

56-1715



National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

1. Name of Property

Historic name: Charley's Automotive Service

Other names/site number: Charlie's Radiator Service; Star Café; SR 1943

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

2. Location

Street & number: 1310 West Santa Fe Avenue

City or town: Grants State: NM County: Cibola

Not For Publication: Vicinity:

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 at the following level(s) of significance:

___ national ___ statewide X local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

X A ___ B X C ___ D

| | |
|---|--|
|  <hr/> Jeff Pappas, Ph.D., New Mexico State Historic Preservation Officer Signature of certifying official/Title: | <u>8/15/17</u> <hr/> Date |
| <hr/> State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government | |
| In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria. | |
| <hr/> Signature of commenting official: | <hr/> Date |
| <hr/> Title : | <hr/> State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government |

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4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain:)

Jon Edson H. Beall
Signature of the Keeper

10.4.17
Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private:
- Public – Local
- Public – State
- Public – Federal

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

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Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

| | | |
|--------------|-----------------|------------|
| Contributing | Noncontributing | |
| <u>4</u> | <u>1</u> | buildings |
| <u>0</u> | <u>0</u> | sites |
| <u>0</u> | <u>0</u> | structures |
| <u>1</u> | <u>0</u> | objects |
| <u>5</u> | <u>0</u> | Total |

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Commerce/Trade: specialty building, restaurant

Domestic: single dwelling

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Vacant/Not in use

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7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

No style _____

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: Concrete, Stucco, Metal, Glass _____

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

Charley's Automotive Service is a complex of five pumice-block buildings on the north side of Grants in Cibola County, New Mexico. Diaz was a city of Grants and U.S. Highway 66 entrepreneur who built an automotive service building and the Star Café fronting West Santa Fe Avenue, former U.S. 66. Both are plain buildings and excellent representative examples of a mid-20th-century service building and a roadside café. The automotive service building contains much of the equipment and many of the tools used by Charley Diaz from 1943 until his death in 1995. Diaz constructed the garage, diner, his house, and shed of a then-emerging technology called pumice-block construction. Pumice blocks are made of volcanic pumice stone and weigh less than half the weight of concrete blocks. The property includes a large, sloping yard, which separates the commercial buildings from the Diaz House, an L-shaped dwelling that fronts Peel Street. The property also includes a large shed on the northwest side of the house and a small shed on the northwest side of the property, behind the automotive service station. Charley's Automotive Service was listed in the State Register of Cultural Properties in 2010.

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Narrative Description

The section of Santa Fe Avenue where Charley's Automotive Service is located is mostly empty lots.¹ It was once a strip of gas stations, motels, and bars, it includes only the occasional store or restaurant. The only remnant left of the earlier roadside cluster is Charley's Automotive Service and the adjacent Star Café. To the west sat the Blea family enterprises, which included Los Alamitos Motel, a gas station, and a cab service, now identified only by a neon sign. To the east stood Eppie's Bar, now an empty swath of land. Black Mesa to the north rises above Grants, and can be seen behind the automotive and cafe buildings.

Charley's Automotive Service

Charlie's Automotive Service building is a rectangular-shaped building constructed of pumice block with an addition to the rear (photos 1-3). A utilitarian building, its ornamentation is spare aside from a stepped parapet and corbelled chimney. Facing West Santa Fe Avenue are two corrugated sliding-steel doors painted barn red. The business name is painted above in block letters. Centered between the doors is a window with steel muntins, now protected by plywood. A mail slot is located on the east door in the raw cut between the "E" and "R" of the hand-painted "AIR CON. SERVICE" (photo 4).

The east elevation is distinguished by a door, window, chimney, and the faded wall sign that reads, "CHARLIE'S SERVICE" (photo 5). The wood-panel door is set in a heavy steel-frame protected with plywood panels. A corbeled brick chimney starts midway up the wall. The chimney shelters a pipe leading to a cast-iron stove inside the garage.

A bathroom addition is located in the middle of east elevation. The space holds bathroom fixtures, which have been vandalized, and is entered through doors to the south and east. An original multi-light wood window is located on the north elevation.

The north elevation originally featured a large multi-light window, which was converted to a passage to the radiator service addition. West of this addition, across the north side, are two multi-light, wood windows, double window and single sash, which have been covered with on the exterior. The west elevation is punctuated by two multi-light wood windows that are also covered with stucco. The windows behind the stucco remain mostly intact. The condition of all the original wood windows is fair, with much of the glazing broken or missing and some muntins have been damaged.

The interior of the automotive service is a large open space with two service bays, workshop on the north wall, and a small frame office (photo 8). Spanning the interior in an east-west orientation is a large wood joist used to hoist engines. The joist is comprised of three parallel 2 x

¹ The business has alternately been named "Charley's" and "Charlie's." The nomination is named for the former because the first business on the site was named Charley's Automotive Service.

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16-inch boards supported in the center by wood post. Scattered throughout the interior are tools and equipment used to repair cars, such as a homemade acetylene torch, and artifacts that supported the operation of the business, such as business documents and a cash register (photo 13). A work bench along the north wall is heaped with old parts and radiator caps (photos 11-12). A wood-framed office and a separate framed storage area are located at the back of the east service bay (photo 9). A cast-iron stove is located along the east wall, adjacent to the storage room (photo 10). A 1958 pinup calendar remains tacked to a roof rafter.

In roughly 1954, Diaz changed from a full automotive service operation to a business providing primarily radiator repairs. During this period, he built a pumice-block addition to the back of the main service building (photo 6). The rectangular-shaped addition, which creates an overall L-shaped plan, contains the equipment for cleaning and re-coring radiators (photos 14-15). A large, three-part steel hopper window dominates the east elevation. The long span of glass provided light and air to the shop. A large corrugated sliding door is situated across the north elevation; the west side contains no fenestration.

