

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section _____ Page _____

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SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD

NRIS Reference Number: 08001138

Date Listed: 11/25/2008

Gate, Fence and Hollow Tree Shelter

Designed by Dionicio Rodriguez

Union

NM

Property Name

County

State

N/A

Multiple Name

This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.



Signature of the Keeper

11/25/2008

Date of Action

Amended Items in Nomination:

Historic Resource Name:

For purposes of the National Register Information System the title of the property is amended to read: *Gate, Fence and Hollow Tree Shelter Designed by Dionicio Rodriguez*

Classification:

The Category of Property is amended to read: *Structure*.
[The Category and Resource Count terminology should be consistent. As works of art, "object" might be an equally valid term, but the size and scale of the works appear better suited to use of the term "structure."]

Function:

The Historic and Current Functions are amended to add: *Recreation/Culture--Work of Art*
[This is consistent with the terminology used for similar resources in Texas. While the works had a utilitarian purpose as yard landscape features, they also represented the conscious choice of the property owner to incorporate a clear aesthetic/artistic statement into his property.]

These clarifications were confirmed with the NM SHPO office.

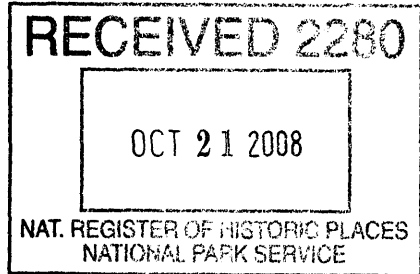
DISTRIBUTION:

National Register property file
Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)

(Oct. 1990)

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM**



1138

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

HISTORIC NAME: Gate, Fence and Hollow Tree Shelter Designed by Dionicio Rodriguez for B.C. Froman
OTHER NAME/SITE NUMBER: N/A

2. LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER: 320 Oak Street
CITY OR TOWN: Clayton
STATE: New Mexico **CODE:** NM **COUNTY:** Union **CODE:** 59
NOT FOR PUBLICATION: N/A
VICINITY: N/A
ZIP CODE: 88415

3. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this 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
 meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant ___ nationally
___ statewide locally. (___ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Katherine Slich
Signature of certifying official

16 Oct 2008
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): _____

[Signature]
Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

11/25/2008

5. CLASSIFICATION

OWNERSHIP OF PROPERTY: Private

CATEGORY OF PROPERTY: Object

NUMBER OF RESOURCES WITHIN PROPERTY:	CONTRIBUTING	NONCONTRIBUTING
	0	0 BUILDINGS
	0	0 SITES
	3	0 STRUCTURES
	0	0 OBJECTS
	3	0 TOTAL

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

NAME OF RELATED MULTIPLE PROPERTY LISTING: N/A

6. FUNCTION OR USE

HISTORIC FUNCTIONS: Landscape Street Furniture/object=bench, fence, gate

CURRENT FUNCTIONS: Landscape Street Furniture/object=bench, fence, gate

7. DESCRIPTION

ARCHITECTURAL CLASSIFICATION: Other: Faux bois sculpture

MATERIALS:

FOUNDATION	N/A
WALLS	N/A
ROOF	N/A
OTHER	Concrete

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

8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

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: Art

PERIOD OF SIGNIFICANCE: 1943

SIGNIFICANT DATES: 1943

SIGNIFICANT PERSON: N/A

CULTURAL AFFILIATION: N/A

ARCHITECT/BUILDER: Rodriguez, Dionicio, designer/builder

NARRATIVE STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE (see continuation sheets 8-8 through 8-14).

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES

BIBLIOGRAPHY (see continuation sheets 9-15 through 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: Herzstein Memorial Museum, Clayton, New Mexico

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF PROPERTY: less than one acre

UTM REFERENCES Zone Easting Northing
1. 13 0663083 4035413

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION The assembled structures making up the nominated property are located in the north and west portion of a tract of land described as Lots 22 and 24 Block 1347 Clayton Original Addition, Clayton, Union County, New Mexico. The nominated property is approximately 82' in length, relative north to south, along South Third Street and 69' in length, relative east to west, along Oak Street and 20' wide along both sections.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION The boundary is drawn to include only the structures and their immediate setting. While the adjacent home is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, it is not associated with Dionicio Rodriguez.

11. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME/TITLE: Patsy Pittman Light with Maria Pfeiffer and John Murphey

ORGANIZATION: New Mexico Historic Preservation Division

DATE: February 2008

STREET & NUMBER: 407 Galisteo Street, Suite 236

TELEPHONE: 505-8276320

CITY OR TOWN: Santa Fe

STATE: NM

ZIP CODE: 87501

ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION

CONTINUATION SHEETS

MAPS (see enclosed *Clayton, NM*, USGS quadrangle map).

PHOTOGRAPHS (see continuation sheet Photo-21)

ADDITIONAL ITEMS N/A

PROPERTY OWNER

NAME: Lani Hammond

STREET & NUMBER: 11320 Southwest 11th Street

TELEPHONE: 503-641-0176

CITY OR TOWN: Beaverton

STATE: OR

ZIP CODE: 97005

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Gate, Fence and Hollow Tree Shelter Designed by Dionicio Rodriguez for B.C. Froman
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Description

The faux-wood concrete structures designed by Dionicio Rodriguez for B.C. Froman draw attention to the intersection of Oak and South Third streets in this otherwise unremarkable neighborhood in Clayton, New Mexico. Made entirely of ornately rusticated concrete, the ensemble consists of a faux-wood log fence, a hollow tree trunk bench and a Japanese *Torii*-like entry. Constructed in 1943 for local contractor B.C. Froman, these structures exhibit the artistry of their creator, Mexican artisan Dionicio Rodriguez. The sculptural fence and entry are masterful illustrations of Rodriguez's life-like *trabajo rustico* (rustic wood) technique and the only known example of his work in New Mexico. Aside from weathering, the structures retain a high degree of integrity of location, design, workmanship, setting, feeling and association.

Setting

The B.C. Froman structures are situated in a neighborhood east of downtown Clayton. The residential area is populated with early- to mid-twentieth century homes shaded by mature trees. The whimsical structures frame the B.C. Froman home, the most architecturally significant house in the neighborhood (Photo 1). Designed by Froman, a local building contractor, the 1933 house exhibits an exuberant and eclectic blending of architectural styles. The two-story, buff-tan brick home displays an essentially classical design ornamented with heavy cast-stone features painted brilliant white. Froman, who vacationed in Mexico, Spain, Greece, Turkey and Asia, incorporated many of the architectural traditions he observed on his travels into his home (Wilson 1968: 20). These traditions influenced the Ionic columns and classical entablature across the facade, the Turkish-type entry, the hipped roof over the third-story observatory, and much of the design of the interior. His travels and taste for the exotic also influenced Froman to hire Dionicio Rodriguez to create the rusticated structures that grace his front yard.

Fence

Starting at the east, along Oak Street, is a low fence exhibiting Rodriguez's *trabajo rustico* technique. It is made of concrete posts fashioned to look like weathered tree trunks (Photo 2). From the posts grow a sinuous and life-like array of concrete branches that function as fence rails. After the first section, a small gate made of the same material gives passage to a side yard. The fence continues for approximately 69' along Oak before intersecting with South Third Street. At Third, the fence turns south and continues for approximately 82', including a break for the entry, before terminating at a driveway. The Froman fence is typical of a Rodriguez design, with its intertwining concrete branches and overall rustic appearance.

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Hollow Tree Shelter

Situated just beyond the fence at the northwest corner of the property is a unique seating area—a bench made of a large concrete cylinder designed to look like a hollowed out tree (Photo 3). The “tree trunk,” measuring 9’ high and 21’-3” in diameter, exhibits a less nuanced technique than found in Rodriguez’s log creations. It is entered through a low door, and three oblong shaped windows offer views to the house, side yard and street. In concept, the bench is reminiscent of a Victorian-era design, offering a semi-private experience to the sitter. Rodriguez designed similar hollow tree shelters for clients in San Antonio, Texas, Memphis, Tennessee, North Little Rock, Arkansas and Suitland, Maryland.

