

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM  
NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK NOMINATION  
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**1. Name of Property**  
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historic name:    Mabel Dodge Luhan House

other name/site number:    Big House

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**2. Location**    Morada Lane, Taos, New Mexico  
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street & number: Morada Lane

not for publication:N/A

city/town: Taos

vicinity:N/A

state:NM    county: Taos    code: 055    zip code: 87571

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**3. Classification**  
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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: 1

Name of related multiple property listing:

=====  
**4. State/Federal Agency Certification**  
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As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this \_\_\_\_\_ nomination \_\_\_\_\_ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation \_\_\_\_\_ standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property \_\_\_\_\_ meets \_\_\_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria. \_\_\_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of certifying official Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property \_\_\_\_\_ meets \_\_\_\_\_ does not meet the National Register criteria. \_\_\_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting or other official Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

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**5. National Park Service Certification**  
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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 Keeper Date  
of Action

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**6. Function or Use**

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Historic: domestic Sub: single dwelling

\_\_\_\_\_

Current : domestic Sub: hotel

other conference center

\_\_\_\_\_

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**7. Description**

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Architectural Classification:

Late 19th and 20th  
Century Revivals  
Pueblo

Other Description: \_\_\_\_\_

Materials: foundation: adobe roof: tar paper

walls: adobe other

Describe present and historic physical appearance.  X  See continuation sheet.

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**8. Statement of Significance**

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Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: national

Applicable National Register Criteria: A,B  
National Historic Landmark Criteria: #1,2  
Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) : G

Areas of Significance: Art  
Literature

National Historic Landmark Theme:  XIX-Literature  
 F-Supporting Institutions  
 XXIV-Painting & Sculpture  
 K-Supporting Institutions

Period(s) of Significance: 1922 to 1949

Significant Dates :

Significant Person(s): Mabel Dodge Luhan, D. H. Lawrence, Robinson  
Jeffers, Willa Cather, Georgia O'Keeffe,  
Andrew Dasburg, Leopold Stokowski, Ansel Adams

Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Architect/Builder: Mabel Dodge Luhan, Designer  
Tony Luhan, Builder

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria  
considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.  
X See continuation sheet.

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**9. Major Bibliographical References**

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X See continuation sheet.

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 # \_\_\_\_\_

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other state agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other -- Specify Repository: Beinecke Library, Yale University

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**10. Geographical Data**

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Acreage of Property: 5.3 acres

UTM References: Zone Easting Northing      Zone Easting Northing

A 13 449 380 4029160 B \_\_\_\_\_  
C \_\_\_\_\_ D \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

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Verbal Boundary Description: \_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

The nominated property occupies approximately 5.339 acres located at the northerly end of Morada Lane, about 1/2 mile due west of the Taos Plaza. See attached map of Plat of Pt. Tr. 48, M9, S.2 for the Mabel Lujan estate.

Boundary Justification: \_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

The boundary includes approximately 5.339 acres associated with the Big House and Gatehouse as per survey by Irvin Sackett, 1970, and the original deeds to the property. The 5.339 acres includes the sale of a portion of the tract sold to Fowler to 1980.

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**11. Form Prepared By**  
=====

Name/Title: Dr. Page Putnam Miller, Director

Organization: National Coordinating Committee Date: March 7, 1990  
for the Promotion of History

Street & Number 400 A Street, SE

Telephone (202) 544-2422

City or Town Washington

State DC ZIP 20904

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DESCRIPTION OF SITE:

Designed by Mabel Luhan and built by Antonio Luhan, the Mabel Dodge House was started in 1918 and ready for occupancy in 1922. During the next ten years the house continued to evolve into a three story, twenty-two room house. Blueprints for the main house and surrounding buildings were not drafted initially, rather the property developed through time. According to architectural historian Bainbridge Bunting this adobe structure fuses elements derived from Pueblo and Spanish Colonial architecture or gently recalls Tuscan villas. Although the house is not considered significant architecturally, it is one of the earliest examples of pueblo revival style in Taos.

