

SEEING WHAT'S THERE:

Life and Land Along New Mexico Route 53

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Field drawings by Erin Elder, all are gouache on paper, 11" x 14"

Frank Jones' House

1. Frank Jones' homestead, and the valley where he grew his carrots, from the cliff above
2. Field Drawing: Frank Jones' House, 2025
3. Frank Jones' homestead patent - The original conveyance of land title from the US government to a private individual was called a patent. Private conveyance, from individual to individual, is called a deed.
4. Frank Jones with some of his El Morro and Ramah friends. Top row - first adult on left, Gordon Willcox; third from left, Lucille Lambson; fifth from left, Aunt Ida Willcox; second from right, Robert Siemens. Bottom row - from left, Frank Jones, Marion Lambson, holding Sherrill Lambson, Sheriff Ben Willcox, Monty Lambson.
5. This geologic quadrangle map highlights the El Morro Quadrangle. Quadrangle mapping began in the late 19th century, the same period when New Mexico became a U.S. territory, reservation boundaries were drawn or redrawn (from the Spanish Colonial period), and the original US land survey maps of western states were created. Each quadrangle is a piece of the Earth's surface, bounded by parallels (latitude) and meridians (longitude). They showed geologic features such as rock formations, folds, and other kinds of structural data. They are used to support things like infrastructure engineering and natural resource management.
6. Frank Jones' grave at the El Morro Cemetery

Windell Lamance

7. Coming out of the Zuni Mountains with logs
8. Field Drawing: Intersection Infrastructure, 2025
9. Riley Lamance homestead patent - Most, if not all, of the El Morro homesteaders filed under the Stock-Raising Homestead Act of 1916. This new version differed from the Homestead Act of 1862 and the Enlarged Homestead Act of 1909 by the creation of what became known as "split estates," in which surface rights were separated from subsurface rights, also known as mineral rights. Settlers who acquired land through this version of the Act only held rights to the surface of the land. Another difference was that a claim could be made for an entire section, 640 acres, of "non-irrigable" land. Previous Acts allowed claims on 160 acres or, in certain dry-land circumstances, 320 acres. Over 70 million acres were patented under this act. The 1916 law emphasized stock-raising, which these homesteaders did some of, but they were generally not ranchers. They tried to eek out a living dry-farming beans, and sometimes corn, and often did have a few head of cattle, hogs, or sheep.
10. The 1920s, when most of the El Morro homesteaders staked their claims were a time when much of the work was still done with horse and wagon or plow. But,

there were various kinds of wheeled tractors, Caterpillar crawler tractors and dozers, and Ford Model A and Model T trucks, too.

11. Original Survey Plat of Township 8 North, Range 13 West (1883) - Riley Lamance homesteaded section 6, in the top left corner; Jake Duerksen homesteaded section 10, second row, fourth from left. The **Public Land Survey System**, also known as the Rectangular Survey System, is the method developed in the US, through the Land Ordinance of 1785, to subdivide land for sale and/or ownership west of the original thirteen states. This system replaced the one of metes and bounds, which used landmarks (like trees and rivers) and topography to determine property boundaries, often making for irregular shapes. The new system employed a consistent rectangular shape and standard measurement. In New Mexico, measurement starts from a **principal meridian** (longitudinal line). New Mexico and Colorado share one. The point from which the principal meridian in New Mexico drawn is between Belen and Socorro, just east of I-25. Paralleling the Camino Real, this was already well-traveled route, hence the choice. Measured outward from the principal meridian and from a latitudinal **base-line**, a **township** is a parcel of 36 square miles, of which each square mile is known as a **section**. Township, somewhat confusingly, is also the name for the measure north or south of the latitudinal base-line. **Range** is the name for the measure east or west of the principal meridian. The El Morro homesteaders often filed on one section, though sections were sometimes divided into smaller parcels.
12. When homestead parcels were sold, they were sometimes sold to developers who would subdivide the land to resell. This map shows different subdivision scales east of Bond Mesa. The latest subdivision (upper left, section 18), what was the James Ranch, allowed bigger parcels that could, and have, continued to be used as ranch land. Tierra Verde Ranchettes, sections 15-17 are good-sized residential properties. El Morro Estates is the NE corner of section 28. Most lots in this subdivision are .25 acre, with some of that, in many cases, eaten up by road easement. El Morro Estates is an example of what came to be called "paper subdivisions," because they existed mostly on paper, never as privately-owned and utilized property. This form of (what is considered to be) land-sale fraud became popular in the mid-20th century. The pattern was that a developer would acquire a large tract of undeveloped land, generally in a remote area, and divide it into often unusably tiny parcels. These parcels would be aggressively marketed to out-of-state buyers using promotional materials that showed a lush landscape, a beautiful model home, etc. and made promises about things like infrastructure improvements, or an inevitable economic/development boom. Parcels were sold sight-unseen. Before the time when a parcel could be found by typing GIS coordinates into your phone, many people would come out to settle their land and not ever be able to find it.
13. Field Drawing: Forest Corral, 2025
14. New Mexico land status map showing lands held in trust - While many sections of surveyed land were released for homesteading, other sections were set aside as railroad sections or school sections.

