

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For NPS use only  
received JAN 10 1985  
date entered FEB 21 1985

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

**1. Name**

historic Aztec, New Mexico  
Historic Resources of Aztec, New Mexico \* \*registration name  
and/or common (Partial Inventory: Historic and Architectural Properties)

**2. Location**

street & number Survey area: Corporate Limits \_\_\_\_\_ not for publication

city, town Aztec NA vicinity of

state New Mexico code 35 county San Juan code 045

**3. Classification**

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

**4. Owner of Property**

name Multiple

street & number (Owners of individual structures listed on continuation sheets)

city, town \_\_\_\_\_ vicinity of \_\_\_\_\_ state \_\_\_\_\_

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. San Juan County Courthouse

street & number S. Mesa Verde Avenue

city, town Aztec state New Mexico

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

title NM Hist. Bldg. Inventory has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date 1981-1984  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records NM Historic Preservation Division

city, town Santa Fe state New Mexico

# 7. Description

**Condition**

excellent  
 good  
 fair  
 varies, generally good

deteriorated  
 ruins  
 unexposed

**Check one**

unaltered  
 altered

**Check one**

original site  
 moved date \_\_\_\_\_

**Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance**

The two historic districts and fourteen individually nominated historic features of Aztec, New Mexico are located on a rise at the edge of the Animas River Valley--a narrow irrigated ribbon of land in the arid northwestern corner of the state. A generally regular grid of streets is integrated with an irrigation system, supplying each lot with lawn and garden water. The brick and wood frame, one and two-story houses of the city represent a good sample of the picturesque electric and classical revival styles popular in the Anglo-American towns of New Mexico at the turn of the century. They are located somewhat irregularly on oversized lots, leaving an unusual amount of open space. The two-story, brick business blocks of the commercial district offer a similar range of turn-of-the century, New Mexican commercial styles.

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet

Item number 7

Page 1

Aztec is located on the Animas River, a tributary of the San Juan River, thirty-six miles below Durango, Colorado, fifteen miles below the Colorado-New Mexico border and fourteen miles above Farmington, the largest city of San Juan County. The county is generally arid and sparsely populated except for the irrigated valleys of the San Juan, Animas and La Plata rivers. The Animas Valley at Aztec is about one-and-a-half miles wide; the elevation, 5640 feet. The historic town and all of the nominated resources are located east of the river, on a rise, up against the foothills which lead to Knickerbocker Peaks. The area is above the flood plane, but served by the Aztec and Lower Animas irrigation ditches. Williams Arroyo slices through the residential district just north of Blanco Street.

The development of Aztec can be roughly divided into four periods: Homesteading and Trading Post, 1876-1887; Regional Market Town and County Seat, 1887-1905; Railroad Boom Town, 1905-1915; and Gradual Growth, 1915-1938. The first decade after the valley was opened for homesteading was a rugged time. Looking back in 1901, the local San Juan County Index wrote: "Twenty years ago where Navajo Indians and his Ute Indian visitor were dreaded by a few scattered half-starving white people who were trying to secure homes, the people now market annually millions of pounds of fruit."<sup>1</sup> The first homestead cabins were begun with one or two rooms; most were built with horizontal log construction, some with adobe and rare auxiliary buildings and summer kitchens of jacal or vertical log construction.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps a dozen homesteads were established within the current city limits--our survey area. In 1880, one homesteader, John Koontz, established a general store in a one-room adobe next to his house at the current corner of Park and Chaco.<sup>3</sup> A second store followed and within a decade a handful of adobe and wood frame buildings formed a small marketing village.

Fifty acres of Koontz' homestead was platted in 1890 at the beginning of a brief struggle with Farmington for the county seat. By 1892, Aztec was assured the seat of the new San Juan County. The entire population of the area helped build the adobe Presbyterian Church in 1889-90, which doubled as the first community center and meeting hall. In 1894, the Territorial Legislature established an agricultural experiment station here. With its role finished in 1901, it was given to the County, which sold the property to help pay for a new brick courthouse. By 1900, 200 to 250 people lived in the village itself and a total of 538 in the immediate area. As homesteaders proved-up their claims and prospered, they built more substantial houses of brick and wood (ill. 34). In town, adobe continued to

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet

Item number 7

Page 2

be used (ills. 12 right, 19), although wood frame cottages quickly began to predominate (ill. 20). On Main Street, ten to fifteen false-fronted buildings comprised the business district. An 1896 promotional pamphlet boasted: "Its businesses and professional lines comprise three large general stores, two hotels, one hardware store, two millinery stores, one newspaper, two blacksmith shops, one livery stable, two saloons, one harness shop, one meat market, two attorneys, two physicians."<sup>4</sup>

A stagecoach line running once a day connected Aztec to Durango. Freight wagons typically took three to four days to cover the thirty-six mile dirt road. About 1901, talk of a rail connection, and of a tomato canning plant quickened the pace of development. A second wave of newcomers--merchants, professionals, real estate men and builders, anticipating the boom--began to arrive. During this pre-boom period, brick became popular for houses (ills. 12 left, 30) and the first two-story brick business block appeared on Main Street (ill. 5).

