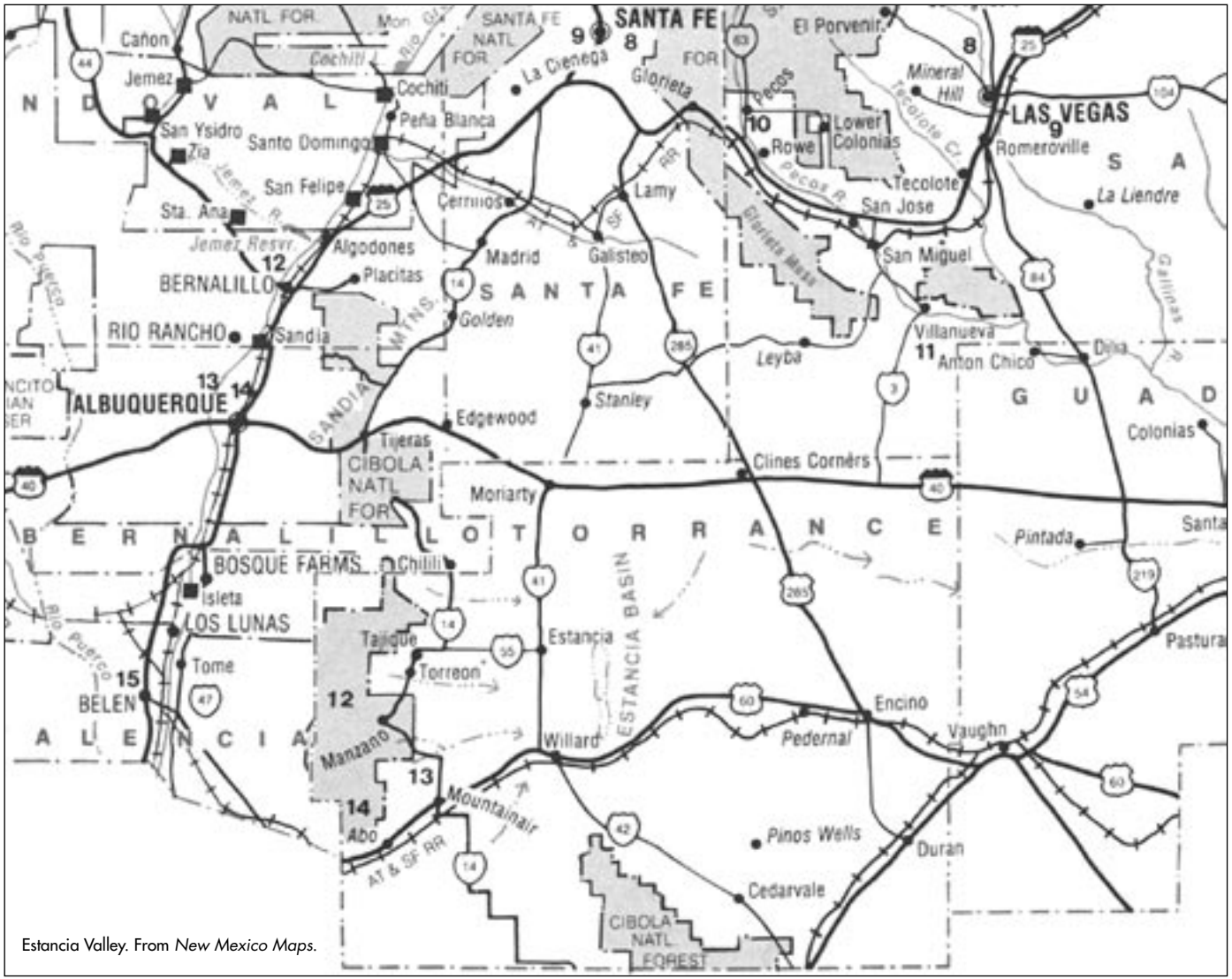
The Bassett Ranch

Homestead at the "Edge-of-the-Woods"



