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Peopling the Northeast Plains

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PEOPLING THE NORTHEAST PLAINS

"Why not immortalize the Nester, the first man to break the sod and plant seed on our forbidding plains? The rancher came first and built an empire. The homesteader then came with his plow and built another kind of empire."¹

During the 1880's and the early part of the 1890's the cattle companies were continuing to hire ranch hands to prove up homesteads around water holes. At the same time the early farmers began to appear in the northeast, but not in the form of the sodbusters who were to later swarm over the highland llanos during the early part of the twentieth century. The early farmers were not labeled "nesters", ^{which was} the derogatory term coined by the stockmen for the people who turned small parcels of the grassland into fields and began erecting fences over the plains. The first pioneer homestead families were located in the canyons and in the areas not covered by the prime grasslands. These settlers moved into the northeastern plains from a few locales in the west. After they had established their settlement areas and acquired the land ^{and} water rights to support themselves, the rush of farmers onto the upland grasslands was just beginning. These homesteaders, who came from the east, blanketed the remaining lands of the northeast that could be farmed.

Those Who Came From the West

The Santa Fe Trail, which opened the territory of New Mexico to the American Midwest, also opened the eastern slope of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains to Hispanic settlers between 1820 and 1850. The Pecos Valley, and its tributary the Gallinas in western San Miguel County, as well as the Mora and its tributaries in Mora County, began to receive settlers from the Rio Grande Valley several decades before the Americans annexed the Mexican territory into the United States in 1856. The riverine plazas and placitas such as Las Vegas, San Antonio, Los Alamos, Sapello, and Bueno Vista were secure hamlets on the edge of a vast open territory. Although hostile bands of Indians and Comancheros (a mix of Hispanic, Anglo, Indian, and half-breed traders and raiders) roamed over the northeastern territory, the grasslands had already ^{been} ~~been~~ providing ^{an} economic return to the farmers who had settled west of the 105-degree meridian.

The main economic production of the Hispanic farmer was not in the irrigated valley fields that laced the drainage areas, but was tied to the herds of sheep that had been driven into the area with the first settlers. One of

initial back-hauls on the Santa Fe trail for the freighters bringing in the goods from the east, was raw wool for the midwestern mills. This ready economy stimulated the expansion of the ^{Alcarrif} herds and the consequent search for new grazing lands. Herdsmen were hired to trail sheep into the sheltered canyons of eastern San Miguel County in the winters when there was little grass cover available near the home villages and ^{when} the upland pastures of the mountains were snow-covered. It was only a matter-of-time before vast regions of grass-lands not being utilized by the cattle companies (many of which also stocked sheep) became known. The herds^smen would then begin a practice of transhumance in the eastern area by wintering in the lowland portions of the river valleys and summering the herd on the llano. By the 1870's the herd and herding families became a permanent fixture in the areas surrounding the Red River canyon (Canadian River) and the sheep camps on the canyon bottoms began to appear more permanent. The families, ^{in pay for a dm} who were occupied on a sheep-share basis called the partidero, also began to cluster for security purposes along the canyon floors. As the sheep were grazed on the highland grasses during the summer, the canyon floodplains ^{near the settlements} would be turned into fields by using both irrigated and dry-land farming techniques.

A second manner in which the Hispanic population was introduced to the abundant grass plains of the east was through the annual ^E sojourn of the village men from the Pecos drainage area into the llano estacado to hunt buffalo for meat and hides. This mainly occurred during the 1870's while the eastern border counties contained large herds and before the arrival of American hunters by the trainloads to shoot the buffalo for sport ^{(which} ~~and~~ contribute to the near disappearance of an entire animal species)² Hispanic hunters from western San Miguel and Mora counties, along with some from the Rio Grande valley further west, would follow either the Cibolero Trail or some old Comanche trails to the rich highland grass plains of the east. The hunters became familiar with not only the extensive and apparently unoccupied grazing areas, but also the increase in security as the hostile bands of Indians and Comancheros were being controlled by the American military. Many of these Hispanic buffalo hunters would eventually decide that a permanent move into the vast eastern space would be an opportunity to advance themselves economically and to break from the traditional long-lot confined land subdivisions of the valleys where their families were living.³

The knowledge that the survey system had opened this area for settlement and that much of the land did not appear to be occupied, led to the movement of the adventurous Hispanic population into the canyonlands, river valleys, and the mountainous highlands. Juanita Miera Vigil, whose father founded Miera Plaza along the Tramperos Creek, related that "my father was a surveyor and knew that the area was open (for settlement)... . He moved here to the open country with two uncles in 1873 to homestead a place called 'La Placita'. He was looking for good sheepland and grazing land. They came in on ox wagons, leaving the women and children in Los Alamos (San Miguel County). They brought sheep with them and filed on 160 acres at first... later another 160. Many relatives came right after and built stone houses. The Placita springs was a beautiful place...plenty of fruit trees and wild-flowers. Small ditches from the springs fed the apples and peaches."⁴

