

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

For NPS use only

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

received OCT 20 1986
date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic

and/or common The Arkansas Sculptures of Dionicio Rodriguez

2. Location

street & number See individual inventory forms

not for publication

city, town _____ vicinity of _____

(Garland & Hot Spring
County sites)

state Arkansas

code 05

county Pulaski, Garland
Hot Spring

code 119¹
051, 059^{AD}

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> object	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> park
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Multiple Ownership; see individual inventory forms

street & number

city, town _____ vicinity of _____

state Arkansas

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Pulaski Co. Courthouse, Garland Co. Courthouse, Hot Spring Co. Crthse.

street & number Markham Street Ouachita Malvern

city, town Little Rock, AR Hot Springs, AR state AR

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

Old Mill #199-56-72

title AHPP Survey Inventory has this property been determined eligible? yes no N/A

date January, 1973 federal state county local

depository for survey records Arkansas Historic Preservation Program, 225 E. Markham, Suite 200

city, town Little Rock state Arkansas

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

SUMMARY

Ranging in date from the early 1930's to the first years of the following decade, there exist seven known sites of sculptures by Dionicio Rodriguez, a Mexican-American folk sculptor. The pieces extant in Arkansas constitute one of the most representative collections of Rodriguez' work. Three of these sites, each located in parks in North Little Rock commissioned by Justin Matthews, are included in this nomination, as are a Garland County and Hot Spring County site commissioned by Harvey Couch. Convincingly resembling forms of natural creation, these sculptures were constructed of reinforced concrete with a hand-sculpted surface that was tinted to more closely resemble the material it was imitating. Working in a folk tradition learned in his native Mexico, Rodriguez was the most skillful and convincing sculptor known to have produced rustic concrete landscape features during the period 1925-1950.

ELABORATION

In describing his own work, Rodriguez wrote in 1935 that "It doesn't take much material and gives wonderful results."¹ The majority of his sculptures were functional depictions of fallen or decaying trees with split, peeling, lichen-covered or insect-eaten bark. The astounding accuracy of Rodriguez' detailing enables the observer to frequently identify the tree specie represented. Many pieces are similar to one another, such as the tree trunk shelters located in Lakewood Park, North Little Rock, Arkansas; Memorial Park in Memphis, Tennessee; and at two sites in San Antonio, Texas. Fallen tree benches and bridges were the most frequently executed sculptures. The existence of an Annie Laurie chair in Maryland reveals that the sculptor was not opposed to repeating himself, as this was a piece first commissioned by Clovis Hinds in Memphis. Lakewood Park possesses the only known example of a drinking fountain with "carved" faces. Occasionally small animals, cactus or toadstool sculptures were included in large landscape settings.

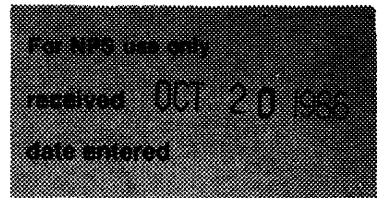
Rodriguez' methodology, which was based on folk tradition learned in Mexico, differed from the practices promoted in publications of the period. The majority of concrete landscape features made during the early twentieth century were made with molds. In fact, a 1917 publication How to Make Concrete Garden Furniture and Accessories doesn't even mention or refer to the technique employed by Rodriguez.

Rodriguez was possessive of his craft and unwilling to share his methodology with his assistants or observers. He never produced any sketches or drawings; nor did he write about or discuss his work. Thus, much is unknown concerning the technical and inspirational aspects of his work. Recollections by those who knew him and the sculptures themselves provide the only source of information. Usually Rodriguez worked with at least one helper, sometimes more, who would form the reinforced core of the sculptures. One such helper recalls that Rodriguez never taught anyone how to do any work, though he worked alongside his assistants until they achieved a fair degree of skill.

Rodriguez' sculptures were constructed of reinforced concrete. For large pieces, the first step was to construct footings. The General form was made using reinforcing bar, rod, mesh, screen, wire, and rubble, held together with a rough coat of concrete.