Torii-style Gate

The most elaborate element of the composition is the entry, for which Rodriguez employed the *trabajo rustico* technique to build a Japanese-style gate (Photos 1 & 4). Modeled after Rodriguez’s 1942 Japanese Sunken Garden Gate¹ at Brackenridge Park, San Antonio, the Froman structure is less elaborate in scale and ornamentation (Figure 7-1).

The San Antonio design, constructed by Rodriguez, with assistance from frequent collaborator Maximo Cortes, was commissioned by the City of San Antonio as an entry to a garden made from a reclaimed quarry. In both designs sturdy rusticated concrete logs support a cross piece, resembling the woodwork of a *myoujin* (curved beam) torii gate. The torii, in traditional Japanese culture, sits at the entry of a Shinto shrine. It signifies the passage to a sacred space and symbolizes an act of sanctification before approaching a shrine.

The entry is sheltered by a tiered roof displaying a characteristic Asian design with their hipped formation and flared eaves. The tiered roof, though greatly simplified, is reminiscent of the pagodas of Japanese antiquity. The roof material is made to look like thatch. Unlike the San Antonio gate, the Froman design does not terminate with a pagoda-like finial.

The gate represents Rodriguez’s mastery, if not perfection, of the *trabajo rustico* technique. Vertical lines, meant to look like stray axe marks, give a realistic touch to the crosspiece. The logs, stained in a marbling of reds and tans, reveal realistic details, including sections of peeled back bark, knot- and worm-holes and cracks (Photo 5).

¹ This gate and the gate in San Antonio are the only known Asian-style entries designed by Rodriguez. After its completion in 1942, the San Antonio garden was renamed the Chinese Tea Garden because of the anti-Japanese sentiment during the time. The name reverted to the Japanese Tea Garden in 1983, though the title “Chinese Tea Garden” still adorns the crosspiece of the gate.

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Figure 7-1: Chine Tea Garden Gate, Brackenridge Park, San Antonio (John Murphey, 1998)



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Significance

Designed by master folk artist Dionicio Rodriguez, the B.C. Froman commission consists of a log fence, a hollow tree shelter, and a torii-style gate—all fashioned in Rodriguez's *trabajo rustico* style. As a composition, the three elements show Rodriguez's mastery of the concrete rustic-wood technique. The B.C. Froman commission is nominated to the National Register under Criterion C, in the area of Art, as an excellent example of Dionicio Rodriguez's concrete sculptural work.

The Work of Dionicio Rodriguez

Mexican artisan Dionicio Rodriguez was a skilled practitioner of the technique variously described as rustic, *faux bois* (imitation wood) or *trabajo rustico* (rustic work).² His great-nephew by marriage, Carlos Cortés, who continues to practice this art form today, describes Rodriguez's naturalistic style as "organic" (Cortés to Light). John Beardsley, an authority on landscape architecture, believes that Rodriguez was trained in this tradition in Mexico before coming to the United States ca.1924 (Beardsley 1995: 130).

Over a period of nearly thirty years, from 1924 through the early 1950s, Dionicio Rodriguez traveled throughout the United States creating concrete sculptural works which imitated the natural forms and textures of rocks and wood. His designs include gates, bridges, steps, grottos, fountains, hollow tree shelters, thatched-roof benches, tables, and buildings. Many of these works were included in planned landscape environments. Examples of theme-oriented environments include a cave and pool at Memorial Park in Memphis, Stations of the Cross at St. Joseph's Church and Shrine in Cambridge, Michigan, and the "old mill" at T. R. Pugh Memorial Park in North Little Rock, Arkansas.

