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(Oct. 1990)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service
NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

HISTORIC NAME: Cousins Bros. Trading Post
OTHER NAME/SITE NUMBER: Cousins Bros. Trading Company

2. LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER: 768 A-D Cousins Road
CITY OR TOWN:
STATE: New Mexico CODE: NM COUNTY: McKinley CODE: 031
NOT FOR PUBLICATION: N/A
VICINITY: Chi Chil Tah
ZIP CODE: 87326

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.)

Signature of certifying official (Handwritten signature)

Date (Handwritten: 02 February 2006)

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 of the Keeper (Handwritten: Edson R. Beall)

Date of Action

(Handwritten: 3/22/06)

5. CLASSIFICATION

OWNERSHIP OF PROPERTY: Private

CATEGORY OF PROPERTY: Building

NUMBER OF RESOURCES WITHIN PROPERTY:	CONTRIBUTING	NONCONTRIBUTING
	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: N/A

6. FUNCTION OR USE

HISTORIC FUNCTIONS: COMMERCE/TRADE: department store (trading post)

CURRENT FUNCTIONS: COMMERCE/TRADE: department store (trading post)

7. DESCRIPTION

ARCHITECTURAL CLASSIFICATION:

MATERIALS: FOUNDATION STONE; CONCRETE
 WALLS STONE; ADOBE; CONCRETE
 ROOF STEEL (corrugated steel roofing)
 OTHER N/A

NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION (see continuation sheets 7-5 through 7-9).

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: COMMERCE

PERIOD OF SIGNIFICANCE: 1930-1955

SIGNIFICANT DATES: 1930; 1940; 1942; 1952

SIGNIFICANT PERSON: N/A

CULTURAL AFFILIATION: N/A

ARCHITECT/BUILDER: unknown

NARRATIVE STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE (see continuation sheets 8-10 through 8-19).

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES

BIBLIOGRAPHY (see continuation sheet 9-20).

PREVIOUS DOCUMENTATION ON FILE (NPS): N/A

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

PRIMARY LOCATION OF ADDITIONAL DATA:

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

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF PROPERTY: less than one acre

UTM REFERENCES	Zone	Easting	Northing
	1.	691499	3902723

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION (see continuation sheet 10-21)**BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION** (see continuation sheet 10-22)

11. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME/TITLE: John W. Murphey, Architectural Historian**ORGANIZATION:** New Mexico Historic Preservation Division**DATE:** November 2005**STREET & NUMBER:** 228 East Palace, Room 320**TELEPHONE:** 505-827-3990**CITY OR TOWN:** Santa Fe**STATE:** NM**ZIP CODE:** 87501

ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION

CONTINUATION SHEETS**MAPS** (see attached *Chi Chil Tah, N. Mex* U.S.G.S 7.5-minute series topographic map)**PHOTOGRAPHS** (see continuation sheet Photo-22)**ADDITIONAL ITEMS** N/A

PROPERTY OWNER

NAME/TITLE: Grant and Grace Wheatley**STREET & NUMBER:** P.O. Box 1336**TELEPHONE:** 505-778-5662**CITY OR TOWN:** Gallup**STATE:** NM**ZIP CODE:** 87305

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Cousins Bros. Trading Post
Vic. of Chi Chil Tah, McKinley County, New Mexico

Description

Located at the bend of Cousins Road, approximately 20 miles south of Gallup, the Cousins Bros. Trading Post is a simple, rectangular plan building built of stone, concrete and adobe. The front or east-facing elevation presents a nearly symmetrical façade with a gradually stepped parapet and centered entrance. To this elevation occurred a sequential accretion of three major additions: the first to the north in 1940, and then to the rear in 1942 and 1952, respectively. An informal earth parking area surrounds the building to the east. Daily a steady stream of vehicles arrive to conduct business at the trading post. A mature oak tree shades the building with customers sitting underneath its wide canopy on simple wood benches. Nearby are the original trader's home, a lumber shed and sheep corrals, all once associated with the trading post. Changes to the trading post's original 1930 design reflect growth expansions during the period of significance and do not detract from its overall integrity.

Cousins Bros. Trading Post is located approximately 7.5 miles down a narrow county road southwest of the community of Vander Wagen (Vanderwagen). The road terminates just beyond the trading post at the Navajo community of *Cheechilgeetho* or Chi Chil Tah, meaning "oak by two waters." Approximately five miles to the south is the northern boundary of the Zuni Pueblo reservation, and 11 miles to the west is the eastern boundary of the Navajo Reservation in Arizona. The Cousins property sits on "checkerboard" private land that is adjacent to Navajo land.

The rural setting is of rolling terrain covered with sage and small- to-large native juniper and oak trees. The trading post hunkers down on the north side of the road and is shaded by a mature oak tree (Photo 1). Family tradition has it that Charles Cousins, the first owner of the trading post, decided to build his trading post at this location to protect the tree from the path of a bulldozer during road construction. Only recently was the road paved.