Star Café

The Star Café, later Star Drive-In, is located along Sana Fe Avenue, approximately ten feet east of the automotive service building (photos 1-2, 6, 16). Built c.1949 by Diaz's great uncle, Salome Saiz, it originally consisted of a small rectangular space comprising a kitchen and counter. After 1954, an addition was added to the west and the rear, signaling its increased business during the period of uranium boom high mark of travel on Route 66.

The pumice-block building includes a façade with a symmetrical arrangement of a center door flanked by two fixed-light windows and capped with a stepped parapet. The openings are currently protected by plywood. A small block addition to the west held bathrooms. The post-1954 gable-roofed addition to the rear was constructed of pumice blocks. The low-pitched gabled roof features exposed rafter ends. A steel-framed door provides entry from the west. Next to the door is a large fixed-light wood window. The back is punctuated by a small multi-light wood window covered with plywood. The interior is composed of small spaces that form kitchen and the dining area, separated by a pass-through window and door. The interior also includes a small storage room.

Diaz House

The Diaz House is located at the northeast corner of the property, approximately seventy feet from the café. The house is perched at a higher grade than the commercial buildings. Constructed of pumice block, the one-story, L-shaped house is clad in stucco, but unpainted (photo 17). It contains in linear arrangement of bedrooms to the south, public rooms to the west, and the kitchen in the northeast corner. The front façade on Peel Street features a stepped

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parapet. Centered below the parapet is an original steel-casement window. A multi-light wood door and original wood-frame window appear across the west face.

The main entrance is located on the south side of the house, and includes a hand-carved multi-panel door with a fanlight design. A large, steel-framed window opens to the south. Except for a small window at the northwest corner, the west side of the house is devoid of openings. The rear, or north, elevation, facing Peel Street, is a shallow, shed-roof addition. It is punctuated by a few windows and an original door with a half side-light. Unlike the main part of the house, the shed roof is deteriorated, allowing moisture into the back rooms. The east elevation, like its western counterpart, is without openings except a small original wood-frame window at the northeast corner.

The house includes a small fenced yard, which has a specimen juniper tree and a rock and cacti garden. To the west is a pumice-block shed used for storage. A small shed in poor condition is located along the west side of the property, near the automotive service building (photo 18).

Contributing and Noncontributing Resources

Charley's Automotive Service is counted as one contributing building.

Star Café is counted as one contributing building.

Diaz House is counted as one contributing building.

Diaz House shed is counted as one contributing building.

Equipment, tools and other artifacts from in the automotive service from 1943 to 1967 are counted as one contributing object.

The small shed is counted as one noncontributing building.

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- 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 values, 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

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location
- C. A birthplace or grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

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Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Commerce
Transportation
Architecture

Period of Significance

1943-1967

Significant Dates

1943—Charley's Automotive Service opens
1949—Star Café opens
c.1950—Charlie Diaz builds his house behind automotive service
c.1954—Charlie Diaz closes pumps and specializes in radiator repair

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Capelli, Joseph (builder)

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Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

Charley's Automotive Service is significant at the local level under National Register Criterion A in the area of commerce because the automotive service and the Star Café provided local residents and motorists with important roadside services in the decade before the oil companies standardized the designs of service stations and restaurant franchises began to displace small, locally owned restaurants. Charley's Automotive Service is significant at the local level under National Register Criterion A in the area of transportation because the automotive service provided both residents of Grants and long-distance travelers along U.S. 66 with general automotive repairs and, after 1954 with radiator repair services. Charley's Automotive Service is significant at the local level under National Register Criterion C in the area of architecture because of its use of innovative pumice blocks and because it is an excellent representative example of a late first-generation gas and service station constructed in the mid-20th century in the decade before most national and international oil companies standardized their designs for the purpose of promoting their products.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

Charley's Automotive Service represents the commercial ambitions and domestic life of Charley Diaz, a Grants-U.S. Highway 66 entrepreneur. Constructed soon after the realignment of U.S. 66 and near a booming area of vegetable packing plants, Charley's Automotive Service represents a response to the growing local economy and the impact of a national highway. Adapting to changes in automotive service, its owner, Charley Diaz, became turned to radiator repair, and the shop became the preeminent business of its type in the region. The adjacent Star Café, built just before the first uranium boom, is a small, roadside restaurant selling the fast food of its day to both locals and travelers. While modest in design, the buildings represent emerging vernacular building trends. With much of Grants' west end stripped of its automobile legacy, Charley's Automotive Service is a rare survivor. Taken together, the complex is significant because of its contributions to commerce, transportation, and architecture.

Charley's Automotive Service is significant at the local level under National Register Criterion A in the area of commerce because the automotive service and the Star Café provided local residents and motorists with important roadside services in the decade before the oil companies standardized the designs of service stations and restaurant franchises began to displace small locally owned restaurants.

Charley's Automotive Service is significant at the local level under National Register Criterion A in the area of transportation because the automotive service provided both residents of Grants and long-distance travelers along U.S.66 with general automotive repairs and, after 1954 with radiator repair services.

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Charley's Automotive Service is significant at the local level under National Register Criterion C in the area of architecture because of its use of the innovative pumice blocks and because it is an excellent representative example of a late first-generation gas and service station constructed in the mid-20th century before most national and international oil companies standardized their gas station designs for the purpose of promoting their products. Mobil was among the last major oil companies to establish a standardized design and Charley's continued to sell Mobil gasoline as late as 1954.

In the 1900s and 1910s, oil companies based their nationwide distribution networks gasoline pumps in front of a variety of buildings, including hardware stores, grocery stores, car dealerships, and automotive service stations. In exchange for the lack of architectural uniformity, the oil companies received prime locations, a ready workforce, and existing infrastructure. Although the oil companies dispensed with first-generation gas stations, they were indispensable in distributing gasoline to the 27 million cars registered in the United States in 1940.

