

**MUSEUM OF NEW MEXICO**  
**OFFICE OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL STUDIES**

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**ARCHAEOLOGICAL TESTING OF A TWENTIETH-CENTURY SITE  
AT RODEO, HIDALGO COUNTY, NEW MEXICO**

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**Submitted by  
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**ARCHAEOLOGY NOTES NO. 18**

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## ADMINISTRATIVE SUMMARY

Archaeological testing was conducted at a twentieth-century railroad site in the town of Rodeo, New Mexico, by staff archaeologists of the Research Section, Laboratory of Anthropology, Museum of New Mexico, from January 3 through 6, 1989. The New Mexico State Highway and Transportation Department (NMSHTD) requested that the testing be completed prior to the start of construction for the realignment of U.S. 80.

LA 67962 was investigated to define the nature and extent of subsurface cultural deposition and to determine whether more intensive investigation was necessary. The site consists of two building foundation slabs, a large refuse area, and several associated features. Features were recorded, one test pit was excavated, and diagnostic surface artifacts were collected. Cultural deposits dating to after World War II were found to be very shallow.

Based on test excavation, there appear to be no deposits of historic cultural remains at LA 67962, and only the foundations of the structures remain. The site does not appear to have the potential to yield useful archaeological information on local or regional history. We do not recommend that any further studies be conducted at LA 67962.

Submitted in fulfillment of Joint Powers Agreement DO3553 between the New Mexico State Highway and Transportation Department and the Office of Archaeological Studies, Museum of New Mexico.

NMSHTD Project No. F-014-1(1).  
MNM Project No. 41.450 (Rodeo).

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## INTRODUCTION

At the request of the NMSHTD, staff archaeologists of the Research Section, Laboratory of Anthropology, Museum of New Mexico, conducted test excavations at a twentieth-century railroad site at Rodeo, New Mexico (Fig. 1). The site was within the proposed right-of-way for a realignment of U.S. 80 in Hidalgo County. The main features of the site were a building foundation slab and a refuse area. According to local informants, the slab was the remains of the section crew's house and had been torn down sometime in the 1960s. Most of the surface trash dated to after World War II, but a few pieces of purple glass were also present. Archaeological testing was suggested to determine whether the trash deposits included a historic component.

The site is located on private land belonging to the Southern Pacific Railroad. Testing was conducted between January 3 and 6, 1989. Daisy F. Levine, the project director, was assisted by David A. Phillips, Jr., Research Section director, and Sam Sweesy, a Research Section volunteer. We owe special thanks to Sam for spending four days in the field at his own expense. Laboratory analysis was completed by Adisa Willmer and Sam Sweesy, and Adisa wrote the historic artifact analysis chapter.

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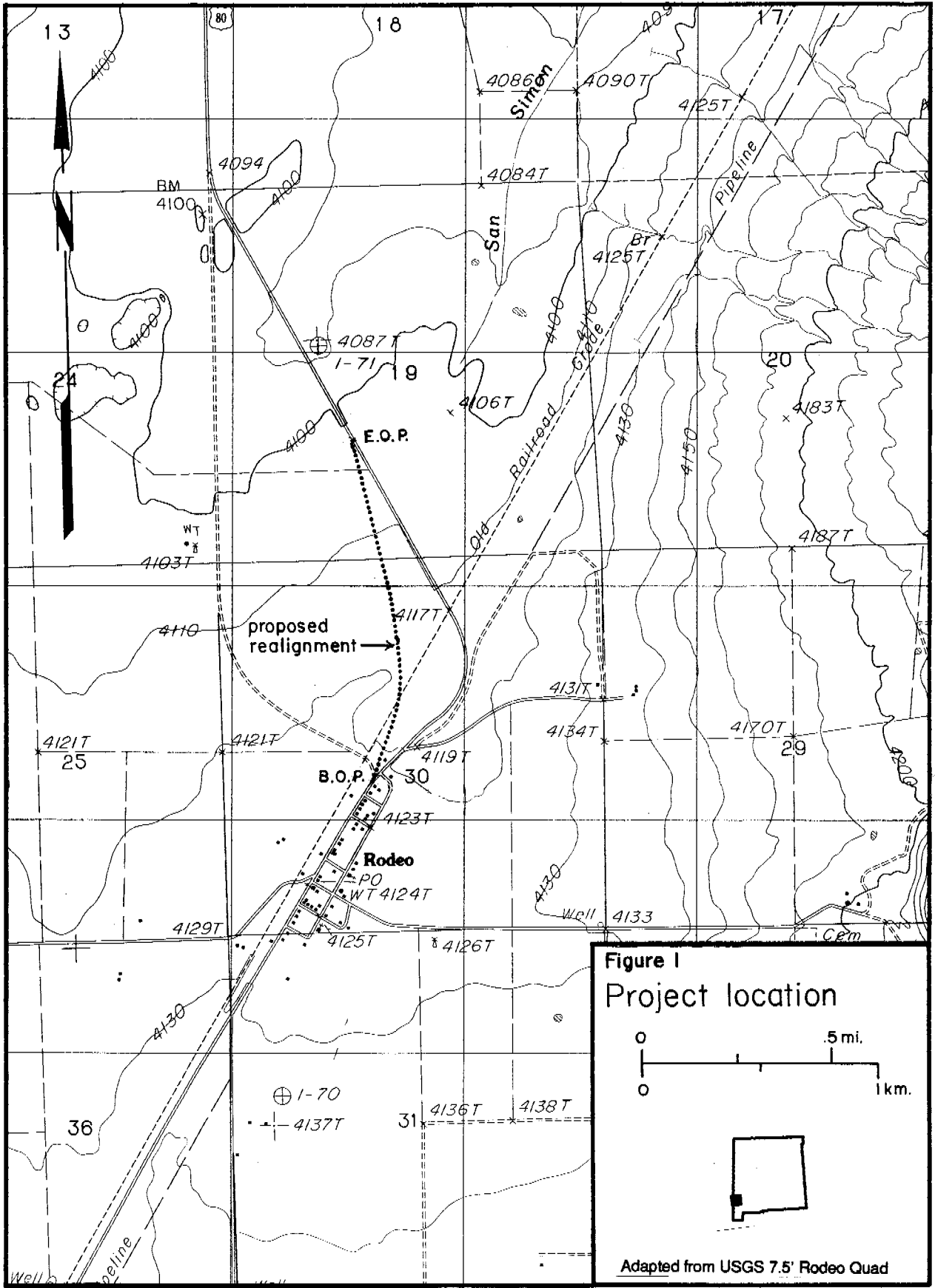
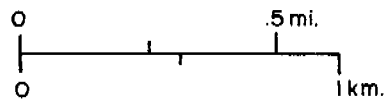


