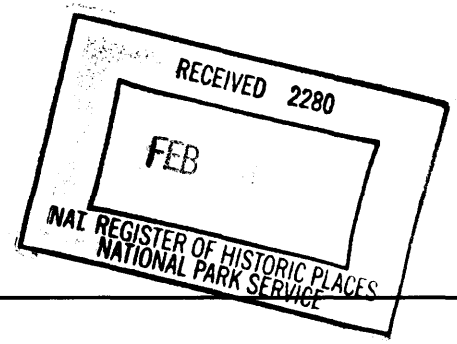


(Oct. 1990)

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM



1. NAME OF PROPERTY

HISTORIC NAME: Bentley, L.B., General Merchandise  
OTHER NAME/SITE NUMBER: Organ Custom Assay Office

2. LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER: 16125 Old Organ Main Street  
CITY OR TOWN: Organ  
STATE: New Mexico CODE: NM COUNTY: Doña Ana CODE: 013  
NOT FOR PUBLICATION: N/A  
VICINITY: N/A  
ZIP CODE: 88052

3. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this   x   nomination    request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property   x   meets    does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant    nationally    statewide   x   locally. (   See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

*Katherine Slich*  
Signature of certifying official

*02 February 2006*  
Date

State Historic Preservation Officer

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property    meets    does not meet the National Register criteria. (   See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register    See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register    See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain):

*Edson H. Beall*  
Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action  
*3-22-06*

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**5. CLASSIFICATION**

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**OWNERSHIP OF PROPERTY:** Private

**CATEGORY OF PROPERTY:** Buildings

<b>NUMBER OF RESOURCES WITHIN PROPERTY:</b>	<b>CONTRIBUTING</b>	<b>NONCONTRIBUTING</b>
	3	0 BUILDINGS
	0	0 SITES
	3	0 STRUCTURES
	0	0 OBJECTS
	6	0 TOTAL

**NUMBER OF CONTRIBUTING RESOURCES PREVIOUSLY LISTED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER:** 0

**NAME OF RELATED MULTIPLE PROPERTY LISTING:** N/A

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**6. FUNCTION OR USE**

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**HISTORIC FUNCTIONS:** COMMERCE/TRADE: specialty store

**CURRENT FUNCTIONS:** DOMESTIC: single dwelling

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**7. DESCRIPTION**

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**ARCHITECTURAL CLASSIFICATION:** OTHER: vernacular

**MATERIALS:** FOUNDATION: STONE: Sandstone; CONCRETE  
WALLS: STONE: Sandstone; ADOBE  
ROOF: METAL: Tin  
OTHER N/A

**NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION** (see continuation sheets 7-5 through 7-14).

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**8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

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**APPLICABLE NATIONAL REGISTER CRITERIA**

- A** PROPERTY IS ASSOCIATED WITH EVENTS THAT HAVE MADE A SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTION TO THE BROAD PATTERNS OF OUR HISTORY.
- B** PROPERTY IS ASSOCIATED WITH THE LIVES OF PERSONS SIGNIFICANT IN OUR PAST.
- C** PROPERTY EMBODIES THE DISTINCTIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF A TYPE, PERIOD, OR METHOD OF CONSTRUCTION OR REPRESENTS THE WORK OF A MASTER, OR POSSESSES HIGH ARTISTIC VALUE, OR REPRESENTS A SIGNIFICANT AND DISTINGUISHABLE ENTITY WHOSE COMPONENTS LACK INDIVIDUAL DISTINCTION.
- D** PROPERTY HAS YIELDED, OR IS LIKELY TO YIELD, INFORMATION IMPORTANT IN PREHISTORY OR HISTORY.

**CRITERIA CONSIDERATIONS:** N/A

**AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE:** COMMERCE

**PERIOD OF SIGNIFICANCE:** 1902-1955

**SIGNIFICANT DATES:** 1902; 1908; 1909; 1915

**SIGNIFICANT PERSON:** N/A

**CULTURAL AFFILIATION:** N/A

**ARCHITECT/BUILDER:** Unknown

**NARRATIVE STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE** (see continuation sheets 8-15 through 8-19).

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**9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES**

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**BIBLIOGRAPHY** (see continuation sheet 9-20).

**PREVIOUS DOCUMENTATION ON FILE (NPS):** N/A

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

**PRIMARY LOCATION OF ADDITIONAL DATA:**

- State historic preservation office (*Historic Preservation Division, Office of Cultural Affairs*)
- Other state agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other -- Specify Repository:

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**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

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**ACREAGE OF PROPERTY:** less than one acre

UTM REFERENCES	Zone	Easting	Northing
	1 13	349684	358880

**VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION** (see continuation sheet 10-21)**BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION** (see continuation sheet 10-21)

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**11. FORM PREPARED BY**

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**NAME/TITLE:** Marty Davenport**ORGANIZATION:** N/A**DATE:** November 2004**STREET & NUMBER:** P.O. Box 224**TELEPHONE:** (505) 373-0668**CITY OR TOWN:** Organ**STATE:** NM**ZIP CODE:** 88052

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**ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION**

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**CONTINUATION SHEETS****MAPS** (see attached U.S.G.S. *Organ* 7.5-minute series quadrangle map)**PHOTOGRAPHS** (see continuation sheet Photo-22 through Photo-23)**ADDITIONAL ITEMS:** N/A

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**PROPERTY OWNER**

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**NAME:** Bud and Nancy Abernathy**STREET & NUMBER:** P.O. Box 277**TELEPHONE:** (505) 382-5614**CITY OR TOWN:** Organ**STATE:** NM**ZIP CODE:** 88052

