

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY
RECEIVED AUG 29 1977
DATE ENTERED JAN 30 1978

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC

The Catskill Charcoal Ovens

AND/OR COMMON

LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

35 miles west of Raton, New Mexico

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Raton

X VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

#1

STATE

New Mexico

CODE

35

COUNTY

Colfax

CODE

007

CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

OWNERSHIP

STATUS

PRESENT USE

__DISTRICT

__PUBLIC

__OCCUPIED

__AGRICULTURE

__MUSEUM

__BUILDING(S)

X PRIVATE

X UNOCCUPIED

__COMMERCIAL

__PARK

X STRUCTURES

__BOTH

__WORK IN PROGRESS

__EDUCATIONAL

__PRIVATE RESIDENCE

__SITE

PUBLIC ACQUISITION

ACCESSIBLE

__ENTERTAINMENT

__RELIGIOUS

__OBJECT

__IN PROCESS

__YES: RESTRICTED

__GOVERNMENT

__SCIENTIFIC

__BEING CONSIDERED

__YES: UNRESTRICTED

__INDUSTRIAL

__TRANSPORTATION

X NO

__MILITARY

X OTHER:

OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Kaiser Steel Corporation, c/o Mr. Ed Moore, Mgr. York Canyon Mine

STREET & NUMBER

Box #1107

CITY, TOWN

Raton

VICINITY OF

STATE

New Mexico 87740

LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Colfax County Clerk's Office

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Raton

STATE

New Mexico

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

State Register of Cultural Properties

DATE

August 22, 1975

__FEDERAL X STATE __COUNTY __LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

New Mexico State Planning Office

505 Don Gaspar

CITY, TOWN

Santa Fe

STATE

New Mexico 87503

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Situated in a scenic northeastern New Mexico mountain valley near the headwaters of the Red River, the Catskill Charcoal Ovens consist of 25 large cone-shaped brick structures which appear similar to enormous beehives. Overshadowed on the west by the towering peaks of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, the Catskill townsite is approximately 20 miles southwest of Trinidad, Colorado and 35 miles west of Raton, New Mexico, the region's two largest communities. During the 1890s Catskill was one of New Mexico's most important lumbering towns serving as headquarters for as many as six sawmills, but today only a few scattered foundations of homes and businesses mark the townsite, which is now part of a summer pasture used by a local rancher. The charcoal ovens have endured, however, little changed since their construction in 1892 and continue as monuments to a pioneer industry, the only one of its kind in New Mexico.

Part of a large property acquired in 1955 by the Kaiser Steel Corporation to exploit vast coal deposits nearby, the ovens are about four miles northeast of the private road leading from Raton to Kaiser's York Canyon mine. Because of their remote setting and tremendous size they are a continual source of surprise to the area's occasional visitors. Separated by the original Catskill townsite, the ovens are divided into two groups, a row of fourteen which stand 2 1/2 miles west of the townsite, and another file of eleven 2 miles east of the old town. Each oven is approximately 28' high and 28' in diameter with two 6' arched openings, one at ground level and the other approximately 8' below the apex on the opposite side. The openings were closed by iron doors which were used as dampers to regulate air intake when the ovens were fired. The 15" thick walls composed of a double layer of brick are perforated around the base by three rows of 4" square apertures which provided ventilation and prevented gas explosions during the charcoal making operation. The interior walls are now covered with a heavy black coating of pitch.

During the late 19th century large quantities of charcoal were needed at smelters throughout the West for the refining of precious metals. At Catskill charcoal manufacture was a simple process which began by cutting and hauling wood from the surrounding pine forests to the ovens where the logs were stacked inside and set afire. When the piles had been reduced to a heap of glowing coals, the oxygen supply was cut off by plugging the small holes at the base of the ovens, thus smothering the blaze. Once sealed, the ovens were left untouched while the coals were converted into charcoal, the whole process requiring from 10 to 12 days. After cooling, the charcoal was removed and broken into uniform size while the ovens were cleaned and prepared for another batch. The product was then loaded on railroad cars and shipped to Colorado smelters at Denver and Pueblo.