To the north is a wide expanse of flat area, with low red mesas forming the northern edge the Whitewater Arroyo in the distance. It was here that Charles Cousins dry-land farmed for a number of years. Surrounding to the north and west are structures historically associated with the Cousins, including a lumber shed, sheep corrals, and the 1925 dwelling of Charles and Lucie Cousins (Figure 9-1). A modern residence, the former home of second-generation trader Betty Cousins, sits on a slight rise across the road to the south.

Exterior

Composed of four distinct building phases dating between 1930 and 1952, the essentially rectangular plan building measures approximately 30 x 49 feet and is faced with unpainted stucco along all but its rear quarter (Photo 2). The front elevation facing east presents a stepped parapet rising in front of a gently sloping pitched

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metal roof. Near its center is the store's sign, "COUSINS BROS. TRADING POST," and above it, an old Pepsi-Cola bottle cap sign is affixed to the gray stucco. Flanking the door are two single pane fixed windows installed prior to 1969 and probably dating to a 1953 upgrade of the trading post. To the north, a set of steel casement windows lights the office of the building. The unadorned façade belies the trading post's history and significance.

The south elevation sits directly at the road's edge and presents a façade with little adornment. From east to west, the elevation reveals two of the trading post's additions (Photo 3). Two small, multi-light wood-frame windows daylight the original bullpen area of the 1930 trading post. West of this is an entry and window into the 1942 storeroom addition, now a kitchen. Beyond, is the exposed concrete masonry block section of the 1952 addition. Now a coin-operated laundry, this section is entered through a non-original door.

The north elevation is equally unadorned and shows the sequence of the 1940 and 1952 additions and small 2003 bump-out of the northeast corner (Photo 4). The exposed *vigas* denote the extent of the first, 1940 addition. A single, original one-over-one window provides light into the office. West of the window is the exposed concrete block of the 1952 storeroom addition, followed by the more recent bump-out of the same material.

The west or rear elevation is terminated by the 1952 addition and 2003 bump-out (Photo 5). Two steel doors give entry to northeast corner and a small sliding aluminum window opens to a restroom.

Interior

A homemade screen door opens to a large room crowded with rows of wooden shelves stocked with grocery items (Photo 6). Bob Cousins, the second owner of the business, installed the shelves and removed a wood-burning stove in 1953, modernizing the original bullpen area. Suspended from the square beam ceiling are dozens of household items secured by large penny nails. Here hang a single paintbrush, boxes of crayons, a church-key can opener and a plastic brush (Photo 7). Below, an unfinished floor of strip pine creaks underfoot.

Along with the modernization of the bullpen, Bob Cousins removed the traditional high counter, a place described by anthropologist Edward T. Hall as used "to reduce your [customer's] physical height to that of a child [as] the trader, meanwhile, stood on a raised platform behind the counter like a parent or a king surveying his subjects below."¹ With its removal, Bob Cousins installed large refrigerator cases holding meat and other perishable goods and a counter used to conduct business, pick up mail or swap news.

¹ Edward T. Hall. *West of the Thirties: Discoveries Among the Navajo and Hopi*. New York: Doubleday, 1994: 143.

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Everyday current owner Grace Wheatley and her employees use the counter to dispense mail to more than 200 customers who get their mail sent in care of Box 1336, Gallup Post Office, the Wheatley's P.O. box. Important pieces of mail, including paychecks and Social Security checks, hang by clothespins from a line suspended from the ceiling. A piece of paper taped to a nearby pole lists the names of 25 or so customers who have magazines waiting for them. This arcane —yet vital— mail delivery and sorting service, keeps local Navajo coming to Cousins, rather than driving to Gallup. Behind the counter area, crowded with its calculators, receipts, telephone, and items being negotiated for purchase, is a series of shelves holding the cash register, a fax machine, a photocopier, a file of family credit slips and a Western Union machine —the implements of a modern trading post.

North of the former bullpen are two adobe-constructed rooms containing an office and a fabric/clothes area (Figure 9-2). Both rooms have *viga* beam and board *latilla* ceilings. The fabric/clothes area, once a dry goods room, dates to 1940 and contains a glass display case with its wood rails pricked with small carpet nails to measure yardage. The room still holds a small stock of fabric, but is used mostly today for mail sorting and the display of books and videos for sale.

To the east, and entered through a rustic wooden door made by Bob Cousins, is an area that historically included the curio room, a display for the blankets and silver goods coming in for trade. As trading diminished, the room evolved into the trading post's office. On the north wall are two Native American figures painted by Dan Garduno in the 1950s. Above the office door is a ceremonial bird-like figure displaying the number "18," designating the Cousins' United Indian Traders Association (U.I.T.A.) number.