By the 1920s and after the Second World War, some gas stations attempted to attract customers with inventive buildings in the fanciful shape of animals, apples, tea kettles, tepees, windmills, castles, icebergs, and airplanes. Appealing to the curiosity of passing motorists, these gas stations were inspired by local culture, distinctive local materials, or the whim of the owner.² Restaurants, tourist camps, and many other roadside businesses attracted motorists with gasoline pumps. These included Mammy's Cupboard in Natchez, Mississippi; the Windmill Tourist Camp in Seneca Falls, New York, Wigwam Village No. 2 in Cave City, Kentucky; and the airplane service station in Salt Lake City, Utah. Though located across the nation, California and its car culture remained the epicenter for imaginative roadside gas stations.

More significantly, beginning in the 1920s oil companies began to explore uniform designs of gas stations that would blend with their locations in America's residential neighborhoods. Developed in the late 1920s and built throughout the 1930s, the English cottage gas station appeared as a small house. In its design, the Pure Oil Company embraced the marketing concept of "place-produce-packaging" in which a positive message is communicated through standardization of design. Standardization extended to almost everything on the lot from the buildings and their contents to the employees to create a distinctive corporate image. The English cottage gas station was built in cities and small towns across the nation. The building itself was akin to billboard sign promoting Pure Oil and its steeply pitched blue-tile roof was instantly recognizable to motorists.³

During the 1930s the trend shifted more to the utilitarian box with bays, a new form that blended Art Moderne and International Style motifs. Box stations featured flat-roofs and unadorned exteriors of stucco, terra cotta, porcelain-enamel steel, or structural glass panels. The glossy

² Chad Randl, *Preservation Brief 46: The Preservation and Reuse of Gas Stations*. (Technical Preservation Section, National Park Service, 2008), n.p.

³ John A. Jackle and Sculle, Keith A. *The Gas Station in America*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 167-182.

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white exteriors and scientifically-designed lighting schemes exuded modern efficiency, cleanliness, and professionalism. Unlike the English cottage station, the box station was designed to attract attention.⁴ These stations in their architecture and advertisements promoted the image of reliability and dependability and as beacons of safety to drivers on dark, rainy nights. These box stations remained popular until the 1980s when the booth-style stations and then the convenience store began to dominate new construction.

Developmental history/additional historic context information (if appropriate)

The Diaz Family in western New Mexico and Arizona

Charles Diaz was born in 1914 in the hardscrabble coal-mining town of Gamerco, McKinley County. His father, Domingo, soon moved the family to a logging camp at Kettner in the Zuni Mountains.⁵ By 1930, Charley, as he was known, was living with his six siblings at San Rafael, in the ancestral home of his mother, Maria. His father continued to work at a lumber camp away from the home, while the children mixed with their extended family.⁶ In San Rafael, Charley met his future wife, Dorela Cordova. Mechanically inclined, he began working on cars as a youth, starting at a Grants Chevrolet dealership in the 1930s. During the Second World War, he moved a few miles west where he was employed as a “heavy duty” mechanic at Fort Wingate.

He moved with his wife to Gallup, where his only child, Joseph Diaz, was born. Charley saved enough money from his government job to start his own business. Diaz purchased land that was owned by the Seligman family in the booming west end of Grants.

In the late 1930s, Arizona vegetable farmers discovered that the rich lava fields in the Bluewater area west of Grants provided key nutrients for beans, peas, tomatoes, cabbage, lettuce and the area's dominant crop, carrots. Quickly the west end of Grants, especially an area briefly known as Breece Town, hummed with box factories, packing, and distributing plants. Prominent growers and distributors included Dean Stanley and A.R. Card and Church & Harden.⁷

The 5,000-acre Bluewater Vegetable Project attracted hundreds of migrant workers who either worked in the fields or in the box factories and packing plants. One such worker, seventeen-year-old Ernest Miera, came to Breece Town in 1942 from Arizona, along with his father, to work in a box factory. Paid one dollar an hour, Miera helped produce hundreds of long,

⁴ Chester H. Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile: American Roadside Architecture*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 103-107.

⁵ 1920; Census Place: Kettner, Valencia, New Mexico; Roll T625_1080; Page: 2A; Enumeration District: 194; Image: 1151.

⁶ 1930; Census Place: Precinct 17, Valencia, New Mexico; Roll 1400; Page: 1B; Enumeration District: 21; Image: 1056.0.

⁷ Grants also prospered during this period as a mining center and a shipping point for sheep and cattle.

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rectangular boxes that were brought into the fields to be packed with lettuce.⁸ It was estimated the carrot boom alone boosted Grant's population by 270 percent between 1940 and 1950.⁹

Charley Diaz's choice of location for his business coincided with the improvement and realignment of U.S. 66, the primary artery through Grants in the late 1930s. Before its improvement, the highway entered town from the west on San Jose Drive, a narrow road that wended its way through the early Hispanic community of Alamitos. Moving the roadbed to a bench high above the San Jose River created a wider footprint. As it did for many towns in New Mexico, the highway's realignment brought new business for Grants.