The extent of Rodriguez's travels is attested to by known remaining examples of his artistry in Arkansas, Maryland, Michigan, Illinois, Tennessee, Alabama and New Mexico. A portion of this work is already listed on the National Register of Historic Places:

² The background information on Dionicio Rodriguez and his work is taken directly from the document, *Sculpture by Dionicio Rodriguez in Texas*, a Multiple Property Documentation Form prepared by consultants for the Texas SHPO. The Texas SHPO gave permission to repeat this information for the preparation of this nomination. Material specific to the B.C. Froman commission Rodriguez's work in New Mexico was generated by the New Mexico Historic Preservation Division. The New Mexico Historic Preservation Division took liberty editing sections of the original document.

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Faux Bois Sculpture

Dionicio Rodriguez's use of the rustic theme in garden design has documented antecedents in Europe, Asia, Mexico and the United States that span several centuries. John Beardsley writes that *faux bois* pieces were "incorporated into the landscape of public parks in nineteenth-century Europe." A small building behind the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris has a "wood" textured façade and roof, with a plaque reading "*Ciment Arme. Travaux Rustiques*" (reinforced cement; rustic work) *J. Dunaique*. Concrete "wooden" bridges can be seen in several parks in the environs of Paris, and there are two stairways at the Musee Hotel Baudy in Giverny, France.

Many *faux bois* designs are associated with whimsical themes and are known as follies, as exemplified by Marie Antoinette's folly, the Petit Trianon at Versailles. A less well-known example was the fanciful pagoda at Bonnelles, France, commissioned by the Duke d'Uzes, ca. 1780 (demolished) (Dams and Zega 1995:161). A tiny, Chinese-style structure on an artificial rockwork island in a lake was reached by a series of rustic arching wooden bridges. In Turkey, Sultan Abdulhamid's gardens at Yildiz Park, outside of Istanbul, have a bridge built in 1877. Examples of rustic concrete work also can be found in Mexico and Japan.

In the United States, A.J. Downing designed naturalistic landscapes in the 1840s, and landscape engineer George Woodward's drawings of rustic wooden seats were published in 1869 in *Woodward's Architecture and Rural Art*. Architect Calvert Vaux, who, with Frederick Law Olmstead, was responsible for much of the early design of Central Park, published drawings of a rustic wooden bridge and a shelter for the park in 1854 (Vaux, 1864, 292, 288). Several of these structures have been reconstructed using the original drawings (Rogers to Light).

It is important to note that at the time Dionicio Rodriguez was working, there were other artisans practicing in the *trabajo rustico* genre. Several of these individuals worked with Rodriguez at different times. These craftsmen included Basilio (last name unavailable), Sam Murray, Maximo Cortés, Modesto Dena, Aguilar (who signed his work, "Aguilar, maker"), Dionicio Rosales, Tony Lopez, Mauro Del Toro, Ralph Corona and George Cardosa. Although there are fine, extant works by these men (and others whose identities are unknown), it is generally agreed that Rodriguez was the most skilled practitioner of the genre.

Genaro Briones also worked with Rodriguez in Memphis in the 1930s, and later used tinted concrete on his own house in Austin (Briones House, NR 1998). Rodriguez frequently visited the house while it was under construction, beginning in 1947. Briones was no imitator, developing a style of his own: while Rodriguez utilized color to achieve a natural effect, Briones applied bright colors to low relief as a bold decorative device. Briones' *faux bois* furniture in the front yard, however, is reminiscent of Rodriguez's lighter pieces of park furniture.

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Dionicio Rodriguez (1891-1955)

Dionicio Rodriguez was born in Toluca, on the outskirts of Mexico City, on April 11, 1891.³ His family moved to Mexico City, where, as a young man, he assisted his father in building brick houses. Later, he was employed by Luis Robles Gil, a civil engineer and contractor who specialized in works of reinforced concrete. He also worked for J.W. Douglas, making concrete objects. Discussing Rodriguez's work on the artificial rocks in Lagos de Chapultepec, a Mexico City park, Rodriguez's cousin, Manuela Vargas Theall said, "they made everything that looked like rock" (Theall to Light). Although not documented as his work, there are approximately 100 *palapa* (a structure with a roof made of bundled straw) benches in Parque de Mexico in the La Condesa district of Mexico City that could be by Rodriguez as they are similar to benches that he created in the United States.