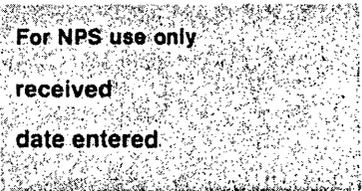
The railroad finally arrived August 24, 1905 and the anticipated boom began. Several one to four block additions were platted, extending the Original Town Site to the northeast and surrounding the new depot. The greatest construction activity occurred in 1906 and 1907. Most of the two-story business blocks (ills. 6-11, 32) and all of the impressive residence (ills. 16, 17, 22-26, 37-40) date to this boom era. "New residences are being built at a very rapid rate," reported the Index in the spring of 1907, "and every desirable house is being filled before it is completed."<sup>5</sup> The rate of growth slowed by the First World War, but began a gradual climb again after the war. Modest bungalows (ill. 18) filled in some vacant land in the residential areas. When U.S. Highway 550 connected Aztec to Durango and Farmington in 1933, tourist courts and service stations also appeared. The broad outlines of the growth of San Juan County and its communities can be read in the census figures on the following page.

Since the Second World War, two energy booms have greatly increased the county's population. The first in the 1950s was based on the development of oil and natural gas, the second of the 1970s added coal stripmining to the other energy sources. Aztec has expanded into new suburban additions stretching to the west toward Farmington.

The architecture of Aztec covers the range of building types and styles found in a typical New Mexican, Anglo-American railroad town. Original homestead cabins have disappeared from the survey area. The earliest, definitely dated building, the Presbyterian Church of 1889-90, is an unadorned adobe structure. Some of the houses which date to the 1890s are also of adobe (ills. 12 right, 19). Their symmetrical facades represent a provincial influence of the Greek Revival style, popular in New Mexico from 1865 to 1915 and generally known as the Territorial Style.

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**



Continuation sheet

Item number 7

Page 3

**SAN JUAN COUNTY POPULATION**

Parentheses denote the population for minor civil division which includes surrounding rural areas; figures without parentheses are populations of incorporated areas.

<u>Year</u>	<u>County</u>	<u>Farmington</u>	<u>Aztec</u>	<u>Bloomfield</u>
1880 <sup>a</sup>	830	(75)	(90)	
1890	1,890	(336)	(439)	(144)
1900	4,828	(548)	(458)	(246)
1910	8,504	785 (1,674)	509 (975)	(316)
1920	8,333	728 (1,304)	480 <sup>b</sup> (851)	(258)
1930	14,701	1,350 (2,560)	680 <sup>b</sup> (1,183)	(1,272)
1940	17,115	2,162	756 (1,261)	(1,291)
1950	18,282	3,637	885	
1960	53,306	23,786	4,137	1,292
1970	52,517	21,979	3,354	1,574
1980	81,433	31,222	5,512	4,703

a Part of Rio Arriba County in 1882. Totals based on San Juan district enumerator sheets (excludes Indians).

b Estimates based on change in minor civil division and Farmington population.

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet

Item number 7

Page 4

Most houses, however, are built of lumber or brick. From the 1890s to 1910, a simple, front-facing, L-shaped plan with a half porch was popular (ills. 12 left, 21, 36). The asymmetrical massing of these houses and such typical details as slender lathe-turned posts, cut-out brackets and decorative shingles in the gables are drawn from the Queen Anne style. Since these examples are modest in size and ornamental, they are identified as Simplified Anne. A related group of seven brick houses (ills. 12, 13, 15 right, 35), built between 1898 and 1905, have similar lathe columns, cut-out details and shingles. While they have symmetrical, story-and-a-half shapes with front facing gables, their doors and windows are arranged asymmetrically, suggesting a flexible interior room plan akin to Queen Anne style plans. A few full-blown Queen Anne houses were built immediately after the arrival of the railroad (ills. 22-24), employing the typical picturesque massing, slender columns, cut-out and applique details and mixture of richly textured materials--stone, brick, clapboard and wood shingles. A fine example of the related Shingle Style was also built (ill. 16). A Methodist church built in 1906 employed the Gothic Revival (ill. 14).

Neo-Classicism, which became popular throughout the country following the success of Chicago's 1893 Columbian Exposition, arrived in Aztec with the railroad. Some houses (ill. 17, 40) added classical details such as stout columns, balustrades and Palladian windows to irregular Queen Anne-like shapes. Elsewhere in New Mexico these have been designated as the Free Classic style. The few which adopt an overall symmetry approximate the American Colonial Revival (ill. 25). A hint of the Prairie Style appears in a pair of two-story mansions (ill. 42) with low-hipped roofs and broad enclosed eaves.

