

(Oct. 1990)

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM**

**1. NAME OF PROPERTY: MIDWAY SERVICE STATION**

**HISTORIC NAME:** Midway Service Station  
**OTHER NAME/SITE NUMBER:** Old Kenna Store

**2. LOCATION**

**STREET & NUMBER:** 38797 U.S. Highway70  
**CITY OR TOWN:** Kenna  
**STATE:** New Mexico      **CODE:** NM      **COUNTY:** Roosevelt

**NOT FOR PUBLICATION:** N/A  
**VICINITY:** N/A  
**CODE:** 041      **ZIP CODE:** 88122

**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 Stich*  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of certifying official

*16 November 2004*  
\_\_\_\_\_  
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  
*11/12/05*

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**5. CLASSIFICATION**

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**OWNERSHIP OF PROPERTY:** Private

**CATEGORY OF PROPERTY:** Building

<b>NUMBER OF RESOURCES WITHIN PROPERTY:</b>	<b>CONTRIBUTING</b>	<b>NONCONTRIBUTING</b>
	2	0 BUILDINGS
	0	0 SITES
	0	0 STRUCTURES
	0	0 OBJECTS
	2	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 (service station)  
COMMERCE/TRADE: specialty store (drug store)

**CURRENT FUNCTIONS:** COMMERCE/TRADE: department store; general store  
GOVERNMENT: post office (postal facility in non-federally owned building)

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**7. DESCRIPTION**

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**ARCHITECTURAL CLASSIFICATION:** LATE 19<sup>th</sup> AND 20<sup>th</sup> CENTURY REVIVALS: Mission/Spanish Colonial Revival (late Mission Revival as applied to commercial structure)

**MATERIALS:** FOUNDATION CONCRETE  
WALLS BRICK; ADOBE  
ROOF ASPHALT  
OTHER N/A

**NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION** (see continuation sheets 7-5 through 7-8).

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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; TRANSPORTATION; ARCHITECTURE

**PERIOD OF SIGNIFICANCE:** 1938-1954

**SIGNIFICANT DATES:** 1938; 1939; 1954

**SIGNIFICANT PERSON:** N/A

**CULTURAL AFFILIATION:** N/A

**ARCHITECT/BUILDER:** unknown

**NARRATIVE STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE** (see continuation sheets 8-9 through 8-16).

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**9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES**

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**BIBLIOGRAPHY** (see continuation sheet 9-17 through 9-18).

**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    613625 E    3745125 N

**VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION** The property is a rectangular parcel measuring 157 x 236 feet, whose northwest corner is 128 feet directly northwest of the northwest corner of the foundation of the main service station building and whose southeast corner is 92 feet directly southeast of the southeast corner of the foundation of the main service station building.

**BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION** The boundary includes all the property historically associated with the nominated resource.

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**11. FORM PREPARED BY**

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**NAME/TITLE:** The Community of Kenna and HPD Architectural Historian John W. Murphey

**ORGANIZATION:** N/A

**DATE:** September 2004

**STREET & NUMBER:** P.O. Box 1099

**TELEPHONE:** (505) 274-6418

**CITY OR TOWN:** Kenna            **STATE:** New Mexico

**ZIP CODE:** 88122

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**ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION**

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**CONTINUATION SHEETS**

**MAPS** (see attached Kenna 7.5-minute series U.S.G.S. quad map) (note: all the buildings depicted north and east of the nominated property burned down as the result of a June 2000 fire).

**PHOTOGRAPHS** (see continuation sheet Photo-19)

**ADDITIONAL ITEMS** N/A

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**PROPERTY OWNER**

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**NAME:** Trudi Davis

**STREET & NUMBER:** P.O. Box 1099            **TELEPHONE:** (505) 274-6418

**CITY OR TOWN:**    Kenna    **STATE:** New Mexico    **ZIP CODE:** 88122

**NAME:** Debi Allison

**STREET & NUMBER:** HC 66 Box 20            **TELEPHONE:** (505) 378-8378

**CITY OR TOWN:**    Glencoe    **STATE:** New Mexico    **ZIP CODE:** 88324

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Midway Service Station  
Kenna, Roosevelt County, New Mexico

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### Description

Midway Service Station, a former Phillips 66 gas outlet and site of the town's first bank, is located in Kenna (population 14), along U.S. 70, in Roosevelt County, New Mexico. Constructed in 1938, the modified Mission Revival style gas station is faced with contrasting tan and red brick. Sharp stepped parapets crown three of its elevations. A separate freestanding garage, detailed in the same manner, is situated to the west. With its impressive size and imposing service canopy, the Midway Service Station dominates the landscape and surprises drivers passing through this sparsely settled country. Experiencing few alterations, the former service station retains a high degree of integrity as to its location, design, materials, workmanship, feeling and association.