In 1924, armed with letters of recommendation from Gil and Douglas, Rodriguez left Mexico City, and lived for a short time in Monterrey (see Appendix, items 2 and 3). There he joined Maximo Cortés' father who worked near a cemetery where he made *pedra prensada* (ornamental work). The elder Cortés suggested that Rodriguez go to Laredo, Texas, where he found work with Maximo Cortés, who was casting cement embellishments for a school (Cortés to Light). After a short period, Rodriguez left Laredo and moved to San Antonio, arriving in about 1924 during the city's pre-Depression building boom. The 1924-1925 San Antonio City Directory lists "D. Rodriguez," an employee of Alamo Cement Company, living at 1919 W. Commerce. Soon after moving to San Antonio, Rodriguez contacted Maximo Cortés to inform him that there were employment opportunities. "I'm going to return the favor, and you can work with me" (Cortés to Light). Cortés came to San Antonio, and the two later collaborated on numerous projects.

According to photographs, Dionicio Rodriguez was small in stature with a dark complexion. He suffered throughout his adult life with diabetes, which eventually caused him to lose his sight. His diabetic condition was not diagnosed until two of his clients, Clovis Hinds and Justin Matthews, arranged for him to seek medical help in Arkansas in 1935. His personality has been described as "*muy aparte y muy seria*" (very distant and serious) (Del Toro to Pfeiffer and Light). Manuela Theall said, "He didn't have many friends because he was always going—he didn't stay in one place too many days" (Theall to Light). According to Theall, he was a very neat dresser, usually wearing a coat and tie. She said, "He took off his coat, put on a pair of long pants, rolled up his

³ Much of what is known about the life of Dionicio Rodriguez is based on interviews with his niece, Manuela Vargas Theall, who traveled with him to commissions outside of Texas from May 1937 to March 1938; fellow artisan, Sam Murray; Mrs. Guadalupe Del Toro, the wife of Mauro Del Toro who worked with Rodriguez; and Carlos Cortés, Rodriguez's great nephew by marriage.

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sleeves and went to work” to apply the details and color to the forms that had been constructed by laborers under his supervision.

Dionicio Rodriguez’s work is on a human scale and the tints he used mimic the colors of the natural surfaces that he emulated. The majority of his works are realistically modeled in cement that imitates wood surfaces of cross-cut and hewn logs, tree trunks, logs and branches with deeply textured and peeling bark, knot holes, insect borings and patches of lichen. Rodriguez did not discuss his work nor did he make preliminary drawings.

With assistance from his helpers, he formed the armatures of the sculptural works from steel reinforcing bars, bound them together with wire, wrapped them with mesh wire, filled the wire with cement and rubble, and applied a coat of rough cement. (In one instance, at Pugh’s Old Mill project in Arkansas, he used copper rebar in order to insure longevity of the work.) He then applied a final coat of “neat” (pure) Portland cement with no mortar directly from the bag. According to Stanley Schmidt, “He just sat down on the ground with a sack of cement, and started working” (Schmidt 1980:1). Rodriguez used homemade tools and ordinary tableware to create textures, although he later acquired some professional tools. His ability to reproduce the textures of rocks, thatch and wooden surfaces is so realistic that in many cases it is impossible to distinguish the difference between cement imitation and actual surface.

Rodriguez was very secretive about his process, especially the final step that included the application of color when the cement was slightly damp. According to John Kagay, the chemist at the Alamo Portland Cement Company, San Antonio, Texas, who supplied him with these colorants when he was in San Antonio, he used a mixture of water and chemicals to create various tints—sulfuric acid, muriatic acid, iron oxide, saltpeter and some lampblack to darken the colors (Schmidt to Light and Pfeiffer). His niece, Manuela Theall, recalled that he heated these chemicals with water on a stove.