Figure 1  
Project location



Adapted from USGS 7.5' Rodeo Quad

## ENVIRONMENT

The town of Rodeo is located in a broad open valley between the Peloncillo Mountains to the east and the Chiricahuas to the west. It is situated on a geological structure known as the Mexican Highlands in a basin and range structure (Nelson 1988). The elevation at the site is 1,257 m (4,122 ft), with little variability in the surrounding area. The predominant soil, the Mohave-Stellar-Forrest association, consists of loams, silty clay loams, and sandy clay soil (Nelson 1988).

The project area lies within a semidesert grassland environment (Brown 1982:123). It falls within the lower elevational range of 1,100 to 1,400 m for this type of environment. Semidesert grassland receives an annual precipitation of between 250 mm (9.8 in) and 450 mm (17.7 in). Over 50 percent of this total occurs between April and September. Perennial grass growth depends heavily on the rainfall during these months.

Vegetation found in this zone includes various types of grama grasses (*Bouteloua* spp.), bush muhly (*Muhlenbergia porteri*), tobosa grass (*Hilaria mutica*), and catclaw (*Acacia greggii*). Succulents found include sotols (*Dasyilirion* spp.), agaves (*Agave* spp.), yuccas (*Yucca* spp.), and various cacti. The only trees occurring in semidesert grassland are mesquite (*Prosopis glandulosa*) and occasionally juniper (*Juniperus monosperma*) (Brown 1982:127-129). These trees have invaded large areas of former grassland within the last 100 years.

Fauna found in the area include mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*), javelina (*Dicotyles tajaca*), jackrabbit (*Lepus californicus*), spotted ground squirrel (*Spermophilus spilsoma*), and various rodents and birds. Antelope are now absent from large areas of semidesert grassland. This is largely because overgrazing by livestock has fostered the invasion of woody and shrubby species such as mesquite, forcing antelope to find other grazing areas (Brown 1982:129-130).

## CULTURAL OVERVIEW

### Prehistory

The Paleoindian period (10,000 to 7000 B.C.) is traditionally characterized by the hunting of large herd animals, including the now extinct bison (*Bison antiquus*) and mammoth (*Mammuthus primigenius*). Large, distinctive lanceolate points were used. These have been divided morphologically and chronologically into Clovis, Folsom, and Plano (LeBlanc and Whalen 1980). Two Paleoindian sites have been recorded in the general project vicinity: Burro Cienega No. 9, south of the Burro Mountains in Grant County, and the Cloverdale Creek site in Hidalgo County.

The Archaic period (7000 B.C. to A.D. 200) is characterized by highly mobile groups of hunters and gatherers. Subsistence focused on the hunting of smaller game and the gathering of wild plants (the large megafauna of the preceding Paleoindian period were extinct by this time). This desert adaptation has been defined as the Cochise Culture and is divided into three phases: Sulphur Springs (7500 B.C. to 3500 B.C.), Chiricahua (3500 B.C. to 1500 B.C.), and San Pedro (1500 B.C. to A.D. 200) (LeBlanc and Whalen 1980). Sites generally consist of lithic scatters with diagnostic projectile points and ground stone, but a few San Pedro phase pithouses have been found.