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The various metal materials were tied together with wire rather than welded. This rough form, frequently executed by assistants, was allowed to dry before Rodriguez himself applied the surface coat of smooth concrete or "neat" cement. In sculpting the surface layer, Rodriguez "just sat down on the ground with a sack of cement and started working. They only other material he used was tinting."² He often used pure portland or "neat cement" that he would wet down one sack at a time. Handmade tools formed on the job and table utensils were used to create the variety of surface textures.

Once the surface coat had been sculpted and dried, it was tinted using chemical re-agents. These mixtures, for which the recipes are unknown, were applied with a brush and worked into the concrete with utensils. Once the chemicals had been applied, the sculpture was hosed with water. The chemicals constituting the tints were "copperas, sulfuric acid, iron oxide, salt peter, and some lamp black to sometimes darken his colors."³

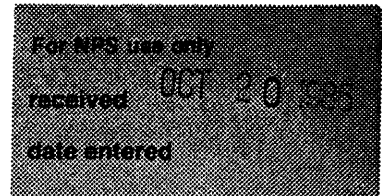
It is not known how he mixed the colors, though observer's recollections indicate he mixed them in gallon jugs in Memphis and a Prince Albert Tobacco can at Lakewood Park. It is quite possible that Hinds knew the nature of the colorings, for he wrote inquiring of Rodriguez' desire to have colors ordered during the sculptor's absence from Memphis. "I note you will be in Chicago six or seven weeks. Don't forget to order what coloring you want. If you want me to order any coloring, send a list of colors, giving number of pounds on the enclosed card."⁴ Correspondence between the sculptor and Hinds suggests that there was a problem with the colors fading. In 1939 Hinds wrote "You know I want you to personally go over all your old work with good colors so it will hold and look good."⁵ A letter two years later indicates that fading was still a problem, ". . . as expressed in enclosed copy of letter, I feel we should deduct not less than \$50.00 for repainting of the old work faded out so soon."⁶

Three of the sites included in this nomination were parks commissioned by Justin Matthews. The T. R. Pugh Memorial Park and the Crestview Park are both owned by the City of North Little Rock. Lakewood Parks is owned by the Lakewood Property Owners Association.

Dating from the T. R. Pugh Memorial Park, or "Old Mill" as it is commonly known, is one of Rodriguez' masterpieces. Included in this park are a variety of benches, bridges and fences, as well as the "wood" architectural details of the mill itself. Sculptures of subjects unique to this site include a rain barrel with downspout, a pump with trough and a mill wheel. Rodriguez had already begun working in Memphis when Hinds received a letter from Matthews inquiring about the availability of the sculptor. Hinds related to Rodriguez by letter that "From what he says I think he wants a big overshot wheel and some other rustic seats, features, etc."⁷ The "Old Mill" was conceived and constructed by Justin Matthews to be a focal point of his new residential subdivisions that surround the "rough and unsightly spot."⁸ Matthews intended for the mill to serve as a tribute to early Arkansas pioneers, specifically

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ARKANSAS SITES

Thomas Robert Pugh, a noted plantation owner and settler of Ashley County. The mill itself was designed by Frank Carmean, architect of the Matthews Company, who chose the site and designed the building, the wheel, its supporting blocks and the water flume. The water wheel weighs 10,000 pounds, and except for the axle and bearing, is entirely made of concrete. Carefully balanced, the wheel requires only a small amount of water to turn. One of the most striking features of this picturesque site is the long narrow bridge below the mill pond which was described by Matthews as depicting two bent swamp persimmon trees joined together. The footbridge nearer the mill is a twisted black locust tree. Immediately after construction, the park became a showplace of the area and was featured in the opening credits of "Gone With The Wind" in 1939.

Though the exact date of the sculptures at Lakewood Park is not known, they date before 1935, as evidenced by a reference contained in a letter to Rodriguez from Hinds.⁹ This site, located within a short distance of the T. R. Pugh Memorial Park, has six sculptures placed closely together and a seventh near the entrance. The palapa shelter near the entrance to the park is similar to a piece in Brackenridge Park in San Antonio. This shelter has a rope-tied thatch roof supported by a tree trunk that forms benches at its base. Grouped together are a small footbridge of split logs, a bent tree limb footbridge, the drinking fountain, a tree stump trash container, the flower basket planter and the hollow tree trunk shelter.

