson of Los Alamos National Laboratory offered welcome support and encouragement. Kari Garcia of LANL's Environmental Stewardship Group helped with graphics and general support. Rebecca Collinsworth, archivist for the Los Alamos Historical Society, was invariably gracious and helpful in answering our numerous requests for information or photographs. The efforts of volunteers Paul and Linda McClendon, who painstakingly digitized homestead records on file at the U.S. Forest Service office in Santa Fe, contributed immeasurably to our research efforts. We thank Chris Chavez of the U.S. Forest Service for initiating the digitization project, rescuing the documents from destruction, and furnishing us with the files. Andi Kron, superb cartographer, produced our frontispiece map. We also would like to thank our LANL editor, Caroline Spaeth, our designer, Jim Cruz, and our compositor, Teresa Hiteman, for the superb job they did under tight deadlines to turn our research into the first book to be published specific to the history of homesteading on the Pajarito Plateau.

Joe Gutiérrez of the Pajarito Plateau Homesteaders Association, another fellow historical researcher, has been supportive and helpful along the way. Sharon Snyder, writer and history detective, unearthed details about the Smithwicks of Anchor Ranch and searched federal censuses and genealogy files for us. Larry Campbell connected us with descendants of the Romero family and cheered our efforts on. One of those descendants, Severo Gonzales, has been tireless in sharing his experiences of growing up on the plateau before 1942. Georgia Strickfaden contributed information

accumulated from a lifetime of exploring local canyons and mesas by horseback. Janie O'Rourke, inveterate tracer of old telephone lines on the plateau, advised on historic Forest Service activities. Francisco Guillermo (Willie) Atencio's interviews of descendants of homesteaders provided valuable reminiscences, and he and Robert T. Naranjo of Santa Clara Pueblo were expert sources on Hispanic and Native American agricultural practices. Elmer Torres queried residents of San Ildefonso Pueblo and helped pinpoint the early crossing of the Rio Grande at San Ildefonso, while Gary Cascio of the Southwest Ferry Project shared the results of his and Bryan Brown's research confirming the existence of a historic U.S. Army ferry there.

Last but certainly not least, Judith Machen would like to acknowledge the contributions and support of her coauthors, Ellen McGehee and Dorothy Hoard. As the References section testifies, the previous research done on the archaeology, history, trails, and roads of the Pajarito Plateau by these two respected researchers is the foundation of this book. During the writing and compiling process, they were constantly at hand, answering questions, solving problems, and delving ever deeper into the history of homesteading on the Pajarito Plateau. Additionally, it was Dorothy Hoard who mapped the homesteaders' tracts, traced land-ownership changes, and pored over surveyors' notes and BLM tract records, while Ellen McGehee shepherded this book through the publication process. The questions never end, as Dorothy Hoard has often commented, but the search to find answers in the company of these two authors has provided endless pleasure.

Congress of the United States

At the Second Session

BEGUN AND HELD AT THE CITY OF WASHINGTON

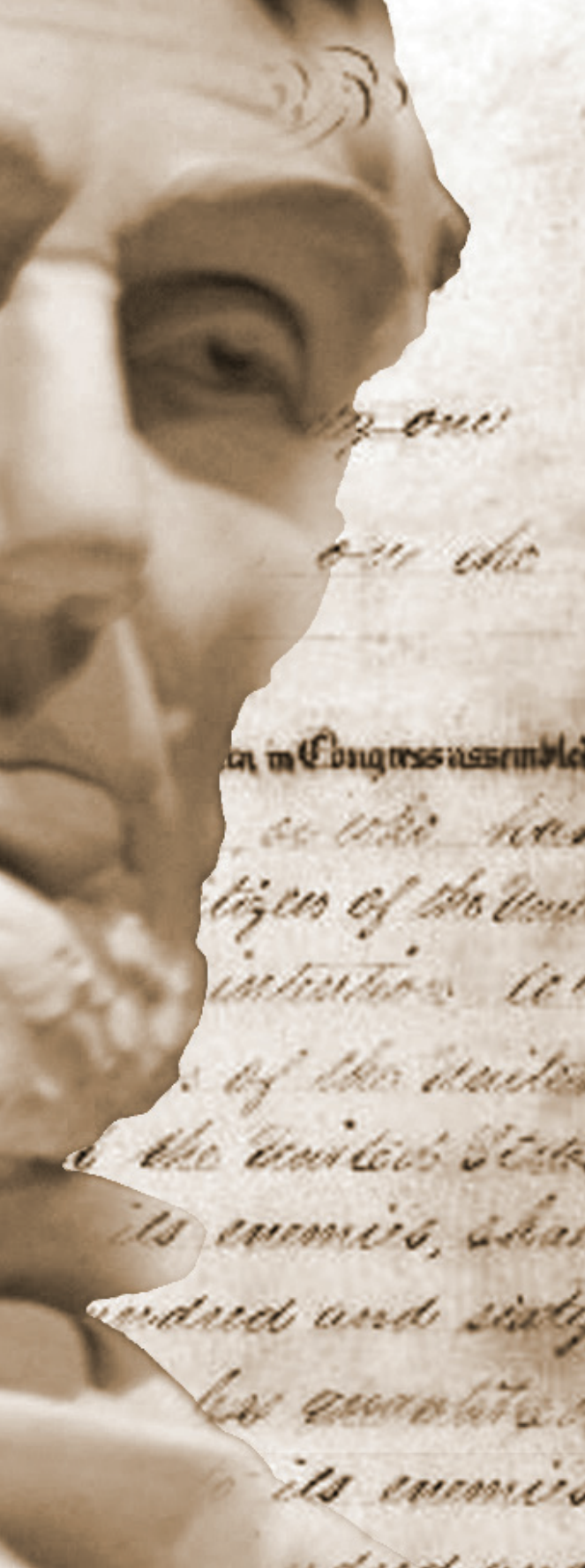
(In the District of Columbia)

Monday the 5th day of December one thousand eight hundred and

AN ACT to secure homesteads to actual settlers
public domains.

Enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

That every person who is the head of a family, is
at least at the age of twenty-one years, and is a citizen
of the United States, or who shall have filed his declaration of intention
to become such, as required by the naturalization laws of the United
States, and who has never borne arms against the United States,
or given aid and comfort to its enemies, shall be entitled to enter one quarter section of land



Introduction

In 1862, President Abraham Lincoln signed the Homestead Act, giving U.S. citizens who were aged twenty-one years or older the opportunity to file a claim for 160 acres of land—and to receive a deed to that land, free, if they successfully completed the requirements for ownership. This history traces how mostly Hispanic families from the Rio Grande Valley north of Santa Fe, New Mexico, responded to this opportunity and shaped the homesteading experience to fit local conditions.

Chapter One, Homesteading in the United States, begins with a brief overview of the history of homesteading on a national level. It includes a description of the Homestead Act of 1862 and outlines the context in which it was created. This chapter provides a basis for comparing homesteading on the Pajarito Plateau with the more typical homesteading experience as it was conducted, for example, on the great plains—the experience captured in the well-known “Little House” books by Laura Ingalls Wilder. Wilder’s descriptions have become part of our national myth, but as will become apparent, homesteading on the Pajarito Plateau differed substantially from this model.

Chapter Two, Homesteading in Northern New Mexico, begins with a review of the land-use customs, derived from Spanish law, that prevailed before New Mexico became a U.S. territory in 1848. Characteristics of this system, which recognized community rights as well as individual rights, clashed with Anglo-American common law, which promoted individualism over the preservation of community.² The chapter ends with a discussion of homesteading in northern New Mexico to provide a comparison between homesteading on the Pajarito Plateau and homesteading as it occurred in other parts of the region.

Chapter Three, Homesteading on the Pajarito Plateau, explores the main themes of this book: people and place. Described herein is the homesteading experience specific to the plateau’s beautiful but unforgiving landscape and the culture of the people who learned to wrest a living from it. The climate, geology, and terrain determined what was possible; the skills and lifestyle of the people who inhabited and adapted to the plateau turned possibility into reality. This chapter examines the reasons people homesteaded the Pajarito Plateau. What did the plateau offer, and what constraints did its physical landscape put on what could be accomplished there? How did the homesteaders get to the Pajarito Plateau? Where were the homesteads? Who farmed them, and when? What was life like on a plateau homestead?

Chapter Four, The Homesteaders, forms the heart of the book. It outlines what is known about each of the original homesteaders and any subsequent owners of homesteads that were later sold. The original homestead families are presented in alphabetical order.

Chapter Five brings the story of homesteading on the Pajarito Plateau to a close. It briefly describes how, as the homesteaders were focusing on survival, discoveries were being made in Europe and the United States that would eventually intersect with the homesteaders’ lives and change them irrevocably. The chapter concludes by asking who the ultimate beneficiaries of the Homestead Act on the plateau were and whether homesteading on the plateau can be judged a failure or a success.

Note on research and writing methods

The authors have examined historical documents, oral histories, archaeological excavation reports, survey records, and architectural and cultural-landscape studies to tell the story of homesteading on the Pajarito Plateau. Ellen McGehee has made and published in-depth studies of homesteading in connection with her responsibilities as an archaeologist and historian at Los Alamos National Laboratory. Dorothy Hoard, an independent scholar, has done original research on homesteading as background for her books on trails and historic roads of the Pajarito Plateau. Judith Machen, a research historian for Los Alamos National Laboratory, has compiled the results of Hoard's and McGehee's research and has conducted additional research in the course of preparing this history.



Chapter 1

Homesteading in the United States



Land to Call One's Own

Those who chose to homestead in the last third of the nineteenth century exhibited a special brand of courage. As John Martin Campbell wrote in *Magnificent Failure: A Portrait of the Western Homestead Era*, homesteaders were people who “wrestled with the land, the government, and the banks, believing in their heart and soul that they could win the long, hard-fought battle and claim the coveted prize, land they could call their own.”³

Although homesteading in the United States became legally possible only after the passage of the Homestead Act in 1862, the word homestead itself, as Campbell explains, expresses a concept valued by people since Anglo-Saxon times.⁴ It comes from “hamstede,” an Old English word used before the year 1100. Ham means home, and stede means place. These root words remain barely altered in our word, homestead, meaning the dwelling and adjacent land occupied by a family. “To homestead” and “homesteader” have been used in the United States since 1872. The words connote the fundamental importance of having a piece of land to call one's own as a source of individual security, sustenance, and wealth.

Since the beginning of this country's history, land has been considered a source of national wealth and security as well. A nation of farmers, the young United States needed settlers to provide food for consumption and for trade—and to spread the roots of the expanding country into the wilderness that stretched beyond the original thirteen states. The seemingly vast and almost endless lands of the continent were a currency, in Campbell's words, used as an incentive to states, to corporations, and to individuals for many purposes. All land that was not included in the original thirteen states became part of the public domain,

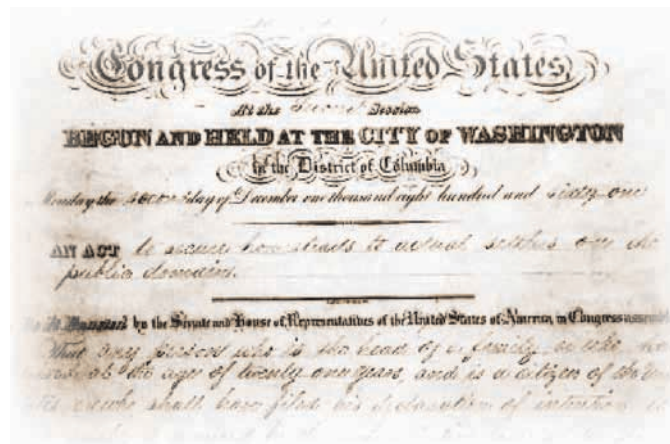
owned by the national government. This land was given to territories and states for schools, agricultural colleges, and for needed improvements; it was given to companies in exchange for building the railroad system; it was given as a reward to men who had served in their country's military.⁵

The concept of the right to free land thus had a long precedent in the United States, although not everyone agreed with it. Some saw land not as a legitimate gift from government to the people but as a valuable commodity that should be used to turn a profit. The issue was debated extensively between the 1820s and the 1860s along social, sectional, and political lines, resulting eventually—but not without some initial failures—in the Homestead Act of 1862.

The Homestead Act of 1862

The Homestead Act formally regulated how land was to be distributed. It delivered a tempting proposition: virtually free land in exchange for the successful establishment of a farmstead. Any citizen of the United States, male or female, who was at least twenty-one years old and the head of a household could file a claim for up to 160 acres of land.⁶ The legal process was straightforward. Local land offices had a list of available public lands open to homesteading; all that potential homesteaders had to do, to begin, was to visit the land office nearest them and apply for the property they wanted by filing out a homestead entry application. In legal terminology, that particular plot of land was now “entered” into the system, and the land office withdrew the property from the list of available land. It would stay off the list unless the homesteader relinquished the land before “patenting” it—that is, before completing the process required to patent, or to receive legal title, to the land.

The patent process required homesteaders to make improvements on their land within six months of their initial application. They then had five years to establish themselves as permanent occupants. Once having accomplished that step—often a more challenging one than met the eye—they had only to validate their claim. This last step



The Homestead Act of 1862, signed by Abraham Lincoln.

meant filing documents at the end of the five-year period proving that the applicant had met all the requirements leading to ownership of the property. The “proving-up” process required the testimony of witnesses who could verify the improvements made upon the property, such as the construction of a cabin and corrals, and who could verify the permanent nature of a homesteader’s residence. Once a homesteader had completed the homesteading process, he or she received a land patent: a formal title to land acquired from the U.S. government. The only costs to the homesteader for the entire process were small amounts for administrative fees and commissions.

Only two homesteaders on the Pajarito Plateau, Severo Gonzalez and James Loomis, took advantage of a second, shorter method for obtaining a homestead tract: they qualified for ownership by commuting their entry to a cash entry, paying \$1.25 per acre for the land.

Despite the apparent advantages of homesteading and the simplicity of the bureaucratic process, homesteading was a difficult undertaking in the arid regions of the western United States. The Homestead Act was based on the assumption that 160 acres of land would be adequate for sustaining a family through farming and that an adequate supply of water for each plot existed. But the method used to draw land boundaries did not assure that those assumptions would be met.

The Survey System for Public Lands

Public lands are surveyed primarily by what is known as the rectangular survey system, originally conceived by Thomas Jefferson in the early 1780s. Jefferson’s system had two purposes: to assure the equitable distribution of land and to make land descriptions less complicated than they were under the variety of surveying systems in use at the time. Jefferson’s more rational and uniform method of determining boundaries was enacted into law by the Land Ordinance of 1785. His system divided land into townships and sections. Subsequent modifications required dividing public lands into townships six miles square. Townships were subdivided into thirty-six sections, each one mile square and containing 640 acres. Sections could be further gridded by quarters into smaller units if necessary. Quarter sections, initially the largest amount of land allowed for a claim under the Homestead Act, contained 160 acres. The familiar checkerboard pattern of land ownership in the West, so apparent from the air, reflects Jefferson’s gridded townships.⁷

An older survey system called “metes and bounds” dominated surveying practices in the eastern states and was used in the West for areas not suitable for the rectangular system. Surveyors designated a well-documented starting point from which they measured the angle and distance to the next corner. They continued this process to subsequent corners until they had encircled the area of interest back to the starting point. Three homesteads on the Pajarito Plateau were established by metes and bounds: those of Locadio Archuleta, Andrés Martínez, and Fermin Vigil.

The claims of Ezequiel Garcia and Martha Brook initially were surveyed by metes and bounds, but the Forest Service persuaded them to change to the standard system. In a few other cases, the metes-and-bounds system was preferred either because it was cheaper or easier or because it was a better way, in locations where the topography was irregular and rough, to separate forest land from agricultural land.

Before a township could be open for homestead entry, the perimeter and section lines had to be surveyed by a federally licensed surveyor under contract to the regional surveyor general. The Pajarito Plateau required two surveys. The first, for Township 20 North, Range 6 East, which includes Garcia Canyon to the north of the Los Alamos townsite, was approved and accepted on May 11, 1883. The second survey, for Township 19 North, Range 6 East, includes the Los Alamos townsite and was approved on December 12, 1890. It was filed in the local land office on April 20, 1892.*

Unfortunately, the grid system ignores topography. It is simply laid down in a rigid pattern over the landscape—with the result that one section may have plenty of water and fertile land suitable for agriculture while another may have no access to water at all or be located on hills too steep to farm. West of the one-hundredth meridian—a vertical line of longitude that splits North and South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, and Texas, and forms the western boundary of Oklahoma—homesteaders and farmers could not count on rainfall to water crops, as could people who lived in the more verdant eastern half of the country. Average annual precipitation east of the one-hundredth meridian is more than twenty inches; west of the line it is less. Homesteaders in the arid Southwest had either to irrigate, if a water source existed, or resort to dry-farming the land. The one-hundredth meridian, although an imaginary line, symbolizes to this day the boundary between the American East and the American West.

Supplements to the Homestead Act

Eventually, to address the problems confronted by homesteaders in arid parts of the country, Congress passed several supplemental pieces of homesteading legislation after the Homestead Act's enactment in 1862. On June

11, 1906, the Forest Homestead Act became law. It added agricultural lands located within forest reserves to the pool of government lands potentially open for settlement. (In New Mexico, for instance, in 1905, the government transferred nearly five million acres of land from the public domain to the Forest Service.⁸) The Forest Service, however, retained discretionary authority to recommend which parcels of land could be opened for homestead entry and usually recommended homestead entries only in response to specific applications.⁹ This law would become important to the history of homesteading on the Pajarito Plateau.

Three years later, Congress enacted the Enlarged Homestead Act of 1909, which increased the maximum size of claims to 320 acres (a half section) in areas where the land was not “susceptible of successful irrigation at a reasonable cost from any known source of water supply.”¹⁰ Another three years later, the Homestead Act of 1912 reduced the homestead residency requirement from five to three years but did not address the continuing need for even more acreage. The 1912 act, however, allowed homesteaders to be absent continuously for up to five months a year, once they had established residence on their claim. This provision legalized the informal custom homesteaders on the Pajarito Plateau had been practicing annually, when they returned to their valley homes during the cold winter months.

The National Homesteading Experience

Although homesteading was frequently portrayed as way to acquire “wealth, social privileges, and political honors” after only a few years of “intelligent industry and patient frugality,” the reality did not match this optimistic prediction.¹¹ The first homesteaders had to leave their homes, their families, their friends, and the support systems in their towns and villages that had sustained them. As these homesteaders spread out across the vast plains of the American Midwest, they encountered drought, plagues of grasshoppers, extremes of weather, and prairie

fires. The “Little House” series of children’s books about homesteading by Laura Ingalls Wilder vividly portrays the difficulties, and the occasional pleasures, faced by the early homesteaders as they attempted to build new lives and new communities. Wilder’s depiction of the homesteaders’ hard-fought battles has entered the national myth, embodying and codifying the image most people identify with the national experience of homesteading.

Other reports reveal similar portraits of “long days and hard work.”¹² For some, the western plains would be a land of opportunity; for most, though, the homesteading life would lead to a meager and difficult existence.¹³

A major goal of the Homestead Act was to provide enough land for people to sustain themselves economically through subsistence agriculture. With little ready cash for supplies, homesteaders had to grow most of the family’s food. They lived in rustic log or sod houses, most commonly with dirt floors, sometimes brightened with newsprint wallpaper. Farm work was divided: men were responsible for hard labor, such as clearing and preparing the fields and hauling water; women and children worked the family garden, gathered wood or “buffalo chips,” and took care of the hogs, family cow, and chickens. Women sewed the family’s clothes, collected whatever wild herbs and berries grew locally, and perhaps, if there was a local market, sold eggs and butter. Field corn and salt pork were mainstays of the homesteader diet. To survive during the winter months, families stored foods such as potatoes, carrots, turnips, apples, and squash in root cellars (which doubled as tornado shelters on the prairies), dried their surplus fruits and vegetables, and smoked meat in the fall. Work during the growing season was nonstop; even washing the family laundry took all day. Homestead families lived in rural isolation, especially during the winter months; trips to town were long and infrequent. The school year was scheduled around planting and harvesting times, with classes held in town during the winter months.¹⁴

* Historical records related to Pajarito Plateau land surveys are on file at the Bureau of Land Management, New Mexico State Office, Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Success or Failure?

Homesteading became more successful after 1900, with the number of claims peaking in 1913—in part owing to changes in the Homestead Act that made it easier to complete the homesteading process. However, by the turn of the century, almost half of all claims had resulted in failure.¹⁵ When crops failed, so did many of the homesteads.¹⁶ The original Homestead Act did not take into consideration the realities of life in the arid West beyond the one-hundredth meridian. One hundred sixty acres of land was not enough to support the diversity of strategies needed to survive on the plains and in other arid regions of the West; even renting out the land or working for others was often unsuccessful. Many families abandoned their claims and moved back east. For some homesteaders, the cycle of farming, failure, and abandonment continued for years.¹⁷

Nonetheless, homesteaders settled approximately eight percent (around 270 to 285 million acres) of all the land in the United States during the 123 years that the Homestead Act was in effect—from January 1, 1863, until 1976 in the forty-eight contiguous states and until 1986 in Alaska. About two million people took advantage of the Homestead Act to try to obtain land they could call their own. Not all succeeded, but those who persevered helped change the face of the nation.¹⁸

Homesteading in a Changing Nation

The Homestead Act was based on the prevailing belief that increasing the number of farmers would benefit the nation because people who lived on the land were “more democratic, honest, hardworking, independent, virtuous, and patriotic than city residents.”¹⁹ The image of the sturdy yeoman farmer as the backbone of society was a powerful one in early American history. Yet homesteading took place in a rapidly changing world. The first decades of the homesteading era, the period from about 1870 to about 1900, coincided exactly with the

development of the United States as an industrial nation in the aftermath of the Civil War.²⁰ The transformation from an agrarian country to an industrial one occurred along with increased immigration of European peoples, changes in federal policies towards the continent’s Native American population, and rapid advances in technology. Westward expansion, aided by the development of the transcontinental railroad system (whose construction was authorized by Congress the same year that the Homestead Act was passed), increased the pressures on the land.

Only seven years after homesteading began, the tracks of the Union Pacific Railroad were joined with those of the Central Pacific Railroad in 1869 at Promontory, Utah. Now the populous East was connected to the undeveloped West by a train ride of only six days instead of an arduous, four- to six-month overland trip from the Missouri River to the Pacific Coast. This radical improvement was followed shortly, beginning in the late 1870s, by a series of inventions that altered the daily lives of Americans as much as the transcontinental railroad had altered their concept of transportation. In the late nineteenth century, America’s most prolific inventor, Thomas A. Edison, invented—to give just a few examples—telephone technology, carbon-filament lamps, the phonograph, the movie camera, a system of wireless telegraphy, and the first meaningful radio device.²¹ Changes were equally monumental in the industrial world. By 1901, the first billion-dollar corporation in America was established, the United States Steel Corporation.²² Transportation was further transformed at the beginning of the twentieth century when Orville and Wilbur Wright made their first successful flight in 1903 and Henry Ford introduced his Model T automobile in 1908.

Isolated as they may have been on their claims on the prairies or deep within thick forests, occupied as they were with the struggle to live off the land, homesteaders were not unaffected by America’s rising industrialism. It is not surprising that applicants for homesteading claims declined after the peak in 1913. Subsistence agriculture was no longer as appealing as it once was. No longer did the yeoman farmer epitomize America; images of industrialists took his place.



Chapter 2

Homesteading in Northern New Mexico



The Pattern of Life

Homesteading in northern New Mexico shared many characteristics of the national experience, especially in terms of the daily life of a farm family, but it also exhibited distinctive differences. In contrast to the situation in other parts of the United States, homesteading in northern New Mexico was superimposed on already established indigenous patterns of grazing and farming—patterns whose roots extended to the arrival of the Spanish in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. These settlers brought with them familiar traditions of land use that were centuries old. After the Pueblo Revolt in 1680, recolonization efforts by the Spanish government included the issuing of land grants to groups of individuals as a means of settling the area. Under the terms of the grants, settlers received individual farm plots but shared grazing lands with the rest of the village.²³

This process produced a pattern of life and work that had strong similarities to peasant societies elsewhere. People who made their living on the basis of subsistence agriculture normally clustered in villages for mutual support. They shared cultivation rights on arable land, receiving individual plots that they eventually divided equally among their heirs. Grazing land for the villagers' stock, however, was considered common land, shared by all, owned by none.²⁴

Settlers in northern New Mexico continued these traditions while altering them to fit local circumstances. As historian John Van Ness has noted, although inhabitants of land-grant villages periodically lived together in fortified plaza communities, families often preferred to live in a more dispersed pattern, locating their land plots in several areas depending on the proximity of arable land.

A pattern of multiple residences grew out of these dispersed land-distribution practices. According to Van Ness, a family might have a residence in a community near the Rio Grande and “a ruder unit for summer habitation.” Villagers would construct these “simple seasonal dwellings” in the high country where they pastured their animals in the summer. Van Ness also notes that the emphasis on animal husbandry as a subsistence strategy made the establishment of separate grazing areas a necessity: pasturage in the valley areas was limited during the spring and summer growing season. This “seasonal round” of stock grazing was fully integrated with the village agricultural cycle and was linked to age-old Iberian customs of communal grazing known as alpine or vertical transhumance.²⁵ Thus, traditional boundaries of common lands associated with the original Spanish and, after 1821, with Mexican land grants extended to adjacent upland areas where cooperative activities such as grazing, hunting, fishing, quarrying of rocks, gathering herbs and berries, and wood cutting were seasonally practiced by the land-grant village residents.²⁶

Most of these common lands became part of the public domain starting in 1850, when New Mexico was incorporated into the United States as a territory. As a result, the land that the settlers of New Mexico had once depended on as an essential part of their survival strategy was removed from their free use.²⁷ Whereas Spanish civil law emphasized the preservation of community, the Anglo-American legal system that superseded it emphasized individualism. Gradually, the right to graze stock on what had once been communal land became a privilege, eventually obtained only by the purchase of grazing permits, while ownership of former communal land could now be obtained only through a legal process dictated by the laws of the new government.

Homesteading to Regain Common Land

The Homestead Act of 1862 and its successor legislation provided one avenue to ownership of pieces of what once had been community land grants. Research done by Alvar Carlson, author of the first systematic study of northern New Mexico’s homesteading patterns, indicates that many northern New Mexico Hispanics used the provisions of the Homestead Act to regain their lands. In his 1990 analysis of homestead claims, Carlson notes that Hispanics, although often patenting smaller claims than Anglo newcomers, received the majority of patents and had the highest success rates in the proving-up process. Furthermore, local Hispanics, fully familiar with local terrain, often selected the best lands.²⁸ The transition from a survival strategy that relied on the free use of common land to one dependent on private ownership effected major changes in the cultural and social practices of Hispanic communities. As Carlson noted, Hispanics “had to adapt to a dispersed settlement pattern that necessitated their residing on relatively large land units, mostly without irrigable acreage and separated from nearby neighbors.”²⁹ In this regard, the situation of homesteaders in northern New Mexico was similar to that of homesteaders nationwide.

Richard Nostrand, in his 1992 study of New Mexico villages, points out yet another drawback to homesteading as it evolved in northern New Mexico: it complicated access to, and use of, public land for raising stock. The practice of homesteading on scattered land tracts within the former common land limited access to public lands that fellow villagers still used for stock. Stock-raising practices were further limited by the checkerboard patterns that arose from homesteading. The discontinuous nature of the homestead claims resulted in small areas of remaining public land that were unsuitable for ranching and grazing.³⁰

It was within this regional setting, then, that homesteading on the Pajarito Plateau took place and evolved.



Chapter 3

Homesteading on the Pajarito Plateau



Overview

Formal homesteading on the Pajarito Plateau began in the late 1880s when, in 1887, Juan Luis Garcia filed the plateau's first successful homestead application (one that led to a "patent" or formal land title).³¹ Plateau homesteaders filed the greatest number of claims from 1911 to 1917, and, just as occurred on the national level, claim applications peaked in 1913.³² By the late 1930s, thirty-six individuals had patented claims under the terms of the Homestead Act or related land legislation.* (Two others, for whom records are incomplete, apparently sold their claims before 1942.) During the homesteading years, families used the Pajarito Plateau for seasonal farming, ranching, and resource gathering. Many of these dry-land farmers—primarily Hispanic-Americans from the nearby Rio Grande Valley settlements of San Ildefonso, Pojoaque, El Rancho, and Española—did not live on their claims year-round, as was the case elsewhere in the country. Typically, they worked on their patented lands during the spring and summer months while retaining their permanent homes in the valley and living there the rest of

* A. J. Connell and William Moses received patents under the "in-lieu" process and were not required to abide by the residency requirement that the other Pajarito Plateau homesteaders had to follow. The "in-lieu" process, enacted by Congress on June 4, 1897, allowed an owner to relinquish (to the government) a tract of land that was located within a public forest reservation. The owner could then select, "in lieu thereof," another tract of land open to settlement, not exceeding the area of the original claim or patent. The exchange was based on the appraised value of the land rather than its area. Thus, Connell obtained only 40 acres on the plateau in exchange for his 160 acres in the Pecos National Forest.

the year. Most of the Hispanic families on the plateau were related by birth or marriage; in some cases, family homesteads were adjoining or located in close proximity to one another. (Notable exceptions to this pattern included the establishment of two large Anglo ranches: the Anchor Ranch and the Los Alamos Ranch School.) This mainly seasonal and loosely communal way of living came to an abrupt end in late 1942 when the U.S. government appropriated the plateau for its secret atom-bomb project.

Topography of the Pajarito Plateau

The Pajarito Plateau lies on the edge of the Jemez Mountains. A series of large volcanic eruptions produced the ash flows that form the plateau, heavily eroded over millennia into a series of mesas separated by canyons. Elevations range from 5,500 feet at the eastern edge of the plateau, along the Rio Grande Valley, to above 10,000 feet in the Sierra de los Valles of the Jemez Mountains.³³ Homesteaders settled between Santa Clara Canyon at the north end of the plateau and the Ramón Vigil Grant to the south, the only area on the plateau subject to entry. Many of the homestead claims on the Pajarito Plateau were well under the allowable acreage limits. This situation was probably more a function of the topography of the region than anything else, for the only land suitable for farming was located on the narrow mesa (tableland) tops and in wide canyon bottoms.

Because of the plateau's high altitudes, the growing season is relatively short—from 120 to 160 days. Further, there are few sources of perennial water available; homesteaders had to depend on runoff from winter snows and summer thundershowers to water their crops.³⁴



Figure 1. Aerial view of Los Alamos and a major portion of the Pajarito Plateau, looking west toward the Jemez Mountains. The majority of the plateau homesteads were on the land now covered by the townsite and its surrounding neighborhoods. “Pajarito” means “little bird” in Spanish. (Los Alamos National Laboratory)

The Climate

Homesteaders had to cope with a harsh, semiarid climate on the Pajarito Plateau. High summer temperatures average around 80° Fahrenheit, although evenings are always cool. Winters are usually snowy and cold, sometimes dropping below zero degrees Fahrenheit. Annual precipitation in the vicinity of Los Alamos ranges from 13 to 18 inches; at higher altitudes, it ranges from 20 to 30 inches, with much of it occurring during summer thundershowers in July and August.³⁵

Plant and Animal Communities

Homesteaders encountered a variety of plant and animal communities on the Pajarito Plateau. The higher elevations, rising above 10,000 feet, are characterized by spruce-fir forests and mixed conifer forests. Below them, forests of ponderosa pine descend from about 7,800 feet in elevation to as low as 6,300 feet; it is in this zone that most homestead claims were made. Lower in elevation lie piñon-juniper woodland and juniper savanna.³⁶



Figure 2. Aerial photograph of Los Alamos in 1935 showing the cleared land areas patented for dry-land farming under the Homestead Act and related land legislation. The present townsite of Los Alamos is in the center of the photograph. (National Archives and Record Service)

Throughout these ecological zones roam numerous animals. Homesteaders had to watch out for mountain lions, bobcats, black bears, coyotes, and rattlesnakes. To supplement their diet, homesteaders could hunt mule deer, turkeys, and cottontails. (Elk were extirpated from the plateau by 1900 and not reintroduced until the 1950s.)³⁷ The plateau also provided some edible resources, such as piñon nuts and herbs used medicinally.



Figure 3. New Mexico supported a mountain-lion bounty program until 1923. Here, in an undated photograph, members of two Pajarito Plateau families pose with C. B. Ruggles (far left), a professional hunter, and a trophy mountain lion taken near Pajarito Lodge in Pajarito Canyon. Standing behind Ruggles are Peggy Pond (Church), her mother Hazel Pond (white hat), and her brother, Ashley Pond III. In the black hat is Cassy Brook, wife of H. H. Brook, standing behind her young son, Frank Brown. The young girl in a black hat is a visitor, Theiline McGee; the man behind her is unidentified. Kneeling is Dorothy Pond; at right, holding the family dog, is Ashley Pond. (Los Alamos Historical Society)

Land-Use History

Although a critical resource base for centuries, the plateau, characterized as it is by a rugged topography and challenging climate, has always been marginal land.³⁸ It served first as an occasional hunting ground for Paleoindians almost 10,000 years before the present era; next, and much more recently, as a home for Ancestral Pueblo peoples from about the 1150s. They abandoned the plateau around 1600, possibly because of drought. The Spanish Colonial and Territorial periods (about 1600–1900), so well represented in other areas of New Mexico, are rarely associated with the history of the plateau. The Spanish do not make note of the Pajarito Plateau in their

journals after their arrival in 1598, nor do archaeologists find evidence of European use in the area.³⁹ During the years that the Spanish colonized the state, however, the plateau acted as a buffer area between Spanish settlements along the Rio Grande and Navajo, Apache, and Ute nomadic groups. Grazing and seasonal use of the plateau during this time is highly probable.⁴⁰ There were Spanish land grants south of Frijoles Canyon, and Hispanics occupied Frijoles Canyon itself into the late 1800s.

In 1742, the viceroy of Spain granted a portion of the plateau to Pedro Sánchez. (The grant is now called the Ramón Vigil Grant after a later owner.) Permanent activity on the remaining portion of the plateau—the area that eventually was opened to homesteading between Santa Clara Canyon and the Ramón Vigil Grant—began just over 100 years later, after the annexation of New Mexico by the United States in 1846. At least one road crossed the area before 1851 to allow access to extensive grasslands in the Jemez Mountains. Sheep and cattle grazing were common in the area by the mid 1800s.⁴¹

By the last half of the nineteenth century, New Mexico's relative isolation began to end.* With the coming of the railroad in 1880, the state entered more fully into the national economy. Exploitation of the Pajarito Plateau increased dramatically for sheep and cattle grazing, cash cropping, and lumbering. Roads were cut up the narrow, steep-walled canyons of the plateau, allowing access through the difficult terrain.⁴² The result was an influx of both seasonal and some year-round use of the mesas and canyons by local Hispanic farmers and ranchers and by Euro-American entrepreneurs. Lumbermen, archaeologists, and tourists began to descend upon the plateau in addition to the homesteader families discussed herein.⁴³

* To read more about the use of the plateau by nonhomesteaders from the 1880s to the 1940s, see Chambers and Aldrich 1999, Rothman 1992, and Wirth and Aldrich 2003.

The Coming of the Railroad

The Denver & Rio Grande (D&RG) “Chili Line,” a narrow-gauge train, ran 125.6 miles from Antonito, Colorado, to Santa Fe, New Mexico. The track was completed as far as Española on Dec. 31, 1880. The extension into Santa Fe was completed in January 1887. The Chili Line brought supplies for local residents and for the Los Alamos Ranch School, which then trucked the deliveries up to the

plateau. Some children of homesteader families recall the excitement of taking the Chili Line into Santa Fe.

Otowi Station was built when the new road bridge was completed across the Rio Grande at Otowi Crossing in 1924. An earlier depot existed at Buckman Crossing a mile or so south from 1899 until replaced by Otowi Station.



Figure 4. In this picture of Otowi Station taken from the west side of the Rio Grande, one of the D&RG locomotives has pulled in from the direction of Buckman and is apparently unloading cargo. A Ranch School truck backed up by the boxcar appears to be receiving shipping. The tracks of the D&RG ran on the west side of the Rio Grande from Española south to Otowi, then crossed the river and ran along the east bank to Buckman (leaving the river there to go on to Santa Fe). Note that the boxcar/station is actually sitting between two sets of tracks, one on each side of it. Two sets of tracks allowed cars to be disconnected and left or allowed one train to wait while another passed. (Los Alamos Historical Society)



Figure 5. In 1928, A. J. Connell, director of the Los Alamos Ranch School, hired Edith Warner as station mistress at Otowi Station. She had come to New Mexico from Pennsylvania in 1922 for her health and eventually had settled on ancestral land of San Ildefonso Pueblo near the river. Her job was to see that the freight was unloaded and watched over until a truck came down the steep, switchbacked road from Los Alamos three times a week to pick up supplies. (Los Alamos Historical Society)



Figure 6. Chester Nelson, Los Alamos Ranch School employee from 1920 to 1922, poses at the Otowi railroad station. The Chili Line existed for almost the entire period of the Homestead Era, from 1887 to 1941; increased competition from road transportation caused its demise. (Los Alamos Historical Society)



Cattlemen

In the 1880s, during the era when the railroad arrived in New Mexico, W. C. Bishop, a cattleman from Texas, leased the Ramón Vigil Grant after the Texas legislature limited the use of badly overgrazed rangeland in West Texas. Bishop and his cowhands, who brought more than 3,000 head of cattle to the plateau, built their headquarters in the lower section of Pajarito Canyon.

Figure 7. Cattle drive over Sawyer Mesa during the Homestead Era. (Los Alamos Historical Society)

Lumbermen

Henry S. Buckman, a lumberman originally from Oregon, began exploiting the Ramón Vigil Grant commercially for timber in 1898. He built the first railroad depot along the Rio Grande to serve the Pajarito Plateau, naming the location for himself, and carved out a road from the depot to a sawmill he built on the plateau.

After Buckman left New Mexico in 1902, a series of entrepreneurs established small lumbering operations on the Pajarito Plateau. Homesteaders over the years report working at many local mills: the Ruufe, Haynie, Sawyer, McCurdy, Thompson, Hughes, and Huffacker mills. These small operators moved their milling equipment over the landscape, setting up operations where water was available for their steam engines and timber was close at hand.