The turn-of-the-century shift away from picturesque styles with irregular massing and intersecting gables to classical styles with symmetrical facades and simple hipped roofs had its most widespread impact in Aztec on modest working-class houses. This Hipped Cottage type (ills. 15, 3rd, 4th, 6th from right; 26; 37; 38) with a symmetrical window/door/window facade, cubic massing and hipped roof with enclosed eaves accounted for about half of the houses built in the decade after the arrival of the railroad.

Portions of a few 1890s business buildings remain, but all have extensive recent facade remodelings. All of the remaining significant commercial structures were built between 1903 and 1913; all are of brick; eight are two story, and three are one story. The two-story business block, popular in New Mexico from 1880 to 1910, predominates with its glass and cast-iron storefront on the first floor and offices, apartments, or lodge hall on the second floor. Two (ills. 5,6) are topped by Italianate bracketed, pressed

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet

Item number 7

Page 5

metal cornices; three (ills. 7, 8, 10) are sheeted with stock pressed metal Neo-Classical details including columns, scrolls, garlands and floral patterns. The Citizen's Bank (ill. 11) reveals a deeper understanding of Neo-Classicism. The remaining five historical commercial buildings are distinguished mainly by their Decorative Brick style parapets and details which combine corbelled, dentil and zipper-like effects, separated by small piers.

This brickwork is the most distinctive feature of local building craftsmanship. On residences, decorative effects are concentrated on the heads of windows. A few have simple segmental arches (ills. 26, 28), others have splayed brick arches (ills. 25, 29, 34) and many add projecting brick caps (ills. 21, 28, 39).

An unusual brick bond, which will be called the Flemish/common bond, substitutes a row of Flemish bond for the normal row of headers (ill. 29). In general, common bond walls are paired with segmental arches (ill. 28), while Flemish/common bond walls accompany splayed brick arches, which often are accented with red mortar (ill. 29).

The leading institutional buildings--a grade school, high school, courthouse and Baptist church--had similar brickwork details, but all have been demolished. The first brick kilns were burned at Aztec about 1895 and local brick was used throughout the boom years of 1905 to 1910. As late as 1938, brick was made on the site for the WPA city hall. A Mr. Kern and Clarence Brown were active making and laying brick in the 1890s. G. Brewer had a brickyard during the boom years and active bricklayers included Brown, George Weaver and M. Bachman, and a Mr. Doddington. Others active in brick construction included Sol Baker, John Morrison and Dick Noble.

Milled lumber, nevertheless, was the chief building material. Stock columns and cut-out decorative brackets were shipped in from Durango. Many house gables combine two or three profiles of wood shingles in decorative patterns; one even offers a catalogue of all eight styles of decorative shingles used locally (ill. 27). Sandstone was reserved for foundations and the window sills of brick buildings. A few buildings (ill. 24) used an early form of concrete block known as cast stone.

The Original Town Site which was platted in 1890 extended a typical speculative grid from Park Avenue to a block east of Mesa Verde Avenue and from Blanco Street to a half block south of Zia Street. Why this grid was not oriented to the points of the compass to better correspond to the section line boundaries of Koontz' property is not entirely clear. Perhaps the buildings already clustered about Koontz' store on the current Chaco Street (then the road to Farmington) dictated this orientation. In 1905, the railroad passed to the east and roughly parallel to the original town. This

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet

Item number 7

Page 6

reinforced the same tilted orientation for the six small additions platted north and east of the original town in 1906 and 1907. A few irregular lots resulted in adapting these new grids to existing farmhouses, the Williams Arroyo and the main irrigation ditch. The original approach to town from the north followed Rio Grande south to Blanco Street, and turned west there toward town. A new approach was formed when Fred Bunker departed from the general orientation of the grid and located Lovers Lane on a section line.

The Lower Animas Ditch was begun in 1878. The Original Town Site of 1890 and the Additions of 1906 and 1907 all incorporated a system of small ditches tied to the Animas Ditch. The Church Avenue-Lovers Lane District and six individually nominated residences are served by this system. Laterals flow northeast along the edges of cross streets with smaller ditches along the avenues and alleys supplying each lot. Many residents purchased two to four of the original twenty-five foot wide lots to have space for gardens, small orchards and grapevines. As a result, the spacing between houses on some blocks is more irregular than in a typical grid town (ill. 17). Most houses do respect a uniform setback from the street which varies from block to block from twenty-five to thirty-five feet (ills. 12, 15, 16). A few large property owners did violate this informal convention by moving their houses well back from the street (ills. 20, 21). Commercial buildings are all located at the sidewalk's edge (ills. 1-3). Of the 78 buildings nominated individually or as significant or contributing structures in the districts, 11 or 14% are commercial, 65 or 83% are residential and 2 or 2% are churches.

