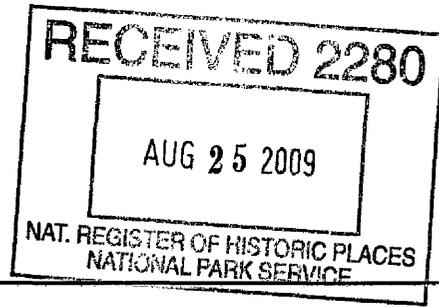


(Oct. 1990)

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM

817



1. NAME OF PROPERTY

HISTORIC NAME: Acoma Curio Shop

OTHER NAME/SITE NUMBER: Gallery 66

2. LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER: 1090 State Road 124

CITY OR TOWN: San Fidel

STATE: New Mexico

CODE: NM

COUNTY: Cibola

CODE: 006

NOT FOR PUBLICATION: N/A

VICINITY: N/A

ZIP CODE: 87049

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.)

Jan V Biella  
Signature of certifying official

11 August 2009  
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

10-7-09  
Date of Action

---

**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>
	1	0 BUILDINGS
	0	0 SITES
	0	0 STRUCTURES
	0	0 OBJECTS
	1	0 TOTAL

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

**NAME OF RELATED MULTIPLE PROPERTY LISTING:** *The Historic and Architectural Resources of Route 66 through New Mexico*

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**6. FUNCTION OR USE**

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**HISTORIC FUNCTIONS:** Commercial/Trade: specialty (curio)

**CURRENT FUNCTIONS:** Commercial/Trade: specialty (art gallery)

---

**7. DESCRIPTION**

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**ARCHITECTURAL CLASSIFICATION:**

**MATERIALS:** FOUNDATION Sandstone  
WALLS Adobe; Stucco  
ROOF Metal  
OTHER N/A

**NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION** (see continuation sheets 7-5 through 7-6).

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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:** c.1937-1940

**SIGNIFICANT DATES:** c.1937; 1940

**SIGNIFICANT PERSON:** N/A

**CULTURAL AFFILIATION:** N/A

**ARCHITECT/BUILDER:** unknown

**NARRATIVE STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE** (see continuation sheets 8-7 through 8-13).

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**9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES**

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**BIBLIOGRAPHY** (see continuation sheet 9-14 through 9-15).

**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    0263201    3885247

**VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION** The boundary for the nominated property consists of the north half of Lot 1 of Parcel #196-296, Cibola County Tax Map, Section 20, Township 10 N, Range 7 W, San Fidel, Cibola County, New Mexico.

**BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION** The boundary includes the parcel containing the building that is historically associated with the nominated resource during the period of significance.

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**11. FORM PREPARED BY**

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**NAME/TITLE:** John Murphey, Architectural Historian

**ORGANIZATION:** New Mexico Historic Preservation Division

**DATE:** November 2008

**STREET & NUMBER:** 407 Galisteo Street, Suite 236

**TELEPHONE:** 505-827-3990

**CITY OR TOWN:** Santa Fe

**STATE:** NM

**ZIP CODE:** 87501

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**ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION**

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**CONTINUATION SHEETS**

**MAPS** (see enclosed *Cubero* USGS quadrangle map).

**PHOTOGRAPHS** (see continuation sheet Photo-16)

**ADDITIONAL ITEMS** (see continuation sheets Figures 17 through Figures 20).

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**PROPERTY OWNER**

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**NAME:** Michael T. Petzel

**STREET & NUMBER:** P.O. Box 201

**TELEPHONE:** 505-554-6316

**CITY OR TOWN:** San Fidel

**STATE:** NM

**ZIP CODE:** 87409

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 5

Acoma Curio Shop  
San Fidel, Cibola County, New Mexico

### Description

Constructed in c.1916, the Acoma Curio Shop is a simple false-front building straddling former U.S. 66 in San Fidel, Cibola County, New Mexico. Composed of coarse adobe, the single-story structure was used during the period of significance to sell locally made American Indian crafts to dealers and passing tourists. The building consists of one large open room, used as a gallery, and a smaller room to the rear. Over its 90 years of use, the building reveals little loss of integrity, retaining its original window and door openings and the majority of its interior finishes.