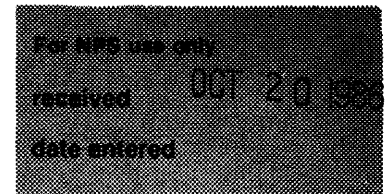
Crestview Park, located to the west of the other two sites, has only two sculptures, a rusticated shelter and a fallen tree bridge with bent tree limb railings and a plank floor. Both pieces are located at the bottom of the steeply sloping site.

Located in Garland County and Hot Spring County are two sites, Couchwood and Little Switzerland, where Rodriguez was commissioned to execute several sculptures to embellish the summer retreat of Harvey C. Couch, President of Arkansas Power and Light. A barbecue disguised as a tree is a large piece located [REDACTED] on a piece of property called "Little Switzerland". It resembles several sculptures at Memorial Park in Memphis in its scale and form. The largest fallen tree bench known to have been sculpted by Rodriguez is [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]. This bench has a stump at one end where it appears as if the tree has been felled. Seats and planters have been "carved" into the long trunk which extends from the stump. Located in front [REDACTED], are concrete steps and planters sculpted to resemble logs, that lead from the drive to the front door. Knot holes serve as drains for the planters. Simple log steps are located at the rear of the building, as is a log stump that functions as a soda pop cooler with a knot hole drain.

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NATURE OF SURVEY

This nomination is the result of a three year investigation by the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program (AHPP) staff. Every effort has been made to identify all existing sites of Rodriguez' sculptures and collect all available information pertaining to his life and work. Information helpful in piecing together the sculptor's movement throughout the United States was provided by Katherine Hinds Smythe of Memorial Park in Memphis and Bill Green, Curator of the State Capitol, Austin, Texas, both of whom are concerned about the preservatiuon and recognition of Rodriguez' work. Of enormous value was the correspondance between E. Clovis Hinds, founder and President of Memorial Park, and Rodriguez during the years 1935 to 1942, generously made available to the AHPP by Katherine Hinds Smythe. Though there are gaps in the surviving correspondence, the letters that remain have provided important clues to sources of information and locations of sculptures. Due to Rodriguez' peripatetic nature, it is extremely difficult to completely ascertain the nature of his personal life, the development of his unique style or a comprehensive inventory of his sculptures. Interviews with persons who remember working with or observing Rodriguez have been invaluable in determining what little is known of his personality and method of sculpting. Particularly helpful are the recollections of J. R. Kagay and Stanley Schmidt of San Antonio and John Richmond of Memphis. All persons interviewed recall that Rodriguez spoke little English and is not known to have ever written anything directly addressing his background or the highly individual style that characterized his work. In September 1986, Maximo Cortes, a friend and assistant of Rodriguez, was interviewed in San Antonio. He is the only known assistant still living and knew Rodriguez throughout his career.

FOOTNOTES

¹Dionicio Rodriguez. Letter to Clovis Hinds, January 7, 1935.

²Stanley Schmidt. "The Concrete Art of Dionicio Rodriguez". Date unknown.

³ibid.

⁴Clovis Hinds. Letter to Dionicio Rodriguez, August 24, 1939.

⁵ibid.

⁶Clovis Hinds. Letter to Dionicio Rodriguez, February 5, 1941.

⁷Clovis Hinds, Letter to Dionicio Rodriguez, January 14, 1935.

⁸"Old Mill Is a Romantic Monument to Men of Vision" North Little Rock Times, May 24, 1962, p. 15C.