Back in the former bullpen, a doorway breaking the west wall leads to a storeroom constructed in 1942. This room was recently modernized as a kitchen for the Little Rabbit Deli, a business started by Grace Wheatley and her daughter Donna McMillan (Photo 8). The spartan room is finished with a concrete floor and contains a stainless steel range and a large basin sink. A 1950s Superline refrigerator dominates its northeast corner.

Attached to the west wall is a separate concrete block addition constructed in 1952 and converted in 2003 into a coin-operated washer/dryer service tightly packed with eight stacked washer and dryer units. The small laundry provides a much-needed service to the local community, as most local Navajos — even to this day — do not have running water in their homes. In 2003 a small concrete block addition holding an ADA-accessible toilet was constructed at the northwest corner of the building. A separate room within this addition is currently unused but is planned as a substation for tribal police.

Evolution of Property

Constructed in 1930 of red stone block and wood framing, the original Cousins Bros. Trading Post consisted of a small rectangular building. The fenestration across its front façade included a centered wood door flanked on

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either side by six-over six-double-hung wood windows (Figure 9- 3). In 1940, an adobe addition was added along the north side, providing two rooms that now house the office and fabric/clothes storage area. This addition slightly changed the symmetry of the front façade by adding a steel casement window to the north. In need of more room, the Cousins added a rectangular, concrete masonry unit addition to the west in 1942, creating two storage rooms. A third addition, consisting of a concrete masonry block storage room, was added to the southwest corner of the building in 1952.

The sequence of additions reveals an essentially east-to-west accretion of new space reflecting the growth in business. With the last major addition constructed in 1952, these changes have not adversely affected the historical integrity of the building. The historical appearance of the 1930 front façade and its 1940 addition are still readily identifiable. The 2003 masonry block bump-out at the northwest corner did somewhat alter the building's footprint maintained during the period of significance. But this small addition is across the trading post's least visible area, an elevation that has continuously been modified since the first addition in 1940.

In 1992, the New Mexico Historic Preservation Division sponsored a survey to locate and record all extant pre-1946 trading posts in the northwest quadrant of the state.² Of the 37 trading posts surveyed, only 12, including the Cousins Bros., were determined eligible for the National Register. At the time, only eight of the 37 surveyed buildings still functioned as trading posts. Following the general decline of the trading economy, most of the trading posts had been abandoned, fallen to ruin, or altered to serve a new purpose, most commonly a residence or a gasoline convenience mart. Since the survey, many of the eligible trading posts have closed, making the significance of the Cousins Bros. even more significant.

² Spears Architects, AIA. *Historic Trading Posts of Northwest New Mexico*. Report prepared for the New Mexico Historic Preservation Division, 1993. The survey included all of San Juan, McKinley, and portions of Taos, Sandoval, Bernalillo, Rio Arriba and Valencia counties.

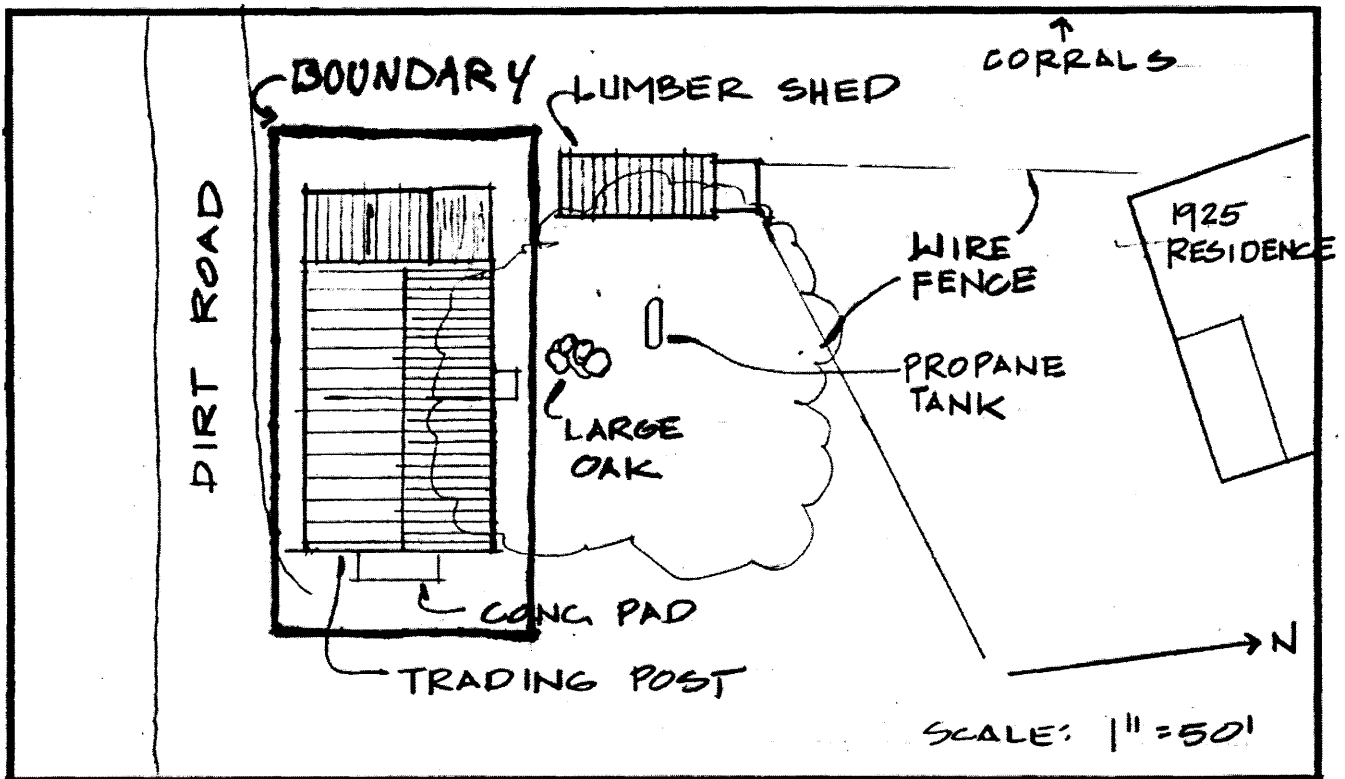
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Figure 9-1: Site Plan (1993, Spears Architects, AIA, updated 2005)