In 1981, Beverly Barsook, a graduate architecture student, conducted a field survey of all pre-1945 structures within the incorporated limits of Aztec, using the standard New Mexico Historic Inventory form and procedures. In 1984, architectural historian Chris Wilson, working under contract to the New Mexico Historic Preservation Division, reviewed the survey in the field and conducted extensive research in primary and secondary sources. Preliminary assessments of significance were re-examined in light of the community history developed (and reported in section 8). Two concentrations of historic buildings were identified and proposed district boundaries tightly drawn to include only those areas where the sense of the community's history is sustained. All historic features outside the districts were examined a final time and those of individual significance were selected for individual nomination. The potentially significant remains of a water-powered mill are not nominated here because they will be evaluated in the context of the state historic engineering survey.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet

Item number 7

Page 7

Footnotes

1. "Sunny San Juan," San Juan County Index, (Index) March 1, 1901, p. 1.
2. Robert Duke, "Political History of San Juan County, New Mexico, 1876-1926," (Thesis, UNM, 1947), p. 27; C. V. Koogler, Aztec: A Story of Old Aztec from the Anasazi to Statehood, (Fort Worth: American Reference Company, 1972), pp. 15, 20, 21, 27, 36, 62, 69.
3. Duke, pp. 21-23.
4. Board of Immigration of San Juan County, "Aztec," pamphlet by author, 1896.
5. Index, April 12, 1907, p. 3.
6. U.S. Bureau of the Census: 1880 Census, enumerators sheets, Rio Arriba county, San Juan district; 1890-1980 census, Census of Population, published two to three years after date of Census by U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C.

# 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input 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 type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" 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** 1876 to 1935

**Builder/Architect** specified where known

**Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)**

The San Juan Basin of northwestern New Mexico was one of the last frontiers of westward, Anglo-American migration. The homestead families of 1876 to 1890 established farms, built extensive irrigation systems, developed fruit orchards and established the marketing village of Aztec which became the county seat in 1892. A second wave of Anglo-American newcomers between 1900 and 1906 included farmers, but also specialty merchants, builders, bankers, real estate developers and professionals. During the boom decade following the arrival of the railroad in 1905, they joined with the more established residents to build a town typical for New Mexico in its architecture, but unique for its city irrigation system. This system allowed the development of many small family "homesteads" or country homes on city lanes. This historic aspect is preserved by the irrigation system, the irregular spacing of houses and the large amount of "open space" with large gardens and the remnants of small orchards and vineyards. The proposed commercial historic district reflects the city's position as the leading market town of northeast San Juan County. The architecture includes well-preserved, typical examples of the many styles popular in New Mexico at the turn of the century, including Italinete and New-Classical commercial buildings, and Queen Anne, Free Classic, Hipped Cottage and Bungalow-style residences. Some of these rank with the best examples of their particular type in the state. Evidence of the quality of local building craftsmanship, in particular decorative brick work, is preserved about town.

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet

Item number 8

Page 8

Aztec was named for the large Pueblo III (Anasazi) ruins located just north of the current city limits. (These became the Aztec Ruins National Monument in 1923). The name was given not because of any substantiated tie to Aztec culture, but rather because of a popular linking about 1880 of Southwestern "cliff-dwellings" with the then well-known Aztecs. At the same time, a promotional book, Atzlan: The History, Resources and Attractions of New Mexico, could claim that Santa Fe was the site of Montezuma's birth. Some Aztec streets were renamed in a similar vein this century: D Street became Chaco, B Street became Zia, and 6th Avenue became Mesa Verde. The Anasazi had abandoned the San Juan basin before the arrival of the Spanish.

Nomadic Navajo, Jicarilla Apache and Ute Indians occupied the basin when white settlers began to push into the area after the Civil War. The Brunot Agreement formulated between the Utes and the Federal government (1872-74) opened up the mining districts to the north of Aztec in Colorado. By 1877, Animas City (later Durango) had developed as a supply town. Meanwhile, a portion of northern San Juan county (NM) was offered as reservation land to the Jicarilla Apaches in 1874. Since the area was a zone of conflict with the Utes and Navajos, the Jicarillas refused the offer. As a result, the area was opened for settlement on the United States Centennial, July 4th, 1876. Most of the prime farmland in the Midwest and on the West Coast was taken by then, so the San Juan Basin was one of the last frontiers of homesteading.

People of three cultures quickly pushed into the basin. Hispanic settlement had continued to spread after the American annexation (1848) and had occupied the San Luis Valley of southcentral Colorado and the Chama River drainage of northern New Mexico. As early as 1872, Hispanic settlers pushed over the Nacimiento Mountains and into the San Juan River valley. The opening of the Canyon Largo Road in 1876 linked the San Juan basin to the Gallina valley and Hispanic areas of the Río Chama and Upper Río Grande. By the 1880 census, the population along the San Juan as far west as Bloomfield was overwhelmingly Hispanic--the roots of present-day Archuleta, Turley and Blanco.<sup>1</sup> A second smaller thrust of Mormon settlers pushed east up the San Juan from Arizona in 1881, establishing Olio (later Fruitland) and Kirtland just west of gentile Farmington.<sup>2</sup>

The third group of settlers were part of the general Anglo-American settlement of the West. These ranchers and farmers pushed down the Animas and La Plata Rivers from Colorado and quickly settled both valleys as far as Farmington. Pioneer memories and the 1880 Census enumerator sheets, which record occupation, place of birth and parents' place of birth, tell an interesting story of westward migration. Many cattlemen (the Cox, Graves and Stockton families) came from Texas and their parents from Arkansas, Missouri, Tennessee and Alabama. Other stockmen (the Solomans, Harris,es,

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet

Item number 8

Page 9

Blancetts, and McCoys), and all of the farmers (the Knickerbockers, Fawcetts, Coles, Sharps, Vaughns and Barlows) hailed from Missouri, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio and Michigan, and their parents from farther east--Ohio, Kentucky, Virginia, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York, Vermont and Maine.