⁹Clovis Hinds, Letter to Dionicio Rodriguez, January 14, 1935.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates 1932-1939 **Builder/Architect** Dionicio Rodriguez (1891-1955)

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

SUMMARY

Described during his lifetime as a "naturalistic" artist, Dionicio Rodriguez was a Mexican folk sculptor whose outdoor works in tinted reinforced concrete cleverly imitated forms found in nature, most frequently, though not exclusively, trees and stone masses. Most often his sculptures depicted fallen or decaying trees that functioned as footbridges, shelters and benches. Typically his works were commissioned for landscaped settings such as parks, gardens and cemeteries. Concrete sculpted to imitate wood is called "rustico" or "el trabajo rustico" (rustic work) in Mexico. So convincing are Rodriguez' imitations of nature, observers unfamiliar with his work frequently mistake it as being real or petrified. Rodriguez' sculptures are known to exist in seven states, with Arkansas possessing one of the finest and most representative collections. Until recently, little consideration has been given these unique works of art and their creator. It is the intention of this nomination to recognize the significant contribution of this skilled artist to the medium of American sculpture and to nominate under Criteria C the nationally significant sculptures located in Arkansas.

ELABORATION

In order to appreciate and accurately assess the sculptures of Dionicio Rodriguez in Arkansas, it is necessary to examine the background of the artist, as well as nature and evolution of his unique artistic style and the artistic climate within which he lived and worked.

Rodriguez worked in a rustic tradition learned in Mexico, and while he was not the only folk artist of the period producing rustic concrete sculptures, he was clearly the most skilled. It has been suggested by Maximo Cortes, a friend and assistant of Rodriguez', that this rustic landscape sculpture tradition originated in Europe.

Working in the United States from circa 1925 to 1950, Rodriguez was the most talented and convincing sculptor producing this type of work in the United States. When Rodriguez first arrived in Texas there was already an established tradition and interest in rustic landscape features that dated back to the mid-nineteenth century. Illustrations found in Calvert Vaux' Villages and Cottages (1864), Henry Hudson Holly's Country Seats (1863), and George Everston Woodward's Victorian Architecture and Rural Art (1867) are very similar to several of the imitation wood pieces by Rodriguez. Using concrete instead of wood, he departed somewhat from this established tradition. Rodriguez actually participated in two continuing and concurrent traditions- Mexican folk sculpture and American rustic. Though interest in rustic art waned at times, it never completely died out as evidenced by the continued production of rustic memorial art, most frequently

9. Major Bibliographical References

See Continuation Sheet

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property See individual Survey forms

Quadrangle name See individual Survey forms

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UTM References See individual Survey forms

A

Zone									

B

Zone									

C

D

E

F

G

H

Verbal boundary description and justification

See individual Survey forms

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

RE: Couchwood
state Arkansas code 05 county Garland Co. code 051
Hot Spring Co. code 059

state code county code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Julie Vosmik, Architectural Historian

organization Arkansas Historic Preservation Program date June 4, 1984 revised October 9, 1986

street & number Suite 200, 225 E. Markham telephone (501) 371-2763

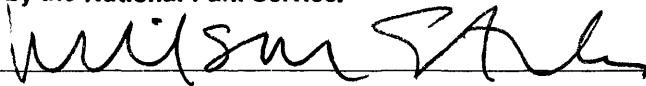
city or town Little Rock, state AR 72201

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

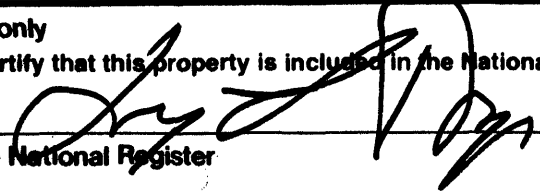
As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature 

title State Historic Preservation Officer date 10-13-86

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register



date 12/4/86

Keeper of the National Register

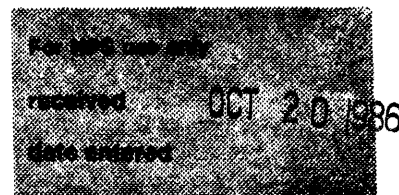
Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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of carved limestone. Though unrelated, a renewed interest in Rustic Architecture was taking place during Rodriguez' lifetime through state and National Park systems.