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Bentley, L.B., General Merchandise  
Organ, Doña Ana County, NM

Section 7 Page 5

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### Description

Located on the northeast corner of Old Organ Main Street and 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue in Organ, Doña Ana County, New Mexico, the L.B. Bentley General Merchandise consists of a complex of three contributing buildings and three contributing structures. The most prominent building is the former L.B Bentley General Merchandise and assay office. Constructed of adobe and stone between 1884 and 1909, this building aligns along the south boundary of the property facing south onto Old Organ Main Street. A stone storeroom covered by a corrugated metal shed roof occupies the southeast corner of the property. In the northeast corner stands a rental house. Built with stone in ca. 1914, the building is covered by a corrugated roof. A wood barn, tack room and workshop occupy the north boundary. On the west side of the complex is a single room stone cottage with a corrugated metal pyramidal roof. A stone fence surrounds the complex, abutting the store and residence. Between the fence and the street, mature Mulberry trees and native cacti conceal the complex from the street.

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### Setting:

The L.B Bentley General Merchandise is situated on the northeast corner of Old Organ Main Street and 1<sup>st</sup> Street in Organ, Doña Ana County, New Mexico (see Figure 7- 1). Organ, estimated population 600, is located on U.S. Highway 70, a mile west of the steep San Augustine Pass and approximately 11 miles northeast of Las Cruces. In the shadow of the Organ Mountains at 4,500 feet, Organ exists in the Chihuahuan desert ecosystem.

A century ago, this corner of Organ was the social, commercial, and transportation hub for the Organ Mining District and adjacent ranches. Although contemporary guidebooks refer to Organ as a ghost town, the current population of several hundred refutes this classification.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, abandoned and dilapidated buildings scattered throughout the town are reminders that Organ has experienced both prosperity and decline since its founding in 1884.

The tailing piles and tipple wall from the Torpedo Mine are visible a few hundred feet southeast of the Bentley store and are reminders of Organ's mining past. Northeast of the store, tailings from the Memphis Mine are evident on the far hillside. South of the building is a concrete building historically a bar and dancehall dating to World War I. First known as "Buergo's" and then as "Aces," the building is currently under rehabilitation to open as a restaurant and community museum. Further south is U.S. 70, a four-lane divided highway connecting Las Cruces to Alamogordo and points beyond. Located along this busy highway are the Organ Mountain Lodge and adjacent motor court, two gas stations, a small store and an RV park — all abandoned.

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<sup>1</sup> Linda Harris, *Ghost Towns Alive: Trips to New Mexico's Past*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2003): 218-22. James Sherman and Barbara Sherman, *Ghost Towns and Mining Camps of New Mexico*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1975). Philip Varney, *New Mexico's Best Ghost Towns*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987).

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 6

Bentley, L.B., General Merchandise  
Organ, Doña Ana County, NM

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The Slumbering Mountain Cemetery, with graves dating back to the nineteenth century, is located two blocks north of Bentley's at the end of 1<sup>st</sup> Street. Across 1<sup>st</sup> Street, and to the west of the former store, is a town park that has been part of Organ's community life since its beginnings in the 1880's. Two blocks west of the park is a stone schoolhouse built in 1907 when "the elected school directors of Organ and Mr. Bentley decided that Organ should have a new school building."<sup>2</sup> A half-dozen historical stone buildings in various stages of neglect, are scattered throughout the town.

### L.B. Bentley General Merchandise Complex

Amidst this incongruous setting of abandoned mines, a modern highway, dilapidated buildings and sundry of works-in-progress, the L.B. Bentley General Merchandise remains a symbol of survival. The complex consists of several buildings and structures constructed — as needed — over a 50-year period from the mid 1880's into the 1930's. Historically the buildings have served a number of uses, including a general merchandise, a stage terminal and way-station, an assay office, a post office, a telephone office, a justice of the peace and constable office, miner's housing, and a residence, in addition to being a social gathering spot for the town and the surrounding ranches. The evolution of the complex reflects the varied history of Organ starting with its inception as an optimistic boomtown and carrying into the bust days of the Depression when only a few hard-pressed families remained on the road between Las Cruces and Alamogordo. As such, the L.B. Bentley General Merchandise is the only property in Organ to authentically convey this historic period.

### L.B. Bentley General Merchandise Exterior:

The L.B. Bentley General Merchandise is a long, one-story vernacular building, roughly rectangular in plan, and oriented on an east to west axis (see Photo 1). The front façade of the former store and assay office faces south onto Old Organ Main Street (see Figure 7-1). Two rooflines are visible from the street: a front gable roof sheltering the older adobe core and the east stone section of the buildings and a hipped roof over the west stone section (see Photo 1). Both roofs consist of corrugated metal placed over built up adobe. An interior concrete chimney penetrating the hipped roof section once provided venting for the assay furnace. Two interior adobe chimneys covered with stucco rise above the gable roof.

The east portion of the façade is made of coursed stone laid in a cement mortar. Fenestration along this section consists of one four-over-four double-hung wood window with a stone arch lintel and a wood panel and glass door crowned by an arch lintel (see Photo 2). The middle section of the façade is constructed of adobe finished with stucco (see Photo 3). The main entry is located along this section and consists of two wood panel and glass doors topped with a transom (see Photo 4). This is the original door depicted in period photographs (see Figure 7-2). A multi-light fixed wood window is located on either side of the entrance. To the west is a separate entrance made of a batten door surmounted by a transom. West of this door is a non-original single-

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<sup>2</sup> "Organ School Opens," *Rio Grande Republican*, 8 June 1907.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Bentley, L.B., General Merchandise  
Organ, Doña Ana County, NM

Section 7 Page 7

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hung multi-light window.