Not only had their families been moving west for at least two generations, but the birthplaces of their young children suggested that many of these pioneer Aztec families had been moving about for the previous five to ten years looking for a good homestead. Most had tried Colorado just before arriving here. The Knickerbocker children for example, who ranged in age from eight down to two, were born in Kansas, Colorado and New Mexico. The Earle children, seven years to two months old, were born in Michigan, Colorado (2) and New Mexico. Several families had even bypassed the arid mountain region to look for land on the West Coast. The Blancetts, who hailed from Illinois and Iowa, had a son five born in California, and a daughter two born in Colorado. For the families whose names disappear from subsequent local records, we can only conjecture that they did not make a go of it even here and pressed on to yet another area, possibly to dry farm on the plains or seek wage work in the cities.

The grass which grew stirrup-high in the valley in 1876 attracted cattlemen with herds as large as 5,000 head. The overstocking of the range, which had taken years elsewhere, occurred almost immediately here. Many who came from Texas and southeastern New Mexico had been involved in struggles to control the cattle industry, the best known of which was called the Lincoln County War. In 1880 and 1881, some of these men became involved in a similar, though smaller, struggle to control San Juan basin range land, now known as the Stockton Cattle War.<sup>4</sup> The days of the large herds were brief as settlers quickly marked out their 160 acre homesteads. Stockmen produced forage and wintered their cattle in the Animas Valley, but moved their herds to mountain pastures in summer.

Several local irrigation ditches, including the Lower Animas Ditch, which serves historic Aztec, were placed in service in the spring of 1878. All three cultures which occupied San Juan County were experienced with irrigation.<sup>5</sup> Spanish settlers brought a tradition of irrigation with them to the Southwest and their descendants carried this tradition to the Bloomfield/Blanco area. The Mormans had been developing their skills with irrigation since 1847 when they arrived in the Salt Lake Basin, skills which they employed after 1881 at Fruitland and Kirtland. Other Anglo-American settlers began irrigating lands near frontier trading posts in the late 1840s. By the 1860s, Anglo farmers in Colorado were increasingly using irrigation and probably had closely observed the methods of nearby Hispanic farmers.

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For NPS use only
received
date entered

Continuation sheet

Item number 8

Page 10

In 1869 and 1870, large scale commercial irrigation projects (of the sort the Federal government would later support through the Bureau of Reclamation) were begun at Union Colony (later Greeley), Colorado, and Riverside and Fresno, California. The wide publicity of these large projects, and the more modest Anglo and Hispanic irrigation in Colorado contributed to the quick utilization of irrigation by Aztec's settlers. All three cultures employed a simple form of irrigation, described in an 1890 congressional report as: "Irrigation in its more primitive form compels the settlers to hold possession at points where arable land can easily be reached by water taken from a natural stream or spring and distributed by gravity through the rude ditches or other means at their command."<sup>6</sup>

The farmers, along with the many stockmen who increasingly shifted their energy to farming, produced forage for their animals, as well as vegetables and grain for themselves and for the mining camps to the north in Colorado. They soon discovered that many fruit trees were especially well adapted to the region. The first fruit trees were introduced in 1879 at Farmington; they were widely planted at Aztec by 1884 and were producing by 1888.<sup>7</sup> In 1901, the San Juan County Index, Aztec's newspaper, boasted: "Last year San Juan county shipped by way of Durango, to Chicago over the D&RG, 100 car loads of winter apples, alone, and with many new orchards coming in this year, the indications are that at least 125 cars of apples will be shipped to Chicago."<sup>8</sup> Some of these, the Index went on, were even reshipped to Europe. Promotional literature called San Juan County "The Land of the Big Red Apple," and when the railroad arrived in 1905, it was nicknamed the Red Apple Express. Fruit continued as the local cash crop up to the Second World War.