During the last 70 years the town of Catskill has all but completely disappeared but the charcoal ovens remain almost exactly as they were when constructed. In the early 1970s a bulldozer operator partially demolished one unit in the west bank of ovens but Kaiser officials demanded that the damaged brickwork be entirely restored. Although the new masonry is readily apparent today, time will eventually make it indistinguishable from the original work. In other respects the ovens are in excellent condition.

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 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 type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)	
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION			

SPECIFIC DATES **Erected 1892**

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Erected in 1892 in rural Colfax County, New Mexico, the Catskill Charcoal Ovens stand on property for many years part of the famous Maxwell Land Grant. From 1870 when the dubious grant was purchased from Lucien Maxwell by the first of a succession of absentee syndicates, the managing company was the dominant factor for the next 100 years in the economic growth of a large region extending northward from New Mexico into southern Colorado. The company not only controlled the agricultural, mining and timber properties but the area's towns and villages as well. Although the charcoal ovens were never a vital element in the development of the grant, they are significant today as the only structures intact at the site of Catskill and because they are apparently the only charcoal kilns ever erected in New Mexico.

The huge property known as the Maxwell Grant originated in a land grant of doubtful validity first made by Mexican Governor Manuel Armijo in 1841, five years prior to the U.S. takeover of New Mexico, to Charles Beaubien of Taos and Guadalupe Miranda of Santa Fe. During the 1860s the grant was acquired through inheritance and purchase by Beaubien's son-in-law, Lucien Maxwell, who in turn sold it to what was to be the first of a series of speculative companies backed by eastern, then British and, finally by Dutch capital. After much controversy concerning its boundaries a patent was issued on May 19, 1879 by Secretary of the Interior Carl Schurz which, following lengthy litigation, was confirmed by the U.S. Supreme Court eight years later giving the Maxwell Grant Company title to over 1,700,000 acres. Included in this enormous tract were vast natural riches including mineral resources, pasture lands and timber reserves, truly a western empire.

Although a number of small sawmills had been established on the grant as early as 1866, inaccessibility of the forest areas made extensive exploitation of the timber lands impractical until 1890 when company officials persuaded the Denver, Texas and Fort Worth Railroad to build a 15 1/2 mile branch from Martinsen station near Trinidad into the upper Red River Valley. A subsidiary of the Union Pacific, the new line climbed a 2000' grade, crossed two spectacular trestles and was regarded as a triumph for engineer J. R. DeRemer, a veteran of the Santa Fe-Denver and Rio Grande right-of-way wars of a decade earlier. Even before the branch was completed a townsite was platted beside the Red River and named "Catskill" by railroad executive C. F. Meek who was reminded of his mountain home in upper New York State.

The new community grew slowly at first but by the end of the summer a school had been erected in addition to two hotels, several restaurants, a

(See Continuation Sheet Page 1)

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Colfax County Records, State Records Center and Archives, Santa Fe, New Mexico.
 County Assessment Rolls, 1892-1900.
 Maxwell Land Grant Collection, Zimmerman Library, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, New Mexico.
 (See Continuation Sheet Page 2)

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY Approximately 1 acre for each bank.

UTM REFERENCES

east bank			west bank				
A	1,3	51,99,0,0	4,08,75,0,0	B	1,3	51,37,0,0	4,09,02,8,0
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C				D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

John Baxter, Archivist

ORGANIZATION

State Records Center and Archives

DATE

August 19, 1977

STREET & NUMBER

404 Montezuma

TELEPHONE

827-2321

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

Thomas W. Merlan

TITLE

State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE

8-19-77

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

ATTEST:

Charles W. ...

