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# Capturing the Hidden Legacies of Route 66 in New Mexico: Centennial Documentation Projects and Programs Honoring the Mother Road, Its People, and Stories

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# Capturing the Hidden Legacies of Route 66 in New Mexico: Centennial Documentation Projects and Programs Honoring the Mother Road, Its People, and Stories

## Abstract

From southern Chicago to the Santa Monica Pier, the historic U.S. highway Route 66 captures the imagination of travelers and dreamers. The “Mother Road” – as it was nicknamed during its heyday (1926-1985) – represents an upbeat spirit through its colorful streetscapes highlighting neon signs, diners, drive-ins, courtyard motels, and whimsical road art. Revealing the full story of Route 66 as a symbol of America itself, however, is richer and more varied than even its vibrant material culture might suggest. The road and the people who lived, worked, played, and traveled on it – and continue to do so – tell a profound story.

Ahead of the centennial of Route 66 in 2026, several regional and national initiatives have developed to expand the highway’s narrative. Through hands-on preservation programs, research collaboratives, photographic surveys, and digital story-mapping tools based in public agencies, universities, libraries, archives, and museums, projects are harnessing the story-telling possibilities of the road as a cultural landscape of grand and complicated significance.

## Keywords

Visual resources, historic preservation, legacy, history, historical, digital curation, Route 66, road, research, collaboration, grant, New Mexico, architecture, diversity, visual anthropology, American studies.

## Author Bios

Dr. Audra Bellmore is the University of New Mexico’s (UNM) faculty representative on the National Park Service initiative Research Route 66 since 2013. She is the principal investigator and primary writer for the National Trust for Historic Preservation’s Hidden Legacies of Route 66 project. She is an Associate Professor/Curator of the John Gaw Meem Archives of Southwestern Architecture at UNM.

Dr. Donatella Davanzo, Italian American cultural anthropologist, is a scholarly photo ethnographer and instructor of visual anthropology. Her documentary work primarily focuses on the Southwest area by surveying Native American sites, the *acequia* communities, and historic properties along Route 66 to preserve their contemporary cultural, social, and iconographic aspects and traditions.

## Background



Figure 1: Typical Route 66 neon signage in Carnuel, New Mexico (photographer: Donatella Davanzo, 2023).

Route 66, the historic and iconic U.S. highway, touches the heart of America. Established in 1926, it spans eight states, from in southern Chicago through rural Illinois to Missouri, a tiny portion of Kansas, Oklahoma, the panhandle of Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California, where it terminates at the end of the Santa Monica Pier. Along its journey, Route 66 represents the American spirit of individualism and optimism in stories, photography, movies, books, and music.

The upbeat America associated with Route 66 is symbolized in its vernacular architecture, signage, roadside advertising, and artwork. Pink motels, neon signs (Fig. 1), diners, and drive-ins evoke the enchantment that people associate with Route 66. These associations are entertaining and important but the full story of the

“Mother Road” is bigger and, in many ways, better. Route 66 acts as a story-telling thread that winds its way across the middle of America through communities big and small until it reaches the Golden State and the ocean (Fig. 2). Along that thread, we see, hear, and feel a tangible America – in all its complexity.

## Expanding the Route 66 Narrative

The 100-year anniversary of Route 66 will occur in 2026. The period leading up to the centennial offers a chance to explore and reflect on the story of the road and its significance to the American experience. While it continues to capture the imagination of people from all over the world, serving as a symbol of entertainment, adventure, and renewed life acquired by driving across the country, the road’s story is broadening and diversifying. Recent programs and initiatives reveal the equally compelling stories of people – in all their varied backgrounds, occupations, and cultures – who lived, worked, and traveled on the Mother Road. Over the last two decades, various programs and initiatives centered in public and private agencies, universities, museums, libraries, and archives have emerged, increasing awareness of the story-telling power of the Mother Road and the importance of preserving aspects of its fast-dwindling material heritage.