John Richmond, who worked with Rodriguez in Memphis, recalled that the artisan always wore rubber gloves when he was applying the chemicals (Richmond to Smythe and Anthony). Rodriguez kept the colorants in the trunk of his car, and if anyone came too close, he immediately shut the trunk lid. He sometimes mixed them in a tent adjacent to his work site. One source recalls that he would break the bottles of the chemicals when they were empty, in order to keep anyone from learning their identity (Richmond to Smythe and Anthony).

Rodriguez’s rustic style of work, using concrete and metal reinforcing rods to reproduce realistic sculptures that imitated wood or rock, was a technique that he learned in Mexico from one of his early employers, Robles Gil. It is possible that that Gil was familiar with faux bois antecedents in Europe (oral tradition reveals that Gil had come to Mexico from Europe), but it is unlikely that Rodriguez had seen drawings

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or reproductions of European works. Rodriguez has been recognized as the most skilled and most “naturalistic” of the artisans who were working in this style in the United States in the 20th century (Cortés to Light). Many of his peers learned the sculpting technique from him, although few were able to duplicate his method of color application or attain his level of expertise.

In spite of his extensive travels and many commissions, Rodriguez never learned to speak or write English. Letters from Rodriguez to a client, Clovis Hinds, were apparently written for him by friends and/or family members (Clovis Hinds’ Collection). Rodriguez worked intermittently for Hinds at Memorial Cemetery in Memphis from the early 1930s through the early 1940s, and his correspondence indicates that he was a conscientious worker. He wrote, “I always try to do the best of my ability” (Rodriguez to Hinds, ca. 1939).

Rodriguez purchased a new car each year for his travels to work on commissions across the United States. Manuela Theall said he didn’t know anything about cars, and he wouldn’t let anyone else drive, although occasionally she was permitted to drive on country roads. Traveling companions included friends and/or family members, and the group would rent rooms in boarding houses, hotels or YMCAs. He hired local laborers as assistants at the various job sites. Between projects, when weather conditions were not right for working in concrete, during cold weather, or when he was not feeling well, Rodriguez would return to Mexico or San Antonio. He was married and divorced twice, and had no children.

Dionicio Rodriguez’s peripatetic nature makes it difficult to precisely catalogue his work by place and year. His first jobs after he arrived from Mexico were in San Antonio and the largest concentration of his work in Texas can be found there. The second phase of his work was primarily in other parts of Texas, and finally, he began securing commissions throughout the United States. His career in the United States spanned a period of over twenty years, from 1924 to the early 1950s, and much of his work remains intact (2003).

B. C. Froman Commission

Born Bayliss Calvin Froman on September 1873 in Elizabethtown, Kentucky, Froman was remembered to be a determined businessman and an “expressive, fast-talking, gentleman.” He could be generous to his friends, giving them home-made wine, yet once fired a carpenter who dropped too many nails on the roof of a building Froman was constructing (Bullock 1989: 61). A Republican and a Baptist, in 1900 Froman married Mamie Abernathy, a Democrat and a Methodist, and together they moved in 1910 to Sofia, New Mexico, where they homesteaded. In 1929, the Fromans relocated to Clayton, where he established a successful contracting business. As a contractor, Froman built many of Clayton’s public and commercial buildings, including gas stations, stores and churches (*Union County Leader*).

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For his own home, Froman designed an exuberant amalgam of architectural traditions he had observed while traveling in Europe, Asia, and South America. In Clayton, Froman was considered a man of means, who because of his wealth and no children could do eccentric things, like design a house with canon-like drain pipes and import a tree from Kentucky to use as a staircase. Froman even kept in his study a lamp made from a human skull (Bullock 1989: 6B). According to his close friend, former Clayton building inspector Manson Edmondson, Froman had a dream about “the fence before he had it built” (Bullock 1989: 1B).

Spending winters in Corpus Christi, the Fromans would stop in San Antonio on their return to Clayton. On one such trip, Froman arrived too late to visit the Alamo, and instead stopped to look at a Rodriguez sculpture at Alamo Plaza (Bullock 1989: 6B). Intrigued by the design, Froman sought out Rodriguez, enticing him and several “Mexican nationals” to travel Clayton to create a similar design for his eclectic home.