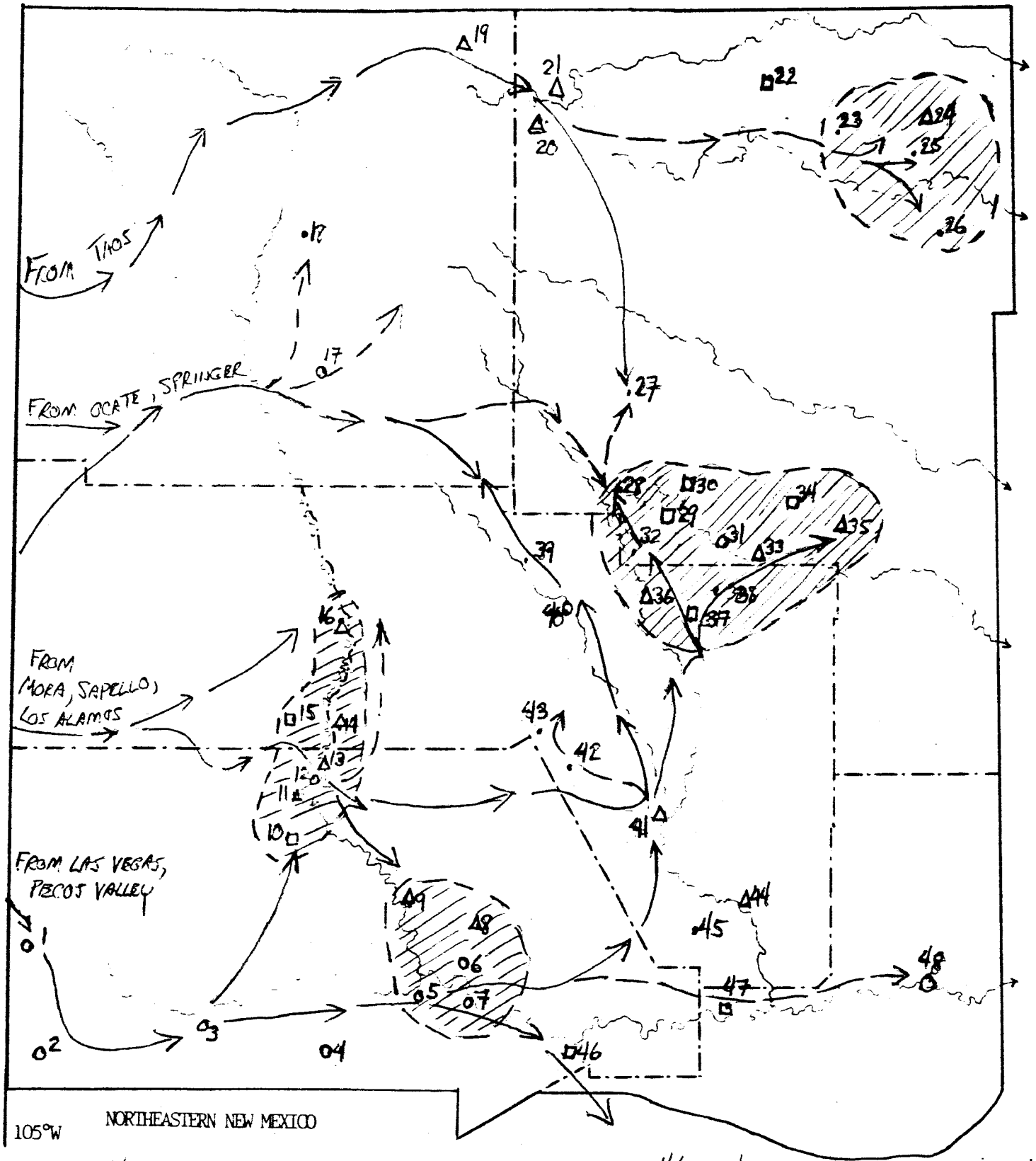
Evidence has unfolded a definite staging area of this movement into the northeast during the 1870's and 1880's. Interviews with members from pioneer hispanic families indicated that their grandparents shifted from the Rio Grande and upper Pecos valleys to the area between Las Vegas and Mora. It was from this area that they moved toward the Red River (Rio Colorado) which was the name given to the Canadian River at that time. Several interviewees specifically pointed out the small valley settlements of Los Alamos and Sapello as hearths of the immigrants. A few others identified Mora as the place from which their relatives pressed eastward.⁵ Baptism records from the Holy Family Parish in Roy (Harding County)⁶ of 249 people who were married between 1918 and 1938 in the churches and missions on the llano, show that a large proportion of the baptisms prior to 1900 had occurred in the settlements of western Mora and San Miguel counties. Forty-four of the marriage partners had been baptised at Mora, with most of the baptisms occurring between 1860 and 1890. Fourteen had been baptised in the small communities surrounding the village of Mora and sixteen more were from the northern area of Mora County in the communities of Ocate and Wagon Mound. Only thirteen of these eastern marriage baptisms had occurred in western Colfax County (at Springer, Maxwell, and Raton) between 1890 and 1910, and ten had been baptised in the Rio Grande Valley (Taos, Santa Fe, and Espanola) between 1880 and 1905.

Few of those who were married in the 1930's had been baptised west of the Canadian River. From 1895 to 1915 a large number of baptisms had been

held in the valley of the Canadian River at Sabinoso (21) and at Canon Largo and Plaza Armenta (7). After 1895 practically all baptisms of marriage partners occurred in the area where the marriage was being consummated. Forty-six of these had been recorded at Albert, Bueyeros, and the surrounding missions, with another fifty-two recorded at Roy, Mills, and Mosquero.

