

BUILDING, STRUCTURE, AND OBJECT RECORD

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*NRHP Status Code

*Resource Name or # Lockhart General Merchandise Store
(P-36-006558)

B1. Historic Name: Lockhart General Merchandise Store

B2. Common Name: Lockhart General Merchandise Store

B3. Original Use: Retail/Commercial building

B4. Present Use: None

***B5. Architectural Style:** Commercial, Modern

***B6. Construction History:** (Construction date, alterations, and date of alterations)
(See Continuation Sheets)

***B7. Moved?** No Yes Unknown **Date:**

Original Location:

***B8. Related Features:**
(See Continuation Sheets)

B9a. Architect:

b. Builder:

***B10. Significance: Theme:**

Area:

Period of Significance:

Property Type:

Applicable Criteria:

(Discuss importance in terms of historical or architectural context as defined by theme, period, and geographic scope. Also address integrity.)
(See Continuation Sheets)

B11. Additional Resource Attributes: (List attributes and codes)

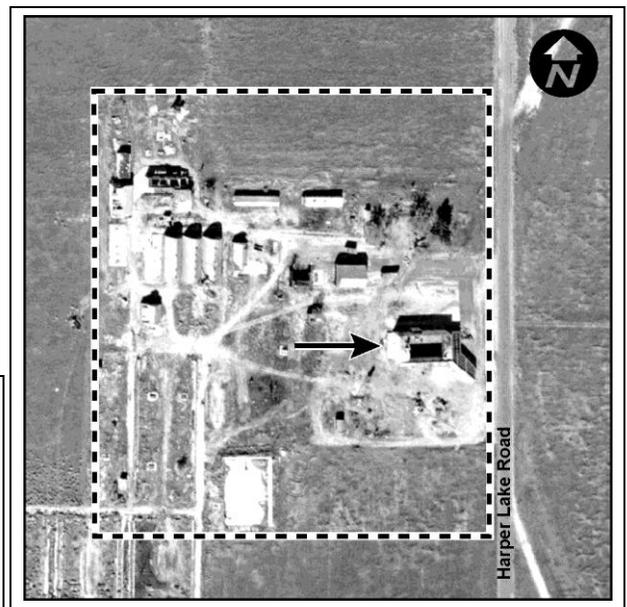
***B12. References:**
(See Continuation Sheets)

B13. Remarks:
(See Continuation Sheets)

***B14. Evaluator:** M.K. Meiser, M.A., AECOM Design + Planning

***Date of Evaluation:** 11/23/2009

(This space reserved for official comments.)



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***B6. Construction History:** (Construction date, alterations, and date of alterations)

The Lockhart General Merchandise Store was built in 1953. Constructed in poured concrete, concrete block, glass block and a broad roof truss system, the building functioned as a commercial center until sold in the late 20th century. Since the store's closure, the roof deteriorated in the mid-2000s leaving the interior exposed to the elements. At some point, a makeshift basketball court was created in the interior. No major alterations to the massing or materials of the building are evident.

***B8. Related Features:**

The community of Lockhart centered on a site previously recorded as P-36-006558 (Hampson and Swanson 1989) which included the Lockhart General Merchandise Store. The site was described as the central complex of the Lockhart and Most ranches at 41810 Harper Lake Road. Associated with farming and ranching activities from 1922 to 1990, the record identified 41 buildings and structures associated with the complex, including multiple residential buildings, a water tower, reservoirs, hay sheds, a general merchandise store, bunkhouses, warehouses, granaries, cattle sheds, various outbuildings, garages, and an airplane hangar. The site was largely intact when it was originally recorded, and it encompassed four broad periods of history: a) Davis/Weatherill homesteads circa 1922-1930, b) Evans ranch circa 1930-1940, c) Lockhart Ranch circa 1940-1962, and d) Orita Land and Cattle/Most Ranch circa 1962-1990s. Research suggested the site was significant as one of the earliest locations of permanent occupancy within the Harper Valley study area. William and Elsie M. Davis are among the first to be assessed for improvements, and the Davis house was still standing and was occupied in 1990. The transition from homesteads to town community occurred in the early 1950s, when Lockhart improved the Evans ranch with his cattle ranching facilities expansion and amenities for locals and employees. At the time of recordation, the central complex, or town of Lockhart, retained architectural integrity spanning from circa 1919 to the early 1950s, including a collection of buildings associated with the Davis, Weatherill, and Evans ranches. It represented the virtual development of the Harper Valley community and the inception of the Lockhart community.