Figure 8. Lumbering in the Jemez Mountains, 1914. The Denver & Rio Grande railroad company, which built the narrow-gauge "Chili Line," used the timber resources of the Pajarito Plateau for replacement railroad ties. (Los Alamos Historical Society)



Figure 9. Ten mounted students from the Los Alamos Ranch School pose at the site of the old Buckman sawmill, May 1919. The Buckman "set," as it was called, was near present-day S-Site at Los Alamos National Laboratory. (Los Alamos Historical Society)



Figure 10. Buckman, New Mexico. The lumber "town" of Buckman was established in 1899 on the southeast side of the Rio Grande. This view looks west, across the river towards Mortandad Canyon and the Jemez Mountains. The road Buckman built to the Pajarito Plateau cuts a slash across the mesas at the right. (Los Alamos Historical Society)



Figure 11. Riders from the Los Alamos Ranch School trot into Buckman in the early 1920s, scattering free-range chickens. (Los Alamos Historical Society)



Figure 12. Visitors at the Buckman set. (Los Alamos Historical Society)



Figure 13: A photographer (left) captures the view of the Buckman Road in this undated photo. (Los Alamos Historical Society)



Figure 14. Unidentified residents at the Buckman post office. Although Buckman left the area by 1902, the town he founded lasted into the early 1940s. The post office at Buckman served area residents until the early 1920s, when the railroad depot was moved to Otowi Crossing. (Los Alamos Historical Society)



Figure 15. Buckman served as a railroad stop for the Chili Line after 1899. Timber and livestock from the Pajarito Plateau were loaded onto the train from the siding here, as well as beans grown at some of the larger farms on the plateau for commercial sale. After 1917, Buckman Station was the drop-off point for boys enrolled at the Los Alamos Ranch School on the Pajarito Plateau. The depot at Buckman was abandoned between 1921 and 1924, replaced by a station built just upriver next to the new road bridge at Otowi Crossing. (Los Alamos Historical Society)



Figure 16. The original caption for this photo reads, "McCurdy sawmill—Pine Spring. Mr. McCurdy in foreground. The man extreme left is Cal Loag? Loge? A lumberjack who skidded logs with a very large ox. His claim to fame however rested on his ability to swear and being heard for long distances. He skidded in the winter months as it was easier on snow. A horse could not cope with the steep hills but the ox could." (Los Alamos Historical Society)

Archaeologists, Preservationists, and Tourists

Adolph Bandelier was led to the prehistoric ruins in Frijoles Canyon in 1880 by a Pueblo guide, thus possibly, according to legend, becoming the first tourist or outsider to see the evidence of the ancient culture that once thrived there. Well-established horse trails already led to Frijoles Canyon, where a Hispanic family was living at the time. Although Bandelier did not have a university degree, his archaeological and ethnological studies ultimately earned his work the respect of the academic community. Bandelier's subsequent explorations of prehistoric Southwestern sites, and his publications describing them, inspired not only public interest in these sites, including those on the Pajarito Plateau, but triggered attempts by anthropologists, ethnologists, and archaeologists to preserve them from increasing depredations by careless visitors and pothunters. A preservation effort specific to the Pajarito Plateau was spearheaded by Edgar L. Hewitt, who fought, beginning at the end of the nineteenth century, to protect its ruins. His attempt to create a national archaeological park ultimately failed by 1906, although his efforts did result in a law passed in 1905, the American Antiquities Act, to protect American archaeological ruins. That act allows the president of the United States to create national monuments. Thus, in 1916, Hewitt's efforts culminated in the creation of Bandelier National Monument.⁴⁴

Even before the creation of the national monument, the plateau had been sought out by tourists attracted by its dramatic landscape and its archaeological ruins. By the late 1910s and the early 1920s, commercial tour organizations were bringing tourists to the area, and tourist numbers increased when the Fred Harvey Company began its Indian Detours program in 1926.

The Ten Elders Ranch in Frijoles Canyon, established by Judge A. J. Abbott in 1907, soon became a resort for adventurous persons willing to brave the narrow, winding

trail down to the canyon floor. In 1925, George and Evelyn Frey established the Frijoles Canyon Lodge in the monument. By the end of the 1920s, more than 4,000 visitors a year were drawn to Bandelier by Fred Harvey's Indian Detours and the Frey's Frijoles Canyon Lodge.

Figure 17. By 1925, the automobile was beginning to augment rail transport as a way to give tourists a closer experience of the Southwest. Young women, trained by novelist and historian Erna Fergusson in the history, archaeology, and culture of the Southwest, personally guided tourists on the famous Fred Harvey Indian Detours tours. Here, the Indian Detours bus awaits train passengers arriving at Lamy, near Santa Fe. (Los Alamos Historical Society; Robert Clarkson, State Records Center and Archives, 404 Montezuma, Santa Fe, New Mexico, #37709)



Figure 18. Early tourists to the Pajarito Plateau were fascinated by its archaeological ruins. Tourism to New Mexico was systematically promoted by the Santa Fe Railway beginning in the late 1890s, and the effort to include the plateau in a national archaeological park sparked additional interest. (Los Alamos Historical Society)



Figure 19. Indian Detours took tourists to Santa Fe and to Old Town in Albuquerque as well as to pueblos. Here, an Indian Detours driver, tour guide, and tourists pose with Pueblo Indians in front of Santa Fe's art museum. (Los Alamos Historical Society; George Kennedy Collection, State Records Center and Archives, 404 Montezuma, Santa Fe, New Mexico, #39595)

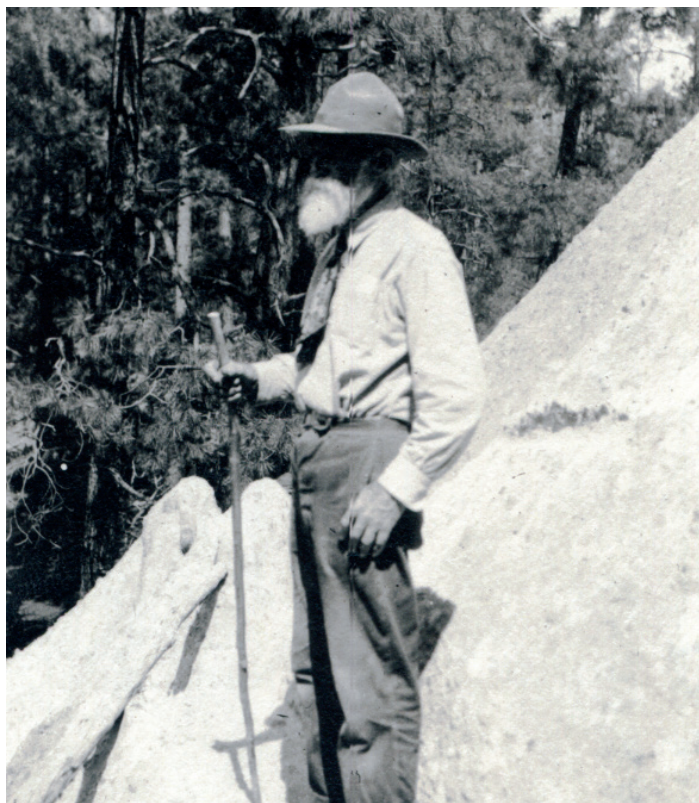


Figure 20. Judge A. J. Abbott, June 12, 1919. In 1907, Judge A. J. Abbott obtained a special-use permit for "resort purposes" to accommodate tourists and archaeology crews at his Ten Elders Ranch in Frijoles Canyon. (Los Alamos Historical Society)



Figure 21. Mrs. Abbott at the Ten Elders Ranch and Judge Abbott in the background. According to the original caption for this photo, Judge Abbott was "distinguishable by his Charles Evans Hughes beard and moustache." Mrs. Abbott acted as hostess to visitors during the Abbotts' tenure in Frijoles Canyon. The Abbotts built not only a house and barns but also rented tents to campers. The original caption identifies the man to Mrs. Abbott's right as "a Mr. Hopkins, long-time friend of Ashley Pond, a financier reportedly heading a group backing Pond in his Pajarito Lodge and Ranch School ventures. Hopkins was a frequent visitor to Pajarito Lodge and environs." (Los Alamos Historical Society)



Figure 22. Ten Elders Ranch in Frijoles Canyon. The extensive vegetable gardens and an orchard were immediately adjacent to an ancient pueblo. Its ruins, a circle of collapsed rocks, lie to the left of the cultivated areas. (Los Alamos Historical Society)



Figure 23. The Abbotts tour visitors along the rim of Frijoles Canyon. Ida Abbott can be identified by her pointed hat; Judge Abbott by his white beard. H. H. Brook stands to the left in the bottom photo, taken about 1915; others are unidentified. This particular outing was interrupted by car trouble, not an uncommon experience in those days. In the top photo, H. H. Brook works on straightening a bent steering rod. (Los Alamos Historical Society)

The Pajarito Club

During this same era of burgeoning interest in the Pajarito Plateau, affluent easterners purchased the Ramón Vigil Grant and planned a private outdoor resort there. That rustic resort, the Pajarito Club, had been built in Pajarito Canyon in 1914 and had been managed, at least until 1916, by Ashley Pond, who would later go on to found the Los Alamos Ranch School.



Figure 24. The Pajarito Club in Pajarito Canyon. The Pajarito Club was conceived by its eastern owners as a rustic retreat for wealthy businessmen and was to be managed by Ashley Pond, a part owner. The site had been the headquarters of the unsuccessful Ramón Land and Lumber Company, of which H. H. Brook was a partner. (Los Alamos Historical Society)



Figure 25. Main house at the Pajarito Club. Ashley Pond renovated the old lumber-company headquarters, a two-story corrugated metal building, into a home for his family and the main house of the Pajarito Club. Eventually he invited H. H. Brook and his wife Katherine (Cassy) to serve as general manager and hostess, positions that the couple accepted to supplement the income of their Los Alamos Ranch. (Los Alamos Historical Society)



Figure 26. Besides renovating the main house, Pond built small log cabins for the use of the eastern partners and their guests. Among those who ventured to this isolated location were a university trustee, the editor of an eastern newspaper, writers for national magazines, artists, a financier, two opera singers, and a historian. (Los Alamos Historical Society)



Figure 27. The interior (left) and exterior (right) of Ashley Pond's "office cabin" at the Pajarito Club. (Los Alamos Historical Society)



Figure 28. In this interior photograph of the main house of the Pajarito Club, Ashley Pond is sitting on the floor at right; Cassy and Harold Brook are seated behind him. Others are unidentified. (Los Alamos Historical Society)



Figure 29. For a short time, the Pond children had the run of Pajarito Canyon. The eastern partners bought out Ashley Pond in 1916, however, and two months later Pond partnered with H. H. Brook to start a boys' school at Brook's Los Alamos Ranch. (Los Alamos Historical Society)



Figure 30. Houndsmen Jack Thompson, Albert Pickens, and Ben Lilly. Houndsmen were active during the era when predators such as grizzlies, black bears, and cougars were considered pests. The legendary Ben Lilly was a major contributor to the near extinction of these animals. Later in his life, he provided specimens of animals and his observations of their behavior in the wild to institutions such as the Smithsonian. (Los Alamos Historical Society)

Mountain Men and Lion Hunters

A more rugged type of visitor to the Pajarito Plateau was Ben Lilly, a mountain man, lion hunter, and houndsman characterized by Theodore Roosevelt as “indifferent to fatigue and hardship.” Considered by some the most famous houndsman in American history, he pursued predators such as grizzlies, black bears, and cougars with a pack of hounds for his living. Lilly arrived in southwest New Mexico about 1911 and spent part of his hunting career ridding the Pajarito Plateau of predators.⁴⁵

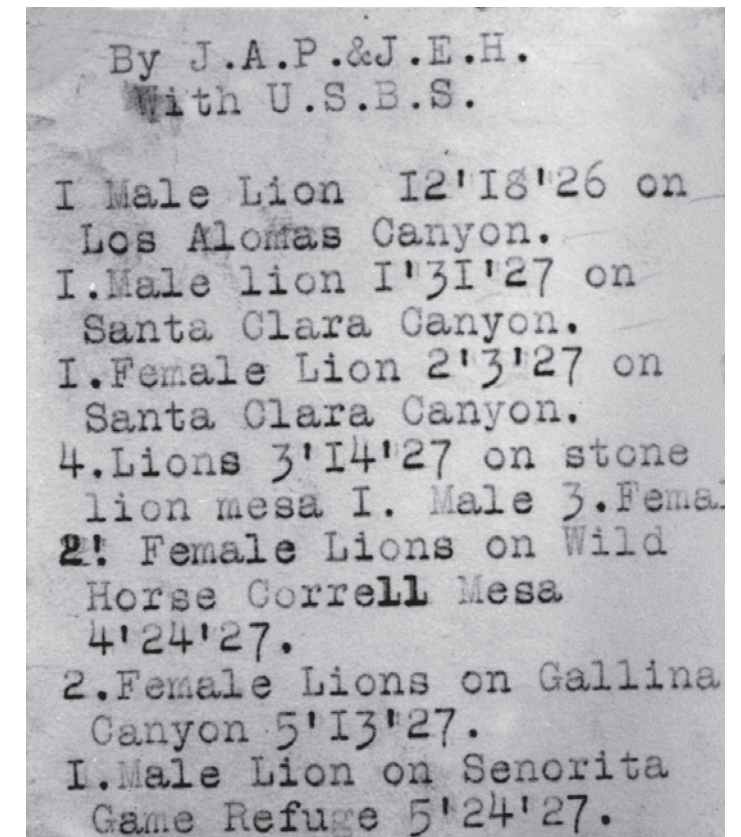


Figure 31. The list of mountain lions killed by Albert Pickens and someone with the initials JEH between December 18 and 19, 1926, and June 30, 1927, while hunting for the U.S. Biological Service (forerunner of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service). (Los Alamos Historical Society)



Figure 32. Jack Thompson, Ben Lilly, Walter Hoskiss, and J. Stokely Ligon. The 33-caliber Winchester rifle Lilly is holding had no trigger and didn't always fire properly. Lilly called it his "snappin' 33." Lilly carried his entire camp equipment on his belt and, he claimed, never slept in a bed. (Los Alamos Historical Society)

The Ramón Vigil Grant

Although lands within the Ramón Vigil Grant were not open for homestead entry, the ownership and management of the grant played a role in the history of the plateau.

Like other former Spanish and Mexican land grants in New Mexico, the Ramón Vigil Grant has had a history rife with dispute and legal battles. The Spanish government originally granted the land to Pedro Sánchez in 1742. The boundaries of the grant included the Rio Grande to the east and the Jemez Mountains to the west and covered much of the central part of the Pajarito Plateau. In 1860, the U.S. Congress awarded clear title to the grant to Ramón Vigil, who purchased eight out of eleven hereditary interests in the property from a Sánchez heir. In 1879, Vigil sold his claim to Padre Tomas de Aquinas Hayes for \$4,000. Five years later, in 1884, Hayes sold the grant to Midwesterners Winfield Smith and Edward Sheldon for \$100,000. In 1885, Sheldon sold his interest to George Fletcher of Detroit.⁴⁶

A dispute arose around the turn of the century with the first profitable use of the grant area. (As mentioned earlier, Henry S. Buckman, a lumberman, had leased the grant in 1898 to cut and process timber; he left New Mexico in 1902).⁴⁷ A group representing the remaining hereditary interests descending from Pedro Sánchez, the original Spanish grantee, filed suit against the grant's

Midwestern owners, citing laws of inheritance. At the conclusion of the case in 1908, the judge ruled in favor of the defendants because only they had paid property taxes on the land.⁴⁸ Smith and Fletcher had both died; their estates began looking for a buyer for the grant. They found one in the Ramón Land and Lumber Company, formed by businessmen including H. H. Brook and his fellow homesteader Robert McDougall. The new owners set up a mill in Pajarito Canyon, but by 1910 their lumber company had run into financial difficulties.⁴⁹ It eventually defaulted on its contract some time around 1911.

The Ramón Vigil Grant was next purchased, as discussed earlier, by a group of Detroit businessmen in partnership with Ashley Pond in 1914. That Pond-managed venture, the private outdoor club known as the Pajarito Club, sold out to sheepman Frank Bond after a few years, a victim of mismanagement, drought, and the effects of World War I on the economy. Frank Bond used the grant land he purchased as a livestock way-station for cattle and sheep being herded to grazing areas in the Jemez Mountains. Bond's ownership of the Ramón Vigil Grant continued until 1934, when he sold the land to the Soil Conservation Service, a government reclamation project born of the Depression.⁵⁰

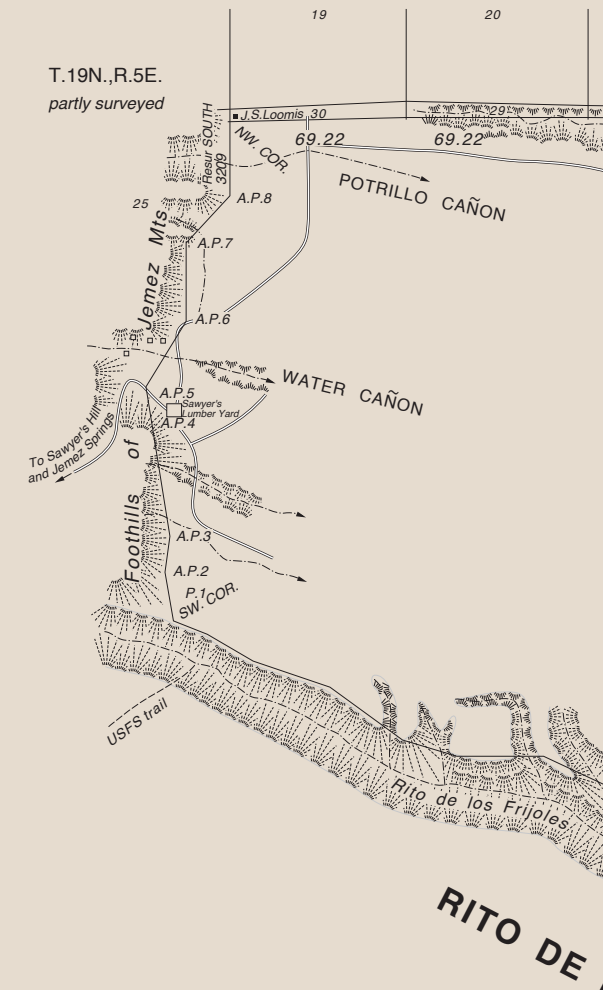
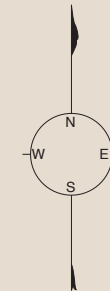


Figure 33. The Ramón Vigil Grant occupied the heart of the Pajarito Plateau. The present-day community of Los Alamos lies beyond its northern boundary. The frontispiece map shows the relationship of the grant to the Pajarito Plateau. (Map by William B. Douglass, U.S. Surveyor; redrawn by Andrea Kron)

Scale: 60 chs to 1 in
SAN ILDEFONSO



*I hereby certify that this plat of the restorative survey of
is strictly conformable to the field notes thereof, which have
been proved, and are on file in this office.
U.S. Surveyor General's Office
Santa Fe, N. Mex., April 9, 1915.*

Chapter 3: Homesteading on the Pajarito Plateau | 23

The Homesteading Era on the Pajarito Plateau

The homesteading period (1887–1942) was an outgrowth of an earlier undocumented use of the plateau by local Hispanics for cattle grazing and farming activities. Land ownership caused no change to the Iberian custom of seasonal migration up to the plateau homesteads during the growing season and back to the valley during the winter months. Homesteaders continued to practice self-sufficient subsistence living as it had been practiced in northern New Mexico since the coming of the Spanish, building their own homes, growing their own food, existing almost entirely without access to markets. The pattern changed only by its adaptation to new legislation that required ownership as a prerequisite for using the land. Turning the new rules into an opportunity, homesteaders patented the very lands they had used historically for grazing and farming. Ownership of this land gave them the means to augment their income by growing cash crops, to feed their stock during the summer months, and to take advantage of the resources the plateau offered in terms of lumber, game, and wild edible plants. Homesteading proved to be an especially critical safety net during the Depression years, when cash jobs were scarce.

Many of the plateau homesteaders were native New Mexicans and had established local residences before making entry on the land.⁵¹ To claim land on the Pajarito Plateau, they followed the procedures set out in the Homestead Act. The claims that the homesteaders carved out on the Pajarito Plateau were not the neat squares created by the grid system across the Midwest. Instead, faced with the plateau's rugged topography, their claims most often followed the natural contours of the land.⁵²

The moment of truth came when homesteaders had to prove that they had fulfilled the conditions that would allow them to take legal possession of their claim. The “proving-up” process required homesteaders to publish notices of final proof in local newspapers including the *Santa Fe New Mexican*, the *Eagle*, and *La Luz*. This public notification allowed interested parties to submit comments challenging



Figure 34. Forest Service Ranger James Leese (left) and unidentified companion. In the early days of the Forest Service, rangers had to pass tests assessing their knowledge of (for example) timber and sawmill operations, the stock industry, the township-and-range system, and what constituted a valid homestead claim. They also had to demonstrate that they could saddle, bridle, and pack a horse; identify cattle brands and marketable trees; estimate distances, the size of a cord of wood, and the amount of food to pack for a two-week trip; fight a fire; and run a compass line around a designated area.⁵³ (Los Alamos Historical Society)

or confirming a claimant's declaration of proof. After the passage of the Forest Homestead Act of 1906, forest rangers annually investigated homestead claims to confirm the validity of a homesteader's final-proof documentation. (Before the 1906 act was passed, local witnesses attested to homesteaders' declarations that they had fulfilled the requirements of the Homestead Act of 1862.) Rangers recommended hearings when claims did not appear to comply with the provisions of the various homestead acts.

Even though they were tasked with monitoring claims to ensure that homesteaders were complying with the law, rangers were not unsympathetic to the difficulties homesteaders faced. One name that stands out is that



Figure 35. Frank E. Andrews, shown here, was for many years the supervisor of the Santa Fe National Forest. The national forest system began with the Forest Reserve Act of 1891, which allowed the president of the United States to set aside forest reserves on timber-covered areas of the public domain. The Santa Fe National Forest was established in 1915 with the amalgamation of the Jemez and Pecos National Forests. (U.S. Forest Service)

of Forest Ranger Fred Plomteaux from the Santa Clara (later Pajarito) District office located in Española. Experience had honed his instinct for behaviors that suggested an attempt to exploit the law, yet that same instinct led him to recognize when claimants were making serious good-faith efforts to fulfill the required conditions, even if they had not met them completely.

Some rangers had more than Forest Service ties to the plateau. For example, James (Jim) Leese, who was a forest ranger between 1911 and 1913, later worked as a ranch foreman for H. H. Brook. A. J. Connell was a former forest ranger turned plateau landowner, and Dick (Richard)



Figure 36. During the winter of 1924, the Pine Spring Ranger Station was the site of one of the annual meetings held for the rangers of the Jemez National Forest. (U.S. Forest Service)

Pfaffle and his wife Carol briefly ran the former Pajarito Club for lessee Nat Stern from 1917 to early spring 1918, when it was still owned by the Detroit partners.⁵⁴

The biggest obstacle for both the homesteader and the investigating ranger was the Homestead Act's requirement for permanent residency. Writing in a forest report, Jemez Forest Ranger Dick Pfaffle questioned whether a claimant really intended to establish a permanent residence:

Claim does not have the appearance of a permanent home, I believe claimant has and expects to maintain his home in Ildefonso, but expects to farm and raise what feed he can on claim in connection with his cattle he runs near his claim. The buildings have a permanent appearance but one could not say they were habitable during the winter months without considerable repairing. Lack of machinery and household goods give one the impression that it is not a permanent home.⁵⁵



Figure 37. The old road to Los Alamos (the Buckman Road) about 1916. (Los Alamos Historical Society)

Most reviews, however, concluded with a “no protest” decision from the forest administrators, even if the decision was contrary to the forest ranger's recommendation.

Transportation to the Plateau

Not only did the homesteaders on the Pajarito Plateau have to improve their claims, they also had to build roads—wagon roads—to get to the plateau. Forest Service maps, which were issued annually starting in 1913, show that a well-established road network linking the plateau to the valley already existed by that year. The principal roads came up Rendija, Bayo, and Pajarito canyons—homesteaders did not attempt to build a wagon road up

the formidable Pueblo Canyon. There was some travel up through the neighboring canyon to the south, Los Alamos Canyon, but that route was abandoned after the Los Alamos Ranch School built its road up the cliff.⁵⁶

The first challenge, however, for most people from the valley headed for the Pajarito Plateau was to get their wagons across the Rio Grande. Initially, wagons crossed the Rio Grande at a ford at San Ildefonso. According to San Ildefonso Pueblo elders, this gravel crossing was used when the Rio was low. Gravel was dumped into the river to provide a firmer foundation for the wagons that then forded the river.⁵⁷ Buckman Crossing was another location where homesteaders could cross the Rio, although it was located farther south along the river. The Buckman bridge

was a precarious affair of planks and had to be rebuilt several times. This bridge was eventually replaced by the suspension bridge at Otowi, built between 1921 and 1924, which could accommodate automobile traffic.⁵⁸

After the river was negotiated came the long haul up to the plateau. Teams of horses had to pull wagons heavily loaded with supplies, tools, household goods, seed, and perhaps an entire family. It was not an easy task. The elevation gain between the Rio Grande and White Rock is 700 feet, while the homesteads on the Pajarito Plateau lie almost 2,000 feet above the communities settled along the banks of the Rio Grande. One descendant of a homesteader recalls a story his grandfather told him:

He would tell us that one time they were coming up the mountain when the wagon was full of food for the family and seed to do the year's planting. The horses were pulling with all that they had and they just couldn't pull any more. My grandmother and my aunt were in the wagon and he had to get them down and sit them down on the side of the road and unload the wagon so the horses could make it up the steep hill. After he finished unloading, he led the horses and wagon out and then took my grandmother and her daughter and picked them up. Then began to haul what he had emptied and loaded upon the wagon once again.⁵⁹

The wagon roads built by the homesteaders formed a transportation network vital to their needs. They used these narrow, one-lane tracks to migrate up to the plateau each March, to access water sources, to visit their plateau neighbors, to haul products to market back down in the valley, to herd stock to grazing land, and to return to their winter homes each November. Building the wagon roads required hard labor. One of the two homestead roads up Bayo Canyon, for example, ascends from the canyon floor at a grade of 12 percent to 16 percent. Occasionally, a short section could be a steep 18 percent grade. Sometimes

homesteaders had to build rock embankments to shore up the outer edge of a road; sometimes they had to excavate an inside wall to allow their wagon to pass by. Such excavations could extend as high as 9 or 10 feet.⁶⁰

Local Homesteading: The 'Seasonal Round'

Homesteading on the Pajarito Plateau was a seasonal survival strategy used by Hispanics to supplement the year-round subsistence living they practiced on their valley farms. A subsistence economy is a barter economy, one in which people raise most of their own food, make most of their clothing and material goods, and trade with other families or with the larger community for food or articles they cannot produce themselves. Cash is little needed and little used. Homesteaders on the plateau who had received title to their land needed cash primarily for paying the annual property tax.

During the early twentieth century, the United States was making a rapid transition away from the agricultural way of life experienced by most Hispanics living in northern New Mexico. Bartering as an economic strategy was quickly being replaced by a cash economy, and staking a claim on the plateau offered a way for farmers to increase their production of food, not only for their own use but to sell for cash.



Figure 38. This early plateau road led to Frijoles Canyon, now part of Bandelier National Monument, between about 1910 and 1925. (George Lytle Beam, Denver Public Library, Western History Collection, GB-7672)



Figure 39. During the early years of automobile traffic on the Pajarito Plateau, barrels of water were installed along some roads (shown here: Buckman Road to Los Alamos through Mortandad Canyon) to aid motorists coping with overheated engines. (Los Alamos Historical Society)

Figure 41. Early transportation on the Pajarito Plateau (about 1932). Sometimes horseless carriages needed the application of real horsepower to negotiate the plateau's steep or muddy roads. A team of two horses pulls an automobile up a sandy road identified as the road to the Tyuonyi ruin in Bandelier's Frijoles Canyon. (Horace Swartley Paley, Denver Public Library, Western History Collection, P-1234)

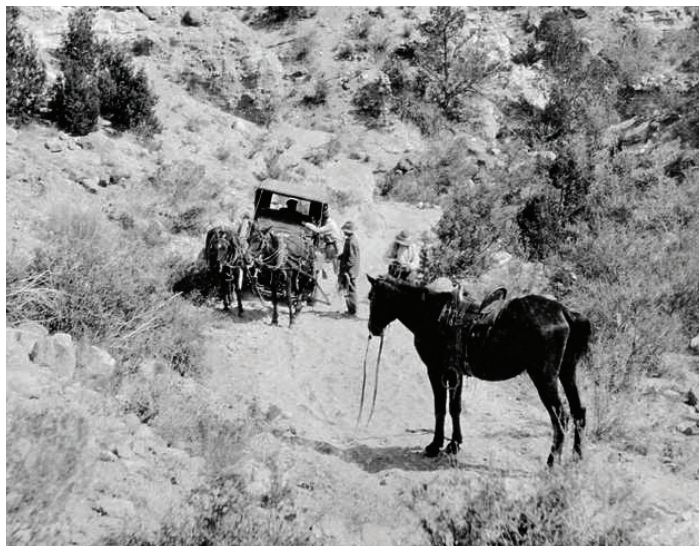


Figure 40. Historic road rockwork above Rendija Canyon. Settlement patterns imply that Rendija Canyon was the most likely route onto the plateau for the earliest homesteaders between Rendija and Pueblo Canyons. (Laurence Campbell collection, Los Alamos Historical Society)



Figure 42. The cliffs of Los Alamos Canyon overlook this early plateau road in 1915. The present-day parking lot at the Tsankawi unit of Bandelier National Monument is located just to the right of this road. This road connected the Los Alamos homestead roads to the Buckman Road in White Rock Canyon. (Horace Swartley Paley, Denver Public Library, Western History Collection, P-1619)



Figure 43. Ranch School students make their way down the steep and narrow, original main road to Los Alamos.
(Los Alamos Historical Society)

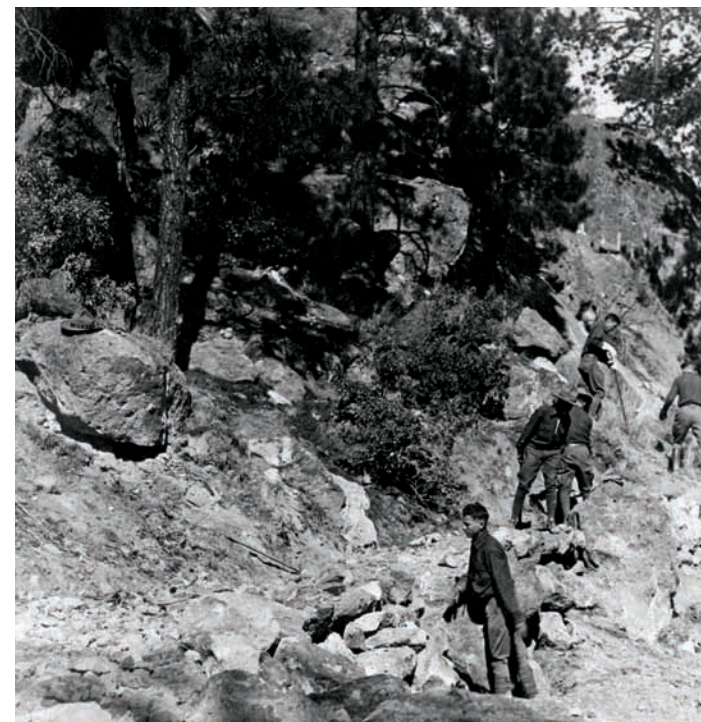


Figure 44. Trails as well as roads on the plateau needed to be constructed and maintained. Here, about 1920, boys from the Los Alamos Ranch School clear rocks from Deadman's Trail and maintain the stonework. (Los Alamos Historical Society)



Figure 45. The steepness of this grade (exact location unidentified) vividly conveys the effort it took early residents to reach the Pajarito Plateau. (Los Alamos Historical Society)



Figure 46. The original main road to Los Alamos challenged early automobile traffic. Large vehicles could not make the final, tight curve (compare this photo to photo on previous page) and had to back up the last section of the old dirt road. The Ranch School improved the road, bypassing the last switchback and extending it more gradually to the right, through the gap shown at the end of the mesa. (Los Alamos Historical Society)



Figure 47. The lumberman Henry S. Buckman built this bridge across the Rio Grande, as well as a sawmill and a train siding. The bridge was the primary crossing to the Pajarito Plateau until 1921, when a new road bridge was built a little farther north at Otowi Crossing. (Los Alamos Historical Society)



Figure 48. The Buckman bridge accommodated one-way traffic only. In this photo taken about 1914 or 1915, the original notation says, "Driver may be Ashley Pond." (Los Alamos Historical Society)



Figure 49. Once the Otowi suspension bridge was built (1921–1924), automobilists no longer had to rely on the makeshift Buckman plank bridge or attempt a precarious crossing on the railroad trestle when the train was not in sight. A new road led west from the bridge to the Pajarito Plateau, making Buckman's old lumber road to Los Alamos through Mortandad Canyon obsolete. Although the Otowi suspension bridge was bypassed in 1948 by a new steel truss bridge, the old suspension bridge was left in place as a convenient crossing for livestock and can still be seen. It holds the natural gas pipeline crossing the river. (Los Alamos National Laboratory)



Figure 50. Traveling to the Pajarito Plateau up Otowi Hill. The present-day Anderson Overlook is just off to the left.
(Los Alamos Historical Society)

To work their homestead claims, families first cleared the land and constructed fence lines along the boundaries of their property. They built cabins and other farm buildings out of locally available timber. Some supplemented their farming activities with small-scale cattle-ranching and sheep-herding ventures. Some raised barnyard animals, such as goats, pigs, rabbits, and chickens, and kept a cow for milk. Horses were the farmers' draft animals and the major source of power on the homesteads.

One homestead family, the Garcias, had a sawmill* and produced finished beams for use as vigas. Other families made use of the former common lands and nearby land-grant area to collect firewood. During the homestead era, the practice of communal bartering and harvesting was common. Local homesteaders also worked for the larger ranches on the plateau or for local lumber mills to supplement their income. Some hired themselves out farther afield as seasonal labor.⁶¹

* Plateau sawmills were portable and moved around to wherever timber harvesting was going on.