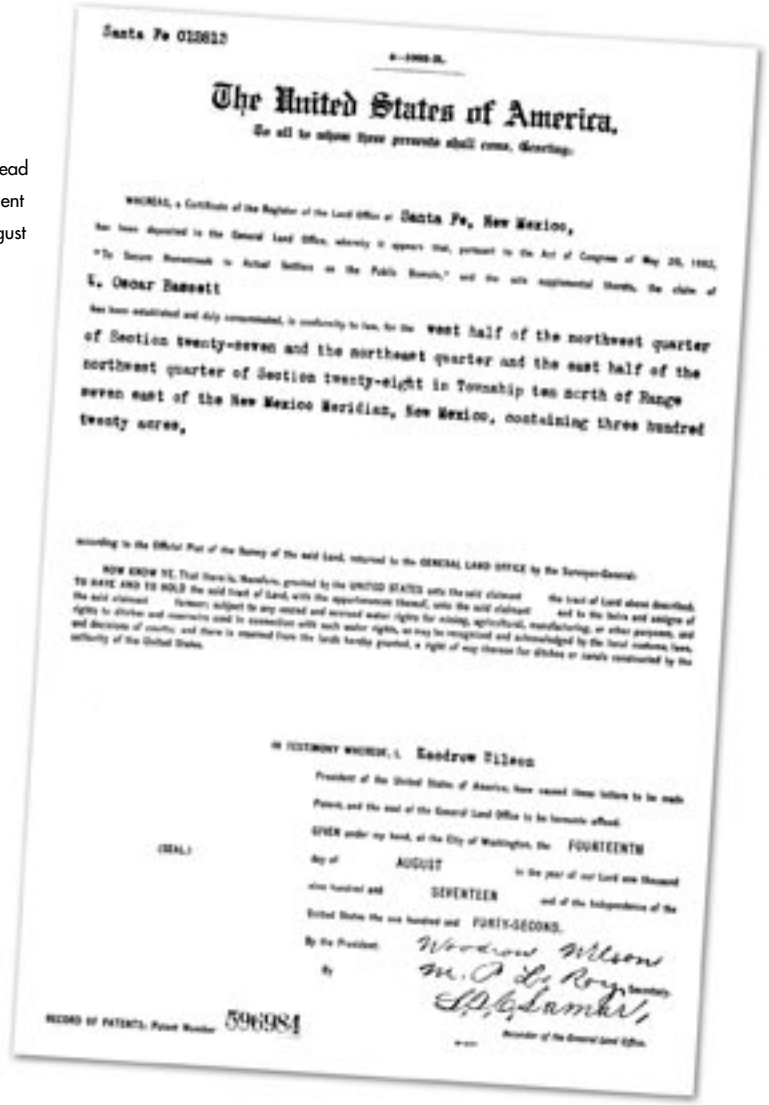
Estancia Valley. From *New Mexico Maps*.

Creating A Home

Traveling across the red hills of Oklahoma and the arid panhandle of Texas from their home state of Missouri, Amos Bassett, and his younger brother Oscar, arrived in the Estancia Valley in 1908 to set up a homestead and begin a new life as dry-land farmers. While Amos plotted his 320 acres, Oscar was not quite old enough to file for his own homestead patent so he returned to Missouri to tell his family about the prime pinto bean farming valley that lay east of the Sandia Mountains.

Within a few years, Oscar's parents, George and Sirena Bassett, together with Oscar's younger siblings, pulled up stakes and moved to the Estancia Valley to join Amos. In 1912, Oscar, now accompanied by his wife, Clara, returned to the area that would later become the community of Edgewood, New Mexico and filed a patent for 320 acres under the Enlarged Homestead Act.

Plank house built by Amos Bassett.



Santa Fe 013812

The United States of America,

To all to whom these presents shall come, Greeting:

WHEREAS, a Certificate of the Register of the Land Office at Santa Fe, New Mexico,

has been deposited in the General Land Office, whereby it appears that, pursuant to the Act of Congress of May 20, 1862, "To Secure Homesteads to Actual Settlers on the Public Domain," and the acts supplemental thereto, the claim of

E. Oscar Bassett

has been established and duly consummated, in conformity to law, for the west half of the northwest quarter of Section twenty-seven and the northeast quarter and the east half of the northwest quarter of Section twenty-eight in Township ten north of Range seven east of the New Mexico Meridian, New Mexico, containing three hundred twenty acres,

according to the Official Plat of the Survey of the said Land, returned to the GENERAL LAND OFFICE by the Surveyor-General:

NOW KNOW YE, That there is, therefore, granted by the UNITED STATES unto the said claimant the tract of Land above described; TO HAVE AND TO HOLD the said tract of Land, with the appurtenances thereof, unto the said claimant and to the heirs and assigns of the said claimant forever; subject to any vested and accrued water rights for mining, agricultural, manufacturing, or other purposes, and rights to ditches and reservoirs used in connection with such water rights, as may be recognized and acknowledged by the local customs, laws, and decisions of courts; and there is reserved from the lands hereby granted, a right of way thereon for ditches or canals constructed by the authority of the United States.

IN TESTIMONY WHEREOF, I, Woodrow Wilson

President of the United States of America, have caused these letters to be made Patent, and the seal of the General Land Office to be hereunto affixed.

GIVEN under my hand, at the City of Washington, the FOURTEENTH

(SEAL) day of AUGUST in the year of our Lord one thousand nine hundred and SEVENTEEN and of the Independence of the United States the one hundred and FORTY-SECOND.