### Setting

Situated 20' south of old U.S. 66, the Acoma Curio Shop is one of the last active businesses in San Fidel, a small rural community in central Cibola County. San Fidel (pop. 220), sitting under the shadow of Mount Taylor, was stripped of its commercial activity in the 1970s with the completion of Interstate 40 to the south. Evidence of this lost commerce includes the shuttered White Arrow Garage to the west, the crumbling adobe remains of the Ramsey's Café to the east, and to the north, across the highway, Tafoya Café, a forlorn building with a washed-out neon sign. Among these ruins sits the curio shop, a whitewashed adobe gallery with blue window and door trim — a bright spot along this faded stretch of highway.<sup>1</sup>

The Acoma Curio Shop is a one-story, adobe-constructed building with a prominent false front hiding an original corrugated metal gable roof (Photo 1). Its walls made of double adobe bricks, are approximately 18" thick. The walls along the north and west elevations are stuccoed and painted crisp white. Starting at the northeast corner, 12' of the east wall is covered with stucco, revealing in faded letters the name "ACOMA CURIO SHOP" (Photo 2). Beyond, the adobes are exposed to the elements (Photo 3). The south wall is additionally exposed, showing the composition of the adobes, which includes bits of rock, metal, glass and various parts of plants and animals.

The façade is sheltered by a simple sloping shed roof supported by square posts. The false front and the roof are covered with corrugated metal painted white. The porch, with a ceiling of pressed tin panels and a concrete floor, provides shelter from the sun and the elements (Photo 4). The façade is divided into two large four-light swing windows<sup>2</sup> to the east and a double-door entry to the west. The entry is two three-panel-and-light wood doors painted blue and topped with a swing function transom.

<sup>1</sup> The remnants of two signs — most likely advertising a service station— are located just north and northeast of the nominated property. The signs are not located within the legal and/or nominated boundary of the property. While they were most likely erected after the period of significance, they neither detract from nor diminish the setting of the roadside business.

<sup>2</sup> All window and door openings have two opposing layers of wood lintels to accommodate the thick walls.

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# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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Acoma Curio Shop  
San Fidel, Cibola County, New Mexico

The doors open to a large room (30' x 45') divided by a partition, making up the entirety of the store. The floor is tongue-and-groove; the ceiling is covered with patterned tin panels (Photo 5). Walls are stucco finished with a modest crown molding. The east and west sides of the room are punctured with two small windows set high in the wall. Various holes indicate the locations where a wood stove once sat. The building has no plumbing.

Two original five-panel doors at the rear (south) lead to a back room with a lower shed roof. This room, used as storage, is composed of adobe and contains a single casement window and three doors. The narrow door to the west opens to a shed roof porch enclosed by a rough slab wood wall (Photo 6). These two elements are an addition to the c.1916 building. Though their date of construction is unknown, they appeared by 1936, placing them within the period of significance.

The false-front of the façade is noteworthy in that most curio and roadside trading post operators in the Southwest traded on the romantic image of Pueblo Indian and Hispanic architectural traditions to dress up their businesses. The false-front façade, more typical of mining boom towns where it was used to lend a sense of legitimacy,<sup>3</sup> is rare along U.S. 66 in New Mexico. Here the choice to keep the false-front of the older building may indicate the owner's motivation to quickly catch tourist trade. Additionally, the facade in a modest way harkens to one of the most famous New Mexico curio shops, J.S. Candelario's The Old Curio Store in Santa Fe, which used a prominent false-front to advertise its merchandise.

The building has weathered several changes in use over the years, but retains a high degree of integrity of location, design, feeling and association. Few historic roadside curios or tourist trading posts remain in New Mexico. Construction of Interstate 40 shuttered dozens of Route 66 curios that came into existence in the 1930s and 1940s. While some of their urban counterparts continue to exist, and often still sell curios, the rural roadside curio has succumbed to abandonment and demolition. The integrity and its continued use as a gallery elevates its significance above the few surviving U.S. 66 rural curio trading posts of the era.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Kingston W.M. Heath, "False-Front Architecture on Montana's Urban Frontier." In *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture*, III. Carter, Thomas, and Bernard L. Herman, eds. Published for the Vernacular Architectural Forum, Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1989: 200.

<sup>4</sup> Approximately three other Route 66 rural roadside curios of this period survive in New Mexico, including the National Register-listed Bowlin's Old Crater Trading Post in nearby Bluewater.