When Mabel Dodge first arrived in New Mexico in December 1917, Taos was a simple out-of-the-way village, adjacent to an Indian pueblo. She purchased two small adobe houses on twelve acres of land for the price of \$1500 on 22 June 1918. The property consisted of high land on one end and a low lying meadow on the other, surrounded by Indian fields on two sides. An orchard occupied the north end, and the Acequia Madre del Pueblo, the oldest water rights in New Mexico, ran through the property.

One of the two small adobe houses on the property was a four room coffin-shaped house dating to the late 18th century, and the other was simply two rooms with a portal built somewhat earlier. She began her renovations as soon as she took possession, and when completed in 1922, both houses spread out from a common entrance court. Mabel hired Tony Luhan, who later became her husband, as foreman for the construction crew that was to build the additions to the houses. All the materials they used were traditional, consisting of adobe walls, wood and dirt floors, and vega and latias to support the dirt roofs.

The first addition to the Big House was completed in 1919. It consisted of adobe storage rooms and a maids' room on the south end of the coffin-house. In 1920, Mabel completed phase two of her home with the addition of an L-shaped living room, dining room, and kitchen added to the north side of the house. A portal was also built in that year across the front of the structure. The living room, called the Big Room, consists of two rectangular areas 15' x 15' and 12 x 20', each with a fireplace and six columns carved by Taos artist Ralph Myers. The front section of the room, with a smaller fireplace, serves as the entrance hall, and the back, cozier section has a larger fireplace. Mabel furnished the room not only with Southwestern furnishings, but also with a mixture of French, Italian, oriental, Indian and Mexican artifacts. Apparently, her goal was not authenticity but glamour. Several steps down from the Big Room is the 28' x 15' dining room. Mabel Luhan described this room as:

"always cool and dim and rather like a pleasant tomb in the summer. The wild olive tree outside one of the west windows hands its thick pale leaves against

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the panes and the other windows in the eastern alcove, as well as the long French window, are veiled with full gauze curtains, the color of burnt sienna, to tune in with the red-brown and black tiles on the floor. These tiles were made behind the house one year, and they are polished glossy with bees wax every few days. The ceiling is like the one in the Laguna church, the saplings painted with earth colors, sienna red and white earth, and lampblack, in stripes of four saplings to each color, so that it looks like an Indian blanket. The walls are white-washed, of course, and they are gray and shadowy in the subdued light." (Quoted in Agnesa Lufkin, "A Rare Place: Mabel Dodge Luhan's Taos Estate" Palacio 86:1 (Spring, 1980, p. 32)

Off the dining room was a small alcove with a large fireplace. Traditionally, the women built the fireplaces and accordingly one was being constructed. Tony Luhan apparently did not like the fireplace, took an ax to it, and built himself a fireplace with a peyote altar.

The 15' x 18' kitchen, the northern-most room, remodeled in 1970 by Dennis Hopper, is the only room in the house which has been completely altered since 1922. New cabinets, tiles, and appliances have been added and the room is in keeping with the character of the house. On the east side of the room, windows illuminate white-washed walls, blue woodwork, and a long table covered in oilcloth. During Mabel Luhan's occupancy this room was also equipped with a blue stove that burned cedar wood.

In 1921 the Rainbow Room, so called because of the number of colors painted on the latias, was built. It served as a salon that extended several steps up from the Big Room. Following the construction of the dining room, two bedrooms complete with an open sleeping porch were built over the Big Room in 1922. Tony's room was the smaller one, and had a light blue ceiling of vega and latias, windows facing the mountains and a corner fireplace. The sleeping porch, was off of his room. Mabel's room was seven steps down from Tony's. It was large, airy, and had twisted white columns, large windows and a stairway leading to the porch. One side consisted of a sitting room and the other of a bedchamber furnished with with a large bed. The sleeping porch, glassed-in in the late 20s or early 30s, is above Mabel's room, and she described the walls as being of helioglass set in wood. This section of the house also had a bathroom with windows on three sides. During a day of boredom Brett and Lawrence painted geometric designs on the windows, which have been restored.