By the President: Woodrow Wilson

By M. P. Le Roy, Secretary

L. G. Lamkin, Recorder of the General Land Office.

RECORD OF PATENTS, Patent Number 596984

1900
Pinto bean farming becomes popular in the Estancia Valley

1903
Santa Fe Central Railway service begins in the Estancia Valley

1906
Wood burning bean threshers introduced

1907
A.T. & E.F Belen-Cut Completed

1908
Amos & Oscar Bassett arrive in the Estancia Valley

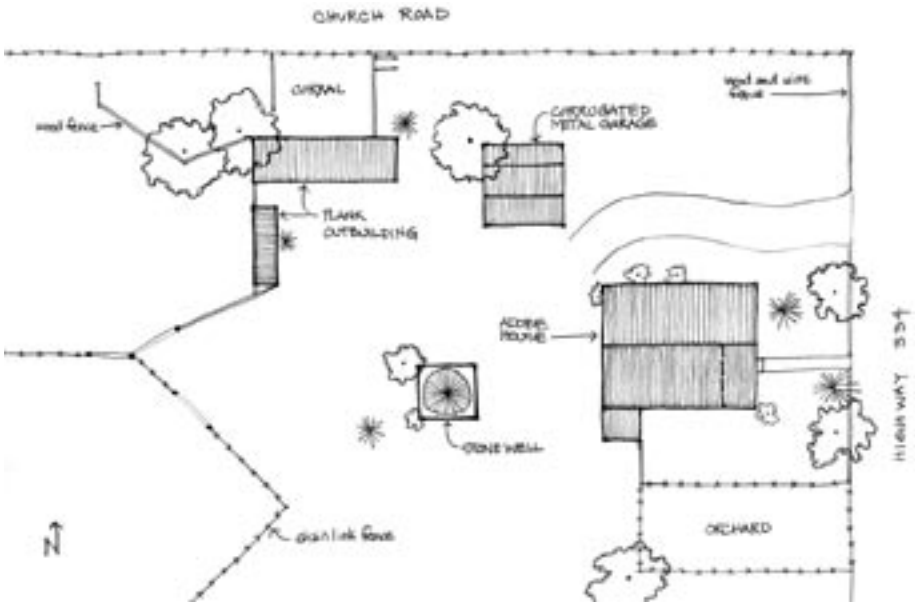
1909
Enlarged Homestead Act passed

Oscar Bassett house, southwest corner with room addition, 2006.

Detail of wood frame window and exposed adobe bricks at the Bassett house.

Bassett house and water well from the west, 2006.

Members of the Bassett family arrived in New Mexico on "immigrant trains" with all their worldly possessions packed into a boxcar rented from the railroad company. Unloading at the rail stop in Vaughn, some 55 miles to the southeast, they headed northwest to the community of "Venus" where Amos had patented his homestead. Oscar's first house was literally created from the earth, by excavating a "dugout" – a seven to eight-foot deep hole in the ground covered by a simple roof with a doorway to the outside. Ray Bassett, Oscar's son, explained the process: "They'd dig down, then they'd put a pine log down the center. Then they'd take the smaller stuff, the piñon stuff, and give it a slope. Then they covered it with dirt. And it was a warm building." This temporary structure was replaced by a simple plank house. These were made out of rough lumber sitting on a rock foundation. It had little or no insulation and plenty of gaps between the planks. Doris Morris, a descendent of the Moseley family and the Bassett's neighbor, remembers that these houses weren't very substantial, "The houses back then, you could throw somethin' through [them], a lot just had cracks in 'em."



Sketch map of the Bassett ranch, 2006.

1910
Estancia Valley Irrigation Company Founded

1912
Mechanical bean threshing machine introduced
New Mexico becomes 47th state

1913
George Bassett receives homestead patent

1914
World War I begins in Europe
Amos Bassett given Homestead Patent

1916
Stock Raising Homestead Act passed
Mechanical bean re-cleaner first used in the valley

1917
Oscar Bassett patents his homestead in Venus, NM

1918
Armistice declared

Bassett water well and tank, note sandstone enclosure, 2006.

Livestock corrals at the Bassett Ranch.

Livestock chute made of wood planks.

Sometime in the late 1920s, Oscar saved enough money to begin work on a more substantial house for his family, one that survives to the present day. The new house was a rectangular shaped, stuccoed adobe building with a gable roof that featured a center hall and eight small rooms. The roof was made of tin, and double-hung wood windows provided light to the interior. A front porch was later added to the structure. Oscar lived in this house until his death in 1966.

Water was pumped from a well on the property, first powered by a windmill and later, when electricity came to the valley in the 1950s by an electric pump. Oscar built a rather elaborate square enclosure around his well and water tank, which featured a high wall made from cut sandstone.