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## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 7

Acoma Curio Shop  
San Fidel, Cibola County, New Mexico

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### Significance

Operated by Lebanese immigrant Abdo H. Fidel, the Acoma Curio Store represents a trend along U.S. 66 to sell American Indian crafts at a specialty store — the roadside curio. Neither a traditional trading post nor the tourist trap that would dominate the highway after World War II, the roadside curio shop represented a short-lived trend to adapt the nineteenth century idea of curio trade to the developing sphere of roadside, tourist-driven commerce. Working directly with artisans from Acoma Pueblo, Fidel sold authentic crafts to dealers and passing motorists. As a business, his roadside curio soon closed, and Fidel returned to managing his original enterprise, the San Fidel Store. Despite its short use, the Acoma Curio Shop is an important example of this trend. It stands as one of the last rural curio shops in New Mexico still retaining the majority of its integrity from the period of significance. The building meets the criteria of “Curio Shops,” defined in *The Historic Architectural Resources of Route 66 through New Mexico* Multiple Property Documentation Form, and is eligible at the local level under Criterion A, Commerce.

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### Context

Much of the experience of Route 66 in the West, especially across New Mexico and Arizona, was anticipated and colored by tourists’ exposure to American Indians and their culture, particularly their arts and crafts. The selling of American Indian culture, first exploited by the Santa Fe Railway, picked up speed in the 1920s as swarms of tourists, guided by more reliable automobiles and better highways, headed for the Southwest. Without the restrictions of train travel, the automobile tourist became free to create his or her own experience of the seemingly “exotic” multiracial cultures of the Southwest.<sup>5</sup>

The rise of the roadside curio shop — often called a trading post — coincided with major changes taking place on the Navajo Reservation, including a federal stock reduction program and a move to a cash economy that jeopardized the business of the traditional on-reservation trading post operator. As the barter system began to fail, tourism along the highway emerged as a new means to earn a living.

Acting for nearly 60 years as the Navajo and Pueblo Indian’s window to the Anglo world, many trading post operators and merchants (particularly the younger generation) moved away from Indian communities, setting up tourist trading posts along U.S. 66. This trend made the former trader an interpreter and seller of the American Indian world to tourists. As such, U.S. 66, and specifically the dozens of curio shops along its stretch of Arizona and New Mexico, became an intersection between these two distinct and yet interdependent worlds.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> John W. Murphey, “Roadside Trading Posts along New Mexico Route 66.” Paper presented at the National Council on Public History 25th Annual Conference, Houston, Texas, April 24-27, 2003: 1.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

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## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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Acoma Curio Shop  
San Fidel, Cibola County, New Mexico

### The Rise of the Route 66 Roadside Curio

*“Such a trek across Pueblo land, from either west or east, must leave the tourist with a blurred impression of pots — and more pots — good, bad and worse. If he seeks only the cheap, the amusing, the gaudy and unusual, he is sure to find much to satisfy his taste.”* Kenneth M. Chapman, 1936<sup>7</sup>

The sale of American Indian crafts evolved into a major industry in the Southwest in the last decades of the nineteenth century, fueled, as author Jonathan Batkin posits, by “subjugation of the indigenous peoples..., emergence of Euro-American mercantilism in the West, completion of the transcontinental railroad and romantic notions of a vast untamed wilderness.” At its worst, the curio trade movement introduced a “lopsided barter system,” in which dealers mined native communities for artifacts that they later converted to cash.<sup>8</sup> Some dealers could also be accused of dictating styles of craft production that were palatable to tourists but diminished the artist’s work and trivialized ceremonial life.<sup>9</sup> At the same instant Indians, especially those of the Southwest, realized the lucrative business of selling crafts and trinkets to the passing tourist.

The Fred Harvey Company — a chain of fantasy architecture hotels and restaurants along the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe — was the first to successfully mass-market Indian jewelry as curios. Following the lead of late nineteenth century curio dealers such as the Gold brothers and Jesus Sito Candelario of Santa Fe, Harvey opened trackside “Indian rooms,” where tourists could view and purchase American Indian “curiosities” in a comfortable, museum-like setting. The concept soon expanded to Indian rooms being created in hotels in Albuquerque, Santa Fe and Gallup.<sup>10</sup> Fred Harvey and the curio dealers’ manipulations of Indian crafts set in motion the tourist souvenir — an inexpensive, authentic to semi-authentic, portable, Indian-made item meant to be brought home and displayed on a mantel or collected in the “Indian corner” of a home.<sup>11 12</sup>

The selling of native crafts reached new heights in the 1920s with the arrival of automobile tourism. Through the curio traders’ manipulation and promotion of Indian-made goods, the so-called Zuni Knife Wing, Tesuque Rain God, Hopi Kachina, Pueblo pottery and the Navajo wool blanket became collectible items, manufactured in mass production.