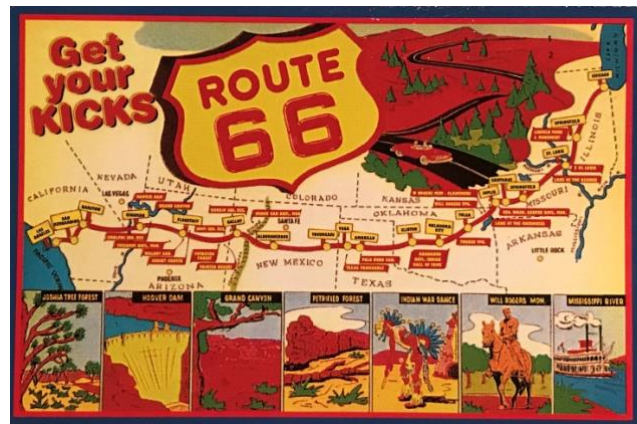


Figure 2: Route 66 map showing road through U.S. Postcard Collection, c. 1950s (PICT 995-027, Center for Southwest Research, University Libraries, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque).

## National Park Service: Route 66 Corridor Preservation Program

The Route 66 Corridor Preservation Program (R66 CPP) authorized by the U.S. Congress works as the central organizing body for national- and state-level Route 66 preservation and documentation activities ahead of the 2026 centennial. Based in the National Park Service (NPS) system and managed within the National Trails Office, R66 CPP operates out of the Southwest Regional Headquarters in Santa Fe, New Mexico. The program promotes the preservation of sites and stories on Route 66 through public and private partnerships, cost-sharing grants, and programs providing technical assistance. Route 66 was officially decommissioned in 1985 because its narrow roadways and outdated infrastructure reduced its carrying capacity, precipitating the decline of many

of its iconic buildings. Since 2001, the R66 CPP has funded the preservation of over 100 Route 66 buildings.<sup>1</sup>



*Figure 3: Threatt Filling Station, recent Route 66 preservation project of Black-owned business in Luther, Oklahoma, 2020, National Trust for Historic Preservation.*

A recent project supported by the Route 66 Corridor Preservation Program is the Threatt Filling Station in Luther, Oklahoma. Built around 1915 by Allen Threatt, an African American farmer and business-owner from a local homesteading family, the early gas station served patrons driving Oklahoma's highways (Fig. 3). When Route 66 was designated in 1926, the business became the only Black-owned and operated gas station on the Mother Road. It was a safe stop for Black motorists crossing the country at a time when they were barred from many businesses along America's highways.<sup>2</sup> The property was listed on the

National Register of Historic Places in 1995. The National Trust for Historic Preservation added the Threatt Filling Station to its list *America's Eleven Most Endangered Places* in 2021 and awarded it a grant from its African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund to support preservation efforts. In September 2023, a National Trust HOPE (Hands-On Preservation Experience) crew traveled to Luther to work on restoring the property.

### **Research Route 66: Collecting Route 66**

The Route 66 Corridor Preservation Program organized a collaborative group of archivists, curators, and researchers representing ten repositories in the eight states along Route 66 in 2007. Now called Research Route 66 (RR66), the group fulfills the National Park Service's legislated mandate to coordinate a program of historical research and collection development documenting the highway, based in archival repositories in the eight states.<sup>3</sup> The group recognized that working cooperatively furthered both individual and institutional goals and the national research possibilities of Route 66. RR 66 makes archival materials accessible to both the general public and Route 66 stakeholders for the purposes of education, preservation, and management of the historic corridor.

Research Route 66 Lead Institutions include:

- **Illinois** – Illinois State Museum
- **Missouri** – Missouri State University, Special Collections and the State Historical Society of Missouri Research Center
- **Kansas** – Baxter Springs Heritage Center
- **Oklahoma** – Oklahoma Historical Society and Oklahoma State University-Tulsa
- **Texas** – Panhandle Plains Historical Museum
- **New Mexico** – University of New Mexico, John Gaw Meem Archives of Southwestern Architecture, Center for Southwest Research

<sup>1</sup> *Route 66 Corridor Preservation Program*, National Park Service, National Trails Program, January 23, 2023, <https://www.nps.gov/orgs/1453/route-66-corridor-preservation-program.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> *Oklahoma: Threatt Filling Station*, National Park Service, June 6, 2022, <https://www.nps.gov/places/threatt-filling-station.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> *Route 66 Archives and Research Collaboration*, Research Route 66, <https://researchroute66.org/archives-and-research/>.



- **Arizona** – Northern Arizona University-Cline Library, Special Collections and Archives
- **California** – Autry Museum of the American West

### A Focus on Route 66 in New Mexico

The University of New Mexico (UNM) has been a leader in Route 66 research endeavors. The University benefits from its proximity to and close association with both the National Park Service’s National Trails and the Route 66 Corridor Preservation Program that operate out of the NPS Southwest regional headquarters in Santa Fe. UNM works as a collaborative research partner with both organizations for projects originating in the Southwest region. As a founding institutional member of RR66, UNM has an obligation to collect, interpret, and participate in educational and outreach activities related to Route 66.