The west section, built in 1908, is made of coursed stone laid in a cement mortar. Fenestration along this section includes a four-panel wood and glass door and three sash single-hung wood windows crowned with cast concrete lintels (see Photo 5). Alterations along this section include two original windows replaced with fixed metal windows.<sup>3</sup> These alterations do not compromise the overall integrity of this elevation, with the façade appearing much as it did when the building attained full configuration in 1909 (see Figure 7-3).

The north, or rear elevation, reflects much the same design as the front façade with the exception of the addition of a small sunroom. The original stone section reveals three single-hung wood-sash windows, a wood door with ten lights and a separate wood door with a wood frame screen. Cast concrete lintels bridge door and window openings (see Photo 6). Continuing to move around the building, the west adobe elevation reveals one aluminum sliding glass window (see Photo 6). The remaining east section contains four aluminum single-hung windows. The changes in windows and the addition of a sunroom have somewhat altered the fenestration of this secondary elevation.

### Interior

During the 1970's the former store was converted into a residence. Some of the improvements included changing the configuration of interior space and adding new wall and floor finishes. The high ceiling with wood herringbone pattern is readily apparent upon entering the building through the double doors along the front façade. The walls of this room, formerly part of the showroom, are finished with plaster, and the floor is terra cotta tile over concrete. An adobe fireplace occupies the northeast corner. Currently the space is used as a living room. A bedroom and small bath dominate the east side of the building. The post office occupied this space until the 1940's. To the rear of the living room is a kitchen, recently remodeled. Turning west and leaving the entry room one passes between walls almost three feet thick and enters a room that once was Bentley's living area, and now an office. The high ceiling reveals a wood herringbone pattern, the walls are plaster, and the floor is tongue-and-groove salvaged from the demolition of an old school in the 1990's. Moving west, one enters a hall and entryway to the three rooms, which Bentley used as an office, assay room, and furnace room, now converted into bedrooms. The ceilings are fiberboard material, the walls are plaster, and the floors are carpet over a concrete slab. Although much of the interior has changed in use and to some extent design, the original adobe and stone walls are readily apparent upon entering the building from any entrance.

### Evolution of Store

The earliest reference to the property is an October 1883 newspaper account documenting that the William Bros.

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<sup>3</sup> The fixed windows were in place when the present owners bought the property in 1972 and may date to the 1950's.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 8

Bentley, L.B., General Merchandise  
Organ, Doña Ana County, NM

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of Las Cruces were making adobes to erect a storehouse.<sup>4</sup> The adobe section was later described in an 1889 quit claim as the William Brothers grocery.<sup>5</sup> The three rooms comprising the west section were constructed in 1908 and used by Bentley as an office, an assay laboratory and a furnace room for over 40 years.<sup>6</sup> A concrete scales bench with a marble top is still in place. There is no documentation to date the construction of the earlier east stone addition other than photographic evidence showing that it existed at least by 1904-05.<sup>7</sup> Photographic documentation also reveals that all sections of the existing building were complete before 1915.<sup>8</sup> (Figure 7-2)

Two buildings and three structures constructed during the period of significance contribute to the setting and significance of the L.B. Bentley General Merchandise.

### Storeroom

This small, square plan building is constructed of random-course stone and rests on a concrete foundation. (see Photo 7). A sloped shed roof covered with corrugated metal shelters the building. It is entered through the north by a single wood plank door. One glass window is located on the east elevation. The south wall is incorporated into a stone fence surrounding the complex. The precise date of construction is unknown, however, it appears to postdate 1915 when a wood saloon was torn down at this location. Based on its design, materials and use, the Storeroom appears to have been constructed during the period of significance.

### Residence

In the northeast corner of the property is a long, one-story vernacular stone house obscured by mature vegetation (see Photo 8). Built L.B. Bentley as a home<sup>9</sup>, the house is approximately 1,250 square feet and is sheltered by a corrugated metal side-gabled roof. The building is constructed of native stone and sits on a concrete foundation. Small window openings with thick concrete lintels and sills penetrate its north, east and south elevations. The majority of the original windows were replaced in the 1990's with aluminum sash units. Period photographs indicate the house originally had a shed roof porch supported by square posts (see Figure 7-4). Some time in the 1930s' stone arches were added between the porch posts, resulting in raising the roof of the entire building. The interior floor plan consists of two rooms of equal size at each end with a kitchen and bathroom in the middle.

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<sup>4</sup> "Organ Tones—Personal and General, "Rio Grande Republican, 27 October 1883: n. page.

<sup>5</sup> Quit Claim Deed from Thomas J. Williams and Maggie Williams to William Murphy on March 15, 1889 and recorded in Deed Book 16, page 318, Dona Ana County Courthouse.

<sup>6</sup> "Doings of the Week in and About Our Town," *Rio Grande Republican*, 20 June 1908:n. page.

<sup>7</sup> "Organ" hanging files at the Archives and Special Collections Department, New Mexico State University, Las Cruces.

<sup>8</sup> Photo 00140182, Louis B. Bentley Photographs, Rio Grande Historical Collection, New Mexico State University, Las Cruces, New Mexico.

<sup>9</sup> Photographs in the L.B. Bentley Photographs collection refer to this building as Bentley's home. =



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Bentley, L.B., General Merchandise  
Organ, Doña Ana County, NM

Section 7 Page 9

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According to L.B. Bentley's papers, the building dates to 1915 when Bentley built it as housing.<sup>10</sup> Despite changes, the building retains a sufficient degree of integrity of original materials and design to contribute to the complex.