Other buildings on the property included a wood garage, animal stalls, corrals, and a livestock chute. The structures represent a time in the 1950s when Oscar gave up bean farming because of severe drought conditions and began small-scale ranching that included growing alfalfa for his livestock. Together with the Bassett house and well, these weather-worn, rustic outbuildings, now leaning precariously in their old age, are one of the few reminders of a time when the valley was still part of the "old West," when farming and cattle raising, rather than one-acre house lots and strip shopping centers, dominated the landscape.

A Sense Of Community

In the early twentieth century, the area around Edgewood, then known as Venus, was a much different looking place than it is today. Farm houses were few and far between, and one had to travel to the nearby towns of Moriarty or Stanley for shopping and business transactions. Oscar Bassett's house was one of only four along a five-mile stretch of road today known as State Highway 344. As John Bassett remembers, "You had this guy here, and a couple of miles away, another guy, and another guy. You know, they were sprinkled around, and that was the community. I mean they all knew

1920
James Bassett, Oscar's brother, receives homestead patent

1926
Construction of Route 66 begins

1927
Bassett Bean Company opens in Moriarity

1930
Drought in New Mexico begins

Before the Bassett Homestead

The Estancia Valley, while never densely populated, has been utilized for thousands of years by people of various cultures who have exploited the land's natural resources. Early "big-game" hunters were drawn to the area by its salt lakes and plentiful grasses which attracted a variety of animal species. The Pueblo Indians also used the area for hunting and gathering salt for their own use and trade. Although Spanish settlements concentrated along the eastern foothills of the Manzanos and Sandias they too utilized the valley for gathering salt and grazing their sheep. In fact, salt "mining" became an important commercial venture in the late nineteenth century when the New Mexico Salt Company in Estancia shipped up to 100 tons of salt per month. The region was also used as a route for cattle drives. The Slaughter/Stinson trails were used between 1880 and 1895 to bring herds westward from the panhandle of Texas. Nomadic Indian tribes, such as the Jicarilla Apache, Faraón Apache, and the Comanche used the region as a base for hunting, raiding, and trading with communities along the Rio Grande. Sheepherding in the valley became popular in the late 1800s as new immigrant families from Scotland, such as the Dunbars, McGillivrays, McIntoshs, and Frasers brought their herds with them. It was, however, the opening of public lands to homesteaders, such as the Bassetts, in the early 1900s that attracted the largest migration of people into the valley.

each other, whose place that was." When giving directions, local residents referred to a person's house or homestead. Doris Morris recalls, "And we didn't go by [named] roads back then, we went by places. It was either the AC place or Moseley's place, or the Bassett place . . ."

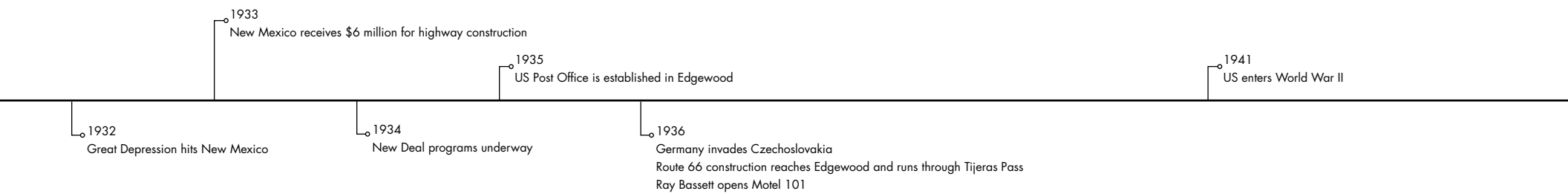
Over the years, the small communities, really just groups of homesteads, acquired names usually derived from a prominent family that lived there, such as Stanley, McIntosh, Willard, Barton, or Venus which was named after a local farmer's daughter. Other communities were named for geographical features, such as Mountain Valley, Estancia ("ranch"), Eastview, and Edgewood (Edge-of-the-Woods), which became a post office around 1935. Further to the west, in the Sandia and Manzano Mountains were old Hispanic communities such as San Antonio, San Pedro, Chilili, Tajiquie, and Torreon.

But communities were much more than just place names. In the wide open spaces of the Estancia Valley, churches, mostly non-denominational, and schools played a large role in developing a bond among neighbors. Building a school was always an early priority for the community. In the area around the Bassett homestead, two one-room schoolhouses, Venus No. 1 and Venus No. 2, served elementary school students. When ready to attend high school, the students went to nearby Moriarty or Stanley to continue their education. These schools were built by local labor with funds provided by government programs such as the New Deal's Works Progress Administration and help from private donations.