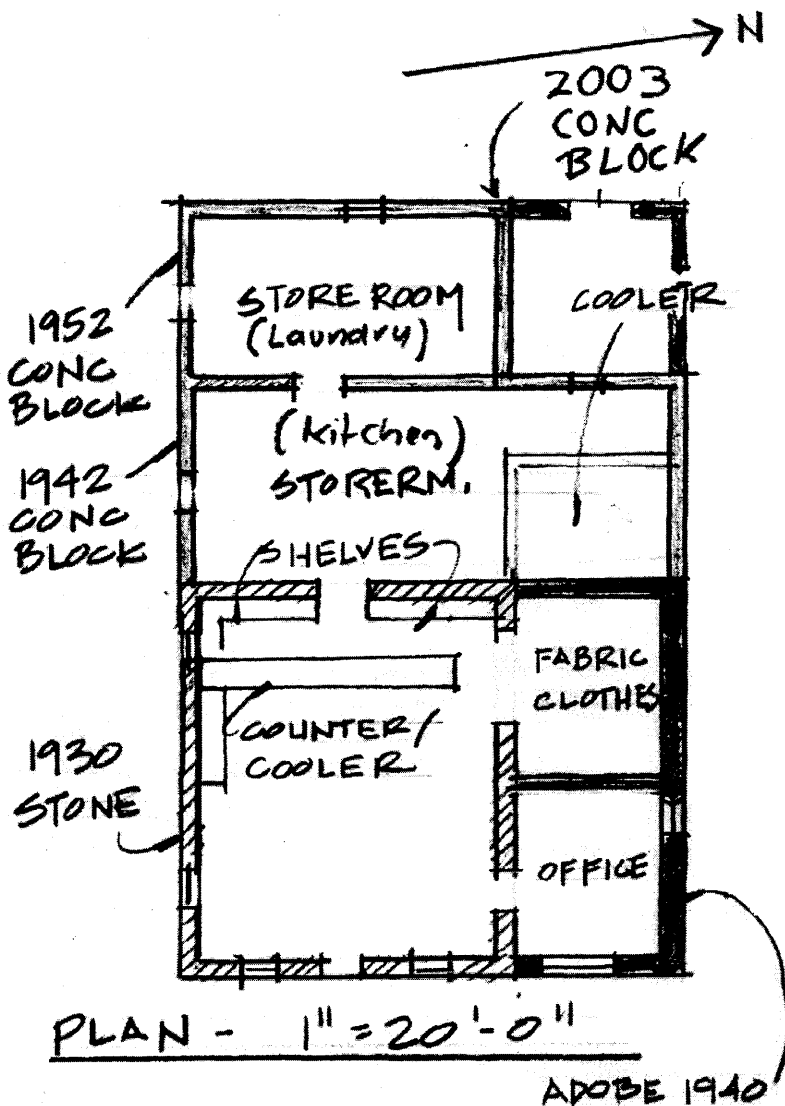
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Figure 9-2: Floor Plan (1993, Spears Architects, AIA, updated 2005)



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Figure 9-3: Cousins Bros. Gen'l. Merchandise (undated, pre-1940)