In New Mexico, Route 66 runs a circuitous course. It extends east to west across the northern part of the state, continuing the length of the current I-40 corridor. Initially, the route incorporated a loop from Los Lunas to Santa Fe then down to Santa Rosa where it connects to the east-west axis. Route 66 in New Mexico is the “Main Street” of cities and towns, including many traditional Hispano communities. Route 66 intersects the Tribal lands of the Rio Grande Valley; it connected villages and ran alongside railroad corridors. The road was a lifeline that transported goods and services and was an escape route for dustbowl farmers looking for a better life. It sadly transported Japanese internees to camps during WWII. While the Route held the promise of travel and freedom for many women drivers, it was an uncertain journey for Black motorists. In almost every way, Route 66 offers an understanding of a complicated cultural landscape.

### University of New Mexico’s *Albuquerque Route 66 Photographic Survey*



*Figure 4: Davanzo at work on the Route 66 Documentation project, 2015 (photographer: Ennio Fermo, personal collection of Donatella Davanzo).*

An early and innovative Route 66 project originating at the UNM is the *Albuquerque Route 66 Photographic Survey*. In 2013, the UNM’s Center for Southwest Research (CSWR), with funding from the University’s Center for Regional Studies, organized a photographic project to document every block of Route 66 in Albuquerque, New Mexico. The project considered both original sections of Highways 66 that historically bisected the city: the pre-1937 north-south alignment along Fourth Street and the east-west section along Central Avenue.

#### *Project Methodology*

The CSWR hired professional photographer and American Studies’ PhD candidate Donatella Davanzo (now Dr. Davanzo) to work on the project. Davanzo photographed at the street level every building, sign, public space, and piece of public art – from the mundane to the colorful – corresponding to a street address along Central Avenue from Albuquerque’s east boundary at Tramway Boulevard to the Route 66 Casino on the city’s west boundary (Fig. 4). The survey documented 731 buildings in 7266 images along 18 miles of the post-1936 east-west alignment. The following year, from August 2014 to May 2015, the second phase of the project followed the historic north-south pre-1937 corridor, entering Albuquerque on Fourth Street and continuing along Isleta Boulevard. The path, also 18 miles long, documents 636 buildings in 4013 images. The project’s portrait of Route 66 captures a moment of time and continues to offer valuable documentation of individual sites as well as the broader cultural landscape of significant portions of the road.

Davanzo's work included records management. Digital photo files with the specifications Canon EOS Mark III were created and archived in a CSWR internal server. The same records are housed in the New Mexico Digital Collections, a state-wide digital image consortium managed by UNM. Davanzo spent 2013-2015 working on descriptive metadata for the selected 1364 images that form the photographic archive of this project.<sup>4</sup> Subject headings were created using the Dublin Core open-standard metadata vocabulary. A hard drive with raw data, including Davanzo's original 13,326 digital images, is housed in a box in the CSWR analog archives and indicated in a finding aid housed in the New Mexico Archives Online.

### ***Route 66 Connected: A National Park Service-Funded Project***



*Figure 6: A trading post in Tucumcari, 2023 (photographer: Donatella Davanzo, Route 66 Connected Archive).*



*Figure 5: Davanzo interviewing the 66 Diner's owner in Gallup, 2023 (photographer: Donatella Davanzo, Route 66 Connected Archive).*

Following her collaboration with the University of New Mexico in 2013-2015, Davanzo generated a related and expanded project called *Route 66 Connected*, funded by the National Park Service's Route 66 Corridor Preservation Program. First proposed in 2021 and funded in 2022, this photographic documentation explores the whole of Route 66 across New Mexico

from the east to west state borders at Glen Rio and Gallup, over 335 miles, to provide a comprehensive view of the cultural, social, and economic narratives of the Mother Road in its current reality (Fig. 5).

#### *Project Methodology*

By examining the original commercial properties still in operation as well as the historic remains and conducting oral interviews with business owners along the way (Fig. 6), the new survey will generate a detailed picture of the contemporary tangible, symbolic, and ethnic legacy of Route 66 in New Mexico. In an agreement with the National Park Service Route 66 Corridor Preservation Program, the digital records generated from the project will be housed in the UNM CSWR where metadata descriptions will be created for each image and oral interview to enable inclusion in the New Mexico Digital Collections consortium.