***B10. Significance: Theme:** Mid-20th century ranching

Area: Mojave Desert

Period of Significance: 1953 - 1990s

Property Type: Commercial

Applicable Criteria: CRHR Criterion 1

(Discuss importance in terms of historical or architectural context as defined by theme, period, and geographic scope. Also address integrity.)

Historical Context

The history of the early Harper Lake homestead community and its transition into the Lockhart ranching community provides the context for the significance of the remaining Lockhart Ranch buildings, particularly the General Merchandise Store, which is the most conspicuous remaining landmark to the Lockhart Ranch and Harper Valley ranching community.

San Bernardino County surveyors measured the section lines of the rectangular grid system for the Harper Lake area in 1856. At that time there were no land improvements in the area. In 1872, C.S. Black established a cattle ranch just east of Harper Lake. Black built an adobe house, and the Black Ranch was the only settlement within the Harper Lake Valley for decades. The west side of Harper Lake was not settled until the early part of the 20 century. The first homesteaders on the west side were Henry and Emma Spenker, who arrived in 1911 and filed for a homestead patent on the southwest quarter of Section 28 (Township 11 North, Range 4 West). The Spenkers hoped to create a small farming community based on irrigation. Spenker maintained an alfalfa ranch by creating irrigation ditches and building an irrigation reservoir. The Spenkers also planted orchards and raised chickens and turkeys (Swanson 1988).

Eleven additional homestead patents were issued by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) between 1921 and 1929. A patent for the southern half of Section 30 (Township 11 North, Range 4 West) was awarded in 1921 to James M. Maclachlan, who in turn sold portions to William A. and Elsie Davis and James T. Weatherald (Hampson 1990). The Davis and Weatherald families constructed homesteads on this land. In 1921, a two-room school was constructed from the lumber of an abandoned homestead. This building was also used as a community center and a church (Swanson 1988). Although BLM listed all homesteaders as residents of Hinkley, local residents considered themselves a separate community. Underground water was most accessible at lower elevations near the lake bed. Each homestead installed its own well, and irrigation ditches were constructed to permit year-round farming. However, many homesteaders were not permanent residents.

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In 1925, business partners Victor York and L.M. (Lester) Lockhart obtained a desert land entry patent to the north half of Section 24 (Township 11 North, Range 4 West) (Hampson 1990). This area became the core of the York Ranch, with the York house and reservoir located on this land. York served as president of the York-Smullin Oil Company that operated the ranch, and Lockhart served as the secretary. The York Ranch used diesel pumps to dig deep wells for flood irrigation. Likewise, the Evans Ranch, established by Hugh Evans in 1930, developed an extensive irrigation system. Evans had obtained the former Davis property and established a ranch and alfalfa farm that included his residence and several new buildings. Evans constructed a water tower, reservoir, two hay sheds, and a horse barn. Together, the enterprises of the Lockhart and Evans ranches dominated the area, eventually edging out smaller farms, including the Spenker farm. By the end of the 1930s, alfalfa was only grown on the York and Evans ranches.

During Prohibition in the early 1930s, the York Ranch became a local center of moonshining until it was raided in 1932. The property then changed ownership several times until it reverted to the sole ownership of L.M. Lockhart in 1937. Three years later, Lockhart also acquired the Evans Ranch, giving Lockhart the vast majority of land holdings in the community. Lockhart's influence was widespread, and the community began to be known as Lockhart. Lockhart's land holdings increased in the early 1940s. However, he sold the York Ranch and made an effort to sell the Evans Ranch (Hampson 1990).

The introduction of electricity into the valley after World War II had a tremendous impact on ranching and farming activities. The first California Electric substation was constructed in Harper Lake in 1947. Once electricity was available, the area developed as more settlers arrived. Among those to arrive, the Most family purchased the York Ranch in 1946 and lived in the old York house until 1955 when the family sold the property back to Lockhart. With this purchase, Lockhart again owned the largest cattle ranch and farm complex in the area. In 1949, Lockhart invested the money from the sale of an oil company into expanding and improving the cattle ranch. By 1951, it was one of the largest farming industries in the Mojave Desert (Hampson 1990).