### Studio

On the west side of the complex is a 600-square-foot stone cottage. The small house is sheltered by a pyramidal hipped roof of corrugated metal and has an enclosed porch across its west facade. This building was constructed by infilling forms with concrete and rock. Single windows along the north and east elevation are original wood-sash single-hung with cast concrete lentils above. The entry along the north elevation is a wood panel door with two lights and a transom window. The interior features a rough-cut lumber ceiling, plaster walls, wooden floors and a poured concrete porch floor. The date of construction is speculative, but it appears in photographs around 1910.<sup>11</sup> A covered porch with stone corner posts was added at an undetermined date, but most likely during period of significance. The originally open porch was closed in the 1980's with a pair of steel casement windows (see Photo 9). The cottage currently serves as an informal museum exhibiting old photographs, letters and maps connected to the Bentley store and the town of Organ. Despite changes, the building retains a sufficient degree of integrity of original materials and design to contribute to the complex.

### Barn

North of the former store, the barn is a "L" shape structure with stables and feed storage on its east side and a workshop, including a historic forge, and a tack room, on the west (see Photo 10). The barn is made of wood frame sheathed with corrugated metal along the workshop and tack room and board-and-batten along the stables. A corrugated metal roof sloping to the north covers the stables; a lower roof of the same design and material shelters the shop section. The tack room is covered by corrugated metal roof sloping in the reverse direction. There is a concrete floor in the workshop and a wood floor in the barn. As a stage stop, a freight center and a livery station for hack lines operating out of Las Cruces, Bentley required a large barn and workshop to care for the horses, mules and wagons that were part of the business venture. Historic photographs indicate the barn was erected by 1915.

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<sup>10</sup> Louis B Bentley Papers MS 14, Box 4, Archives and Special Collections Department, New Mexico State University, Las Cruces, New Mexico.

<sup>11</sup> Louis B. Bentley Papers MS 14, Box 4, Bentley writes to Robert See in May 1910 that "a couple of rooms to let-new ones built last fall and all furnished."

**United States Department of the Interior**  
National Park Service

# **National Register of Historic Places**

## **Continuation Sheet**

Section 7 Page 10

Bentley, L.B., General Merchandise  
Organ, Doña Ana County, NM

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### **Stone Wall**

A low stone wall (see Photo 11) surrounds and connects the buildings forms the boundary of the property. Built over a period between 1915 and the 1930's, the wall varies in height from approximately three to six feet, and totals 250 linear feet in length. It features three single-gate entrances and one double-gate entrance, all made of iron (see Photo 11).

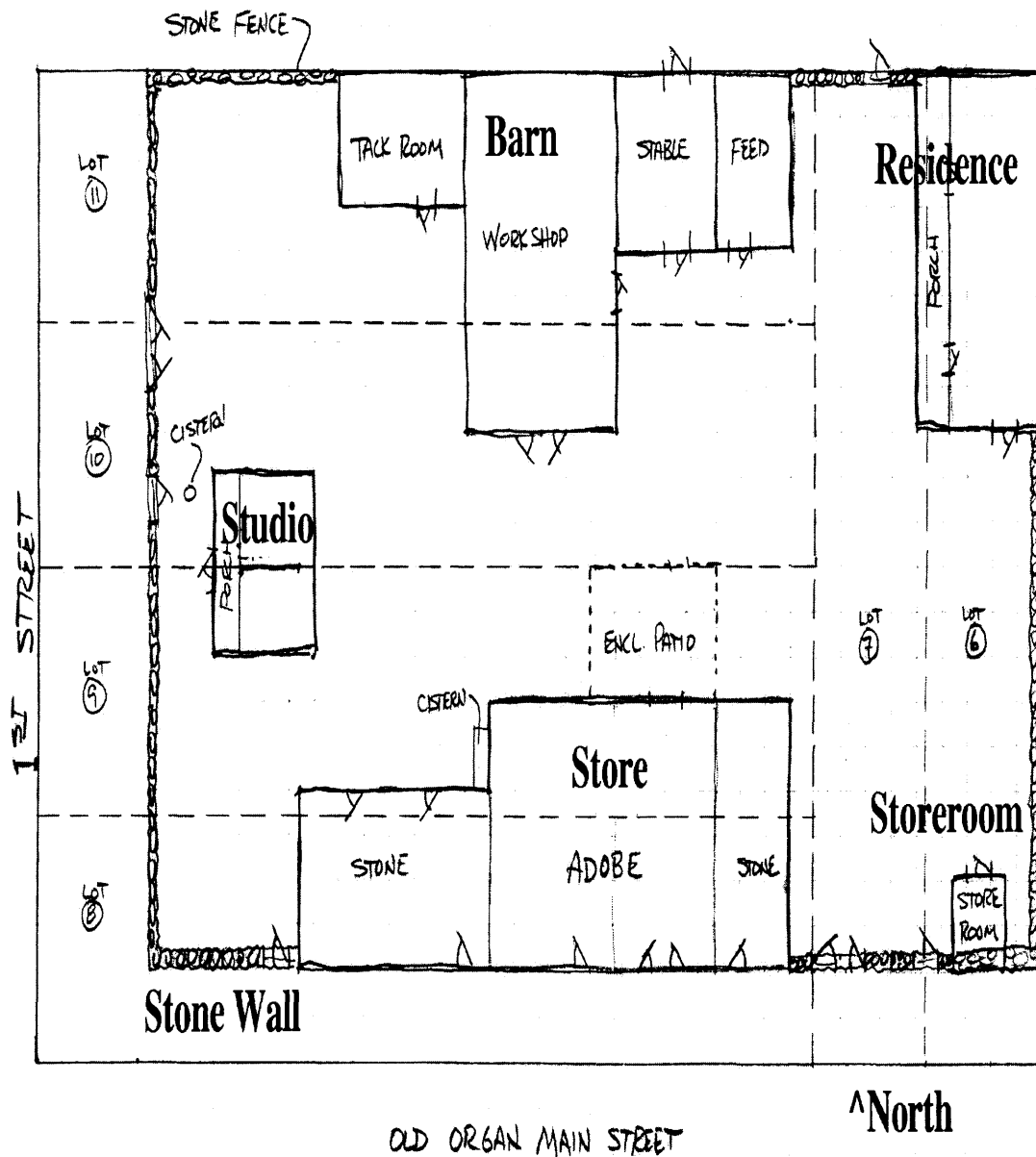
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# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 11