This sequence of incomplete baptism records provide an interesting chronology of movement onto the eastern llano of Hispanic Catholics between 1880 and 1920. The route to Harding County (formed from Mora and Union counties in 1921) and the Tramperos Creek area of Union County appears to have followed a distinct pattern. From staging places in Mora County, in which people from the Rio Grande drainage would occupy for only a few years, pioneer families would move with the stock and household goods into the Canadian River Valley as a first stage of penetration between 1870 and 1900. The routes that were identified as the main avenues into the valley were along the Mora River or by descending the western escarpment of the piedmont via the old fort road through Chaperito to the Conchas Valley. Once they had descended from west to east into the valley they would disperse along the valley floor, anchoring their villages along the Canadian or Conchas rivers and some of the tributaries.

Post Office data ⁷ supports this movement into the lowlands and the establishment of communities at that time. Numerous territorial post offices were formed in the 1870's in areas no longer controlled (or formerly controlled) by the large cattle companies. If we may assume that a post office function is not added to an area until there is sufficient population to be served, ~~then~~ ^{then} we may attach the opening date of a post office to the date that a settlement becomes a community. This function was added to Cabre Springs (1878), Chaperito (1875), Gallinas Springs (1874), La Cinta (1877), San Hilario (1878), San Lorenzo (1876), Tequesquite (1879), and Tramperas (1879), reflecting the early movement of population into the Canadian lowlands and further eastward. Once the people had moved into an area they would establish sizable placitas (such as San Lorenzo, Sabinoso, Canon Largo, Plaza Armenta, and Plaza San Felipe) consisting of several related families clustered near a spring and in an area with sufficient bottomland for farming...some of it by irrigation. Most of the farm crops raised on these lowland floodplains consisted of frijoles, chiles, and cane sorghum. ~~Most~~ ^{A lot of the} families also maintained a small irrigated plot of fruit trees. Farming wasn't the most significant



HISPANIC SETTLERS FROM THE WEST:
1873-1900

→ routes documented
- - → routes undocumented

.m = settlements established by Hispanics between 1870-1900
(Refer to table which follows)
Hispanic Core by 1900

○ 1870's
△ 1880's
□ 1890's

SETTLEMENTS ESTABLISHED BY
HISPANIC PIONEERS: 1870 - 1900

map key	name	post office established	map key	name	post office established
1	Chaperito	1875	26	Moses	(1909)
2	Gallinas Springs	1874	27	Don Carlos	---
3	Cabre Spring	1878	28	Airola	(1905)
4	Garita	1879	29	Cerrito Blanco	---
5	San Lorenzo	1876	30	Beenham	1890
6	La Cinta	1877	31	Tramperas (Garcia Plaza)	1879
7	San Hilario	1878	32	Telesfora	(1901)
8	Tajon	1889	33	Miera	1889
9	Alamocito (El Cuervo)	1888	34	Garcia	1892
10	Sanchez	1898	35	Clapham	1888
11	Sabinoso	(1914)	36	Baca	1884
12	Canon Largo	---	37	Bueyeros (Vigil)	1894
13	Rio Mora	---	38	Reyes	(1910)
14	Plaza Armenta	---	39	Pita	---
15	Alamitos	---	40	Tequesquite	1879
16	Plaza San Felipe	---	41	Gallegos	1884
17	Chicoso (Rael)	1876	42	Ramon	(1911)
18	Tinaja	---	43	Old Mosquero	---
19	Trinchera	1882	44	Genova	1884
20	Los Alamos	---	45	Rael	---
21	Folsom (Mexican Plaza)	1888	46	Charco	1893
22	Travesilla	1892	47	Marguerita	1891
23	Pacheco	---	48	Hogadero (Red River Springs)	1878
24	Martinez	1889			
25	Atencio	(1910)			

economy of these settlers as most herded sheep following the transhumant pattern of upland pasturage in the summer (as long as the pasture was available) and canyon slopes and bottomlands for grazing and shelter in the winter. The homestead would sometimes consist of as little as forty acres at the spring and a possible extension of or a refile for acreage at the upland areas around the depression lakes...some of which held water all year round. The sheltered canyons appeared to be a suitable location for the combined economy of the Hispanic farmer-herder. However, all of those who can recall early settlement in the canyonlands also can recall the uncontrolled violence of sequent floods, many of which would destroy the crops and housing. Following several occurrences of this hazard would convince many of the settlers to search for land in the areas outside of the canyons.

As the settlers frequently grazed their herds as far east as the Texas border, many new places with strong springs during the summer period became known to the Canadian lowlands herders. Some of the people from the Sabinoso-Canon Largo settlements departed as early as 1880 and extended their movements into the Ute Creek-Tramperos Creek areas of Union County. Tramperas and Tequesquite were two of the earliest settlements in the eastern llano area with a postal service, but there were many more people filing on land in other areas around 1880. These land ownership claims show up on county title records. Both postal records and land titles do not accurately relate the settlement chronology, they simply reveal that the area was occupied at that particular time. A lot of the areas had been occupied earlier by cattle companies. The post offices were added when the population increased sufficiently to warrant one. Some of these early Hispanic clusters and their post office dates were Clapham (1888), Miera (1889), Gallegos(1884), and Genova (1884).

By 1900 there were four major Hispanic core areas in the northeastern region. Two clusters existed along the Canadian River with one centered around Sabinoso and Canon Largo at the mouth to the Canadian Canyon and the confluence with the Mora Canyon. The other was near San Lorenzo and San Hilario close to the confluence of the Canadian and Conchas rivers. There was a large concentration of Spanish-speaking settlers around the Ute Creek-Tramperos Creek area and a smaller and more dispersed settlement of Hispanics in the northeastern portion of Union County near the Corrum,pa Creek.