At first, Aztec was a small cluster of buildings like others in the valley such as Riverside, Cedar Hill and Flora Vista. It began to grow and distinguish itself from the others, in part, because it was at the terminus of the road from Blanco and the Hispanic settlements to the southeast (the current Blanco Street). The leadership of John Koontz also proved important. His experiences in town development in Nebraska and as a member of the first Colorado legislature of 1876 were useful in securing the county seat for Aztec. When the New Mexico territorial legislature created San Juan County in 1890, Koontz joined with his neighbors to form the Aztec Town Company. The company bought and platted fifty acres of his land--the first step to make Aztec a viable candidate. The support of the Hispanic communities was enlisted in the 1890 vote which Farmington won 255 to 246. After court challenges disqualified several votes (mostly Farmington voters who had been given free town lots), the vote stood at 237 to 232 in Aztec's favor. The state supreme court settled the county seat at Aztec in 1892 and it has since provided jobs and a distinction which railroad-era promoters played up.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only  
received  
date entered

Continuation sheet

Item number 8

Page 11

Aztec was still only a village in 1896 when dreams of something grander began to take shape. Since 1880, Anglo settlers had campaigned for the removal of the nearby Ute Indians. In 1896, the allotment of land to individual Utes (and removal farther north of those refusing allotment) opened land northeast of Aztec for further Anglo settlement. The County Board of Immigration circulated a brochure addressed to those visiting the Ute lands which beckoned:

. . . you want a home of your own with rich soil and plenty of water, and one that will produce anything that grows and you want a change of climate from the hot, sultry summers of the east and the cold, long winters with their many grievances. . . Come right on down to Aztec where the Animas river basin widens out into a beautiful broad valley with thousands of acres of the most fertile land.<sup>9</sup>

By the turn of the century, talk turned increasingly to the possibility of a railroad link to the area. With the formation of the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, the commercial scale Inca and Eden Ditch projects were begun, which, the Index assured its readers, "will bring to the country hundreds of new people seeking homes and brighter futures."<sup>10</sup>

While many continued to seek farms, a second group of newcomers was to have a more direct impact on the town. Throughout the 1890s, a trickle of merchants and craftsmen had moved to Aztec. But from 1900 to 1906, the year after the railroad arrived, this became a wave of speciality merchants, real estate men, bankers, lawyers, doctors, clerks, newspapermen and salesmen. Many had saved some money and gained experience working in another's business; they came to Aztec looking to make their own opportunity. Granville Pendelton, Fred and Frank G. Townsend, Oley Owens, C. G. Brewer, Sam Pinkstaff, Robert and Charles Maddox, T. A. Pierce and H. D. Abrams, among others, arrived during this period. They quickly became active in business and civic affairs, and were responsible for many of the business buildings and fine residences of the boom years.

While the older residents and nearby farmer/property owners played an active part in this boom, an undercurrent of friction between farmers and boosters is detectable in the town's newspaper. The Index encouraged farmers to sign over their water rights to the commercial ditch company and also to spend at home rather than through catalogue houses. The newcomers, for their part, would bring new capital and energy, expand markets for local goods, develop resources and "add to the value of the community in buildings and public improvements." "The new blood and new methods in Aztec," the Index assured local farmers, "will make for good for one and all."<sup>11</sup>

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

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received

date entered

Continuation sheet

Item number 8

Page 12

The construction of the Denver, Rio Grande and Southern Railroad south from Durango reinforced the county's ties with Colorado. Many of Aztec's residents had once lived there. Transportation since homesteading days led out through Durango. The major market for local produce was southwestern Colorado and farmers often displayed their produce at the Colorado, rather than the New Mexico, state fair. When the county's legislative delegation felt that the territorial legislature was unresponsive to their needs in 1907, a campaign for annexation to Colorado was begun. In two days, six hundred signatures were gathered in Aztec and Farmington on a petition asking the Colorado legislature to annex the area as Orchard county. The Colorado legislature obliged with a memorial to Congress and the President requesting approval for this step.<sup>12</sup> While this sentiment was carried no further, ties with Colorado have remained strong. Direct highway links with the Rio Grande Valley constructed in the late 1930s began to lessen Aztec's isolation from the rest of New Mexico.

By the First World War, the railroad boom was over. The Inca Canal failed when a key tunnel collapsed and the Eden Ditch never got off the ground. Aztec grew fifty percent between 1910 and 1940, much less than the boosters had expected. Orchards and livestock remained the basis of the local economy, although the development of natural gas began on a small scale in the late 1920s, including two wells directly south of town. Energy development took off in the 1950s, slumped in the 1960s, boomed again in the 1970s, and is currently in a slump. Farmington has been the center for most of this development and has grown into the major city of the region. Aztec, too, has grown substantially, but new subdivisions to the west of the old town have taken the new population, leaving the historic area largely intact.

The remaining architecture and the town's plan represent a coherent record of the stirrings of the marketing center in the 1890s, the blossoming of the railroad era boomtown from 1905 to 1915, and the gradual growth of the community, spurred by highway construction, up to the Second World War. The buildings represent the best preserved Anglo-American architecture in northwestern New Mexico; a similar set of buildings in Farmington has largely fallen prey to the pressures of growth there. The character and quality of the individually-nominated buildings and representative buildings in the two districts are discussed on the continuation pages. The Simplified Anne, Queen Anne, Free Classic and Hipped Cottage styles are each represented by ten to twenty-five well-maintained houses. While most are the typically modest sort seen in New Mexico, some (ills. 16, 22, 24-26, 34, 40) are among the finest examples of their type remaining in the state. The proposed commercial district is a virtual catalogue of the styles of commercial buildings popular in the state at the turn of the century (omitting only the Richardsonian Romanesque style). Evidence of the quality and distinctiveness of local building craftsmanship abounds.