Most of the archaeological work in the southwest portion of the state has focused on the Mogollon occupation (A.D. 200 to 1450), but not much work has been done in the vicinity of Rodeo. The transition from the Archaic period to the Mogollon period is marked by the appearance of Alma Plain Brown wares (Stuart and Gauthier 1981). During the first half of this period, including the Pinelawn phase (A.D. 250-550), the Georgetown phase (A.D. 550-650), the San Francisco phase (A.D. 650-850), and the Three Circle phase (A.D. 850-975), architecture was dominated by pithouses. Masonry pueblos, along with the classic Mimbres pottery, appeared during the Mimbres phase (A.D. 975-1150). Both the Animas phase (A.D. 1150-1375) and the Salado phase (A.D. 1300-1450) are characterized by adobe architecture, thought to be a result of contact with the Casas Grandes culture (Martin 1979). A few Animas-phase sites have been excavated in southern Hidalgo County, including the Clanton Draw site, the Box Canyon site (McCluney 1962), and the Pendleton Ruin (Kidder et al. 1949).

There is a hiatus in the occupation of the area between the disappearance of the Salado and the arrival of the Apaches. LeBlanc and Whalen (1980:316) suggest that the Salado may have evolved into the Jumanos, the Conchos, or related people. These groups all became subsumed under the general label of *Apache* in the later historical period. Our inability to recognize late non-Pueblo sites makes it difficult to identify possible descendants of the Salado.

## History

Early Spanish accounts from 1680 to 1750 include references to Jocomo, Suma, Manso, Jano, and Apache Indians of northern Mexico. The linguistic affiliation of the first four groups has not been satisfactorily resolved. Historical documentation suggests Uto-Aztecan or Athabaskan, but the evidence is scarce for both (Forbes 1957; Griffen 1983). The Janos and Jocomo were located near the study area, while the Suma and Manso were located along the Rio Grande as far north as Las Cruces. It is likely that these groups occupied the study area, but archaeological evidence is scarce.

Mining in southwest New Mexico began in the 1870s and was greatly aided by the arrival of the railroad in 1880. Mining and the railroad caused a rapid increase in population (Levine 1990). Copper, silver, and gold helped establish boom towns like Shakespeare. Lordsburg was established in 1880 as a railroad town.

The El Paso and Southwestern Railroad was originally created to serve the Phelps Dodge Company. Phelps Dodge began full-scale copper mining activities at Bisbee, Arizona, in 1885. By the turn of the century, the use of electricity was expanding, and this increased the demand for copper wire (Myrick 1966). A new smelter was built outside of Bisbee, and within a few years, Arizona became the leading copper-producing state. Up until this point, the Southern Pacific Railroad had been handling the freight for Phelps Dodge. With the heavy increase in shipping, the Southern Pacific was no longer able to satisfactorily keep up with the demand. Phelps Dodge solved this problem by constructing their own line, the El Paso and Southwestern, in 1901. It ran from Douglas, Arizona, to El Paso, Texas (Sivinski 1973:183).

After World War I, the price of copper plummeted, forcing most of the Arizona mines to close. In 1924, the El Paso and Southwestern sold the railroad to the Southern Pacific (Myrick 1966). The Southern Pacific continued to operate the line until 1961, when the bottom fell out of the mining industry. The tracks and facilities remained in place until 1963 (Myrick 1970:82).

The town of Rodeo was established as a station on the El Paso and Southwestern Railroad in 1902. The name comes from the Spanish word meaning "roundup, enclosure for cattle" because ranchers went there to separate, brand, and ship their cattle each year (Pearce 1983).

There was often no town where the railroad company needed a depot, so a town was built and populated with company employees. Supporting industries such as creosoted tie plants, building material workshops, and supply stores required numerous employees, whom the railroad often housed in town (Sivinski 1973:38). At the minimum, a station was needed to provide water for the steam engines. These were generally spaced about 10 miles apart.

The depot, section house, and section crew's house were all essential elements of a station. The depot provided living and office space for the agent, the section



foreman inhabited the section house, and the maintenance crew lived in the section crew house. In a two-story depot, such as the one at Rodeo, the living quarters for the agent and his family were situated on the upper floor. The lower floor provided room for freight storage, shelter for passengers, and work space for employees. The depot was usually divided into three separate rooms, one for each of these functions (Sivinski 1973:39). There are very few two-story depots left in New Mexico. Some have been dismantled entirely, and others have had the second story removed to avoid taxes on the larger space. At Rodeo, the upper story had been removed because it was in danger of collapsing.

Depots typically had several standardized features, no matter which railroad line built them. Most depots built before 1900 were constructed on a wooden pier foundation. Sometime after the turn of the century, concrete and cinderblock foundations became popular. Wood construction with a pitched or hip roof was typical. Railroad buildings usually conformed to a standard color scheme, and yellow with brown trim was one of the more popular combinations (Sivinski 1973:41-44).