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The Midway Service Station straddles the south side of U.S. 70 in Kenna, a small ranching community 55 miles northeast of Roswell. South of the former gas station are the tracks of the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe (AT&SF) railroad, and beyond, the town's only cemetery. To the north are the few remaining buildings making up Kenna's current population of 14, including the former depot, moved and remodeled as a residence, the Community Kenna Community Church, and a scattering of former homesteads and modern houses. East, across a county road, are the ghostly footprints of the first Denton gas station, mercantile store and residence, each lost to a June 2000 fire. The stock pens that made such a vital contribution to Kenna's early economy are situated on a bluff to the west (Photo 1). Beyond, rolling hills covered with buffalo grass and meandering cattle form a backdrop to this rural community.

Facing U.S. 70, the Midway Service Station is composed of two separate buildings built in 1938 as the Midway Service Station (Photos 2 & 3). The larger building features 33-foot-long canopy extending over the former gas pump islands. Large riveted girders spanning between the posts and the building support the canopy (Figure 7-1). The building is faced with textured buff color brick highlighted with contrasting bands of red brick used as accent. Brick is employed along all elevations of the gas station, except the rear or south side of the main building where the original poured adobe of the c.1910 bank building is exposed. Red metal cladding meant to simulate clay tiles, covers the pent roof across this and the east and west elevations. A stepped brick parapet rises above the canopy. The parapet is topped with concrete capstone, and at its center, is a concrete square incised with the Zia symbol and the year "1938."<sup>1</sup> (Photo 4).

A separate entrance, once the entry to a drugstore and soda fountain, is situated along the east elevation. The entry, made of a two-light door has glass block surrounds and is surmounted by a fixed light transom that historically had the word "Drugs" emblazoned across its glass (Photo 5). Originally a divided wood frame door provided access to the drugstore. At some point in the late 1940s, the glass blocks were introduced along with a smaller door to this entry as well as the Denton Brothers Mercantile that stood across the street. A large multi-

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<sup>1</sup> Concrete panels located in the parapets across the east and west elevations were once painted with the Phillip's 66 shield.

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light window is located on each side of the door. Both of these windows were replaced as a result of the June 2000 fire, but retain the general appearance of the original units. A small, one-story volume along the west exterior contains rest rooms and a large air-compressor once used to fix flat tires. It is also ornamented with a concrete capstone and red metal tile roof.

Behind the canopy a single door opens to the sales/store area of the service station. Three large display windows with divided transoms daylight the interior. The long, rectangular room is furnished with shelves stocked with merchandise; a wood-burning stove sits at the west end of the room (Photo 6). Reminders of its days as a service station include fan belt hooks running across the length of the south wall and the original sales counter and cash register at the west end of the room.

Beyond the sales/store area is a large room currently containing Kenna's leased post office. This room, constructed of poured adobe, was originally a separate building housing the Kenna Bank & Trust Company.<sup>2</sup> Constructed in c.1910, the bank operated out of this building until 1924, after which time it was purchased by John Denton and used as a drugstore. The bank's vault is located in the southwest corner of the room. The vault, accessed by a steel door, contains a Mosler Safe Co. wheeled safe with the words "Kenna Bank & Trust Co." painted across its face.<sup>3</sup>

Dominating the east wall is the small post office lobby and P.O. boxes. The entrance along the east side of the building provides 24 four-hour access to 30 P.O. boxes used by approximately 20 customers. The original marble top counter and swivel chairs from the drugstore period, though repositioned, are still evident as well as wood display shelves along the north wall that once held patent medicines.

To the west is a separate freestanding structure situated at a setback from the main building (Photo 7). Made of one large rectangular volume, the building was used to service cars and make small repairs. Two large wood and glass roll up doors provide access to the garage. Large multi-light casement windows across the east and west elevations illuminate its interior. Like the main building, the garage features a parapet along the front and side elevations and is faced with contrasting buff and red brick.

The Midway Service Station is a late example of the House with Canopy type of gas station. The house form, introduced in the 1920s, employed residential architectural details to domesticate the selling of gas. Neighborhood filling stations, designed to look like small houses, employed steep gables, shutters, chimneys and

<sup>2</sup> Carol Condie, during a highway survey of U.S. 70, discovered that a number of buildings around Kenna were constructed of poured adobe "that at first looks like poor quality concrete, but is in actuality a poured mix of adobe and fieldstone." According to research by Kent and Erik Stout, wooden forms were used, and entire were probably constructed with one pour. Carol J. Condie. *Inventory of Structures Along 101 Kilometers/63 Miles of Interstate 70 from Acme, Chaves County to Delphos, Roosevelt County, New Mexico*. Albuquerque, NM: Quivira Research Center Publications 387, 1999: 7.

<sup>3</sup> Inspection stamps on the vault door indicate the vault was used between 1910 and 1923.

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other residential architectural details to communicate an image of the comfort of home. Pure Oil's 1923 English Cottage station, the highest articulation of the style, was followed by standard house-type designs introduced by Phillips, Texaco and other major oil companies. Unlike the house-type gas station, the Midway Service Station displays few residential architectural details. Instead it adheres more closely to the House with Canopy form. The building, essentially a rectangular plan with a long extended canopy, also diverges also from standard designs of the day by separating the garage from the service area.