### ***Route 66: Sharing Our History: Hispanic Legacies of Route 66 in New Mexico***

Working cooperatively, the NPS Route 66 Corridor Preservation Program and the National Trails Program, based in the National Park Service Southwest Regional Headquarters in Santa Fe, created the ongoing *Hispanic Legacies of Route 66 in New Mexico*.<sup>5</sup> This story-mapping project focuses on uncovering Hispanic life on Route 66 in New Mexico (Fig. 7). The stories are told through images and audiovisual histories from the people who experienced it. This project recently won the Stanton-Horton Award for Excellence in National Park Service History.

<sup>4</sup> *Albuquerque Route 66 Photographic Survey*, New Mexico Digital Collections, <https://econtent.unm.edu/digital/collection/route/search>.

<sup>5</sup> *Hispanic Legacies of Route 66 in New Mexico*, National Park Service, December 20, 2022, <https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/hispanic-legacies-of-route-66-in-new-mexico.htm>.

### *Program Methodology*

Overseeing this National Trails program, NPS staff led by Dr. Angelica Sanchez-Clark are based, through a memorandum of understanding agreement with the University of New Mexico, in offices on UNM's main campus in Albuquerque. Trails staff manage a graduate fellowship program which employs UNM students to conduct research, uncovering potential sites and stories of Hispano life on Route 66 in New Mexico. Program staff also established a collaborative relationship with the CSWR. CSWR staff perform library and archival instruction sessions with the graduate fellows and work as follow-up contacts to offer continued research assistance throughout the project. Historic and contemporary maps, city directories, and local histories help determine places and people to document through photography, oral histories, and audiovisual interviews. Working with NPS information technology resources, the team created an interactive story map. With continued NPS funding and oversight, the project continues to grow as new sites and stories are added to the map.



Figure 7: "Hispanic Legacies of Route 66 in New Mexico," National Trails, National Park Service  
<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/f1f3820170d24e2ca79a2db31f5d9e76>.

### ***Hidden Legacies of Route 66 in New Mexico***

Another story-mapping project based in New Mexico is *Hidden Legacies of Route 66 in New Mexico*, sponsored by the National Trust for Historic Preservation in collaboration with scholars at the UNM. The project's goal is to uncover underrepresented sites and stories on Route 66 during its period of significance (1926-1985). The stories represent a broad range of experiences, including those of women, Indigenous people, Hispano, Black, Asian, and Jewish Americans, veterans, and the LGBTQ community.

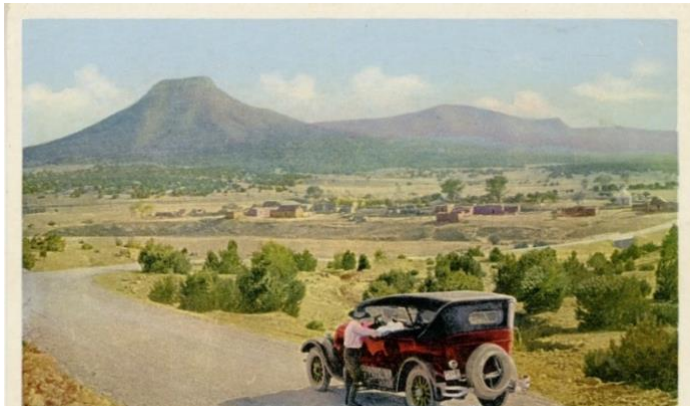


Figure 8: Starvation Peak from Historic Route 66, between Santa Fe and Las Vegas, New Mexico, c. 1920s (PICT 995-027, Pictorial Collection, Center for Southwest Research, University Libraries, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque).

The first phase of *Hidden Legacies of Route 66* focuses on what is known as the "Historic Route 66" (pre-1937) in New Mexico. This section of the road runs north from Los Lunas, New Mexico, following the river corridor of the Rio Grande to Santa Fe where it winds through city streets and catches up to the Old Santa Fe Trail that leads east out of town. Historic Route 66 proceeds through small villages along the Pecos River and down in a loop to the city of Santa Rosa (Fig. 8). Here, the Old Alignment meets the post-1937 Route 66, which now runs parallel to the Interstate-40 corridor. This

historic loop is rich in stories. It still serves as the Main Street of many traditional Hispanic communities – Los Lunas, Barelás, Bernalillo, Algodones, Glorieta, Pecos, San José, Bernal, and Romeroville – established during New Mexico's Spanish and Mexican Land Grant periods.