Rodriguez' methodology, which was based on tradition learned in Mexico, differed from the practices promoted in contemporary journals. As publications of the period demonstrate, most concrete landscape features were made with molds. A 1917 publication How To Make Concrete Garden Furniture and Accessories doesn't even mention or refer to the technique employed by Rodriguez.

Although Rodriguez can not be credited with discovering something totally new and different, he achieved a level of skill and creativity unequalled by his peers. The variety of sculptures produced was far greater than that of other folk artists. A genius in the medium of concrete, he was able to control and manipulate the surfaces of his pieces, achieving astounding accuracy and detail.

A small number of Mexican-American folk sculptures have been identified as working in Texas at the time as Rodriguez. Though their work reflects the influence of the same rustic folk tradition, their sculptures are technically far less sophisticated. A small number of Mexican-Americans residing in Texas continue to produce these concrete landscape features.

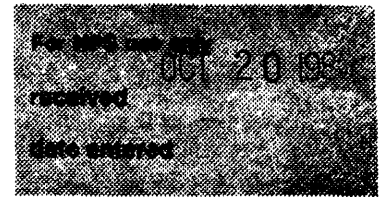
Though Rodriguez began and ended his career in San Antonio, his sculptures have been located in seven states, with Texas, Arkansas and Tennessee possessing the most diverse and representative collections. Located at seven sites within the state, Rodriguez' Arkansas sculptures were executed between 1933-39, the time during his career when he was most successful. Prior to this period, he worked primarily within Texas. As his skill became recognized, and his number of contacts grew his commissions took him to many other states. Several of the Arkansas sculptures are unique to the state.

Rodriguez was born in 1891 in Toluca, Mexico, approximately sixty miles from Mexico City. Very little is known about his early years, but there is nothing to indicate it included much education. As a boy of fifteen he began working in a foundry. The following year he was employed by an Italian artist by the name of Robles Hill who specialized in producing imitation rocks, caverns, ruins and ancient buildings. Though unconfirmed, some of Rodriguez' early work reputedly exists in Chapultepec Park in Mexico City. With experience and a letter of introduction from Robles Hill, Rodriguez arrived in Laredo, Texas, apparently influenced in moving by the political situation in his native country.

Though the reason of his arrival in the San Antonio is not known, it is very likely that he was encouraged by Dr. Auraliano Urrutia, a Mexican physician residing in San Antonio and an early client. It was Dr. Urrutia who introduced Rodriguez to Charles Baumberger, Sr. of the Alamo Cement Company around 1925, and for whom he did quite a bit of work during the late 20's. Acquiring information about this artist and his techniques is difficult, as Rodriguez did not speak or write English, nor did he produce any sketches. He traveled from place to place, frequently returning to Mexico for the winters, with no permanent place of residence. He had no children, so there

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do not exist any relatives of whom to ask questions.

Rodriguez was fortunate to have several clients who took an interest in his welfare and success in the States. The two most important of these were Justin Matthews and E. Clovis Hinds, with whom the artist was in contact for a number of years. The sculptor was well-liked by his clients who frequently assisted in securing new contacts. He was well-paid, earning enough from his sporadic employment to support himself and the several members of his family who sometimes traveled with him.

From what little is known, it seems Rodriguez was rarely employed for more than several months consecutively. Winter weather interfered with his work, as did his chronic poor health and his unpredictable ability to secure new commissions. He traveled from place to place by car, frequently accompanied by his nephew and niece Manuella. Several of his letters refer to "helpers" that he could engage as his assistants. It is highly possible that these "helpers" were family members or friends. Periodically the artist returned to Mexico City for brief visits, though he clearly considered the States his home by the late 1920's.