The combined service station and garage displays the latent influence of the Mission Revival style. Characteristic features of the style include its stepped parapets, red metal tile roof, wide overhanging eaves, decorative brackets and large, square canopy supports. As a late expression of the Mission Revival style, the gas station is an anomaly for its period. By the late 1930s, Phillips and other oil companies had introduced a streamlined version of the gas station — the Oblong Box. The box-like rectangular plan removed all references to domestic architecture, replacing gables with flat roofs, textured walls with smooth finishes, and increased sales space for the merchandising of sales of tires, batteries and other accessories.<sup>4</sup> Both the station's architectural detail and size distinguish it from other contemporaneous service stations in Southeastern New Mexico.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The architectural development of the American service station is presented in John A. Jakle and Keith A. Sculle's *The Gas Station in America*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994.

<sup>5</sup> The Condie and subsequent surveys of U.S. 70 across Roosevelt, Chaves and Lincoln counties, found only a small handful of service stations that had survived from the early period of highway development. Most surviving examples are modest House with Canopy or later Oblong Box varieties. The Midway Service Station is the largest and the only service station displaying any architectural detail along the entire 100-mile-long corridor.

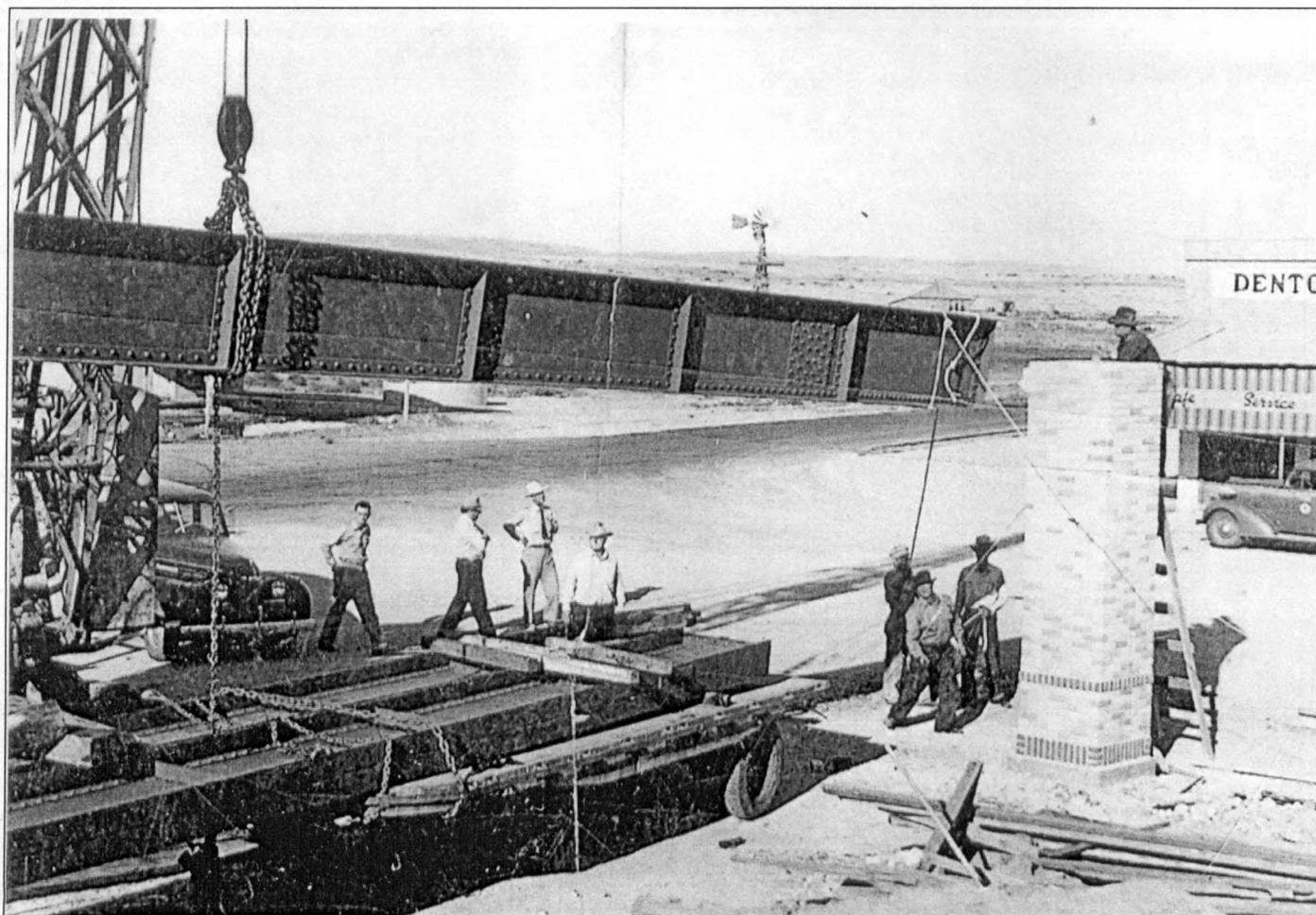
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Midway Service Station  
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Figure 7-1 Erecting canopy, 1938 (courtesy Jayne Taylor)