Rodeo was a water stop, and cattle were loaded there. Swain (1962) lists the "source of traffic" as the station building and stockpens. As facilities, he lists two spur tracks, a well/water tank, and houses. Neither the stockpens nor the spur tracks were observed during field work.

Most of the inhabitants of the town of Rodeo now work at the Phelps Dodge copper smelter at Playas, 64 km (40 mi) northeast of Rodeo. Ranching is the other major form of livelihood. Rodeo, along with the neighboring town of Portal, has also become a minor haven for writers and artists, and it supports its own local art gallery.

## SITE DESCRIPTION

LA 67962 is a historic site associated with the former El Paso and Southwestern Railroad (Fig. 2; see Appendix 1 for site location information). Five features were recorded, including two foundation slabs, a refuse area, a well housing, and a septic pit.

Feature 1 is a cement foundation slab (Fig. 3), according to local informants, the location of the section crew's house. The house was oriented north-south and divided into four living areas of two rooms each. Each living area had an entrance on the west side, and a porch ran the length of the east side of the structure. The west rooms were the living/sleeping rooms, and the east rooms were all kitchens. An 80 cm wide doorway connected living rooms to kitchens in each "apartment." An inside doorway connects the two south apartments through the kitchens -- probably a later development when a family outgrew its two small rooms. The structure had brick interior and exterior walls, and apparently a wood floor. The interior brick walls were two courses wide. The slab appears to have been poured at some later date over a base of crushed slag, and porches and running water were added to the house at this time. The new foundation, 7 cm thick, was poured concrete mixed with slag. The house was torn down in the 1960s by a family leasing property from Southern Pacific Railroad. They did not know when the structure was abandoned.

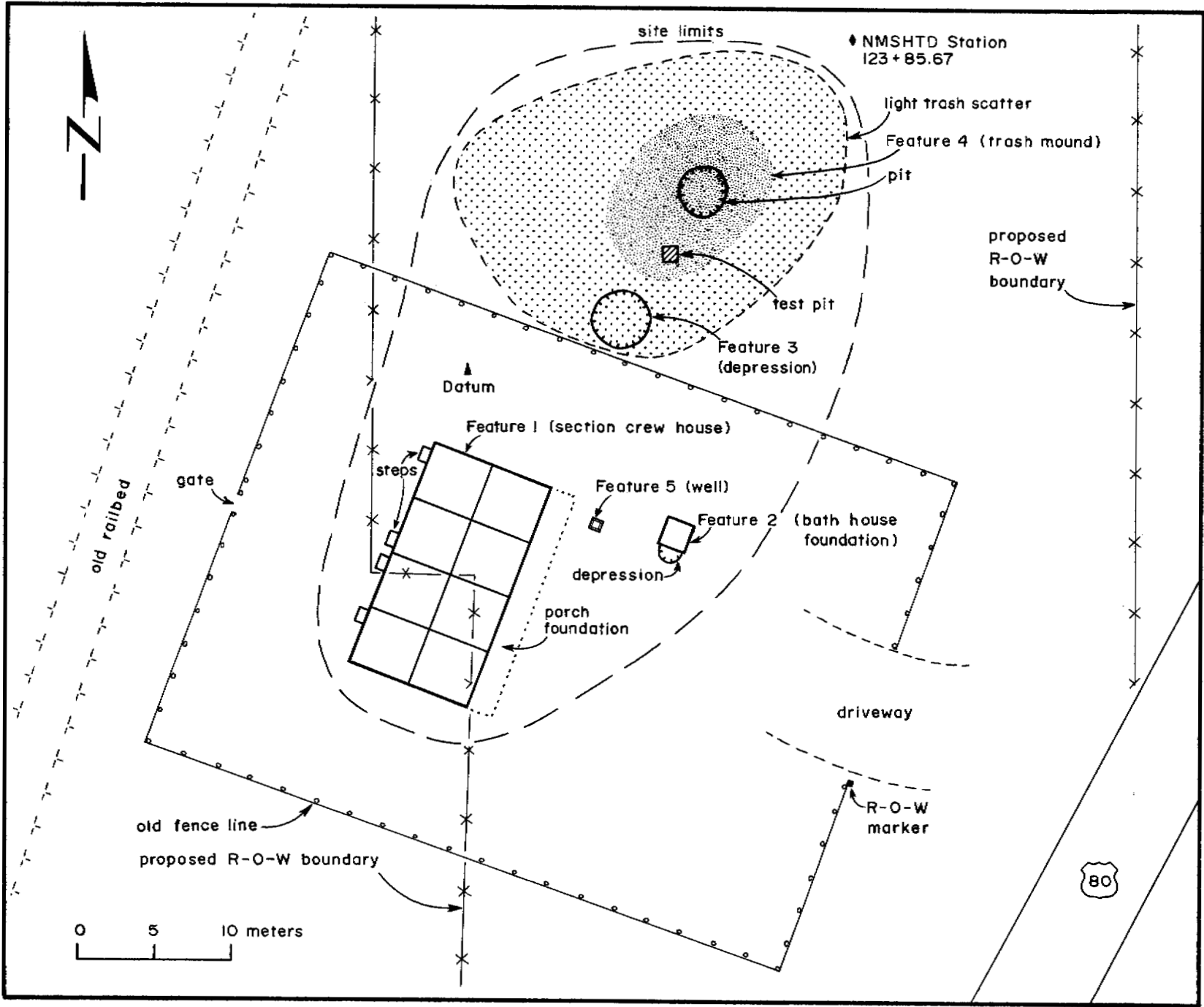
Feature 2 is a 2 by 2 m slab, 8 m east of Feature 1, representing the remains of a bathhouse. One toilet drain was found in the slab. A depression adjacent to the south side of Feature 2 probably indicates the septic pit for the structure.