Descendants of the original homesteaders remember the seasonal round of activities associated with life on the Pajarito Plateau. As mentioned above, Hispanic homesteaders from the nearby Rio Grande Valley settlements of San Ildefonso, Buckman, Pojoaque, El Rancho, and Española came to the plateau during the spring and summer months.⁶² The homestead families lived in their permanent homes in the valley during the rest of the year.⁶³ Lydia Martínez, who lived on the plateau as a child, recalled in a 1992 interview that “just about everybody from the valley had a place up here. The Roybals, and the Sernas. Most people farmed up here because it was better, you could raise more than if you farmed off the Hill.”⁶⁴

Some families took several trips back and forth from the Rio Grande Valley to the plateau during planting, tending, and harvesting periods. Other families stayed on claims throughout the spring and summer months.⁶⁵ In the summer, Pajarito Plateau homesteaders also continued to farm their valley lands where crops could be irrigated with water from the Rio Grande. Tony Borrego, a grandson of Juan Luis Garcia (the plateau's first homesteader), recalled that because homestead families were large, they could assign part of the family to stay in the valley to look after the irrigated fields.⁶⁶ Valley farmers grew alfalfa, wheat, and corn and tended orchards.⁶⁷ Appolonia Garcia Trujillo, Juan Luis Garcia's granddaughter, remembered the work in the valley:

My daddy had 14 acres down in Española in alfalfa and orchard and some of the garden plants. We used to plant chile and melons, watermelons and all those things that we couldn't raise here.... Then we had to take care of the fruit down in Española and the garden with the plants that we couldn't grow up here.⁶⁸

The homesteaders left their claims during the winter months and brought farming and ranching equipment back to the claim each spring. Homesteaders also brought canned goods, sugar, salt, oil, coffee, and other food staples with them each year when they returned to their land.⁶⁹

The Hispanic “Seasonal Round” in Northern New Mexico: from the Pojoaque Valley to the Pajarito Plateau, circa 1920s

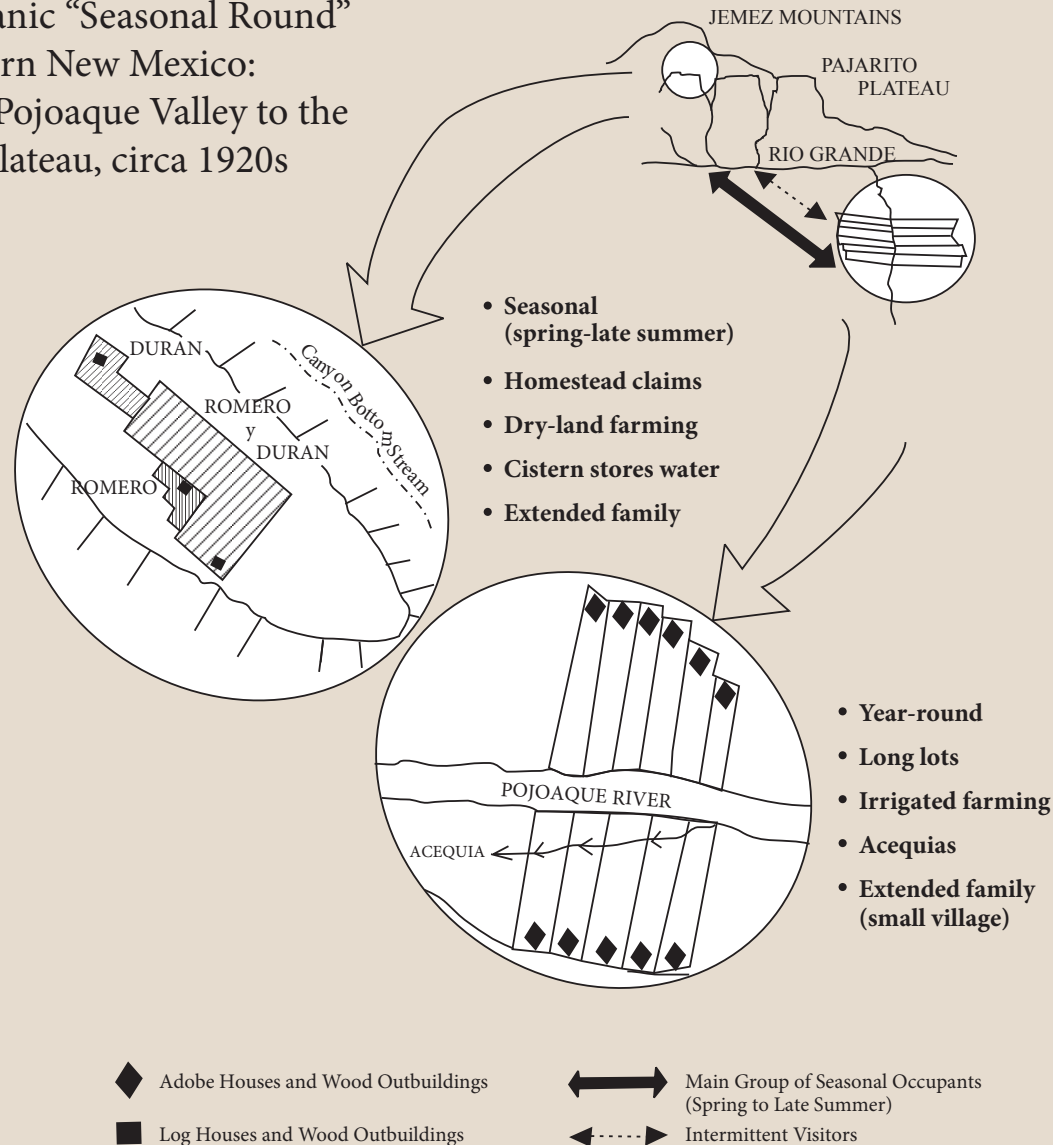


Figure 51. The “Seasonal Round.” Homesteaders left their permanent homes in the Rio Grande Valley every spring to graze their stock and grow crops on the Pajarito Plateau. (Los Alamos National Laboratory, Ellen McGehee)

Farming and Ranching

Dry farming was the only method for growing crops on the plateau because there was not enough surface water available for irrigation. Dry farming does not mean growing crops without water; it means growing crops without irrigation and making the most of what little water is available. Dry-land farmers employ specific strategies, such as using drought-resistant seed or mulching plants, to lessen water loss from evaporation. They keep the soil loosened, through plowing, so moisture will be retained by the soil, and they weed so that any available water will go to crops. Dry farming is possible only if rainfall reaches at least 10 inches annually. There has to be enough moisture in the spring, either left over from winter or from spring runoff, to start crops. The growing season must be at least 120 days. Fortunately for people dependant upon farming, most of the rain on the Pajarito Plateau falls during the summer months of July and August.⁷⁰

Beans were the primary cash crop on the plateau, while wheat, corn, squash, pumpkins, melons, potatoes, peas, beets, and turnips were grown for personal consumption.⁷¹ In addition to pinto beans, the homesteaders planted frijole bonita, a rounded variety of bean.⁷²

Plateau crops were used to feed the families; any extra would be sold for cash. Annie Luján’s father, José Serna, was a plateau farmer. He grew corn, wheat, and pinto beans in Rendija Canyon. Serna sold most of the harvest each year but kept some for the family. Luján remembered that the family raised pigs and rabbits for the family to eat and usually had a few cows and chickens.⁷³

In addition to cash crops, homestead families cultivated small vegetable gardens and fruit orchards near their cabins. During the summer months, homesteaders would gather local plants and culinary and medicinal herbs, including wild strawberries, wild plums, yucca root, oregano, quelitas (wild spinach),

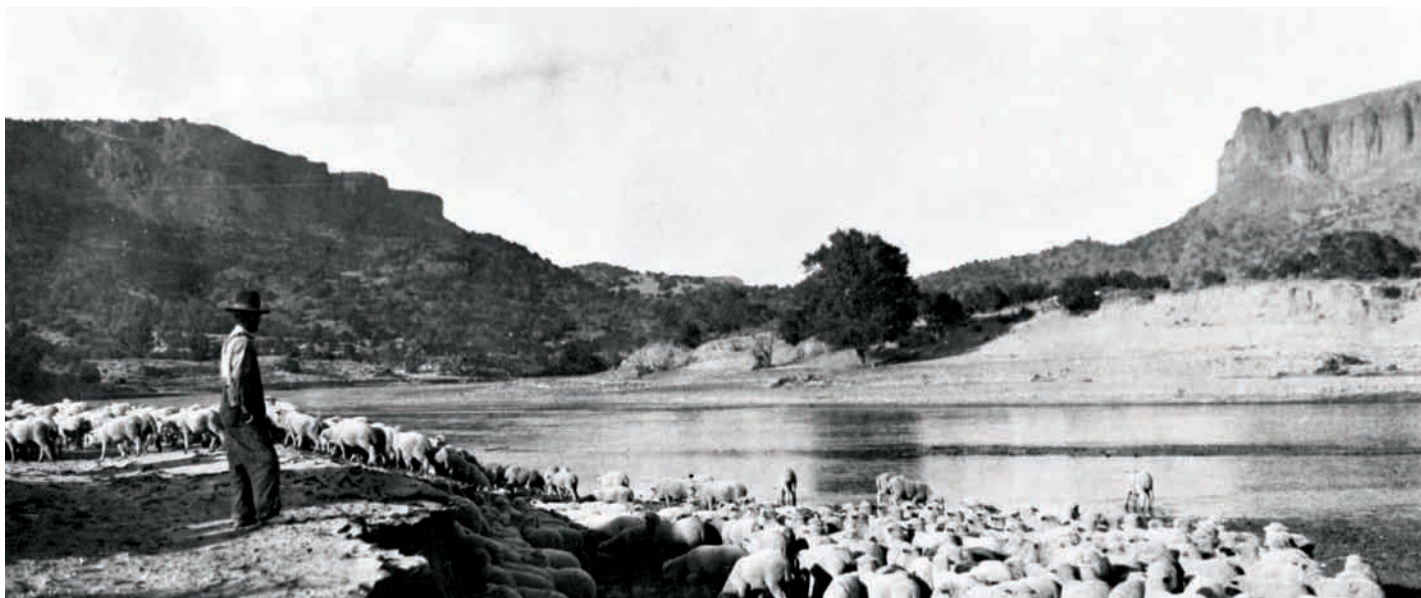


Figure 52. The original caption for this 1920s photo, taken in the vicinity of Buckman, reads, "A shepherd minds his flock as they water in the Rio Grande, then scramble up the riverbank." (Los Alamos Historical Society)



Figure 53. Sheep stubble-grazing at the H. H. Brook homestead. Sheep were valued for their fleece, meat, and milk. (Los Alamos Historical Society)

podillo, chimajá, and yerba buena.⁷⁴ Piñon harvesting was also an important activity because it provided supplemental income.⁷⁵ After the harvest period, homesteaders would preserve food, canning and drying local produce for later use in the fall and winter months.

Sowing and Reaping on the Homesteads

Every spring, work on the plateau began with preparing the fields for planting. Anthropologist Richard Ford describes the field preparation process at nearby San Juan Pueblo and notes how logs were used to prepare the soil.

A field is converted into cultivated land by cutting bushes...and tall grass, burning them, and then plowing the land. A planted field is usually used at least two successive years in which case the previous year's field need only be plowed by a horse or oxen team and a log dragged over the land to break up the clods.⁷⁶

Beans were a major cash crop. Tony Borrego noted, "Pinto beans was a pretty good cash crop; not only does it provide food for the family but also it doesn't spoil. You could save it." His grandfather did. Tony continued, "During the winter time when he went back to Española, he'd pack up his wagon and go out to the surrounding communities and sell it by the sack or the peck or whatever. But anyway, it brought him some cash."⁷⁷ Beans were harvested by hand, the entire family sharing the effort. Dried bean plants were placed on a hard-packed surface and horses were driven around the area in a circular fashion to trample the plants and separate the beans from their pods. Bean plants were also piled up and a wooden roller, pulled by horses, would be rolled over the piles.⁷⁸ Dried plants would be removed from the area using a pitchfork, and the beans would be separated from the soil using a bean sifter or criva. Borrego related what his mother told him about bean harvesting:

She said, "We had to get up real early because the bean plant, the dew would be on the bean plant." It would be moist and they'll pull the whole plant out and turn the



Figure 54. Bean-harvest time at H. H. Brook's Los Alamos Ranch, about 1910–1915. In the background is Brook's silo, the first in New Mexico. Brook's fields extended through what is now known as Eastern Area to the end of what is today the Los Alamos airport. According to the original caption for this photo, many of Brook's ranch hands were Native Americans from nearby pueblos. (Los Alamos Historical Society)

roots up. If they did it in the late afternoon, the beans would shake loose and they would lose the product...I asked, "what did you do after that?" She said, "Well, we would stack them in piles and as we went along, we just pulled the whole plant out." Later on they would come along with wagons and pick them up and take them over to an area they had kind of cleaned out, it was padded down real hard. They would stack all of these plants that were now dry. They would stack them in the center and they would put them out on the side.

Of course, as they packed them around, they let the horses come through, around and around in a circle. The horses would hit the plants and the beans would

come loose. Then they would come through with pitchforks. They would remove the dry plant—pick it up and take it out and down at the bottom would be the beans. Some of them would be quite high; they would not be mixed with the dirt. They were able to slip them out. As they got closer down to the earth, they would have to sift them. If it was a real windy day, some of these old timers can just throw them up like that and the wind would hit them and would clean the beans that way.⁷⁹

Division of Labor on Plateau Homesteads

On most small subsistence farms throughout the West, the entire family, including children, would share



Figure 55. Log roller used to prepare the fields or to crush harvested bean plants. (Los Alamos National Laboratory)

the workload. Life on the Pajarito Plateau and in the nearby Hispanic villages was no exception. Children helped with the planting and harvesting during the spring and summer months; in the fall, most of school age would return to the valley to attend local schools. Women on the plateau helped clear the land, plant and tend the crops, and hoe corn. Women would also collect much of the yearly piñon nut crop.⁸⁰

Speaking in a 1982 lecture, Tony Borrego recalled that life on the plateau was hard for women, commenting that it was not uncommon for men to marry more than once because of the high female mortality rate. He also recalled that men would do the heavier farm work, like plowing and

field clearing.⁸¹ Appolonia Trujillo came from a family where the first five children were girls. She worked with her father in the fields, planting wheat, peas, barley, and “acres and acres of beans.”⁸² She took care of the cattle, helped plow, and cooked meals in her mother’s absence—beginning when she was eleven or twelve years old. Trujillo remembered how “the women did the work as the man did,” stating that her mother usually worked on the family’s farm in Española during the summer months. She added that she and her sisters had to take the place of her younger brothers until they were old enough to work.⁸³

I helped my daddy with the plow again because my brothers were the last ones to come. Five girls came first. So we had to take the place of the boys until they grew....So again, I had to take the plow with my sisters and we plowed as much as we could, and planted as much as we could. Then we had to harvest and clean the plants also because my daddy was in the sawmill. We had to work very hard, but we seemed to enjoy it and grow very healthy.⁸⁴

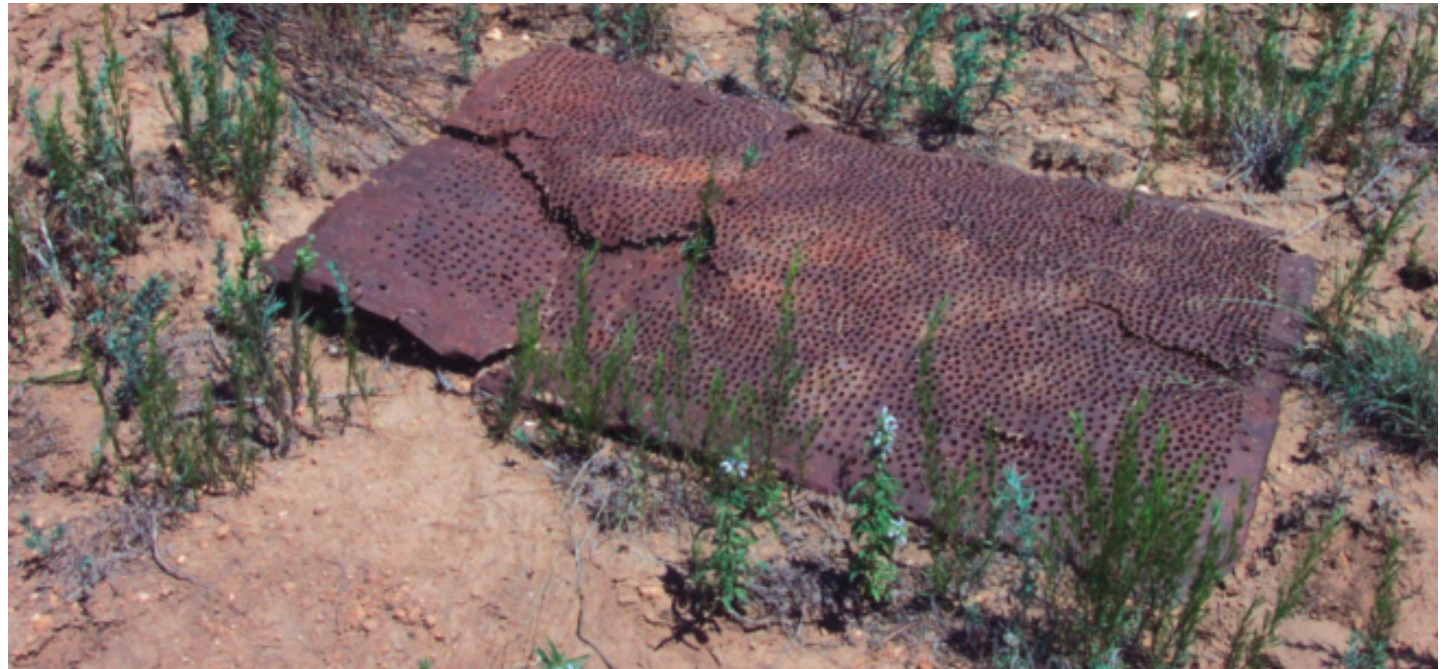


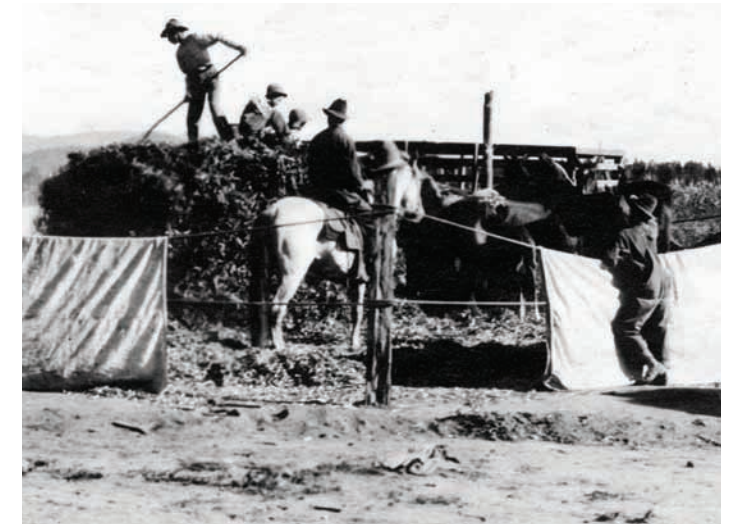
Figure 56. Bean sifter or criva (alternatively spelled criba) found at the A. Martínez/J. Serna homestead in Rendija Canyon. (Los Alamos National Laboratory)



Figure 57. Criva (criba) found at the McDougall homestead. (Los Alamos National Laboratory)



Figure 58. These two 1921 photos, taken at the Los Alamos Ranch School, illustrate how horses were used to thresh bean plants. (Los Alamos Historical Society)



Annie Luján also commented on the seasonal division of family labor. Her father had a farm in El Rancho where he raised vegetables. He traveled to the plateau with her brother and other field workers during the summer. In her oral history, she remembered coming to the family homestead in Rendija Canyon for brief visits with her mother.⁸⁵ Down in the village of El Rancho, her mother would tend the vegetable garden and raise rabbits. They had a peach and apple orchard and would can fruit and vegetables for the winter months. She recalled how her mother would buy food staples in bulk, including coffee beans, and would render lard from the pigs they raised.⁸⁶

Women sometimes had to shoulder the entire load when economic circumstances forced the men of the family to seek work for wages elsewhere. They would leave their farms to work at day labor or to work away from their homes for extended periods. Before 1930, some local men went to work for five to seven months a year in the mines of Colorado and Utah or hired themselves out as harvest workers or shearers. This response to economic stress created domestic stress—women became the sole operators of the family farm with responsibilities for child rearing, animal husbandry, and crop production. During the Depression years, unfortunately, most of these opportunities dried up, forcing many families to rely on various forms of relief.⁸⁷ While Hispanic villages in northern New Mexico were especially hard hit by the effects of the Depression, most families on the Pajarito Plateau had their homesteads and, after 1917, the possibility of work at the Los Alamos Ranch School, to buffer them.

Homestead Architecture

On the Pajarito Plateau, local architectural practices, like seasonal grazing and farming, were also outgrowths of centuries-old vernacular traditions that came from Spain through a central Mexican “cultural hearth.” Homesteaders built their cabins and outbuildings with the skill of their own hands, using local materials. Although cabins built

on the plateau lacked much uniformity of design, they nonetheless exhibited some key distinguishing features of the local Hispanic tradition. These features included doors along a long dimensional wall, a relative absence of windows, corner placement of stoves, and the use of hewn, double-notch timbers for construction.⁸⁸

Some single-room cabins were subdivided with partitions or augmented with loft areas to make smaller interior spaces. Roofing designs included flat, low-pitched, “v”-pitch, and shed styles. Logs were laid horizontally; sometimes their inner and outer sides were milled while their bark was kept on the upper and lower sides. Notch patterns ranged from saddle to square notching. Cabin walls were often chinked with small pieces of milled wood and adobe daub to keep out the wind and rain. Newsprint was sometimes applied to the inside of the cabin walls for use in weatherproofing. Some cabins had one or two planks nailed vertically on top of the horizontal logs on the exterior of the cabin. These vertical planks could have served as a means of stabilizing the wall logs or could have been used for hanging objects or tools, like washbasins. Most cabins had wood plank roofs that were covered with corrugated-iron roofing metal. Sometimes fragments of felt were placed between the wood planks and the roofing metal. Exterior cabin features included porches, wooden tables and platforms used for exterior work surfaces, and door frames and window sills. Doors were typically constructed of vertical planks of lumber.

Most cabins had windows with small windowpanes. Some windows may have been fixed, while others may have slid open and may have had exterior screens. As mentioned earlier, many Hispanic cabins had interior wood stoves—historic photographs show stove pipes extending beyond the rooflines. Stone chimneys have been documented on the plateau, but only at sites primarily associated with Anglo occupation.

Cabin construction was often accretionary in nature. Examples from the plateau include cabins with two dis-

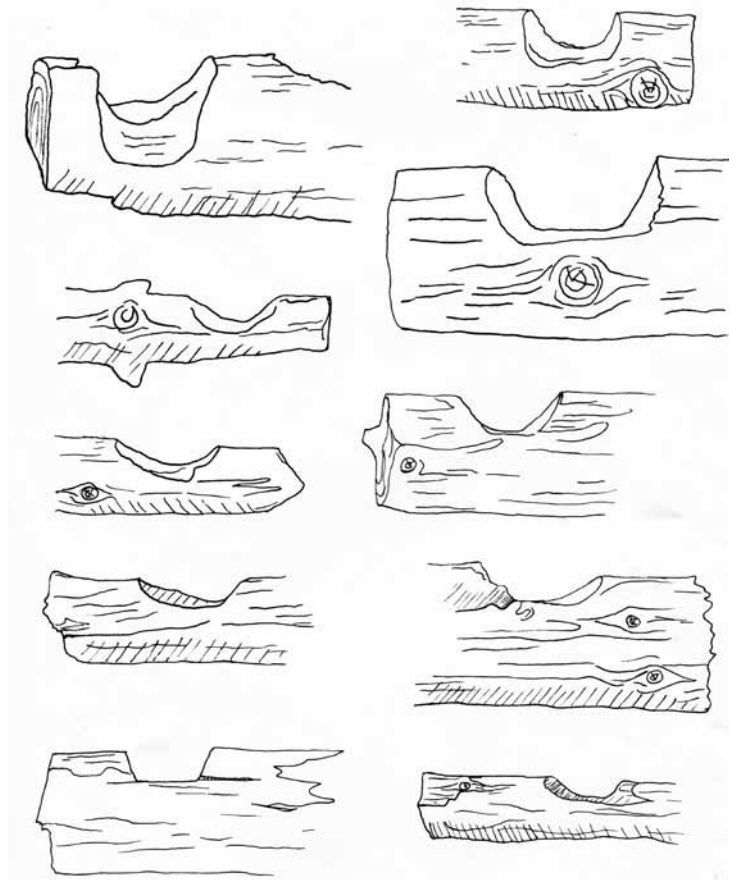


Figure 59. Sketch of the log notching on the Romero cabin. (Martha M. Teck)

continuous rooms joined under one roof with a “dog-trot” passageway in between. In Rendija Canyon, a room was added to a one-room cabin, resulting in a longer rectangular building. On North Mesa, an addition was placed on the east side of an original cabin, forming an L-shaped building. Several cabin photographs from the 1940s show haphazardly constructed additions, almost “lean-to” in style. Many cabins had wooden plank flooring, which was laid across floor joists that rested on a foundation wall or footing made of local stone. At least two wooden

buildings were built directly on leveled ground. One homestead cabin has been documented with a cellar, a feature associated with Anglo construction. While most cabins were single story, Noberto Roybal, whose homestead was located on Barranca Mesa, built a second story for use as a sleeping room and storage area.⁸⁹ Victor Romero's cabin had a small partial loft area for storage.⁹⁰

Water-catchment strategies include cisterns and rain barrels. Rain barrels were positioned next to a building under a downspout and its associated roof gutter. Cisterns were both rock lined and of concrete construction. Both variations were, by necessity, excavated into the tuff (compacted volcanic ash) bedrock. Concrete cisterns include both square and round examples. Earthen stock ponds have also been documented on the plateau.

Homesteaders built privies or outhouses near the main complex of buildings. These were wooden structures with corrugated metal roofs. Other common outbuildings and structures included root cellars (souteranos), sheds, corrals, hornos (outdoor ovens for baking bread), ramadas (sun shelters), chicken coops, hog pens, and rabbit hutches. Some corrals and outbuildings were built of local stone, but most were constructed of wood. Hornos were built with a stone foundation and constructed in the traditional conical circular fashion out of stone and adobe. The completed oven would be finished with adobe plaster.

The main complex of residential structures and outbuildings was usually located to the side of the homestead claim on the edge of the mesa, away from the main fields on the top of the mesa. Homestead buildings were constructed near roads or along connecting driveways. Property boundary fences were constructed of barbed wire and vertical posts and, where possible, incorporated available trees. Some homestead fences within the property itself were of open log construction.



Figure 60. The Efren Durán cabins had flat roofs. (Los Alamos National Laboratory)



Figure 61. In contrast, the Romero cabin had a shed roof. (Los Alamos National Laboratory)

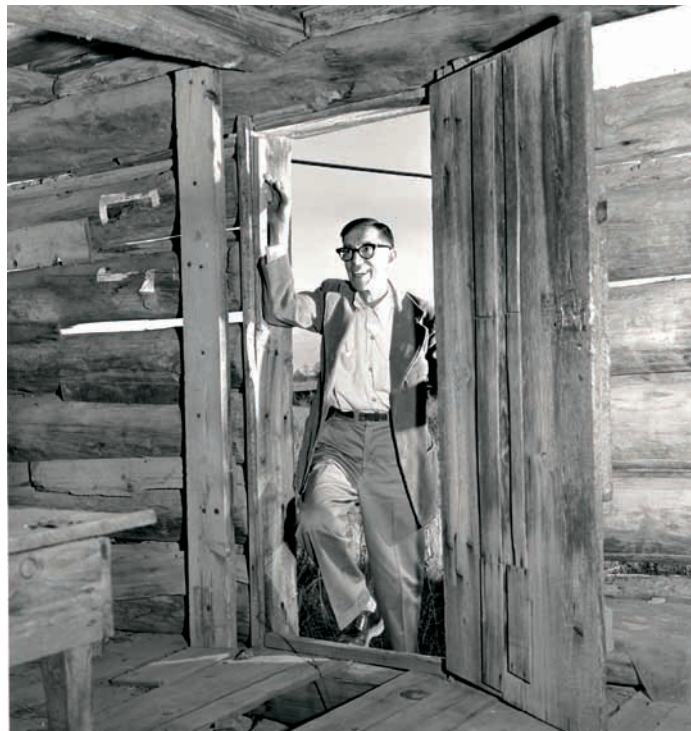


Figure 62. Bences Gonzales steps into the Victor Romero cabin in 1959, once the plateau home of his wife's family. Note the newsprint remnant at left, once used as wallpaper. (Los Alamos National Laboratory)



Figure 63. The spaces between the logs of the Miguel Sánchez cabin were chinked with small strips of wood. (Los Alamos National Laboratory)

Log construction practices and design and site layout—key elements of the cultural landscape—provide a revealing view into the homesteading lifestyle on the plateau. For example, homestead cabins on the Pajarito Plateau contained many design elements found in wooden outbuildings and sheds from village settings. These stylistic similarities suggest that homesteaders saw their homesteads simply as extensions (albeit discontinuous ones) of their homes in the valley, belying suggestions that homesteaders were isolated from community life because they left their village homes during the spring and summer months.

Living Conditions

Homesteaders survived and thrived on the Pajarito Plateau despite the lack of amenities considered essential today, such as running water, electricity, indoor bathrooms, and telephones. Of necessity, much of their life was spent outdoors. Homesteaders prepared their meals on wood stoves and hauled water for domestic purposes from nearby streams, springs, and potholes to their cabins, often using wood sledges. Additionally, as described above, they captured water from downspouts and gutters or in cisterns.⁹¹ Dishes and clothes were washed in tubs in water that had been heated on the stove. Furniture was sparse and often hand-hewn; the major store-bought item was often the parents' bed (sometimes shared by both parents and young children). Older children frequently slept outside on porches or in tents. Because every item the homesteaders needed—from tools to household items—had to be hauled up to the plateau by wagon, plateau families who lived on their claims only during the growing season made do with the bare necessities. Theirs was an “economy of scarcity,” one eased by the support systems provided by family, neighbors, and their communities in the Rio Grande Valley.⁹²



Figure 64. This 1959 photograph shows a stovepipe still extending above the Romero cabin roofline at upper left (Bences Gonzales, left, with son Ray). (Los Alamos National Laboratory)



Figure 66. The Pond cabin in Pajarito Canyon, on the grounds of the Pajarito Club, featured a substantial stone fireplace and chimney. (Los Alamos National Laboratory)



Figure 65. Close scrutiny of this 1942 photo reveals a shaded dog trot, or covered passageway, connecting the two ends of the Efrén Durán cabin. (Los Alamos National Laboratory)

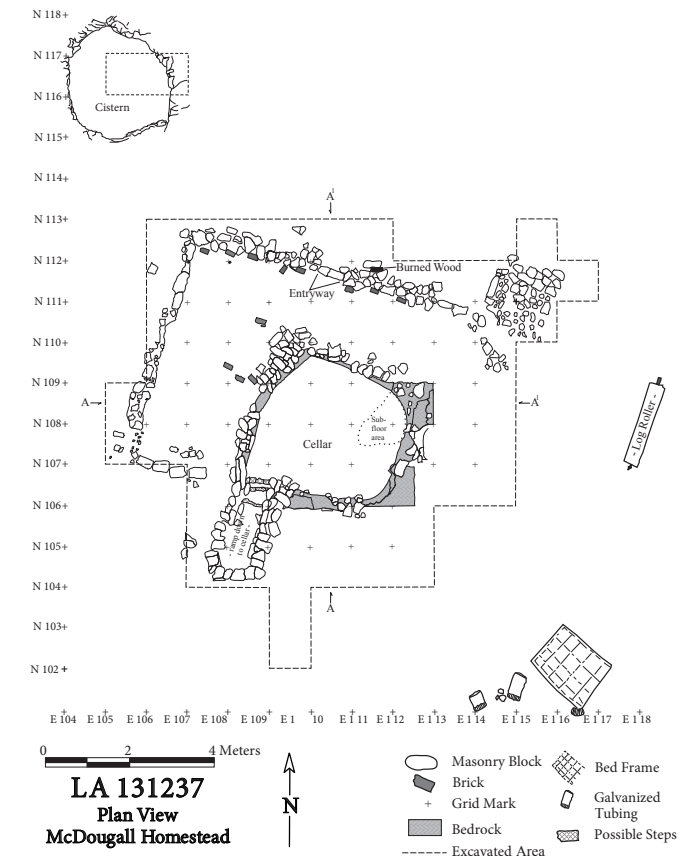


Figure 67. This plan view of the McDougall cabin highlights the foundations, cellar, and (upper left) cistern. (Los Alamos National Laboratory)

Social Life

Although physically isolated from their home communities in the Rio Grande Valley, many homestead families on the Pajarito Plateau recreated village networks during the spring and summer seasons by staking claims close to family members and members of their home villages. These networks allowed homesteaders to continue their traditions of mutual cooperation and gatherings at kin-related social events. Through these traditions, the plateau homesteaders experienced continued family support, no matter what their location. Although some families stayed together throughout the growing season, most divided their time and family members between the valley and the plateau. For example, in times of summer drought or during the winter months when nothing could be cultivated, the homestead families would leave the plateau, returning to their claims when growing conditions improved. Sometimes only the men would return, leaving the women responsible for the management of the family's valley farm. Because of the proximity of the plateau to the valley, homesteaders could travel back and forth within a day's wagon ride to help with farming tasks or to take part in family and community events. The intricate social networks that sustained the homesteaders thus remained unbroken or were constantly renewed.



Figure 68. Remnants of the concrete cistern at the Fermin Vigil homestead in Mortandad Canyon. (Los Alamos National Laboratory)



Figure 69. The concrete cistern from the José Albino Montoya homestead on Sigma Mesa. (Los Alamos National Laboratory)



Figure 70. The stock pond at the Efren Durán homestead still exists near the South Mesa administrative center of Los Alamos National Laboratory. (Los Alamos National Laboratory)



Figure 71. Stone corral or animal pen at the Donaciano Gomez homestead. The Gomez family herded cattle and sheep and kept lambs, goats, pigs, and chickens at their family tract. (Los Alamos National Laboratory)



Figure 72. Horno from the Gomez homestead. These wood-fired outdoor ovens were used for baking bread and other foods. (Los Alamos National Laboratory)



Figure 73. This wooden sled (or sledge), dating from about 1925, was found at the Ted Mather cabin site in Water Canyon. It would have been used to haul heavy loads, including water. (Los Alamos National Laboratory)



Figure 74. Remnants of fence on the Miguel Sánchez homestead. (Los Alamos National Laboratory)

Homesteaders and Their Native American Neighbors

Despite occasional conflicts over Anglo encroachment on Pueblo land, in general the homesteaders and their Pueblo neighbors cooperated in a number of ways. Although the Pueblo communities did not participate in the plateau homesteading process,* members of nearby pueblos continued to use the mesa areas for gathering, hunting, and religious activities. Many homesteaders owned valley homes in the vicinity of the Santa Clara and San Ildefonso Pueblos or on Pueblo land itself. During the homestead period, farmers hired local Pueblo men to help with the plowing and harvesting.⁹³ Homesteaders also sold cane syrup, a sweetener made locally from sorghum plants, to the residents of the valley pueblos.⁹⁴

* It seems likely that local Native Americans did not participate in the homesteading process because most were not U.S. citizens (a requirement of the Homestead Act) until 1924 when the Indian Citizenship Act was passed.

Those homesteaders who lived on the San Ildefonso Pueblo Grant often borrowed from their Pueblo neighbors, exchanging produce and other subsistence items. The 1935 Tewa Basin Survey report noted a special dependence on the Pueblo-owned threshing machine:

The most important Indian item of which the Spanish-Americans have made use, is the threshing machine. All the Spanish-American people west of the Mexican cemetery have had their wheat threshed by this machine. The price set by the Indians has been 10 percent of the wheat, and this, in all cases, has been paid to the governor.... The rest of the borrowing and lending has been on a 50-50 basis, and the Indians have been just as dependent, if not more so, upon the Spanish-Americans, especially in the matter of horses. All the relationships have been on a good neighbor basis.⁹⁵

Archaeological research at plateau homesteads has revealed the presence of historic Pueblo ceramics.⁹⁶ These items obviously reflect some form of economic interaction between Hispanics and the local Pueblo people. Interviews with descendants of the original homesteaders also confirm that Hispanics had close relationships with the Indians at San Ildefonso Pueblo during the early twentieth century.

Anchor Ranch and the Los Alamos Ranch School

Notable exceptions to the seasonal occupation of the Pajarito Plateau by Hispanic homesteaders included a few permanent ranches such as the Los Alamos Ranch School, located in the area of present-day downtown Los Alamos, and Anchor Ranch, located on land now occupied by the Los Alamos National Laboratory. Both ranches were obtained, in the later years of homesteading on the plateau, by Anglos who bought out adjoining or nearby land originally patented through the homesteading process. The ranch properties were occupied year-round. Unlike the seasonal dry-land farmers, the ranch owners

(or their ranch managers, in the case of Anchor Ranch) irrigated their crops and employed the latest farming and ranching methods. Both ranches had ice houses in which they stored ice cut during the winter from ponds.

Anchor Ranch

The 322-acre Anchor Ranch was located on lands originally patented by Severo Gonzalez and James Loomis. Loomis bought out Gonzalez before 1913, and in 1914 he sold both his patents to Claud Irwin. Irwin, in turn, sold the land to Alexander M. Ross.⁹⁷ Alexander M. Ross was from a wealthy New York family but was mentally impaired. He had been declared incompetent in 1915, shortly before his twenty-first birthday, and the responsibility for managing his affairs had been assigned to the Fulton Trust Co. of New York (the “Committee of his property”).^{*} His mother, Florence Potter Sheppard, and Henry M. Maxon were appointed his legal guardians (the “Committee of his person”).⁹⁸

Although Alex, as Alexander M. Ross was known, was a permanent resident of Anchor Ranch, he did not personally oversee its operation. The Smithwick family operated the ranch until 1937. Major Smithwick had been a British army officer in World War I, and his wife, Constance, was a nurse by training.⁹⁹ O. M. Linn, one of Ross’s caretakers, wrote monthly reports about Ross’s health and about the status of the ranch:

Plowed part of the field for oats and maize...Removed overhauled and replaced wooden flume through which water passes from upper reservoir to irrigation ditch... Alex is agreeable, obedient well and seemingly happy.¹⁰⁰

After the ranch was appropriated by the government, a second Anchor Ranch was established near Silver City, New Mexico, where Ross continued to live with caretakers.¹⁰¹

^{*} The compensation check from the government for the Anchor Ranch property was written to the Fulton Trust Co.



Figure 75. Anchor Ranch icehouse before the Cerro Grande fire, 2000. (Los Alamos National Laboratory)



Figure 76. Anchor Ranch stone fireplace (from former outbuilding). (Los Alamos National Laboratory)



Figure 77. Remains of small outbuilding/root cellar at Anchor Ranch. (Los Alamos National Laboratory)



Figure 78. Anchor Ranch main house, 1943.
(Los Alamos National Laboratory)



Figure 79. Anchor Ranch toolshed, 1943.
(Los Alamos National Laboratory)



Figure 80. Foreman's house, Anchor Ranch, 1943.
(Los Alamos National Laboratory)



Figure 81. Anchor Ranch, bunkhouse #1, 1943.
(Los Alamos National Laboratory)



Figure 82. Barn, Anchor Ranch, 1943.
(Los Alamos National Laboratory)

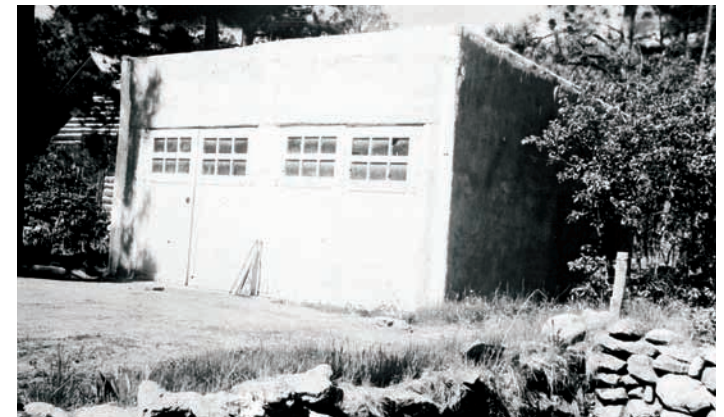


Figure 83. Anchor Ranch garage, 1943.
(Los Alamos National Laboratory)



Figure 84. Anchor Ranch, bunkhouse #2, 1943.
(Los Alamos National Laboratory)



Figure 85. Anchor Ranch icehouse, 1943.
(Los Alamos National Laboratory)



Figure 86. This series of photos shows how ice was cut at Ashley Pond by Ranch School employees every winter. The blocks of ice were hauled by horse-drawn sledge to the nearby Ice House at the edge of the pond, where they were insulated with straw and stored. (Los Alamos Historical Society)

Figure 87. Aerial view of Los Alamos Ranch School looking east. Ashley Pond, named for the founder of the Los Alamos Ranch School (Ashley Pond), is at right center of the photograph. Just below the cultivated field lies Fuller Lodge, and to its left lie the Big House and the schoolmasters' houses along Bathtub Row. The two roads that converge in the distance have become the present-day Trinity Drive (right) and Central Avenue (left). (Los Alamos Historical Society)





Los Alamos Ranch School

The Los Alamos Ranch School was located on the consolidated properties of H. H. Brook. Brook sold his ranch in 1917 to Ashley Pond Jr., who had moved to New Mexico from Detroit to recover from typhoid fever. As mentioned earlier, the Brook ranch was not Pond's first purchase of land on the Pajarito Plateau; in 1914, Pond and an association of Midwestern businessmen had bought the Ramón Vigil Grant and had opened a private guest ranch, the Pajarito Club, in Pajarito Canyon. It was H. H. Brook whom Pond had hired to manage the Pajarito Club in 1916.

To direct the boy's preparatory school that Pond established on Brook's ranch, Pond hired A. J. Connell, a ranger with the Forest Service. In turn, Connell hired an enthusiastic faculty of young men, mostly graduates of Eastern colleges. The school recruited boys from the East whose parents wanted a good academic education in a rugged outdoor setting for their sons.