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Significance

The Cousin Bros. Trading Post is an unadorned building constructed of stone adobe and concrete block. Built by pioneer trader Charles Craig Cousins, the trading post has served the local Navajos of the Chi Chil Tah community as a store and gathering place for 75 years. In 1936 Charles turned the store over to his son Bob and daughter-in-law Betty Cousins. Expanding operations, the trading post experienced three additions in 1940, 1942 and 1952. Sold in 1975 to Betty Cousins' nephew, Grant Wheatley, the trading post continues to sell goods on credit and serves as the social hub for the local community. Charles Cousins' granddaughter and great-granddaughter are carrying the trading post into 21st century, by offering expanded services, including a delicatessen and coin-operated laundry. Though a more modern business, Cousins still transacts up to 50 to 60% of its business on credit, and represents one of the last active trading posts of its era. Given its more than 70 years of history, the Cousins Bros. Trading Post is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places at the local level under Criterion A, Commerce.

Charles Craig Cousins

Born May 20, 1862 in Calcutta, India to British subjects, a young Charles Craig Cousins ran away from home at 12 after a cholera outbreak killed his mother, devastating his home life (Figure 8-1). The son of a British Navy captain, Charles enlisted as a British merchant marine with a ship sailing to New York City. As family lore has it, Charles jumped ship in the New York harbor in 1881, later to join the U.S. Navy as a sailmaker. After two enlistments in the Navy, Charles enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1885, coming west with Saddle Troop C of the Sixth U.S. Cavalry to Fort Wingate, New Mexico.

Under General E. A. Carr, Charles saw action in the Geronimo campaigns. He later recounted to his children the horrors of these campaigns, telling of a grisly discovery of "people butchered and their bodies hung in trees" at Tinaja.³ This and other experiences left an indelible impression on the young soldier and influenced his future dealings with Native Americans. At Fort Wingate he met a young Navajo, Henry Chee Dodge, who would later become his friend and fellow Indian trader. After honorable discharge in 1890, Cousins enlisted with the New Mexico Militia, reaching rank of First Lieutenant.

Charles started his Indian trading career in early 1903, banding together with two of his Army buddies and another partner, and opening a trading post at Nutria, a small village near Zuni Pueblo. The business soon faltered after two of the partners left the post. Not discouraged, Charles moved to a trading post at the Box S Charley Ranch (Pinehaven) between Fence Lake and Rahma. During this time, Charles Beeson, one of the partners of the failed Nutria operation, introduced Charles to Lucienda (Lucie) Ethel Randolph, an Arkansas

³ Jean and Bill Cousins. *Tales from Wide Ruins*. Lubbock, TX: Texas Tech University Press, 1996: 12.

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native living in Oklahoma. Lucie and Charles carried on a lengthy courtship by mail and married in May 1903.

Charles sold the Box S Charley Ranch operation in 1904, and moved with Lucie to Manuelito, McKinley County, to work for traders Stephen E. Aldrich and Henry Chee Dodge. (Chee Dodge, his friend from his Fort Wingate days, by the late 1920s had accumulated a herd of 50,000 sheep, making him one of the wealthiest shepherders in the region.⁴) It was here that their first son Tom Cousins was born.

At the invitation of Charles Weidemeyre, Charles and his family transferred to a trading post at Chin Lee (Chinle) at the mouth of Canyon de Chelly.⁵ Lucie, pregnant with their second son, started out from Gallup with son Tom to meet Charles at the new post. Snow at Fort Defiance halted their journey and forced them to stay at the home of trader Monroe Holloway for several weeks. Embarking again on their journey, they were met near Ganado by prominent trader Juan Lorenzo Hubbell, who informed Lucie that she “wasn’t going any further,” and offered the pregnant woman a room at his trading post.⁶ This type of hospitality and concern for other traders would mark Lucie and Charles’ experience as Indian traders. After nearly three decades in the United States, Charles became a naturalized citizen in 1905.

In 1907, Charles and his wife and their three children relocated temporarily to Oklahoma, trying their hand at farming. When farming didn’t prove profitable, Charles moved the family back to the New Mexico territory, working in a quick succession of trading posts at Mariano Lake, Fort Defiance and Floating Rock. Tired of this itinerant lifestyle, Charles struck out on his own in 1908, homesteading south of Gallup along White Water Creek (Figure 8-2). There he built a house (the Old Homeplace) and opened the first C.C. Cousins General Merchandise, a small shed-roof structure made of stone. Sadly at the Old Homeplace Charles and Lucie lost their only daughter, Anna, to a fire.

Due to a steady advance of Anglo homesteaders, pushing back the Indians, Charles sold his homestead and settled at Vanderwagen, closer to the reservation. The small community along Zuni Road was originally the site of a Dutch Reformed Church mission. In the mid-1920s the community appeared in state business directories as Cousins, and supported a population of 100. Here Charles ran a general merchandise store and served as the justice of peace, and in 1924 Lucie became its first postmistress (Figure 8-3).