Lockhart Ranch was projected to have the potential to accommodate up to 5,000 cattle and six sub-industries, including alfalfa farming, a mixing plant, a dehydrator, a general store, a poultry ranch, and a hog farm. Only three of these industries came to fruition as the failure of the dehydrator did not allow for the establishment of a poultry or hog farm (Hampson 1990). In 1951, the ranch had seven wells and a large flood irrigation system, and plans for installing seven additional wells. In 1953, with the opening of the General Merchandise Store, Lockhart became a destination. The building cost \$365,000 to construct and was one of the largest buildings in the valley (Hampson 1990). Visitors came from places as far away as China Lake to shop and buy prize cuts of meat. Though Lockhart became more visible, the community remained a small enclave of approximately 200 people, most of who worked for the Lockhart Ranch. The social life of the ranch revolved around the Lockhart family. L.M. Lockhart almost always traveled by plane; he owned a DC-3 and a twin Beech (Hampson 1990). The Howard Hughes airstrip located on the dry lake bed provided access to and from the community. The decline of Lockhart Ranch in the late 1950s can be attributed to several factors, including the fact that the ranch never really returned a profit (Hampson 1990). Other factors included Lockhart's divorce settlement from his second wife, a number of bad oil investments, the failure of the dehydrator to function properly, and the fact that the ranch was overstaffed. Lockhart parted with the ranch in 1958.

Boys Town International, a corporation operated by Arnold J. and Willie Mae Dittmar, briefly owned the ranch. The Dittmars ran the ranch in the same manner as Lockhart, though there were rumors they were going to convert it to a boys' ranch. However, they sold off all the movable goods acquired by Lockhart. When the Dittmars failed to pay Lockhart, the ranch reverted back to Lockhart. Lockhart in turn sold the ranch to the Orita Land and Cattle Company in 1962 (Hampson 1990).

Milton Most managed the ranch for the Orita Land and Cattle Company and lived in Lockhart's large ranch house from 1963 to 1972. Most made some changes to the ranch, tearing down unnecessary structures, including the dehydrator and 16 houses for married employees (Hampson 1990). The mill complex was abandoned, and only a minimal crew worked the ranch. Most also introduced the pivot system of irrigation, which allowed the watering of nearly an entire quarter section from one horizontal pipe revolving in a circular motion from a center point in the field. The use of the pivot irrigation system reduced the need for employees and also deemphasized cattle ranching. The Orita Land and Cattle Company operation reached its peak in the late 1960s and early 1970s with 2,800 acres farmed with 22 employees (Hampson 1990). It was a much more successful operation than the Lockhart operation. There were only 500 to 600 cattle on the ranch during this period (Hampson 1990). In 1977, the Orita Land and Cattle Company sold the ranch to Al Cotton. Cotton went bankrupt and in 1979 Milton Most purchased the ranch.

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When Most purchased the ranch in 1979, he obtained the area south of Hoffman Road, which separates Sections 19 and 30 (Hampson 1990). This ranch was approximately 1,650 acres. Most continued to farm alfalfa with the pivot irrigation system, but he only raised cattle in the winter months. Alfalfa grown on the farm was sold on the open market. Most constructed the airplane hangar on the complex, but otherwise he left the buildings that were present during Lockhart's tenure. In 1986, surveyors updating the USGS quadrangle map offered to change the name of the community to Most as he had been associated with the ranch for so long. Most declined and the area is still known as Lockhart (Hampson 1990).

In June 1988, Luz Development and Finance Corporation purchased most of the ranch (Hampson 1990). The ranch was leased back to Most until the early 1990s. Luz installed solar energy panels within Sections 19 and 24 on the old ranch land. The remainder of the old ranch changed hands before it was purchased by Abengoa Solar, Inc. in 2008 with the intent of installing more solar energy panels. Since the 1990s, the former York, Lockhart, and Most properties, as well as smaller farmsteads and associated buildings have been abandoned and have rapidly deteriorated.

The center of the Lockhart community and ranching activities, and one of the largest operations in the Mojave Desert in the 20th century, this site had widespread associations with the development in the region. The site was largely intact when it was recorded in 1990, but the majority of the buildings and structures have since been demolished. All that remains of these buildings are their concrete foundations. In addition, the Davis House and the Evans House (both present in 1990) no longer exist. As a whole, the complex recorded in P-36-006558 does not retain sufficient integrity to convey its importance as the community center of Lockhart. The removal of significant features has irrevocably altered the materials and setting of the complex.