Of the two principal year-round ranches, Anchor Ranch and the Los Alamos Ranch School, the Ranch School had the greater effect on the lives of the seasonal homesteaders on the Pajarito Plateau. The school provided economic opportunities for the homesteaders, employing some of them and buying some of their crops. Because the school used motor vehicles, it soon began to improve the old roads, making access to the plateau easier for everyone and lessening the earlier isolation of the plateau. By 1921, a road that switch-backed directly up Otowi Hill onto Los Alamos Mesa had been built (contracted by and paid for by the Ranch School) for automobile traffic, and by 1925, that road—despite its hairpin turns and 14 percent grade, which guaranteed an exciting drive—had become the primary road to the Pajarito Plateau. It was not upgraded until the army took over the plateau in late 1942.¹⁰²



Figure 88. An undated photo of A. J. Connell taken during the Ranch School years. As director of the Los Alamos Ranch School, A. J. Connell devised a program for East Coast boys from well-to-do families that emphasized outdoor skills as well as academics. A former scoutmaster, Connell integrated the school program with the Boy Scouts and assigned each student his own horse. The Ranch School's Troop 22 was claimed to be the first mounted scout troop in the country. (Los Alamos Historical Society)



Figure 89. The heart of the Los Alamos Ranch School was Fuller Lodge, named for Edward Fuller, the son of a financial backer of the school. The lodge was designed and built during 1927 and 1928 by noted Southwestern architect John Gaw Meem. (Los Alamos Historical Society)



Figure 90. A team of horses pulls a twine binder on the plateau. Horse-drawn twine binders were first marketed in 1880 and were the chief method of harvesting grain on small holdings until the early twentieth century. The binder cut and bundled the grain. (Los Alamos Historical Society)



Figure 91. Ranch hands harvest beans in fields east of H. H. Brook's home at the Los Alamos Ranch. (Los Alamos Historical Society)



Figure 92. Ranch School workers use the latest equipment for harvesting crops in 1921. (Los Alamos Historical Society)



Figure 93. Local workers pose in haying wagons at H. H. Brook's Los Alamos ranch. (Los Alamos Historical Society)



Figure 94. The Ranch School tractor, driven by an operator identified as Bob Lewis, 1921. (Los Alamos Historical Society)



Figure 95 (first three photos). The equipment at the Ranch School included a reciprocating steam engine used to saw wood. The need for firewood for cooking and heating homes was constant on the Pajarito Plateau. The operator shown in top left photo is identified in the original caption as "Henry Cook, retired engineer on Santa Fe RR." Photo is dated 1922–23. (Los Alamos Historical Society)

Figure 96. Branding cattle at the Ranch School in the early 1920s. From left to right: Bences Gonzales, Wally Kieselhorst, and Ben White. (Los Alamos Historical Society)



Figure 97. Sheep were an important economic resource on the Pajarito Plateau. Here, they graze on stubble in fields in front of the Ranch School's Big House. (Los Alamos Historical Society)



Figure 98. In 1922, Santa Fe pilot Lowell Yerex flew Ashley Pond to the Ranch School. The Big House is almost directly below the plane; Pajarito Mountain looms in the background. (Los Alamos Historical Society)

The McDougall Homestead

A few other homesteads on the Pajarito Plateau were occupied year-round, although without the success experienced by the Los Alamos Ranch School and Anchor Ranch. The McDougall homestead serves as an example. The McDougalls, in particular Mrs. McDougall, were permanent residents of the plateau (see Chapter 4). But the hard life and the isolation proved to be too much for this couple. They left the plateau in 1916, only two years after patenting their homestead in June 1914.

Figure 99. Aerial photograph of the Pajarito Plateau showing approximate homestead boundaries. Present-day Los Alamos is in the center of the photograph, marked by Ashley Pond and the Brook, Hopper, and Connell properties. (Dorothy Hoard and Los Alamos National Laboratory, Jim Cruz)



Chapter 4

The Homesteaders

To Garcia Canyon and Chupadero Canyon homesteads:
Juan Luis Garcia 1887, Ezequiel Garcia 1914, José L. Garcia 1915,
Ruperto Archuleta (widow Hipolita de Archuleta) 1917, and Adolfo Garcia 1921

Román
Martínez
1915

Federico Gonzales
1913, 1921

Andrés
Martínez
1914

Estanislado
Gonzales
1911

Noberto Roybal
1916, 1918

Pedro Gomez
y Gonzales
1893

Juan N.
Gonzales
1893

Donaciano
Gonzales
1916

Barranca Mesa

Francisco
Gonzales
1914

David Quintana
1909, 1913

Martin
Luján
1914

North Mesa

William White
1899

Benigno
Quintana
1892

Juan Ignacio
Durán
(widow Efren
Gonzales
de Durán)
1898

William
Hopper
1908

H. H. Brook
1908, 1913

Ashley Pond

Los Alamos
Ranch School

A. J. Connell
1921

Martha Brook
1913

Eliseo Vigil
1913, 1915

Los Alamos Canyon

Los Alamos National Laboratory

José Montoya
1911

Locadio
Archuleta
1915

Ramon
Durán
1917

Miguel Sánchez
1899

Victor
Romero
1913

David
Romero
1893

Robert
McDougall
1911

Fermin Vigil
1915

The Original Homesteaders

This chapter describes what is known about the plateau properties of the original thirty-six people who successfully patented their land under the provisions of the Homestead Act or related land legislation. The homesteads are presented by family name in alphabetical order.* This chapter begins, however, with a brief chronology of homesteading on the Pajarito Plateau to put its evolution and development in perspective.

Although people had been using the Pajarito Plateau earlier on a seasonal basis, homesteading on the plateau began, officially, in March 1887, when Juan Luis Garcia filed entry papers for the first homestead to be successfully patented. The homestead era on the plateau spanned a period of fifty-five years, from 1887 until 1942, when the army began the process to evict the homesteaders and other plateau landowners for security reasons connected with the creation of the secret project to build an atomic bomb.†

The last formal entries for homesteads were made in August 1932, by which time all land suitable for farming on the plateau had been claimed. Both the first and the last applications were filed by members of the Garcia family,

* Where there are homesteaders with the same last name, the individual histories in that section are presented in chronological order.

† Although official acquisition of Pajarito Plateau lands by the U.S. government was a lengthy administrative and legal process spanning several years, the Los Alamos Ranch School was given its eviction notice in late 1942, and homesteaders were evicted at the same time. These actions brought an end to the ownership of private lands on the plateau until the 1960s, and, by extension, an end to the homestead era. By the end of 1943, four formal petitions of condemnation had been issued by the government. These petitions covered all tracts of land on the plateau that had been patented under the Homestead Act and related legislation.

who eventually patented four of the plateau's thirty-six homesteads. The number of families who successfully homesteaded the Pajarito Plateau represents only a small percentage of the people who wanted to claim land on the plateau. Many others applied to the Forest Service to release land that could then be claimed through the formal homestead process. But the amount of land suitable for farming was severely limited; most of the timbered plateau was more suitable as a forest reserve.¹⁰³

Juan Luis Garcia was the first person to patent land on the Pajarito Plateau through the formal application process, entering his claim to land in Township 20 North, Range 6 East (north of the boundaries of what is now the town of Los Alamos) on March 30, 1887.¹⁰⁴ Because the official survey of the remainder of the plateau was delayed (the area in Township 19 North, Range 6 East), it was not until five years later, in November 1892—after Juan Luis had gained title to his homestead in June of that year—that a second entry claiming land on the plateau was made. Benigno Quintana's chosen site of 160 acres in Township 19 North was well south of Juan Luis Garcia's tract, in what is now the Western Area of Los Alamos. By the turn of the century in 1900, ten more entries to land on the Pajarito Plateau had been filed that were eventually patented: three in 1893, one in 1898, five in 1899, and one in 1900.¹⁰⁵ A flurry of filings occurred in 1899. William White filed for land at the north end of Western Area around present-day Sandia Drive adjacent to Benigno Quintana's homestead. Miguel Sánchez, Severo Gonzalez, and Donaciano Gomez chose land on the north boundary of the Ramón Vigil Grant, as did James Loomis. In 1900, William Moses obtained, through exchange, a tract neighboring this cluster of homesteaders on the meadows around Pajarito Canyon.

From 1887 until the end of the nineteenth century, then, twelve families were homesteading on the plateau (although it is believed that William Moses, technically not a homesteader, never visited his tract; see his section below). After 1900, the flow of entries abruptly ceased when archaeologist Edgar Lee Hewitt proposed that a Pajarito National Park should be created to protect the archaeological sites on the plateau. On July 26, 1900, part of the plateau was withdrawn for the proposed park, which in the end never became a reality.¹⁰⁶

Congress enacted the Forest Homestead Act in 1906, after which interest in the Pajarito Plateau revived. It was from this time on that entries had to be made through the Forest Service. In 1908, Harold H. Brook applied for entry; his land, as noted earlier, eventually became part of the site of the Los Alamos Ranch School. That same year, William Hopper applied for a plot adjacent to Brook's. David Quintana made the only entry in 1909 that ultimately resulted in a patent; there were three entries in 1911, 1913, and 1914, four in 1915, two in 1916, one in 1917, two in 1921, and two in 1932.

Over the fifty-five years that homesteaders farmed the plateau, nineteen of the homesteads passed down through the original families and were still in the hands of those families when the army began appropriating the properties at the end of 1942; twelve of the nineteen

were still owned by the original patentee. The remaining homesteads had been sold to other area residents or had become part of Anchor Ranch or the Los Alamos Ranch School, established in 1917. (See the Atomic Energy Commission [AEC] map and list on next page).¹⁰⁷

When the homestead era began on the Pajarito Plateau in 1887, Grover Cleveland was serving his first term as president of a United States whose economy was in great part still agricultural. Only thirty-eight states had been admitted to the Union. New Mexico was not one of them; it had been a territory of the United States since 1850 and did not achieve statehood until 1912. When homesteading abruptly came to an end on the Pajarito Plateau in December 1942, Franklin Delano Roosevelt was president of a United States that had become highly industrialized and was in the midst of a global war. In that span of 55 years, the world had changed irrevocably, and with it the way of life the homesteaders once knew on the Pajarito Plateau.

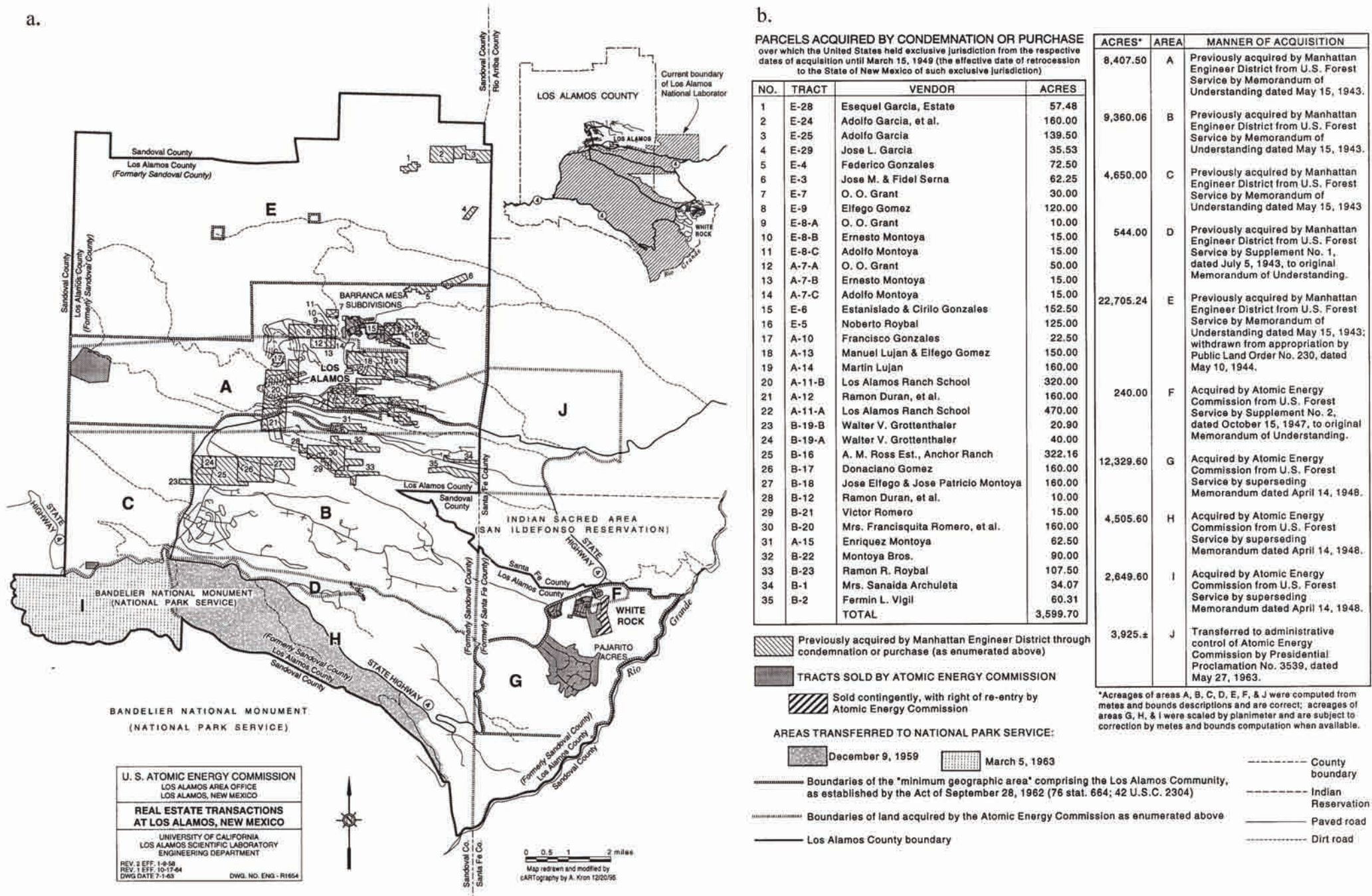


Figure 100. The 1963 Atomic Energy Commission Real Estate Transactions Map (left). AEC list of condemned or purchased land (right).

Count	Patentee	Date Filed	Date Patented	Patent #	Acres	Location	Seller to Government
1	Archuleta, Hipolita	July 17, 1917	August 31, 1922	878099	156.74	Garcia Canyon	Garcia, Adolfo
2	Archuleta, Locadio	June 10, 1915	April 1, 1921	801627	53	Sandia Canyon	Archuleta, Sanaida
3	Brook, Harold H.	August 1, 1908	March 6, 1914	389938	150	Los Alamos Townsite	Los Alamos Ranch School
4	Brook, Martha	August 11, 1913	November 28, 1919	721732	150	Los Alamos Townsite	Los Alamos Ranch School
5	Connell, Albert J.*	January 21, 1921	January 21, 1931	1043435	40	Los Alamos Townsite	Los Alamos Ranch School
6	Durán, Eflen Gonzales de	October 24, 1898	June 14, 1904	3285	160	South Mesa	Durán, Ramón
7	Durán, Ramón	March 2, 1917	August 15, 1922	876162	10	Pajarito Road	Durán, Ramón
8	Garcia, Adolfo	March 15, 1921	December 8, 1924	949507	55	Garcia Canyon	Garcia, Adolfo
9	Garcia, Esequiel	December 24, 1914	December 4, 1922	889406, 1095524	58	Garcia Canyon	Garcia, Esequiel Estate
10	Garcia, José L.	November 27, 1915	August 15, 1922	875161	36	Chupadero Canyon	Garcia, José L.
11	Garcia, Juan Luis	March 30, 1887	June 13, 1892	60724	160	Garcia Canyon	Garcia, Juan Luis
12	Gomez, Donaciano	March 14, 1899	April 18, 1905	3455	160	2-Mile Mesa	Gomez, Donaciano
13	Gomez y Gonzales, Pedro	February 8, 1893	October 4, 1898	2442	120	Golf Course	Gomez, Elfego
14	Gonsalez, Severo	June 6, 1899	February 7, 1902	1979	79	TA-6 area	Ross, A.C. Anchor Ranch
15	Gonzales, Donaciano	December 1, 1916	September 20, 1920	773942	13	Barranca Mesa	Gonzales, Estanislado & Cirilio
16	Gonzales, Estanislado	December 12, 1911	February 18, 1916	514423	140	Barranca Mesa	Gonzales, Estanislado & Cirilio
17	Gonzales, Federico	February 26, 1913	May 4, 1917	582454	73	Rendija Canyon	Gonzales, Federico
18	Gonzales, Francisco	October 16, 1914	September 15, 1919	706489	22.5	Urban Park	Gonzales, Francisco Estate
19	Gonzales, Juan N.	March 6, 1893	September 11, 1894	1118944	120	Golf Course	Grant O.O.; Montoya, Ernesto and Adolfo
20	Hopper, William M.	August 5, 1908	March 6, 1914	389939	130	Los Alamos Townsite	Los Alamos Ranch School
21	Loomis, James S.	April 11, 1899	May 8, 1901	1920	164	TA-6 area	Ross, A.C. Anchor Ranch
22	Luján, Martín	January 27, 1914	June 17, 1918	636672	160	North Mesa	Luján, Martín
23	Martínez, Andrés	September 8, 1914	July 16, 1920	762235	63	Rendija Canyon	Serna, José & Fidel
24	Martínez, Román	April 22, 1915	October 21, 1919	714008	30	Cemetery	Grant, Ottie Oman
25	McDougall, Robert G.	January 5, 1911	June 15, 1914	413859	108	Pajarito Road	Roybal, Ramón
26	Montoya, José Albino	January 5, 1911	June 21, 1915	479145	90	Sigma Mesa	José Albino Montoya Estate
27	Moses, William*	June 1, 1900	July 31, 1903	2559	40	TA-6 area	Grottenthaler, Walter V.
28	Quintana, Alberto	January 11, 1921	January 8, 1925	951049	160	Garcia Canyon	Not applicable
29	Quintana, Benigno	November 23, 1892	September 11, 1894	2090	160	Western Area	Los Alamos Ranch School
30	Quintana, David	July 19, 1909	August 20, 1913	351630	151	North Mesa	Luján, Manuel & Gomez, Elfego
31	Romero, David	February 28, 1893	July 20, 1901	2781	160	Pajarito Road	Romero, Francisquita
32	Romero, Victor	February 25, 1913	March 28, 1916	541208	15	Pajarito Road	Romero, Victor
33	Roybal, Noberto	July 31, 1916	November 4, 1920	780148	125	Barranca Mesa	Roybal, Noberto
34	Sánchez, Miguel	March 8, 1899	September 28, 1904	3350	160	2-Mile Mesa	Montoya, José Elfego & José Patricio
35	Vigil, Anastacio M.	May 7, 1915	June 12, 1925	961379	32.4	Mortandad Canyon	Not applicable
36	Vigil, Eliseo Montes	March 25, 1913	November 10, 1916	553805	63	Trailer Park	Montoya, Enriquez
37	Vigil, Fermin	May 7, 1915	July 16, 1920	762236	60.31	Mortandad Canyon	Vigil, Fermin
38	White, William Carpenter	March 18, 1899	April 18, 1905	3459	160	Western Area	Los Alamos Ranch School

* indicates in-lieu exchange

3787.95

Figure 101. Los Alamos homestead patents: homesteads and in-lieu exchanges on the Pajarito Plateau. (Dorothy Hoard)

The Individual Homesteads

The Archuleta Homesteads

Ruperto and Hipolita Archuleta

After an earlier attempt in 1913 (see section on José L. Garcia below), Ruperto Archuleta applied for a homestead of 156.74 acres on July 17, 1917. He and his wife, Hipolita, also owned property in Española—6 acres and a house in the community of Pajarito.¹⁰⁸ Located in Garcia Canyon, the tract that the Archuletas applied for had previously been listed to a Clara D. True and came with a small house or cabin. Ruperto's widow, Hipolita, explained during her final-proof testimony the story of the homestead's houses. As the translator recorded, she said, "one was builded [sic] when we purchased or exchange [sic] the improvements from Miss C True one was built 1919."¹⁰⁹ Clara True had submitted an application for homestead entry but never patented her homestead.

The Archuletas, who began residence in April 1918, built that second cabin and added a log corral plus a log shack to keep their cut hay dry. On approximately 26 acres of arable land on their homestead, the Archuletas grew beans, wheat, corn, peas, and squash. During the years that they worked to establish their claim, the Archuletas lived on their property from April to late October or early November, returning to their valley home during the winter months so their children could attend school.¹¹⁰

The Archuletas did not fence their claim, partly because it was bounded adequately on the north and south by mesas, on the west by the fence built by their neighbor, Garcia, and on the east by the fence built by Teofilo Lopez and Clara D. True. And as a witness, Locadio Archuleta, stated when Hipolita filed her final proof papers in the spring of 1922, Hipolita, by then a widow, could not afford to build fencing of her own.¹¹¹

Hipolita's husband had been ill and bedridden since May 1919, unable to work. Ruperto died on December 6, 1921, leaving Hipolita with a young son, aged fourteen, and a daughter who was seven. Because Hipolita did not have enough money to make the trip to Santa Fe to file the final proof for her homestead, and because one of her witnesses could not attend, being needed at his farm, she was unable to appear on the advertised date for filing her proof, May 23, 1922. She then had to file an affidavit explaining her absence; in addition, the U.S. commissioner, Alejandro Naranjo, had to file a certificate testifying that no one had protested the final proof.¹¹²

Hipolita eventually prevailed, and on August 31, 1922, she received title to the homestead that she, Ruperto, and their children had farmed.¹¹³ The history of the Ruperto Archuleta homestead after Hipolita successfully became its owner is unknown, but sometime before 1943, Hipolita sold her homestead, or part of it (80 acres), to Adolfo Garcia.¹¹⁴

Locadio Archuleta

Locadio Archuleta was listed in the Santa Fe Land Office records as a resident of Española, although his descendants described the location of the family home more precisely as the community of Pajarito, on the west bank of the Rio Grande near Black Mesa.¹¹⁵ On June 10, 1915, Locadio applied for a tract of 71.69 acres in lower Sandia Canyon west of the Tsankawi Indian ruins.¹¹⁶ He was not the first person to apply for this tract; two years earlier, on March 3, 1913, his brother Manuel Archuleta filed entry papers for the same property. But Manuel failed to complete the homestead process because of physical incapacities. Even Manuel was not the first person to try to make a living here; centuries earlier, Native Americans inhabited Sandia Canyon. Extensive cliff dwellings just north of the Archuleta claim testify to their presence.¹¹⁷

Locadio built a three-room log house, a corral, an earthen bake oven, and a chicken house on his claim and strung a three-wire fence around the entire property. Ultimately, he

had about 40 acres planted with beans and corn. He hauled water for domestic uses from Los Alamos Canyon to the north. On September 16, 1920, when he submitted proof that he had fulfilled all requirements, he listed himself as married with six children at the time. Locadio was awarded his title to the land—that is, to 52.70 acres of his original, larger claim—on April 1, 1921, six years after his initial entry.¹¹⁸ In a letter dated January 27, 1919, Forest Ranger Fred Plomteaux wrote that Andrés Martínez, Fermin M. Vigil, and Locadio Archuleta had had their applications for proof rejected at first because the Forest Service questioned the original boundary survey. Therefore, the claims of these three men were surveyed by metes and bounds, assuring that each applicant's boundaries were correctly described.¹¹⁹

Locadio supported his family by working in the mines of Colorado and at nearby sawmills in winter. During the summer, he farmed his tract with a team of horses, his only stock. The ranger's report for 1917, signed by Fred Plomteaux, mentions that Locadio used up-to-date farming methods, although the same report reveals that not even the most modern techniques were a defense against lack of adequate rain. "Small patch of vegetables failed on acct of drought," reads one report entry. Another noted that "crops are rather backwards on acct of continued drought." In 1918, dry conditions continued; the single word "drought" was entered in the space on the report where rangers were to list "Factors affecting success or failure." Nonetheless, in his 1920 report, Plomteaux stated that "Everything on the claim has the appearance of a preferred summer home," one that was in fact habitable for all seasons.¹²⁰

According to his descendants, Locadio died in a mining accident in Colorado in 1925, leaving his wife Zenaida Vigil Archuleta to raise the family—by 1925 there were eight children—and manage the family home and the plateau homestead.¹²¹ When the government condemned the homesteaders' lands, Locadio's wife, Zenaida Vigil Archuleta, was listed as the seller of Locadio Archuleta's property.¹²²

The Brook Homesteads

Harold H. Brook and Martha Brook

Note to reader: The homestead histories of both Harold H. Brook and his mother, Martha (“Mattie”) Brook, are treated together here because they overlap.

Harold Hemingway Brook, an agronomist, came to New Mexico from Illinois in search of a cure for his tuberculosis. Attracted by the possibilities of farming the Pajarito Plateau, he filed for a homestead of 130 acres on August 1, 1908. His choice of location on the plateau was Los Alamos Mesa, where the town of Los Alamos now stands. Part of his site included land that had been claimed and entered in March 1893 by an earlier settler, Antonio Sánchez. But Sánchez never completed the homestead process; his case was cancelled by the Forest Service in June 1901.¹²³

Unlike most of the homesteaders on the plateau, Brook lived year-round on his claim, beginning in August 1908; by December he had completed a house.¹²⁴ Eager to expand his holdings, Brook entered into a partnership with his friend and neighbor, William Mackwood Hopper, who had applied for a homestead at the same time Brook had in 1908. When an earlier homesteader, William White, sold his acreage of 160 acres to Hopper that same year (1908), Brook immediately bought White’s property from Hopper. He bought it, however, in the name of his widowed mother, Martha A. (Mattie) Brook, while his own patent was pending. This latest property of Brook’s was located in what is now the Western Area of Los Alamos, just west of the main townsite, where Los Alamos High School and the University of New Mexico-Los Alamos are now located.

Five years later, in pursuit of still more property, Brook persuaded his fifty-two-year-old mother, Mattie, to apply for 150 acres, which she did on August 11, 1913.



Figure 102. H. H. Brook. Despite sometimes being unable to work because of the effects of his tuberculosis, Brook was a driving force in the development of his ranch and the plateau community. He built roads, introduced the most up-to-date agricultural practices, and provided jobs for local residents. (Los Alamos Historical Society)



Figure 103. Mattie Brook stands in front of her homestead cabin in photo dated “about 1915.” The cabin, located near the present-day DP site at the eastern edge of Los Alamos, was built of cut lumber, had a screened entry door, and was made cozy with curtained windows. (Los Alamos Historical Society)



Figure 104. A photo of Brook’s Alamos Ranch taken before 1917. (Los Alamos Historical Society)



Figure 105. Katherine "Cassy" Brook. The caption on the back of the photograph states, "Photographed about sunset at a cave below the plateau rim in Los Alamos Canyon. On a 'dare' she spent the night in the cave, commenting only that she was 'much more afraid of that pistol than of any wild creatures in the area.'" (Los Alamos Historical Society)

Less than a month later, on September 9, 1913, Brook applied for an addition of 20 acres to his original homestead, bringing his acreage up to 150 acres. It was during this period that Brook courted Katherine Lucy Cross Brown of Santa Fe, a young widow of twenty-six and mother of a toddler son. Excerpts from letters written during their extended courtship (1911 to 1914) reveal much about the hard work required to farm and ranch on the plateau.¹²⁵



Figure 106. Katherine "Cassy" Brook. It is said that it was she who suggested the name "Los Alamos Ranch" for H. H. Brook's ranch on the Pajarito Plateau. (Los Alamos Historical Society)

Brook patented both his properties on March 6, 1914; he was 28 years old. On April 2, 1914, he married Katherine Brown. Known as Cassy, Brook's bride had been born in Santa Fe in 1888 to George and Francis Cross. It is believed that her father was for a time the editor of the *Santa Fe New Mexican*. Cassy was educated in Santa Fe until her high school years, when she was sent to San Francisco for further schooling. The destruction of much of that city by earthquake and fire in 1906 forced her return to Santa Fe,

where within a year or two she married Frank Orlando Brown. Brown was a health-seeker from Indiana, one of many people afflicted with tuberculosis who moved to the Southwest hoping for a cure. For several years Brown operated the Capital Pharmacy on the Santa Fe Plaza. Brown lost his battle with tuberculosis in April 1910, dying just two months before the birth of his and Cassy's son, Harry Franklin Brown, known as Frank.¹²⁶



Figure 107. Cassy's son Harry Franklin "Frank" Brown poses with his pet burro in front of the H. H. Brook house. As an adult, Frank Brown worked for the Zia Company in Los Alamos. (Los Alamos Historical Society)



Figure 108. Mattie Brook at the home of her son H. H. Brook. Because of poor health, Mattie spent little time on her own nearby homestead. She much preferred the climate of Las Cruces to that of the Pajarito Plateau. (Los Alamos Historical Society)



Figure 109. Mattie Brook feeds a lamb on the Brook homestead. (Los Alamos Historical Society)

Still not content with the amount of acreage he owned or controlled, Brook bought his neighbor Hopper's homestead of 130 acres when Hopper sold out in 1914. The next year, Brook bought the Benigno Quintana homestead (in what is now Western Area) of 160 acres from Quintana's heirs. In 1917, for the sum of one dollar, Brook bought William White's property from his mother. This was the land adjacent to the Quintana homestead that Brook had bought in Mattie Brook's name in 1908. According to Forest Service correspondence, he was also interested in obtaining land from a José B. Gonzales who had abandoned his claim before receiving a patent. Brook reportedly asked Gonzales to go to patent so that Brook could buy him out right away.¹²⁷ The land in

question was eventually patented by Ramón Durán, who retained ownership until the government takeover.

By patenting in his mother's name as well as in his own and by buying up other tracts, Brook came to own a large part of Los Alamos Mesa, just under 800 acres.¹²⁸ While he lived on his claim year-round, his mother, not in good health, far preferred the warmer temperatures of lower altitudes. Witnesses testified to Mattie's illnesses and indicated that the "desolation of the land" also contributed to her preference to live away from the Pajarito Plateau. Further, life was hard on the homestead; water had to be hauled up to Mattie's claim, and when the weather was severe the water sources froze. Mattie nonetheless endured

the plateau's harsh conditions for three years, living on her "waterless, isolated" claim from June to December 20 in 1914 and from March to mid-December in both 1915 and 1916.¹²⁹ She left the plateau permanently on December 11, 1916, testifying in an affidavit that her health and the severity of the winter forced her to move to a lower altitude. She went to Leavenworth, Kansas, first, but by January 1918 had moved to Las Cruces.¹³⁰

Access to Los Alamos Mesa, where the Brook farmsteads lay, was by way of a wagon road, a spur of the Buckman Road, that climbed up out of White Rock Canyon after crossing the Rio Grande and connected to Los Alamos Canyon. From the lower end of Los Alamos Canyon, the road diverted to a small side canyon, now called DP Canyon. The road topped out at Mattie Brook's homestead at the east end of DP Mesa. This wagon road (today called the Mattie Brook Trail) was used by homesteaders on the mesa and, for a short while from 1916, by the Los Alamos Ranch School, until the school contracted to have built—up the south cliff of neighboring Pueblo Canyon—what has become the present State Road 502 to Los Alamos.¹³¹

Interested in improving modern farming methods, Brook started an experimental farm to test new techniques in the high, cold climate characteristic of the Pajarito Plateau. He employed the most modern agricultural techniques known, earning a reputation variously as "the first successful farmer" on the plateau, the "bean king," and "a pioneer in the bean business." He rotated his crops, manured his fields, and tilled them according to the latest scientific principles; he used modern equipment like discs, harrows, cultivators, and planters. Some of the agricultural machines (such as threshers) he bought were so large that the routes up to Los Alamos Mesa had to be widened to accommodate them, thus indirectly improving access to the plateau. It is also said that Brook built the first silo in New Mexico on the Pajarito Plateau. For local markets, which extended to Denver, he raised lamb, feeding his animals with a scientifically researched mixture of corn, beans, and the silage produced by his silo. On his properties he built a

five-room frame house, a smokehouse, a chicken house, a barn, sheds, a blacksmith shop, and corrals. He is recorded as having had ten head of cattle, nine horses, 1,300 sheep, and four hogs. Besides beans, he planted corn, wheat, rye, oats, barley, peas, and spelt. A forest ranger, sent to observe the extent of Brook's improvements to his claims, reported that Brook had the best ranch in the area.¹³²

Despite the effort Brook put into his experimental farm—a farm successful enough to be considered the first commercial farm on the plateau—it was not financially successful. To implement his income, Brook engaged in a number of different enterprises. For example, he was a director of the Ramón Land and Lumber Company, which had established headquarters in Pajarito Canyon. When that company went bankrupt, Brook formed a partnership with Ashley Pond. Their plan, conceived in 1916, was to turn Brook's farm into a school for boys.

At the time of his final purchase of property on the Pajarito Plateau in 1917, Brook owned most of Los Alamos Mesa and today's Western Area. By then, however, he was deeply in debt and sold his holdings to Ashley Pond that same year. Cassy was pregnant with twin daughters at the time, giving birth in Santa Fe. The family then moved to Las Cruces, where Brook became the county agriculturist for Doña Ana County. It was here that his mother Mattie joined him in January 1918.

Mattie Brook successfully patented her homestead on November 28, 1919, although Forest Ranger Fred Plomteaux protested, expressing doubts about Mattie Brook's status as a bonafide homesteader. Plomteaux had kept thorough accounts describing what he found at Mattie Brook's claim every time he inspected it. In a letter dated December 18, 1918, he wrote that Mattie had met the letter of the law but that he suspected from various kinds of evidence, which he listed, that her homestead had always been intended to go to the "Los Alamos Ranch Company," her son's operation. Someone overrode Plomteaux's protest, writing in the letter's margin, "We

don't want your opinions, only facts," and adding in another margin, "Nothing to this" [to Plomteaux's suspicions].¹³³

In 1920, Brook sold his mother's homestead to Edward Fuller, son of one of the eastern industrialists who joined with Ashley Pond to form an exclusive secondary school for boys.¹³⁴ That sale marked the end of the Brook era on the Pajarito Plateau. Brook lost the fight with his illness in 1924, leaving Cassy a widow once again.¹³⁵

The A. J. Connell Tract

Albert J. Connell

Albert J. Connell, always known as "A. J.," was working as a ranger for the Forest Service when, in 1917, Ashley Pond hired him to direct the newly conceived Los Alamos Ranch. Thirteen years later, in 1930, Connell obtained a 40-acre parcel of Forest Service land on Los Alamos Mesa. He obtained it in exchange for a homestead of 160 acres that he had bought for that purpose in the Pecos area near Santa Fe. Connell's new parcel was just west of Fuller Lodge and included what is now considered the heart of Los Alamos, land centered around Ashley Pond.

The Pecos land of 160 acres was first patented by José Labadie on March 11, 1909. On May 9, 1930, the Labadies sold their land to J. O. Seth, a lawyer in Santa Fe (who became Connell's lawyer). One day later, on May 10, 1930, Seth and his wife sold the property to A. J. Connell. A document signed by Herbert Hoover indicates that Connell relinquished his Pecos property and received "in lieu thereof" the Los Alamos claim as patent #1043435 on January 21, 1931.¹³⁶

Three-quarters (30 acres) of Connell's parcel was in Section 16, the section of a township that is not open to homesteading but instead is reserved to provide income to benefit schools. However, the ranch school had several special use permits in Section 16 and had

erected buildings, a telephone line, and a pipeline across the section. In evaluating the trade, the Forest Service also considered the educational value of the school as a public good. Connell had originally wanted to conduct an “in-lieu” trade for all of Section 16 (640 acres). Forest Service records indicate that there were several pieces of land that the Forest Service wanted Connell to buy as part of the land swap. However, the in-lieu agreement was eventually finalized when Connell bought the Pecos tract of 160 acres, which the Forest Service did not particularly want, in exchange for only 40 acres of land in Section 16.¹³⁷ Connell sold his parcel to the Ranch School on April 22, 1934. He died in February 1944, a year after the Ranch School’s last day in February 1943.¹³⁸



Figure 110. A. J. Connell and his dog, Peggy, allegedly named after Peggy Pond Church. (Los Alamos Historical Society)



Figure 111. Schoolmaster Fermor Church using the Ranch School telephone line in the field. (Los Alamos Historical Society)



Figure 112. Above, the Ramón Durán homestead and below, the Efren Gonzales de Durán homestead on South Mesa (Pajarito Mountain in background on lower photo). (Los Alamos National Laboratory)

The Durán Homesteads

Juan Ignacio Durán and Efren Gonzales de Durán

The story of the Durán homesteads begins officially on October 24, 1898, when Juan Ignacio Durán filed for 160 acres of land, on what is now called South Mesa, where the main administrative area (Technical Area 3) of Los Alamos National Laboratory is located. Durán died not long after he filed, in 1899, leaving his widow to complete the homestead process with the help of three small children. Efren Gonzales de Durán received the patent for the land her husband had claimed on June 14, 1904.