In this boomtown atmosphere, Diaz built his shop and home with the assistance of his maternal grandfather, Joseph (Joe) Capelli, an Italian-born stone mason. Capelli (c.1880-c.1973) immigrated to the United States in 1904, having first built coke ovens in Buenos Aires, Argentina.¹⁰ Upon entering the states, he lived near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania constructing coke ovens, and later he worked on a mining tunnel in Pueblo, Colorado. While working in Albuquerque on the Alvarado Hotel, his construction skills were noticed by Sylvester Mirabal, a wealthy rancher from San Rafael, which was then the trade center for western Valencia County. For Mirabal, Capelli built a large, two-story stone house and a stone warehouse in San Rafael, both extant. Joseph Diaz recalls that his grandfather built many of the earliest houses in Grants and worked on Santa Maria mission, designed by John Gaw Meem as a stone church perched above U.S. 66 at McCarty's.¹¹

For many of his buildings, Capelli did not use stone, adobe, or wood, but instead he chose a novel construction material called pumice block. Though it has been employed as a building material since the Roman antiquity, pumice, a solidified, porous lava honeycombed with elongated cavities, didn't come into popular use until after the Second World War.¹² Its use by the Navy during the war to build landing craft, pontoon bridges, and military housing demonstrated that pumice blocks had sufficient compressive strength even though they were lighter and provided better insulation than concrete block.¹³ In fact, concrete weighs on average 150 pounds per cubic foot, but pumice weighs only seventy-pounds-per cubic foot.¹⁴

New Mexico, blanketed with volcanic fields, became a center of the pumice-block industry, with at least sixty block-making plants opening after the war, including the Valencia Pumice company in Grants. Pumice construction, with its standard 8 x 8 x 16-inch dull-gray blocks, soon supplanted adobe in New Mexico and became the dominant building material in developing countries where volcanoes are found.

⁸ Ernest Miera, November 24, 2009.

⁹ Wayne Winters, March 1951: 15.

¹⁰ 1920; Census Place: San Rafael, Valencia, New Mexico; Roll T625_1080; Page: 6A; Enumeration District: 192; Image: 1131.

¹¹ Diaz, October 3, 2009.

¹² *Architectural Record*, 1954: 88.

¹³ Fremont Kutnewsky, 1949: 13

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

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Full Service

In 1943, the twenty-nine-year-old Diaz opened Charley's Automotive Service. Dressed in overalls and wearing a train engineer's cap, Diaz offered locals and travelers full service with two gas pumps at the roadside and a garage for general automotive service and body repair.

He employed a few mechanics and family members always helped out, including his uncle, Raymond Diaz; his wife, Dorela, who kept the books for the gas pumps, and his son Joseph, who assisted his father after school. One of his longest-serving employees came by accident. As son Joseph recalls,

One night during the Christmas season, as father and son worked on the radiator of a pumice mine truck, they heard a knock on the door. They found a man shivering in the doorframe. He had the distinct smell of liquor on his breath. The man said his car broke down several miles down the highway and he needed help. The stranger said he didn't have money to pay for the repair, but said he could repay Diaz if he gave him a job. Charley said he didn't need anybody at the moment, but instructed the stranger to get a sandwich at a café down the highway and that he'd talk the next morning about potential jobs. He offered the stranger a place to sleep in the garage. Charley's son was incredulous at his father's generosity, guessing the stranger had only parked his car a couple blocks away and would steal their tools. His father reminded his agitated son that it was Christmas. The next day, Charley tried him out, and the stranger, Joe Bounds, worked for Joe as a mechanic for thirty-three years.¹⁵

His son tells this story to illustrate his father's character as someone who was fair and generous in his business and his judgment of human character. Other stories illustrate his fairness to Native Americans, who often faced discrimination. "To us, it didn't matter any difference what race or religion you were," recalls Joseph.¹⁶

Charley was an instrumental volunteer in the Catholic men's association that built the stone community center in the 1940s, laboring after work to complete the project. A Democrat, he also served on city council.

¹⁵ Paraphrased from an account Joseph Diaz told John Murphey. Joseph Diaz, December 1, 2009.

¹⁶ Diaz, December 1, 2009.

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Uranium Boom Town

Uranium was found in the Grants Mining District as early as 1949, though it was not until a Navajo named Paddy Martinez discovered a big cache at Haystack Mountain in 1950 that the boom took off. With this discovery and others, the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission arrived, setting up an office in Grants to organize widespread exploration. “[J]ust about every major mining interest and oil company sent their young Turks in there to pursue this large development,” remembers Irving Rapaport, who headed the Grants Atomic Energy Commission office.

Merle Armitage described Grants in 1959, where “we saw on every side the evidence of great activity. Everything was in a state of becoming. Buildings were being erected, pavement laid, and the Santa Fe had spread out switch tracks like new tendrils on a plant, to take care of the increasing tempo of arriving freight. Uranium had done all this.”¹⁷

On December 15, 1951, the *Grants Beacon* exclaimed “Uranium Ore is Here to Stay,” and dozens of claims started to fill the pages in place of the usual “Local Brevities” column. These entries were often followed by advertisements for hand-held Geiger counters (“Discover Uranium”) and other devices.

By 1951, a mill had been established near Grants to treat the ore and by 1955, Anaconda Corporation, the largest of the eighty mining operations in the area, had “blocked out” five-hundred-million dollars’ worth of ore.¹⁸ The boom arrived, along with geologists and engineers from around the globe, who spoke a the mix of languages, including German, Swedish, various African languages, and Indonesian so that Grants, sounded like the biblical Tower of Babel, as Irving Rapaport recalled years later.

In 1955, planes equipped with uranium-detecting scintillators flew grid-like patterns over Grants. Jeeps and sedans filled with professional geologists and prospectors scoured the Jurassic-Age hills around the city searching for the next uranium jackpot.

At the west end of town, Charley’s Automotive Service was ideally situated to serve prospectors and miners heading northwest on then State Highway 334 toward claims in the Haystack Mountain and Ambrosia Lake areas. One frequent customer, a Missouri-born oil wildcatter named Stella Dysart, struck pay dirt. Dysart had spent nearly thirty years unsuccessfully trying to find oil in the Grants backcountry, never making a big strike. But her firsthand experience meant that she knew every inch of Section 21, a 640-acre parcel of land she purchased in the mid-1920s for oil exploration. In 1955, she met Louis B. Lothmann, an ambitious Texan with training in geology and a \$10,000 grubstake.¹⁹ Using her old drilling logs, they selected a spot

¹⁷ Merle Armitage, 1959: 6.