In 1925, Charles Cousins filed for another 160-acre homestead at the site of the present trading post. What attracted him to the spot were the large oak trees and their promise of water. Digging a well, Charles hit water at 20 feet and established a homestead, moving the family and the mercantile to the new location, opening

⁴ Edward T. Hall. *West of the Thirties: Discoveries Among the Navajo and Hopi*. New York: Doubleday, 1994:145.

⁵ Only eight months after moving to the Chinle trading post, Charles used his cool demeanor and knowledge of Indians to prevent a potentially violent confrontation between an Indian agent and a group of Navajos defending a man who had been accused of rape. The Perry incident is described in Frank McNitt’s *The Indian Traders*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1962: 284-85.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 283.

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the Cousins Bros. General Merchandise in an adobe building. In its early years, Charles ran the trading post and dry-land farmed, while Lucie raised the children and baked bread to sell at the store. Charles learned to speak Navajo, and according to family history, was well respected by the Indian community. His Navajo friends gave him several names, including *Ad-a-kai* (the gambler); *Dine Di-bitsai*, (the talker); and *Bi Lah Klikizhe* (painted hands), because of the many tattoos he acquired in the Navy.⁷ In 1930 Cousins moved out of the adobe building, constructing a sturdy new store out of red stone.

At age 74, Charles turned over the trading post to his son Bob⁸ and Bob's wife Betty (Elizabeth E.) English Cousins (Figure 8-4). Betty, born in 1917 in Carson City, Nevada, had spent her youth in transit.⁹ Her parents were teachers with the United States Indian Services, and frequently moved as the rules stated teachers could only teach at one school for two consecutive years. This frequent moving exposed Betty to diverse Native American cultures, as her parents "wanted [her] to see every Indian dance and every Indian thing there was to see."¹⁰ Bob and Betty first met in 1926 at McGaffery, where Bob worked at a sawmill and her parents taught school. Before marrying some ten years later, Betty had attended the University of New Mexico, where she pursued a teaching degree.

At the trading post, Betty managed the daily operations, while Bob did the "outside work," ranching and tending to the sheep. Yet, trading was a family affair where all members pitched in. Betty's daughter Dorothy Scrivener started working at the trading post on Saturdays at age 8, selling fresh vegetables pulled from the family garden and restocking the soda machine.

Trading: 1930-1975

"In 1933, the trading post was the economic core of reservation life, as well as the frontline defense against starvation for many Indians when times were hard. The relationship between the trader and the Indians who were his customers was symbiotic — neither could have survived without the other."

Edward T. Hall, 1994

The business of Cousins, as of any traditional trading post, was trade — the simple exchange of sheep, wool, or rugs for salt, coffee, sugar or other staples not available on the reservation. Beyond this simple exchange of goods was a complex economic system in which traders were bound by the "costs and practices of wholesale and retail, of profits and loss, and of payment of bills and salaries" — the reality of every trading

⁷ Jean and Bill Cousins, *Tales from Wide Ruins*. Lubbock, TX: Texas Tech University Press, 1996: 11.

⁸ The three other Cousins brothers, Tom, Bill and Malin, left the trading post. Bill Cousins went on to operate the Wide Ruins Trading Post, Arizona, and documented his experience in the work *Tales from Wide Ruins*, 1996.

⁹ Charles, or "Pop" to familiars, died in May 1940.

¹⁰ Quoted in Nancy Watson. "Betty Cousins continues trader-family tradition." *The Independent*. 18 Jan. 2000: 1.

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post.¹¹ However, unlike trading posts operating on the reservation, Cousins was not weighed down by a requirement to post a liability bond, or fill out reporting paperwork to the Bureau of Indian Affairs. This, to some extent, streamlined trading at Cousins to a business, rather than an arm of government custodial policies.

To make trading as safe business transaction, Betty Cousins never took in trade that was not four to five times the value of the item exchanged. Trades were entered in long three-column ledgers. Year after year the names of local Navajos like “Cow Boy,” “Stuck Ann,” and “Jesse James,” appeared in the ledgers, many on the same page as the year before. Pawn was never a focus of the trading post, and Betty Cousins knew instinctively that a “good trader would not sell an Indian’s pawn.”¹² As current owner Grace Wheatley summarizes, customers were “more like a family... [you] did not take advantage of people.”¹³ But trading hinged on mutual trust between both parties. Betty Cousins, who could speak Navajo recounted the trader needed “to know what they [Navajos] are saying to each other,” but that in the end, “it all depended on the person.”¹⁴ Up until the 1950s, the Cousins issued scrip for exchange. The trading money, which the Navajos called *Paish-ti-tee*, meaning white or thin metal, came in denominations of 25 cents to a dollar.