Feature 3, a depression located between the house and the trash area, may represent another septic pit. It is 4 m in diameter and 50 cm deep.

Feature 4, the refuse area, covers an area 11 by 9 m north of the house. Household, auto, and construction debris (including crushed slag, used in railroad fill) were present on the surface. Trash deposits, concentrated but very shallow, ended 10 cm below the surface. The trash all appeared to have been deposited after World War II. There was nothing in the subsurface deposits to indicate the presence of historic trash, as the few pieces of purple glass on the surface had suggested. It is possible that this dump site was used by the town after the abandonment of the section crew house.

Feature 5 is a small square well housing, 75 by 75 cm, made out of railroad ties. It is located 3 m east of the house.

Several other railroad-related structures were observed for a distance of 600 m to the south of the site. These included concrete foundation slabs, slag foundations, and two standing buildings. One of these buildings is a house similar to the section crew's house; the other is the Rodeo depot. Although they lie outside the proposed new right-of-way, they are briefly described here as supplementary information.



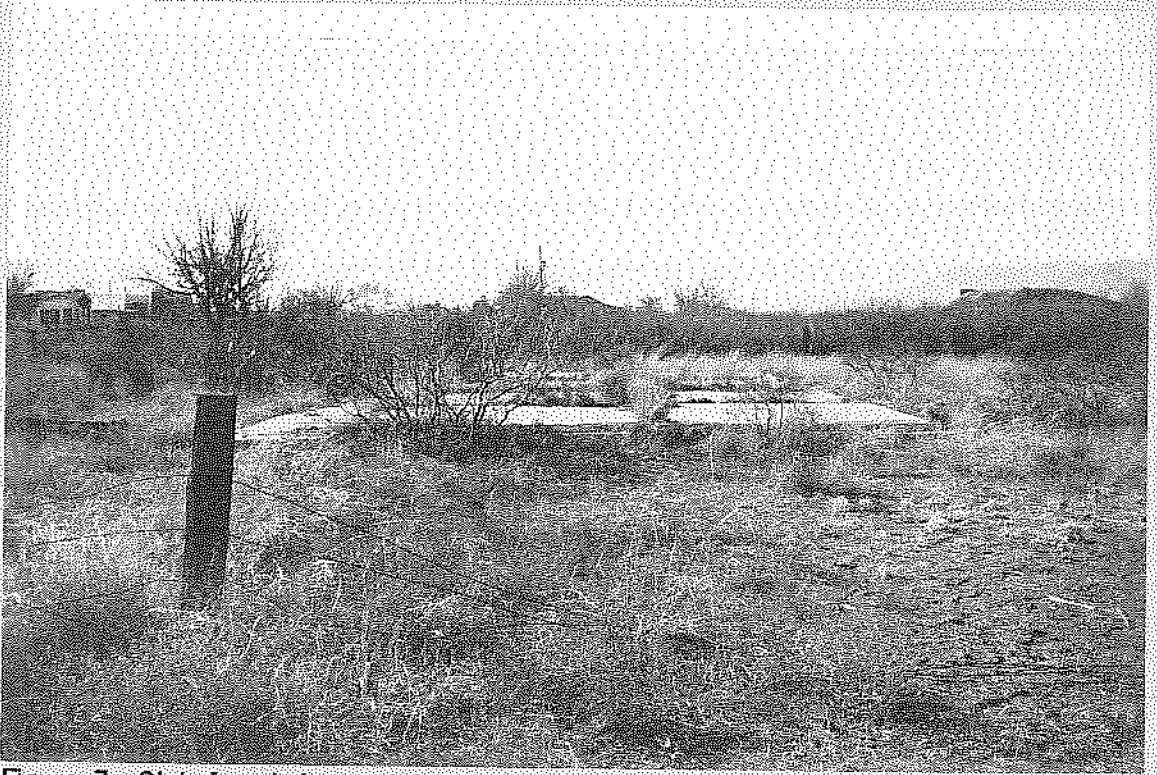


Figure 3. Slab foundation, LA 67962



Figure 4. House, LA 67962.