¹⁸ Other companies in the Grants Mining District included American Metals, Climax, United Western Miners, Four Corners Exploration, Kerr-McGee, Lea Exploration, Mid-Continent Uranium, Rio de Ore Uranium, Santa Fe Railroad, Pacific Uranium, Pinon Sabre Uranium and Yucca Uranium; and R.R. Spurrier, 1955: 11.

¹⁹ *Time* magazine: 1959, n.p.

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on her land and drilled down 360 feet, hitting a 17-foot-thick bed of uranium. The Rio de Oro Dysart Mine No. 1 made the once-failed wildcatter famous and rich. A new land rush arrived at Ambrosia Lake. Before her big discovery, Stella payed Charley visits, asking for his burned oil to drip into her jeep. Several times she stayed overnight in the garage, stoking the potbelly stove to keep warm.²⁰

As in many extractive industry booms, other industries are diminished. To power uranium exploration, mining companies bought water rights from Bluewater farmers, and in Louise Rapaport's memory, "finished the carrot crop." What had delivered so much growth to Grants just a few years earlier was now gone, and the Lava City of the 1940s stepped aside to make way for the Uranium City of 1950s.

The Star Café

Salome Saiz, Diaz's great uncle, arrived in Grants in c.1949 seeking help after several personal tragedies. Saiz, an Albuquerque resident, had recently lost his wife in childbirth. Several weeks later his young son drowned in an irrigation ditch. Saiz was left with a teenage daughter and the newborn and he was desperate for help. The family came together to help. Charley offered his great uncle space on the property to run a business. With assistance from Joseph Capelli, Saiz built a small café, paying Diaz a discounted rent.

Star Café consisted of a small counter with five to six stools, tables in front and a kitchen in the back. It served a basic fare of hamburgers, chile and beans, and soup, but Saiz "could serve you anything," including steak, recalls Joseph Diaz.²¹

As a result of the mining and truck-farm boom, Grants was filled with tiny cafes. Andrea (Blea) Miera, who grew up in Grants and worked in a similar café, remembers dozens of these small restaurants fronting U.S. 66, catering to "workers in the field and mine workers," with clientele equally Indian and Hispanic.²²

The Star Cafe was later taken over by a Mr. Moon, an Anglo with restaurant experience. Moon was successful during the uranium boom because the café was located near a bus stop where miners assembled at 5:00 am and waited for transportation to the mines. Moon "worked out a deal with the busses," so the men could purchase pre-packed sandwiches to take to the mines.²³ The café soon expanded into a drive-in, open for business twenty-four hours a day. A 1954 advertisement for the drive-in said it specialized in steaks and chops and short orders—the food of workers and travelers—and encouraged customers to "Come as You Are." Moon, who slept

²⁰ Diaz, October 3, 2009.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Andrea Miera, November 24, 2009.

²³ Diaz, December 1, 2009.

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in the kitchen, was beaten and robbed one night and he quickly sold the business. The café was purchased by a local man who ran it for a number of years until it closed in c.1985.

Route 66 Improvements through Grants

Even before the passage of the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956, which ushered in the era of the modern interstate highways, the New Mexico State Highway Department set an ambitious goal of widening its principal arteries to four lanes. U.S. 66 alone was to receive sixty miles of four-lane construction, widening roughly sixteen percent the road into a “super highway.”²⁴

This not only affected U.S. 66, but stretches of U.S. highways coursing through the centers of Deming, Santa Fe, Espanola, Albuquerque, and other communities. In 1955, the department set an aggressive goal of opening 194 miles of super highway. Slung along U.S. 66, Grants was in the path of progress.

As the so-called longest city along U.S. 66, the majority of Grant's businesses fronted the highway and was in the path of the road widening. The 1954 project plans showed the widened highway slicing off frontage of dozens of building lining the highway. If not impact directly, the proposed right of way expanded on the south side of the roadway affecting most of the south-side businesses.

In total the project required twenty feet of new right-of-way to create the desired 100-foot-wide corridor. Trees were removed, signs taken down, gas pumps moved, buildings sometimes demolished or relocated on their lots. Louise Rapaport, who operated a tourist trading post in nearby Bluewater, was affected by the widening. As she recalled later, “the trading post was torn down and a quonset [sic.] was put up further back. . . . To me [with the new building] there was no more ambience as a trading post.”²⁵

To purchase the needed right-of-way, the state provided \$100,000, later increasing the amount to \$250,000.²⁶ In early fall 1954, property owners were warned that they must clear their land of encroachments by January 1, 1955. Concerned about their future, south-side business owners met at Sunshine Dance Hall to discuss how to respond to the loss of their businesses. In November 1954, there were still nineteen property owners that not had reached an agreement with the highway department over a purchase price for their property. As a result, the Valencia County Commission signed a condemnation suit against the non-cooperative property owners.

The project was completed in 1956, resulting in a four-lane highway with landscaped medians and street lights. *New Mexico* magazine claimed it “a pleasure to drive.”²⁷ While it did provide

²⁴ “Plan 94 Miles of 4-lane Highways,” 1955: 31.

²⁵ Louise Rapaport, January 20-21, 2009.

²⁶ *Grants Beacon*, September 2, 1954: 1.

²⁷ “Modern Grants,” 1956: 42.

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an efficient thoroughfare, some merchants in Grants point out that cars speed too fast on U.S. 66 and miss their businesses.

While he did lose considerable frontage, Charley Diaz was not directly affected by the widening. He had already removed his gas pumps several years prior, realizing he couldn't compete with the other gasoline stations that had popped up at the west end of town. But the improvement of U.S. 66 coincided with a new direction for his business.