Historic Route 66 also intersects the Indigenous Pueblo communities of the Rio Grande Valley. Here the road played a role in altering the largely autonomous, self-sustaining agricultural communities to ones based on market economy and tourism. This unwelcome change had far-reaching implications for the sustainability of Pueblo life, land-use, and traditions.

Like many sections of Historic Route 66, it marries the old and new by adopting parts of existing roads, trails, and trade routes. The alignment overlaps the trade and settlement route Camino Real de Tierra Adentro which brought colonists and goods up from Mexico. Historic Route 66 also overlaps the primary railroad line through New Mexico, the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe. The alignment is a historic transportation corridor bridging differing modes of conveyance and transecting and interconnecting traditional villages and towns. Learning more about the communities and telling the complicated and multi-layered stories of the people who lived in them and continue to thrive is an important undertaking meant to inform cultural tourism interpretations.

### *Project Methodology*

The methodology for the *Hidden Legacies* project is multi-layered. Initially, a primary dataset of extant sites along the pre-1937 Route 66 alignment (Los Lunas to Santa Fe) in New Mexico was established through a survey of listings on the National Register of Historic Places, the State Register of Historic Places, and the Historic American Buildings Survey. The next task determined a subset of sites suitable for story-telling purposes, highlighting various communities typically under-represented in the popular narratives focusing on Route 66. Identifying sites along the alignment requiring preservation work is an added benefit and will assist in organizing future hands-on projects through the National Trust's HOPE which connects preservation needs with the national youth corps movement. *Hidden Legacies* is meant to promote partnerships and leverage current Route 66 related work undertaken by the NPS/National Trails Program, the NPS Route 66 Corridor Preservation Program, the New Mexico Historic Preservation Division, and UNM's Historic Preservation and Regionalism Program.

### ***Hidden Legacies: Story Excerpts from Historic Route 66 in New Mexico***

The following entries are part of the *Hidden Legacies* project and represent a small subset of the narrative stories included in the National Trust for Historic Preservation's digital story map.



Figure 9: El Rey Court, Santa Fe, c. 1930s (PICT 995-027 Pictorial Collection, Center for Southwest Research, University Libraries, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque).

### ***Hidden Legacies Excerpts: El Rey Court (featured in the African American Green Book): 1862 Cerrillos Road, Santa Fe, New Mexico***

El Rey Court was a Southwestern style oasis that opened in 1936 for automobile travelers driving along Route 66 in Santa Fe (Fig. 9). The motel was featured in the *Negro Motorist Green Book*, an annual set of guides published from 1936 until the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964. Developed by a postman from Harlem named Victor H. Green, the guides helped African Americans navigate travel during the perilous days of the Jim Crow era of racial segregation by listing hotels, rooming houses, restaurants, gas stations and other services that accommodated black motorists (Fig. 10). The guides initially covered the

New York City area but soon expanded to include states east of the Mississippi.



By the late 1940s, the guides covered most of the United States, including the Southwest. Eventually the guides included international locations as travel opened after WWII and in 1952 was renamed *The Negro Traveler's Green Book*.<sup>6</sup> Over the years, the content broadened with listings of Black colleges, entertainment venues, travel tips, and helpful articles, increasing interest and readership. Green eventually retired from his postal job and worked on the publication full-time until his passing in 1960. At that time Alma Green took over editing the *Green Book* until its last annual edition, renamed the *Traveler's Green Book: 1966-67 International Edition: For Vacation without Aggravation*.<sup>7</sup>

El Rey Court catered to drivers by offering convenience, accessibility, and an attractive respite from the road. Arranged around a central court with individual guest rooms directly opening to the parking area, guests could pull up, unload, and relax on their own *portal* (porch). Most of the rooms included adjacent car ports, later enclosed to provide extra interior spaces.<sup>8</sup> The El Rey's surrounding property suggested a haven shaded by cottonwood trees, lush with flowers and vines. With its charming Southwestern adobe-style buildings with colorfully painted doors, café, and swimming pool, the El Rey resembled other examples of eye-catching Route 66 roadside architecture. Today the motel is refurbished and continues to offer a comfortable and charming reprieve from the road.