Four bedrooms, two of them belonging to the original structure, are at the center of the house. The library is small, 12' x 14', and although it was more of a passageway, it did contain bookcases. The bedrooms are typical; they are about 12' x 12', and each have small windows, fireplaces and ceiling of vega and latias.

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Mabel Luhan visited the house frequently when it was under construction and when the D.H. Lawrences arrived in 1922, the house was fully completed. Mabel moved out of the Big House around 1954 when she built her last and smaller house, now privately owned. It is about a half-mile from the main house. The Big House was in her son, John Evans', possession until 1969 when it was sold to actor Dennis Hopper. It is now owned by George Otero and is a conference center and bed and breakfast place with an emphasis on use for educational programs.

In addition to the main house, or Big House as it was called, Mabel Dodge Luhan also built a number of small guest houses for her many visitors. However these have either been altered significantly or are in bad disrepair. Thus this nomination is only for the Big House.



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HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE:

Mabel Dodge Luhan was an important patron of the arts not because she purchased artwork, but because she successfully created and managed a lifestyle and environment that fostered artistic creation. During the 1920s and 30s over 250 artists and writers, many of national significance, visited and worked at Mabel Dodge Luhan's Taos home. Within the context of the National Historic Landmark Program thematic framework, the Mabel Luhan House has national significance under theme: XIX. Literature (F) Supporting Institutions and it also has national significance under theme: XXIV. Painting and Sculpture (K) Supporting Institutions. Before moving to New Mexico, Mabel Dodge had a "salon," as her gatherings have become known, at 23 Fifth Avenue in New York City. According to Lincoln Steffens, her salon was the most successful he had ever seen. The building that housed her New York salon is no longer standing. However it was not in New York but in New Mexico that for forty years she nurtured her famous artistic community. There she drew on Indian ways of life, that she envisioned as a source of spiritual and cultural redemption for a bankrupt white civilization. Mabel Dodge Luhan had the distinct ability to choose conversation topics at social gatherings that generated intellectual excitement and creativity.<sup>1</sup>

In the 1920s and 1930s her Taos home, frequently called Big House, served as a national center of native American culture and as a work space and inspiration for numerous artists and writers. There is no other single home in the United States that has been such a haven for such a wide range of artists.<sup>2</sup> Among those who stayed and worked at the Luhan estate, and whose creativity was affected by Mabel Dodge Luhan were writers such as: D. H. Lawrence, Mary Austin, Willa Cather, Robinson Jeffers, Jean Toomer, Witter Bynner, Frank Waters, Myron Brinig; painters and photographers such as Ansel Adams, Paul Strand, Edward Weston, Laura Gilpin, Carl Van Vechten, Andrew Dasburg, Marsden Hartley, John Marin, Nicolai Fechin, Georgia O'Keeffe; musicians such as Leopold Stokowski, Carlos Chavez, Dane Rudhyar; and social theorists/activists such as John Collier, Elsi Clews Parson, and Jaime de Angulo. It was also at her Taos home, that Mabel Luhan wrote seven books that record significant aspects of the intellectual, social, and cultural history of the United States.

Mabel Ganson Evans Dodge Sterne Luhan was born in Buffalo, NY in 1879 to a wealthy but conservative family. As a young debutante, she married Karl Evans, a local sportsman. They had a son, John, in 1901, however Evans died soon thereafter. Widowed at 25, she traveled to Europe and there married Boston architect Edwin Dodge whom she had met aboard ship. The couple moved to Florence in 1905 and bought a house, Villa Curonia. Mabel Dodge kept busy by furnishing the house and by entertaining many famous Americans. While in Florence she met Leo and Gertrude Stein, who introduced her to the possibility of constant self-regeneration through

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art. In 1912, Mabel Dodge grew tired of Florence and moved to New York City. She soon divorced Dodge.