Along the Canadian River the settlements were more compact than those that were founded further east. It has not been made clear to this reporter how residents were able to file on homesteads in this area and continue to reside in nucleated settlements. One interviewee⁷ suggested that the plazas formed initially and that only temporary shelters were erected on the land which the family was filing on. Sometimes no attempt was made to demonstrate occupancy of the filing land as the land commissioners and their agents were very lax in reviewing lands in or near the canyons. All of the Hispanic families in the rural areas of the northeast did file for homesteads and the success rate on proving-up the claims (meeting the government requirements) was significantly higher than that of the Anglo families who came later.

With the bottom land occupied and homesteaded by 1900, ~~the~~ ^{there} remained large tracts of highland plains that awaited the land rush. The llano between the Tramperos and the Dry Cimarron, from the Tramperos south to the Canadian, and from the Ute west to the Canadian began to fill up rapidly with settlers from the east between 1905 and 1920.

Those Who Came From the East

Most of the narratives about homesteading in New Mexico concentrate on the westward movement of the people from homelands in the midwestern and eastern areas of the United States. These are the pioneers who have been popularized in the literature and on film as the farmers who tamed the prairies. The literature which recruited the settlers, whether it originated by the railroads or the territorial government, or if it was simply an appeal in a church newsletter, was almost entirely directed to the people living east and north of New Mexico. New Mexico was promoted to these potential homesteaders as a limitless place of agricultural production with a climate that is designed to cure all health impairments. The following is an example of the notices that people in small communities of the midwest were reading during the first decade of the twentieth century.

"...New Mexico is not an arid waste, but a vast region of almost unlimited resources; with literally millions of acres of irrigatable land, many millions more of land which may be cultivated profitably without irrigation... . The so-called dry-farming method has brought a wide extent of land under cultivation in northeastern and eastern New Mexico. This system and its application in New Mexico is described in detail in a pamphlet, Dry Farming in New Mexico, which will be mailed free...upon application to the Bureau of Immigration." 9

Many families in the Midwest had children who were reaching adulthood (21 years) with little land available for them to settle on. For them the millions of open acres must have seemed especially attractive. Many people were also being diagnosed for consumption (TB) and other respiratory ailments which could only be arrested by moving to a high, dry, and sunny environment.

Sometimes the recruitment of settlers would follow a functional format, such as the promotion of a community centered around a church. Amistad, for example, was promoted throughout the upper Midwest in the Congregational Church magazine. The minister who advertised the land (also in the church magazine of the Methodists) marketed the area as a perfect location for a frontier Christian settlement. His descriptive promotions brought in a large population of Congregationalists and Methodists as well as a supply of forty ministers who filed on the land. According to Christine Brahms, there was ²⁴⁰⁰~~5100~~ a resident population of some thirty-five old maids (any woman over

21 years who qualified to file on land)... "the proper ingredients for a Christian homestead community".¹⁰

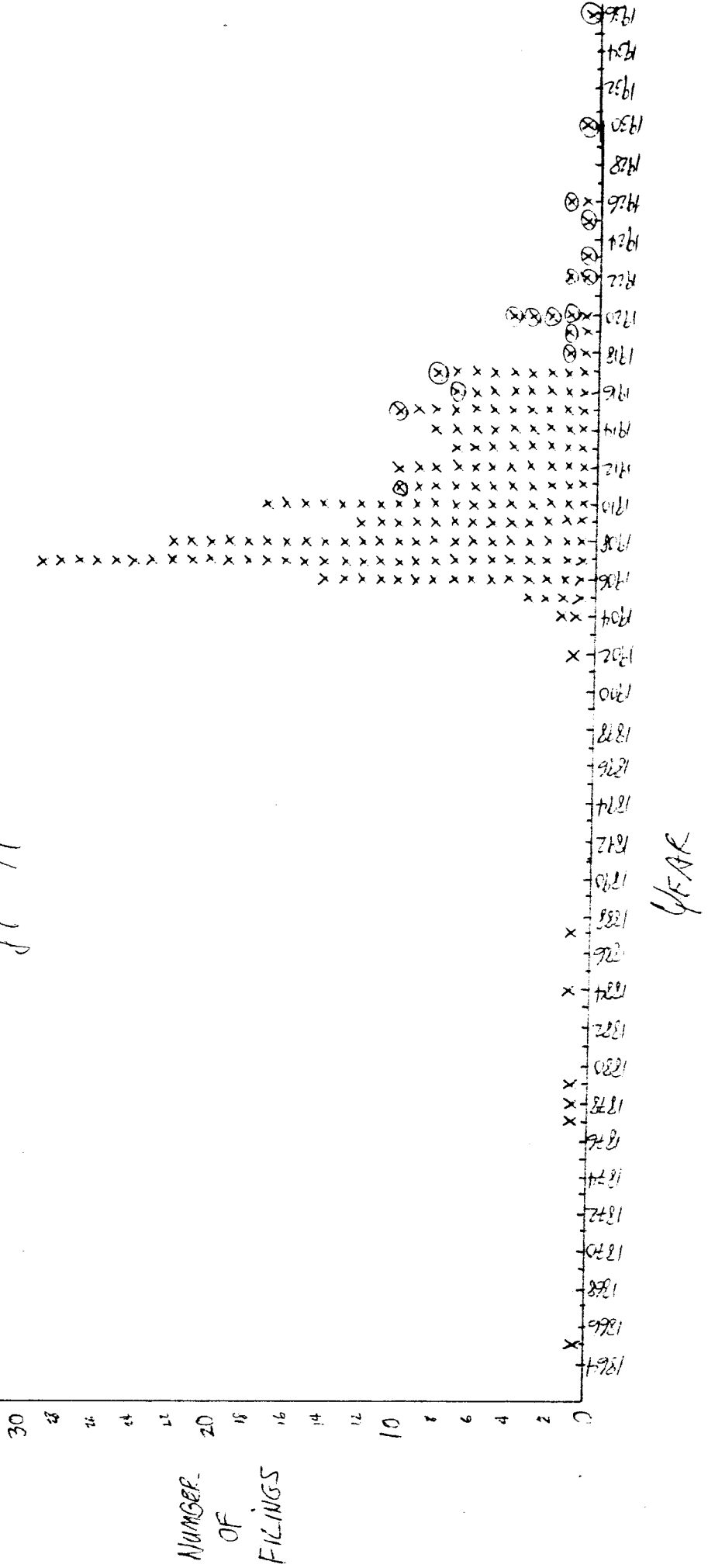
No matter what attracted the settlers from the area east of New Mexico, they all appeared to have come at once. Land title records and oral histories imply that the land was not homesteaded on a phased basis. Practically the whole area was swarmed over between 1905 and 1915. Bearing in mind that the proving-up period following a filing date was five years until 1912 (when it was reduced to three years), most of the land would have been under private ownership by 1920. A scan of 196 family histories from Union and Harding counties demonstrates that there was a time gap of about fifteen years from the close of the Hispanic settlement shift from the west and the dates of when the surge of homestead filings began by the Anglo settlers from the east. Six of the family histories that were reviewed covered settlers who were on the land prior to 1890 (four in the Dry Cimarron, one at Bueyeros, and one at Tramperas) and all of them had moved into the northeast from Colorado or from Mora and Colfax counties. ^{over half of} The remaining 190 families arrived and filed between 1906 and 1910. Only seven of the sample filed on land between 1900 and 1905, leaving that period from 1890 to 1905 with very little homesteading activity in the northeast.