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet

Item number 8

Page 13

The combination of a speculative grid with a residential irrigation system is Aztec's most notable historic feature. Such arrangements were once more common in the West; Aztec is the best preserved example in New Mexico. The forces of homesteading, arid land irrigation, real estate speculation and populism combined to cause this new form of half-country, half-city life, a form which one proponent characterized as city homes on country lanes.<sup>13</sup> Each family would have an irrigated plot of land, large enough for their house and to produce much of their food and to benefit from physical labor and country fresh air and sunshine, but a plot small enough that families could be grouped close enough with others to have the benefits of sociability, education and spiritual improvement found in a city. The size of the lot depended on the local climate and soil. The optimal range was one-half to five acres, though some felt much could be accomplished through the efficient use of a standard city lot as small as fifty by one-hundred-fifty feet. A current of cooperativism, implicit in the community maintenance of the irrigation system and the organized marketing of farm products, often surfaced (although not publicly in Aztec as far as I can tell).

The majority of Aztec houses had oversized lots, averaging one-third to two-thirds of an acre. These gave way almost imperceptibly to the surrounding homesteads, many of which had been subdivided into efficient five to ten-acre farms. Photographs of residences from the mid-teens exult in a jungle-like appearance; families proudly posed before their houses flanked by orchards and gardens (ill. 24, which I cropped in copying before fully realizing the importance of this point). "Would you like A New Home in A New Land?" the Index's promotional ads asked, "Where the sun shines on a fertile soil 335 days each year, where crops never fail for water, where fruit reaches absolute perfection, where wealth of natural resources beckons the investor and the homeseeker, where today exist the opportunities now gone farther East, and the dry bracing air starts to life new blood and ambition?"<sup>14</sup>

With a maximum population of 750 people at the end of the historic period, the old town was roughly limited to the thirty block area bounded by Zia Street on the south, Park Avenue on the west, Highway 550 on the north and Rio Grande Avenue on the east. At the southwest edge of this area, the proposed Main Street District represents the one intact half-block of what was once a three-block commercial section stretching from two buildings south of Zia St. to three buildings north of Chaco St. Of the twenty-four buildings outside the proposed district, but in the historic commercial area, eleven were built before 1908, one between 1908 and 1913, four between 1913 and 1930, and eight after 1930. Since few buildings have been demolished here since the Second World War, the historic facade lines

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet

Item number 8

Page 14

remain intact. The extensive remodeling of building facades, however, precludes extending the boundaries of the Main Street District beyond the proposed half-block. Of the sixteen pre-1930 buildings in this excluded area, nine have had substantial facade remodelings, four have had moderate, possibly reversible, remodelings, and three are basically unmodified. Three significant buildings in this excluded portion of the commercial area are nominated as individual structures.

The proposed Church Avenue and Lovers Lane Residential District represents the city's one large residential neighborhood. The Hipped Cottages (and some Bungalows) along Bunker, White and Orchard Avenues have been too greatly remodeled to be nominated. Significant features outside the districts are represented by thirteen individually nominated buildings and the irrigation system.

No official historic preservation program exists in Aztec. Many houses have been well maintained and some recent house rehabilitations are indirectly attributable to the preservation movement. The city had developed an historic zone (which roughly corresponds to the historic residential area) before this survey was completed. The establishment of a design review process is being considered and the city has asked for copies of the survey forms and nominations for future use. Contacts with the preservation community in Durango, Colorado are being developed with an eye toward establishing a Main Street revitalization program.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet

Item number 8

Page 15

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2. John F. Palmer, "Mormon Settlement in the San Juan Basin of Colorado and New Mexico," Thesis, Brigham Young University, 1967.
3. C. V. Koogler, Aztec: A Story of Old Aztec. . ., (Ft. Worth: American Reference Library, 1972); Robert Duke, "Political History of San Juan County, New Mexico," Thesis, University of New Mexico, 1947; U.S. Census of 1880, enumerators sheets, Rio Arriba County, San Juan district.
4. Duke, pp. 31-41; Swadish, p. 99.
5. Richard Hinton, Irrigation in the U.S.: Progress Report for 1890, Senate Ex. Doc. No. 53, 51st Congress, 2nd session, pp. 11-19; George Thomas, Early Irrigation in the Western States, (Salt Lake City: University of Utah, 1948), pp. 31-61.
6. Hinton, p. 16.
7. New Mexico State Planning Division, "San Juan County's Growth Management," (Santa Fe: author, 1982), p. 19; San Juan County Index (Index), March 8, 1907, p. 2; New Mexico Bureau of Immigration, Mineral Resources and Fruit Growing, (Santa Fe: New Mexican Publishing, 1907), p. 14; Ralph Twitchell, Leading Facts of New Mexico History, (Cedar Rapids, Iowa: Torch Press, 1917), pp. 183-4.
8. Index, April 19, 1901, p. 1.
9. San Juan County Board of Irrigation, "Aztec: Great Fruit Belt of the Southwest," pamphlet, 1896.
10. "The Eden Canal," Index, December 14, 1906, p. 2.
11. "The New Aztec," Index, November 9, 1906, p. 2. See also: "The Eden Canal."
12. "Put Us In Colorado," Index, March 22, 1907; "Orchard County, Colorado," Index, March 29, 1907, p. 2, related item, p. 3.
13. William Smyth, City Homes on Country Lanes, (NY: Macmillan, 1921). See also: Hinton, pp. 16-17, 32-33.
14. Index, January 25, 1907, p. 4

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheets, item 9.

