

**United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For HCRS use only
received MAY 20 1980
date entered JUN 20 1980

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Oljato Trading Post

and/or common

2. Location

street & number c 75 miles SW of Blanding not for publication

city, town Oljato Blanding vic vicinity of congressional district 01

state Utah code 049 county San Juan code 037

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> museum private
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted home	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted store	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Virginia and Edward D. Smith

street & number P.O. Kayenta

city, town _____ vicinity of state Arizona 86033

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Navajo Nation

street & number _____

city, town Window Rock state AZ 86515

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title none has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date _____ federal state county local

depository for survey records _____

city, town _____ state _____

7. Description

Condition

excellent
 good
 fair

deteriorated
 ruins
 unexposed

Check one

unaltered
 altered

Check one

original site
 moved date _____

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The present structure is a roughly rectangular, single-story structure made of adobe with a flat or gently-sloping roof. The original 1921 structure, incorporated into the present one, was rectangular, of adobe, with a log and branch roof covered with dirt and sod. In building materials it imitated the construction of the Navajo hogan, the predominant local building type. As the post experienced additions in the 1930's the integrity of materials were maintained, with the exception of the roof on the new (attached) trading post which is covered with shingles. The original trading post has been converted into a private museum. A hogan, originally built in a traditional style but now cemented over, is located in front of the trading post. The nomination includes the post and hogan.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/ humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

Specific dates 1921 **Builder/Architect** Joseph Heffernan; John Taylor, Edward Smith and others have made additions.

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Oljato Trading Post built in 1921 is significant as a building closely tied to the history of Indian trading throughout the Four Corners region of Utah, Colorado, New Mexico and Arizona, and is one of the few remaining examples of this type of enterprise still flourishing in Utah. It is located approximately one mile west of the ruins of the Wetherill Trading Post (1906-1910), the first one established in the northwestern part of Navajo land. The present Oljato Trading Post continues the traditions of trading in this remote section of the reservation. It also houses an eclectic collection of Navajo artifacts which the owners wish to preserve intact with the building. The post still functions as a communications center with the only telephone for miles. It is primarily a trading post, differing slightly in appearance from those of the last century. And it retains the spirit of the "old trader" in the desire of the owners to preserve the post's appearance, function and collection of artifacts reflecting the heritage of both the traders, and the Navajos they serve.

The history of trading on the reservation has been one of growth. After the Navajo return from the "captivity" of 1864-1868 at Fort Sumner, trading posts were quickly established. "In 1887 there were six licensed traders on the [Navajo] reservation. By 1890 there were nine on the reservation and thirty more surrounding it on all sides". However, the Oljato area was undeveloped for two more decades. The movement grew until "by 1943, probably the peak of the trade, there were 146 trading posts on or near the reservation, of which ninety-five were licensed by the government".

As trade increased the type of people involved in trading gradually changed. The founders of most of the posts, known as "old traders", were an independent group of people, deeply involved in the lives of the Indians and, of necessity, concerned about their welfare. As well as salesmen, they were inn-keepers, interpreters, guides and friends to the Navajos in times of trouble. However, as the reservation modernized and contact increased with the outside world, the traders lost their old, paternalistic functions and were replaced with people more interested in commercial possibilities and less in the well-being of the Navajos. In most areas of the reservation, the "old trader" was gone by the end of World War II; in Oljato the original pattern still persists to a limited extent.

The isolation of Oljato has been a major factor in its resistance to the transformation of trading posts into supermarkets with absentee owners. Because of its remoteness, trading here began late in history. Not until 1906

9. Major Bibliographical References

Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1887, 256; 1890, 162 cited in Robert M. Utley "The Reservation Traders in Navajo History," *El Palacio*, 68 (1961).
 Frank McNitte, *The Indian Traders* (Norman, OK: Univ. Oklahoma Press, 1962).
 Interview Virginia Carson Smith, Oljato, UT August 1, 1979.

10. Geographical Data

UTM NOT VERIFIED

Acreege of nominated property less than 1

ACREAGE NOT VERIFIED

Quadrangle name Oljeto, UT

Quadrangle scale 1:62500

UMT References

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 Zone Easting Northing

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 Zone Easting Northing

C

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Verbal boundary description and justification

Boundary includes all the land within a 200 foot radius of the Trading Post and Hogan.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	code	county	code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Nancy J. Taniguchi

organization Utah State Historical Society date 2-25-80

street & number 307 West 200 South telephone 533-6017

city or town Salt Lake City state UT 84101

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

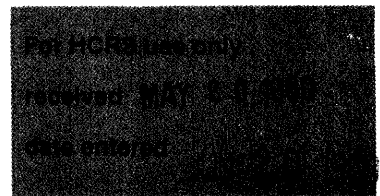
State Historic Preservation Officer signature Melvin T. Smith

title Melvin T. Smith, State Historic Preservation Officer date 5/5/80

For HCRS use only	
I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register	
<u>W. Ray Luce</u>	date <u>6/20/80</u>
Keeper of the National Register	
Attest: <u>William A. Graham</u>	date <u>6/19/80</u>
Chief of Registration	

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did the Wetherill family open a post in the area, which they ran only four years before moving on to Kayenta. An eleven-year hiatus followed, during which the local Indians had to trek long distances to sell their wares and obtain supplies.