The house is a wood building, painted white (Fig. 4). Because yellow with brown trim was the standard railroad color, it was probably repainted at some time. The house was designed for three families, and each section had three walk-through rooms. As in Feature 1, the kitchens are in the back (or east) of the house. The house has double-hung six-over-six windows and a porch in front (west side). The pitched roof is still intact.

The Rodeo depot (Fig. 5) is situated on U.S. 80 directly across from the general store. Originally it was a two-story building (as discussed below), but only the one-story portion remains. It is painted in the railroad's standard yellow and brown color scheme. The building is leaning precariously (Fig. 6). According to local informants, the second story had been leaning worse than the remainder of the building and was therefore torn down as a protective measure.

The depot has a hip roof and relatively new corrugated tin roofing. The door to the loading platform is still present on the west side, facing the track. The building is now being used for hay storage by the lessee of the property. The date "4-54" is carved on the wall of the depot by the door. A square foundation, probably from a signal tower, is located 12 m north of the depot. The date "8-31-54" was scribed in the damp concrete.

There is a continuous light scatter of trash between LA 67962 and the depot. Two cleared areas were evident where houses probably once stood. No concrete foundations remain, but the foundation may have been slag, or the buildings may have been constructed on wooden piers. One of these clearings may have been where the section house stood. There is a root cellar, a rock base for a large water tank located 10 m east of the rail bed (Fig. 7), and a wellhead associated with this clearing.

The section house (Fig. 8) was moved sometime in the 1960s by the lessees to their ranch, 5 mi to the southwest. It is the typical yellow with brown trim railroad building, with a flared hip roof and a front porch. The rafter tails have rounded edges, and the chimney is brick. The siding is milled wood, clapboard style. The house is built on joists and was probably originally set on wooden piers. There are two doors on the front of the house, indicating original construction as a duplex, but at present there is no separating interior wall. The windows are all double-hung two-over-two, except one window on the back, which is one-over-one.



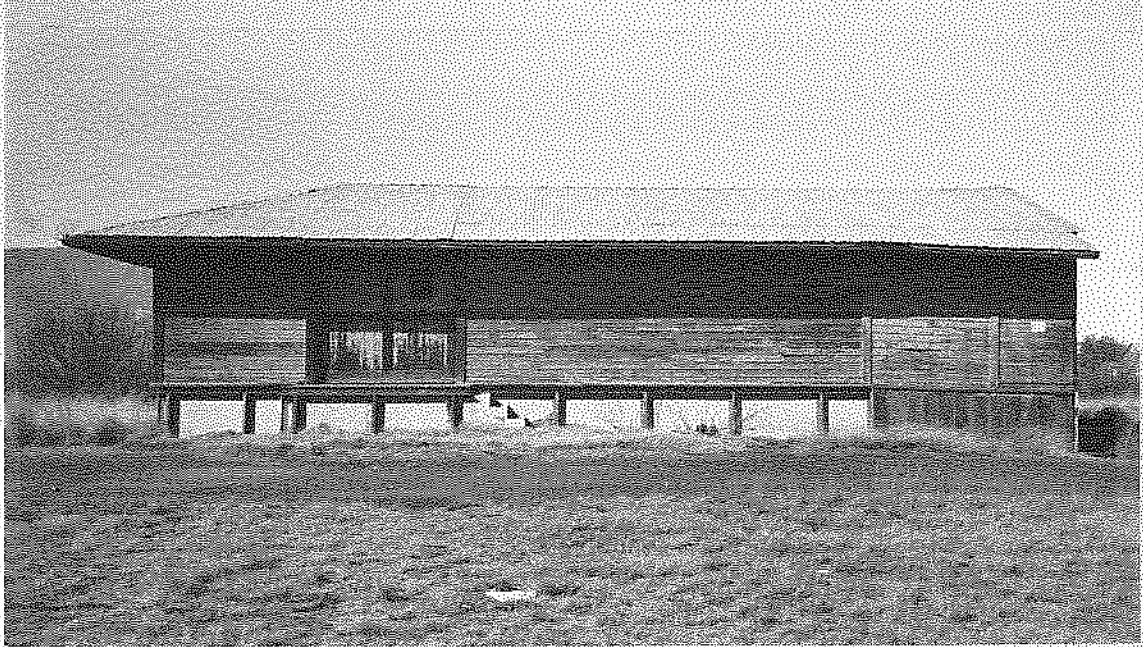


Figure 5. Rodeo depot, LA 67962.



Figure 6. Rodeo depot, side view, LA 67962.



Figure 7. Rock base for water tank, LA 67962.