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property see continuation sheets

Quadrangle name Aztec, NM

Quadrangle scale 1:62500

UTM References See continuation sheets and district nominations for individual structures and districts.

A 

Zone	Easting			Northing					

B 

Zone	Easting			Northing					

C 

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D 

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E 

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F 

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G 

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H 

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### Verbal boundary description and justification

The boundaries of the survey area are the current city limits recorded on Map 3. See continuation sheets for boundaries of individual properties and districts.

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

state not applicable code county code

state code county code

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Chris Wilson, contract architectural historian

organization for NMSHPD

date 7-15-84

Villa Rivera, Room 101

street & number 228 East Palace Avenue

telephone (505) 266-0931 (Albuquerque)

city or town Santa Fe

state New Mexico 87503

# 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 12-12-84

For NPS use only

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

date 2/2/85

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

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received

date entered

Continuation sheet

Item number 9

Page 16

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United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet

Item number 9

Page 17

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**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For NPS use only  
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Continuation sheet

Item number

Page 1 of 2

Multiple Resource Area  
Thematic Group

dnr-11

Name Aztec, New Mexico Historic MRA  
State San Juan County, NEW MEXICO

Nomination/Type of Review

Date/Signature

- |   |                                  |        |                                     |
|---|----------------------------------|--------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. Aztec <del>Main</del> Street Historic District | <del>Substantive Review</del>    | Keeper | <u>B.H. Groves</u> <u>2/21/85</u>   |
|   |                                  | Attest | _____                               |
| 2. Church Avenue-Lovers Lane Historic District    | Entered in the National Register | Keeper | <u>Delores Byers</u> <u>2/21/85</u> |
|   |                                  | Attest | _____                               |
| 3. Abrams, H.D., House                            | Entered in the National Register | Keeper | <u>Delores Byers</u> <u>2/21/85</u> |
|   |                                  | Attest | _____                               |
| 4. American Hotel                                 | Entered in the National Register | Keeper | <u>Delores Byers</u> <u>2/21/85</u> |
|   |                                  | Attest | _____                               |
| 5. Austin-McDonald (Koogler) House                | Entered in the National Register | Keeper | <u>Delores Byers</u> <u>2/21/85</u> |
|   |                                  | Attest | _____                               |
| 6. Aztec Motor Company Building                   | Entered in the National Register | Keeper | <u>Delores Byers</u> <u>2/21/85</u> |
|   |                                  | Attest | _____                               |
| 7. Ball, D.C., House                              | Entered in the National Register | Keeper | <u>Delores Byers</u> <u>2/21/85</u> |
|   |                                  | Attest | _____                               |
| 8. Building at 500 White Avenue                   | Entered in the National Register | Keeper | <u>Delores Byers</u> <u>2/21/85</u> |
|   |                                  | Attest | _____                               |
| 9. Building at 202 Park Avenue                    | Entered in the National Register | Keeper | <u>Delores Byers</u> <u>2/21/85</u> |
|   |                                  | Attest | _____                               |
| 10. Daws-Keys House                               | Entered in the National Register | Keeper | <u>Delores Byers</u> <u>2/21/85</u> |
|   |                                  | Attest | _____                               |

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**



Continuation sheet

Item number

Page 2/4 2

Multiple Resource Area  
Thematic Group

Name Aztec, New Mexico Historic MRA  
State San Juan County, NEW MEXICO

Nomination/Type of Review

Date/Signature

11. Denver and Rio Grande Western  
Railway Depot

Entered in the  
National Register

Keeper

Helena Byers 2/21/85

Attest

12. Engleman-Thomas Building  
(Old Post Office)

Entered in the  
National Register

Keeper

Helena Byers 2/21/85

Attest

13. Lower Animas Ditch

Substantive Review

Keeper

Beth Carosena 3/19/87

Attest

14. McCoy, Harvey, House

Entered in the  
National Register

Keeper

Helena Byers 2/21/85

Attest

15. McCoy-Maddox (Spargo) House

Entered in the  
National Register

Keeper

Helena Byers 2/21/85

Attest

16. McGee House

Entered in the  
National Register

Keeper

Helena Byers 2/21/85

Attest

17.

Keeper

Attest

18.

Keeper

Attest

19.

Keeper

Attest

20.

Keeper

Attest