Bentley, L.B., General Merchandise  
Organ, Doña Ana County, NM

Figure 7-1: Sketch of the L.B. Bentley General Merchandise Complex (not drawn to scale)



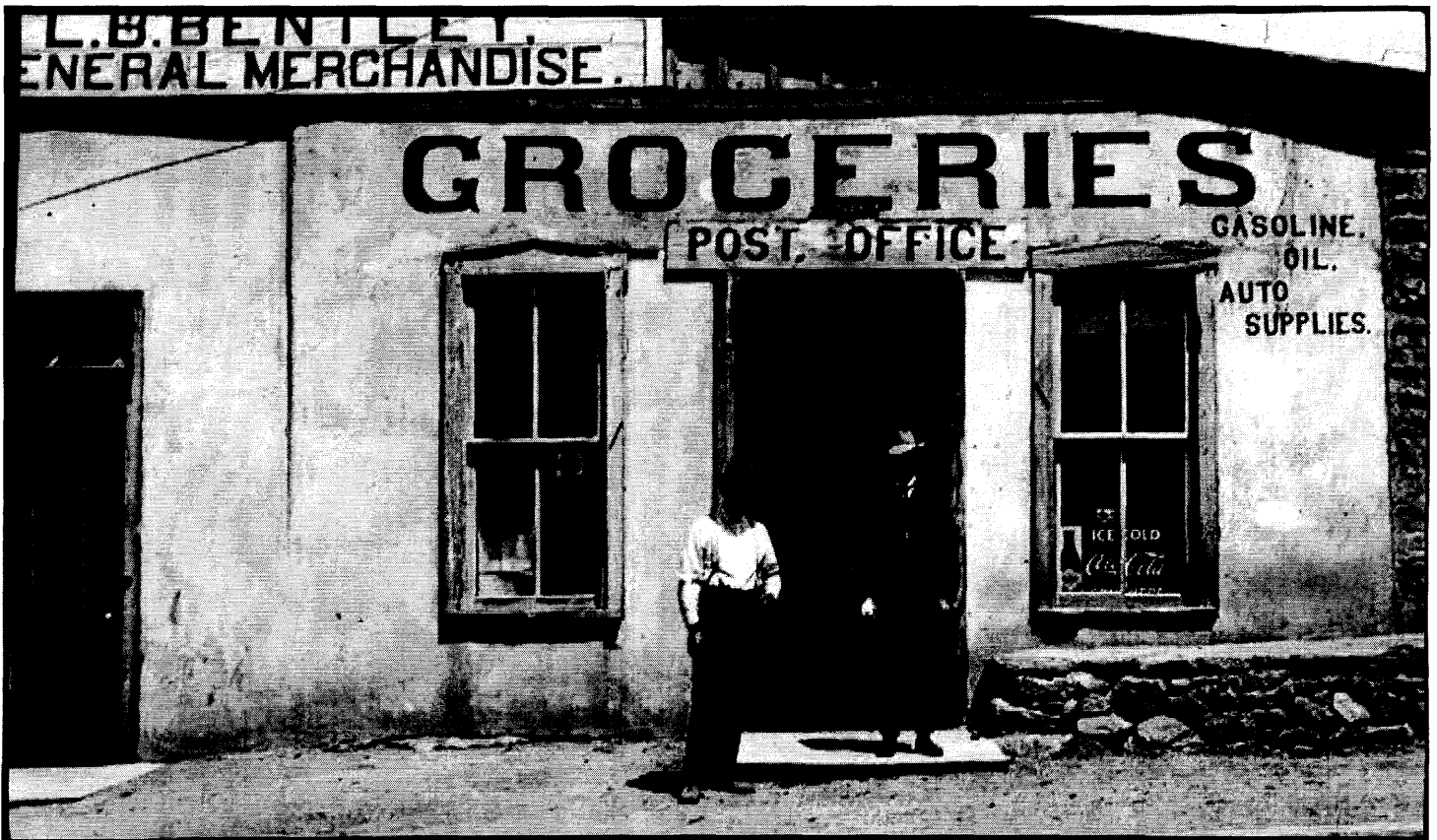
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## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 12

Bentley, L.B., General Merchandise  
Organ, Doña Ana County, NM

Figure 7-2: L.B. Bentley General Merchandise, Louis B. Bentley Photographs:00140204 (no date)



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## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 13

Bentley, L.B., General Merchandise  
Organ, Doña Ana County, NM

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**Figure 7-3: L.B. Bentley General Merchandise, Louis B. Bentley Photographs: 00140206 (1909)**