The Business of Radiators

Before the modern era of plastic radiators, electric fans, and full-season antifreeze, automotive cooling systems were delicate machinery, circulating water up and down narrow tubes to cool the engine. When clogged by hard water and scale, the radiators could be flushed at home with a washing-soda solution. But if a tube deteriorated, the whole unit, including top and bottom tanks, brackets, fan belts, and assembly and temperature indicator would have to be removed from the engine and disassembled. This was not the work for average auto enthusiast as it required specialized knowledge and equipment.

Seeing an opportunity to specialize, Diaz removed his gasoline pumps and gave up his full service automotive business in order to focus on radiator repair. After 1954, Diaz built a pumice-block addition to the back of the building, giving the building an L-shaped plan. The addition signifies Diaz's change from a full-automotive service operation to a business providing primarily radiator repairs. The addition holds equipment for cleaning and re-coring radiators, including large, steel vats constructed by Diaz.

His shop was at one time the only radiator shop between Gallup and Albuquerque.²⁸ His clients included the pumice mine at Mount Taylor, which required him to do work at night so the trucks could operate during the day. He also provided most of the radiator for the local service stations. He offered them a twenty-five percent discount if they pulled the radiators and brought them to his shop. The other service stations in Grants charged customers for removing and reinstalling radiators. Repairing radiators, as his son recalls, "became very lucrative for him."²⁹ Another major component of his business was repairing radiators for summer tourists whose automobiles overheated along U.S. 66.

Instead of simply cutting and stuffing a tube, as many shops did, and thus decreasing circulation, Diaz reconstructed a tube by repairing it with solder. He did not purchase radiator repair equipment, preferring to make his own. The hoists used by big-city radiator repair shops were too expensive so Diaz did his lifting by hand. And instead of buying a prefabricated vat, he built his own steel vat.

²⁸ Diaz, December 1, 2009.

²⁹ Ibid.

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“Rodding the radiator,” another common procedure, involved taking the top tank off and running a rod through each tube to push out obstructions. Filled with clean water, the repaired radiator was put on a platform and dunked into a vat. Diaz would stare intently into the water, looking for bubbles that signified leaks. If any bubbles appeared, the radiator was reworked until no bubbles floated to the surface.

Diaz’s switch to the more specialized radiator service represented a change in Grant’s increasing range of automotive services. Prior to the Second World War, the options for automotive services consisted of a few independent garages, or repair shops, and a few automobile dealerships.³⁰ After the uranium boom, new automobile dealerships opened, offering full-service repairs in their modern buildings. Diaz’s success is due in part to the deal he struck to do the radiator work for most of the dealerships.

By the mid-1980s, Charley “was doing everything,” by himself, including radiator repairs and mechanical work for his steady “old timers.”³¹ Charley, with his son’s encouragement, leased the business so he could retire. The lessee picked up Diaz’s contracts from the mines, but it became clear that he “wasn’t keeping up with business.”³² Charley threw him out and reestablished his business. He worked several more years, until he died of a heart attack in 1995. The radiator repair shop was never reoccupied. A tire shop occupied the Star Café for a period, but, along the Diaz House, is vacant.

³⁰ Listings from the 1942-1943 New Mexico State Business Directory identified as “auto service” include Fed Allen camp, grocery and auto service; O. B. Calame gas station with auto service; Deluxe Auto Service Station; O. H. Hawkinson, Garage; Elias Jaramillo auto repairs; Robert E. Lee gas station with auto service; John A. Morrow A. gas station with auto service; Red Ball Garage; and S. G. Zamora gas station with auto service.

³¹ Diaz, December 1, 2009.

³² Ibid.

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9. Major Bibliographical References

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Ernest Miera worked in a box factory several years; his wife, Andrea, is related to the Blea family that owned a gas station, motel and cab service next to Charley's Automotive Service.

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- 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 # _____
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
 - Other State agency
 - Federal agency
 - Local government
 - University
 - Other
- Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): SR-1943

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of Property Approximately 0.50 acres

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates (decimal degrees)

Datum if other than WGS84: _____

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

- | | |
|------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Latitude: 35.155597 | Longitude: -107.863753 |
| 2. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 3. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 4. Latitude: | Longitude: |

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Or

UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

NAD 1927 or NAD 1983

- | | | |
|----------|-----------|-----------|
| 1. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 2. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 3. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 4. Zone: | Easting : | Northing: |

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The National Register boundary appears on the sketch map as a red line drawn to scale and corresponding with the point of latitude and longitude in Section 10.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The National Register boundary includes the intact property historically associated with the commercial activities and domestic lives of the Diaz family.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: John W. Murphey, Architectural Historian
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street & number: 111 Stanford Street
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date: November 12, 2009

State Historic Preservation Office

name/title: Steven Moffson, State and National Register Coordinator
organization: New Mexico Historic Preservation Division
street & number: 407 Galisteo Street, Suite 236
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e-mail: steven.moffson@state.nm.us
telephone: 505.476.0444
date: June 1, 2017

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Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo Log

Name of Property: Charley's Automotive Service

City or Vicinity: Grants

County: Cibola

State: New Mexico

Photographer: Steven Moffson

Date Photographed: February 9, 2017

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

- 1 of 18. Diaz property with garage (left), Star Café (right), and Diaz House (rear of property), with US Route 66 (foreground) and Black Mesa (background), photographer facing northeast.
- 2 of 18. Charley's Automotive Service (left) and Star Café (right), photographer facing northwest.