On the Navajo Reservation, the trading post — usually a remotely sited, unadorned building where sheep, wool, or rugs were exchanged for salt, coffee, canned peaches and other staples — was undergoing its

<sup>7</sup> Kenneth M. Chapman, “Roadside Shopping.” *New Mexico*. June, 1936: 39.

<sup>8</sup> Jonathan Batkin, “Some Early Curio Dealers of New Mexico.” *American Indian Art Magazine*. Vol. 23, Number 3, Summer 1998: 69.

<sup>9</sup> Murphey, 2003, 4.

<sup>10</sup> The Curio Stand at the Franciscan Hotel in Albuquerque, a shop run by Indian trader Mike Kirk at the El Fidel Hotel in Albuquerque, and the La Fonda Indian Shop in Santa Fe are notable examples.

<sup>11</sup> John W. Murphey, “The Real, the Fake, and the Tacky: The Evolution of Tourist Trading Post Along New Mexico Route 66.” *SCA Journal*, Spring 2008, Vol. 26, No. 1: 7.

<sup>12</sup> Discussion of the shift of objects from a traditional *use-* and *exchange-* value to a commodified *sign-value* is found in Thorstein Veblen’s *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899), and later expanded upon by French philosopher Jean Baudrillard and other post-Marxist theoreticians.

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# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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Acoma Curio Shop  
San Fidel, Cibola County, New Mexico

own evolution. In the 1930s, overgrazing of sheep led to the introduction of controversial stock-reduction programs that stripped the Navajos of their primary economy. This, along with the improvement of rural road across the reservation and Pueblo lands, gave Native Americans access to wage-paying jobs. These factors, along with the economic pull of U.S 66, led many traditional traders to accept that the era of traditional bartering had ended.<sup>13</sup>

Some of these traders, like Mike Kirk of Gallup and the Richardson family of Arizona and New Mexico, purchased real estate along U.S. 66 and constructed trading post-like curios that offered tourist amenities and a market for American Indian crafts.<sup>14</sup> Early on, the roadside curio operators continued to keep a portion of their stores stocked with staples to trade with Indians. But the gritty array of everyday commodities often clashed with the glass-cased jewelry and crafts, resulting in most roadside traders phasing out the staples and concentrating on tourist trade alone. Starting modestly at around eight curios in 1920 in the tourist-destination cities of Albuquerque, Santa Fe, Gallup and Taos, the number of curio shops reached over 60 in 1940, as automobile tourist traffic picked up across New Mexico, especially along U.S 66.<sup>15</sup>

The traders were not the only ones to appreciate the profit to be made from the roadside sales of American Indian crafts. The Indians themselves began to shape the production of traditional pottery to please a passing public. Kenneth M. Chapman, a Santa Fe-based artist and archaeologist, writing for the *New Mexico* magazine in 1936, captured this trend. Of Zia Pueblo pottery, he states, "Thousands of miniature replicas of their useful pots, honestly fashioned and well-fired, are made for the tourist. Yet added to this, the potters have been *encouraged* in making of Mexican hats, in clay, and other trinkets."<sup>16</sup> And similarly, he describes the tourist-oriented pottery of Santo Domingo, another pueblo along U.S.66, as "imitations of the latest and most popular wares of other pueblos, usually crudely moulded [*sic*] and decorated, and poorly fired..."<sup>17</sup> But Chapman, a promoter of Indian arts and artists, also saw tourism in a more beneficial way, stating in the same article that Laguna Pueblo's pottery had "been revived since the increase of motor travel."

## A.H. Fidel

A. H. Fidel, a Lebanese immigrant, arrived into this milieu, opening in the late 1930s a roadside curio where he operated as a wholesaler and a retailer of authentic art, and to a lesser extent, tourist trinkets. Born in c.1882 as Abdo<sup>18</sup> H. Fidel, he grew up in Roûmîne, a small, hillside village in Nabatîyé, Lebanon.<sup>19</sup> In 1913, Fidel

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 7-8.

<sup>14</sup> David Kammer, *The Historic and Architectural Resources of Route 66 through New Mexico Multiple Property Documentation Form* report. Prepared for the New Mexico Historic Preservation Division, 1992: 122.

<sup>15</sup> *Gazetteer Publishing & Printing Company, New Mexico State Business Directory*. Denver: The Gazetteer Publishing & Printing Company, 1920 and 1940.