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### State of Significance

In the late afternoon of Sunday, June 11, 2000, a day of heavy thunderstorms across Curry and Roosevelt counties, a freight train rumbled down the tracks of the AT&SF railroad towards the small community of Kenna. Around 5:00 p.m., two miles west of Kenna, the older engine pulling the train started spitting sparks across the tracks, igniting wide swaths of dry grassland into swelling prairies fires. Fire departments from surrounding communities and faraway Roswell rushed to the scene. Before they arrived, the fire had crawled across Kenna, burning all that remained of its early homestead boom days. Though some of its windows — due the extreme heat — cracked and popped out, one building survived. When constructed in 1938, and incorporating an older homestead era bank building, the Midway Service Station, with its attractive brick design, deep canopy and full line of Phillips products and fountain service, brought new pride and business to Kenna, a community suffering years of drought and population loss. Today, the former gas station is the town's only business, serving as store, community gathering place and leased post office. As the last surviving commercial operation dating to Kenna's historic period, the Midway Service Station is eligible to the National Register at the local level under Criterion A in the area of Commerce. The building is also eligible at the local level under Criterion A for its association with the development of U. S. 70. Due to its regionally unique design, the former service station is additionally eligible at the local level under Criterion C in the area of Architecture, as a late example of a Mission Revival-style service station.

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### Cattle Empire

Kenna, a small ranching community in Roosevelt County, started in name in 1899 as a construction camp along the Pecos Valley and Northeastern Railroad. Before the arrival of the railroad, famed Texas cattleman George W. Littlefield claimed much of the land surrounding future Kenna as part of his cattle empire spreading across Texas and New Mexico (figure 8-1).<sup>6</sup> Major Littlefield started the advance of the Texas-Anglo frontier across the Pecos River in 1882 when he purchased John Chisum's Bosque Grande Ranch near Roswell. Later, following the advise of his principal ranch manager and half-nephew, J. Phelps, Littlefield, purchased water rights east of the Pecos between Fort Sumner and Roswell, permitting control of four over million acres of rangeland. This massive holding became the basis of his LFD Ranch. The "drought of 1866" struck the overstocked range. Despite this

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<sup>6</sup> In 1881, in the vicinity of present Kenna, the Hernandez Brothers set up headquarters for a horse ranch at an area that became known as Hernandez Spring. Charles S. McCarty, one of Major Littlefield's trail bosses, later purchased their claim, establishing the T 71 Ranch, a ranch still in operation today. Arriving in 1884 from Missouri, the Urton Brothers, W.G. and George, established another ranch northwest of Kenna. W.G. Urton became a stockholder for the Bar H Ranch, managing at the height of its operation 30,000 head of cattle. For years the locality went by the name of Urton. Reportedly at one time two settlements, Kenna and Urton, existed adjacent to each, causing much confusion as the area's post office used both names.

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setback Littlefield, who lived by the “buy when people are selling” philosophy of business, continued to expand his holdings, purchasing and consolidating ranches up and down the Pecos River.<sup>7</sup>

A fortuitous discovery of a hidden spring resulted in moving Littlefield’s operations near future Kenna. One day, while searching the canyons of Kenna Mesa, an unnamed “Mexican” came across a patch of unusually green grass.<sup>8</sup> Prodding the patch with a shovel, the cowhand discovered that cedar poles and old blankets, apparently placed by Native Americans, concealed a spring. Offering him \$700 for his discovery, Littlefield purchased the spring and gave the site to his younger brother William P. Littlefield, “a lovably irresponsible character” who did not possess the same business acumen as his older brother.<sup>9</sup> Established as the Hidden Springs Ranch (locally Littlefield Ranch), in 1886 William and his wife Euphemia K. Mathew built an adobe dwelling finished with lumber freighted down from Las Vegas.<sup>10</sup> This ranch served as his home for nearly 40 years until his death in 1927.

### Homestead Frontier

The short chapter of open-range ranching came to an end in 1899 with the arrival of the Pecos Valley and Northeastern Railroad.<sup>11</sup> Initially the railroad benefited the surrounding ranches, serving as a convenient shipping point for cattle. As the only shipping point west of Amarillo, some 170 miles to the northeast, thousands of head of cattle were driven to the stock pens at Kenna from Littlefield’s ranches and ranches from the surrounding area. After the turn of the century, use of the railroad changed from shipping cattle to carrying hopeful homesteaders to the closing range. In 1904 the federal government ordered ranchers to remove their cattle from public domain opening the region to settlement.<sup>12</sup> This event combined with two years of above average precipitation greened the open range, attracting hundreds of land-hungry homesteaders. Cowboys associated with the LFD Ranch settled nearby to start ranches in a move to preempt the homesteaders.