Of her 160 acres, Efren farmed only ten, using the rest as pasture for her stock. In her Testimony of Claimant, dated December 28, 1903, Efren testified that she was thirty years old and that “our house was built a few days before my husband made his entry, and we established our residence at the same time.” The couple built a log house of three rooms, a corral, and a stable; they raised chickens, fenced about 10 acres, and dug a small reservoir. Her family, Efren testified, consisted of herself and three children, “and we have lived on this land continuously before and after the death of my husband, which occurred in 1899.” They raised crops every season on their 10 acres of cultivated land.¹³⁹

While it is not known by what route or trail the Duráns originally reached their homestead from the valley (Efren listed her post-office address as San Ildefonso), eventually they, or other families who needed access to South Mesa to reach their own homesteads, built a wagon road that led directly to South Mesa. It was carved out of the side of Los Alamos Canyon—a formidable, 200-foot wall. The roadbed was 9 feet wide, just wide enough for one wagon only. Its builders dug bank cuts and created crude rock embankments to shore up the overhanging, outer edge of the road, evidence that can still be seen along the old route.¹⁴⁰

By the time the army appropriated the homesteads on the Pajarito Plateau, Efren had died; her estate, Ramón Durán et al., is listed as the seller of Efren's homestead to the government. By then, Efren's pastures had been abandoned, much of the property had reverted to pine forest, and taxes were in arrears.¹⁴¹



Figure 113. A July 1977 view of the Ramón Durán homestead. (Los Alamos National Laboratory)



Figure 114. The foundations of the Ramón Durán homestead cabin were revealed after excavation about August or September 1977.¹⁴⁴ (Los Alamos National Laboratory)

Ramón Durán

When Efren's son Ramón grew up, he too applied for a homestead. He had just met the minimum age requirement of twenty-one when, on March 2, 1917, he entered a claim for only 10 acres southeast of the family homestead, on what is now known as Pajarito Road. There was already a log cabin on Ramón's claim, for José B. Gonzales had applied for the land five years earlier, on November 13, 1912. But Gonzales had relinquished his claim about 1915, abandoning it before making final proof because he married and moved away. Ramón bought Gonzales's cabin from him (after first working for Gonzales from about 1914 and then using the land by permit or by renting it until he came of age), thus reducing the amount of effort that Ramón had to put into improving his claim.¹⁴² Ramón successfully patented his claim on August 15, 1922. By then he was married and had three children. The family did not live on their small claim year-round, as Ramón's mother stated she did; Ramón moved his family seasonally to the plateau from the valley.¹⁴³

Ramón seems to have used the two combined homesteads (his and his mother's) for raising stock as much as for farming, and Ramón and other family members had grazing permits for the nearby forest. However, Ramón did grow some beans, corn, wheat, oats, and peas on his land, and his niece, Cordelia García Romero, indicated that her uncle Ramón and her father had a machine they used for soil preparation, which they shared.¹⁴⁵ The results of their efforts were not completely satisfactory, for Ramón reported only a "fair" crop for 1917 and 1918; he did not plant at all in 1919; and he listed the results for the plantings between 1919 and 1922 as "not very good."¹⁴⁶ Ramón rented and cultivated adjacent private land in connection with his claim, and he cared for his mother's homestead nearby, in which he had a one-third share. To augment his income during slack periods, he worked at ranches and timber operations on the plateau.¹⁴⁷

At the time of the army takeover, the two Durán homesteads included several log cabins (one tumbled-down and abandoned), a log shed, a stone shed, a stable, earthen water tanks, and a fence. The owner of the homesteads at the time of the takeover was Ramón Durán et al.¹⁴⁸

The Garcia Homesteads

Juan Luis Garcia

Juan Luis Garcia was the first person to file a homestead application for the Pajarito Plateau and successfully patent his land. He applied for entry in Township 20 North on March 30, 1887, although he may have been using the plateau seasonally since about 1870.¹⁴⁹ By June 1892, he had fulfilled the requirements of the Homestead Act and had received a patent for his 160 acres in Garcia Canyon.¹⁵⁰ The pressures of feeding many mouths may have been the source of Juan Luis's incentive to farm the plateau, for by the time Juan Luis filed, he was well on his way to becoming the patriarch of a large family. In his April 11, 1892, Testimony of Claimant, Juan Luis stated that he was forty years old, married, and had four boys and three girls. Some time later, before 1907, his first wife, María Leonora Gonzales Garcia, died. Juan Luis remarried, and six more children were born to him and his second wife.¹⁵¹

Juan Luis had a permanent home at Guachupangue, between the southern boundary of Española and the northern boundary of Santa Clara Pueblo. For his homestead he chose a site at the north edge of the Pajarito Plateau, relatively accessible to the Garcia family home in the Rio Grande Valley. Juan Luis's choice of a site lay in an unnamed canyon (soon to be known as Garcia Canyon) between Santa Clara and Guaje Canyons. Ultimately, some of Garcia's children from his first marriage established homesteads to the east and west of their father's land, filing several separate homestead patents.

For five years Juan Luis Garcia was the only official homesteader on the Pajarito Plateau although other area residents, such as the father of homesteader Donaciano Gonzales, had unofficially been farming plateau land since 1887. As mentioned earlier, it was not until the 1890 township survey covering the present-day townsite of Los Alamos, Township 19 North, Range 6 East, was approved in 1892 that another family (that of Benigno Quintana) staked a formal claim on the plateau. The Garcia and Quintana homesteads, however, were separated by a distance of about seven and a half miles as the crow flies and by several deep canyons.

Surrounded by his growing family, Juan Luis may not have been disturbed by the isolation of his homestead on the plateau. Work during the growing season occupied almost all the family's hours. Coming up to the plateau on a seasonal basis—thus establishing the seasonal round of activities that would characterize homesteading on the Pajarito Plateau—Juan Luis, his wife, and his children cleared their claim of trees and planted pinto beans, wheat, corn, and potatoes.¹⁵² Juan Luis also applied for grazing permits; in April 1909, he applied for a permit to pasture ten cattle and four horses around his homestead on public lands within the Jemez National Forest. Another grazing permit dated ten years later (March 1919) authorized Juan Luis to pasture eight head of cattle in a portion of the national forest identified as Pajarito District, Alamitos Unit. In this permit, the grazing area was specifically identified in terms that give people today a glimpse of the rugged landscape of the Pajarito Plateau: "Bounded on the north by the Santa Clara Indian Reservation; on the east by the drift fence; on the south by the Los Alamos Canyon; on the west by the north and south forks of the Guaje Canyon, the most westerly saddle in the ridge between the Guaje and Los Alamos Canyons and the Los Alamos Canyon."¹⁵³ According to a grandson of Juan Luis, Tony Borrego, Juan Luis also grazed animals in the Valle Grande.¹⁵⁴ A letter written in 1932 to the estate of Juan Luis Garcia by the Forest Service indicates that Juan Luis's descendants were still grazing animals on the plateau. It informs the heirs

that their application to graze seven head of cattle on the Guaje and Rendija allotments has been approved.¹⁵⁵

The family traded or sold their beans to their winter neighbors in Española. In addition to farming, the energetic Juan Luis established a sawmill at Pine Spring at the head of his namesake Garcia Canyon. For approximately six years, until a fire destroyed the mill, the Garcia men worked at the mill, leaving the women and children to tend the crops and watch the animals.¹⁵⁶ The women also picked piñon nuts, selling them for a price (in 1918) of seven cents a pound. All the family members worked hard to sustain themselves, for not only did they farm the plateau, they also tended crops and orchards at their valley home. The children went to school in the valley but often started late in the school year and left early in the spring so they could help with the fall harvest and the spring planting.¹⁵⁷

Appolonia (Polly) Garcia Trujillo, granddaughter of Juan Luis Garcia and his first wife, gives a vivid description of the life of a homesteader's child:

Well, the women did the work as the man did. I used to come up real early when I was 11-12 years old with my daddy very early in the spring. I left the school for two weeks to help my daddy plant the wheat, take care of the cattle that were kind of lean so they would feed them for two weeks. He planted his wheat in March.... Then I went for another month to school with the rest of the family. My mother stayed in Española. Guachapanga, if you know where the division is, the arroyo from Española south. I helped my daddy with a one-half pound plow with one horse and my daddy with another plow with another horse. I made breakfast for him. He took care of the animals, cows and the horses.

I took my food to cook it for noon in cans. I made a fire, a hole, what you call it and when it was almost finished, the flames were almost finished, I put my cans and covered them with a piece of board and then with dirt. That way I cooked the meal for the

noon. I helped my daddy plow until it was noon and we'd carry the food to the house again. My daddy fed the horses and I put on the table, we ate and went back again to plant the wheat and the peas and the rest of the barley and whatever there was along with the wheat. I went back to school in early May, or the latter part of April, we came back and planted acres and acres of beans. I helped my daddy with the plow again because my brothers were the last ones to come. Five girls came first. So we had to take the place of the boys until they grew... So again, I had to take the plow with my sisters and we plowed as much as we could, and planted as much as we could. Then we had to harvest and clean the plants also because my daddy was in the sawmill. We had to work very hard, but we seemed to enjoy it and grow very healthy...

My daddy had 14 acres down in Española in alfalfa and orchard and some of the garden plants. We used to plant chile and melons, watermelons and all those things that we couldn't raise here.... My daddy took a ranch himself and then he had a big ranch and the 50 acres [from his grandfather] and with all girls it was hard on us. They we had to take care of the fruit down in Española and the garden with the plants that we couldn't grow up here... There was a crop of pinons [near Garcia Canyon] and we used to divide the time with picking pinons and harvesting but we did it. I love to pick pinons.¹⁵⁸

Besides farming his homestead, Juan Luis improved it by building a four-room house, a stable, and a corral. He planted a small orchard and fenced his land. There was no water on Juan Luis's property; the family hauled it from Pine Spring by wagon. By the time the army condemned the Juan Luis Garcia homestead, its improvements included a box cabin, a log cabin, a log-and-stone cabin, a log barn, and a fence.

While Juan Luis Garcia's adult years were spent farming and lumbering, his childhood years were not so peaceful.



Figure 115. One of the log buildings on the Juan Luis Garcia homestead. (Los Alamos National Laboratory)

An episode from his youth illustrates the dangers from nomadic, raiding Indians who threatened the people of the Rio Grande Valley until the mid-1860s and sporadically after that. In 1858, when Juan Luis was eight years old, he and two other boys encountered a band of Navajo near Puye, the name given to the cliffs not far from Guachupangue (now part of the Santa Clara Pueblo reservation). The Navajo killed the two boys and took Juan Luis captive. According to the story passed down through the Garcia family, it was not until three years later, when Juan Luis was eleven, that he managed to escape and rejoin his family near Española. By that time, his father had died and his mother had remarried. Juan Luis relearned Spanish and eventually settled on land in Guachupangue.¹⁵⁹

Records indicate that when he was in his late sixties, in 1917, Juan Luis sought to find out if Congress would grant him a pension in compensation for the “numerous wounds” he received during his captivity that were now affecting his health.¹⁶⁰ The outcome of this request is not known. Juan Luis Garcia died in 1931 at age eighty-one. His homestead was owned by his estate (Adolfo Garcia et al.) when the government took over the plateau during World War II.

Adolfo Garcia

Adolfo Garcia was one of the sons of Juan Luis Garcia by his first wife.¹⁶¹ In 1910, Adolfo Garcia, a resident of Guachupangue, requested that 55 acres of Forest Service land in Garcia Canyon be declared open to homesteading.¹⁶² Adolfo then made two entries for homestead land, the first on July 25, 1911, and the second on December 24, 1914. Adolfo submitted final proof for his claims on December 12, 1918, but his proof was rejected by the government, which contended that Adolfo had not resided on his land for the required five years.¹⁶³

For the next year, Adolfo fought his case, as is documented in “U.S. v. Adolfo Garcia.” Fred Plomteaux, Forest Service ranger, testified that he had issued Adolfo a permit in early 1915 to cut logs for a dwelling but that Adolfo



Figure 116. Marialla Vigil and Adolpho Garcia. (Courtesy of the family)

had not built until two years later, in 1917. Further, because Adolfo's claims were in what was then Sandoval County, while Adolfo voted in Rio Arriba County (his permanent residence and where he was also justice of the peace), the government claimed he was "stopped from asserting continuous residence upon his claim."¹⁶⁴

But Adolfo ultimately won his suit, making a second entry for his claims on March 15, 1921, and finally receiving a patent for 55 acres in 1924. Forest Service officials had doubted Adolfo's assertion of continuous residence because although he had a large family—he and his wife María Vigil Garcia ultimately had nine children—he had built only a one-room cabin on his homestead. Further, a 1919 Forest Service report indicated that the cabin on Adolfo's claim was "uninhabitable in severe or rainy weather." Adolfo built a barn as well, which may have served his needs adequately but which the 1919 report described as "poorly constructed."¹⁶⁵

Nonetheless, the Forest Service eventually came to the conclusion that Adolfo had fulfilled his obligations under the law. In a 1918 memorandum for the court case, Forest Ranger Plomteaux described each of his 1917 visits to Adolfo's claim, noting that he has seen Adolfo and his family working the land every time and that they had planted beans, corn, potatoes, "sugar cane," and "garden truck, sufficient for family use." Plomteaux concluded his report by writing, "In my annual reports on this case I have stated that claimant had not resided at the claim. This is a fact, however, there is an explanation due. The claimant has a large family and has been suffering with the rheumatism constantly for several years and was unable to construct his cabin on the claim but having one on his share of his fathers estate adjacent the claim, he lived there. Last season he was considerably relieved and was able to construct the cabin and is now complying to the letter with the laws. The claimant has been acting in good faith all along."¹⁶⁶

Adolfo farmed his land as his father and brothers did, producing a remarkable amount despite the lack of irrigation and the "primitive methods" of farming noted by Forest Service inspectors. Garcia, the inspector wrote, used "ordinary time-worn methods" that had been "in vogue for centuries"—methods that depended on deep fall planting, constant attendance, and endless work by the entire family.¹⁶⁷

Just as Adolfo grew beans, corn, wheat, fodder, and straw like his father and brothers, his wife, like other homestead women, maintained a kitchen garden. In 1919, Adolfo testified that he planted seven thousand pounds of beans, selling them for eight cents a pound. Corn sold for one-and-a-half cents per pound; oat hay for ten dollars the ton. Adolfo also planted 2 acres of what he called sugar cane but which must have been a similar plant, sorghum. Sorghum is drought tolerant and grows well in locations with limited water. Adolfo's 2 acres yielded, he testified, "about a ton" of sorghum, from which a sweet, molasseslike syrup could be pressed. (See the section on the Montoya homestead,



Figures 117. Forest rangers took these photos to document their opinion that Adolfo Garcia had not established residence on his homestead tract as required by law. The original caption for the photos of the dwelling that Adolfo Garcia eventually built on his homestead tract reads, "The only building on the claim where claimant professes that he and his family resided while proving up. It will be noted that while chinking has been left out of space for windows, these have not been opened up." The exposures were made April 2, 1919. (U.S. Forest Service)

below, for a description of how syrup was pressed from the sorghum cane.)¹⁶⁸ Adolfo's livestock included four cows and four horses. He had a grazing permit for twelve cattle.¹⁶⁹

In 1933, Adolfo received a patent for another 4 acres. He was still in possession of his property at the time of the government buyout and owned an additional 80 acres located immediately east of his homestead that were originally patented by the Archuleta family.



Figure 118. The homestead of Adolfo's father, Juan Luis Garcia. The original caption for this photo reads, "Cabin in group of dwellings on the Juan L. Garcia patented claim where claimant [Juan's son Adolfo] and family reside throughout the summer season instead of on the claim. This is situated about one half mile west, and on the same mesa, from the claim." The exposure was made on April 2, 1919. (U.S. Forest Service)



Figure 119. Forest rangers believed that Adolfo Garcia's legal residence was at this home in Guachapangue, south of Española. The original caption for this photo reads, "Claimant's residence in Guachupanga, Rio Arriba County. Looking east from public road." (U.S. Forest Service)



Figure 120. The Ezequiel Garcia cabin. (Los Alamos National Laboratory)

Ezequiel Garcia

Juan Luis Garcia's son Ezequiel applied for a claim near his father's homestead in Garcia Canyon on the day before Christmas, 1914. Ezequiel, whose principal residence was also in Guachapangue, near Española, filed a claim for approximately 31 acres. Three years later, on July 28, 1917, he filed an application to adjust his entry, enlarging it to 42.5 acres.¹⁷⁰

He began farming his claim in April 1915 but was not able to establish residence at first, staying instead at his father's homestead about three-quarters of a mile away while he tilled his own claim. It was not until April 1919 that Ezequiel was able to finish building a log cabin on his claim and settle his family there each growing season,

returning to Guachapangue every winter so the children could go to school. Ezequiel's homestead lay at the highest altitude of all the Garcia homesteads, 7,440 feet, in the Garcia Canyon area. Ponderosa pine and gamble oak grow on the mesa top; today, large stumps of ponderosa testify to the effort Ezequiel made to clear his land.¹⁷¹

Ezequiel gradually improved his property with a one-room log house, a chicken coop, a corral, and a stock tank for animals. He built an horno for baking bread, and he strung a wire fence along the west side of his property. There was no merchantable timber on his claim, and only about half his property was suitable for cultivation. Nonetheless, Ezequiel planted corn and beans in 25 acres of fields as his major crops. Over the years, he added

oats, potatoes, and wheat. Like the other homesteaders on the plateau, Ezequiel had to dry-farm; there was no water for irrigation. The family hauled water half a mile from a spring, the Ojito del Pinabete or Pine Spring (the same source that Juan Luis's family used).¹⁷² As U.S. Forest Service records indicate, Ezequiel also grazed some cattle, having obtained grazing permits over the years for up to eighteen head of livestock (three or four horses and cattle). To supplement the family income, Ezequiel worked at the nearby Garcia family sawmill, in which he owned a share.¹⁷³

Ezequiel filed his notice of intention to make proof on his land on May 23, 1922, and on July 6 of that year he and his witnesses appeared at the U.S. Land Office in Santa Fe to give testimony. Ezequiel was forty-seven by that time, a married man with six children. A document in the Forest Service files, also dated July 6, 1922, explains why Ezequiel did not file for final proof within three years of the date he entered his claim, December 24, 1914: "Because the forest ranger advised me in 1919 that my time is not come yet, and I myself do not know much about homestead law." There was an additional reason why Ezequiel delayed proving on his claim: he was waiting for action on the application to amend his homestead entry that he made back in 1917.¹⁷⁴

On December 4, 1922, Ezequiel was awarded a patent to his claim of 42.5 acres of land in Garcia Canyon in a document signed by President Warren G. Harding. Ten years later, in 1932, Ezequiel made an additional homestead entry for 14.98 acres. That claim became his on February 11, 1938, in a patent signed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt.¹⁷⁵ The same year that Ezequiel obtained title to his second homestead claim, 1938, he moved his family from Guachapangue across the Rio Grande to San Pedro, now a part of Española. With his brother, he bought 60 acres of farmland and settled his family there. Ezequiel died in 1941, shortly before the army arrived on the Pajarito Plateau. He left his wife Consuela and eight children. The land was in the name of his estate at the time of buyout.¹⁷⁶

José Luis Garcia

José Luis Garcia, son of Juan Luis Garcia and his first wife and a resident of Española (where he owned 1 acre and a house), applied for a homestead of 35.53 acres on the Pajarito Plateau on November 27, 1915. By the next spring, in April 1916, José began to work his land; by 1917, he had begun to build a small, earth-roofed log cabin.¹⁷⁷

José chose land that had been filed on two-and-a-half years earlier, on February 28, 1913, by Ruperto Archuleta, who later withdrew his claim.¹⁷⁸ On his homestead, besides the two-room log cabin, José built a log corral and strung a three-wire fence. Gradually he expanded the cabin, adding an additional room in 1921 and starting another. Like other homesteaders, he planted beans, corn, wheat, and oats, some of which he sold and some of which he used in connection with the family sawmill.¹⁷⁹ In 1917, he even managed to grow "a wagon load of pumpkins."¹⁸⁰ José eventually had about 23 acres under cultivation. He also ran up to sixteen head of cattle each year and had several horses. By 1918, two pigs and about twenty hens had been added to the homestead's livestock.¹⁸¹

José's claim was not among the other Garcia homesteads in Garcia Canyon itself but higher up (at about 7,400 feet) in Chupadero Canyon just south of Garcia Canyon.¹⁸² He was not able to make final proof on his land within the statutory period of five years because, as he stated in an affidavit, the forest ranger advised him that he had to wait until 1922.¹⁸³ The records of the forest ranger whose responsibility it was to visit regularly the homesteads on the Pajarito Plateau do indicate that José did not establish residence on his claim during his first two years on the land, but they record that during that time José made "consistent effort to improve the claim," had begun building a log cabin, and was giving his crops all the attention necessary. The forest ranger, Fred Plomteaux, also indicated that José's claim was "situated very handily to the patented claim of his father, Juan L. Garcia," and that it was natural that José "could make his headquarters there while a proper dwelling was

being constructed" at his own claim. By April 12, 1918, however, José and his family had established their residence on their land. Their cabin had not yet been chinked or plastered when they first moved in, but according to Fred Plomteaux it "was in a neat condition" and contained a small stove, some cooking utensils, and a roughly made table.¹⁸⁴ From that time on, José and his family—his wife and their three children—lived on their claim from March or April until mid-November every year.¹⁸⁵ They returned to Española during the winter months so the children could attend school. Farming was not possible during the winter, of course, but according to a witness, José returned to his homestead very often to look after his pasture and the grain and furniture he had on his claim.¹⁸⁶

His residency finally established, in the spring of 1922 José and his witnesses traveled to the Land Office in Santa Fe to complete the final proof process. José had already complied with the regulations to post the plat of his claim, and his intent to make final proof, on the door of his house beginning March 8, 1922,¹⁸⁷ and to advertise his intent in the *New Mexico State Record* for five weeks. José was thirty-nine years old when he filed final proof on his homestead in Chupadero Canyon. He was awarded his patent, signed by President Warren G. Harding, on August 15, 1922, and was listed as land owner when the government acquired his homestead.¹⁸⁸

The Gomez Homesteads

Donaciano Gomez

Donaciano Gomez filed his homestead claim for 160 acres on the Pajarito Plateau on March 14, 1899. Gomez, who had a wife and (at the time) three children, patented his claim six years later on April 18, 1905. He lived on the homestead with his family until the arrival of the government during World War II, leaving only when plateau weather conditions, such as drought, were unfavorable for growing crops. The Gomez family lived in a log cabin and

had an *horno* for baking. They also built their homestead to last, constructing other ranch structures—such as outbuildings, corrals, lambing pens, pigpens, and chicken houses—from stone instead of wood.¹⁸⁹ Gomez’s homestead lies at an elevation of 7,300 feet on the rim of Pajarito Canyon, on Twomile Mesa just north of the Ramón Vigil Grant boundary. (Today the homestead lies within Los Alamos National Laboratory’s Technical Area 22.) To obtain water, the family created a trail to a spring in a nearby canyon.

The Donaciano Gomez family farmed only about a quarter of their 160 acres, planting beans, alfalfa, squash, and other crops. They also maintained a herd of cattle, hundreds of goats (“goats all over the place”), and numerous sheep.¹⁹⁰ Marcos Gomez, Donaciano’s son, reminisced in several newspaper accounts about life on the plateau during the homesteading years. As a boy and later as a young man, Marcos worked as a sheepherder at the Valle Grande, milked cows, churned butter, broke horses, planted and harvested, and helped build some of the Los Alamos Ranch School buildings.¹⁹¹

Marcos grew up on the Gomez homestead; he stayed on at his family’s ranch after his marriage to his wife María in 1937, building a house on his parents’ property. Marcos visited the former homestead with his wife in 1975. (The visit was videotaped in a Charles Kuralt documentary.)¹⁹² Marcos visited the site again in 1983 with other family members.¹⁹³

These family visits created some confusion regarding the actual location of the Donaciano Gomez homestead, raising the question whether Marcos’s cabin had been moved to a new location by the government during the war years. Additional research has verified that the parcel of land with the *horno* and animal pens made of stone, still located at Technical Area 22, is indeed the Donaciano Gomez homestead. Furthermore, the cabin in question (visited by the Gomez family in the 1970s and 1980s) was actually part of the nearby Sánchez homestead, later owned by José Elfego and José Patricio Montoya.¹⁹⁴

Members of the Gomez family occupied the Donaciano Gomez homestead until the time of the Manhattan Project.

Pedro Gomez y Gonzales

Pedro Gomez y Gonzales filed for entry on February 8, 1893, for 120 acres on land that is now the Los Alamos Golf Course. His immediate neighbor, Juan N. Gonzales, filed just a month later. As noted below for the Gonzales families, Pedro, along with the Gonzalezes, may have been using the land earlier, not an unusual situation. Pedro received the patent to his land on October 4, 1898. He is listed as having built a two-room house (built in 1893), a stable, corrals, and a fence; records indicate that he grew crops on 30 acres of his land but do not identify which kind. At the time of his final proof, he was forty-six years old and his family consisted of a wife and two children.¹⁹⁵ At the time of the army buyout, Pedro’s grandson, Elfego, was listed as owner of the property. Improvements on it were listed only as “two log cabins and a fence.”¹⁹⁶

The Gonzales Homesteads

The name Gonzales appears frequently in the history of homesteading on the Pajarito Plateau. Six Gonzales men filed claims here and ultimately received title to their land. The first was Juan N. Gonzales, who chose 120 acres next to the claim of Pedro Gomez y Gonzales on what is now the Los Alamos Golf Course. Juan filed a month after Pedro did, on March 6, 1893. It appears that some of the Gonzales clan had settled in the area earlier, for in 1890, when U.S. Deputy Surveyor Daniel B. Merry surveyed section lines of the northern part of the township in which the claims were located, he noted several cabins and fenced and cultivated fields. His assistant, Pilar Gonzales, had a house there, which he pointed out to Merry.¹⁹⁷ It is probable that the Gonzales families reached their homesteads by coming up Guaje Canyon to Rendija Canyon. The Rendija route is narrow and rough and required extensive development to make possible the passage of heavily loaded, horse-drawn wagons.¹⁹⁸ Juan N. Gonzales

Juan Gonzales apparently intended to settle in the southwest corner of the golf course area. (When David Quintana later requested that that land be listed, he testified, “I have bought the improvements from one Juan Gonzales.”¹⁹⁹) Juan changed his mind about his choice of land and eventually settled on land in the northeast quarter of Section 9. Although he did not file his entry papers until March 1893, he testified that he had in fact established residence earlier, in March 1889. His early residency made it possible for Juan to patent his land just a year and a half after entering his claim, on September 11, 1894.* In his final proof, Juan testified that he was fifty-eight years old, was of Española, and was married and had two children. In April 1930, he sold his property, 60 acres to Ottie Oman (O. O.) Grant and Grant’s wife and 60 acres to Ernesto and Adolfo Montoya. Juan’s tract was still owned by the Grants and Montoyas at the time of the army takeover. By then, the property included two log-and-board cabins, a log-and-board barn, a shed constructed of boards, and a log chicken house. At least part of the property was fenced.²⁰⁰

Juan’s homestead was originally incorrectly recorded as being in Section 10, an error not discovered until 1944. On August 18, 1944, Ottie Grant applied for a new and correct patent to the land because of an error in the original legal description. The government issued a new patent in Juan’s name.²⁰¹

Severo Gonzalez

Severo Gonzalez, a married man with two children, chose a homestead site well to the south of the first two Gonzales homesteads in an area currently known as Technical Area 6 within Los Alamos National Laboratory

* On September 5, 1944, after his death, Juan N. Gonzales’s original patent was revoked and a new patent was issued in his name. This administrative action was taken because of an error in the original legal land description. The erroneous description listed his tract in Section 10, which was not the section (Section 9) where his homestead was actually located.



Figure 121. Two sheepherders move a flock of sheep down a rocky slope into a mountain meadow above the Pajarito Plateau about 1920. In later life, Marcos Gomez reminisced about the loneliness of the sheepherder's life. (T. Harmon Parkhurst, Los Alamos Historical Society)



Figure 122. María and Marcos Gomez at the site of their homestead on Twomile Mesa. The remains of a corral are in background. (Los Alamos Historical Society)



Figure 123. Candida Gomez Quintana, Elfego Gomez (grandson of Pedro Gomez y Gonzales), Elfego's wife Candelarita Quintana Gomez, and Candelarita's brothers Roberto and Desiderio Quintana. (Photo courtesy of the family)

property. He filed for 158.31 acres on June 6, 1899, on the north boundary of the Ramón Vigil Grant. A little over two years later, on August 29, 1901, Gonzalez qualified for ownership of his tract by commuting it; that is, he paid for it in cash at the rate of \$1.25 per acre (a total of \$197.89).²⁰³ He received patent to his land on February 7, 1902. Gonzalez was the last of four homesteaders who entered claims just north of the Ramón Vigil Grant, all within three months of each other in 1899. His neighbors were Donaciano Gomez, who filed on March 4, 1899; Miguel Sánchez, who filed just four days later, on March 8, 1899; and James Loomis, who filed on April 11, 1899. A nearby landowner, William Moses, received his land patent through the in-lieu process in 1900 but never saw his tract.

Gonzalez had tilled about 10 to 13 acres of his claim by the time he patented it (at age thirty-six); he had also built a three-room house, a stable, a corral, and fences. After fourteen years of working to make a living on the plateau, he sold his land to his neighbor Loomis sometime before March 21, 1913. Loomis and his wife, in turn, sold the homestead not long afterwards to Claud Irwin in December 1914. Four years later, at the end of October 1918, Irwin sold to Alexander M. Ross, whose property became known as Anchor Ranch. The Ross estate was listed as the owner of the original Severo Gonzalez claim in wartime government condemnation documents.²⁰⁴

Estanislado Gonzales

Estanislado Gonzales was born in 1885. He was a resident of San Ildefonso and thirty years old when he filed final proof on August 4, 1915, for his homestead patent on what is now called Barranca Mesa. He testified that he was married with two children at the time. On February 18, 1916, Estanislado received a patent for his homestead claim of 140 acres.²⁰⁵

Estanislado entered an application for the land he had chosen on December 12, 1911, and settled on it about March 20, 1912. He was not the first to use that plot of land; evidence indicated that it was farmed earlier, for

several years, by others and then abandoned. On this tract, Estanislado built a log house (a first-class one, according to a ranger's report, habitable in all seasons and complete with household furnishings "of every description") with three rooms, two doors, and three windows. He also built a separate tool house and stock pond. He installed fences at the eastern and western ends of his claim from rim to rim, surrounding the area with a three-wire fence on cedar (juniper) posts. He also built a stable with loft for hay, a pole corral, and a grain room.²⁰⁶

Estanislado's claim included approximately 10 acres of timber, but instead of cutting it, he acquired the logs for his buildings from the discarded tops of trees previously cut for railroad ties. The Forest Service sold these tops, produced by local sawmills, to the local settlers. Obtaining water was a more difficult effort. For domestic use, the family drew water from a small spring on the mesa about a mile away. In addition, they hauled water from Guaje Canyon, using mules to pull heavy wagons. They also installed cisterns to store water that ran off the metal roofs of their buildings (children were assigned the task of pulling dead mice out of the cisterns). The family boiled water for everything, including laundry. Collecting water for domestic use was a never-ending chore. To water his stock—milk cows, pigs, chickens, and horses—Estanislado dug a reservoir on his claim that could hold about 20,000 gallons and provided water even during the driest seasons.²⁰⁷

As part of the proving-up process, Estanislado cleared all but 40 acres of his claim for farmland and planted corn, beans, rye, and wheat. He also grew fodder and straw for his livestock. Because the homestead had no water supply for ditch irrigation of crops, the family, like other homesteaders, relied exclusively on dry farming. Their crops had to survive on summer rainfall. Each year, Estanislado was able to increase the amount of land he plowed. In 1912, he tilled 25 acres; in 1913, 52; in 1914, 85, and in 1915, 100.²⁰⁸



Figure 124. Stone building at Donaciano Gomez homestead. (Los Alamos National Laboratory)

Like many of the plateau homesteaders, Estanislado worked for others to supplement the family income. He was sometimes absent from his claim for two to three months during the summer, leaving it to the care of his family. He worked for H. H. Brook, whose experimental farm was on Los Alamos Mesa to the south, and occasionally for other farmers. He also worked at local sawmills near the golf course in present-day Los Alamos. A progressive farmer, he invested in modern farming equipment that included mechanical planters, cultivators, disks, and harrows. As was the custom of the Hispanic residents on the plateau, Estanislado's family retained their permanent residence at San Ildefonso, traveling to their homestead on Barranca Mesa in March of each year and returning in November. A ranger's report dated June 15, 1915, notes that the family had gone to San Ildefonso on account of sickness, but that two of Estanislado's younger brothers, Cirilio and Hilario, had remained on the claim. Probably they lived with their older brother, for the ranger's report adds, "These boys are dependent on claimant for support."²⁰⁹



Figure 125. Stone corral or animal pen on the Donaciano Gomez homestead. (Los Alamos National Laboratory)



Figure 126. One of the homestead cabins on what is now the Los Alamos Golf Course. (Carl Buckland photo; Los Alamos Historical Society)

At the end of the year during which Estanislado patented his land,* on December 1, 1916, another of Estanislado's brothers, Donaciano, became his neighbor by applying for 12.5 acres on the small spur of Barranca Mesa just to the east of Estanislado's holdings. In 1920, Donaciano successfully patented his land, but by the time of the government buyout, Donaciano's holding had been acquired by Cirilio Gonzales and subsumed into the larger Gonzales property. By 1935, Estanislado's farmlands covered the mesa tops of his entire homestead. When, in 1943, the U.S. Army purchased the Gonzales homesteads on Barranca Mesa, the property included land jointly owned by Estanislado and Cirilio: Estanislado's 140 acres and the 12.5 acres originally homesteaded by Donaciano, making a total of 152.5 acres.²¹⁰

Federico Gonzales

Federico Gonzales first applied for a homestead of 57.52 acres in Rendija Canyon on February 26, 1913, proving on it by September 1916 and receiving title to his land on May 4, 1917. When Federico gave his final proof in September 1916, he testified that he was twenty-five years old, married (his wife was Emerenciana Roybal), and had two children. In 1920, Federico discovered that some of the land that he had been cultivating and practically all his improvements were outside the boundary of his homestead. He corrected the error by applying, on May 17, 1921, for an additional homestead of 15 acres of adjoining land. Thus, he increased his homestead to 72.5 acres. By the time Federico made final proof on his additional claim in September 1921, at age thirty, he and Emerenciana, age twenty-four, had six children to feed.²¹¹

Federico was not the first person to be interested in the land contained within his homestead boundary. In 1910, Andrés Martínez had applied for the tract. He did not complete the homesteading process for this piece of land,

however, switching instead to a tract on the opposite side of Rendija Canyon. In 1911, Eluterio Gonzales applied but soon relinquished. Even before the creation of the Jemez National Forest in 1905, it appears that squatters had used the land first claimed by Martínez and then by Federico because, according to a Forest Service report, it had already been cleared. Still in evidence were old stumps of trees that had been burned to get rid of them.²¹²

Federico's improvements over the years are described variously in several reports as consisting of a three-room log house (or a two-room dwelling with storeroom attached, the storeroom having been built by the previous claimant, Andrés Martínez), two sheds for wagons and harness, a shed for hay, a grain bin, a corral for stock, and a reservoir. Federico built all the structures of logs and roofed them with earth. He also strung a three-wire fence around the entire claim. He had one team of horses; with their help, the family produced beans, corn, corn fodder, wheat, wheat straw, and bean straw. Federico farmed, according to a report dated June 1, 1915, by using "modern farming implements of every description."²¹³

The family hauled water from a permanent spring in Rendija Canyon about a half mile east of their claim. Like most other homesteaders, they were absent from their claim during the winter months, from November through early March every year.²¹⁴ They would have reached their homestead through the rough bottomlands of Rendija Canyon. Aerial photographs taken in 1935 show ranch roads branching from the main road onto the adjacent bottomlands with roads skirting Federico's fields. The road that today passes the Sportsmen's Club on the Rendija Canyon floor began as a farm road across Federico's homestead fields.²¹⁵

The documents filed by Federico during the homestead application and proving-up processes hint at some of the tribulations even the most successful of homesteaders occasionally faced. Federico was to have made final proof on his additional homestead entry on September 9, 1921, but did not appear on that date "because his wife was very ill at that time."²¹⁶

The issue of residency came up with Federico (as it did for several other homesteaders)[†] because he voted in Santa Fe County. However, in his report of June 23, 1916, Ranger Fred Plomteaux stated that he believed Federico deserved to patent his land, and Federico did so successfully.²¹⁷

When the army appropriated the land in 1943, Federico was still the owner, but it is possible that the family was no longer living on it. The soldiers noted the existence of two log cabins, both made of logs on mudsill foundations. One cabin had an iron roof; the other had a sod roof. Both cabins were in poor condition, and no other structures or features were listed.²¹⁸

Francisco Gonzales

In September 1913, Francisco Gonzales applied for land west of what is now West Jemez Road, but the application was rejected because that highland has always been considered more appropriate for forest purposes. In November of the same year, he applied for 160 acres in what is now the Quemazon Communities area. However, he eventually settled for a much smaller area at yet another location. It was early in January 1914 when Francisco asked that this smaller tract be listed as available for entry. He formally applied for it—22.5 acres—on September 25, 1914; his application was certified on October 16 of that year. The land Francisco chose was between Pueblo and Rendija Canyons, up against the forest at about 7,600 feet in elevation, on what has become Urban Park in the Northern Community of Los Alamos. The only road (until the 1950s) to the settlements on the northern part of plateau led past Francisco's fields. The tract Francisco chose had been used in the past only for grazing purposes, although a telephone line had been strung across its western edge from north to south.²¹⁹

* This parcel of land in the southwest quarter of Section 3 is likely the same land originally farmed by Estanislado and Donaciano's father, which Donaciano had unsuccessfully tried to patent starting in 1910.

† Plomteaux also lists Romero, Victor, Santa Fe; Luján, Martín, Santa Fe; Vigil, Fermin, Santa Fe; and Gonzales, Francisco, Santa Fe. Plomteaux does not list José Albino Montoya, but his files contain several documents concerning his voting elsewhere.

Francisco established residence on his claim in October 1914 and had finished his house by November of that year. Almost all his land could be cultivated; on it, using methods that were “ordinary in vogue for centuries past,” he planted beans, corn, and wheat. His improvements included a two-room log house, two corrals, another one-room log house, and a chicken house. He fenced his claim either with three-wire fencing or pole fencing. His animals included one team of work horses, two cows, two pigs, and about 20 chickens. He kept the pigs and the chickens in enclosures, but he ran his horses and cows on open forest land.²²⁰

As attractive as the claim appeared for its agricultural possibilities, it proved difficult to farm. In a report dated February 15, 1917, Forest Ranger Fred Plomteaux wrote, “Surface rock is very close to the surface on this claim and the result is that the resulting water from the snow in the nearby timber seeps through the soil in the claim very close to the surface, rendering it undesirable as an agricultural proposition.”²²¹ Plomteau explained further:

There is one feature which I wish to discuss in regard to this claim, and that is the unusually small crop harvested the past season. The conditions at the time of planting were usually adverse owing to the fact that the surrounding area is heavily timbered, protecting the snow from melting at as early a date as on other more open areas. Therefore, the lands within this claim were in a very undesirable condition as late as the middle of May. Notwithstanding this fact, the claimant went ahead and planted the claim to crops while the soil was so wet that the furrows remained open after the plow had gone through. When the drag [a heavy log] had been passed over this, the land took on the appearance as if it had been plastered. Then, when the sun struck it became baked, and it is a wonder that any crop whatever was produced.²²²

Francisco and his family worked hard to make their tract productive despite the difficulties, even, in 1915, applying for additional land to the north of their claim.

