



Abstract

In 1998, SWCA, Inc. conducted data recovery investigations at LA 66922, a large multiple homestead site north of Alamogordo in Otero County, New Mexico. The investigation was completed at the request of the New Mexico State Highway and Transportation Department, prior to construction of the Alamogordo Relief Route.

Investigations at LA 66922 consisted of a program of surface collection, shovel scraping, hand excavation of units, and backhoe trenches. Seven surface collection units were defined at artifact concentrations and covered 51 sq. m. Shovel scraping was conducted in a number of areas but primarily to define the extent of a house foundation. A total of 47.5 sq. m was shovel scraped. Nineteen units were hand excavated, covering 25.5 sq. m. Five backhoe trenches, each 60 cm wide, were excavated (for a total trench length of 55 m). Thirty-nine features were recorded (as opposed to seven features identified during the survey and testing phases of the project). The features included house foundations, cisterns, roads, fence lines, trash dumps, artifact clusters, rectangular berms, ash stains, rock alignments, a diversion dam, a culvert, a dugout, a privy, a pump house, and a water tank foundation. Many historic artifacts were recovered but they represent a small fraction of the total site assemblage. A few prehistoric sherds and flaked stone artifacts were also recovered.

The excavations and archival historic research for LA 66922 identified three homesteads occupied during the early 1900s. A fourth homestead, though nearby, did not fall within the site boundaries. Three of the homesteads in the section were established at a time when Alamogordo's economy had been hurt by loss of railroad and lumber jobs, causing city leaders to encourage other types of economic activity. The fourth homestead predated the town's economic downturns. Thus, the homesteads lend support to the theory that farming was part of a deliberate attempt to diversify

the local economy - but also support the notion that farmers were interested in the area before the local economic downturns of 1905 and 1907.

The study revealed that substantial amounts of labor had been devoted to the homesteads, creating permanent homes, and that the homesteading was not merely for land speculation. The artifact assemblage suggests that the occupants of the homesteads were solidly middle class and had ready access to a variety of goods, but that life on the "frontier" still required a degree of self-reliance. Shared construction attributes suggest that the same person or persons may have built two of the houses and the two cisterns. One of the homesteads may have been abandoned as early as 1910. The others may have been reoccupied by new owners or by squatters, but were probably abandoned by the mid-1920s. Cartographic evidence indicates that no structures were present in this area in 1950 (suggesting, in two cases, that the houses may have been moved from this location or the materials totally salvaged).

NMSHTD Project No. SP-4916 (202), CN 3650

Excavation Permit No. SE-141

SWCA Project No. 3007-8324