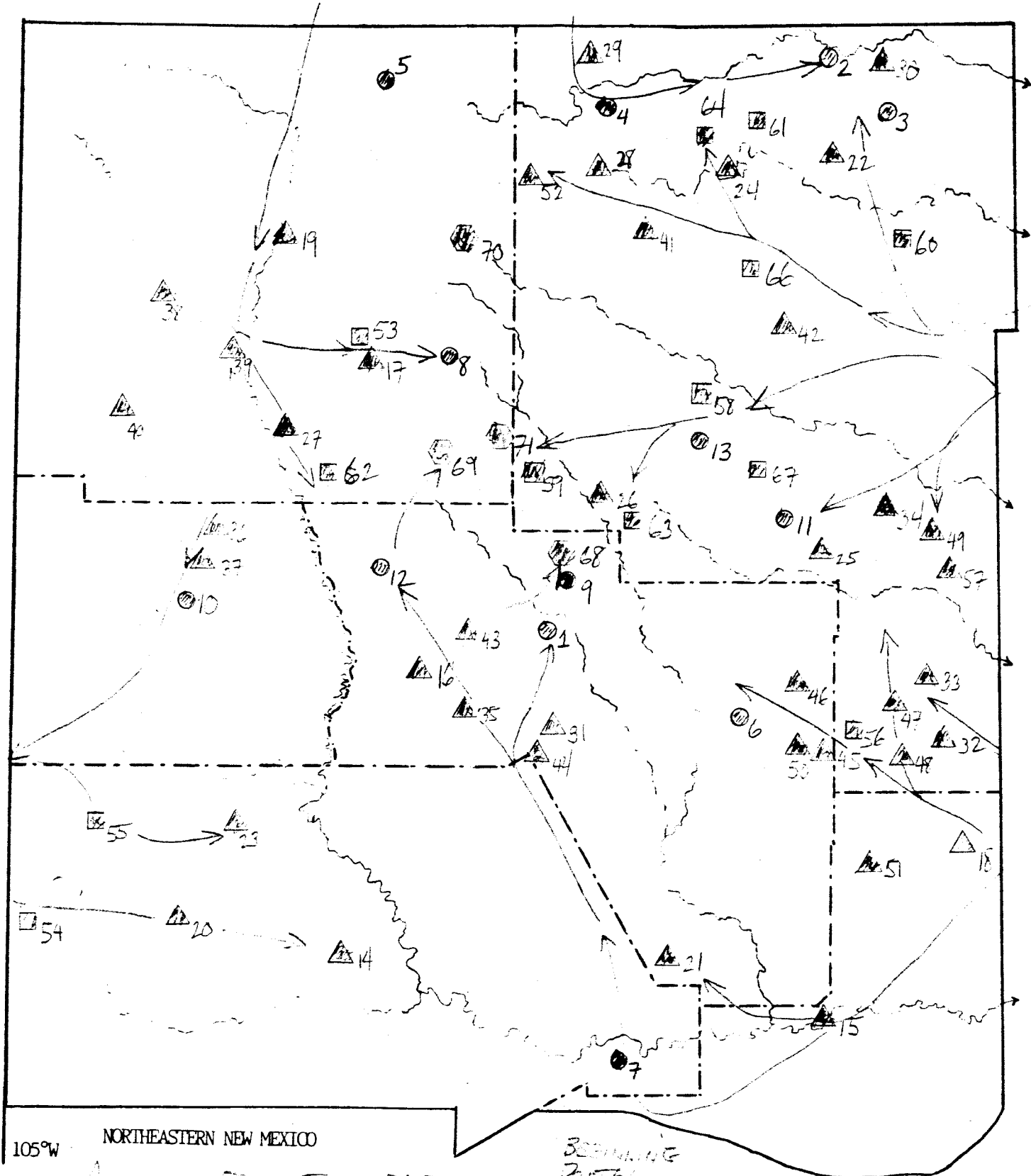
Most of the published and recorded accounts were written or recited by families who came to New Mexico to farm and they would have arrived after a massive promotion scheme had been conducted throughout the country. The railroads, which were great land promoters, had their trackage and sidings well in place by 1900 and would have been anxious to work with the territorial government on advertising free land and townsites. ^{and in} By the response time, it is expected that most of the promotional literature must have been circulating between 1900 and 1905. A possible reason for the lack of family histories associated with the earlier ranching period is that many of the individual ranchers, as well as the large corporate cattle companies, went bankrupt during the beef depression and severe weather conditions between 1884 and 1900. Many of those families and descendants who abandoned the northeast over a century ago would any longer reside in the area or be available to write an account of the family in a local book of family histories.