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National Park Service

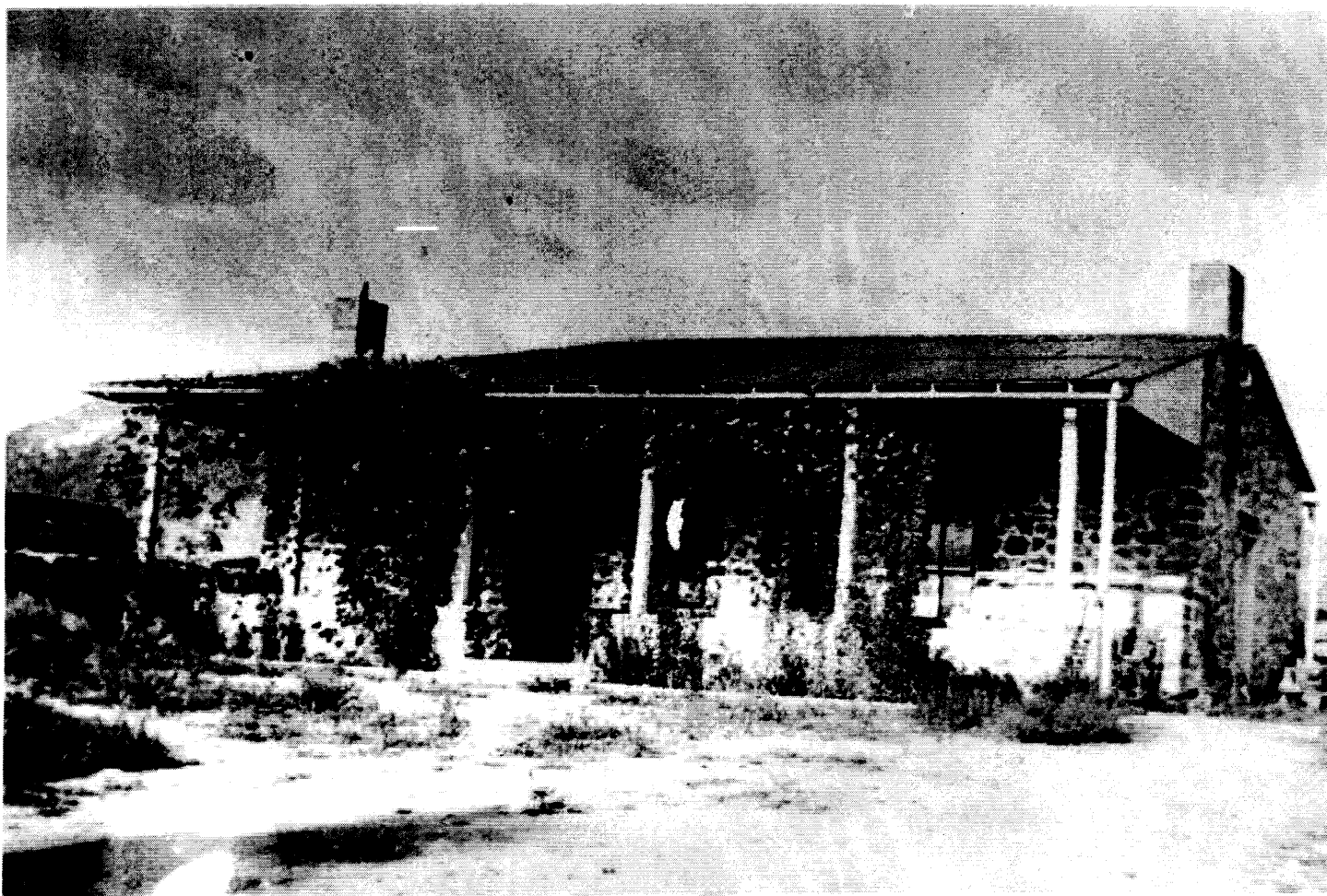
## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 14

Bentley, L.B., General Merchandise  
Organ, Doña Ana County, NM

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**Figure 7-4: Bentley Residence, Louis B. Bentley Photographs: 00140192 (no date)**



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 15

Bentley, L.B., General Merchandise  
Organ, Doña Ana County, NM

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### Statement of Significance

Built between 1884 and 1915, the L.B. Bentley General Merchandise complex consists of the former store, assay office and other commercial enterprises of Louis B. Bentley (1869-1958), a miner, businessman and long-time resident of Organ, New Mexico. The complex is historically significant under Criterion A, Commerce, at the local level for serving the commercial, technical, communication and transportation needs of Organ, the Organ Mining District and surrounding communities. The L.B. Bentley General Merchandise is one of the last tangible reminders of this important chapter of Doña Ana County's history.

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### Historical Context

Mining activity in the Organ District dates to the 1840s with the discovery of silver at the Stephenson Mine near present-day Organ. The discovery of other ore bearing lodes in the area led to the selection of the townsite in 1882. Organ was officially patented as a township on February 26, 1885.<sup>12</sup> During the same period, cattlemen from Texas discovered the grasslands in the Tularosa Basin and the foothills of the Organ Mountains. Organ became the commercial hub and supply point for the mines and ranches in the area. In addition, Organ's strategic location near San Augustine Pass, on the main road between Las Cruces and Alamogordo, provided travelers an opportunity to rest and refuel.

In 1884, Organ was an optimistic town, boasting a smelter, several bars, a bowling alley, a restaurant, a store and approximately 250 occupants.<sup>13</sup> Although the devaluation of silver in 1892 created a temporary slump in the local economy, the Torpedo and Memphis mines struck large copper deposits in the 1890s, leading Organ into a boom phase that lasted until after World War I.