<sup>16</sup> Kenneth M. Chapman, "Roadside Shopping." *New Mexico*, June 1936: 21. Emphasis added.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Variant of Abdo or Abdul, Arabic, abduh "his (Allah's) servant." The 1930 census enumeration provides an alternate Christianized name, Abdon, from the Bible meaning servant; cloud of judgment.

<sup>19</sup> The 1930 census enumeration gives his birth year as c. 1875 and the place of birth as Steiermark (Styria), Austria.

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National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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Acoma Curio Shop  
San Fidel, Cibola County, New Mexico

immigrated to the United States. Like many before him, Fidel left in a wave of Christian Arabs escaping religious persecution, poor economic conditions, or conscription in the Ottoman Army. The majority of these Syrian-Lebanese immigrated to Argentina and Brazil, while a smaller proportion went to tropical Africa, where they played a prominent role in local commerce, both as wholesalers and retailers.<sup>20</sup>

A yet-smaller group migrated to the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, where they relocated in Boston, New York, Chicago and Detroit. In the West, many spread across New Mexico to work in the mercantile trade.<sup>21</sup> Of these, the Fidel name is prominent, including John N. Fidel (not related), who started in the mercantile business in Santa Fe in 1915 and later became the owner of the El Fidel hotels in Albuquerque and Santa Fe.

After arriving in New Mexico, A.H. Fidel settled in Seboyeta, a village northwest of San Fidel and north of Laguna Pueblo. There he stayed with Narciso Francis Sr., a Lebanese immigrant who may have been distantly related. Narciso Francis Sr. ran the Francis & Sons general merchandise, one of three stores competing for the Laguna Indians' business. Fidel most likely worked in the store or on one of Francis's large sheep ranches.

The Lebanese, like other immigrant groups, arrived as a result of serial migration, in which a "pioneer" would establish a base to which others—mostly family or village members—would follow.<sup>22</sup> The pioneer would write letters to relatives on the conditions of the area, enticing them to immigrate. Francis Sr., as the pioneer of the area, attracted not only Fidel but also Joseph N. Hanosh, another Lebanese immigrant from Roûmîne. Hanosh arrived in the United States in 1915, working for Francis as a provisions officer for sheep ranchers, before opening his own mercantile in Bibo.<sup>23</sup>

Following a Lebanese tradition to establish only one business per town in order to avoid competition, Fidel set up a mercantile in nearby San Fidel.<sup>24</sup> Originally *La Vega de San José*, the informal village got its start in c.1868 with the arrival of the Baltazar Jaramillo family.<sup>25</sup> Another community, St. Joseph, organized near the present-day St. Joseph School campus, north of the store. By the turn of the twentieth century, the village, now Ballejos, emerged as a small trading center for area ranches. By 1915, Ballejos supported a population of 100, and included a saloon and general merchandise.

<sup>20</sup> Gérard Chaliand and Jean-Pierre Rageau, *The Penguin Atlas of Diasporas*. New York, Viking Press, 1995: 169.

<sup>21</sup> The 1920 census for New Mexico shows 198 persons claiming Syria (this included people of both Syria and the present-day Republic of Lebanon) as their place of birth, surpassing the number of persons born in Czechoslovakia (113), Denmark (115), Norway (128), Hungary (130), Switzerland (148) and Poland (153).

<sup>22</sup> Joseph A. Fidel, Telephone conversation with John W. Murphey. July 8, 2008.

<sup>23</sup> Jim J. Hanosh, Telephone conversation with John W. Murphey. October 28, 2008.

<sup>24</sup> Fidel, July 8, 2008.

<sup>25</sup> Robert Julyan, *The Place Names of New Mexico*. University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, 1996: 312.

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# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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Acoma Curio Shop  
San Fidel, Cibola County, New Mexico

In San Fidel, Abdoo most likely constructed the false-front building in c.1916 as his mercantile. He later occupied an adobe two-story building at the west end of town in which he lived with his family in an attached house to the east.<sup>26</sup> This is inferred from a review of state business directory listings and right-of-way maps for two separate U.S. 66 highway projects. The first map, surveyed in 1917, shows a lightly populated town with only two buildings adjacent to the highway. One, a building with a rectangular footprint in the same location as the nominated resource, is titled "Fidel Store." A second right-of-way map drawn in 1936 shows a much more populated village. The map again depicts the rectangular building surrounded by land — as well as acreage across the highway — owned by Fidel.<sup>27</sup>