Mabel Dodge's New York apartment, which no longer exists, served as the stage for her artistic involvement. The evenings she held, beginning in 1913, for artists and others in the artistic community were an instant success. She had the ability to serve the artists' imagination. Her granddaughter Bonnie Bill said that her "wealth was not just money. She was truly rich, as a tapestry of landscapes could be . . . she was able to create a physical and emotional arena in which people found the energy to act."<sup>3</sup>

Directing a salon was a skill at which Mabel Dodge excelled. Hers was the only successful American salon in the twentieth century, and it helped to produce works by noted artists as D.H. Lawrence, Willa Cather, Georgia O'Keeffe and many others.<sup>4</sup> The concept of the salon originated in Italy during the Renaissance, however eighteenth century French salons had the greatest influence. The salon's power and influence was due to one particular cause-- they were intellectual exchanges. The salon was neither a house open to everyone, nor a modern day reception. Rather, it was a specific number of individuals chosen by the hostess for their independent contributions to the group as a whole. The newest, most intellectual thoughts flourished here, with conversation and the flow of ideas directed by the hostess. Most significant about the salon was the ability for every member to participate actively; intelligent and creative women received just as much attention as the renowned male philosopher or author.<sup>5</sup>

In 1917 Mabel Dodge married Maurice Sterne, a painter. The marriage was not a happy one, and soon after their wedding Sterne traveled to the west to paint. Mabel joined him in Santa Fe, New Mexico in December of 1917. The couple moved slightly north, to Taos, where Mabel became interested in the Indians at the Taos pueblo. The Sterne's marriage deteriorated; Maurice left Taos in the summer of 1918, and Mabel purchased property in the area. They were divorced somewhat later. Mabel's friendship with Tony Luhan, an Indian she met in Taos, developed further into a love affair. They were married in April 1923.

Tony Luhan supervised the construction of Mabel's new house, and upon its completion in 1922 she set about reestablishing her salon which would be far more ambitious than any other she had presided over. Mabel Dodge Luhan took the lead in promoting the Southwest as utopia; offering her literary and artistic friends an antidote to civilization. She succeeded in putting Taos on the map by appealing to the aesthetic, emotional and spiritual needs of her friends. Lincoln Steffens summed up Mabel's skills in the following way:

"Mabel managed her evenings and no one felt they were managed. She sat quietly in an armchair and rarely said a word; her guests did the talking, and with such

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a variety of guests her success was amazing. Practiced hostesses in society could not keep even a small table of guests together; Mabel did this better with a crowd of one hundred or more people of all classes. Her secret, I think, was to start the talk going with a living theme." <sup>6</sup>

Her friends were productive while staying in Taos; Willa Cather wrote part of Death Comes for the Archbishop while staying in the Big House and modeled one of her characters on Tony Luhan. Georgia O'Keeffe spent two summers painting on the property. Frieda and D.H. Lawrence, close friends of Mabel's, arrived in 1922 and later moved to a small ranch owned by Mabel. The Lawrences brought English artist Dorothy Brett to Taos as well, and Mabel, Dorothy and Frieda developed a close relationship. Other guests included the painter, Andrew Dasburg, and Leopold Stokowski, who tried to capture the rhythms of Native American music in his own work. Other artists who took inspiration from Mabel and her Pueblo aesthetic, included Ansel Adams, Agnes Pelton, Edward Weston, Paul Strand, Mary Austin, Maynard Dixon, Jean Toomer, John Marin. For years, Mabel successfully drew many of the most significant <sup>7</sup> artists and writers to Taos to celebrate and preserve the culture she had discovered.

Mabel Dodge Luhan's influence was not purely artistic. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, she used her considerable resources and influence to fight for land reform, self-determination, and medical benefits for the indians.<sup>8</sup> John Collier, a New York acquaintance, came to Taos and became very involved in Indian affairs. Mabel Luhan arranged a position for him at the Bureau of Indian Affairs, where he later became commissioner in 1932. Tony Luhan influenced Collier tremendously and he in turn relied on Tony to explain BIA's decisions to the Pueblo Indians.