Typical of mining boom towns, Organ hosted businesses that catered to the questionable pastimes of the miners, including five retail liquor licensed stores, two stud horse poker operations, seven slot machines, a crap game, a roulette game — and for the more pious minder, a Catholic church and a schoolhouse.<sup>14</sup>

Yet times wouldn't always be so good. Organ resident Teresa Aguilar Ramirez described the downward slide of the town after World War I: "About the end of 1919, the mines began to peter out. Buergo [owner of several mines and a saloon] had to lay off his men and close the stores. Prohibition closed the bar. People

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<sup>12</sup> James E. and Barbara Sherman, *Ghost Towns and Mining Camps of New Mexico*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1975):164.

<sup>13</sup> "Organ: The Houses and Buildings of which it is Composed," *Rio Grande Republican*, 9 February 1884: n. page.

<sup>14</sup> Weisner Collection, MS 249, Archives and Special Collections Department, New Mexico State University, Las Cruces.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 16

Bentley, L.B., General Merchandise  
Organ, Doña Ana County, NM

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departed as soon as they could, leaving Organ a ghost town.”<sup>15</sup>

### L.B. Bentley General Merchandise and Assay Office

The Williams Brothers, Las Cruces merchants, constructed the original adobe portion of the Bentley store in the mid-1880s, making it one of the first commercial buildings erected in Organ. The store went through several owners until Louis B. Bentley bought the store in 1902, and for the next half century operated the business as a combined store and assay office.

Louis B. Bentley was born in St. Louis, Missouri in 1869. His father, a secretary of the St. Louis Lead and Oil Company, moved the family to Hastings, Michigan, in 1874, where Bentley attended school. After his father's death in 1877, Bentley relocated to Grand Rapids, Michigan, and obtained a position with an electric construction company.<sup>16</sup> He returned to Hastings in 1891, where he organized the Hastings Electric Light and Power Company. Bentley left the Midwest in 1901, heading west for the mining districts of Colorado. Bentley later recalled that his original destination was Cripple Creek, Colorado, but waking to a snowstorm in June, he decided a southern climate was more to his liking.<sup>17</sup> En route to Prescott, Arizona, Bentley and a fellow traveler met C.B. Rogers, Superintendent of the Torpedo and Modoc Mines in the Organ Mining District. Rogers convinced Bentley to move to Organ. Arriving in Organ in 1901, Bentley worked as a mine manager, bookkeeper and assayer at the Modoc Mine until 1902 when he purchased the former Williams Brothers Store.

For the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the L.B. Bentley General Merchandise remained the principal place to purchase general merchandise between Las Cruces and Alamogordo, 50 miles to the east. In 1906, the store offered everything from a case of crackers to roofing nails and a \$1 watch. During 1907, when the Torpedo Mine was running at full blast, Bentley employed four clerks, and grossed \$50,000.<sup>18</sup> In 1916, a customer could buy coal, dynamite and wheelbarrows as well as food. Bentley's letterhead of the period noted the variety of merchandise for sale at the store: "Principal supply house for the Organ and San Andreas Mountains. Groceries and Provisions/ Dry Goods and Notions/ Hardware and Miners Supplies/ Hay, Grain, Corral, etc./Gasoline and Auto Supplies/The Organ Assay Office."<sup>19</sup>

The Bentley Assay Office served the technical needs of the local mining industry. Bentley, an educated man, believed in the scientific and managerial approach to mining.<sup>20</sup> Drawing from his experience working at a

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<sup>15</sup> Vesta Siemers, "Organ As It Was," *Southern New Mexico Historical Review* 1(1987): 22.

<sup>16</sup> Louis B. Bentley Papers online: <http://elibrary.unm.edu/oanm/NmLcU/nmlcu1%23ms0014>.

<sup>17</sup> L.B. Bentley to Jack Pierce, December 17, 1948. Louis B. Bentley Papers, MS 14, Box 2.

<sup>18</sup> Fugate, Francis L. and Roberta B., *Roadside History of New Mexico*, (Missoula: Mountain Press Publishing Company, 1989): 348.

<sup>19</sup> Louis B. Bentley Papers, MS 14, Box 5.

<sup>20</sup> Louis Bentley letter to the editor: "Place Mining on a Business Basis," *Rio Grande Republican*, 1 October 1909; and "The Organ Mining District," 20 May 1920.



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 17

Bentley, L.B., General Merchandise  
Organ, Doña Ana County, NM

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chemical laboratory in Chicago, Bentley opened an assay office in the west wing of the store in 1909, making approximately 5,000 ore assays between 1910 and 1933<sup>21</sup> (see Figure 8-1). In 1919, Bentley organized the Organ Ore Company. Attempting to extract low-grade ore from the mine tailings in the area, Bentley's enterprise included plans for a "custom mill and leaching plant."<sup>22</sup> The venture never materialized and Bentley avoided any reference to it in later years.<sup>23</sup> Although commercial mining ended in the Organ Mining District after World War I, Bentley offered his assay services well into the 1950s.