During its construction, Froman asked Edmondson to monitor Rodriguez’s work. Edmondson recalled that the Mexican crew made the cement “in a box kind of secret-like, and when you’d go up to talk to them they would turn away” (Bullock 1989: 6B). Clifford Sampier, who lived as a boy on Oak Street between 1943 and 1946, remembered Rodriguez and a crew of three to four men working on the project. Sampier, intrigued by the technique, tried to speak to the workmen, but the men were standoffish, and spoke a “different kind of Spanish” (Sampier to Murphey). Still, Sampier marveled over their technique, “especially the intricate knots.”

After its completion, at a cost of \$2,800, Edmondson remembered Froman to be “proud as punch about the job they did on the sculpture,” and greatly admiring of their work (Bullock 1989: 6B). But Mamie died several years later, and Froman spent less time at home, while traveling more and leaving the house nearly empty. Froman died in 1956. Locals consider Rodriguez’s sculptures to be his most visible legacy.

Rodriguez’s Later Activities 1942-1955

Dionicio Rodriguez’s worsening diabetic condition had prompted Justin Matthews to write to Clovis Hinds in March 1935. Hinds made an appointment for Rodriguez with a Dr. Ruder who continued to treat him for several years. By 1941, Rodriguez wrote that he was not well, and was having treatments with the doctor. The final letter from Hinds to Rodriguez was mailed to Dallas in 1942. It appears that they had had a disagreement about money owed by Hinds to the artisan. Theall believes that Rodriguez was married to his second wife when he was in Dallas.

Only a few records are available about Rodriguez’s activities from 1942 until his death in 1955. Theall states that he didn’t travel much after 1942, and returned to San Antonio to live in his “tree” house, where he had a stove, some trunks, and a small cot. Frank Tovar remembers visiting him there, and Rodriguez would pay him and his siblings a penny for each gray hair they would remove from his head. His niece recalls that during the war years he worked on smaller pieces because it was difficult for him to acquire steel and concrete for large

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projects. She remembers some of this later work, such as deer, baskets and other decorative garden pieces that were stored in a yard at a home on General McMullen Drive in San Antonio (Theall to Light).

Rodriguez's last projects were completed after he returned to San Antonio; the portal for the Japanese Tea Garden in 1942 and the grotto at the Moye Military Academy in Castroville, Texas in 1945. In the early 1950s, Rodriguez was commissioned to build a bridge for the Lake View Motel in Little Rock, Arkansas. The bridge (demolished) had realistic "log" rails along its length with large plant containers at regular intervals (Dean 1982: 1-3C). He also worked on the façade of the Jacala restaurant in San Antonio during this time.

Fellow artisan Sam Murray says that during Rodriguez's final years, his eyesight was failing. He would bring some of his work, which lacked the quality of his earlier projects, to Murray for him to sell (Murray to Pfeiffer and Light). According to Bill Green, Rodriguez's health continued to decline, and doctors wanted to remove one of his legs, but instead amputated several of his toes (Green, personal files).

When Dionicio Rodriguez was hospitalized during his last illness, he asked Maximo Cortés to go to his "tree" house and look in his Bible. Cortés found \$500 that Rodriguez instructed him to use for his grave marker (Cortés to Light). He died at the Robert B. Green Hospital of coronary occlusion on December 16, 1955, and was buried in San Fernando Cemetery #2 in San Antonio.

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Photo Log

The following information pertains to all photographs unless otherwise noted:

Gate, Fence and Hollow Tree Shelter Designed by Dionicio Rodriguez for B.C. Froman

Clayton, Union County, New Mexico

Photographer: Patsy Pittman Light

Photographs taken: June 2003

Digital images on file with Patsy Pittman Light

Photo 1 of 5

B.C. Froman House

Camera facing southeast

Photo 2 of 5

Fence

Camera facing southeast

Photo 3 of 5

Hollow Tree Shelter

Camera facing northeast

Photo 4 of 5

Entry Gate

Camera facing west

Photo 5 of 5

Detail of Entry Gate

Camera facing southeast