Fidel, a Roman Catholic, quickly learned Spanish in order to communicate with his customers, only later picking up English as Anglo-Europeans moved into the area. The 1920 census enumeration finds Abdoo (38) married and the head of the household of a rented residence shared with New Mexico-born Jose M. Vallejos and his wife and their child.<sup>28</sup>

## Pottery along the Road

*"At the sound of an approaching motor they emerge from their brush or stone shelters, their bright costumes fluttering; their arms waving, that you might stop and see the pottery of their villages located miles off the highway."* Kenneth M. Chapman, 1936

*"Along this section of US 66 [San Fidel] Indians sit by the roadside selling pottery. For the most part, they do not bargain over their prices: each item bears its price marked on the bottom. Most of the pieces are the fragile Acoma ware, white with brown designs."*<sup>29</sup> Jack D. Rittenhouse, 1946

Artisans of Acoma and Laguna pueblos had already entered the tourist curio market, starting with the arrival of the railroad in the 1880s, as they shifted from the production of pottery for use at home to pieces created for barter or cash sale.<sup>30</sup> The period between c.1880 to 1920 introduced trader-influenced pottery mimicking popular American and European glassware and ceramics of the period. Overall the quality of the work

<sup>26</sup> New Mexico State Highway Commission, "Plan and Profile of Proposed State Highway Federal Aid Project No. 13 A&B, Valencia County," Sheet 3. June 18, 1921 and "Right-of-Way Map, F.A.P. 115 & 13-B-REO, Valencia County," Sheet 1. February 7, 1936.

<sup>27</sup> The store/house complex on the west end of town is depicted, but with no ownership is attributed. This somewhat differs from family memory, which has the nominated building constructed in c.1936. The extent that the Fidel's mercantile on the west end of town played in selling curios is unknown. Even today, on its south-facing wall, the word "CURIOS" is readily evident. It may be that nominated property, his original c.1916 store, was used for a short period as his business expanded. The latter building, today under different ownership, should be considered for possible nomination.

<sup>28</sup> Fidel's wife, Latife, born c.1886, appears ten years later in the 1930 enumeration, where she is 44 and the mother of three children Joseph H. (6), Mary H. (5) and Lidel (2). Latife died a year later.

<sup>29</sup> Jack D. Rittenhouse, *A Guidebook to Highway 66*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1989: 85.

<sup>30</sup> Rick Dillingham, *Acoma & Laguna Pottery*. Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 1992: 156.

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## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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Acoma Curio Shop  
San Fidel, Cibola County, New Mexico

diminished until the 1930s, when there was an effort — much of it by the traders — to revive traditional forms, as tourists sought “authentic” Indian-made art, including water pots miniaturized for greater portability.<sup>31</sup> Initially the Acoma potters sold their pieces at railroad stations at nearby Acomita, McCartys and Anzac, but with the 1930s improvement of U.S. 66, which included a new alignment across the Laguna reservation, they set up roadside stands to sell their goods (Figure 1).

With the uptick of traffic on U.S. 66, merchants in villages such as San Fidel turned their attention to tourists, opening gas stations, cafes or expanding their merchandise to include American Indian crafts. Despite the Depression, three service stations and the Tafoya Café were built in San Fidel during the late 1930s in response to the improved highway. According to New Mexico business directories, Fidel started selling Indian-made goods in 1936-37 as a wholesaler under the business name of Acoma Indian Pottery Arts & Crafts. Around this time, perhaps experiencing an increase in traffic, Fidel, now 55 years old, occupied the false-front building west of his mercantile. There he opened the Acoma Curio Shop, where he acted as a wholesale/retail agent for crafts produced at Acoma Pueblo (Figure 2).

Similar to a traditional post, the interior displayed an open, bull-pen plan, with high counters along its east perimeter and a stove near the center of the room (Figure 8-2). Unlike the traditional trading post, the shelves behind were not stocked with staples and dry goods but instead displayed neatly arranged Acoma Pueblo pottery — pots, water jugs, and tourist-inspired ashtrays — made by noted Acoma artists, including Southwest Indian Fair prizewinner Mary Z. Chino (Figure 3).<sup>32</sup>