In its early years, as a traditional trading post, Cousins stocked a wide variety of groceries, dry goods and implements: coffee, sugar, flour, kerosene, pots and pans, dishes, blankets, clothes, saddles, bridles and wagons. Betty Cousins recalled that in 1936, when they entered the business, a 25lb bag of flour sold for 90 cents, and to entice the customer, a can of baking powder was thrown in for free. Freighters delivered the merchandise to the trading post until the 1920s, after which time traders had to pick up their goods at warehouses in Gallup. Much later in the early 1970s, the Association of Grocers of Arizona delivered groceries to the post, but the company’s minimum order policy made their service too expensive.

Sheep, once the lifeblood of the Navajo, played an important role in trading at Cousins. Charles Cousins typically bought 800 to 1,000 head of lamb every spring from his Navajo customers. Lambs were purchased for cash or credit and shipped in “three-layered trucks” to feedlots in Colorado for fattening. In the fall, the Cousins bought wool by the pound. Later, Bob Cousins improved the Navajo’s stock by introducing Rambouillet rams, which brought in a better price in trade. Sheep trading continued through 1960s, reaching its height in the 1940s and 1950s, after which time the herds and sheep trading dwindled, with the last shipment of sheep leaving Cousins in 1975. By this time the older shepherders were retiring, and the younger generation, exposed to better opportunities, were not inclined to pursue the traditional lifestyle.

Like many traditional trading posts, the Cousins did a good deal of business in its early days trading rugs and blankets. Rugs were purchased for their thinness, consistency of dye color and tightness of weave. A good

¹¹ Willow Roberts Powers. *Navajo Trading: The End of an Era*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2001: 136.

¹² Betty Cousins, interview with author, July 21, 2004.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

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tight rug would lie flat, but not be so tight that it curled at the corners. Betty Cousins, a good judge of human character, could always “tell by looking at a woman what kind of a rug [she] will weave.” Regardless of her instinct, Betty often bought imperfect rugs because she knew the woman needed money.¹⁵ The Cousins also purchased Indian-made crafts for trade and resale. These items, especially silver goods, were sent to a family-owned curio shop in Manitou Springs, Colorado, or sold to Indian craft outlets in Albuquerque, such as Freed's, Buffets and Maisels.

During the height of crafts trading in the 1950s, the Cousins worked with 46 silversmiths. The first silversmiths used Mexican pesos, then U.S. silver dollars. Bob Cousins purchased a silver roller in 1930s, allowing the craftsman to roll square wire and later sheets of silver into jewelry. Turquoise purchased from Battle Mountain, Arizona, or nuggets “in the rough” from traveling salesmen, was supplied to the jewelers.¹⁶ Unlike other traders, the Cousins did not dictate specific designs, but only ring sizes and the quantities to be produced. Robert Skeet Sr., a jeweler who worked for the Cousins in the 1950s, became an artist of his own right, known for his turquoise work, silver jewelry and Concho belts.

Cousins not only provided groceries and modern conveniences, but also as Betty Cousins stated, “took care of the needs of the community.”¹⁷ As Navajos did not typically hold bank accounts, the Cousins routinely assisted their customers with their finances. Betty Cousins often acted as a translator, helping Navajos fill out employment paperwork and answering correspondence in English. She would also read letters to children from fathers who were away at service or worked out of state. The current owners continue to assist Navajos fill out tax forms.¹⁸ Because they were the only people for miles with an automobile, the Cousins were frequently awoken in the middle of the night and asked to rush an injured man or a pregnant woman to the hospital in Gallup or the Indian hospital at Fort Defiance, Arizona. The trader also could be asked to officiate the burial of Navajo family member or comfort the grieving. As Betty Cousins remembered, trading was a “day and night responsibility.”

Trading in the Future

Bob Cousins, nearing retirement, sold the business in 1975 to his niece Grace Wheatley (Charles' granddaughter) and her husband Grant, who were at the time teaching at Indian school in Crown Point, New Mexico. With guidance from Betty, the young couple streamlined the business, fading out some of the traditional staples and emphasizing grocery goods and a self-service approach. Unlike other trading posts that stopped cashing checks, the Wheatleys continued this vital service. Bored with making quilts and baking bread

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

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and pies, Betty at 84 returned to work at the trading post, working 40-hour weeks until 2000.¹⁹ Affectionately called “Aunt Betty,” the second-generation trader died November 5, 2006.

In September 2003, Grace Wheatley joined with her daughter Donna McMillan to start a new business at the trading post. Responding to the community’s need for fresh food and laundry services, they opened a coin-operated laundry and a delicatessen, the latter named Little Rabbit for the nickname the Navajos gave to Bob Cousins. The women’s entrepreneurial approach to carry the trading post into the 21st century was recognized by the New Mexico Small Business Development Center in 2005 as one the state’s top small businesses. Like other trading posts that have survived, it is frequently the women who are carrying on the business by responding to new markets.