Their advance came too late. In 1906 — the year cowboys remember as the “last great roundup” — Wilson Orr, a land agent with the U.S. Government Land Commission opened an office in Kenna. So many homesteaders pushed into the region that William P. Littlefield’s son would later recall that his father’s “cattle were forced into

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7 J. Evetts Haley. *George W. Littlefield, Texan*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1943: 64.

8 George A. Wallis. *Cattle Kings of the Staked Plains*. Denver: Sage Books, 1972: 88. Conflicting information is presented on the discovery of the spring. J. Evetts Haley, Littlefield’s biographer, infers that Littlefield sent “old Nate,” his African-American servant of Civil War days to search for springs near McCarty’s ranch. J.

Evetts Haley. *George W. Littlefield, Texan*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1943: 160.

9 Ibid.: 272.

10 “Natural Spring on Mesa Became Site.” *The Portales News-Tribune*. 11 March 1973. n. pag.

11 In January 1901, the AT&SF took over the purchase and lease of the former Pecos Valley and Northeastern Railroad.

12 Jane Wilcox Taylor. *Kenna a Ranching Community*. Elida, NM: no pub., 1991: 5.

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the brakes” around Kenna Mesa, “virtually wiping out Littlefield Ranch.”<sup>13</sup> Ranchers spurned the newly invented barbed wire, and feared the homesteader’s plow would ruin their pastures. A feud broke out between the homesteaders — derogatively called “nesters”— and the ranchers. Stories of violent confrontations between ranchers and nesters are still recounted today.

That same year, a real estate agent from Hagerman and an undertaker from Roswell purchased 160 acres and platted a townsite named Kenna, after the vice president of the AT&SF.<sup>14</sup> Operating as the Kenna Development Company, the corporation sold lots and advertised Kenna as “the fastest growing town in New Mexico.”<sup>15</sup>

### The Promise of Water

Word of a contemplated irrigation project, increased the homesteader’s rush to the grasslands. Under the Reclamation Act of 1901, the newly formed Reclamation Service began surveying natural lakes in the West to determine whether they could be turned into reservoirs for irrigation. Pressure from western farmers, land boosters, politicians and businessmen, increased their efforts to find suitable reservoir sites. Urton Lake, a large intermittent lake 16 miles northwest of Kenna, was one of several sites investigated in New Mexico. At Urton Lake, engineers studied the feasibility of taking water from the Pecos River near Fort Sumner, and sending it by canal 35 miles south to fill a reservoir, potentially turning 60,000 acres of dry rangeland into an irrigated Garden of Eden.

Despite a 1904 Reclamation Service report stating “three obstacles of greater than ordinary import” could hamper the project, land boosters quickly seized upon the opportunity.<sup>16</sup> In 1909 the Kenna Commercial Club published a booklet promoting Kenna as “the nearest railroad point to the great Urton Lake Reservoir... [which] is to be pushed to completion at the earliest possible date... [to become] one of the largest irrigation projects in the west... furnish[ing] homes for hundreds of families.”<sup>17</sup> Absorbing part of the land rush, Kenna’s population swelled to over 200 persons in 1910, most arriving from Southern states.<sup>18</sup>

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13 G.T. Littlefield. Untitled article reprinted from 1 April 1938 edition of the *Portales Tribune*.

14 Ibid: 6.

15 Undated advertisement postcard published by the Kenna Development Company.

16 United States Reclamation Service. *Seventeenth Annual Report of Reclamation Service*. Washington DC: GPO, 1904: 388.

17 Kenna Commercial Club. “A Book that Will Interest You.” *Kenna Record Print*, 1909: n.pag.

18 Kenna was first enumerated during the 1920 census. At that time, the community had a population of 133 persons. Of the 30 heads of household, the majority (12) claimed Texas as their place of birth, followed far behind by Arkansas (3) and Alabama (3), respectively. No heads of household claimed New Mexico as their place of birth.

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Officially organized in August 1906, Kenna grew overnight with slapped together wood-frame buildings topped with false fronts arranged north and south of the railroad along Main Street. These building housed an array of businesses typical of any western boomtown, including a mill, grocers, a barbershop, two lumber companies, a weekly newspaper, a hotel, a blacksmith shop, saloons and a bank.

Primary to this story is the founding of the Kenna Bank and Trust Company. When chartered on April 30, 1907, the Kenna Bank and Trust Company was one of only five banks in Roosevelt County, providing an essential service to new homesteaders.<sup>19</sup> The bank's officials included Portales resident J.P. Stone, President, George T. Littlefield, Vice President, and W.B. Scott, Cashier. Billing itself as a "Home Institution," the bank moved to permanent quarters in 1910, a "concrete" building facing Main Street, across from the Carmichael Brother's store. The bank went through a succession of officers, and by 1923, the year of its closure, had holdings in excess of \$53,000,00.<sup>20</sup> In 1924, the First National Bank of Elida, took over its operation, evolving in 1935 into the Portales National Bank, an institution still vital in promoting the economic growth of Roosevelt County.