Schools, along with churches, also served as community centers where neighbors got together to hold political meetings, dances, and "pie suppers." Memorial Day was always celebrated with a get-together called "dinner on the ground," a pot-luck affair where people socialized and caught up on the latest local gossip. Young men and women, like J. C. and Doris Morris, often attended these social functions and met their future wives and husbands.

Making a Living

In order to "claim up" his homestead patent, that is to secure legal title to the land, Oscar Bassett had to build a house and live on the land. By the time of his arrival in 1912, a stretch of favorable weather years in the Estancia Valley was fueling a dry-land farming boom that would last another eight years or so. Farming pinto beans, a crop that thrived on dry-land farming techniques, was so productive that the nearby town of Mountainair was proclaimed itself to be the "Pinto Bean Capital of the World."



(Top) Planting pinto beans in the Estancia Vallley, date unknown. Photo by Lee Russell, courtesy of Library of Congress. (Above) In the 1930s and 40s, tractors became a more common sight in the valley, date unknown. Photo by Lee Russell, courtesy of Library of Congress.

New technology also helped the farmers increase their crop yields. While earlier methods for harvesting relied mostly on hand labor supplemented by horses, the introduction of new harvesting and threshing machines around 1912 greatly assisted those farmers who could afford the new equipment.

Pinto Bean Harvesting

Harvesting pinto bean plants, date unknown. Courtesy of Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

Planted in May, pinto beans were usually ready to harvest in September. Harvesting was a labor intensive activity requiring all members of the family plus hired hands to get the crop in. Bean cutting machines, pulled by a horse and, later, a tractor, cut the plants in rows. Three rows of plants were then piled together and picked up by a wagon. After moving them to a separate area and making one large pile, the plants were ready to be threshed. Before the invention of a threshing machine for pinto beans, the large pile of bean plants would be trampled by horses to remove the bean pods from the stalks. Workers then used pitchforks to toss the beans up in the air and allow the wind to separate the beans from the hulls. In 1906 a wood-burning threshing machine was introduced to valley farmers which greatly simplified the process. The bean plants were taken from the wagon and put into the thresher which separated the beans and hulls and deposited the bean into a sack ready for transport to the bean warehouse. Within a few years, threshing machines were powered by gasoline engines or tractors. The sacks of beans were taken to warehouses located in nearby towns, such as Barton, Edgewood, Stanley, and Moriarty. The beans were then cleaned and placed in 100 lbs. burlap sacks, loaded onto train cars and shipped to wholesale bean companies in New Mexico and southern Colorado.

Early threshing machine, date unknown. Courtesy of Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico.

Pinto bean thresher belonging to J.C. and Doris Morris.

1943
Railroad service from Estancia Valley to Santa Fe ends

1945
Atomic bomb tested at Trinity Site, New Mexico

1949
Bassett's last pinto bean crop

1950
Drought worsens in New Mexico
Korean conflict begins
Electricity reaches Estancia Valley
Oscar Bassett begins raising cattle

Check from the Bassett Bean Company, Courtesy of the Bassett family.

Bassett Bean Company warehouse, Edgewood, constructed in 1940s. Courtesy of the Bassett Family.

Home Life on the Farm

The isolated nature of homesteads located in the Estancia Valley in the early decades of the 20th century required self-sufficiency on the part of the farmers and their wives. While the men worked the fields, the women busied themselves tending gardens, housecleaning, minding the children, and when necessary helping in the fields. Although families would make periodic trips to small, country stores in Barton and Stanley for staples such as salt and sugar, it was necessary to raise your own cattle and chickens for meat and eggs. Milk cows were a "savior" as J.C. Morris put it. Not only would you have milk, cream, and butter for your family, but you could sell excess dairy products to companies such as the Trinidad Creamery Company in Colorado. Shipping by rail, the bean farmers would wait to receive their "cream checks." J.C. Morris laughs when remembering this, "It was a pittance compared to today, you know, but it was something."

Gardens were also important and in this dry country this meant having a well on your property. If the well ran dry or the pump broke down, you couldn't water your garden. Raising vegetables of course meant canning them each fall. As Doris Morris remembers, "We always canned. We canned green beans before they got ripe, when they were on the vine, we took them early. We called them 'snap beans'." They would also occasionally travel to the small farms in Albuquerque to trade for fruit. Farmers would exchange peaches, plums, and pears for pinto beans. Homestead wives would then can the fruit for the winter.