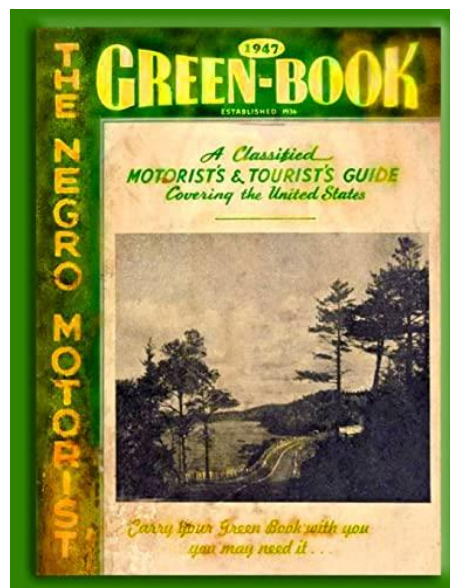


Figure 10: “Green Book” cover, 1947 edition (New York Public Library, <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/29219280-892b-0132-4271-58d385a7bbd0>).

### ***Hidden Legacies Excerpts: Witter Bynner’s House and Garden: 342 E. Buena Vista Street, Santa Fe, New Mexico***

Poet Harold Witter Bynner (1881-1968) came to Santa Fe in 1922 where he became a respected and principal figure in the developing artist and writer’s colony while plainly living in a same-sex partnership. Known to his friends as Hal, Bynner presided over cultural gatherings, parties, and poetry readings by celebrated writers in the sprawling Spanish Pueblo Revival-style adobe home he built in the Buena Vista neighborhood off the Old Santa Fe Trail (now the Inn of the Turquoise Bear).

A Harvard graduate, poet, editor, playwright, and translator, Bynner published widely throughout the first half of the twentieth century. His work appeared in important literary journals of the day including the *Harvard Advocate*, the *Harvard Monthly*, *McClure’s Magazine*, and the *Southwest Review*. Bynner published several of his own volumes of poetry and edited or co-edited many more from 1907-1960. He translated works from Chinese and French and served as associate editor of *Palms* poetry magazine as well as the president of the Poetry Society of America. He established the Witter Bynner Prize for Undergraduate Excellence in Poetry (African American poets including

<sup>6</sup> Kurt Repanshek, *The Green Book and the National Parks*, The National Parks Traveler, April 21, 2019, <https://www.nationalparkstraveler.org/2019/04/green-book-and-national-parks>.

<sup>7</sup> *Green Book Properties Listed in the National Register of Historic Places*, National Park Service, May 5, 2022, <https://www.nps.gov/articles/green-book-properties-listed-in-the-national-register-of-historic-places.htm>.

<sup>8</sup> David Kammer, *Historic and Architectural Resources of Route 66 through New Mexico: National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form* (Washington, D.C.: National Archives, 1993).

Countee Cullen and Langston Hughes were awarded that honor early on).<sup>9</sup> Bynner’s generosity and encouragement to young poets grew throughout the years. The Witter Bynner Foundation for



Figure 11: Witter Bynner and Robert Hunt on sidewalk near cactus and geraniums, c. 1950s (neg. # 099907, Palace of the Governors Photo Archives, New Mexico History Museum, Santa Fe, New Mexico, Albuquerque).

Poetry, created by bequest, continues to fund the Witter Bynner Fellowship.<sup>10</sup>

Bynner initially came to New Mexico on a lecture tour and decided to stay for its healthy climate. He taught at the University of California, Berkeley from 1918-1919 and traveled to China from 1920-1921 to learn about Chinese literature and culture. Bynner rented a small cottage from Ben Muniz, the editor of the Spanish edition of the *Santa Fe New Mexican*. In 1923, he purchased the cottage and added a two-story portal surrounded by extensive flower gardens, terraces, and water features.<sup>11</sup>

Bynner shared his new home in Santa Fe with a former student, Walter Willard “Spud” Johnson. The two were a popular couple. The pair were introduced to notorious British writer D.H. Lawrence and his wife Frieda and accompanied them on a legendary excursion in Mexico which became the basis of Lawrence’s novel, *The Plumed Serpent*. Bynner wrote about Lawrence in his 1951 *Journey with Genius*. Johnson eventually moved to Taos to work as secretary to art patroness and writer Mabel Dodge Luhan.<sup>12</sup> There he established his own literary magazine called the *Laughing Horse Press*.<sup>13</sup>

