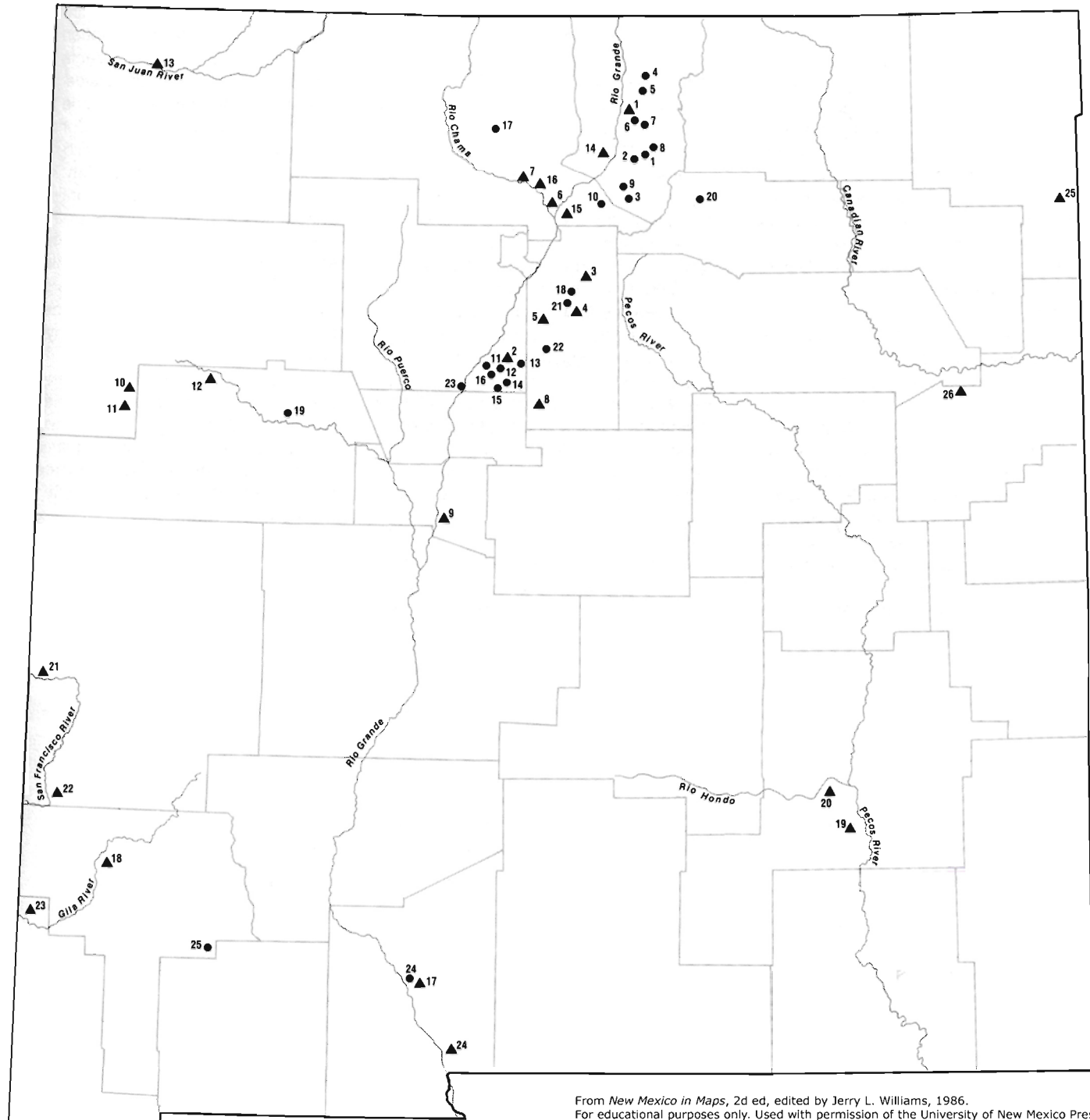


Alternative Communities



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Communes and Alternative Communities

● Communes

▲ Alternative Communities

1. The Family (c. 1968–1970)
2. Five Star Commune (c. 1968–1970)
3. Hog Farm (c. 1966–1970)
4. LILA (1969–1973)
5. Lorian Retreat (1969–1973)
6. Morning Star East (1969–1973)
7. New Buffalo (1969–)
8. Reality Construction Co. (1969–1972)
9. Tree Frog (1969–1973)
10. La Joya (1979–)
11. Lower Farm (1969–1973)
12. Manera Nueva (1969–1973)
13. Ojo de las Casas (c. 1967–1971)