The Oljato site remained attractive, however, largely because of the availability of water. Since 1921 a series of traders have operated there. Joseph Heffernan, the first to re-establish the post, was typical of many of the "old traders". He had moved to Colorado from New York State in 1876 and around 1908 had purchased Noland's Four Corners Store in northwestern Colorado which he ran for several years. In the early 1920's he came to Oljato and began his business in a tent. He later built an adobe structure which forms the basis of the present establishment. He retained ownership when the Navajo reservation was expanded in 1933 to include the land on which he had built the post.

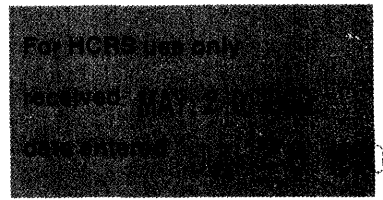
The subsequent history of Oljato has been molded by a long list of inter-related or well-acquainted Indian traders. Heffernan kept the Oljato post until 1936 when he sold it to John Taylor who kept it for two years more and then moved on to the trading post at Red Lake, Arizona (also known as Tonalea). George Pearson owned the Oljato post from 1936 to 1938, after which he sold it to Reuben Heflin, brother-in-law to the present owner, Mrs. Virginia Smith. Heflin had already been trading for a number of years, including a stint at the Shonto Trading Post in northeastern Arizona. In 1944 he was succeeded by Fred Carson who was joined by his cousin, O.J. Carson, in 1948. The Carson family had been actively involved in Indian trading since the late 19th Century and were responsible for starting Carson's Trading Post and the Huerfano Trading Post, both in northwestern New Mexico. O.J. Carson had started his own trading post in 1914 at Star Lake, south of Farmington, New Mexico, then moved to Carson's Trading Post further south and then to Oljato.

In 1949 O.J.'s daughter, Virginia, and her husband, Edward D. Smith, came to Oljato and began work. The following year Mr. Smith obtained a license from the Navajo Nation as Oljato's resident manager; on December 1, 1958 the Smiths received a 25-year lease under which they still operate.

Over the years there have been subtle changes at Oljato. During the last twenty year Mrs. Smith has amassed a fine collection of Navajo artwork, including baskets, rugs and silver. These will be kept intact at the post,

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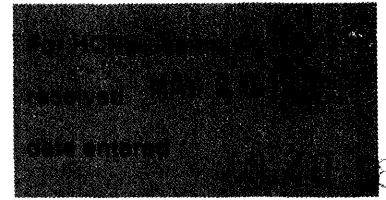
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which will hopefully be passed on to the Smith's daughter, currently the resident trader at Inscription House Trading Post. Additionally, the Oljato Trading Post has always had a traditional hogan in front, facing east, which was previously used by Navajos who travelled long distances to trade and needed a place to spend the night. Water was provided for them and they could stay as long as they wanted, but the advent of the pick-up truck shortened travel time to Oljato. Accommodations became unnecessary; the hogan was first cemented over and is now closed up. Corrals were dismantled as livestock, previously a medium of exchange, was replaced by cash as stipulated by the Navajo tribe.

The role of the traders has changed as well. "The old trader did everything for the Navajo. He was the banker, the doctor, the lawyer. Now there's so many of them [Navajos] that are educated that the trader doesn't play the role he used to in the old days. "We've written a lot of letters for them and read their mail and so forth, but we have never had to, for instance, bury them or doctor them or anything because the hospital has been here [at Goulding's] since we've been here." However, Oljato still provides a unique link to the old ways. It is still a communications center.

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Bibliography

Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1887, 256; 1890, 162, cited in Robert M. Utley, "The Reservation Trader in Navajo History", El Palacio, 68 (1961): 8

Ibid., p.9

All information on Joseph Heffernan is from Frank McNitt, The Indian Traders (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1962), pp. 309, 323, 324.

Information about the chain of title was provided by Virginia Carson Smith in an interview with Nancy J. Taniguchi at Oljato, Utah, August 1, 1979.

McNitt, p.273

Ibid., p. 303

Smith interview,

Telephone interview with Dale Underwood, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Gallup, New Mexico, January 21, 1980.