The map, constructed from post office opening dates, provides a reasonable portrait of the sequence of Anglo settlement. In most cases the post office appeared almost immediately as the area was settled. There was a slight geo-

FILINGS ON THE LAND ACCORDING TO
 196 FAMILY HISTORIES FROM UNION AND
 HARDING COUNTIES: 1865 - 1936

⊗ - land was purchased by settler
 instead of filing for homestead





105°W

NORTHEASTERN NEW MEXICO

ANGLES FROM THE EAST
1900-1930

→ General Direction
of Movement into the Northwest
From the East.

3300' LINE
PARTIAL
DATES

- - 1890's
- △ - 1900's
- - 1910's
- - 1920's

Chronology of Anglo Settlement
Post Office Openings on the Northeast
Plains

1890's	Postal Date	1900's	Postal Date
1. Albert	1890	14. Trementina	1901
2. Valley	1890	15. Logan	1901
3. Leighton	1890	16. Roy	1901
4. Kimball	1890	17. Slagle	1901
5. Bell	1891	18. Nara Visa	1902
6. Leon	1892	19. Hebron	1902
7. Johnson	1892	20. Corazon	1903
8. Chico	1895	21. Bryantine	1903
9. Dehaven	1895	22. Cuates	1903
10. Melvin	1895	23. Gonzales	1904
11. Barney	1896	24. Corrupa	1905
12. Mills	1898	25. Holland	1905
13. Pasamonte	1899	26. Airola	1905
		27. Taylor	1905
		28. Des Moines	1906
		29. Emery Gap	1906
		30. Johnson	1906
		31. Gould	1906
		32. Centerville	1907
			1907
		33. Amistad	1907
		34. Thomas	1907
		35. Solano	1907
		36. Nolan	1908
		37. Levy	1908
		38. Colfax	1908
		39. French	1908
		40. Miami	1908
		41. Grande	1908
		42. Mt. Dora	1908
		43. Lucas	1908
		44. Mosquero	1908
		45. Dale	1908
		46. Cone	1908
		47. Havden	1908
		48. Emberson	1908
		49. Vance	1908
		50. Rosebud	1909
		51. Lockney	1909
		52. Dedman	1909

1910's	Postal Date	1920's	Postal Date
53. Brackett	1910	68. Yates	1922
54. Mishawaka	1910	69. Pittsburg	1924
55. Cherryvale	1910	70. Cunico	1927
56. Stonehaven	1910	71. Farley	1929
57. Sedan	1910		
58. Patterson	1910		
59. Harrington	1910		
60. Wanette	1910		
61. Guy	1910		
62. Vernon	1911		
63. Delores	1913		
64. Pleasant Valley	1914		
65. Tate	1914		
66. Sofia	1914		
67. Pennington	1914		

* numbers are keyed to locations
on the accompanying map

graphical variation in the filing dates in that the areas immediately east, northeast, and south of Clayton (Union Ridge, Apache Valley, Seneca, and New Home) were all filed on prior to 1910 whereas the other areas farther south of Clayton and northwest toward Des Moines were largely homesteaded over a period from 1908 to 1915. The only area which appears to have been settled at a truly later date is the Gladstone-Farley region where most families did not file on the land until after 1915. They were still filing in this latter area until 1930.

Data does not appear to support any theory that homesteading followed a pattern related to the quality of the land. The clayey soils around Amistad were filed on at the same time that the sand hills around New Home and Thomas were being occupied. Even the stabilized sandy dunes area around Obar was settled at the same period as the shallow soils overlaying the basalt flows around Grenville and Sierra Grande Valley. Interviewees implied that the overriding concern of the settlers may have been the condition of the existing grass cover rather than the reaction of the soils to the plow.

Some of the confusion related to the lack of chronology in the settlement of the northeast by immigrants from the eastern areas is that most of the major railroads had their routes in place and land offices located at each station stop. The filing dates were more relative to access to the railroad land office and a realtor than to the systematic phased settlement evolution. The county land office in Clayton or Roy apparently had little control over the areas that were being filed on. The initial record keeping was left at the local control with the final confirmation occurring when the fees were recorded at the land office.