Bynner began a relationship with Robert Hunt from 1930 until Hunt’s death in 1964 (Fig. 11). Hunt, an architect, was the son of well-

known southern California architect Myron Hunt. He designed the additions and modifications to his and Bynner’s home (Fig. 12). The couple stood at the center of the avant-garde art community. They entertained frequently, hosting important literary and artistic figures of the day who visited Santa Fe, including poets Edna St. Vincent Millay, Robert Frost, W.H. Auden, and Carl Sandburg; writers Willa Cather, Thornton Wilder, and Aldous Huxley; and artists and musicians Ansel Adams, Igor Stravinsky, and Georgia O’Keeffe. They supported the Indian Rights Movement and donated most of their extensive collection of Indigenous art to the Museum of New Mexico and Santa Fe’s School for



Figure 12: Witter Bynner House, Old Santa Fe Trail, Santa Fe, New Mexico (photographer: Audra Bellmore).

<sup>9</sup> Witter Bynner Papers, MS-0186, Correspondence, 1906-1967, New Mexico State University Library, Archives and Special Collections.

<sup>10</sup> *About Witter Bynner*, Witter Bynner Foundation, <https://www.bynnerfoundation.org/>.

<sup>11</sup> Audra Bellmore, *Old Santa Fe Today* (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 2022), 109-111.

<sup>12</sup> Witter Bynner of Photographs of D.H. Lawrence, PICT 986-010, UNM Center for Southwest Research and Special Collections.

<sup>13</sup> Daniel Worden, “*Laughing Horse Magazine* and Regional Modernism in New Mexico,” *Journal of Modern Periodical Studies* 5, no. 2 (2014): 195-221.

Advanced Research. Bynner's extensive photography collection documenting the region is part of the Palace of the Governor's Photo Archives.<sup>14</sup>

Bynner and Hunt also presided over a socially and politically progressive group of permanent residents who acknowledged and accepted the pair and other same-sex couples into the growing art colony. Artist Dorothy Newkirk Stewart lived from 1933-1939 in the Canyon Road enclave with writer and photographer Maria Chabot. Chabot famously went on to work with Georgia O'Keeffe as her companion, secretary, and organizer of O'Keeffe's home restoration in Abiquiu, New Mexico. She also oversaw Mary Cabot Wheelwright's ranch Los Luceros (now a State of New Mexico Historic Site) for twenty years and inherited it upon Wheelwright's death. In the 1930s, Chabot worked as Executive Secretary of the New Mexico Association of Indian Affairs and helped develop the Santa Fe Indian Market. Photographer Laura Gilpin shared a home on Santa Fe's Camino del Monte Sol for decades with her life partner, Elizabeth Warham Forster. Well known for her work *The Enduring Navajo* and other photo books, Gilpin worked from her home in Santa Fe into the 1970s.<sup>15</sup>

Educators and owners of the Shipley School in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania Alice Howland and Eleanor Brownell, known collectively as the "Hownells," moved to the artist colony in Santa Fe in 1932, near other Bryn Mawr alumni including the philanthropist sisters Amelia and Martha White of El Delerio (now the School for Advanced Research) and Stewart's sister, Margretta Dietrich, owner of El Zagan on Canyon Road. The Hownells built a home together designed by prominent Santa Fe Style architect John Gaw Meem where they raised two adopted daughters. They were leaders in the Indian Rights Movement and helped develop the Santa Fe Opera.<sup>16</sup>

### ***Hidden Legacies Excerpts: La Cienega and El Rancho de las Golondrinas: 334 Los Pinos Rd. La Cienega, New Mexico***

The village of La Cienega (the Swamp) and El Rancho de las Golondrinas (Ranch of the Swallows) are in a valley southwest of Santa Fe along Historic Route 66 and the El Camino Real de Tierra del Adentro (Royal Road of the Interior Land), an important trade route extending from Mexico City to Santa Fe (Fig. 13). Las Golondrinas presently functions as an open-air, living history museum interpreting seventeenth- and eighteenth-century rural Hispano life. The property



Figure 13: El Rancho de las Golondrinas (photo from the museum's website, <https://golondrinas.org>).

represents an authentic connection to the social and agricultural traditions of the La Cienega Valley, including life-giving water sources in the form of springs, ponds, and swamps that characterize this fertile region.