Before electricity arrived in the 1950s, homestead wives relied on kerosene lamps, which would send you to bed with eyestrain if you read too long by them, and gasoline-powered machinery to do the housework. There were gas-powered washing machines which had a flexible exhaust hose to send the noxious fumes out the door. And the washing machine didn't heat its own water rather the water was heated separately in an iron pot and then poured into the machine. The soap was handmade from back fat and lye. There were also a gasoline irons. They had a small tank and pressure pump that kept the flame lit and heated the iron. Doris Morris remembers her mother getting headaches from the gas fumes. Other irons were heated by laying them directly on the stove. Families were warmed in the winter by gasoline or wood-burning stoves. And, of course, the bathrooms were outside with toilet paper often an improvised commodity. "We used Sears Roebuck catalog, Penney's, whatever we could get," remembers Doris, who added that today's woman would have a difficult time being a homesteader's wife, "Girls nowadays could not survive."

1956
Interstate Highway Act passed
Federal Soil Bank Established

The Bassett family was involved in all aspects of the "bean business." While Oscar farmed the land, his brother, Ray, got into the warehousing and shipping side of the business, which he named "Bassett Bean Company." With a partner, Ray opened up a bean warehouse in the town of Moriarty in 1927. The business was successful, yet hectic – 30,000 one-hundred pound "gunny sacks" of beans were bagged and shipped each year. Small entrepreneurs in other nearby towns also prospered as demonstrated by the fact that there were six bean companies in the town of Moriarty alone. In a 1978 interview, Ray remarked that, "If you could grow anything, you could grow beans. And it was a cash crop. There was always a sale for them, even though they didn't bring in very much sometimes."

But dry-farming is a risky business and major droughts devastated the valley, first in the 1930s and later in 1950s. John Bassett put it, "that just pretty much wiped out everything, farmin'-wise." J.C. Morris remembers, "I've seen two mass exoduses of this valley. When I was boy, why, you'd ride over the countryside and there'd be dugouts abandoned where homesteaders lived and left. And again in the '50s when the drought came." Oscar Bassett persevered, however, and actually enlarged his land holdings by applying for additional acreage under the Stock Raising Homestead Act. The drought eventually took its toll, however, and in 1949 Oscar harvested his last crop of pinto beans.

Oscar quickly turned his attention to cattle-raising and began farming hay and wheat in the 1950s. The newly-passed federal legislation that created the Federal Soil Bank greatly assisted Oscar and his fellow farmers in the valley. The soil bank paid farmers $9.00 per acre to grow grasses such as alfalfa, and in the words of Ray Bassett, "[It] was the best thing [that] ever happened to this country." Scattered around the Bassett ranch today are artifacts of this period – a Minneapolis-Moline "Bale-O-Matic" hay baler manufactured in 1952, a Red River Special Separator made by the Oliver Farm Equipment Company, livestock chutes, and holding pens.

Getting From Here to There

The long periods of drought in the 1930s and 1950s caused many valley residents to leave the area. Others stayed, however, becoming sharecroppers, working for the railroad, or building new roads and highways. Getting from one place to another in valley was always an important concern for valley residents. Whether it was getting to school, an ice cream social, or transporting the all-important bean crop to market, the transportation systems that connected the neighboring communities to each other and to the larger towns and cities was vitally important.

Although there was a short-lived, north-south rail connection through Torrance and Santa Fe counties with stops in Willard and Stanley that lasted until the early 1940s, and a 28-mile stretch of rail line between Estancia and Moriarty which was in use until 1974, the primary mode of transportation for families like the Bassetts in the Estancia Valley was by wagon, automobile or truck. Government "make work" projects like the WPA in the 1930s greatly improved the local roads in Torrance County including Highway 344, which runs in front of the Bassett property. However, it was the development of a cross-country highway system in 1926, epitomized by U.S. Highway 66 that had a significant social and economic impact upon the people of the Edgewood area, including the Bassett family.

Prior to the arrival of U.S. 66, the area around Edgewood was served by little more than two-track wagon roads. It was especially difficult to travel west to Albuquerque through Tijeras Pass. The steep grades, rough roads, and unpredictable weather forced the local residents eastward towards smaller towns like Stanley and Moriarty. The main state highways through the Estancia Valley, like highways 41 and 19 connected the local communities with Santa Fe and Belen respectively.