In spite of the great hopes for the irrigation project, Congress selected the Pecos River Basin Project over Urton Lake and other less feasible projects as a future reservoir site.<sup>21</sup> This disappointment coupled with a run dry years and the "great grasshopper invasion of 1913," eventually forced homesteaders to abandon their claims, selling land back to area ranchers.

### Denton Brothers Mercantile and Gas

The promise of an irrigated Eden brought not only homesteaders but also merchants who would supply the new arrivals with building supplies and merchandise. One such entrepreneur, Lucius C. Denton, moved in 1904 from Dandridge, Tennessee, with his wife and four children to Kenna to open a mercantile store. Born in 1876, Lucius already had experience running a mercantile business. In Kenna, Denton eventually took over a business started by the Carmichael Brothers. By 1914, Denton operated the L.C. Denton General Merchandise, the leading "cash or trade" store, offering an array of goods, including groceries, dry goods, lumber, hardware, clothing, and livestock feeds, and a daily market for eggs, hogs, cream, poultry and hides. Just prior to his death in 1925, Denton had expanded his enterprise to include a boarding house and service station.

Denton's sons, John, Earl and Edwin took over the business after his death, forming the Denton Brothers partnership. The brothers jointly operated the Denton Brothers Mercantile, the boarding house, and filling station. Located just south of the mercantile and oriented toward Main Street, the small, pyramidal roof service station,

<sup>19</sup> Jane Wilcox Taylor. *Kenna a Ranching Community*. Elida, NM: no pub., 1991: 9.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.: 10.

<sup>21</sup> Of the 79 irrigable sites investigated across the West between 1902 and 1907, only 25 were recommended for reservoir construction.

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fueled cars traveling between Portales and Roswell on the Ozark Trails highway. Besides running the gas station with his brother Earl, John Stanley Denton and his wife Laura did second duty at the drugstore located in the old bank building across the street. For years the extended Denton family dominated this corner of the old highway, positioning both their businesses and homes close to the highway.

During the late 1920s and early '30s Kenna experienced a decline in population as the last wave of homesteaders left for better opportunities. Today, townsfolk say the Depression had little effect on their community, claiming circumstances actually improved in mid-1930s when U.S. 70 was upgraded to become a major transportation route.<sup>22</sup>

Prior to 1934, U.S. 366, the third branch of U.S. 66, passed through Kenna on its way to Roswell. Always a secondary highway, U.S. 366 connected Texico, New Mexico to El Paso. In the late 1930s, U.S. 366 was upgraded and renumbered as U.S. 70, a number formerly assigned to the alignment of today's U.S. 60. The new route was conceived as a more efficient connector to U.S. 85, the dominant north-south route, and U.S. 80, a transcontinental route to California. The 23-mile section of U.S. 366 and former the Ozark Trails starting at Kenna, hindered the direction of the new highway, and in 1938, the highway department commissioned a new road, bypassing the old trail. When completed in 1939, Kenna hosted party celebrating the opening of the new highway.

The rerouting affected Kenna directly. Where the Ozark Trails once made a turn south along Kenna's Main Street, the new road followed a more direct east-west course. The new highway's 100-200 feet right-of-way considerably widened the former Scott Avenue, displacing a number of properties, including a post office, north of the drugstore.

Accordingly, the community shifted its orientation towards the new highway. The Denton Brothers Mercantile soon sported bright new awning advertising in large cursive letters "Café," "Services," and "Drinks" to the passing motorist. Other businesses up and down the highway followed suit. W.J. Crume, an enterprising businessman from Elida, built Conoco outlets in Kenna, the Antelope Service Station (no longer extant) and at nearby Elida, the Oasis Service Station and Garage, each facing directly onto the new highway. The new station at Elida boasted the first neon sign in region.<sup>23</sup> John Denton, operating his little three-pump gas station on the old road, jumped at the opportunity to work with Phillips Petroleum to build a new branded outlet. With his already

<sup>22</sup> Kenna residents who lived through the Depression claim that the period was no harder than "any other time on the ranch." Only three homes were equipped with bathtubs, and most cooking was done over a kerosene stove. One resident stated the local high school was so strapped for money in 1935 that pen and ink sketches of students were substituted for the usual photographs in the annual yearbook. Jayne Taylor, et al. "Kenna: Looking Back..." Kenna, New Mexico, No pub., 2001: 27; Earl T. Busby, et al. Personal interview. 8 Aug. 2004. Kenna, New Mexico.

<sup>23</sup> *Roosevelt County Record*. "Erects Neon Sign." 19 May 1938: 1.

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well-positioned drugstore near the highway, John installed a new floor in the building, and worked with Phillips to construct a gas station across the north side of the former bank.