But by 1917, they were tempted to give up the effort. In that same report of February 15, 1917, Plomteaux wrote that “it was the claimant’s intention to relinquish on October 23 [1916] in case that the application under the Act of June 11th, made by Antonio Durán y Roybal, had been acted upon favorably. Now, however, since this application was rejected, he intends to stay with it.”²²³

And the family did. Whenever Ranger Plomteaux rode by to inspect the homestead, he found someone at home or in the fields, and he noted that the house and out buildings were in good condition and well kept up. The family had also dug a reservoir with an earth embankment on a slight slope on their claim; when it rained, it could hold about five thousand gallons. During dry spells, the family obtained water from a spring on private land about one mile distant to the north.²²⁴

Surprisingly, farming went better for the Gonzales family during dry years, years that posed drought problems for other homesteaders. On January 25, 1918, Ranger Plomteaux, summing up the past season in his annual report on Francisco’s claim, wrote that “It will be noticed by referring to reports for previous years that it is stated that this area as a general rule is too heavily sub-irrigated [wet] for successful cultivation. The past season was very dry, and this, in addition to the fact that there was not much snow during the winter, allowed of earlier planting and therefore better crops during the past season.”²²⁵

Francisco and his son also worked for H. H. Brook on the Los Alamos Ranch as well. Records give additional glimpses of Francisco’s work ethic; he helped Plomteaux fix the telephone line and cooperated in fire-prevention efforts.²²⁶ In addition, Francisco’s wife Rathcinda Gonzales served as a midwife.²²⁷

Francisco and his family were absent from the plateau only from about mid-November to early March annually. They wintered at San Ildefonso, which Plomteaux described as a small village about six miles north of

Buckman station and about sixteen miles by wagon from the claim. They left the plateau, Plomteaux explained, “because at the claim the weather is too severe and there is a lack of water for domestic purposes. Isolation and difficult egress and ingress is also a valid reason.”²²⁸ The Gonzales children also went to school at San Ildefonso.

When Francisco made final proof on September 10, 1918, he testified that he was sixty-three years old with a wife and two children; he listed his postal address as Buckman and said that he had some household furniture at Ildefonso. Because he had voted in Santa Fe County, his residency on the plateau, which was in Sandoval County, was briefly challenged, but it was clear to the Forest Service that Francisco and his family had been homesteading their claim in good faith. Francisco received the patent to his land in five years, on September 15, 1919. At the time of the army takeover his estate was the legal owner. The army listed his improvements as a log cabin, a log shed, and a fence.²²⁹

Donaciano Gonzales

Donaciano Gonzales was one of three homesteaders on the Pajarito Plateau who claimed less than 20 acres for their primary claim. He applied for a claim of 12.5 acres on December 1, 1916, although he had made earlier, unsuccessful claims for larger parcels beginning in 1909. These earlier applications, however, were refused either because of mistakes in filing, filing for more than the limit of 160 acres, or (in a third case) because the tract was located on the part of the township reserved for school purposes.²³⁰

Having finally chosen an alternative tract located on a small spur of Barranca Mesa (now the site of Camino Encantado), close to claims of relatives, Donaciano established his residence there by March 1917. Only about eight of his 12.5 acres were cultivable; on them, Donaciano planted beans, corn, and peas. His livestock consisted of two horses, an average of fourteen cattle, two milk cows,

two pigs, and about thirty chickens. On his claim he built a two-story, six-room log cabin with a corrugated iron roof, a corral, and a cistern. The family hauled water for domestic use from the La Jara spring, three miles distant. Every fall, in late October with the onset of winter, Donaciano filed his intent to be absent from his claim until the following spring. The family also had a residence at San Ildefonso, along with many members of the extended Gonzales clan.²³¹

Donaciano farmed his claim with the help of his brothers Cirilio, Hilario, and Estanislado, for according to a ranger's report, Donaciano lacked one arm. Yet besides doing what he could on his claim, and share-cropping on his brother Estanislado's homestead (because Donaciano's own claim was not large enough to support a family; Donaciano and his wife had six children by 1920), he also found outside employment to augment the family income. He hauled lumber and ties for J. P. Haynie & Son, owners of a nearby sawmill in Rendija Canyon, and worked for the county of Santa Fe as a janitor at the courthouse. During his absences, which occurred both summer and winter, his family and his brothers managed his claim.²³²

Donaciano Gonzales had a longer association with the Pajarito Plateau than would appear from the 1916 date of his successful homestead entry, for he asserted that he had actually settled on the plateau in 1897. Records show that his father, Alejandro Gonzales, had farmed on the plateau unofficially since 1887—not, as has been mentioned, an uncommon practice.²³³ According to Forest Service records, Donaciano's father squatted on a 160-acre tract of land until 1899 and then abandoned it. He changed his mind in 1907 and began the official homestead entry-process, bringing it to the final-proof stage in July of that year. The process was interrupted, however, when he died eight months later in March 1908.

Donaciano, his father's heir and executor, believed he had a right to his father's claim and applied for it himself on March 7, 1910, testifying that he had settled on it "more

than six years ago" and that improvements consisted of one house, one stable, and a plot of 400 yards, "square plowed and cultivated," on which Donaciano had been growing beans, wheat, and corn "for about twelve years." At about the same time, in February 1910, Donaciano also applied for 17.5 acres on another tract, one that had been previously farmed about twenty years earlier by Pilar Gonzales. "I have known the land and been on it at off times for the last twelve years," Donaciano testified.²³⁴ Still standing was a log cabin, but its doors were gone and its roof had fallen in. James Leese, the Forest Service ranger who evaluated the tract, wrote, "I don't believe that applicant will succeed in his claim as land is too small an amount."²³⁵ Within a month, however, Donaciano's application for this tract was cancelled by the Forest Service, not because of the tract's small size but because Donaciano had already filed for the 160 acres of his father's tract, the upper limit of acreage allowed. In any case, Donaciano's father had mistakenly used an incorrect legal description when he filed for entry and ultimately Donaciano's attempt to acquire his father's tract also failed.²³⁶ By the time Donaciano made final proof on his land, on May 13, 1920, he testified that he was thirty-seven years old, married, and had six children.

At the time of the government buyout, Donaciano's holding had been subsumed into the larger Gonzales property on Barranca Mesa; its owners were Donaciano's brothers Estanislado and Cirilio Gonzales. On the property, the army found two log cabins, two log barns, a log corn crib, and a fence.²³⁷

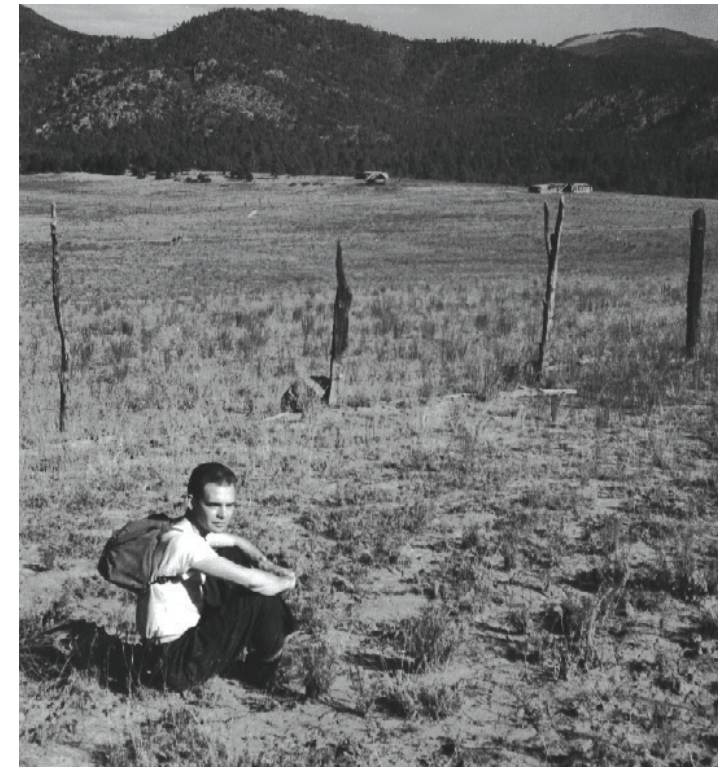


Figure 127. Early homesteads on what is now the Los Alamos Golf Course. (Carl Buckland photo; Los Alamos Historical Society)



Figure 128. Estanislado and Vicenta Gonzales. (Photo courtesy of the family)

The William M. Hopper Homestead

William Mackwood Hopper*

William Hopper, like his business partner H. H. Brook, was a newcomer to New Mexico and the Pajarito Plateau. Born in 1872 on a farm in Yorkshire, England, and one of ten children, he emigrated to the United States in 1893. He was twenty when he passed through Ellis Island at the end of that year, a young man looking for adventure and opportunity. Seven years later, he became a naturalized American citizen.²³⁸ An innovative person, he earned his living variously as a lumberjack, a prospector, a miner, a construction worker—and, for six years, as a homesteader on the plateau.²³⁹

Hopper came to the Pajarito Plateau from Jacksonville, Illinois. “I was on my way back to California from Jacksonville, met Mr. Brook, and decided to stay,” he told the *Santa Fe New Mexican* as reported in an article written on September 11, 1951.²⁴⁰ The two men became partners to enlarge their holdings (see section above on H. H. Brook). Hopper applied for a homestead of 110 acres on the Pajarito Plateau in 1908, in the same week in August as did Brook. That same year William White, whose claim lay to the west, sold his 160 acres to Hopper. Hopper immediately sold the White homestead to Brook (who bought it in his mother’s name).²⁴¹

To improve his claim, on which he established residence in August 1908, Hopper built a two-room log house that had two doors and two windows. (The ruins of his chimney still lie near Fuller Lodge.) He roofed the house with boards

* While sometimes Hopper’s middle name is spelled Macwood, H. H. Brook, in his letters to the Forest Service complaining about the delay in the granting of his and Hopper’s patents, spells Hopper’s middle name Mackwood. It is also spelled Mackwood in the *Santa Fe New Mexican* article of 1951, when Hopper returned for a visit to the plateau. Sometimes Brook turns Hopper’s name around and writes of him as Mackwood W. Hopper, and sometimes the Forest Service officials do too, in their replies. Hopper signed his homestead documents “William M. Hopper.”



Figure 129. Undated photograph of William Mackwood Hopper. (Los Alamos Historical Society)

and tar paper. In addition, Hopper built a “good substantial barn” for eight horses, dug a reservoir as a source of water for his stock, and fenced the east and west sides of his property with barbed wire. Besides his workhorses, Hopper also kept three milk cows. He plowed about 80 acres of his claim and planted corn, wheat, beans, oats, rye, spelt, barley, and peas. Hopper listed no other residence than his Pajarito Plateau claim, stating “All I own is on this place.”²⁴² In April 1913, he applied for an additional 20 acres to add to his claim, enlarging it to 130 acres.²⁴³

Hopper, a bachelor, was forty-one years old when he made final proof on his land. Both Hopper and Brook received patent to their original homesteads on the

same day, March 6, 1914. Soon after, Brook bought Hopper’s homestead for ten dollars an acre.²⁴⁴ In an undated letter to his fiancée, Brook wrote after Hopper’s departure, “I miss Mack very much especially when I am part invalid.” Brook suffered from recurring bouts with tuberculosis, and Hopper, thirteen years older than Brook, had provided welcome and needed help in the two partners’ agricultural and stock-raising endeavors.²⁴⁵ Mackwood Hopper died at age 83 in Shasta, California.²⁴⁶

The James S. Loomis Homestead

James Samuel Loomis

James S. Loomis was originally from California. His family consisted of his “wife, two children of [his] own and one step son.”²⁴⁷ In testimony he gave during a lawsuit in 1904, he said that he was then fifty-one years old, thus making his birth year 1852. Loomis was in the Pajarito Plateau area at least from 1898, when, he testified, he started working for Henry Buckman; he was put in charge of building roads into the plateau to serve Buckman’s timber operations.²⁴⁸ Just a year later, Loomis applied for homestead entry in the southwest corner of the plateau, at the northern edge of the Ramón Vigil Grant. On April 11, 1899, he chose a site amidst the cluster of homesteads claimed that same year, between March and June, by Donaciano Gomez, Miguel Sánchez, and Severo Gonzalez. Loomis commuted his entry to a cash entry on December 3, 1900, paying \$200 for his tract at \$1.25 an acre.²⁴⁹ He received his patent for his 164 acres on May 8, 1901. Four years later, he bought out his neighbor Severo Gonzalez, increasing his acreage to 240 acres. Improvements on his original claim included two houses, a stable or barn, a hay barn, and a pole fence. Loomis became ill, however, and by 1914, he and his wife, María Vitalia M. de Loomis, had sold out to Claud Irwin. Irwin, in turn, sold the property to Alexander Ross of New York state in 1918. The original Loomis homestead thus became part of Ross’s Anchor Ranch.²⁵⁰



Figure 130. William Mackwood Hopper beside his old fireplace on Juniper Street. Hopper briefly returned to Los Alamos as the guest of Cassy Brook's son Frank Brown in 1951. He complained at the time that he found Los Alamos "too damned full of people!" (Los Alamos Historical Society)

The Martín Luján Homestead

Martín Luján

The original entry for the 160 acres ultimately patented by Martín Luján was made not by Luján but by Roberto Quintana, whose family's land was immediately adjacent to the west. However, Quintana, who had been on the land since 1911,²⁵¹ relinquished his claim on May 5, 1913. That very day, María C. Gomez de Sánchez, Martín Luján's

mother-in-law, filed an entry for the same land. But less than a year later, on January 27, 1914, María in turn relinquished her claim. Her son-in-law Martín filed for her claim that same day. As soon as weather permitted, he began to homestead it, and within four-and-a-half years, on June 17, 1918, Martín received his patent for the land.²⁵²

Martín's success was achieved after three previous attempts to obtain a homestead on the Pajarito Plateau. In 1910, land he was interested in and had thought was available because it was unoccupied had already been listed to J. A. McDougall. In 1911, a tract of land for which he had applied was declared not chiefly valuable for agriculture; in 1913, land he chose was found to be within the Ramón Vigil Grant.²⁵³ Martín (who was born about 1870 and who listed his major residence as San Ildefonso) was about forty-four when he was finally successful in obtaining a homestead on the plateau. He was married and had four children by then, two of them already adults. The family improved their claim by building substantial log houses, one of which is still standing in its original location to this day. It lacked a fireplace, however, and does not show evidence of wood stoves, clearly indicating that the house was meant for summer use only. Yet it was snugly built, intended to serve for many years. The logs with which the house was built appear, by their uniformity, to have been milled instead of shaped by hand; they are sawn on two sides and are the same length on all four sides of the building. Close to this main residence, the Lujáns built a separate, one-room log house.

For an immediate, although not always reliable, source of water, the family captured rainwater running off the metal roof; they directed it down gutterlike troughs into cisterns or reservoirs dug into the ground and sealed with concrete. They also obtained water from springs and, according to a forest ranger's report, during droughts the Lujáns watered their animals at a neighbor's stock pond. Descendants of the Lujáns believe that their homesteader ancestors also collected runoff water that collected in pot-holes and may even have drilled wells to ground water in the canyons, hauling it back to their homestead in barrels

on wagons.²⁵⁴ Although Martín Luján voted in another county, as did several other homesteaders, he was not prevented from successfully patenting his homestead.

In 1916, two years before Martín received title to his land in 1918, his son Manuel bought a 19/20th interest in the adjacent David Quintana homestead of 150 acres from David's heirs. (Elfego Gomez owned the remaining 1/20th.) Quintana had been on the land since 1909 and had patented it in August 1913. With the acquisition of the Quintana homestead, the combined Luján property now covered the entire level, cultivable area of North Mesa. The Manuel Luján house stood near the common boundary between the two homesteads, in the middle of today's stable compound. Members of the extended Luján family farmed the mesa together, clearing the land for corn, beans, and wheat. In their kitchen garden they grew vegetables, including onions, cabbage, pumpkins, musk melons, and watermelons. The Lujáns followed the traditional "seasonal round," spending the cold winter months at their San Ildefonso homes, returning to the plateau every spring, and staying until the fall harvest was completed (about November).²⁵⁵

The children returned to the valley to attend school earlier in the autumn, in the care of their grandmother, Martín's mother-in-law María. At harvest time, the Lujáns loaded their horse-drawn wagons with crops to take down to the valley, partly for their own use, partly to barter or to sell. (For example, residents of Chimayó would trade their noted wool blankets, horses, and melons for the Luján's beans.) The Lujáns may also have sold some of their crops to the Los Alamos Ranch School after 1917. They supplemented their subsistence lifestyle by raising some livestock as well, grazing the animals on rented pasture on the Ramón Vigil Grant to the south of Los Alamos Canyon.²⁵⁶

Although the Lujáns were still the owners of their homesteads in 1942 when the army acquired the land for the secret Project Y, they apparently had abandoned farming on the plateau in preference to other economic



Figure 131. The Martín Luján homestead, with the Luján cabin in distance (view looking west). (Los Alamos National Laboratory)

pursuits. The army report describes uncared-for fields except for the northwest corner of Manuel's property. The report was made in late November, however, and may reflect normal winter farm conditions. Michael Marchi, a Luján descendant, believes that the Lujáns farmed until 1926 and then leased their plateau property to others until the government takeover.²⁵⁷

Farming the plateau was not easy. Marchi recalls, "I remember my grandfather talking about many difficult times that they had in those days. There were no machines to help them plant or weed or harvest. It was all done by hand or with the help of horses. They were so far up in the mountains that it was difficult to get any type of machinery to harvest whatsoever. When harvest was done, they would bring the sacks of beans and corn down on horses and wagons. The road was extremely treacherous and was very steep...times were difficult."²⁵⁸

The wagon road that Marchi recalled was the principal access to the Luján homesteads on North Mesa. It was a single-track, one-way road that switchbacked steeply on the north wall of North Mesa (the south side of Bayo Canyon)—not to be confused with the main Bayo Canyon road, which was on the north side of Bayo Canyon (the south wall of Barranca Mesa). There were

also connecting roads where the roundabout is now (at the intersection of Diamond Drive, North Mesa Road, and San Ildefonso Road) that the Lujáns could have used.²⁵⁹

By the time of the 1943 buyout, both the Luján families had moved to Santa Fe, where Manuel served as mayor and was an unsuccessful candidate for governor and the U.S. Congress. Martín's grandson, Manuel Luján, Jr., was born in San Ildefonso on May 12, 1928. He served as U.S. congressman for New Mexico from 1969 to 1989 and as secretary of interior during the first Bush administration from 1989 to 1993. In his campaign speeches, Manuel, Jr. claimed that he often visited his grandparents' house on the plateau.²⁶⁰

The Martínez Homesteads

Andrés Martínez

Homestead records indicate that Andrés Martínez of Ildefonso, New Mexico, first applied for a homestead tract on the Pajarito Plateau as early as 1909. Several years later, on September 8, 1914, Martínez, then listing his post office address as Buckman, New Mexico, filed another application. This second and ultimately successful land entry was for a 62.25-acre plot of land located on the bluff

north of lower Rendija Canyon. At an elevation of 6,900 feet, Andrés planted beans, corn, wheat, peas, and garden vegetables.²⁶¹ A forest surveyor noted in 1916 that Andrés had fenced his land with wire and brush, plowed it, and had built a two-room cabin measuring 12 by 30 feet, a corral, and a pole shed that measured 12 by 20 feet. He had also dug a small reservoir or basin to catch rainwater. When that was empty, Andrés and his family—he had a wife and five children by 1920—hailed water for both domestic and livestock use from a well in the canyon about a quarter of a mile south of the cabin.²⁶² The Martínez family lived on the land during the farming season, staying until November or sometimes even later ("till snow flies").²⁶³ On several occasions, Andrés returned as early as the month of February to do preparatory work for the coming season.²⁶⁴ Forest Ranger Fred Plomteaux noted that when he went by Andrés's claim he would see a lot of activity: pigs and chickens running about, Andrés hoeing beans, Andrés and his family threshing wheat, or the family working on their cabin. (They built a 12- by 14-foot cabin adjoining the first one.)²⁶⁵ He also stated in a formal report, written on January 28, 1918, that Andrés's claim "is and has been well cared for, and an unusual amount of work has been done since...1916."²⁶⁶ During those two years, Andrés and his family had completely remodeled their cabin, constructed a new addition to the barn and corral and remodeled the old one, and had cleared and broken five more acres of land.

Forest Service documents list what and how much Andrés planted. A handwritten note next to a listing in one of the reports observed that Andrés's land was "much more productive than normal."²⁶⁷ Not all seasons were equally productive; another report states that Andrés's bean crop was suffering from an "epidemic of chinch bugs."²⁶⁸ The 1917 season suffered from lack of rain, the report for that year recording "only about 80% of normal crops on account of drought."²⁶⁹ Documents further indicate that Andrés kept two horses, three cows, pigs and chickens, and "3 dogs, (bad ones),"²⁷⁰ and that for about two months in the winter he worked at a sawmill. One document gives more details; it says that Forest Ranger Plomteaux saw



Figure 132. A Luján cabin (now part of the Los Alamos county horse stables area on North Mesa): view north (top), view northeast (center), view southwest (bottom). (Los Alamos National Laboratory)



Figure 133. The Luján road is typical of the homestead roads leading to the Pajarito Plateau. Creating such roads, and then getting a horse-drawn wagon up them, were feats still deserving of admiration today. (Laurence Campbell collection, Los Alamos Historical Society)

Andrés Martínez on December 18, 1917, at the Haynie and Huffaker sawmill “where he had taken contract to cut ties. On this date he moved his family from the claim to the mill where he intends to work the balance of the winter.”²⁷¹

A fair wagon road out of the canyon led to the nearest post office, twelve miles away at Buckman on the Rio Grande. This road was also used by Andrés’s neighbor, Federico Gonzales, who had applied for a homestead in 1913, and later by subsequent owners of the Martínez homestead, the Sernas. One of the Serna descendants, Annie Luján, recalls making the trip up to the plateau in a covered wagon.²⁷² To reach the nearest place to trade or sell their crops or obtain supplies, the families had to travel twenty miles to Española. The wagon road mostly followed the wash at the canyon bottom and then branched to the Martínez and Gonzales homesteads. Andrés patented his homestead on July 16, 1920, but by 1922 he had sold his homestead to José and Fidel Serna.

After Andrés Martínez’s departure, the Serna families maintained the homestead until 1942, when the land was taken over by the army. Following the traditional Hispanic pattern, they used the homestead as a seasonal farm. (José María Serna had a permanent home in El Rancho.) According to Annie Luján, daughter of José María Serna, the family traveled to the homestead during the year for planting, to weed and clean the fields, and to harvest the crops. It took an entire day to get to the homestead from their residence in the valley.²⁷³ Annie Luján also stated that “they used to come up in the summer... for two months at a time, two or three months. Then we used to go down.”²⁷⁴ Her family brought staples such as canned goods (canned milk, vegetables and baked beans, fruits, and juices), lard, coffee, sardines, bottled relishes, sauces, preserves, syrup, and kerosene. They also herded some cows up the old road, found a place in the wagon for squawking chickens, and filled the remaining space with all the supplies and tools they needed. On their homestead,

the family grew pinto beans, corn, wheat, pumpkins, and “soft vegetables” such as onions, squash, and chile. They possibly also gathered beeweed, goosefoot, pigweed, and groundcherry seeds and collected annual wild greens.²⁷⁵

The Sernas lived in a log cabin on the property that was roofed with sheet metal and included three rooms and a sunporch.²⁷⁶ There was also an horno on the site for baking bread. The family ate their meals on a type of ceramic dish called whiteware and possibly stored some of their food in stoneware crockery. For cooking fuel, they gathered wood from juniper, piñon, and ponderosa trees.²⁷⁷

Román Martínez

Román Martínez applied for a homestead of 30 acres in Rendija Canyon (site of the present-day Guaje Pines Cemetery) on April 22, 1915. His father-in-law, Emiliano Roybal, had filed on that tract the year before, on August 15, 1914, but he relinquished his claim to Román less than a year later. (Emiliano had also applied for a tract in 1913, but his application was denied because the land was deemed unsuitable for farming.) Román received patent #714008 to his tract on October 21, 1919. At the time he made final proof on his claim—January 27, 1919—he testified that he was twenty-four, married, and had started a family. To improve his claim, Román built a two-room log house with a roof of corrugated iron. Each room was 16 by 16 feet in size. Other improvements included a small pole corral, a shade structure, a chicken house, and one 12- by 12-foot room used for storing tools and forage. Román fenced about 20 acres of his claim. His domestic water was supplied by a permanent spring located a half mile away. He cultivated approximately 15 acres and grew wheat, corn, potatoes, beans, and garden vegetables.²⁷⁸

Román’s attempts to farm on the Pajarito Plateau demonstrate the difficulties homesteaders often faced. He stated in his homestead proof that “crops have been poor with the exception of the year 1916.” Right from

the beginning, Román faced problems with the weather, and his first year, 1915, was a difficult one. Forest Ranger Fred Plomteaux wrote, in a report dated November 7, 1915, “Mr. Martínez at my Office at Española. He states that his entire crop was destroyed by frost and that he had left the claim on October 22, 1915, in order to send his children to school at San Ildefonso.” In 1916, Plomteaux reported, “planting delayed because the ground was too wet,” although Román managed to harvest about 7,000 pounds of wheat that year. To combat the bad luck dealt by Mother Nature, Román apparently made every effort to improve his farming methods. Ranger Plomteaux, who at first judged Román’s farming methods as “old-style methods in vogue for past centuries,” reported in 1918 that “this year claimant practiced modern methods to large extent.” Román and his family, like other homesteaders, worked hard. In a report dated January 30, 1918, Plomteaux reported that he always found Román or his family on the property; that Román also worked, “on shares,” about 20 acres on the claim of his father-in-law; and that Román and his wife kept their claim in “a neat homelike condition.” Plomteaux’s report also gives us a glimpse of another aspect of homesteaders’ lives: in a report dated February 16, 1917, Plomteaux said that another homesteader, Martín Luján, explained that Román was absent that particular day “on account of religious duties.”²⁷⁹

In 1925, a Joe Martínez sold the 30-acre Román Martínez homestead to Ramón and Adelaida Roybal for \$500. Within five years, on April 1, 1930, the Roybals sold to the property to Ottie Oman Grant, the landowner at the time of buyout, for \$300.²⁸⁰ In 1957 or 1958, the Grant cabin that had stood on the original Román Martínez homestead was relocated to the North Mesa horse stables for use as a tack room.²⁸¹

Ottie “Dot” Grant was an enterprising settler; not only did he buy outright the original Román Martínez homestead, which became the site of Los Alamos’s Guaje Pines Cemetery, but he also bought half of the homestead in the golf course area that Juan N. Gonzales



Figure 134. Andrés Martínez (later Serna) homestead, Rendija Canyon. (Los Alamos Historical Society)



Figure 135. Andrés Martínez (later Serna) homestead (Rendija Canyon). (Los Alamos Historical Society)



Figure 136. Cabin foundation after excavation, Andrés Martínez (later Serna) homestead. (Los Alamos National Laboratory)



Figure 137. Horno remains, Andrés Martínez (later Serna) homestead. (Los Alamos Historical Society)



Figure 138. Horno after excavation, Andrés Martínez (later Serna) homestead. (Los Alamos National Laboratory)



Figure 139. Delphina and José M. Serna. (Photo courtesy of the family)

had patented in 1894. In addition, Grant acquired grazing permits on Forest Service land north of his home. The Grant family raised pinto beans, squash, and corn and large flocks of chickens. They sold eggs, produce, and meat to the Los Alamos Ranch School and drove to Santa Fe to market their products.²⁸²

Dot's parents, mother Rosa Grant Mather and stepfather Ted Mather, had been residents of the plateau for many years. Ted Mather, a hunter and trapper, also worked for Frank Bond on the Baca location in the Valle Grande. The Mathers lived seasonally in a cabin near the Dome Road turnoff in the Jemez Mountains; they also lived for several years in a cabin in Water Canyon, located to the west of present day State Road 501 (West Jemez Road). According to Tom Grant, Dot Grant's son, his grandmother Rosa had acquired the land in Water Canyon from a land trade with the Forest Service, although verifying documentation has not been found.²⁸³ U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service employee Homer Pickens, in a 1979 interview, described having breakfast with the Mathers at their Water Canyon cabin. According to Pickens, the Mather residence was located just south of the old fence and gate left behind by the Atomic Energy Commission at the mouth of Water Canyon. Pickens remembered recovering the sled that Ted Mather made out of oak and having it moved to the Los Alamos Historical Museum. He also confirmed that the cabin whose remains are located just east of State Road 501, long thought to be the "Mather-Grant" homestead, was actually built around 1929 or 1930 by John Davenport (see McDougall homestead description below) and Bill Smith. "Uncle" Bill Smith, as he was known, lived there with his stepson Billy.²⁸⁴ The Mathers moved to Los Alamos Mesa after Ted was hired as a wrangler at the Los Alamos Ranch School.²⁸⁵ Richard Womelsdoff, the son of Jim Womelsdoff, the Ranch School foreman, recalled that in the "summer of 1935, the old grade-school building was converted into a small residence for the horse wrangler, Ted Mather, and his wife."²⁸⁶



Figure 140. The Water Canyon cabin of the Mathers in 1934. O. O. "Dot" Grant stands at left with his wife and son Tom; at right is Dot's mother, Rosa Grant Mather. (Los Alamos Historical Society)



Figure 141. Eliza and Román Martínez. (Photo courtesy of the family)



Figure 142. Dot Grant was also a government bounty hunter and was often called upon to eliminate predatory animals, such as mountain lions and bears. (Los Alamos Historical Society)



Figure 143. Ted Mather and Rosa Grant Mather (rider on horse is Rosa's sister, Jessie Waugh). Ted Mather's duties as horse wrangler at the Los Alamos Ranch School included leading Ranch School students on extended pack trips. (Los Alamos Historical Society)



Figure 144. Former Grant cabin, built on the original Román Martínez homestead, at its new location in the North Mesa stable area. (Los Alamos National Laboratory)



Figure 145. Winter camp at Water Canyon, before the Mather cabin was built. Christmas 1926 was reported to be "bitter cold." The animal skin nailed to the tree on the left belonged to a large mountain lion killed at the head of Los Alamos Canyon. (Los Alamos Historical Society)

The Robert McDougall Homestead

Robert G. McDougall

Robert Grant McDougall, also known as Archie, was originally from Muscatine, Iowa. He is not to be confused with J. A. McDougall, also from Iowa and probably Robert's brother, who made several requests to the Forest Service to open various tracts of land for homesteading on the Pajarito Plateau between January 1909 and February 1910. While it is likely that J. A. McDougall came to the Southwest in hopes of making his fortune, in the end he never made a formal homestead entry and apparently spent only about a year in the area. He disappears from the homestead records after 1910.

Robert McDougall, however, remained on the Pajarito Plateau. He had settled onto the land he wished to claim on the plateau by the fall of 1907, he testified, although his occupancy was not officially recognized by the Forest Service until he received from them a special-use permit the next winter, on December 16, 1908 (permit 116). According to a letter written by McDougall's wife Francis, the couple moved to their claim shortly thereafter, on February 1, 1909. The Forest Service, however, calculated the date that the McDougalls established actual residence as June 1, 1909.²⁸⁷

Whatever the exact date, McDougall had been on the plateau since at least 1908, when he joined a group of local businessmen, including H. H. Brook, who contracted to buy the Ramón Vigil Grant. In that year, the men formed the Ramón Land and Lumber Company with the intention of starting a logging and sawmill operation. The business was not successful; the company was accused of logging outside the boundaries of the grant and became enmeshed in a lawsuit. In 1911, the owners of the Ramón Land and Lumber Company were forced to declare bankruptcy.²⁸⁸

Both Brook and Robert McDougall remained on the Pajarito Plateau after the failure of their business.

McDougall's claim, which he farmed with his wife Francis (they had no children), was along what is now Pajarito Road on Laboratory property. Their immediate neighbor to the northwest was David Romero, who had been on the land since 1893; close by, after 1913, was the homestead of David's son Victor Romero and his family.

The McDougall claim was not immediately available for homestead entry because, according to a letter written by Mrs. McDougall to the Department of the Interior, the McDougalls were told in October 1909 that their tract was in land withdrawn in 1900 for the proposed Pajarito archaeological park "and was not open to entry but we still lived there."²⁸⁹

Despite the confusions over the withdrawal, confusions that affected other homesteaders such as H. H. Brook and William Mackwood Hopper, on February 17, 1910, Robert McDougall applied to the Forest Service for the examination and listing of the tract in Section 22 that he and his wife had been living on under the special-use permit. He testified that they had settled on the land on December 16, 1908, had built improvements consisting of two frame houses and one barn, and had cleared approximately 85 acres of land.

Three months later, the McDougalls received a letter dated May 6, 1910, from the Forest Service saying that their special-use tract had been recommended for listing. In the meantime, the letter confirmed, it was permissible for the McDougalls to continue cultivating and improving their tract under the special-use permit. They would be told when their entry (made in Robert's name) was accepted; they were advised to wait and make no formal attempt to make homestead entry until they received that notice.

Nonetheless, just over a month later, on June 18, 1910, an impatient Robert sent a letter to the Forest Service requesting that his tract be opened to settlement and entry. But it was not until early the following year, on January 5, 1911, that Robert was able to make his

formal homestead application, HE 014750. According to the Forest Service records, however, Robert's application date had to be listed as almost two weeks later, January 17, 1911, because that date was the official date of the restoration of his tract to entry.

The McDougalls had hoped to receive title to their claim within a year because they assumed that under the three-year residency rule their required three years of residency would be counted as beginning in 1909—that is, that they would be allowed credit for the time they occupied and farmed their land under their special-use permit before their tract was restored to entry. Had that been the case, the McDougalls could have received title to their claim by 1912. The authorities rejected this argument, however, despite appeals from the McDougalls and a favorable recommendation from the Forest Service, which stated,

Claim has the appearance of permanent home. Buildings are all up in good repair, sheds built for wintering stock, every thing on place, the place tends to show a permanent home....Claimant has been away from claim a great deal but keeps a man in his employ to do the work on ranch, as his wife has lived continually on claim and appears able to run the ranch during his absence I do not recommend a hearing in this case.²⁹⁰

A letter ostensibly from Robert to the U.S. Land Office in Washington D.C., but written in his wife's handwriting, complains that they were not allowed to prove up until January 1914 under the three-year rule, their official filing date having been January 1911, and repeating that they wanted to be given credit for the years they had lived on their tract before 1911 under their special-use permit.

Doggedly, the McDougalls attempted to prove up in 1913; on September 4, 1913, Robert filed notice of his intent to make three-year proof on November 12. But on November 22, 1913, Robert's final proof was rejected because, according to the Forest Service, no credit for residence could be allowed before January 17, 1911, when the land was opened for entry.

In a letter written by a frustrated Mrs. McDougall on December 29, 1913, she said,

I have made a residence of this place for over five years. Have not been off it for three months in that whole time and I am now almost a cripple with rheumatism and have to get to a lower altitude but am now compelled to stay here longer on account of all this bother.... We did not make expenses or even a living off the ranch last year owing to the cut-worms rabbits and rain and snow that came just at harvest time. My husband has had to leave to get work.... We want to make final proof so as to sell the land so I can be able to get some place where I can have the care of a doctor.... Until you see fit to pass on this I will have to stay here and suffer.²⁹¹

Happily, an appeal to the General Land Office on March 14, 1914, resulted in the resolution of the issue, although not in the timely matter the McDougalls had hoped for, and on June 15, 1914, Robert received a patent to their homestead tract.²⁹²

Mrs. McDougall's letter indicates that the couple's homesteading experience was not a successful one, although the land was considered good for agriculture and, being an open mesa, did not even require clearing. Rangers' reports show that in 1910 the McDougalls had planted 40 acres of corn, oats, and beans—only to see the crop fail “on account of lack of moisture.”²⁹³ The failure of their crops during their homesteading years, not to mention the bankruptcy of the Ramón Land and Lumber Company, had left them in a precarious financial position. To supplement their income, Robert McDougall had had to leave the plateau to get what work he could. He found one job in Arizona, drove a truck in Bernalillo and Lamy, New Mexico, and worked at a sawmill (the Truchas Lumber Co.) in Truchas, a mountain community across the Rio Grande from the Pajarito Plateau.²⁹⁴

The McDougalls tried hard to make a success of their homestead; besides planting oats, corn, peas, and beans, they created an orchard of thirty-five trees of mixed fruit; they also grew a small amount of berries. For livestock, they had ten horses, two hogs, and a flock of chickens. They originally owned sixteen head of cattle but sold some in the spring of 1913; they grazed their stock on the homestead and on the nearby Ramón Vigil Grant. The McDougalls also improved their claim by building a three-room house with a shingle roof, a pole-and-lumber barn, a frame tool house, a log chicken house, a lumber calf shed and a cow shed made of the same material, and a log bean house. They strung a wire fence around their property and collected surface water in a “small reservoir.”²⁹⁵

Despite the prodigious effort the McDougalls put into their year-round farm to qualify for a patent to their claim, they were ultimately defeated by the elements and ill health. In the letter from Mrs. McDougall quoted above, she wrote, “We have lived up to all the rules etc of the homestead law.... Possibly if you knew some of the hard ships of a homesteader you would be more lenient.... There is no justice or anything else in it, and I hope you will see it your self.”²⁹⁶

Despite the difficulties so vividly expressed by Mrs. McDougall, the couple applied, in 1915, to acquire about five more acres from the forest reserve, land that they had been farming for the four previous years with the tacit consent of the Forest Service.²⁹⁷ The McDougall family's stay in New Mexico, however, would soon come to an end. They never followed through on their application for the five additional acres and only a year later, discouraged, they sold their homestead and left New Mexico. Already, as early as 1913, they had prospective buyers waiting for their land to be patented. In a letter to the U.S. Land Office dated April 1913, Mrs. McDougall (writing as her husband) stated “I have buyers for the place if they are not required

* The handwriting in this letter is identical to an earlier letter written and signed by Mrs. McDougall. This letter, however, is signed by “Robert G. McDougall.”

to live here the seven months of the year. One is a teacher whose duties will keep her away more than five month [sic], but she can have some one farm the place for her.”²⁹⁸

It also appears from a letter written by Mrs. McDougall to the Forest Service about a fence and gate dispute that they were in “constant” conflict with their immediate neighbors, the Romeros, a situation that possibly also contributed to their decision to leave.²⁹⁹

McDougall and his wife sold their homesteaded land to James W. Lewis on December 1, 1916. Following the title-recording practices of the day, McDougall officially recorded his patent in January 1917 as part of the sale to Lewis.³⁰⁰ The McDougalls then moved from New Mexico to Arizona. The 1920 census records show that Robert and Francis were living in a rented house in the town of Kingman, Arizona, where Robert was employed as a lineman for the telephone company and Francis was working at home as a housewife.³⁰¹

Not much is known about the life on the plateau of the subsequent buyers of the McDougall homestead. As noted, James Lewis purchased McDougall's 107.5 acres on December 1, 1916. On December 12, Lewis signed a mortgage deed to his wife for \$1,000 using the land as collateral. The mortgage deed identified Anna H. Lewis as being from Ontario County, New York.³⁰² After living in northern New Mexico for more than five years, the Lewises sold their land to John Davenport in February 1922.³⁰³

John Davenport had family connections to one of the most prominent families in northern New Mexico.³⁰⁴ His uncle, George Bond, set up a business operation in Española along with Bond's brother Frank, subsequent owner of the Baca Location and the Ramón Vigil Grant. Frank Bond hired John Davenport as his range manager and Davenport worked in that capacity on the plateau and in the Jemez Mountains area for many years.³⁰⁵ Historical records suggest that John and his wife Frances may not

have actually lived on what had been the McDougall homestead at all and may instead have resided at the Ten Elders Ranch in Frijoles Canyon and at the Ramón Vigil Grant headquarters in Pajarito Canyon.³⁰⁶

On June 2, 1934, Davenport and his wife sold the McDougalls' original homestead to Ramón R. Roybal of Pojoaque for \$1,100.³⁰⁷ While it is not known whether the land was still being farmed, U.S. Forest Service records show that Roybal did indeed graze his stock on the nearby Pajarito grazing area, paying fees of almost \$45 for 56 head of cattle.³⁰⁸ Roybal and his wife Adelaida Gonzales de Roybal had been involved in other Pajarito Plateau real-estate transactions before their purchase of the 107-acre McDougall ranch. For example, in 1926, the Roybals bought 30 acres of plateau land from Joe Martínez (the original Román Martínez homestead). This same piece of land was sold to O. O. Grant in 1930.³⁰⁹

When the army surveyed the McDougall homestead (last owned by Roybal) in 1943, it noted an 18- by 22-foot log cabin and a 20- by 22-foot log barn.³¹⁰ The cabin was in fair condition and had a galvanized metal roof; the barn was in poor condition and had a board roof.³¹¹ The layout of the McDougall homestead was much like that of other homesteads on the plateau in that the cabin and other features were located near the edge of the field and adjacent to the road, thus maximizing the arable land. Yet until 1934, when Ramón Roybal bought the McDougall property, the McDougall homestead represented a different cultural pattern than that exhibited by the Hispanic homesteaders on the Pajarito Plateau. Anglos who homesteaded the plateau around the year and who did not have permanent homes and extended families nearby lacked the community support enjoyed by the Hispanic homesteaders.