Rodriguez sometimes worked on a contractual basis, but usually he was paid hourly or weekly. In 1935 he wrote Mr. Hinds the following, "About the wages, I have received no less than \$75.00 per week, clear, this includes my helper." In a letter dated August 24, 1939, the artist wrote "if the job is by contact or by day I do the work just as good because I always try to do the best of my ability."²

Described as a "stumpy little brown man from Mexico,"³ Rodriguez spoke little if any English, relying on friends or family as interpreters and translators of correspondence. Richard Richmond of Memphis recalls the sculptor as "a short stocky man with very dark, very straight hair."⁴ He described him as "rather dark" and remembered that "Rodriguez brought with him his son or son-in-law, a younger man who spoke better English than Rodriguez did."⁶

Frequently ill, Rodriguez suffered from diabetes for which he periodically underwent "treatments." Both Justin Matthews and Clovis Hinds were concerned about the artist's health, corresponding between themselves on the subject and seeking the advice of medical professionals. In several of his letters to Mr. Hinds, Rodriguez relates his intention to visit San Antonio or Mexico City, purportedly for his health. His occasional visits to Mexico City usually took place during the winter months, when his health would benefit from a more temperate climate and when the cold weather prevented satisfactory sculpting with cement outdoors. Richmond remembers much discussion about "sugar in the blood" and that Rodriguez was probably ill in the mid-1940's when he left Memphis for the last time.

The highest concentration of known Rodriguez work is in San Antonio, where for several years he was associated with the Alamo Cement Company. As Stanley Smith, Vice

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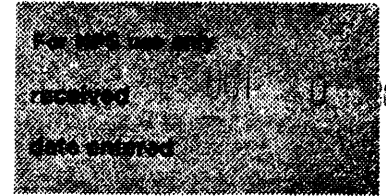
President of the company recalled, "Mr. Baumberger commissioned quite a few jobs to Dionicio. Besides a large "tree house" [redacted] . . . Rodriguez "erected" a fence [redacted] This fence is over 125 feet in length and contains 42 different kinds of "woods." Also executed on this site was a fish pond that "invites a closer inspection when suddenly you are confronted by a snake coiled on the logs made of cement of course. Next to the water is a small alligator of cement and incongruously cement cactus plants grow next to the water."⁸ Other sculptures in San Antonio include the following: Japanese portal at the Sunken Gardens; canales at a nearby mission; animal surroundings at the zoo; light posts and benches in [redacted]; a bridge and palapa shelter in Brackenridge Park; an Alamo Heights bus station; a shelter at Alamo Plaza (now moved); [redacted]

By 1932 Rodriguez was working for Justin Matthews in North Little Rock, Arkansas. It is not known how the two men made contact with one another, though it is likely that Matthews encountered Rodriguez' work while traveling. Matthews was at this time involved with the development of Lakewood and Park Hill subdivisions and he hired the sculptor to execute works at three parks, Crestview, Lakewood and the T. R. Pugh Memorial Park, the latter site being one of the sculptor's most successful illustrations of his enormous talent. Matthews and Rodriguez enjoyed an amicable working relationship that continued over a period of several years.

Matthews had a tremendous impact on the development of North Little Rock. He had been successful in the cotton seed oil business before moving to North Little Rock and investing in real estate development. Following his initial efforts during the late 1920's and early 1930's in developing Park Hill, Matthews formed the Metropolitan Trust Company which developed the Lakewood Addition, including its system of recreational lakes and open spaces. He was an innovative and daring developer who used clever promotions and original advertising to gain public attention for his projects. Frank Carmean, designing architect for the company, drew plans for many buildings throughout North Little Rock, including the mill at the T. R. Pugh Memorial Park.

Matthew's influence on North Little Rock was profound. The most active and successful real estate developer in the history of the community, he was responsible for the majority of this city's residential development. Matthew's, impressed with Rodriguez' talents, hired him on three occasions to execute sculptures for neighborhood parks, each of which was designed as an integral component of a subdivision for the enjoyment of the neighborhood. Matthew's was the only developer to so significantly shape the residential character of North Little Rock.

Several pieces located in Hot Spring and Garland Counties are exceptionally significant, as the subjects and functions are unique within this sculptor's work.

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Located at Couchwood in Garland County, and Little Switzerland in Hot Spring County, the summer residence retreat of Harvey C. Couch, President of Arkansas Power and Light, Rodriguez was commissioned by the owner to execute a barbecue disguised as a tree, steps, a bench, a hollow tree stump for soda pop and planters. The sculptures at Couchwood date from sometime after October 1939, at which time Hinds had corresponded with Couch on Rodriguez' behalf. The barbecue at Little Switzerland is the largest Rodriguez sculpture in the state and the only known piece to serve this unique function. The bench [REDACTED] is an exceptional piece, both in technical execution, length and realistic effect. The steps and planters integrated as functional components of "Couchwood" represent a rare example of this sculptor's work serving an architectural function.