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- 3 of 18. Main façade, photographer facing northeast.
- 4 of 18. Detail of air conditioning service sign, sliding door, main façade, photographer facing northeast.
- 5 of 18. East side with painted wall sign, restroom addition (center), and radiator service addition (right), photographer facing northwest.
- 6 of 18. Rear of Star Café (left) and rear of Charley's Automotive Service (right), photographer facing southeast.
- 7 of 18. Detail of pumice blocks, north side of radiator addition, photographer facing southeast.
- 8 of 18. Interior, west service bay, photographer facing southwest.
- 9 of 18. Interior, office (left) and passage to rear radiator service addition (center), photographer facing northeast.
- 10 of 18. Interior, cast-iron stove in west service bay, photographer facing southeast.
- 11 of 18. Interior, work bench on north wall, photographer facing northwest.
- 12 of 18. Interior, radiator caps on workbench, photographer facing northwest.
- 13 of 18. Interior, cash register, photographer facing northwest.
- 14 of 18. Interior, radiator service addition with large testing vat (right), photographer facing southwest.
- 15 of 18. Interior, radiator service addition with large testing vat (right) and small vat (left), photographer facing southwest.
- 16 of 18. Star Café, main façade, photographer facing northeast.
- 17 of 18. Diaz House, rear elevation, photographer facing northeast.
- 18 of 18. Diaz shed, photographer facing west.

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

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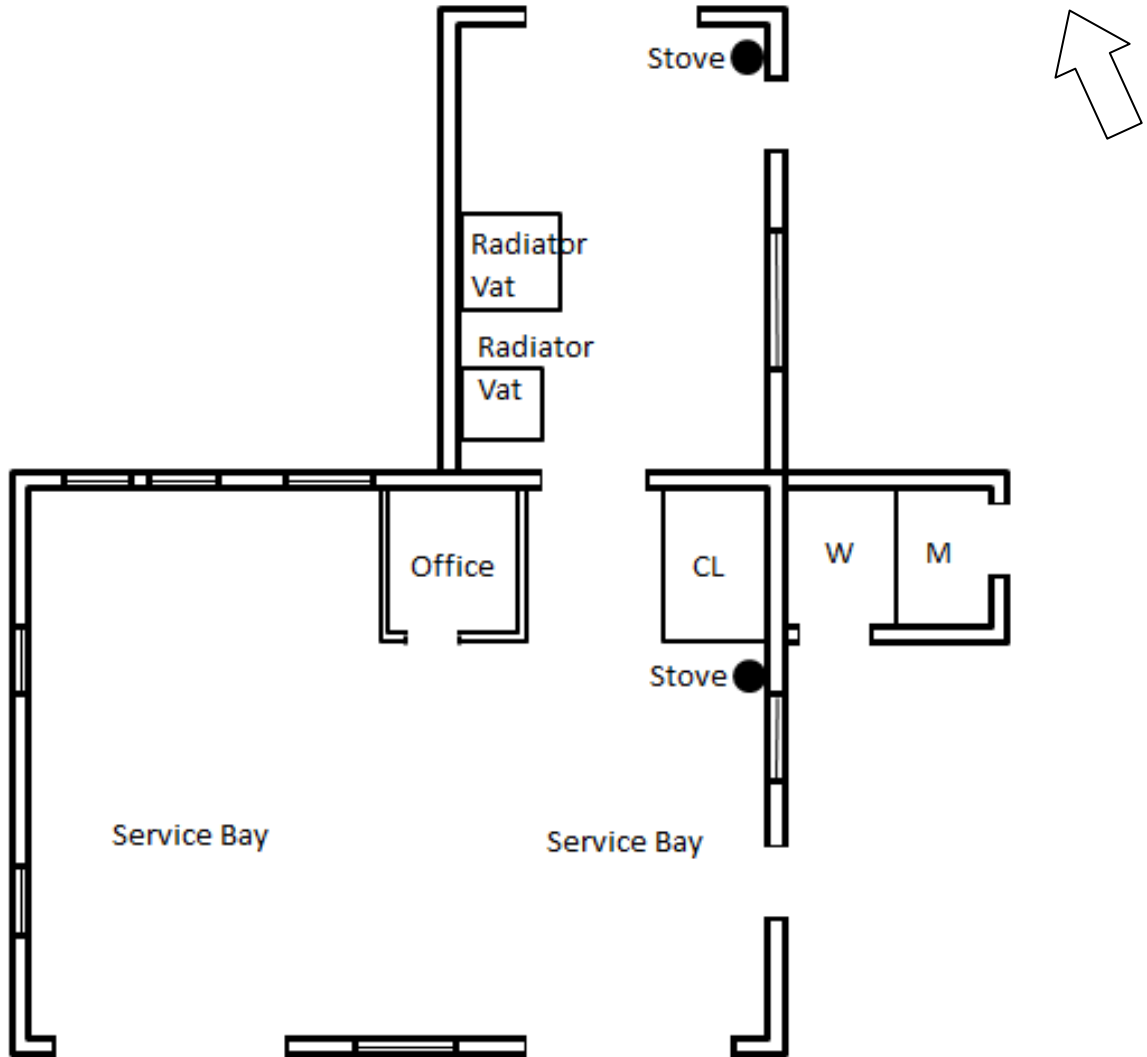
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Charley's Automotive Service
Cibola County, New Mexico

Floor Plan

No scale

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Charley's Automotive Service, c.1949



Charley's Automotive Service, c.1949

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Charley Diaz and son, Joseph, c.1954