As it is nearly eight miles off a secondary highway, few tourists seek out Cousins. Grace and Donna carry no jewelry or trinkets nor do they wish to cater to tourists. The primary focus of business is still the local Navajo customer, who as Betty Cousins once said, “knows we’re going to be here. We were there for their grandparents and we will be here for their grandchildren.”²⁰ Yet beyond the old counter is a gleaming new kitchen, and beyond that, a bank of churning washing machines. It is these updates that have modernized the 75-year-old business, providing an infusion of cash to sustain the more community-oriented function of the old-time trading post.

¹⁹ Quoted in Nancy Watson. “Betty Cousins continues trader-family tradition.” *The Independent*. 18 Jan. 2000: 1+.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

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Figure 8-1: Charles "Pop" Cousins (undated; courtesy Texas Tech)



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Figure 8-2: The Cousins (undated; courtesy Texas Tech)



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Figure 8-3: Cousins at Vanderwagen (1911; courtesy Texas Tech)



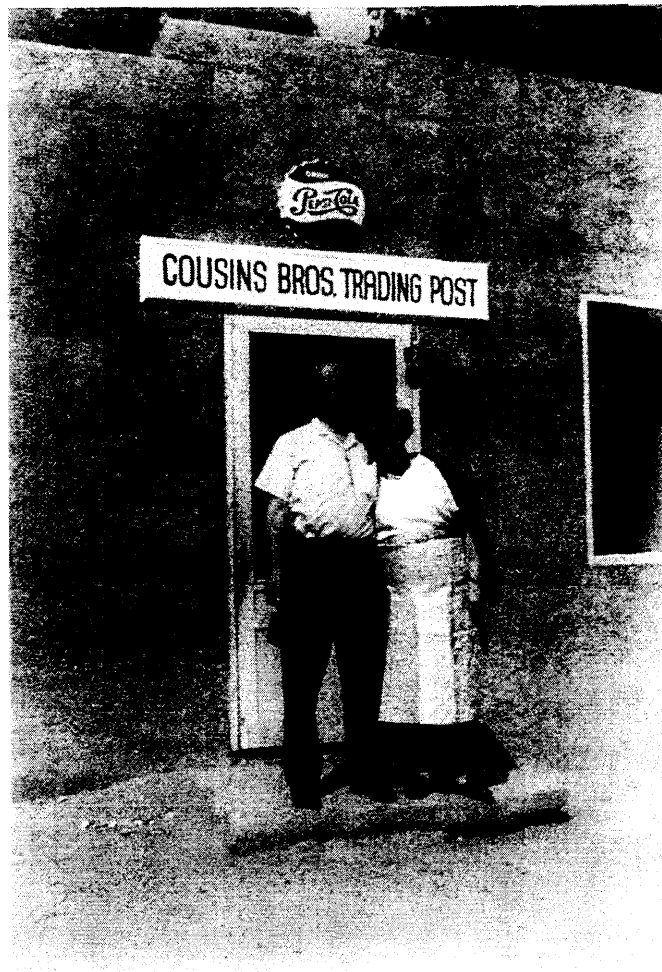
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Figure 8-4: Betty and Bob Cousins, 1969



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Geographical Data

Verbal Boundary Description

The topographic location of the nominated property is a small parcel shown on the U.S.G.S. quadrangle *Chi Chil Tah*, N. Mex. 1973 map, as: NW $\frac{1}{4}$, NE $\frac{1}{4}$, NE $\frac{1}{4}$, NE $\frac{1}{4}$, Section 25, T12N, R20W, McKinley County, New Mexico (see attached map). The nominated property is specifically a rectangular parcel measuring 50 x 100 feet shown as a solid black line on Figure 7-1. The nominated boundary includes only the trading post and its immediate setting.

Boundary Justification

The nominated boundary includes only the trading post and its immediate setting. The boundary excludes the 1925 trading post owner's house and several proximate structures. These resources were excluded because they have either lost their integrity or were constructed after the period of significance.

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Photographs

Cousins Bros. Trading Post

Vicinity of Chi Chil Tah

Name of photographer: John W. Murphey

Date of photograph: July 17, 2004

Location of negatives: New Mexico Historic Preservation Division

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Setting

Facing southwest

Photo 2 of 8

Front or east façade

Facing southwest

Photo 3 of 8

Front and south elevations

Facing northwest

Photo 4 of 8

North elevation

Facing southwest

Photo 5 of 8

Rear or west elevation

Facing southeast

Photo 6 of 8

Interior

Facing southeast

Photo 7 of 8

Goods hanging from ceiling

Facing up

Photo 8 of 8

Kitchen, 1942 addition

Facing north