While Hispano ties to the land are documented through the early eighteenth century, archeological evidence of Puebloan habitation in the area reaches back far longer. Both cultures were attracted to this region, an oasis in the desert. The first official landowner of the present-day ranch property is listed as Miguel Vega y Coca. Coca's descendants, members of the Baca y Terrus

<sup>14</sup> Witter Bynner Papers, MS-0186, Correspondence, 1906-1967, New Mexico State University Library, Archives and Special Collections.

<sup>15</sup> Martha Sandweiss, *Laura Gilpin: Enduring Grace* (Fort Worth, TX: Amon Carter Museum, 1986.)

<sup>16</sup> Brownell Howland House, MSS 790, box 5, folders 15-17, JGM Job Files, John Gaw Meem Archives of Southwestern Architecture, University of New Mexico.



families, owned the rancho until the early 1930s when the Curtain-Paloheimo family of Pasadena and Santa Fe purchased the 200-acre property as a summer retreat. In 1972, they turned the ranch into a living history museum. The family, known for their preservation and philanthropic activities in and around Santa Fe, moved threatened New Mexican log cabins from their original sites to the open-air museum, renovated existing ranch buildings, and incorporated the grouping into a historical narrative with advice from the local residents of La Cienega.<sup>17</sup>

Living history museums came into fashion with the development Colonial Williamsburg in the late 1920s, funded by John D. Rockefeller, Jr. and Greenfield Village in Dearborn, Michigan in 1933, the pet project of industrialist Henry Ford. In Colonial Williamsburg buildings were restored on-site as part of its narrative. Las Golondrinas, like Greenfield Village, imported most of its buildings from other sites, then reassembled them in an interpreted setting.<sup>18</sup> While Greenfield Village's primary theme focuses on the men who advanced American invention and industrialization, Las Golondrinas highlights Hispano rural vernacular craft and the time-honored agricultural practices of the region.

The natural water supply of La Cienga determined both the Pueblo and Hispano settlement of the area and its enduring tradition of farming and ranching. La Cienega springs feed a complex



*Figure 14: Herd of sheep near a farmhouse at El Rancho de las Golondrinas, 1937 (photographer: Leonora Scott Curtain, Box 1410/Folder 5, Acequia Madre House Archive).*

landscape of swamps and ponds diverted into ditches that irrigated fields of corn, beans, and alfalfa and provided water for cattle and sheep (Fig. 14). A primary ditch flowing from the eastern section of Las Golondrinas was redirected into smaller lateral canals by a system of wooden headgates. In more recent years, the system was modernized to include steel flumes and underground pipes channeling water around the ranch and into the village of La Cienega and its adjacent farmland.<sup>19</sup>

La Cienega also greatly benefited from its position on the El Camino Real. The location sat a fair distance from the center of

Santa Fe and therefore offered an ideal spot to rest, wash, and water horses. Residents of La Cienega provided food and services to travelers and goods for trade including sheep, cattle, cow hides, pinon nuts, salt, and craft goods. Built in the mid-eighteenth century, a *torreon* (defensive tower) stood on the Las Golondrinas site and would have served as a landmark for travelers coming and going along the Camino.

Las Golondrinas still welcomes visitors to its complex, bucolic site in the countryside about 20 minutes southwest of Santa Fe. It continues to flourish as a place of learning about traditional

<sup>17</sup> Audra Bellmore, *Old Santa Fe Today* (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 2022), 263.

<sup>18</sup> Audra Bellmore, *English Cottage Style Houses in America: Expressions of Architectural, Technological and Social Innovation* (Chicago: Loyola University of Chicago, 2014), [https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc\\_diss/886/](https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_diss/886/).

<sup>19</sup> John O. Baxter, *Acequia System of El Rancho de las Golondrinas: State Register of Historic Places registration report*, Washington D.C., National Archives, 2014.



New Mexican life, including its building traditions. In 2023, the National Park Service nominated El Rancho de las Golondrinas to its National Register of Historic Places.

Route 66 connects Americans who lived and worked on the Mother Road to their own past. It connects visitors and tourists to a mythic American past represented in colorful buildings, signage, and roadside art. Ahead of the Route 66 Centennial in 2026, projects and programs organized on national and state levels are capturing underrepresented narratives through preservation, written and photographic documentation, and digital mapping initiatives. Programming managed and based in New Mexico is helping to diversify and broaden our view of the American story.

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