Driving to the pueblo, Fidel would order directly from the artists, who would typically take payment in groceries from the older store instead of cash. In his employment were Alvin Concho Lewis, an Acoma silversmith and son of famous potter, Lucy Lewis, and George J. Hanosh, son of fellow Lebanese immigrant Joseph N. Hanosh.<sup>33 34</sup> At one point Fidel hired Harry Harvey, another Lebanese immigrant from Winslow, Arizona, to manage the store.<sup>35</sup> Fidel’s son, former State Senator Joseph A. Fidel of Grants, New Mexico, recalls that his father dealt fairly with both the Indian artists and the tourists: “He thought he should deal fairly with all, and not pull anything on anyone.”<sup>36</sup>

Unlike other U.S. 66 roadside trading post operators of the 1930s such as Mike Kirk, C.G. Wallace and Claude Bowlin, Fidel apparently had little experience in Indian trading, but enough entrepreneurial drive to branch into the wholesaling of Indian craft. Differing from other roadside curio shops along the highway U.S.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 157-158.

<sup>32</sup> Fidel, October 27, 2008.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> In 1999 George J. Hanosh became a New Mexico State Representative, representing Cibola and Valencia counties.

<sup>35</sup> Fidel, July 8, 2008.

<sup>36</sup> Fidel, October 27, 2008.

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San Fidel, Cibola County, New Mexico

66, Fidel's store represented only one pueblo, instead of the usual potpourri of authentic and ersatz crafts, made by diverse tribes or mass produced at distant sweatshops.

Despite its strategic position, the store was short-lived, closing approximately four years after it opened. Other highway-related businesses in San Fidel shuttered around the same time, including two of the three service stations that opened after the improvement of U.S. 66.<sup>37</sup> Gas rationing, which started in 1942, along with war restrictions on travel officially curtailed tourist traffic, which had already been diminishing. "There was no traffic [along U.S. 66], to speak of," recalls Jim Hanosh, brother to George J. Hanosh, of the period.<sup>38</sup> Coincidentally, near the time Fidel closed his business, an advertisement in the *Albuquerque Journal* announced the "new location" of the Acoma Curio Shop in Albuquerque across from the Hilton Hotel. Opened by a Seligman family member, it may be that Fidel sold his business name and wares to this veteran trading family.<sup>39</sup>

After closing the curio, Fidel concentrated on his original general merchandise store. In August 1947, he leased the land holding the former curio to the Standard Oil Company, which opened a service station; two months later, he sold the property. The following year, he sold all of his San Fidel holdings to retire in Grants, where he died in 1958. The land went through a number of uses over the years, including a gas station, a small motel and a sawmill. Still, the false-front building remained. In 2003, the current owners opened an arts, crafts and souvenir store (Gallery 66) in the old curio shop. The business continues the tradition of selling locally-made art, including jewelry created by the son and grandson of Alvin Concho Lewis. By seeking National Register designation, the owners hope to recognize the history of the area and the contribution of A.H. Fidel in authentic American Indian crafts.

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<sup>37</sup> This assumption is made by inference based on national trends and an examination of business directories. The real cause of its closure is unknown. His son remembers that his father closed the curio as it "didn't meet his father's expectations as a business." Fidel, July 8, 2008.

<sup>38</sup> After the war, a number of roadside trading posts continued to operate along Route 66 in what was then western half Valencia County; these included (east-to-west) the Correo Trading Post (demolished), Correo; Paraje Trading Post (demolished), Paraje; Los Cerritos Trading Post, Cubero; Rancho Café (demolished), two miles west of San Fidel; and the Old Crater Trading Post, Bluewater, which by the 1960s, with a change of ownership, had evolved into a tourist trap.

<sup>39</sup> "Announcing New Location of Acoma Curio Shop." Advertisement. *Albuquerque Journal*, October 6, 1940: no page.

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### Photographs

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

#### **Acoma Curio Shop**

San Fidel, Cibola County, New Mexico

Photographer: John Murphey

Date: March 2009

Negatives located at Historic Preservation Division, Santa Fe

Photo 1 of 6

Front façade

Facing south

Photo 2 of 6

Business name, east elevation

Facing west

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Exposed adobes, east elevation

Facing southwest

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Porch

Facing east

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Interior

Facing northeast

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Rear (south) elevation

Facing northeast

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**Figure 1: Acoma Indian Roadside Pottery Business, 1941**



Item 007361, 1941, *New Mexico Department of Tourism photograph collection 1987-066* (New Mexico State Records Center and Archives, Santa Fe, New Mexico).