Not included as part of this nomination is a bridge at the [REDACTED] east of North Little Rock, omitted due to its recent demolition. The date of the sculpture is unknown, though it is likely to date circa 1947, the year the motel was built by Harold and Dorothy Dunaway. A former owner of the site remembers that the bridge "had 'realistic' log rails along its length and floral planters in the form of large pots at regular intervals."⁹ The four foot wide bridge spanned an eighty foot wide pond behind the motel restaurant. The bridge broken into five large sections and fallen in the pond, with numerous pieces broken and buried in the mud bottom, prior to bulldozing of the bridge in 1986.

One of the most significant events in Rodriguez' life as an artist was making the acquaintance of E. Clovis Hinds, a Memphis cemetery owner for whom he began working in 1933. While it is not known how the two met, they corresponded a little more than a year before the sculptor first traveled to Memphis and an early letter to Rodriguez reveals Hinds' familiarity with the work commissioned by Justin Matthews in North Little Rock. Fortunately, correspondence between the client and artist exists and vividly portrays the special friendship and mutual regard that developed between the two men. During a ten year period, Hinds commissioned many sculptures with Biblical and legendary themes to add interest to the grounds of his cemetery, Memorial Park. This mutually beneficial association had a profound influence on the artist's personal and professional life. It was at Memorial Park that Rodriguez executed some of his best work and was introduced to new sources of inspiration.

Hinds took a benevolent interest in Rodriguez, who periodically came to Memphis to work at Memorial Park. The generous cemetery owner was instrumental in obtaining jobs for the artist, interesting other cemetery owners in the Mexican's work. In a later dated July 21, 1936, Hinds advised Rodriguez that he "had another inquiry from a cemetery friend about your work. No special hurry- I will tellyou about it when I see you again."¹⁰ In a letter the following year, the sculptor was cautioned to "Take good care of yourself so you can do your best work as a sample for all the cemetery owners to see when we have the National Cemetery Convention in Memphis."¹¹ Hinds also assisted the sculptor with his finances, frequently administering Rodriguez' funds when the artist was away from Memphis. Many of the letters between the two men are concerned with deposits and withdrawals, as well as Rodriguez' frequent request for money.

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Rodriguez' success in the States was greatly influenced by the fact that his sculptures were unlike those of any other artist. Though he is not known to have experienced any serious competition, he took care to insure none developed. He was very secretive regarding his techniques and materials and while working in a Washington, D.C. suburb and Memphis, is known to have mixed and stored his materials in a canvas tent. Richmond recalls that "Rodriguez had a tent in which he mixed his colors. He used gallon jugs, and when he had emptied one, he broke it. He was very secretive and would not let anyone see the names on these jars."¹² In a letter from Rodriguez to Hinds, it is apparent that the two men had an agreement that the artist would work only for Hinds or the City while in Memphis. While such an arrangement appears to have been acceptable to Rodriguez, his letter of January 11, 1938 expresses concern regarding potential competition. "I can't do any Extra Kind of work in this Town; only for you with exemption (sic) of the City. The same please don't let any bodye (sic) else try to perform or practice any of my Artistical Work."¹³

The existing correspondence between Rodriguez and Hinds reveals the sculptor's conscientious nature, as well as the pride he took in his work. In a letter from January 1935, the artist wrote "I will be very glad to work for you and will do my very best to your satisfaction and within two weeks you can see how fast and efficient. I do my work, then you can compare the price with the product..."¹⁴ In several letters Hinds requests that Rodriguez come to Memphis to repair work that had deteriorated. For this the sculptor would usually work at a reduced rate.