The Bentley store also served the communication needs of the community as a post office and telephone office. Appointed postmaster in 1914, Bentley continued to hold that post until 1940. Community telephone service started in the store in 1915 and continued into the 1940s as The Bentley and Hayner Telephone Company. A precursor to the modern pay phone, in 1916 customers could place a call to El Paso for 66 cents, with Bentley making a 25% profit from each call.<sup>24</sup> Telephone service and the post office helped establish the store as "a central gathering place for Organ residents."<sup>25</sup>

The L.B. Bentley General Merchandise and nearby barn provided for the pre-automobile needs of the area by offering a livery stable and stage stop. Local historian Herman Weisner states that from 1902 to 1908, two stage and hack lines used the store as a terminal.<sup>26</sup> The large barn and workshop also provided "a town hall and meeting place for community functions in the mining days."<sup>27</sup> With the arrival of the automobile, Bentley offered gas and lodging for passing motorists along the Ozark Trails and later U.S. 70.<sup>28</sup> Catering to the driver, Bentley not only offered oil and gas in front of his store, and in the 1930s advertised "Camp La Plaza Home for Tourists."<sup>29</sup>

By 1922, Organ's population dropped to less than 200.<sup>30</sup> The town's decline stabilized with a population of around 200 until after World War II when a military buildup in the adjacent Tularosa Basin opened a new chapter in Organ's boom cycle. White Sands Proving Ground and Missile Range, just over San Augustine Pass, employed hundreds of civilians and many found the location of Organ to be an easy commute. Retirees also found the desert climate healthful. World War II, the Cold War, an influx of military spending, and growth of Las Cruces gave new impetus to the town.

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<sup>21</sup> Charles Dunham Kingsley, *The Geology of the Organ Mountains*, (Socorro: New Mexico School of Mines Bulletin #11, 1935): 197.

<sup>22</sup> "Share offering," *Rio Grande Republican*, April 22, 1920: n. page.

<sup>23</sup> The concrete leaching tank for the failed enterprise exists a few hundred yards northeast of the store.

<sup>24</sup> Bill for W.W. Cox in the Louis B. Bentley Papers, MS 14, Box 5.

<sup>25</sup> Harris, *Ghost Towns Alive*: 221.

<sup>26</sup> Herman Weisner, "Bentley Store and Residence, Organ, N.M.," MS 249.

<sup>27</sup> Marjorie White, "Organ Grew From Silver Finds of Century Ago," *El Paso Times Sundial*, 26 October 1969: 2.

<sup>28</sup> Photograph 00140204, Louis B. Bentley Photographs.

<sup>29</sup> Photograph 00140330, Louis B. Bentley Photographs.

<sup>30</sup> *New Mexico Business Directory*, (Denver: The Gazetteer Publishing Co., 1922): 348.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 18

Bentley, L.B., General Merchandise  
Organ, Doña Ana County, NM

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By 1958, Organ counted 66 permanent dwellings, 43 trailers, and a new direction as an inexpensive residential community.<sup>31</sup> Organ was well on its way to becoming a bedroom community and way station for the military bases to the east and the growing city of Las Cruces to the west. As the only surviving commercial building, the Bentley's store remained a social gathering place for the surrounding area well into the late 1950s, as ranchers came in to buy articles, pick up mail, or make a phone call. Louis B. Bentley, the most successful entrepreneur of Organ's mining heyday, died in 1958.

Over the past 70 years Organ has evolved from a rough-and-tumble mining camp into a suburban outpost. The town has struggled with the vagaries of a mining economy, the demands of a harsh desert environment, and has served as a stop on a vital transportation link between Las Cruces and Alamogordo. The L.B. Bentley General Merchandise contains the only buildings with sufficient integrity to tell each chapter of this history.

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<sup>31</sup> Weisner Collection, MS 249, Archives and Special Collections Department, New Mexico State University, Las Cruces.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 19

Bentley, L.B., General Merchandise  
Organ, Doña Ana County, NM

Figure 8-1: Louis B. Bentley in Assay Office, Louis B. Bentley Photographs: 00140189 (no date)



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 9 Page 20

Bentley, L.B., General Merchandise  
Organ, Doña Ana County, NM

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United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 10 Page 21

Bentley, L.B., General Merchandise  
Organ, Doña Ana County, NM

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### Geographical Data

#### Verbal Boundary Description:

Lots 6-11, Block 3, the original Organ Town Site as surveyed in 1882, Organ, Doña Ana County, New Mexico.

#### Boundary Justification:

The nominated property includes the entire parcel historically associated with the L.B. Bentley General Merchandise.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Bentley, L.B., General Merchandise  
Organ, Doña Ana County, NM

Section Photo Page 22

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### Photographs

*The following information pertains to all photographs unless otherwise noted:*

Bentley, L.B., General Merchandise  
Organ, Doña Ana County, New Mexico  
December 2004; July 2005 \* as noted  
Photographer: Marty Davenport  
Location of Negatives: New Mexico Historic Preservation Division

Photo 1 of 11  
Front façade  
Facing northeast  
December 2004

Photo 2 of 11  
East section of front facade  
Facing north  
July 2005

Photo 3 of 11  
Front façade, original adobe core  
Facing north  
July 2005

Photo 4 of 11  
Front entry of front façade  
Facing north  
July 2005

Photo 5 of 11  
West section of front façade  
Facing northeast  
July 2005

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Bentley, L.B., General Merchandise  
Organ, Doña Ana County, NM

Section Photo Page 23

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Photo 6 of 11  
Rear elevation, west section and adobe core  
Facing east  
December 2004

Photo 7 of 11  
Storeroom  
Facing south  
July 2005

Photo 8 of 11  
South elevation of Residence  
Facing north  
July 2005

Photo 9 of 11  
North elevation of Studio  
Facing south  
July 2005

Photo 10 of 11  
South elevation of Barn  
Facing North  
December 2004

Photo 11 of 11  
Stone wall and gates  
Facing north  
July 2005