1964
Vietnam War escalates

1965
Interstate 40 begins construction in Edgewood
Parts of Bassett Ranch sold off

1966
Oscar Bassett passes away

1969
US lands on the moon

Railroad shops in Estancia, early 1900s.
From *New Mexico's Railroads.*

Railroads in the Estancia Valley

In 1900, two Pennsylvania entrepreneurs, Francis J. Torrance and William H. Andrews, arrived in New Mexico and a year later founded the Santa Fe Central Railway and the Albuquerque Eastern Railway with a plan to provide rail service connecting the two New Mexican cities with El Paso through the Estancia Valley and its small economic centers of Estancia, Moriarty, and Stanley. Although construction started slowly, by 1903 the line was completed between the new town of Torrance (which connected the line to the El Paso and Northeastern Railway) and Santa Fe. That same year, a proposed 43-mile rail line from Moriarty to Frost (located on the eastern slope of the Sandias) and on to the San Pedro coal fields was started, but only eight miles were ever completed. There was also talk of extending the line to Durango, Colorado and eventually Salt Lake City. However, financial problems hampered the company's plans, and in 1918 it was reorganized as the New Mexico Central Railway. Despite the reorganization, economic difficulties continued to plague the company and in 1929 large sections of the line were abandoned. By 1943, only 28 miles of track between Moriarty and Estancia was in use. This line was abandoned in September of 1974. The remaining legacy of the Torrance – Andrews partnership is a now abandoned mining town named after Andrews in southeastern New Mexico and the small railroad stop of Torrance and the county of the same name which was created in 1903.

In 1926, improvements were started on existing roads in New Mexico to create U.S. 66. However, the original route of the highway did not attempt to cross Tijeras Pass. Instead it turned northward just west of Santa Rosa, looped through Santa Fe, entered Albuquerque from the north, and kept going south to the town of Los Lunas where it eventually headed west again. It wasn't until 1936 when highway engineers devised a route through the mountains that the famous east-west highway passed through Edgewood.

For many residents, the construction of the highway came just in time. In the 1930s, drought had made dry-land farming almost impossible and the possibility of work on the new highway meant they could keep their homes and small farms. As noted by long-time resident, Frank Davis, "When the bean crop failed in the valley in 1934, the only thing that saved us was the road jobs."

(Above) Ray Bassett's Motel 101, gas station, café, and souvenir shop, c. 1950s. Courtesy of the Bassett family. (Below) Ray Bassett's old Motel 101 building, 2006.

1974
Nixon resigns the Presidency

1977
Homestead Act of 1862 repealed

1981
The IBM PC introduced

The new highway also meant more people would need gasoline, food, and lodging as they traveled. Ray Bassett opened "Motel 101" on Route 66 which also offered fuel for your car, a place to eat, and a curios shop in which to buy authentic Southwestern souvenirs for your friends and family back home. Other small businesses soon followed. Elmer Bassett, one of Oscar's sons, worked as a manager at the newly built Stuckey's, where you could stop in for a "pecan log-roll."

Unlike later Interstate highway traffic, the cars and trucks on U.S. 66 moved at a slower pace, with often long gaps between vehicles. When asked about the Route 66 traffic before the construction of the Interstate, Eugene Bassett replied, "For one thing there wasn't all that traffic. You'd see the traffic go now and then. There wasn't a big, constant [line of cars]."

The new highway also meant an easier drive to Albuquerque through Tijeras Pass. Ray Bassett had just opened a Case Farm Machinery dealership in Edgewood, and the improved road enabled him to get parts; however, it also meant increased competition from dealers in the "big city." In 1944, Ray closed his Edgewood farm machinery business and opened a new store in Albuquerque. This move also coincided with the decrease in pinto bean farming in the valley. As Ray recalled, "We just got to where we just didn't have much to do [at the Edgewood store] . . . the business wasn't here anymore.

Ray Bassett's expanded warehouse and Case Farm Machinery office. Courtesy of the Bassett Family.

As the drought worsened in the 1950s, people took whatever jobs were available, and often had to move away to make a living. Ray Bassett went to work in the San Luis Valley in Colorado, and ran bean businesses in Fence Lake and Gallup, New Mexico. John Bassett remembers how the decline in farming affected his family, "Like my dad and uncle, they worked construction. You know, whatever would turn a dollar."

Job opportunities picked up in the early 1960s with the construction of another road – Interstate 40. Just as was the case some thirty years earlier, the men in Edgewood and surrounding communities were hired to work on this large, federally funded highway project, which lasted several years. But with the completion of this high-speed, limited access highway came more changes to the area. The Oscar Bassett farm was "chopped up," as John Bassett puts it, by the land taken for highway right-of-way. And cross-country vehicle traffic now whizzed by the little community of Edgewood, and people on their way to Albuquerque or Amarillo did not bother to stop any longer at the small gas stations, cafes, and curios shops.

Changing Times – Rural to Suburban

The completion of Interstate 40 meant it was even easier to get to and from Albuquerque. While this resulted in better access for Edgewood residents to the shops and stores in the city, it also meant that Albuquerque residents had easier access to the open spaces of Edgewood. Thus, by the mid-1970s people "discovered" the East Mountains and began buying property to build their "ranchettes" and make the commute to their jobs in Albuquerque.