DATE

1-30-78

DATE

1-29-78

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

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CONTINUATION SHEET

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blacksmith shop and the requisite number of saloons and gambling halls. In October a post office was established in the general store maintained by J. M. Waldron who also served as timber agent for the grant company. As the town grew recreational amenities included Sunday concerts by the Catskill Coronet Band and spirited baseball games with neighboring towns such as Raton and Trinidad. In April, 1896 the Raton Range society editor reported an impressive soiree which inaugurated the ballroom in the newly constructed lodge hall of the Catskill Tribe of the Improved Order of Red Men.

Besides the saw mills which sprang up around the town operating on royalty agreements with the grant company, Catskill could also boast two unusual ventures associated with the timber resources located there. One of these, the Acme Fence Co. was incorporated in 1890 to manufacture patented lath and wire fencing material then called "the Farmer's Friend" and now known throughout the west as "snow fence" because of its general use to control drifts along highways. Unfortunately, undercapitalization and uncertain markets soon forced this enterprise into receivership. The second innovation was the charcoal ovens which resulted from a proposal made to company officials by lumberman Richard Dunn who was seeking an economical way to make use of the dead standing timber within his leases and the tree tops and other slash unsuitable for saw logs.

President of the Richard Dunn Tie and Timber Co., Dunn was one of the largest timber contractors on the grant, operating a general store at his Catskill headquarters in addition to his extensive trade in lumber, railroad ties and telephone poles. Early in 1892 Dunn persuaded A. C. Dake of Denver to come to Catskill and construct and operate 25 brick charcoal kilns in two banks, one on each side of town. After some sparring between Dake and grant executives as to whether the logs to be used would be 4' or 5' in length, Dunn signed a five-year agreement which gave the company a royalty of 25¢ for each cord of wood delivered to Dake at the ovens with a 5¢ rebate if annual consumption exceeded 18,000 cords.

Sadly, economic success for both the town and the charcoal ovens was short lived. The nation-wide business depression of the early 1890s restricted demand for building materials and Maxwell Grant mill owners, beset with excessive inventories sought permission to reduce production quotas while the Catskill correspondent of the Raton Range stated emphatically "...there is no work for outsiders here." Drinking by idle lumberjacks became such a problem that the W. C. T. U. erected a new church building on land donated by Maxwell officials. In 1895 the owners of the four-story \$30,000 Southern Hotel moved the building to the nearby gold mining camp of La Belle, searching for greener pastures despite a significant recovery in that year. By 1900 it was obvious that timber stands had been so depleted that lumber shipments would soon be inadequate to justify further maintenance to the all-important railroad line.

(See Continuation Sheet Page 2)

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#8

Although documentation is incomplete it is evident that at the end of five years the charcoal agreement was not renewed and control of the ovens passed to George M. Forbes of Trinidad who held timber leases on the grant and also served as president of the Trinidad Fuel Co. Early in 1898 Forbes sold the 25 ovens together with an assortment of kiln doors, wheelbarrows, pumps and other equipment to the Maxwell Land Grant Co. for a mere \$500. Forbes apparently continued to act as sales manager for the business, however, dividing with the grant company any profits remaining after a fee of 5¢ per bushel had been paid to a partnership known as Rich Brothers who assumed responsibility for manufacturing the charcoal and management of the ovens. Railroad officials, meanwhile, were complaining of falling revenues from reduced car loadings of timber products and were reluctant to make needed repairs along the branch. Finally it was agreed that the spur would continue in operation until November 1901 and the following January crews began removal of the tracks, a death knell for Catskill. By 1905 the population had shrunk to 75 and during the same year the post office was closed. Because of the natural beauty of the location the town continued for some years as a vacation center but today the charcoal ovens are the only reminders of this once thriving New Mexico community.

#9

Incoming and Outgoing Correspondence, 1892-1900.
Raton Range, June 27, 1890-July 7, 1896.
O'Neill, James A. "Charcoal Industry of the West." Unpublished ms.
California State University, Fullerton, California.
Pearson, Jim Berry. The Maxwell Land Grant. Norman, 1961.