Mabel Dodge Luhan took up writing upon D.H. Lawrence's death. In 1932 she published Lorenzo in Taos, a description of her relationship with Lawrence. She had always written journals, and had them published in a series called Intimate Memories. The first, Background, appeared in 1933, followed by European Experiences in 1935, Movers and Shakers in 1936, and Edge of Taos Desert in 1937. Mabel published Winter in Taos in 1934, displaying a warmth that must have attracted people to her. Taos and Its Artists was published in 1947, and provides a well illustrated description of her personal relationship with many of the Taos artists. Mabel Dodge Luhan continued as Grande Dame of Taos for many years. Although most of her entertaining ceased in 1949 due to her declining health, close friends continued to flock to Taos until her death in 1962 at the age of 83. Tony died shortly thereafter.

Mabel Dodge Luhan's papers are in the Beinecke Library, Yale University, although some of the unpublished material is still closed to scholars. The Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley contains her extensive correspondence with Robinson and Una Jeffers.<sup>9</sup>

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Lois Rudnick, who in 1984 wrote a biography of Mabel Dodge Luhan, has now received a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to write a cultural history of the Mabel Dodge Luhan Estate. In commenting on her project, Rudnick state "I do not believe that there is a comparable private home that served such an important cultural purpose over so long a period of time, especially in terms of the diversity of the peoples and the kinds of works created -- poetry, sculpture, drama, fiction, painting, and photography."<sup>10</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Rudnick, Lois Palken, Mabel Dodge Luhan: New Woman, New Worlds, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984), p. 74.

<sup>2</sup>Rudnick, Lois Palken, "A Cultural History of the Mabel Dodge Luhan Estate," (application for National Endowment for the Humanities grant, papers of Lois Palken Rudnick).

<sup>3</sup>Rudnick, p. 330.

<sup>4</sup> Sichertman, Barbara, ed., Notable American Women: The Modern Period, (Cambridge, 1980), 430-432.

<sup>5</sup>Clerque, Helen, The Salon: A Study of French Society and Personalities in the Eighteenth Century, (New York: Burt Franklin, 1971). p 23-45.

<sup>6</sup>Rudnick, p. 74, 166, 144.

<sup>7</sup>Notable American Women, p. 432.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid. p. 432.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid. p. 432.

<sup>10</sup>Letter from Lois Rudnick to Page Putnam Miller, February 22, 1990.

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- Lufkin, Agnesa. "A Rare Place: Mabel Dodge Luhan's Taos Estate." Palacio. 86:1, (Spring 1980), 29-35.
- Rudnick, Lois Palken. Mabel Dodge Luhan: New Woman, New Worlds. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984), p. 74.
- Rudnick, Lois Palken, Letter to Page Putnam Miller, February 22, 1990.
- Sicherman, Barbara, ed., Notable American Women: The Modern Period. (Cambridge, 1980), 430-432.