14. Sun Farm (late 1960s)
15. Domes (early 1970s)
16. Towapa (1971–1982)
17. Canjilon (late 1960s)
18. City of Light (1968)
19. Word of God Community (1971)
20. Kingdom of God (1970–1971, 1972–)
21. Maharaj Ashram (1969–1971)
22. Synergia (1970–)
23. Welcome Home (1970–1971)
24. Shalam (1884–1907)
25. Mimbres Hot Springs (1982–)

1. Lama Foundation (1967–)
2. Drop City South (1966)
3. Shidoni (1970–)
4. Seton Village (1932–1946)
5. La Cienega (1972–)
6. Ashram Hacienda de Guru Ram Das (1970–)
7. Dar-al-Islam (1980–)
8. Cedar Grove (1962–)
9. Jerusalem Community (1976–)
10. Savoia (1877–c. 1886)
11. Ramah (1876–)
12. Bluewater Valley (1894–c. 1925)
13. Fruitland (1881–)

14. Carson (1909–)
15. Fairview (1890–1900)
16. Beulah (1893–1895)
17. Levitic (1895–1897)
18. Gila Llano Colony (1932–1935)
19. Blackdorn (1908–1920)
20. The Farms (1877–1878)
21. Luna (1883–)
22. Pleasonton (1880s)
23. Virden (1916–)
24. Vado (1920–)
25. Sedan Mennonites (late 1970s)
26. Tucumcari Mennonites (late 1970s)

0 10 20 30 40 50 Miles

Alternative Communities

"Commune" has been defined as a group of people who come together for "intimate, sharing, cooperative relations with those outside one's immediate family." Communes are voluntary, identifiable, and usually share the same household and work. Alternative communities are defined as communities which share beliefs and values but not necessarily housing, labor, or even income.

Communal and alternative communities in New Mexico date from the 1870s with the founding of Savoia (near Zuni) by a group of Mormons sent from Utah to establish communities in the territory of New Mexico and Arizona. The Mormons settled 10 communities in New Mexico between 1877 and 1915. These early Mormon settlements can be considered alternative communities because historically they settled in separate villages in order to reinforce their beliefs.

The first true commune in New Mexico with shared household work and income was Shalam (Land of Shalam), settled by members of a sect who called themselves "Faithists." In 1884 the land, part of the Doña Ana Bend Colony Grant, was bought and building commenced for a society devoted to raising orphaned city street children. Upon the death of Dr. Newbrough, the founder and leader, the commune slowly crumbled.

Levitica (ca. 1895), the second colony, was the offshoot of Shalam and partially the cause of its demise. The people attracted to Levitica through newspaper ads were promised a free house and land in exchange for growing crops for Levitica. But the greed for land that attracted them also disrupted the cooperative spirit of the community, and the legal rights to property carried the system into the courts. The courts dismissed the claim, and people drifted away.

There were two black alternative communities in New Mexico history. The first, Blackdom (north of Roswell), was begun by Frank Boyer and his family about 1908. It attracted other black families who together built a church and school and for a while operated a small newspaper. The people did subsistence farming, but water was a continual problem, and, by the mid 1920s, it was virtually deserted. Some of the Blackdom families moved to Vado, south of Las Cruces, where another black settlement evolved. Though it still survives, it is not a completely black community now.

The Great Depression rekindled the

searches for perfect worlds on earth. The Llano del Rio Colony, founded in 1932 at Gila, was the last of a series of cooperative colonies called Llano, begun in 1914 near Los Angeles. The Gila Colony was intended to be one of thousands of colonies stretching across the country, abiding by the Golden Rule and, internally, disdaining the use of money. The old problems of land ownership and water rights plagued the colony, and the failure to pay the mortgage and clear the land title caused it to collapse in 1935.

In the 1930s the writer and naturalist Ernest Thompson Seton bought 2,500 acres just southeast of Santa Fe and built a community. He constructed his "castle" of 45 rooms to house his collections (books, biological specimens, art, and artifacts), built cottages to rent to artists and writers, and developed buildings to house his College of Indian Wisdom. Seton Village was, like many alternative communities, a reflection of its founder. It was run in a benevolent feudal manner until his death in 1946.

The severe restlessness and disillusionment of the 1960s contributed to the second great wave of commune development (the first being in the 1840s). Influenced in large part by the writings of Buckminster Fuller and B. F. Skinner, the hippie communards followed the trails and traditions of their spiritual predecessors to mountains and hinterlands, where they found the isolation and cheap land they sought. Most intended to farm the land, although not many had ever planted anything before.