Rodriguez worked for Hinds off and on into the mid-1940's. In 1947 Hinds became ill and his death in 1949 brought an end to their long-standing association. Sometime in the late 1940's possibly before Hinds' death, Rodriguez returned to San Antonio, and it is not known to what extent he worked during the last years of his life. Having been in poor health for many years, Rodriguez died in San Antonio on December 16, 1955.

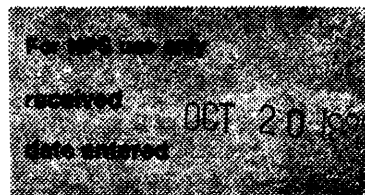
Other sites where the location of sculptures by Dionicio Rodriguez have been confirmed include Castroville, Houston, and Dallas, Texas; Cedar Hill Cemetery, Suitland, Maryland; and Clayton, New Mexico; Detroit, Michigan; Chicago, Illinois; and Chattanooga, Tennessee.

FOOTNOTES

1. James Lowry. "How to Make Memorial Parks Beautiful and Famous," Address by Clovis Hinds made at the Annual Convention of American Cemetery Owners Association, Detroit, MI., 1935.
2. Dionicio Rodriguez. Letter to Clovis Hinds, August 24, 1939.
3. Eldon Roark. "Strolling with Eldon Roark", Commercial Appeal, Memphis, TN., June 20, 1935.
4. Richard Richmond, Interview with Katherine Hinds Smythe and Dale Anthony, March 25, 1983.
5. *ibid.*
6. *ibid.*

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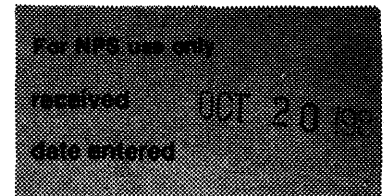
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7. Stanley Schmidt. "The Concrete Art of Dionicio Rodriguez", date unknown.
8. *ibid.*
9. Jerry Dean. "Motel Row is Vanishing", Arkansas Gazette, September 5, 1982. Sec C.
10. Clovis Hinds. Letter to Dionicio Rodriguez, July 21, 1936.
11. Clovis Hinds. Letter to Dionicio Rodriguez, September 24, 1937.
12. Richard Richmond.
13. Dionicio Rodriguez. Letter to Clovis Hinds, January 11, 1938.
14. Dionicio Rodriguez. Letter to Clovis Hinds, January 7, 1935.

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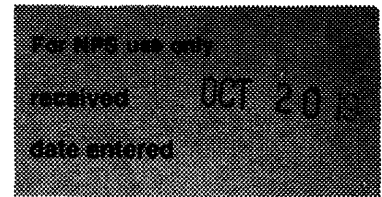
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***NOTE:**

Unless otherwise noted, all interviews were conducted by Julie Vosmik,
AHPP staff.

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Multiple Resource Area
Thematic Group

dnr-11

Name Arkansas Sculptures of Dionicio Rodriguez TR
State ARKANSAS

Substantive Review

COVER BKH Grovenda

Nomination/Type of Review

Date/Signature

- | | | | |
|---------------------------------|--------------------|--------|------------------------------------|
| <i>20</i> 1. Little Switzerland | Substantive Review | Keeper | <i>[Signature]</i> 12/1/86 |
| | | Attest | <i>Bruce J. Noble, Jr.</i> 12/1/86 |
| <i>50</i> 2. Couchwood | Substantive Review | Keeper | <i>[Signature]</i> 12/1/86 |
| | | Attest | <i>Bruce J. Noble, Jr.</i> 12/1/86 |
| 3. Pugh, T. R., Memorial Park | Substantive Review | Keeper | <i>[Signature]</i> 12/1/86 |
| | | Attest | <i>Bruce J. Noble, Jr.</i> 12/1/86 |
| 4. Lakewood Park | Substantive Review | Keeper | <i>[Signature]</i> 12/1/86 |
| | | Attest | <i>Bruce J. Noble, Jr.</i> 12/1/86 |
| 5. Crestview Park | Substantive Review | Keeper | <i>[Signature]</i> 12/1/86 |
| | | Attest | <i>Bruce J. Noble, Jr.</i> 12/1/86 |
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