Figure 146. This 1946 aerial photo illustrates the location, along what is now Pajarito Road, of the McDougall homestead and that of their neighbors, David and Victor Romero. In middle background is the town of Los Alamos; the cleared areas beyond the town mark the site of other homesteads. (Los Alamos National Laboratory)





Figure 147. The foundation of the McDougall cabin before archaeological excavation. In the distance is a Los Alamos National Laboratory building and, behind it, Caballo Mountain. (Los Alamos National Laboratory)



Figure 148. The foundation of the McDougall cabin and cellar after excavation. (Los Alamos National Laboratory)



Figure 149. The depression surrounded by rocks, left center, was the site of the McDougalls' cistern. (Los Alamos National Laboratory)



Figure 150. The McDougalls' cistern after vegetation was removed. (Los Alamos National Laboratory)



Figure 151. Mowing equipment recovered from the fields of the McDougall homestead. (Los Alamos National Laboratory)

The Montoya Homestead

José Albino Montoya

José Albino Montoya applied for a claim of 90 acres (the same 90 acres that J. A. McDougall had been interested in earlier) on January 5, 1911. His application was recorded on January 17, 1911. By June 21, 1915, he had successfully patented his claim.

According to the Forest Service records, Montoya lived at Ildefonso* “in a very good house with 3 acres” with his wife and eleven children but spent the summer months on his homestead on the Pajarito Plateau. (José himself would occasionally be absent when looking after his sheep, which he grazed elsewhere. He is listed in the Frank Bond papers as being one of Bond’s lessees, indicating that Montoya leased land on the Baca Location for grazing his sheep.) The Montoya homestead, today within Los Alamos National Laboratory property on what is known as Sigma Mesa, was between Mortandad and Sandia Canyons, eleven miles from Ildefonso. Every year, from November to April, the family returned to their valley home so the children could go to school.³¹²

By 1914, José had cleared and broken about 22 acres of land, on which he grew corn and beans. He improved his property with a two-story house roofed with corrugated iron, its lower story built of logs and its upper story built of lumber. The house, 20 by 20 feet, was not habitable in winter. José and his family also built a shack out of lumber, a pole corral, a log chicken house with a sod roof, and a wire fence. There was

no water on the property; the family had to haul it from distances of one-and-a-quarter miles to five miles.³¹³

In 1914, José owned nine head of cattle, ten horses, and a small flock of poultry, grazing his work animals on forest land with a permit. While the Forest Service inspectors felt that José’s claim did not have the appearance of a permanent home, they understood that José expected to farm and raise what feed he could on his claim “in connection with his cattle he runs near his claim.” The buildings, the report stated, had a permanent appearance but “one could not say they were habitable during the winter with out considerable repairing. Lack of machinery and household goods give one the impression that it is not a permanent home.”³¹⁴ The inspection report of December 7, 1914, indicated that the Montoya cabin was furnished with only a stove, bedstead, and mattress; outside stood one wagon and one grindstone.³¹⁵

José had trouble meeting the residency requirement for title to his claim because he voted in Ildefonso, in Santa Fe County, yet his claim—which was supposed to be his principal residence—was in another county, Sandoval County. As a memorandum on file in the Forest Service office from the Office of the Solicitor, dated January 29, 1915, noted, “the fact that a homestead claimant votes in a county or precinct other than that in which his homestead is situated has always been regarded by the General Land Office as strong evidence against the claimant’s assertion of residence on his claim.” However, because of the good faith shown by José, his compliance with at least the spirit of the law, and the “more or less loose methods of registration and voting in vogue in New Mexico,” the solicitor recommended that the Forest Service not dispute José’s petition for title to his land. By June 1915, the title was his.³¹⁶ At the time of the army takeover in 1942, José’s property had passed to his estate.



Figure 152. Montoya cabins on Sigma Mesa, November 1, 1946. (Los Alamos National Laboratory)



Figure 153. One of José Albino Montoya’s sons, Adolfo (shown here with wife Elaiza on the grounds of the Los Alamos Ranch School), became the head gardener for the Ranch School beginning in 1925. He served in that capacity for seventeen years besides farming his own land. Adolfo studied the latest horticultural and agricultural techniques and was renowned for his knowledge and skills. In the background is the home of Bences Gonzales, son-in-law of homesteader Victor Romero. (Los Alamos Historical Society)

* In this case, “Ildefonso” may refer to the small Hispanic community of San Ildefonso, New Mexico, located west of San Ildefonso Pueblo and Black Mesa mentioned by Forest Ranger Fred Plomteaux as being about six miles north of Buckman. This “Ildefonso,” however, may nonetheless be within the Pueblo of San Ildefonso. The authors have been unable to locate any indication of a separate community called Ildefonso on maps of the era.



Figure 154. Interior view of the concrete cistern on the Montoya homestead. (Los Alamos National Laboratory)



Figure 156. Cistern and remains of a possible horno on the José Albino Montoya homestead. (Los Alamos National Laboratory)



Figure 155. Overview of the Montoya homestead on Sigma Mesa. (Los Alamos National Laboratory)

The William Moses Tract

William E. Moses

On June 1, 1900, William Moses, an attorney with offices in Denver, Colorado, and Washington, D.C. (as proclaimed by his letterhead), filed for 40 acres near a cluster of homesteads in upper Pajarito Canyon in exchange for land elsewhere in the Santa Fe National Forest (in the Pecos River Forest Reserve). The Pecos land was patented in 1900 by Frank F. Zummach, who sold the land to Edwin M. Armor and his wife Catharine in April 1900. The Armors, in turn, sold the land to William E. Moses and Ella D. Moses on May 21, 1900. On the very same day, Moses and his wife conveyed the Pecos land to the government.³¹⁷

Both the Pecos land transaction with the Armors and the associated Pajarito Plateau in-lieu trade with the government were likely business deals solely for the acquisition of unimproved land. Before beginning to claim land in New Mexico, Moses had been involved during the late 1890s in a land-title dispute in Helena, Montana. Several parties, including Moses, the Castle Land Company, and William Wilson (a soldier from Illinois) apparently conspired to acquire title to land that had already been sold by the land company (without proper title) in town-lot parcels. Wilson, who claimed the land by making a soldier's additional homestead entry, sold the land days later to Moses, who then sold it to the land company so that it could secure the land and defend against individuals who had purchased the original town lots.³¹⁸

Many of Moses's New Mexico transactions were handled by his "attorney-in-fact," one Alexander L. Morrison of Santa Fe, who had power of attorney for Moses and who signed Moses's land-entry paperwork. Moses received a patent to his plateau land (certification no. 2559) in July 1903, but the records show that in 1936, Sandoval County auctioned off his parcel for nonpayment of taxes to Walter Grottenthaler for \$29.32. Grottenthaler was the land-owner of record when the government appropriated the land for the war effort. On June 2, 1900, Moses applied

for almost 21 acres of additional plateau land in another in-lieu transaction. (This land was located west of present day State Road 501 in Section 25 of Township 19 N Range 5 E.) His second plateau land deal was not as successful as the first: it took thirty-one years for Moses to receive the patent to the land (certificate no. 2560). It was eventually obtained by Grottenthaler as well. U.S. government inventory records from the 1940s note that neither of Grottenthaler's land tracts contained any improvements, so it appears that he, like Moses, did not reside on the property or use it for farming or ranching purposes.³¹⁹



Figure 157. William E. Moses was a land-script broker from Denver, Colorado. Land "scrip" or "script" (certificates from the General Land Office) granted people private ownership of certain portions of public lands. Scrip was used primarily to reward veterans, to give land allotments to children of intermarried Native Americans, and to make possible exchanges of forest land for public land open to homestead entry. "Soldier's additional" refers to a soldier's right to additional homestead entry.

The Quintana Homesteads

Benigno Quintana

Benigno Quintana was among the first to receive a patent on the Pajarito Plateau and the first to patent his land within the present Los Alamos townsite. On November 23, 1892, he filed for 160 acres in what is now part of Western Area, including part of the land on which the Los Alamos Medical Center and the high school's Sullivan Field now stand. Benigno received patent to his claim a little less than two years later, on September 11, 1894.³²⁰

His southern boundary was Los Alamos Canyon, at that point 200 feet deep. He built a two-room log house and corrals, and he fenced his fields with barbed wire. When Benigno “proved up” on his claim in April 1894, he explained his residency as follows: “My present house was built in the spring of 1890 and I moved into it at that time from a small shanty which I had built previous to that on the land.” According to his witnesses, he had been on the land since April 1889.³²¹ In a report dated 1890, Surveyor Daniel Merry mentions going through Benigno’s fences during Merry’s 1890 survey of the township section lines.³²²

At the time of his testimony, Benigno was thirty-seven, was married, had four children, and listed his address as Pojoaque. In his testimony he stated that for the past four seasons he had farmed about 80 acres of land; the crops he grew are not listed. Although there is no record of how he brought his household goods and heavy wire to his homestead, he probably drove his wagon up the sandy floor of Los Alamos Canyon and then up on the mesa through the little side canyon now occupied by West Road, making Los Alamos Canyon an early route to the plateau.³²³ The Los Alamos Ranch School was the owner of the original Benigno Quintana homestead at the time of the army buyout in 1943. Interim owners included H. H. Brook (1915/1916), Ashley Pond (1917), Los Alamos Ranch Corp. (1918), and Edward P. Fuller (1920). The property went to the Los Alamos Ranch School in 1921.³²⁴

David Quintana

Documents locate David Quintana on the Pajarito Plateau by March 5, 1907. The first land David requested was 160 acres at the southwest corner of the golf course area. However, by the summer of 1908 he had built a house on a different piece of land he had chosen on today’s North Mesa. David’s son Roberto Quintana chose the contiguous eastern half of North Mesa. Father and son requested permission to begin the homestead process on the same date: May 15, 1908. As soon as the Forest Service

released the land for agricultural purposes, David and Roberto made formal application for a homestead entry. The date was July 19, 1909. By then, David was sixty-three; Roberto was twenty-four. Between them, the two men laid claim to all the arable land on North Mesa.³²⁵

David Quintana and his son Roberto filed for entry on North Mesa in Sections 10 and 11, which they apparently planned to homestead as one large farm. A surveyor’s error caused the boundaries of their individual tracts to be listed incorrectly in their initial applications for homestead entry and required that both men file supplemental applications to rectify the problem. They began that process by requesting that the land be opened to entry and settlement in 1911.

By that time, however, Roberto’s efforts began to wane. In July of that year, a ranger reported that about 35 acres of Roberto’s tract had been planted but that there was no sign of Roberto on the land. By 1912, a report stated “No crop or residence on claim.”³²⁶ Extant documents do not record why Roberto did not persist in patenting his homestead tract, but records show that he formally relinquished his claim on May 5, 1913.³²⁷ María C. Gomez de Sánchez began the application process for his tract that very day. She was the mother-in-law of Martín Luján, who became the subsequent and ultimate owner of Roberto’s tract.

David and his wife Eutemia Garcia had six children when David, at age sixty-six,* made final proof on his first claim on October 10, 1912. They lived on their homestead during the summer months, David testified, returning to their valley home from about the first of December to the first of March each year. David explained their annual absences as owing “to severe weather conditions... [the homestead] being up in the mountains where deep

* According to the U.S. Federal Census for 1910, David would have been sixty-six in 1912, although Forest Service documents list him as sixty-nine. The 1910 census lists six children for David and Eutemia Quintana whose ages ranged from thirteen to twenty-three.

snows prevail during the winter months, and also in order to avail ourselves of school facilities for our family.”³²⁸

David testified that his claim included about 60 acres of cultivable land, the remainder being appropriate only for grazing stock. Every year since the summer of 1907, he said, he planted about 25 acres of his land with beans, wheat, and corn, getting yields of about “one ton of good wheat, about six or seven thousand pounds of good corn, and some beans.” The family also had a kitchen garden in one part of their claim and kept some animals: “I graze nine cows, two burros, two pony horses all owned by me.” Witnesses to David’s final-proof testimony also mentioned that the Quintana family kept a few chickens and describe the horses as being “a team of horses and a couple of colts.” The house that David built for his family in the northeast quarter of the claim had five rooms. In addition, David built one large corral and “two small reservoirs where I hold water for stock and domestic use.” Around the cultivated area he put a barbed-wire and post fence.³²⁹

On March 4, 1913, David Quintana made his formal homestead entry for his additional tract of land of 52.5 acres.³³⁰ He was awarded patent to it on August 20, 1913, the same day that he received patent to his first homestead claim. He now owned 150 acres of land on North Mesa. Yet within three years, David had died. In 1916, Manuel Luján, the son of David’s neighbor Martín Luján (whose homestead immediately to the east of David’s had originally been applied for and farmed by Roberto Quintana) bought a 19/20th interest in David Quintana’s homestead from David’s widow, Eutemia Garcia, and other heirs. (The remaining 1/20th was bought by Elfego Gomez, a grandson of Pedro Gomez y Gonzales and husband of David Quintana’s daughter Candelaria.³³¹) Virtually the entire area of North Mesa was now owned by several generations of the Luján family. Manuel Luján and Elfego Gomez were the owners of what had been the David Quintana homestead when the army took over the plateau in late 1942.³³²

The Romero Homesteads

David Romero

On February 28, 1893, David Romero applied for a homestead on the north rim of Twomile Canyon, a site now within the security perimeter of Los Alamos National Laboratory. David knew the Pajarito Plateau well. His mother was a descendant of Pedro Sánchez, original owner of the Ramón Vigil Grant. Therefore, David and his family had long been grazing cattle on the grant.³³³ Like most other homesteaders, David and his wife Francisquita did not intend to live on the Pajarito Plateau year-round; instead, they used their land as a base for raising cash crops and livestock.

The Romeros' principal home was at San Ildefonso, New Mexico. David farmed his land there and also served the larger community as a natural healer (a *curandero*) and a midwife (a *partero*). He kept medicinal herbs in a back room of the family house at San Ildefonso and often, in response to an urgent message, would saddle up a horse in the middle of the night to deliver a baby in El Rancho or Pojoaque.³³⁴

David Romero applied for the maximum homestead size permitted by the Homestead Act of 1862—a full 160 acres. Born in 1841, David was a citizen of the United States by virtue of the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. He and his wife were among the earliest homesteaders on the Pajarito Plateau. They were preceded only by Juan Luis Garcia, the first successful homesteader, who filed in 1887 for a plot in Garcia Canyon; Benigno Quintana, who filed for a plot in what is now Western Area in 1892; and Pedro Gomez y Gonzales, who filed just a few weeks before David Romero did, in February 1893, for land on the present golf course at Los Alamos.

In his homestead application papers, David stated that his house had been built in 1893 and that, in addition to the house, he had corrals, a reservoir, a stable, and fence lines. He kept some stock at the nearby town of San Ildefonso.³³⁵ Family members recalled that a subterranean storage area or *souterano* was located on his land (Ernesto Romero, personal communication).

On July 20, 1901, David Romero received the patent to his land, eight years after he had applied for entry. When his property was acquired by the government in 1942, it was still owned by the Romero family, in the name of his wife, Francisquita Romero, and other heirs. War Department records list two log cabins and a fence on the land at the time of acquisition.³³⁶

Victor Romero

One of David and Francisquita's sons, Victor, also chose to homestead on the Pajarito Plateau with his wife Refugio Sánchez. Their triangular plot was small, only 15 acres, and surrounded on two sides by that of Victor's parents. Victor Romero applied for his homestead on February 25, 1913, twenty years after his father had filed for land. Unlike his father, who applied under the Homestead Act of 1862, Victor applied under a later, supplemental act, the Forest Homestead Act of 1906. As mentioned earlier, that act added agricultural lands located within forest reserves to the pool of government lands open for settlement. The land Victor wished to homestead was part of what was then called the Jemez National Forest. Victor first applied to the Forest Service for the tract he wanted on August 12, 1912.³³⁷ After the land was certified by the secretary of the interior as being eligible for release to homesteaders, Victor filed formally for entry on February 25, 1913. By that time he was a married man, the head of a family. He listed his address as San Ildefonso.³³⁸

Victor successfully met the conditions set forth by law in just three years and received the patent to his homestead in 1916, although he was among the small group of home-

steaders who had voted in another county.³³⁹ Voting in another county normally disqualified homesteaders from claiming that their homestead was their principal residence.

Victor and his family did not stay on their homestead year-round; patent papers show that Victor conscientiously requested leave to return to his home in the valley every winter (from about mid-November to mid-April) between 1913 and 1916.

When Victor proved up on his claim, he listed as his post office address not San Ildefonso (as he had when he filed his entry papers) but Buckman, a nearby logging town and post office address on the Rio Grande. However, when asked during his final-proof testimony if he had personal property elsewhere than on his claim, he responded that he had house furniture and kitchen utensils at San Ildefonso.

In his final proof, Victor Romero testified that he was forty-five years old, had a wife and six children, had established his residence in April 1913, and had been absent November through March of each year. About thirteen of his 15 acres were cultivable; on them he had planted beans and corn. He had a corral and a one-room log house with a door and two windows (built in June

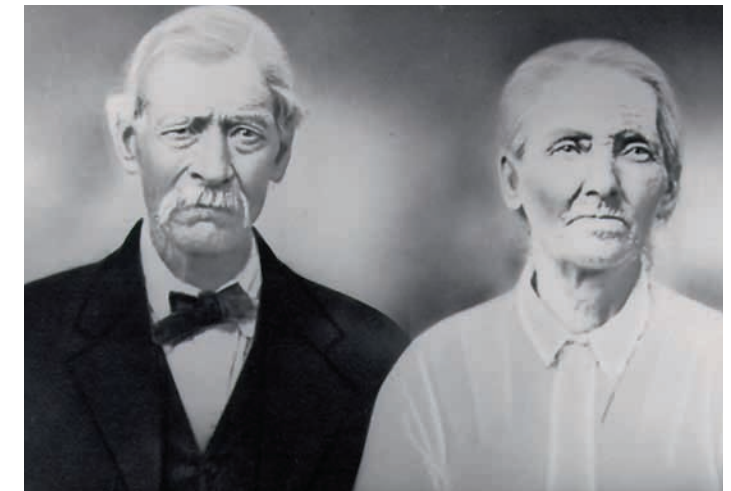


Figure 158. David and Francisquita Romero. (Photo courtesy of the Romero family)

1913), and his claim was enclosed on three sides with a wire-and-post fence. Statements by witnesses also list a stable and small reservoir as additional improvements.³⁴⁰

In 1985, Victor Romero's cabin was moved from its original location just off Pajarito Road to its current location near Fuller Lodge in the historic center of downtown Los Alamos. Historic research conducted as part of the cabin relocation and excavation project revealed that the cabin was rebuilt in approximately 1934 by Victor Romero and his son-in-law Bences Gonzales.³⁴¹ A major transformation in the form of the cabin was the change from a "v"-pitch roof to a shed roof. Minor repairs were made to the cabin by a local Boy Scout troop twice during the 1960s.³⁴²

Not everyone in the family slept inside the cabin; there was a sleeping porch and a small building for the children to sleep in. The cabin's interior was roughly furnished with a homemade table, chairs and benches, and shelving; there was also a small loft space for storage. Pots and pans were hung on the walls near the wood-burning stove, which was located in the northwest corner of the cabin. Behind (to the north of) the house, the family cultivated a small kitchen garden. The Romeros grew melons as well as vegetables in this garden and roamed farther afield to pick wild strawberries, a favorite local delicacy, when in season. Colorful iris plants graced the area by the front door. The family brought cows to their homestead for fresh milk and kept hogs, chickens, and horses as well. In addition to the corral, outbuildings included a chicken pen and a shed for storing grain and hay. The Romeros bought foodstuffs, mostly canned, from the Ranch School store (after 1917), which had high prices, or stores at San Ildefonso and Buckman in the Rio Grande Valley. The latter towns were a considerable distance from the Romero homestead but were on the way to the plateau from their year-round home in San Ildefonso. Food staples mentioned by the family included canned milk, potted meat, Arbuckle's coffee beans, and Libby's canned fruits and vegetables. Water was not readily available on the mesa and was hauled up in barrels from the bottom of the nearby canyon.³⁴³



Figure 159. This 1946 aerial photo, the same as that shown in the section for the McDougalls, illustrates the location, along what is now Pajarito Road, of the David and Victor Romero homesteads and that of their McDougall neighbors. In middle background is the town of Los Alamos; the cleared areas beyond the town mark the site of other homesteads. (Los Alamos National Laboratory)

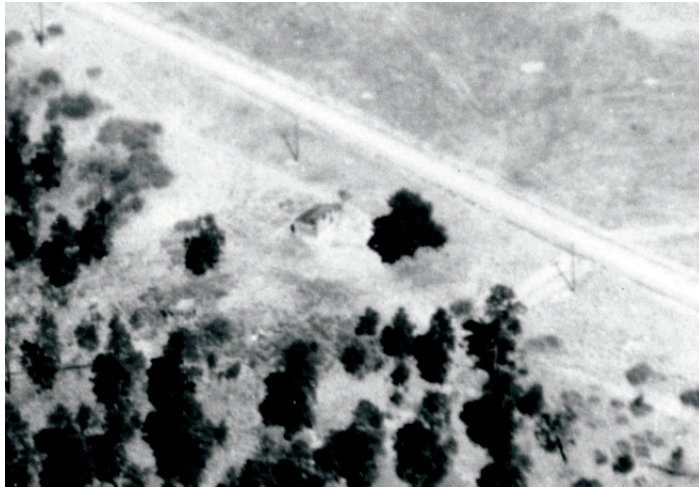


Figure 160. The Victor Romero cabin as it appeared on November 1, 1946. It is this cabin that has been moved to the grounds of Fuller Lodge in the historic center of Los Alamos. (Los Alamos National Laboratory)



Figure 161. The abandoned David Romero cabins. This and the preceding photo were taken on Nov. 1, 1946, four years after the eviction of the homesteaders. (Los Alamos National Laboratory)



Figure 162. Storage loft inside the Victor Romero cabin at its original location. (Los Alamos National Laboratory)



Figure 163. The Victor Romero cabin, shown here at its original location, was built with a distinctive shed roof. (Los Alamos National Laboratory)

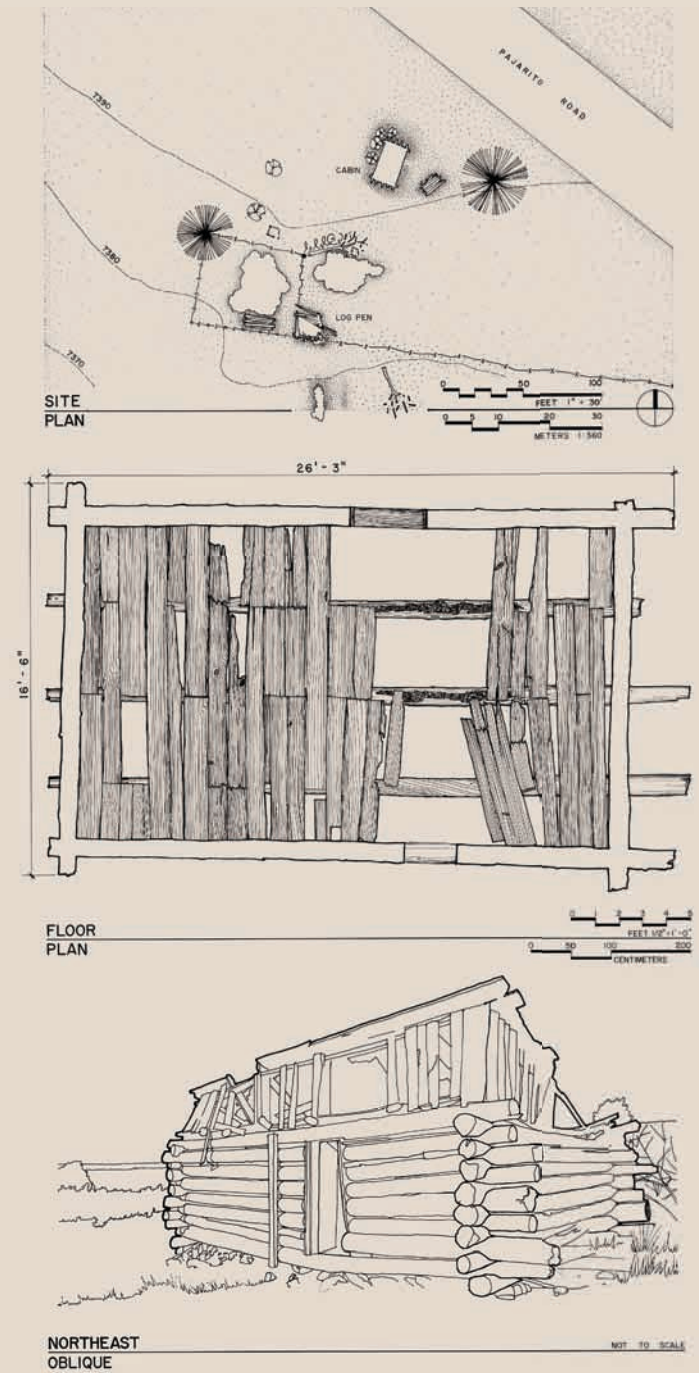
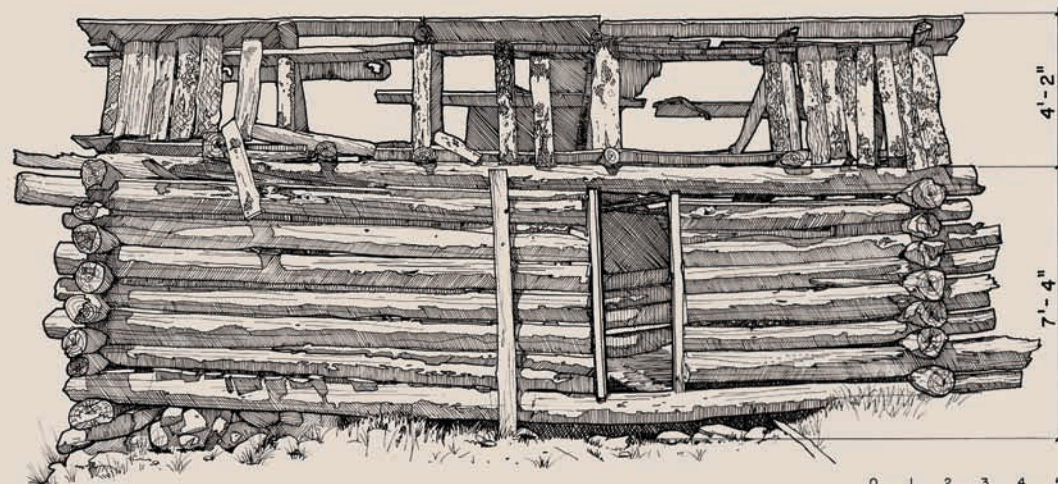
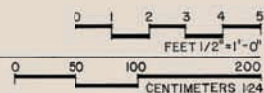


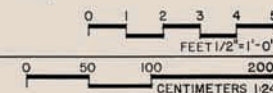
Figure 164. This sketch of the Romero cabin was made for the Historic American Building Survey documentation produced during the relocation project. (Los Alamos National Laboratory)



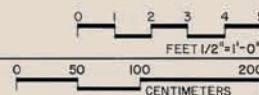
**NORTH
ELEVATION**



**EAST
ELEVATION**



**WEST
ELEVATION**



**SOUTH
ELEVATION**

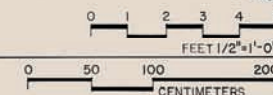


Figure 165. These architectural drawings detail the shed roof of the Victor Romero cabin. (Los Alamos National Laboratory)

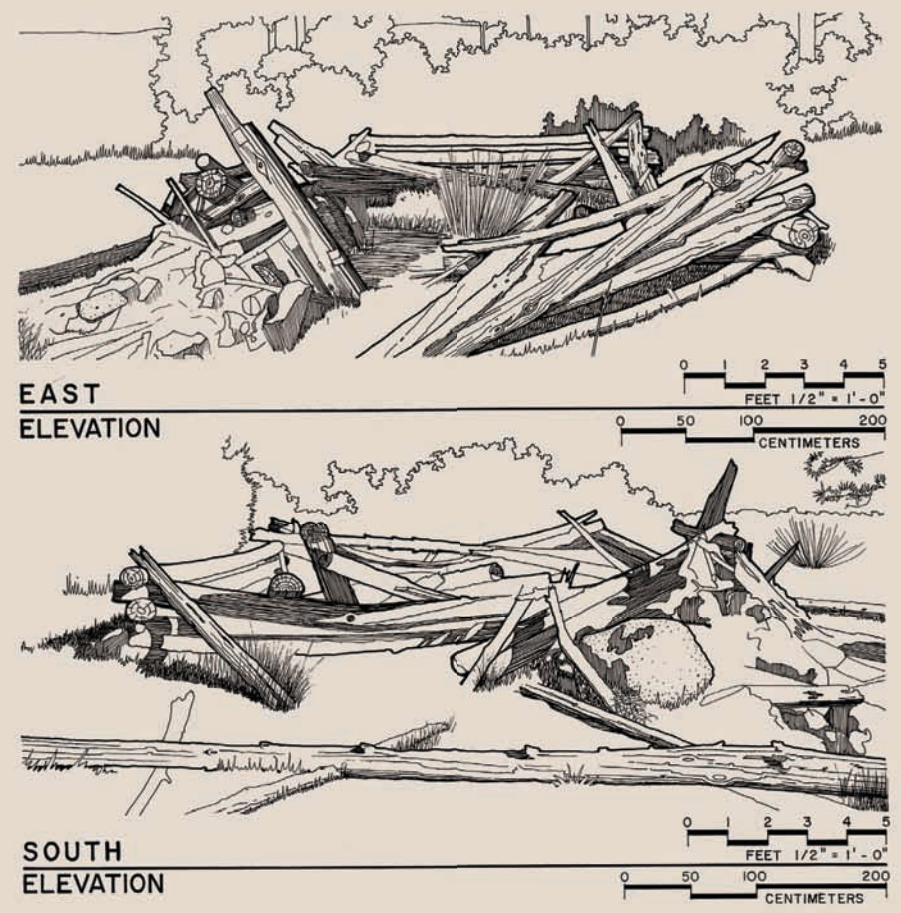
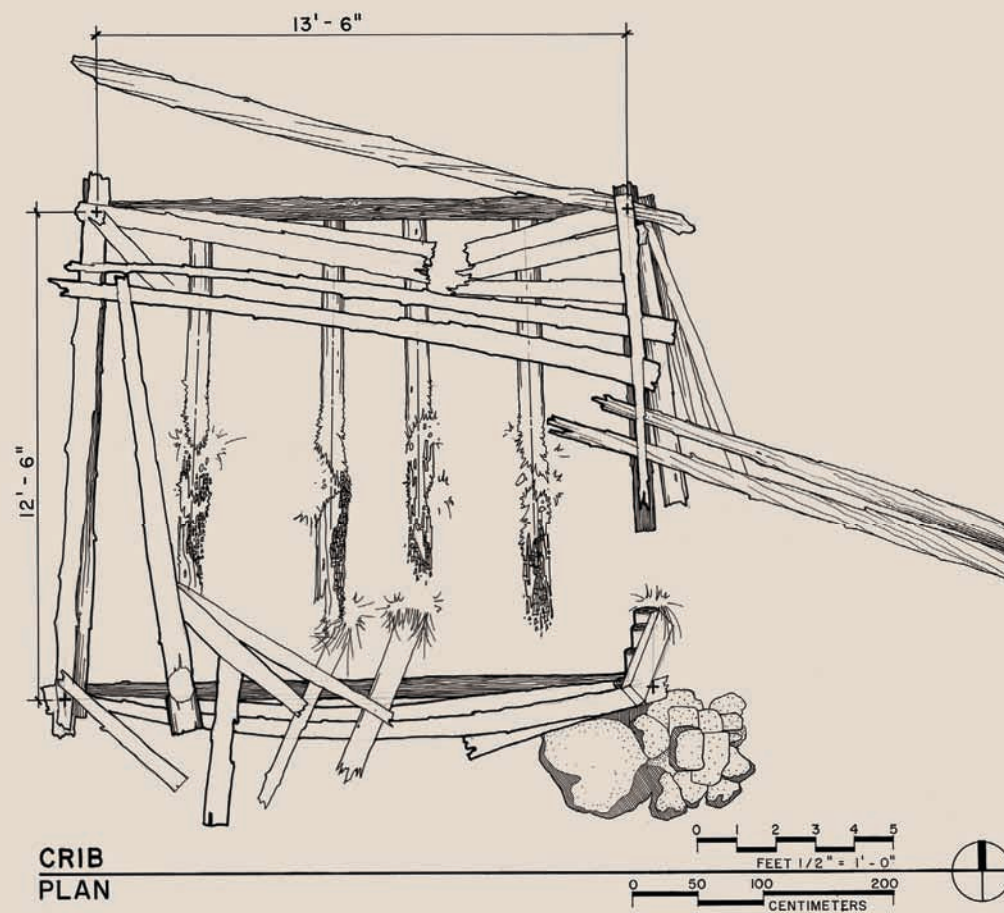


Figure 166. Architectural drawings of "south log structure," the possible Sánchez cabin on the Victor Romero homestead. (Los Alamos National Laboratory)



Figure 167. Rebuilding the Victor Romero cabin in the historic center of Los Alamos, 1984–85. (Los Alamos National Laboratory)



Figure 169. The Romero cabin at its new location. This photo was taken just before a second professional restoration project was undertaken beginning in 2009. (Los Alamos National Laboratory)



Figure 168. Although descendants believe that this shed or animal pen at the Victor Romero homestead was the site of the Antonio Sánchez cabin, evidence contradicts this family legend. (Los Alamos National Laboratory)



Figure 170. Bences Gonzales and son Ray Gonzales at the original location of the Victor Romero cabin, 1959. (Los Alamos National Laboratory)

Many of the Hispanic homestead families on the Pajarito Plateau were related by marriage. A network of trails connected the neighboring properties, often leading from mesa to mesa. In the case of the Romero family, Francisquita Romero, David's wife, was related to the nearby Ramón Durán family; Victor's wife Refugio was the daughter of Antonio Sánchez, one of the earliest Hispanic settlers on the plateau (who established a farm around 1885*) and Victor's son Ernesto's wife was the daughter of Enriquez Montoya (who purchased Eliseo Vigil's homestead).³⁴⁴

The seasonal occupation of the Romero homestead lasted for approximately thirty years (although the Romeros themselves did not continue to use it consistently) until 1942, when the United States government began appropriating plateau land for the Manhattan Project. Survey records indicated that, at the time of the government buyout, major improvements at the Victor Romero homestead included a log cabin, a “tumbledown barn,” and a fence.³⁴⁵ Victor Romero was still the legal owner of his homestead tract at the time of the army buyout.

* Antonio Sánchez, long claimed by his descendants to have been the first homesteader on the Pajarito Plateau, never completed the formal homestead process. Although Romero family tradition posits that Antonio's original 1885 cabin may have been located at the site of the Victor Romero cabin, Daniel Merry's survey of 1890 does not indicate any building at that location. Sánchez's never-completed entry was for land in Section 15; he did not file in Section 21, where the Romero cabin was located. However, logs from one of Victor's outbuildings dated to the early 1890s, predating his official use of the plateau.