### Super Service

Phillips Oil Company, originally a producer of Oklahoma crude oil, started to refine and market its own gasoline in 1927.<sup>24</sup> Although a worldwide leader in the manufacturing of natural gasoline, Phillips had no market name with consumers and was considered by its founder, Frank Phillips “of little consequence to the public as long as the remained in the wholesale end of the of the business...”<sup>25</sup> Buying its first refinery — the “teakettle” — in Borger, Texas, Phillips quickly moved into the retail market, pumping 15,000 barrels of oil every day of the week by 1929.<sup>26</sup> The Phillips brand soon established a trade territory “from New Mexico on the southwest to Minnesota on the north to Indiana in the east.”<sup>27</sup> From the small start of 1,800 filling stations in 1928, Phillips increased its inventory in 1930 to nearly 7,000 stations, many as house-type designs.<sup>28</sup>

The new Phillips gas station in Kenna, built of brick in the Mission Revival style, opened in late 1939, and was publicized for several months in a half-page advertisement in the *Roosevelt Record*. The advertisement boasted that station not only offered a full array of Phillips products, but also café fountain service and “Certified Rest Rooms.” In order to provide the cleanliness of home, the Phillips Petroleum Company in 1939 launched the Highway Hostesses program. The Phillips 66 Highway Hostesses — each dressed in a military blue uniform, and driving a car with “Certified Clean Rest Rooms” emblazoned on the doors — inspected Phillips “certified” restrooms for cleanliness.<sup>29</sup> The “super service” station, claiming to have one of the largest canopies in New Mexico, appeared prominently on road maps of the day, prompting tourists to stop, buy gas and purchase fountain drinks.<sup>30</sup> Southeast of the store, the Dentons built a small tourist court, renting wooden cabins to passing tourists.

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24 John A. Jakle and Keith A. Sculle. *The Gas Station in America*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994: 117.

25 Michael Wallis. *Oil Man: The Story of Frank Phillips and the Birth of Phillips Petroleum*. New York: Doubleday, 1988: 232.

26 Ibid: 247.

27 John A. Jakle and Keith A. Sculle. *The Gas Station in America*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994: 117.

28 Michael Wallis. *Oil Man: The Story of Frank Phillips and the Birth of Phillips Petroleum*. New York: Doubleday, 1988: 251.

29 William C. Wertz. *Phillips: The First 66 Years*. Bartlesville, OK: Phillips Petroleum Company, 1983: 65. Highway Hostesses also directed “tourists to suitable restaurants, hotels, and scenic attractions; discuss infant hygiene with traveling mothers; cooperate with various state highway patrols; and last, but not least, help sell Phillips 66 by their courteous manner, pleasant personalities and willingness to aid anyone in distress.” Clean toilets became a major emphasis of oil industry in the late 1930s and early ‘40s. Between 1937 and 1940, the National Petroleum News 75 articles on the subject of clean toilets. Susan V. Spellman. “All the Comforts of Home: The Domestication of the Service Station Industry, 1920-1940.” *The Journal of Popular Culture*. Vol. 37, No. 3, 2004:

30 Jayne Taylor, et al. “Kenna: Looking Back...”. Kenna, New Mexico, No pub., 2001: 28.

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### Decline and Survival

Kenna's population experienced a small boost during the late 1930s and early '40s.<sup>31</sup> The discovery of a shallow water aquifer near the center of the county opened the Portales Valley to irrigated agriculture. Reversing a trend of nearly 20 years of diminishing agriculture returns, Roosevelt County in 1937 produced over two million dollars in agricultural receipts.<sup>32</sup> As the area's supplier of livestock feeds, the Denton Brothers benefited from this upturn in agriculture. Exploration of the so-called Kenna and Elida domes brought new speculators to the area in the late 1930s, but neither produced oil.

John Denton died in 1954. His brothers, Edwin and Earl, decided to continue to run the gas station, but closed the drugstore. During the 1960s, the town and county again experienced a loss of population. Kenna, reduced to a few stores and dispersed houses, became "just a place to stop for gas."<sup>33</sup> Proud to have once been the second largest shipper of cattle along the A.T.&S.F., Kenna in 1965 lost its distinction even as a cow town, when cattle shipment by rail ceased. By the 1970s, Kenna had become a ghost town. The Midway Service Station no longer pumped gas, but Edwin kept a sign up in order to reach the 50-year anniversary as a Phillips dealer. When Edwin died in 1982, both the gas station and store closed. A few individuals tried to run businesses out of the service station, but each failed.

The gas station took on new life in 1993 when Maurene Howard, Kenna's postmistress, moved her operation from across the highway to the back of the old drugstore. Used by nearly 20 customers, the post office evolved into a community-gathering place, where locals meet to chat, attend Bible study classes, or just to buy a cool drink or piece of homemade cake. Howard, though no longer selling gas, keeps a few five-gallon containers of fuel for stranded motorists. Motorists driving down U.S. 70 are still surprised by the large service station, and often stop to inquire about its history. As the last standing commercial building in Kenna, the old Midway Service Station is an important symbol of Kenna's will to survive.

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31 Aside from the gas station, Kenna grew in 1938, building a new church, a WPA-assisted teacherage and contemplated developing a golf course.