Railroad section - Through the Pacific Railway Acts (1862), railway companies were granted alternate sections of land along proposed railroad routes, for generally ten to twenty miles distance on either side of the proposed track route.

This alternated railroad and government ownership and allowed railroads to sell their lands to finance railroad construction.

School section - Beginning with the Land Ordinance of 1785, specific sections of each township were set aside for public schools. Beginning with section 16 only, section 36 was later added. These sections were given over to individual states to help fund public education. Any revenue they generate - through grazing permits, oil and gas royalties, mineral leases, renewable energy leases, rights-of-way, timber sales, etc - is held in trust into perpetuity. Sometimes lands had already been settled, or given to the railroad before they could be set aside for schools, in which case other land was given in its place. States are allowed to sell certain sections, if they can get equal or greater value than what was originally assigned to that section. The proceeds of any section sold had to go into the trust, and would continue to generate income, therefor still benefitting public schools. The combined trust lands generating support for schools (public schools plus institutions such as UNM, NM School for the Deaf) in New Mexico is about 9 million acres.

15. Delgarito Carissoso homestead patent - On Google Maps, the road east of Bond Mesa has three names - Mesa Ridge Rd, County Road/Indian Service Route 47, and Carrizozo Village Road. The name Carrizozo Village Road was intriguing. Hours online, talking to people, and driving did not lead to anything that explained the name or revealed a village. Then, one day, on a hunt for something else entirely, this patent showed up and provided the first clue. This story is still in the works and may be told at the December 13 closing event.
16. Field Drawing: Subdivision Water Tank, 2025

Airway Beacon

The foundation of an airway beacon sits atop Bond Mesa. The foundation for its power supply shed sits at the mesa's base. Here is some history of the US airway beacon system.

17. Reno, Nevada airmail hangar
18. Exhibition of an airway beacon at the Grants-Milan Aviation Heritage Museum. This beacon is composed of parts of area beacons. The metal arrow from the El Morro beacon is featured in the exhibit.
19. Airway beacon map showing the Los Angeles to Albuquerque stretch of CAM Route #34
20. CAM Route #34, Los Angeles to New York, with elevation detail
21. Field Drawing: Airway Beacon, 2025
22. The two styles of arrow, concrete and metal

Fire Tower

A no-longer-used fire lookout tower sits atop Bond Mesa. Here is some history of US fire lookout practices.

23. Two fires in the Adirondacks, in 1903 and 1908, charred nearly one million acres of forest. The state of New York responded by creating fire districts and building log lookout towers on top of mountains. This is one early example of the move from crow's nests in treetops to fully constructed towers.
24. Lookout tree on Meadow Butte in Washington State (1940). This lookout, with small enclosed crow's nest cab was reached by climbing its 90' ladder!