The Roybal Homestead

Noberto Roybal

Noberto Roybal of San Ildefonso, who was born in the early 1870s, was forty-five years old and the head of a growing family when he filed for homestead entry (a claim of 72.5 acres) on the eastern part of what is now called Barranca Mesa, between Rendija and Bayo canyons. The date was July 31, 1916.³⁴⁶

Noberto had been interested in this property at least seven years earlier, for he applied to the secretary of the interior to open the tract for settlement on January 11, 1909, amending his application on May 22, 1910. Noberto would have been about thirty-four in 1909. For whatever reason, Noberto did not apply for a claim to this land for another six years. Until he did so, the land was used, under a special-use permit, from 1914 by Eluterio Gonzales of Buckman, who cleared and planted about 30 acres. But in 1916, Eluterio relinquished the land to Noberto.³⁴⁷

In the early months of 1917, Noberto established residence on his claim and expanded on the log cabin originally built by Eluterio. Noberto increased the size of the cabin (near the present intersection of Navajo and Barranca roads) by another three rooms, later adding yet another room. He and his sons built an upper story to use for storing supplies and as a sleeping room for some of the family. According to a ranger's report, "The entire house is covered now by corrugated iron roofing and constitutes an excellent homelike building, perfectly habitable at all seasons." Noberto and his sons also put in a corral and three stock ponds, one made of concrete, and installed a three-wire fence. Unfortunately, they built them outside the limits of their claim. "The reason for this, no doubt," a ranger recorded, "was that claimant did not know the location of his lines and supposed that the claim took in the entire mesa top."³⁴⁸ Noberto was not alone in mistaking his property lines; survey markers were often hard to locate on the rugged landscape of the plateau, nor did the landscape permit neat, gridlike boundaries.

On August 15, 1918, Noberto entered an additional homestead entry for 52.5 acres adjacent to his original claim. His property now consisted of 125 acres, on which he and his family cultivated about 100 acres. They planted corn, beans, rye, oats, and peas, and also grew fodder and straw for their livestock. The remainder of their land was rocky and hilly, unsuitable for agriculture. For livestock, the Roybals kept about thirteen head of cattle and four horses, grazing some of the cattle in forest lands under a permit. Closer to home they kept chickens and two hogs.³⁴⁹

The Roybal homestead was so isolated by steep canyon walls that the family's only access to their property was through the land of their neighbor, Estanislado Gonzales, first cousin to Noberto's wife. Like other homesteaders on the plateau, the Roybals had no water supply for ditch irrigation and so relied exclusively on dry farming. A spring in Rendija Canyon about one mile from the homestead supplied water for the stock. Also like other homesteaders, the Roybals spent the winter months in the valley at their permanent residence at San Ildefonso.

By the time Noberto filed final proof for his homestead patent, he and his wife had nine children. He received his patent for his 125-acre claim on November 4, 1920.³⁵⁰ Both the Roybal and the neighboring Gonzales families still owned their homesteads in 1942, the year the government began the formal process to acquire plateau land for the Manhattan Project.

An interview in 2003 with a descendant of the Roybals, Shirley Roybal, sheds light on why homesteaders gave up their property to the government. "They were patriotic," Roybal said, "and, like the other homesteaders, they hoped to get their land back after the war." For most residents of the plateau, the sudden, unexpected appearance of strangers with the power to take over their land was a confusing and not clearly understood experience. "My grandparents spoke only Spanish," Roybal said. "My mother was sixteen or seventeen years old, and she remembers two men coming to the door and asking them



Figure 171. The Miguel Sánchez (later Montoya) cabin. (Los Alamos National Laboratory)



Figure 172. Remains of the Miguel Sánchez (later Montoya) cabin, center, and a second log building. (Los Alamos National Laboratory)



Figure 173. Construction detail of the Miguel Sánchez (later Montoya) cabin. The family's wood-burning stove is visible through the window. (Los Alamos National Laboratory)



Figure 174. The Miguel Sánchez (later Montoya) cabin before the 2000 Cerro Grande fire (cabin now destroyed). (Los Alamos National Laboratory)

to sign over the land.” Roybal recalls her mother saying that one man was in uniform and the other wore a dress suit. Roybal’s grandparents were already serving their country when they were asked to sign over their land. “My grandparents had three sons in the military at the time,” she reported. Expecting to return to the homestead after the war, Roybal’s uncles had to leave the state to find jobs.³⁵¹

The Miguel Sánchez Homestead

Miguel Sánchez

Miguel Sánchez was one of the early settlers of the Pajarito Plateau, entering on March 8, 1899, an application for a homestead of 160 acres on Twomile Mesa. Born in 1831, when what is today New Mexico was part of Mexico, he was eligible to apply because he was a United States citizen by virtue of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. By that time, he had already built a home on the land he would claim. His neighbors, all of whom filed the same year, were Donaciano Gomez, Severo Gonzalez, and James Loomis. Sánchez, who lived on his claim with his wife, patented his homestead in just over five years, on September 28, 1904. By then, remarkably, he was seventy-three years old. Sánchez built a three-room house, corrals, and stables on his claim and had fenced a portion of his land. According to his testimony and that of others, he cultivated only about 4 acres each season. He, too, was sometimes absent from his claim, working for others, but testified that “during my absence my family has remained on the land cultivating and taking care of it.”³⁵²

At the time of the buyout by the army, the owners of Sánchez’s homestead were José Elfego Montoya and José Patricio Montoya. The army inspectors reported finding on the property a log cabin, corral, and barn; two additional “tumbledown” cabins, and a fence.³⁵³



Figure 175. Aerial view of the Eliseo Vigil homestead, December 4, 1946. The dirt road passing by the homestead eventually became today’s East Jemez Road. (Los Alamos National Laboratory)

The Vigil Homesteads

Eliseo M. Vigil

Eliseo Vigil was already farming the Pajarito Plateau under a special-use permit dated July 8, 1912, when he applied for a homestead of 27.5 acres on March 25, 1913.³⁵⁴ His claim was on land now occupied by the Royal Crest Trailer Park on East Jemez Road in Los Alamos. When Eliseo made his final proof on this land and an additional parcel (see below) at the U.S. Land Office in Santa Fe on May 9, 1916, he testified that he had established residence on his claim in September 1912 and had built his house there on the eighth day of that month. The house was a one-room, 14- by 14-foot log cabin with one door, one window, and a stone foundation. A report by the inspecting forest ranger, Fred Plomteaux, indicated that Eliseo’s cabin had a corrugated iron roof that was “in first rate of repair” and

that the cabin was suitable for living in year round.³⁵⁵ Eliseo also built two other log rooms used as a grain house, a small corral, and a stable (described by Plomteaux as being 12 by 16 feet, roofed with corrugated iron, and having a loft where Eliseo stored forage grasses for the animals). Eliseo dug a reservoir for water storage whose capacity Plomteaux estimated at about five thousand gallons; he also built a raised platform for water barrels. Finally, he strung a barrier of about 600 yards of four-wire fence across the west end of his claim, reaching, as Plomteaux noted, “from rim to rim of mesa, effectually enclosing area.”³⁵⁶

Within two years of his 1913 entry, on June 17, 1915, Eliseo applied for an additional homestead of 35 acres.³⁵⁷ His first claim was too small to maintain a desirable home, according to Ranger Plomteaux. Because Eliseo was already farming all his original claim plus more land under a special-use permit, Plomteaux made the following recommendation to his supervisor: “On account of the acreage in his [Eliseo’s] present claim being so small and he has shown such good faith by cultivating nearly every available acre of it, I believe it is highly desirable to list him this additional land.”³⁵⁸ Eliseo’s second claim enlarged his homestead to almost 63 acres.

Eliseo was single and thirty-eight years old on that day in May 1916 when he testified during the process of establishing final proof on his combined claims; he lived alone on his homestead. About 40 acres of his 63 acres were cultivable, he said; another 2 acres were timber. Between 1913 and 1916, he testified, he had broken about 23 acres of land, which he planted with beans for a cash crop and wheat. He had only two horses. With this team, he did all the farm labor.³⁵⁹

Although Eliseo testified that he was absent during the winter months, from November through February, living at San Ildefonso, Plomteaux’s reports indicate that when weather permitted, Eliseo was often back on his claim. He used the winter months to clear trees off his land and do other work “necessary in preparation to tilling the

land.” A road from Eliseo’s claim led to the main road in what Plomteaux called Alamos Cañon (Los Alamos Canyon), which led on to San Ildefonso and Española.³⁶⁰

Because there was no one to maintain his homestead while he was gone, Eliseo’s summer absences were short, occasioned only when he needed to procure provisions and supplies. According to Plomteaux’s reports, Eliseo was a conscientious farmer and did a good job of constructing and keeping up “all improvements and conveniences needed by a bachelor farmer.... The dwelling is well and completely furnished and very orderly, so much so that one would think on observation, that a feminine hand had done the housework.”³⁶¹

Eliseo farmed by modern methods, Plomteaux reported, having “all classes of farming implements, including modern planters, harrows, sulky plows and cultivators” on his claim. With the acquisition of his second claim, he added oats, barley, and corn to his list of crops. Eliseo hauled water for domestic purposes, Plomteaux said, “from the Alamos Cañon, a distance of one-half mile. Water for the stock used on the claim is collected from rains in the reservoir. At times in the late summer this dries up, when the stock must be taken to the Alamos Cañon for water.”³⁶² Although a bachelor, Eliseo was not entirely alone; Plomteaux noted that “There are quite a few ranches and settlers within a radius of a few miles from the tract.”³⁶³

Eliseo patented his two tracts of land on the same day, November 10, 1916. But he was not the owner of his homestead when the army took over in 1943; by then, the listed owner was Enriquez Montoya. Structures listed by the army remaining on the homestead were a log cabin, a log shed, and a fence.³⁶⁴

Fermin Montes Vigil

Fermin M. Vigil applied originally for two tracts of land in Mortandad Canyon, both of which had been previously “entered,” but never brought to patent, by earlier claim-

ants. Fermin applied on October 12, 1914, for a tract of 32.40 acres that overlapped a claim applied for in 1913 by Masimiano Gomez, who subsequently relinquished it. Then on May 7, 1915, Fermin applied for an additional homestead claim of 64.06 acres—a neighboring tract of land that had originally been filed on in 1913 by Francisco Sánchez.

The two claims brought Fermin’s acreage up to 96.45 acres, well below the limit of 160 acres. Unfortunately, permission for Fermin to apply for his additional homestead had been made in error. The following is from a letter of January 29, 1916, written to the forest supervisor in Santa Fe by Assistant Forest Ranger Fred Plomteaux.

While Fermin Montes Vigil has filed upon lands listed to Francisco Sánchez and Masimiano Gomez totaling 96.45 acres, not exceeding 160, he has covered by these filings an extent of over one mile in length and land in two different sections. This, in my understanding of the rules for the examination and survey of homestead claims upon National Forests, is contrary to the rules which limit long strips to the boundaries of one section.³⁶⁵

To remain in compliance with homestead regulations, Fermin relinquished his original claim of 32.40 acres in late 1916, retaining his second claim of 64.06 acres. By that time he had already planted 5 acres of his combined claims to corn, 40 acres to beans, and 5 acres of wheat—some of those cultivated acres on his first claim. Not only did Fermin lose those acres on his first claim, but he was advised by the Forest Service that if the cabin and structures he had built were not within the tract he retained, then it would be necessary for him either to remove them to that tract or to construct new ones.

The records do not indicate what action Fermin took, but they provide a snapshot of the homestead life of the Fermin Vigil family. They tell us that Fermin owned one cow and two horses and usually kept a pig and some chickens. His farming methods were as up-to-date as

his circumstances allowed. Nonetheless, farmers have always been vulnerable to problems caused by weather and pests; the records report that some years Fermin experienced normal growing conditions while other years were plagued by “drought and rodents.” One year, 1917, Fermin lost his entire wheat crop to rodents.³⁶⁶

As for the seasonal round of activity, Ranger Plomteaux reported that “claimant and his wife reside on the claim from the early spring to late fall of each year. During the winter months they live at the small community of La Mesilla in the Rio Grande Valley where claimant owns a small plot of ground and house. This was purchased by him for winter use in 1916.” And, following a list of Fermin’s arrivals and departures on the homestead each year, Plomteau added, “During these absences from the claim, the claimant was employed at nearby sawmills or with private individuals.”³⁶⁷

Other reports by Plomteaux continue to fill out the picture. On November 11, 1915, Plomteaux, on an inspection trip to the Pajarito Plateau, found Fermin and his family on their claim, “thrashing beans and storing produce.”³⁶⁸ On March 23, 1916, Plomteaux passed Fermin’s claim as he was “posting boundary”; he found Fermin and his family planting seeds and breaking more soil, building a corral, and covering an open passageway between two separate cabins: “Everything bears a homelike appearance.” Fermin had not built a fence around his property, Plomteaux noted, because “none needed.” In November 1916, the ranger saw the family in Española on their way to their winter home in La Mesilla. But, Plomteaux added, Fermin explained that he planned to return to the claim and stay on it, clearing additional land, until the latter part of December. Then on December 5, 1916, Plomteaux reported that “I saw claimant at Española today. He is delivering 15000 lbs. beans to Bond & Nohl Co. at 6 1/4 cents.”³⁶⁹

The principal reason that Fermin’s family left their claim during the winter months was to allow the children to go to school at San Ildefonso. Another note made by Fred Plomteaux, however, gives a rare glimpse into the



Figure 176. Eliseo Vigil’s sturdily built cabin was still standing when the army took this photo on December 30, 1942. (Los Alamos National Laboratory)



Figure 177. All that was left of the Eliseo Vigil cabin site before it was excavated. (Los Alamos National Laboratory)



Figure 178. Excavation revealed the stone cabin foundation of the Eliseo Vigil cabin. (Los Alamos National Laboratory)



Figure 179. Excavators found both a bed frame and a mattress support (shown in photos above and below) during the excavation of the Eliseo Vigil cabin site. (Los Alamos National Laboratory)



Figure 180. The Fermin Vigil homestead in Mortandad Canyon still shows signs of having been farmed. (Los Alamos National Laboratory)



Figure 181. View of the interior of Fermin Vigil's cistern. (Los Alamos National Laboratory)

personal tragedies some homesteaders endured. On January 12, 1920, Plomteaux wrote, “Family consists of himself and wife only. They have no children now; having lost two they had by ‘Flu’ in Nov. 1918.”³⁷⁰

The problem of residency also arose for Fermin. A document dated April 17, 1916, reports that Fermin, along with Victor Romero, Martín Luján, and Francisco Gonzales, “having homesteads within Sandoval County, voted in another county at a recent election.” The men were reported by “challengers” Apolmar Trujillo and José Amador Gonzales of San Ildefonso. Nonetheless, Fermin, as were the other homesteaders listed, was ultimately allowed to claim his residence as his homestead, having developed and improved it in good faith in the opinion of the investigating ranger.³⁷¹

A final stumbling block arose when Fermin attempted to submit final proof to obtain title to his homestead. His proof was initially rejected because he failed to submit it within the statutory period. Fermin explained the reason in his final testimony: It was discovered that a special survey of the claim had not been made. Ranger Plomteaux, investigating the problem, wrote to the Santa Fe Forest supervisor on January 27, 1919, reporting that apparently a survey of Fermin’s property had in fact been made back in 1916 by C. A. Long, a Forest Service surveyor, but for unknown reasons it was not filed properly or approved.³⁷²

When Fermin was finally successful in making his final proof on February 20, 1920, he testified that he was twenty-seven years old, married, and had one child. By then he was tilling about 34 acres on a claim that had been slightly reduced from 64.06 to 60.31 acres. During the season of 1919, the last subject to inspection by the Forest Service, Fermin produced approximately 12,000 pounds of beans, 3,000 pounds of corn, 5,000 pounds of wheat, and two tons of vegetables.³⁷³ He was still the owner of his property when the army confiscated it in 1942.

The William Carpenter White Homestead

William Carpenter White

Coming to New Mexico from Meriden, Kansas, in the late 1890s, William C. White and his family settled in Cerrillos, New Mexico, a mining camp. The family later moved to Santa Fe where White worked for several years as a foreman on the Denver & Rio Grande Western Railroad.³⁷⁴ William White was one of the early homesteaders on the Pajarito Plateau, filing a homestead application on March 18, 1899, for 160 acres of land at the north end of what is now the Western Area of Los Alamos (around present-day Sandia Drive). To enter this claim, he paid a fee, plus compensation to the men holding the offices of register and receiver, amounting to \$16. Five years later, by November 1904, White was able to file proof on his homestead; the patent to his land is dated April 18, 1905. At the time White gave his final-proof testimony, he was forty-eight years old and married. He and his wife, Amanda Jane Chapman White, had eight children (six girls and two boys). His sons, Ben Lewis White and George Miles White, were hired later by the Forest Service to hang the telephone line, scaling mature ponderosa pine trees to hammer in insulators.³⁷⁵ They also worked for the Los Alamos Ranch School.

White, a native of Illinois, had been on the plateau since 1897, for he testified that he had established residence on his claim on April 3 of that year. That same summer, he completed a log house of six rooms that he floored throughout. He also built, presumably with the help of his family, a barn, a corral, a chicken house, and a cellar. The family fenced about 100 acres of their land.³⁷⁶ For the past six years, White said during his testimony, he had raised crops on the land, cultivating twenty-five to 30 acres each year. He and his family had no other residence; they lived, according to White, on the Pajarito Plateau “pretty nearly all the time.” An exception occurred two years previous to White’s testimony, when drought forced him off the plateau for about three months. During that time, however, White testified that “some of the family went to the land every week, to look after crops.”

In his 1958 autobiography, White’s son, George M. White, discussed his family’s farming practices, including grain harvesting and cane processing.

We always made a big barrelis of cane syrup for Winter too. We would Plant a Patch of cane in the valley. Would rent a pease of Ground to raise it on and in the fall when time came to make syrup we would go down there and first we would take a stick and go through the field and knock off all of the leaves and then we would go through again and top the seed, then we would cut it and stack it in Bundles then we would get a cane crusher machine and a boiling vat to cook the syrup in and make the syrup. It would take about 2 or 3 days to Grind it and Boil the syrup untill it was done. Had to watch it all of the time while cooking and skim the foam off.³⁷⁷

In May 1908, just three years after William C. White received patent to his claim, he and his wife sold their property to William M. Hopper. Other owners followed: Hopper sold to Martha Brook within two months; Martha sold to her son H. H. Brook some years later; in turn, H. H. Brook and his wife Katherine sold the property to Ashley Pond. A year later, Pond and his wife Hazel sold the land to the Los Alamos Ranch. A Special Master’s Deed went to Edward P. Fuller of the Los Alamos Ranch in 1920, and in 1921 the Fuller deed went to the Los Alamos Ranch School.

In an interview on file at the Los Alamos Historical Museum, William’s son Ben White recalled how he worked for a nearby ranch in the years after his parents sold the family homestead.

From 1916 to 1919 Mr. White [Ben] was employed by Frank Bond on the Baca Location where he stayed on a ranch near Valle Grande. He worked with the foreman, John Davenport, as a wrangler of sheep and cattle and recalls collecting grazing dues of \$1.00 a head from small farmers and ranchers who grazed their livestock on the Baca location during the summer months. These ranchers and farmers whose livestock were



Figure 182. The original caption for this photograph from Fermor Church's photograph album reads, "1920s—White cabin west of the LARS upper fields." Church was a schoolmaster at the Los Alamos Ranch School and the husband of Peggy Pond Church. White's descendants dispute the identification of the cabin as White's. Whatever the case, during the Ranch School years, the upper fields pictured here—once the White homestead—were used for raising hay. (Los Alamos Historical Society)

housed on the Baca came from communities as far away as Española, Pena Blanca, and Cuba. During their affiliations with Mr. Bond, credit would be extended for a period of an entire year. One additional enterprise of the Bond headquarters was the leasing of sheep. An example of this would be where a rancher would lease 100 ewes and the following spring return 50 lambs as payment, and in addition, to sell the wool from his

total flock to Mr. Bond. He also was aware that in many cases, it was necessary for them to sell additional sheep or cattle as payment for credit extended to them at the Bond store in Española.³⁷⁸

The Los Alamos Ranch School owned the William C. White homestead when the army appropriated the land in late 1942.



Figure 183. These two 1924 photos show Ben and George White working at the Los Alamos Ranch School. Ben White (above) helps build the new machine shop. George White (below) helps build the Ranch School trading post. (Los Alamos Historical Society)



Figure 184. The new Ranch School machine shop was built by a crew of men including Ben and George White in March 1924. Note the saw being used by two of the men. In the background are H. H. Brook's original homestead house and, behind it, the Ranch School's Big House, where the Ranch School students lived. (Los Alamos Historical Society)



Figure 185. A. J. Connell (left), headmaster of the Los Alamos Ranch School, and Ben White (right), the Ranch School foreman, share a campsite meal sometime between 1919 and 1923. (Los Alamos Historical Society)



Chapter 5

Conclusion: Success or Failure?



Homesteaders in northern New Mexico shared similar experiences with other homesteaders across the West. The provisions of the Homestead Act applied to all, starting with the requirement for a formal entry application and culminating in the final proof process. Like their fellow homesteaders from other western states, New Mexican homesteaders had to meet the requirements: to establish a home and till the soil within a certain period of time. Like their fellow homesteaders, they weathered a variety of hardships including extreme climate, insect plagues, crop failures, and drought. They, like others, also had to contend with administrative snafus, survey errors, poor interagency communication, cultural and language barriers, and legal battles related to residency requirements. The homesteaders of the Pajarito Plateau differed from their counterparts in one significant aspect, however: the majority of them had permanent homes in well-established communities within a day's wagon ride of their claim. In times of summer drought, or during the winter months when nothing could be cultivated, these homestead families could leave their claims, returning to them when growing conditions improved.

The homestead years on the Pajarito Plateau illustrate how people living in an undeveloped, relatively isolated area used sweat and ingenuity to survive, and how, in the process, they became integrated into the modern world. Originally, homesteaders farmed at the subsistence level: they raised most of their own food and traded or bartered with other families. Cash was little needed, except for paying property taxes.

During the homestead era on the Pajarito Plateau, however, the United States was engaged in a transition that transformed the country—the transition from an agricultural to an industrial society. With the coming of the railroad in the 1880s, commerce increased and expanded westward, including into the territory of New Mexico. By the time New Mexico became a state in 1912, subsistence farmers were experiencing a growing need for cash to pay for goods and services that extended beyond the economy of scarcity they had been practicing. Further, around the turn of the twentieth century, outsiders—in the form of entrepreneurs, tourists, land speculators, archaeologists, and health seekers—were bringing a new American culture with them as they descended upon the remote Pajarito Plateau.

Forced to adapt to changing times, homesteaders modernized their farming equipment and increased their food production, not only for their own use but for cash crops as well. Their decision to do so was part of an economic strategy that helped them keep afloat financially—although many families were forced to adapt to the new economic realities even further by devising strategies that went beyond homesteading.

Economically speaking, then, farming and grazing on the Pajarito Plateau during the late 1880s to the 1940s was a vital supplement to the subsistence living that many Hispanics practiced on their farms in the nearby Rio Grande Valley. Politically speaking, how successful was the plateau homesteading process in terms of meeting the Homestead Act's goal of converting public lands to private ownership?

Both “success” and “failure” can take on several different meanings when examined under the microscope of historical analysis. Success in homesteading was technically achieved when a claim had been “proved up” and a land title had been issued. Using this strict definition, homesteading on the plateau was very successful. Even though some early settlers relinquished their land before completing the requirements, many of their abandoned claims were later successfully homesteaded by others.

Success in terms of the intent of the Homestead Act has a subtly different definition. The Act's original intent was to populate the unsettled western states; the offer of free land was a lure to bring easterners and immigrants to settle the arid and semiarid regions of the country. Viewed in this light, homesteading on the plateau did not satisfy the national goal of bringing newcomers to the West because few homesteaders came from out of state. Further, most claims were settled by native New Mexicans from established communities located less than 20 miles away.

Yet the story of homesteading on the plateau is not one of failure. Homesteading, as an active response to the cultural and economic changes during the 1880s to 1940s, reflects a strategy of “agency and initiative.” Anglos and Hispanics alike used the Homestead Act for personal benefit, to increase land holdings, and to formalize the informal use of the plateau that had been going on well before the introduction of homesteading. Local Hispanics used the law to regain some of the lost common lands traditionally used for grazing and seasonal farming during the Spanish and Mexican land-grant eras. Most plateau homesteaders were small farmers who worked diligently to meet at least the intent, if not the letter, of the Homestead Act, using time-tested methods to improve their lands: building houses and outbuildings, clearing fields, and fencing their claims.

In sum, homesteading on the isolated Pajarito Plateau was a success story for most of the people who rose to its challenges. This is not to say that the homesteading story here was not without a less admirable side. There were occasional examples of land conflict and chicanery, ranging from in-lieu transactions conducted by an out-of-state land speculator to attempts to avoid the residence requirements by locals to the practice of having family members stake out adjacent claims—establishing, in effect, contiguous family holdings to form large ranches that exceeded the 160 acres permitted per individual.

Unlike the situation in other areas of New Mexico, however, Anglos on the plateau did not profit from the provisions of the Homestead Act at the expense of the Hispanic residents. In fact, local Hispanic families still owned much of the homesteaded land on the eve of government appropriation. In a sense, it was the Anglos, not the Hispanics, who had the most difficulty settling on the plateau because they lacked the community support enjoyed by Hispanic homesteaders. While the *acequia*-centered villages of the Rio Grande Valley could not be recreated on the plateau, a strong sense of community, arising from the presence of interrelated families living in separate but nearby farms, is evident from a reading of the homestead documents. For the local Hispanic families, the plateau was not a desolate and isolated place; rather, it was a loose extension of their valley village life, which was the “safety valve” to which they could always return during hard times.

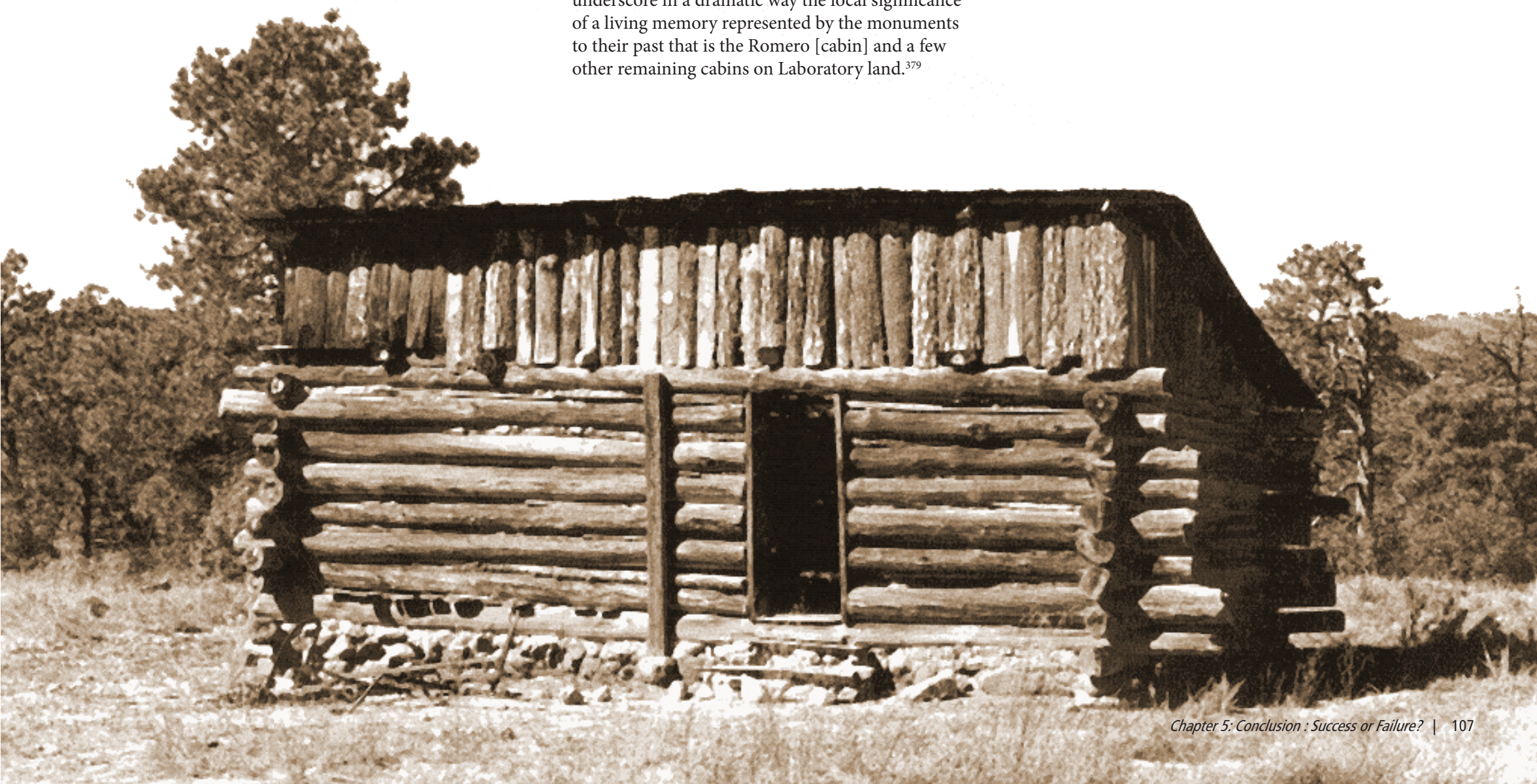
Perhaps the final analysis of success versus failure should focus on the homesteaders' ability to survive in an area of the West that had marginal farming potential. Real success lay neither with strict adherence to the provisions of the Homestead Act nor even with the successful homesteading of the land during the “proving up” period, for that period was relatively brief. Rather, true success can be measured in the way the homesteaders overcame the unrealistic limitations of the Homestead Act and used a diversity of strategies for use and occupation of the land over the long term.

The homestead lifestyle on the Pajarito Plateau came to an end because of developments in science that were going on “in the background” of the homesteaders' lives. The rise of nuclear science in Europe and its conjunction with

the rise of what became World War II led directly to the government appropriation of all homesteaded lands on the plateau. The homestead era on the plateau represents a lost pattern of Hispanic subsistence living that had existed for three hundred years. The homesteading way of life now exists almost exclusively in the memory of the few remaining participants who once had links to the farms that dotted the plateau before the atomic age.

Writing in 1984, archaeologist David Snow summed up the legacy of the Victor Romero cabin and, by extension, plateau homesteading for the lives of the people of northern New Mexico:

The significance of the site lies in what it represents to the local Hispanic population in the valley below. This is not an archaeological site of some vaguely known ancient prehistoric population, nor is it simply a reminder that someone named Romero homesteaded the vicinity. Newspaper accounts and visits by homesteaders and their descendants underscore in a dramatic way the local significance of a living memory represented by the monuments to their past that is the Romero [cabin] and a few other remaining cabins on Laboratory land.³⁷⁹



Note to readers: For published works cited here in short form only, complete bibliographic details appear in References. Some published sources appear here in full and not in the References.

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371. Ibid.
372. Letter about the lack of a survey for the claim of Fermin M. Vigil can be found in Andrés Martínez, Santa Fe Land Office records.
373. Fermin Vigil, Santa Fe Land Office records.
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376. William C. White, Santa Fe Land Office records.
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NAME INDEX

A

Abbott
A. J., 15, 16, 17
Ida, 16, 17
Andrews
Frank, 24
Archuleta
Hipolita, 54, 55
Locadio, 2, 54, 55
Manuel, 55
Ruperto, 55, 67
Zenaida (Sanaida) Vigil, 54, 55
Armor
Catharine, 88
Edwin, 88

B

Bandelier
Adolph, 15
Bishop
W. C., 11
Bond
Frank, 22, 80, 83, 86, 101, 102
George, 83
Borrego
Tony, 31, 33, 34, 63
Brook
Harold, 9, 17, 18, 19, 22, 24, 33, 34, 45, 47, 52, 54, 56, 57, 58, 59, 70, 72, 74, 82, 89, 101, 103
Katherine (Cassy), 9, 18, 19, 57, 58, 59, 75
Martha (Mattie), 2, 54, 56, 58, 59, 101
Brown
Frank Orlando, 57
Harry Franklin, 9, 57, 58, 75
Buckman
Henry, 12, 13, 14, 22, 30, 74

C

Church
Fermor, 60, 102
Peggy Pond, 9, 60, 102

Connell
Albert (A.J.), 7, 10, 24, 45, 46, 54, 59, 60, 103
Cook
Henry, 48
Cross
Francis, 57
George, 57

D

Davenport
Francis, 83
John, 80, 83, 84, 101
Durán
Efren Gonzales de, 37, 38, 39, 54, 61
Juan Ignacio, 61
Ramón, 54, 58, 62, 95
Durán y Roybal
Antonio, 72

F

Fergusson
Erna, 15
Fletcher
George, 22
Frey
Evelyn, 15
George, 15
Fuller
Edward, 46, 59, 89, 101

G

Garcia
Adolfo, 54, 55, 64, 65, 66
Consuela, 67
Ezequiel (Esequiel), 2, 54, 66, 67
José Luis, 54, 55, 67
Juan Luis, 7, 31, 51, 52, 54, 62, 63, 64, 66, 67, 90
Maria Leonora Gonzales, 62
Maria (Marialla) Vigil, 65

Gomez

Candelarita Quintana, 69
Donaciano, 39, 52, 54, 67, 68, 69, 70, 74, 97
Elfego, 54, 69, 75, 89
Marcos, 68, 69
Maria, 69
Masimiano, 98
Gomez y Gonzales
Pedro, 54, 68, 69, 89, 90

Gonsalez

Severo, 2, 41, 52, 54, 68, 69, 74, 97

Gonzales

Alejandro, 73
Bences, 37, 38, 48, 86, 91, 95
Cirilio, 54, 70, 71, 73
Donaciano, 54, 63, 71, 72, 73
Eluterio, 71, 96
Emerenciana Roybal, 71
Estanislado, 54, 69, 70, 71, 73, 96
Federico, 54, 71, 77
Francisco, 54, 71, 72, 101
Hilario, 70, 73
José Amador, 101
José B., 58, 62
Juan N., 54, 68, 78
Pilar, 68, 73
Rathcinda, 72
Ray, 38, 95
Vicenta, 73
Grant
Ottie Oman (O. O. or “Dot”), 54, 68, 78, 80, 81, 84
Tom, 80
Grottenthaler
Walter, 54, 88

H

Hayes
Tomas de Aquinas, 22
Hewitt
Edgar Lee, 15, 52
Hopper
William Mackwood, 52, 54, 56, 58, 74, 75, 82, 101

Hoskiss
Walter, 21

I

Irwin,
Claud, 41, 69, 74

K

Kieselhorst
Wally, 48

L

Labadie
José, 59
Leese
James, 24, 73
Lewis
Anna, 83
Bob, 47
James, 83
Ligon
J. Stokely, 21
Lilly
Ben, 20, 21
Linn
O. M., 41
Loag
Cal, 14
Long
C. A., 101
Loomis
James, 2, 41, 52, 54, 69, 74, 97
Maria Vitalia M. de, 74
Lopez
Teofilo, 55
Luján
Annie, 32, 36, 77
Manuel, 54, 75, 76, 89
Manuel, Jr., 76
Martín, 54, 71, 75, 76, 78, 89, 101

M

Marchi
Michael, 76
Martínez,
Andrés, 2, 35, 54, 55, 71, 76, 77, 78, 79
Eliza, 80
Joe, 78, 84
Lydia, 31
Román, 54, 78, 80, 81, 84
Mather
Rosa Grant, 80, 81
Ted, 40, 80, 81
Maxon
Henry, 41
McDougall
Francis, 50, 82, 83
J. A., 75, 82, 86
Robert, 22, 54, 82, 83
McGee
Theiline, 9
Meem
John Gaw, 46
Merry
Daniel, 68, 89, 95
Montoya
Adolfo, 54, 68, 86
Elaiza, 86
Enriquez , 54, 95, 98
Ernesto, 54, 68
José Albino, 39, 54, 71, 86, 87
José Elfego, 54, 68, 97
José Patricio, 54, 68, 97
Morrison
Alexander, 88
Moses
Ella, 88
William, 7, 52, 54, 69, 88

N

Naranjo
Alejandro, 55
Nelson
Chester, 11

P

Pfaffle
Richard, 24, 25
Carol, 25
Pickens
Albert, 20
Homer, 80
Plomteaux
Fred, 24, 55, 59, 64, 65, 67, 71, 72, 76, 78, 86, 97, 98, 99, 101
Pond
Ashley Jr., 9, 16, 18, 19, 22, 30, 44, 45, 49, 59, 89, 101
Ashley, III, 9
Dorothy, 9
Hazel, 9

Q

Quintana
Alberto, 54
Benigno, 52, 54, 58, 63, 88, 89, 90
Candida Gomez, 69
David, 52, 54, 68, 75, 89
Desiderio 69
Eutemia Garcia, 89
Roberto, 75, 89

R

Romero
Cordelia Garcia, 62
David, 54, 82, 84, 90, 91, 92, 95
Ernesto, 90
Francisquita, 54, 90, 95
Refugio Sánchez , 90, 95
Victor, 37, 54, 71, 82, 84, 86, 90, 91, 92, 95, 101, 107
Ross
Alexander, 41, 54, 69, 74
Roybal
Adelaida Gonzales de, 78, 84
Emiliano, 78
Noberto, 37, 54, 96
Ramón, 54, 78, 84
Shirley, 96

Ruggles
C. B., 9

S

Sánchez
Antonio, 56, 95
Francisco, 98
Pedro, 9, 22, 90
Maria C. Gomez de, 75, 89
Miguel, 37, 40, 52, 54, 69, 74, 96, 97
Serna
Delphina, 79
Fidel, 54, 77
José Maria, 32, 54, 79
Seth
J. O., 59
Sheldon
Edward, 22
Sheppard
Florence Potter, 41
Smith
Bill, 80
Winfield, 22
Smithwick
Constance, 41
Major, 41
Stern
Nat, 25

T

Thompson
Jack, 20, 21
True
Clara, 55
Trujillo
Apolmar, 101
Appolonia (Polly) Garcia, 31, 35, 63

V

Vigil
Anastacio, 54
Eliseo, 54, 95, 97, 98, 99, 100
Fermin, 2, 39, 54, 55, 71, 98, 99, 100
Ramón, 22

W

Warner
Edith, 10
Waugh
Jessie, 81
White
Amanda Jane Chapman, 101
Ben, 48, 101, 103
George, 101, 103
William, 52, 54, 56, 58, 74, 101, 102
Wilson
William, 88
Womelsduff
Jim, 80
Richard, 80

Y

Yerex
Lowell, 49

Z

Zummach
Frank, 88

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