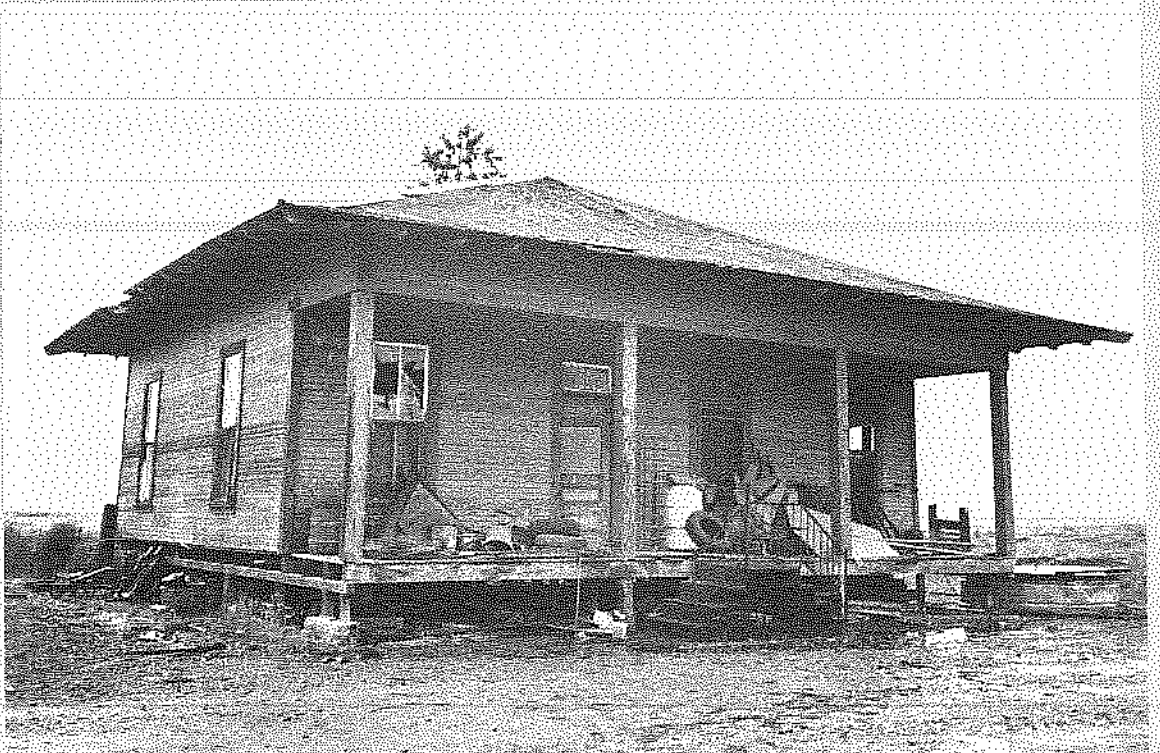


Figure 8. Section house, LA 67962.

## TESTING METHODS

The site was first transected to determine the limits of the features and associated refuse scatter. A site map was then made using a transit and stadia rod or 30 m tape. All features were located, both those associated with the railroad and modern features, such as the highway, and the limits of the refuse scatter were defined.

A 1 by 1 m test pit was placed in the trash midden and its location mapped. Surface artifacts within this area were collected and bagged for laboratory analysis. The plan was to excavate the test pit in 10 cm levels to determine the extent of deposition and define any stratigraphy. In fact, only 10 cm of cultural deposits were found. When sterile soil was encountered, a shovel test was done to ensure that there were no deeper cultural remains. Fill was screened through 1/4 inch mesh screens, and all artifacts from the test pit were bagged and collected. The crew also walked over the trash mound and collected any visible diagnostic artifacts, such as bottles or dishes with makers marks.

All features were described and photographed. Local informants were interviewed to provide information on the slab foundations. Upon completion of testing, the test pit was backfilled, and the site datum was pulled.



# HISTORIC ARTIFACT ANALYSIS

Adisa Willmer

## Artifact Classification

The artifact assemblage was analyzed on the basis of functional typology. The functional categories employed include food, indulgences, subsistence/production, domestic equipment, household equipment, construction/maintenance, personal effects, entertainment, and transportation. This procedure was adopted from a program developed by Ward et al. (1977) and expanded by Laboratory of Anthropology personnel (Seaman 1983; Maxwell 1983; Oakes 1983). Within each functional category, artifacts are assigned to types of items with specific yet different uses, but related according to an overall function.

## Functional Categories

### Food

A total of 21 artifacts related to food consumption or procurement were recovered, comprising 5 percent of the total assemblage. The artifacts include can fragments, fragments of mason jars and other glass jars or bottles, bone, peach pits, and oyster shell remains (Table 1).

**Table 1. Frequency Distribution of Food Items, LA 67962**

<i>Item</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>% of total</i>
Containers			
Can fragments	10	47.6	2.7
Mason jar fragments	3	14.3	0.8
Other glass jars, bottles	2	9.5	0.5
Food			
Bone	2	9.5	0.5
Peach pits	3	14.3	0.8
Oyster shell	1	4.7	0.2

### Indulgences

This category, which consists of 11 soda pop and alcoholic beverage bottle fragments, makes up 2.9 per cent of the total assemblage. Nine soda pop bottle fragments make up 81.8 percent of the category and 2.4 percent of the assemblage. Two alcoholic beverage bottle fragments make up 18.2 percent of the category and 0.5 percent of the assemblage.