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Figure 2: Advertisement for A.H. Fidel's Acoma Curio Shop

**U. S. 66      San Fidel, N. M.      U. S. 66**

THE ONLY WHOLESALE  
**ACOMA INDIAN POTTERY**

in the United States

**Tourist Supplies  
Arts and Crafts**

**A. H. FIDEL**

**SAN FIDEL, NEW MEXICO**

60 miles west of Albuquerque

84 miles East of Gallup



**U. S. 66      GRANTS, N. M.      U. S. 66**

*Southwest Tourist News, July 13, 1937: 3.*

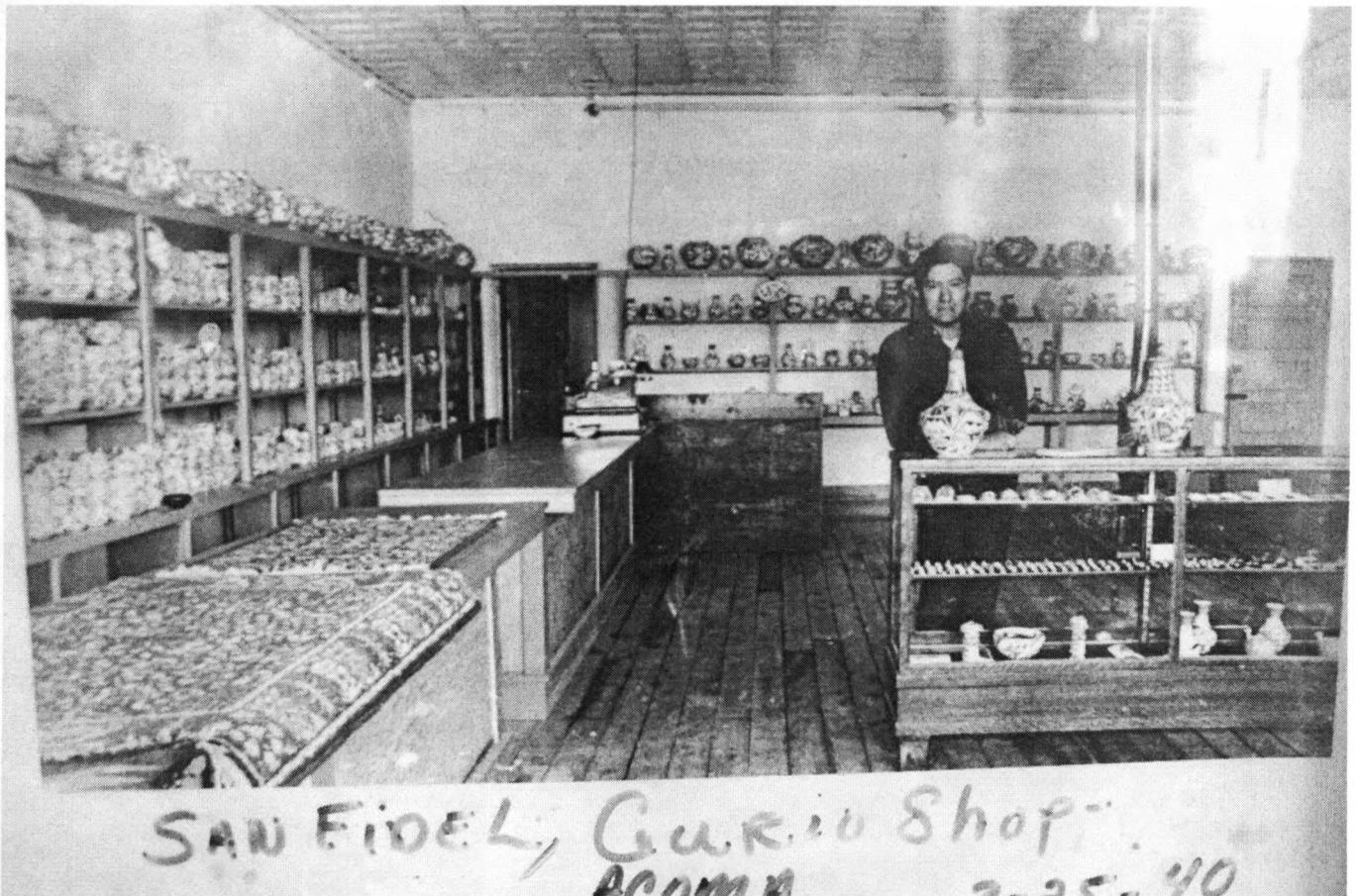
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**Figure 3: Acoma Curio Shop, April 25, 1940, Alvin Concho Lewis pictured**



Provided by the owner

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