32 As calculated from agricultural statistics. George Wallis. "Roosevelt County — Empire of Opportunity." *Elida National Light*. April, 1938: 1.

33 Glen A. Lanier Jr. "Kenna — Ranch Town." *New Mexico Magazine*. March, 1967: 40.

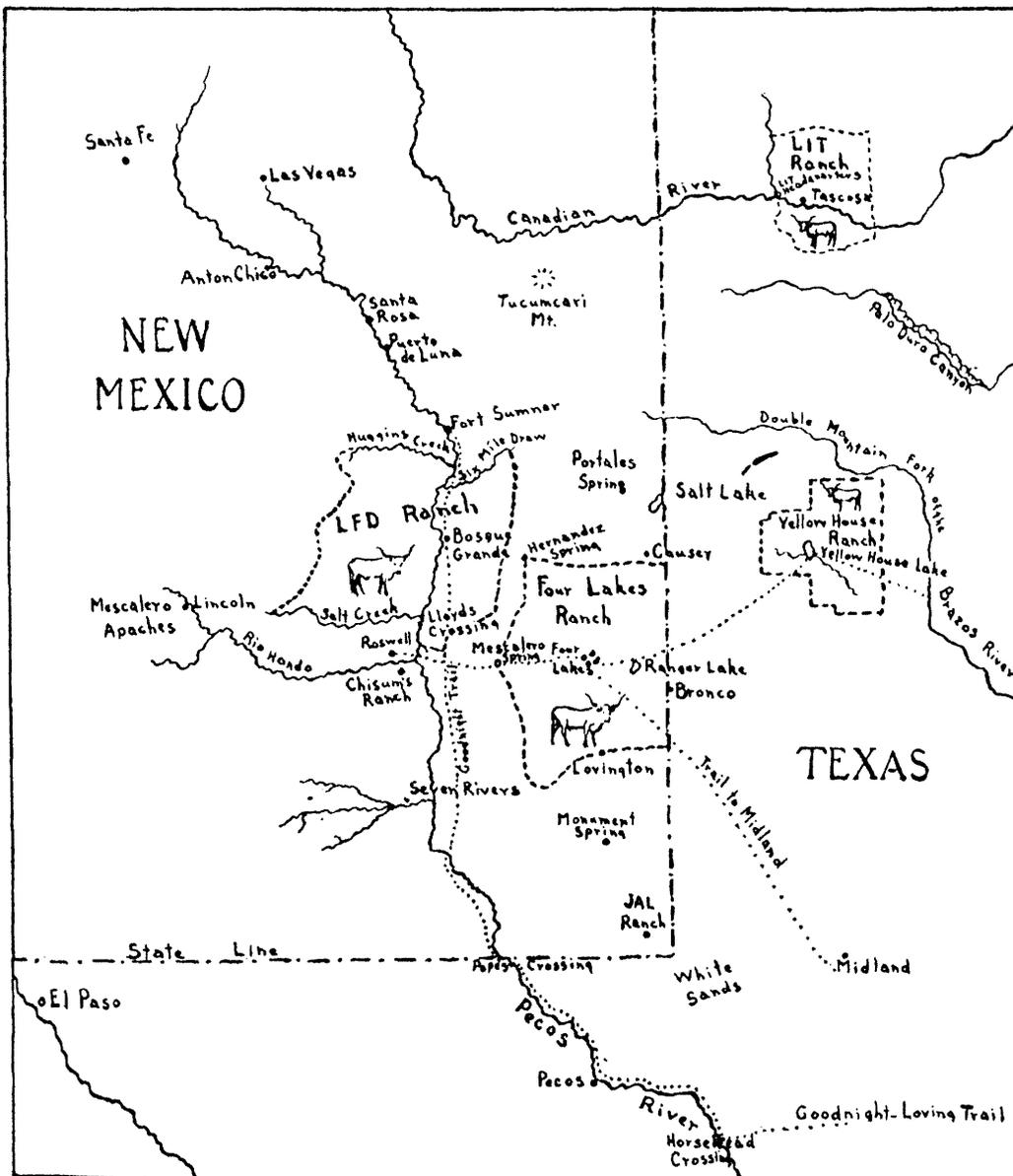
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Figure 8-1 George W. Littlefield's holdings (courtesy University of Oklahoma Press)



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### **PHOTOGRAPHS**

#### **Midway Service Station**

Kenna, Roosevelt County, New Mexico

John Murphey and Tom Drake

August 2004

Negatives on file with Historic Preservation Division, New Mexico Office of Cultural Affairs

Photo 1 of 7

Stock pens

Camera facing south

Photo 2 of 7

Front façade

Camera facing southeast

Photo 3 of 7

West elevation

Camera facing east

Photo 4 of 7

Date stone

Camera facing south

Photo 5 of 7

East elevation

Camera facing northeast

Photo 6 of 7

Store/sales area

Camera facing east

Photo 7 of 7

Garage

Camera facing southwest