### Domestic

A total of 45 domestic items were recovered from the project area, composing 12 percent of the total site assemblage. Eleven glass and ceramic items utilized as tableware and for food preparation (cups, mugs, vases) make up 24.5 percent of the category and 2.9 percent of the assemblage. Thirty-four Euroamerican ceramic fragments make up 75.5 percent of the category and 9.1 percent of the assemblage.

### Construction/Maintenance

This category consists of construction hardware (nails, washers, 1 claw hammer head, wire, door hook), window glass, and 1 glass insulator, totaling 15 items and representing 4 percent of the total site assemblage. Eight hardware items make up 53.3 percent of the category and 2.2 percent of the assemblage. Six fragments of window glass make up 40 percent of the category and 1.6 percent of the assemblage. The insulator makes up 6.7 percent of the category and 0.2 percent of the assemblage.

### Personal Effects

A total of 10 artifacts are represented in this category, making up 2.7 percent of the site assemblage. Eight clothing items (buttons, a buckle, a leather sole, and a rubber sole) make up 80 percent of the category and 2.2 percent of the assemblage. Two miscellaneous items, a cold cream jar fragment and an extract bottle fragment, make up 20 percent of the category and 0.5 percent of the assemblage.

### Household Equipment

The one item in this category, a bedspring, makes up 0.2 percent of the assemblage.

### Transportation

Transportation items make up 0.8 percent of the assemblage. One rubber bicycle tire makes up 33 percent of the category and 0.2 percent of the assemblage. Two

glass headlight fragments make up 66 percent of the category and 0.5 percent of the assemblage.

### Entertainment

Four items belonged to the entertainment category represent 1 percent of the assemblage: 1 plastic toy gun, 1 ball point pen top, 1 record fragment, and 1 glass marble. Each item represents 25 percent of the category.

### Unidentifiable

A total of 184 artifacts consisting of glass and metal fragments were unidentifiable. This category represents 49.5 percent of the assemblage. A total of 163 glass items make up 88.5 percent of the category and 43.9 percent of the assemblage. A total of 21 metal items make up 11.5 percent of the category and 5.6 percent of the assemblage.

### Summary

Unidentifiable artifacts make up almost half of the artifact assemblage. The rest of the assemblage appears to typify a habitation site, judging from the wide variety of functional categories represented. The remainder of the categories are poorly represented. Domestic items are most numerous, representing 12 percent of the assemblage.

### Artifact Dating Method

Of 371 artifacts, only 143 can be used to obtain a date for the site. The dateable artifacts were assigned a beginning and an end date based on the historical documentation of the use of makers' marks or a range of assigned dates.

Two dating formulas were used to obtain an approximate date for the site. Oakes (1983) devised a dating technique to produce a mean glass date. This method separated glass by color and assigned dates based on color alone: aqua (1880-1930), amethyst (1808-1920), amber (1920-1930), brown (1880 to present), clear (1930 to present). A weighted mean and standard deviation were then calculated based on the range of dates for each glass color as well as dates based on makers' marks. South (1977), on the other hand, used a formula for arriving at a mean ceramic date for historic sites. The ceramic assemblage was broken down into ceramic types, and a range of dates was assigned to each category: earthen ware (1830-1900), stone ware (1870 to present), porcelain (1660 to present). A weighted mean date and standard deviation were then calculated based on the ranges of dates of ceramic types, as well as dates obtained from makers' marks. Unfortunately, no exact date can be acquired with either of these dating formulas because the artifacts associated with each date could come from any year within that date.

## Results

The midden deposits recovered from the Rodeo site indicate a primary occupation of  $1931.4 \pm 26.2$  years. This weighted mean date does not accurately represent the early occupation of Rodeo (the early 1900s) since only a few artifacts from this period were found. However, since the purple and aqua glass could be dated, and many of the later artifacts could not be, the mean was weighted as early as 1905 on the low end. Furthermore, the dates derived from the trash do not reflect the current occupation of Rodeo. The town has been continuously occupied since its founding in 1902. Apparently, the data recovered during the recent excavations only represent the middle component of that continuum.

## RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The structures at LA 67962 have been razed to their foundations. The only remains of possible archaeological interest were those in the trash mound. The initial survey (Nelson 1988) indicated that earlier trash deposits might underlie the more recent, superficial refuse. However, testing established that the trash deposits were only 10 cm deep and appeared to have been mostly laid down since World War II. Laboratory analysis produced a mean date of  $1931 \pm 26$  years. This broad range is the result of the scarcity of datable artifacts. The dump site may have been used after the abandonment of the section crew's house but is not presently being used, as evidenced by the lack of aluminum cans, plastic, and paper goods. This observation fits with the high end of the weighted mean date. Given the lack of architectural integrity of structures at the site and the lack of archaeological deposits that could yield important information on local history, we recommend that no further cultural resources studies be conducted at LA 67962.

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