1985
US Highway 66 decertified

1988
Clara Bassett, Oscar's wife, dies

1989
Berlin Wall falls and Cold War ends

1990s
Real estate market booms in the Edgewood area

As the real estate market boomed over the next several decades, the Bassett family found it difficult to resist selling off pieces of the original homestead. Eventually, the farm was reduced to a 70 acre triangle bounded on the south by the Interstate frontage road and house lots on the other two sides. But the Bassetts didn't give up on the land altogether. As the new century began, almost 100 years since their grandfather Oscar built that first crude dugout and planted his first crop of beans, his grandsons are still raising cattle. "We still graze it," said John Bassett. No one makes a living by simply "runnin' cows," anymore, but as John's brother Eugene notes, "Most of them guys kinda liked doin' that thing. I mean, they always had the cows, growed up with the cows, they kinda always, I mean that was something that they liked, enjoyed doin'."

Today, seventy-one percent of the Edgewood population works in Albuquerque. This fast-growing bedroom suburb has two major supermarkets, two automobile dealerships, a national-chain pharmacy, service stations and fast-food restaurants. Although modern schools have replaced Venus # 1 and # 2, and there are several more churches, they continue to be places where the community gets together, just as in the old days.

The old-timers have mixed emotions about all the changes. John and Eugene Bassett, Oscar's grandsons, don't like the changes, stating bluntly, "It's not for the better for me." On other hand, Ray Basset's son, Carroll, believes the changes have made life in the valley better. "I think it's good, because we have some real good people out here, and there a few negative things, but for the most part I like to see development. I like to see

2005
NMDOT proposes road improvements adjacent to Bassett Ranch

2004
Interstate 40 Interchange at Edgewood rebuilt

growth, and that's what this country is all about." Perhaps the most revealing testimony to the power of this place is the fact that J.C. and Doris Morris returned to the Edgewood area – "goin' back to your roots" as they explained it – after having to leave the valley during post-World War II "lean years." They came back for the simple reason that this place, with all its memories of good times and bad, is their "home."

There used to be a lot of places like the Oscar Bassett ranch around Venus, New Mexico. Places located on the "edge of the woods," where the mountains meet the plains. They were created by group of tenacious, hard-working families, such as the Bassetts, the Kings, the Morris', the Moseleys, and others, who hoped to make a better life through farming an unforgiving landscape. The place, characterized by a rural, hardscrabble lifestyle, has since evolved into a fast-moving, contemporary suburb that makes the "ole Bassett place" a bit of an anachronism – a place where we can only sit and wonder what it might have been like when the wind blew, the pump went dry, and the fields turned from green to brown. It's now a place almost lost in its own landscape.

(Opposite Page) 1954 aerial photo of the Bassett property. Route 66 cuts diagonally across the photograph. Highway 344 appears as the main north-south road. (Below) Present day aerial photo showing housing development and the impact of I-40 on the landscape.

References

Taped Interviews

1978 Ray Bassett by Fern Uekert, Paula Donner, and Diane Arnett-Stearley, Edgewood, NM Community Center.

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Carroll Bassett by Cynthia Martin, Edgewood, NM (June 23)
J.C. and Doris Morris by Cynthia Martin, Edgewood, NM (June 23)

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"The Historic and Architectural Resources of Route 66 Through New Mexico," David Kammer, New Mexico Historic Preservation Division, Santa Fe, 1992.

Photographs

Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque
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Bassett Family collection, Edgewood, NM
Van Citters Historic Preservation, LLC, Albuquerque, NM

Project Description

The New Mexico Department of Transportation (NMDOT), in cooperation with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), is preparing plans to improve New Mexico State Highway 344 (NM 344) from the I-40 interchange to Dinkle Road. The purpose of the NM 344 Improvements Project is to improve traffic flow, safety conditions, and drainage. NM 344 is the principal north-south route in Edgewood north of I-40 and serves as a connecting link to many residences in Edgewood. Sight distance, intersection, and drainage improvements are needed to ensure that NM 344 remains a safe roadway in light of future commercial development in the area. The existing two-lane NM 344 will be reconstructed into a four-lane roadway with traffic control signals. Major intersections and access to adjoining land uses will also be improved. Improved facilities will be provided for pedestrians and bicyclists.

Van Citters Historic Preservation, LLC of Albuquerque, NM was contracted by the NMDOT to conduct historic preservation studies with regard to the historic Bassett Ranch located on the southwest corner of NM 344 and Church Road in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. NMDOT requested a mitigation plan that minimized the adverse effects of the highway project on this historic property. This report is the result of the plan and its goal is to place the historic resources of the Bassett Ranch within an historical context relating to the history of Edgewood and the Estancia Valley, and offer of glimpse of what it was like to live a rural farming community before its recent socio-economic transformation into an Albuquerque suburb.

Project Participants:
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