Evaluation

The General Merchandise Store, a concrete block structure built in 1953, has historically been and continues to be the most imposing feature on the site. Of the remaining buildings, only the General Merchandise Store appears to retain characteristics that represent its association with the period. The iconic building was once the center of a vibrant desert community and it remains one of the largest buildings in the valley, clearly visible from Harper Lake Road. During the 1950s, movies were projected onto the west wall, and the building served as a centerpiece for the community. Attracting visitors from the region and beyond, it has historically been a major landmark in the desert and for the desert community. As one of the remaining buildings of the Lockhart Ranch, the building is also one of the only reminders of the past community. For its association with the significant mid-20th century development of a vibrant ranching community out of the otherwise remote desert landscape, and for its significant role as a commercial and social center for the communities of Harper Lake, Lockhart, and more isolated surrounding desert communities, the General Merchandise Store conveys a historical significance that makes it eligible for the CRHR under Criterion 1.

Although it is associated with Lester Lockhart and the ranch that developed under his auspices, it does not specifically possess association with historically significant persons. It is not eligible for the CRHR under Criterion 2.

The General Merchandise Store is an imposing structure within its setting, but the structure itself is not architecturally significant. The practical design of the building maximized interior space with a broad floor plan, introduced natural light with clerestory glass block windows, and provided shade at the exterior with long canopies constructed out of sheet metal. The building does not represent an architectural style or techniques that are unique. It is the largest building in the area, and is a regionally-rare example of a building in that scale, but it is not sufficiently significant to be eligible under CRHR Criterion 3.

The building does not appear to have the potential to yield information about history or prehistory, and is not eligible for listing in the CRHR under Criterion 4.

Discussion of Integrity

Although it is in a state of neglect, the General Merchandise Store retains qualities that convey its historical significance; it retains sufficient integrity to demonstrate its significance as a historical resource. The remaining structures of the Lockhart Ranch are in various levels of deterioration, demonstrating a lack of maintenance and vandalism. As part of the originally recorded site P-36-006558, the General Merchandise Store is one of the few remaining features that suggest the volume of activity of the ranch's capability.

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The current state of the General Merchandise Store and the removal of several buildings in its immediate setting have reduced the level of its integrity; however, the foundation, bearing walls, and overall appearance sufficiently convey its presence within the community and it is easily recognizable as the center of commercial activity for the abandoned community.



Lockhart General Merchandise Store, view facing west.



Lockhart General Merchandise Store, view facing northwest.

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Lockhart General Merchandise Store, view facing southeast.

***B12. References:**

Hampson, R. Paul

1988 *Cultural Resource Investigation: Solar Energy Generating System (SEGS) VIII-XII, Harper Lake Area, San Bernardino County, California.* Greenwood and Associates. Submitted to Luz Development and Finance Corporation. Unpublished report on file at San Bernardino County Museum, 2024 Orange Tree Lane, Redlands, California 92374.

1990 *Cultural Resources Survey: Luz Solar Energy Generating System (SEGS) XI and XII, Harper Lake, San Bernardino County.* Greenwood and Associates. Submitted to Luz Construction, Inc. Unpublished report on file at San Bernardino County Museum, 2024 Orange Tree Lane, Redlands, California 92374.

Hampson, R. Paul, and Elizabeth Skinner

1990 *Site Assessment and Recordation for Solar Energy Generating System (SEGS) IX and X, Harper Lake, San Bernardino County.* Greenwood and Associates. Submitted to Luz Development & Finance Corp. Unpublished report on file at San Bernardino County Museum, Redlands, California.

Hampson, R. Paul, and Mark T. Swanson

1989 *Cultural Resource Investigation: Five Sections West of Harper Lake, San Bernardino County.* Greenwood and Associates. Submitted to Luz Development and Finance Corp. Unpublished report on file at San Bernardino County Museum, 2024 Orange Tree Lane, Redlands, California 92374.

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B13. Remarks:

Mojave Solar, LLC proposes to develop the Mojave Solar Project that would be located near Harper Dry Lake in unincorporated San Bernardino County, California. EDAW AECOM was retained by Mojave Solar, LLC to conduct cultural resources studies, including archaeological and historic architectural surveys in support of preparation of an Application for Certification, which is required by the California Energy Commission (CEC) for power generating plants that produce an excess of 50 MW of energy. The CEC implements California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) procedures during the decision-making stage of development. This study was conducted in accordance with CEQA guidelines to evaluate cultural resources within the project area that are 45 years of age or older for eligibility to the California Register of Historical Resources (CRHR), to assess impacts on historical resources resulting from the proposed project, and to determine potential mitigation measures for significant impacts to historical resources. Field work was conducted by EDAW AECOM between May 27 and June 22, 2009. The current study is documented in *Mojave Solar Project Cultural Resources Technical Report, San Bernardino County, California* (EDAW AECOM 2009).

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