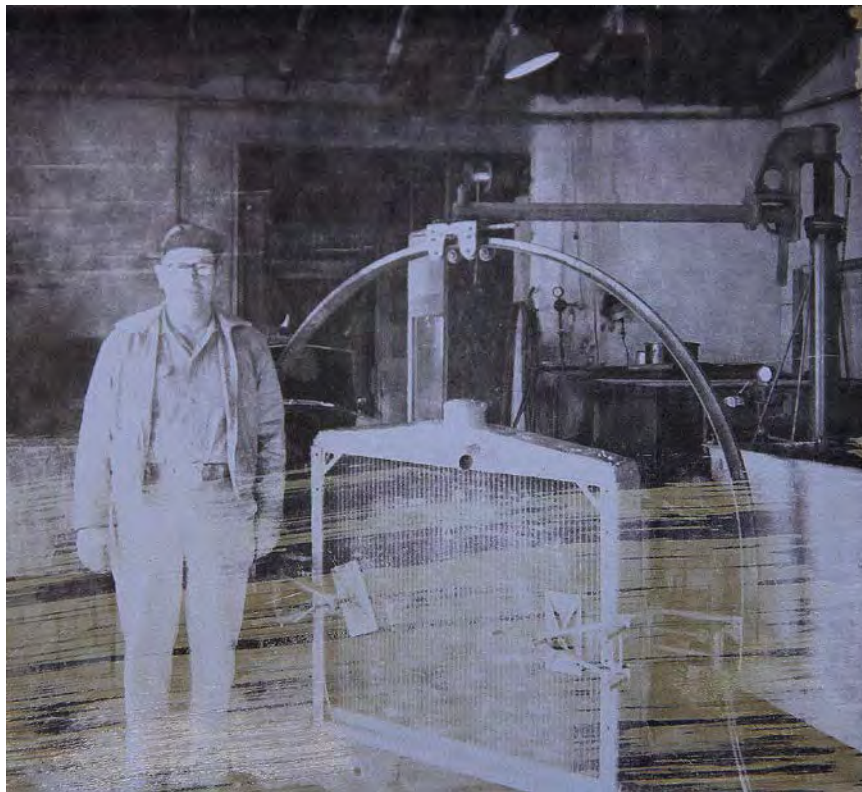
Charley's Automotive Service, c.1954

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Charley Diaz, c.1954



Charley Diaz in garage addition with radiator testing vat, c.1954

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Star Café, c.1949



Star Café, c.1949

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Lavalite-brand pumice block, 1951

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Photographs



1 of 18. Diaz property with garage (left), Star Café (right), and Diaz House (rear of property), with U.S. 66 (foreground) and Black Mesa (background), photographer facing northeast.



2 of 18. Charley's Automotive Service (left) and Star Café (right), photographer facing northwest.

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3 of 18. Main façade, photographer facing northeast.



4 of 18. Detail of air conditioning service sign, sliding door, main façade, photographer facing northeast.

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5 of 18. East side with painted wall sign, restroom addition (center), and radiator service addition (right), photographer facing northwest.



6 of 18. Rear of Star Café (left) and rear of Charley's Automotive Service (right), photographer facing southeast.

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7 of 18. Detail of pumice blocks, north side of radiator addition, photographer facing southeast.



8 of 18. Interior, west service bay, photographer facing southwest.

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9 of 18. Interior, office (left) and passage to rear radiator service addition (center), photographer facing northeast.



10 of 18. Interior, cast-iron stove in west service bay, photographer facing southeast.

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11 of 18. Interior, work bench on north wall, photographer facing northwest.



12 of 18. Interior, radiator caps on workbench, photographer facing northwest.

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13 of 18. Interior, cash register, photographer facing northwest.



14 of 18. Interior, radiator service addition, with large testing vat (right),
photographer facing southwest.

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15 of 18. Interior, radiator service addition with large testing vat (right) and small vat (left), photographer facing southwest.



16 of 18. Star Café, main façade, photographer facing northeast.

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17 of 18. Diaz House and shed (left), rear facade, photographer facing northeast.



18 of 18. Small shed, photographer facing west.



Charlie's RADIATOR SERVICE

AIR
CON
SERVICE

WASH



USED TIRES
POOL BOY

CHARLIE'S
SERVICE

MOTEL

DOMINIQUE'S

Charlie's RADIATOR SERVICE

AIR CON SERVICE



AIR
S E R V I C E
C O W





CHARLIE'S
SERVICE











ITEMS LEFT OVER
30 DAYS
WILL BE SOLD
FOR CHARGES

REVCO

















NO
EXIT



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

Requested Action:

Property Name:

Multiple Name:

State & County:

Date Received: 8/25/2017 Date of Pending List: 9/19/2017 Date of 16th Day: 10/4/2017 Date of 45th Day: 10/10/2017 Date of Weekly List: 10/5/2017

Reference number:

Nominator:

Reason For Review:

Accept Return Reject 10/4/2017 Date

Abstract/Summary Comments:

Recommendation/ Criteria

Reviewer Edson Beall Discipline Historian

Telephone _____ Date _____

DOCUMENTATION: see attached comments : No see attached SLR : No

If a nomination is returned to the nomination authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the National Park Service.



STATE OF NEW MEXICO
DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS
HISTORIC PRESERVATION DIVISION



BATAAN MEMORIAL BUILDING
407 GALISTEO STREET, SUITE 236
SANTA FE, NEW MEXICO 87501
PHONE (505) 827-6320 FAX (505) 827-6338

Susana Martinez
Governor

August 14, 2017

J. Paul Loether
National Register of Historic Places
Mail Stop 7228
1849 C St, NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Mr. Loether:

The enclosed disk contains the true and correct copy of the nomination for the Charley's Automotive Service in Cibola County, New Mexico to the National Register of Historic Places.

- Disk of National Register of Historic Places nomination form and maps as a pdf
- Disk with digital photo images
- Physical signature page
- Sketch map(s)/attachment(s) in hard copy
- Correspondence

COMMENTS:

- This property has been certified under 36 CFR 67
- The enclosed owner objection(s) do do not constitute a majority of property owners.
- Special considerations: Note that this property is significant at the national level.

Sincerely,

Steven Moffson
State and National Register Coordinator

Enclosures