TOWN OF TAOS  
PLANNING AND ZONING DEPARTMENT  
P. O. BOX M, TAOS, NEW MEXICO  
87571

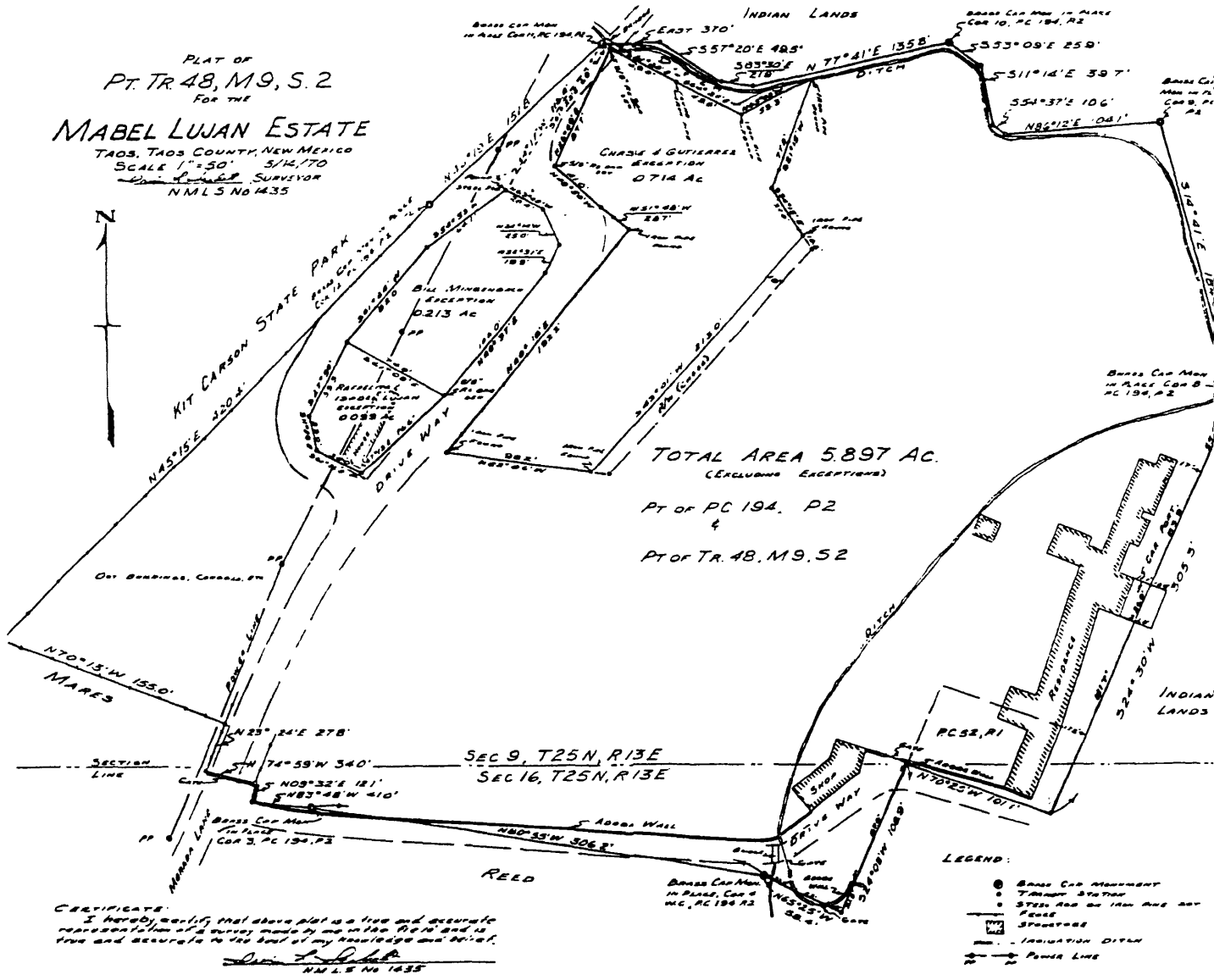
Appraisal Report  
Las Palomas de Taos  
Morada Lane, Taos, New Mexico

TOWN OF TAOS BOUNDARY ————  
EXTRA-TERRITORIAL BOUNDARY ————  
ZONE CLASSIFICATION BOUNDARY - - - -



Survey Plat

PLAT OF  
 PT. TR. 48, M9, S. 2  
 FOR THE  
**MABEL LUJAN ESTATE**  
 TAOS, TAOS COUNTY, NEW MEXICO  
 SCALE 1"=50' 5/14/70  
 SURVEYOR  
 N.M.L.S. NO. 1435



TOTAL AREA 5.897 AC.  
 (EXCLUDING EXCEPTIONS)  
 PT OF PC 194, P2  
 &  
 PT OF TR. 48, M9, S2

CERTIFICATE:  
 I HEREBY certify that above plat is a true and accurate  
 representation of a survey made by me on 14th day of May 1970 and is  
 true and accurate to the best of my knowledge and belief.  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 N.M.L.S. NO. 1435

5.339 acres included in property today