25. Field Drawing: Fire Tower, 2025

26. a. The Osborne Fire Finder is a type of alidade (sighting tool) invented by William Osborne, a Forest Service employee, and has been in use since 1915. A topographic map of the area is inserted under the circular glass. Two sights are moved until their cross hairs are aligned with the fire. In practice, two or more lookout towers would use the intersection point of their fire finders to determine a more precise fire location.

b. Osbourne Fire Finder diagram

27. From the Los Cruces Sun-News, July 3, 1944:

Two young women have lonely but important jobs as fire 'lookouts' in rugged, mountainous forest in the wilds of New Mexico, guarding against fire timber badly needed by Uncle Sam in the war effort.

At the Oso Ridge fire lookout, 8,620 feet high in the Cibola National Forest 25 miles southwest of Grants, Mrs. Orby Swatzell perches in a cabin part-way up an airway beacon tower and scans the horizon for the white puff of smoke which spells danger in timber land.

Mrs. Swatzell got her job when her husband, hired as lookout, was rejected because of poor eyesight.

Mildred Swatzell was the sister-in-law of Ivy Swatzell Ashcroft who, with her husband Al, owned the building that is now the El Morro Feed & Seed. Perhaps Mildred gained her lookout skills by keeping watch from the El Morro lookout across the street?

28. Wallace, Idaho after the Great Fire of 1910. Women looking at what's left of Wallace's train station. Construction of Union Station had just been completed when the fire broke out.

Pinto Beans

29. Bill Stagg turning up pinto beans. Pie Town, 1940. Photo by Russell Lee

30. Field Drawing: Old Truck, 2025

31. Bill Stagg with pinto beans. Pie Town, 1940, Photo by Russell Lee

32. Field Drawing: Fields and Fences, 2025

El Morro National Monument

33. Building a concrete dam around the pool in 1926. Initial work on the pool was started in 1921

34. Undated, but old, photo of El Morro

35. Field Drawing: Monument View, 2025

36. Drinking from a tinaja atop El Morro

37. Chiseling the sandstone steps

38. Seated, starting with second from left, Dorothy Bergman, Shirley Bergman Vogt w/ Evon Z Vogt Jr. "Vogtie," Evon Z Vogt, and F. W. Hodge.

39. Field Drawing: Village Archeology, 2025

40. Back of photo - "Sunshine, homesteader wife. She shot at, or shot, her first husband."

41. Shirley Vogt standing on a new foot bridge

42. Erecting a new sign for El Morro in Grants. Back of photo - "Carved by Betty Vogt, I think"
43. Construction of the first administration building

The Winter of the Big Snow

44. Field Drawing: Old School House, 2025
45. Lee Lambson & his brother, Howard. Their parents, Marion and Lucille, took over the school bus route, from Muerto Creek neighbor Bertie Beech, that got children to school.
46. Royal Hopper and family in front of their home near Los Gigantes
47. Back of photo - "Ramah's First Traveling Band." The El Morro and Ramah communities often came together for events such as dances, baseball games, and work parties
48. The Hunting Party
49. El Morro Baseball Team
50. An extended family of musicians - Cecil Barnes, nephew of both Ida Mae Barnes Willcox and Charlie Barnes; Thomas Henry Willcox, known as "Uncle Dick," father of Ben and Jake Willcox; Buddy Willcox; Royal Hopper, son of Ida Mae Willcox and her first husband Bass Hopper
51. Field Drawing: Distant Homestead, 2025
52. Congregation outside of the Duerksen's church
53. Field Drawing: El Morro Cemetery, 2025
54. Hopper-Willcox Family
55. Jake and Lena Duerksen on their El Morro Property. Distant crop in the top right corner.
56. Victor Duerksen, Jake and Lena's son, in front of their cabin, during one of the El Morro reunions.

Thank you for coming!