Origins of the Eastern Nesters

Most of the interviewees would describe the origins of their neighbors and families in four words: Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, and Missouri. These are also the most accessible states to the lands of the northeast. Only at one place, Amistad, was it claimed that most of the settlers came from the Midwest (Michigan, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, and Missouri) as distinguishable from the Southwest (Texas, Oklahoma, and Arkansas). This clarification, which came from all four information sources at Amistad, indicated an awareness that Congregationalists and Methodists came mainly from the upper Midwest and not from the Baptist country of the Southwest.

The recorded family histories indicated the origins of most of the pioneer families who settled in Union and Harding counties. Of the 159 family records surveyed, 51 (28.5%) reported that they came from Texas and 44 (24.6%) indicated an origin in Oklahoma. The other major origins of the homesteaders in this sample were Missouri (16.2%) and Kansas (11.2%). Although it would appear logical that the immigrants would come from the bordering states in order to reduce the cost of the move and to decrease the trauma of relocating in a new area, the records do not indicate that this was necessarily the case.

For a large number of immigrants, the shift to New Mexico represented just another phase of a step-wise migration. Most of the homesteaders were born during or immediately after the Civil War period in places such as Tennessee, Illinois, Kentucky, Indiana, Ohio, and Pennsylvania...places far removed from the Southwest. Their families had migrated during the late 19th Century to locations in Kansas, Missouri, Texas, and Oklahoma where they had filed on land. Many of the Oklahoma settlers had arrived during the great land rush on the Cherokee Strip in the 1890's. The children of a lot of these families had been born in the 1870's and 1880's and were approaching filing age around the turn of the century. As most of the land in the area of their parents was occupied, the search for land for homesteading focused on places where new land was opening up. If several of the family (siblings or cousins) had reached filing age together, they may move as a group in order to file conterminous claims in an open area on the frontier. Many homesteaders travelled to northeastern New Mexico as a group and communally filed (even to the point of actually residing in one place on only one of the claims) in one area. It was not unusual in the interviews for the interviewee to refer to the family hearth as Illinois or Kentucky when further investigation would uncover that grandfather had a place in Oklahoma or Texas and that dad had actually travelled from the neighboring state to their new claims in New Mexico.

Most of the settlers travelled by immigrant cars on the railroad to the station nearest to their destination. The immigrant cars were essentially converted box cars that were designed to carry stock and the farmers' equipment and household goods. One passenger was allowed to accompany the freight on its' slow journey. Payment for shipping included stops to feed, water, and exercise the stock. There were few facilities for the passenger with the exception of one report of a crude bathroom facility in the corner of the boxcar. The remainder of the family, usually the women, elderly, and the children, travelled

as a group seperately in a passenger train. The passenger trains would normally arrive before the immigrant cars and the family would wait at a hotel near the proper siding for the arrival of the family goods. The Texline, Romero, and Nara Visa hotels were important gateway facilities for the families arriving from the east.

There were travellers, primarily from Texas, Oklahoma, and Kansas, who travelled to the northeast by covered wagon up to as late as the 1920's. Although the tales of travel are much more dramatic by those who came by wagons, the time consumed at a travel rate of ten to twenty miles per day did not appear to compensate for the low rates of renting an immigrant car. A family from Illinois shipped their entire farm and household good to New Mexico on a railroad immigrant car for less than \$100.00

The Settlement Process

Normally the person interested in claiming land in New Mexico would arrive singly or accompanied by a few relatives or by members of the community where his family was living. They would hire a land realtor who was supposed to be knowledgeable about land parcels that were still available. The realtor would accompany the homestead clients to as many sites as they had the ability to pay for. The realtor's fee was not by commission on land sales, but on the time and distance associated with the land search. There is little evidence of legally double-claiming quarter and half-sections of land in the northeast by two people filing on the same piece of land. It is possible that the realtors and land commissioners had a hierarchical filing and recording system which was efficient. As mentioned previously, rural land commissioners were placed in communities according to the intensity of filings. In the early stages it would not be unusual for realtors from two different origins to overlap in showing the land to clients for filing. The filing offices, which were somewhat transient, did not have defined jurisdictions and the claims on the land would often be processed from the location of the realtor's office. There was a time factor from the marking of the land claim and the recording of it in the central land office at Folsom (later at Clayton). Cairns left in the field by the first claimants would be ignored or moved to another site by a later claimant who believed that they could get a claim registered quicker. ¹¹ Later arrivals would find local residents who would help them secure their claim.

Once the claim was filed and a filing fee paid, the claimant was permitted a six-month leave to gather their belongings and occupy the claim. Some claimants would prepare some form of housing and would

possibly till and seed some land prior to returning for the rest of the family. If housing was constructed, it would be the simplest basic temporary structure: either a small frame claim shack or a small half or full dugout. In most cases housing wasn't started until the arrival of the family and the farmer had his wagon available to haul materials. It was not unusual for the prairies to be dotted with tents for shelters until a proper structure could be put into place. By far, the most available "poor-man's" temporary housing was the earth-sheltered concept called a dug-out. The advantages of the dugout far outweighed those of any other structure that the homesteader built on the plains. Unfortunately the dugout would only be used as a house until a "proper" gabled structure could be built above ground.

For a dugout the farmer would remove sufficient dirt to scoop out a rectangular area that would vary in scale from ~~#####~~ as little as 10 by 15 foot sides to as much as 20 by 30 foot sides. The dugout was usually designed to be narrow and small in order to be easier to roof. The footing for the roof (or for the walls if it is a half-dugout) is a foot or two outside of the rectangular hole to reduce the possibility of wall collapse. Most of the dugout sites reviewed for this survey were dug as deep as three to six feet (for a half dugout) and up to eight feet for a full dugout. The roof was usually bowed to provide for rainfall runoff and a shingle or tarpaper covering to reduce leakage. The walls of the single room would frequently be of plastered mud or sometimes covered with thin cotton sheets or with wagon tarp. All of the dugouts had a staired entryway, and, after a winter snowstorm or two, many of those with open stairs would have unusual covered entryways that would stick up out of the plains. These entryways would

often be the only indication (with the exception of a stovepipe) that there was a dwelling on the claim. Mr. Vigil, whose family had settled over 30 years earlier in the Tramperos Valley said, "it was open country until the people came from the east where they had learned about land for homesteading... (came) in covered wagons with little girls and cows. They didn't have nothing... and those Anglos dug holes to live in." ¹² The Hispanic homesteaders had constructed their homes from cut rock and located them near springs in the wind-sheltered areas of the canyons. They had a difficult time accepting that a whole population was willing to live on the windswept llano in uninsulated or unsealed frame shacks or in "gopher holes", and with only unpotable water in depression basins as a local resource. ¹³

Many of the homesteaders were able to establish a crop at both their origin area and at the site of their homestead in the first year. Some of them were able to hold onto the former property for a year or two as insurance on their move to a new soil and climate area. Some of the homesteaders would return to the old hearth and harvest a crop, market some for cash, and return with the rest to New Mexico. This practice could only be continued until he had broken sufficient land at the homestead to meet all of his needs.

Once established in the local community, the homesteader had to break the land and reside (not necessarily survive) on the land for a period of five years. By 1909 the settler could expand his holdings to 320 acres if the land bordering his homestead became available, and by 1912 the period to show proof of residence was reduced to three years. Although it was never clear how much sod had to be turned over, it was generally agreed to be around ten percent of the holdings. One settler

did say that it was 40 acres on a half section of land at the time of proving-up. Either figure would suffice to demonstrate that the land was the basis of support for the family. The tillage figures had very little to do with the proof of a families' existence on a homestead. The male head of the household would frequently seek seasonal employment for cash to support the homestead, and, if the crop market was depressed, the farm would frequently receive more cash from the sale of cream and livestock. Interviewees indicated that the sale of cream was the most dependable source of income for a homesteader and the reason most of the farmers maintained a small dairy herd. The cream was seperated from the milk at the farm, collected by the mail route carrier, and shipped to the mines in New Mexico and Colarado. The skim milk that remained was an excellent feed base for the hogs.

Once the farmer felt he had accomplished all that was required of him to show proof of occupation on the land, he would advertise in a local paper that he was prepared to claim title to the homestead. If there were no contestants to the claim and the land commissioner was satisfied with the proof provided, the homesteader would receive free and clear a United States Government patented title to the land.

Tenure on the Land

Once established, the ability to hold on to the property required more than cash. It also required a resilience to adverse weather conditions and to human and livestock diseases. Often the world of the farmer appeared to follow cycles of promise and disaster: a good period of rainfall and crop production would be followed by drought or particularly harsh winters. It is for this reason that many of the homesteaders

had no intent of remaining on the land. The homestead would be sold or leased by the "nester" immediately upon the acquisition of a title. People from the communities on the plains indicated that there were always vacant houses on the land (as there is today) as a large number would leave the area as soon as they had completed their obligations. A lot of the quarter and half-sections would be acquired by those who intended to stay and were looking for ways to increase production in either cropping or livestock. By 1920, there were a number of homesteaders who had already acquired sizable properties by purchasing the titles from their neighbors when they became available.

- ¹ Clara ^{Tombs Harvey} ~~Tombs~~, Not So Wild The Old West, (1961) p. 219
- ² ^{Alfonso} Griego, Goodbye My Land of Enchantment, (1981) pp. 10-13.
- ³ Interview with Juanita Miera Vigil from Tramperas Plaza, November 7, 1985.
- ⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵ Interviews specifically identifying Los Alamos as a hearth were with Augustine Blea in Mosquero (November 21, 1985); Juanita Vigil of Tramperas or Miera Plaza (Nov. 7, 1985); and Canuto Gonzales of Bueyeros (Jan. 3, 1986). The M.E Gonzales family (Jan. 5, 1986) of Cerrito Blanco identified Mora as a staging area and Candido Baca (Dec. 5, 1985) traced his family to San Jose on the Pecos River west of Las Vegas. San Jose was also the hearth of the Griego family in Goodbye My Land of Enchantment who migrated into the Garita-Variadero area.
- ⁶ Data supplied through the courtesy of Father Douglas Raun
- ⁷ From the listings of nearly 1200 territorial Post Offices presented by Sheldon Dike in several continuing editions of New Mexico Historical Review in 1959.
- ⁸ Interview with Harding County historian Joyce Laumbach, Dec. 3, 1985.
- ⁹ New Mexico State Business Directory: 1907/1908, by the Gazetteer Publishing Company, Denver: 1909.
- ¹⁰ Interview with Christine Brams at Amistad, October 22, 1985.
- ¹¹ From interviews with homesteaders on the Caprock in Guay County in 1980.
- ¹² Interview with Juanita Miera Vigil of Tramperas, November 7, 1985.
- ¹³ Interview with Emilio Garcia from Garcia Plaza, October 23, 1985.