The earliest of the latest wave was probably the Hog Farm, which settled around Peñasco in the mid-1960s. A mobile group who traveled around the country staging "happenings" and caring for those who had bad trips from drugs, they were gone a little too often and came home at one point in the late 1960s to find that strangers had taken over their land and houses. Some of the originals stayed, and a few still live at Tree Frog, a neighboring commune.

Among other communes in the Taos area was Five Star, which was set up in 1968 and attracted so many hippie types that the local authorities harassed them out of existence in 1970. The Family was one of three communal ventures originally supported by the entrepreneur Chuck Lonsdale. The Family gained fame as a set for the movie *Easy Rider*. The other two Lonsdale communes were Lorien Retreat and LILA (Lorien Institute

of Living Arts). Lonsdale's first venture, Lorien Enterprises, Inc., supported the aforementioned Family, a free clinic, general stores, and an information booth for transient hippies in Taos.

Another benefactor, Michael Duncan, bought more than 700 acres of land near Arroyo Hondo around 1967. By the middle of 1969 there were two communes on the land: Morning Star East and the Reality Construction Company. Both communes were gone by 1973. Duncan razed the building, built himself a well-fortified house, and planted alfalfa.

New Buffalo is one of two communal groups founded about 1967 that are still in existence. In both cases the land was bought outright and set up in the group's name, not that of the single buyer of the land. A group of about twelve evolved and worked hard, and New Buffalo is now busy with dairy production and candle making. They live communally in three long buildings and welcome visitors only on selected days.

The other long-lived community is the Lama Foundation. While not communal in living area, it is a spiritual community near San Cristobal, living and working in probably the best-designed and -built adobe-and-domed alternative community in New Mexico.

Other communes from the late 1960s and early 1970s in northern New Mexico included Canjilon, a revolutionary group that hoped to be accepted by the local La Raza party. They left in about six months when the locals made it very clear they were not interested. The Kingdom of God near Guadalupita was attacked by a vigilante group from the area, causing the death of one member and the wounding of another. The rest fled for a time but quietly regrouped and a few still live there. La Joya is a small secretive group that also formed in the northern mountains.

Eastern religion has grown in the United States in recent decades and flourished in New Mexico. A small ashram, founded in 1969 south of Santa Fe, closed in 1971, and the followers went to a new ashram north of Santa Fe. Ashram Hacienda de Guru Ram Das is the spiritual homeland for U.S. members of Sikh Dharma, a religion founded in India 500 years ago. A community with many sources of income, the Sikhs have been well known in central and northern New Mexico since 1970. A newer community near Abiquiu is Dar-al-Islam, a Moslem group. It is financed by grants from Saudi Arabia, has built an adobe

Alternative Communities

mosque, and is building a community around it on 1,000 acres of former ranchland.

Two cooperative arts and crafts communities that are thriving are Shidoni, north of Santa Fe, and La Cienega, south of Santa Fe. Shidoni began in 1970 and has two requirements for the residents: pay annual rent and produce some form of art. Shidoni is well known for its sculptures and annual festival. La Cienega is composed of a colony of artists, potters, and weavers. La Cienega also has an annual arts festival and open house.

At the old village of Placitas, north of Albuquerque, things meshed and unmeshed in a bewildering array of groups, names, and buildings, all in a rather short period of time. Beginning with Drop City South in 1966, patterned after Drop City in Trinidad, Colorado, there followed or existed side by side, Lower Farm or Manera Nueva, Sun Farm, Ojo de las Casas (in the ruins of the old Spanish plaza of that name), Domes (in the domes of former Drop City South), and finally Towapa, which came

to an abrupt halt in 1982 when the land owner evicted the residents.

There was, briefly, a commune at San Fidel, 18 miles east of Grants, called Word of God Community. Members intended to work with the Pueblos of the area, who rejected their assistance. Also in 1970–72, there was an open commune and health-food store in Corrales called Welcome Home which never had more than eight members.

Two cooperative communities which have quietly flourished for many years are Cedar Grove, 35 miles east of Albuquerque, and Synergia Ranch, on State Highway 22, west of Cerrillos. Cedar Grove, begun in 1962, has rebuilt a ghost town into a small community of Ba'hai belief. It operates a school for the members' children and foster children. Synergia Ranch, founded in 1970, has three programs running: a theater workshop, craft shops of several kinds, and an ecology program which includes pasture reclamation.

A newer society near Belen, Jerusalem Community, was founded in 1976 to share spiritual values. It has a farm and

several individual houses with more in the planning. It is a Catholic community sanctioned by Archbishop Robert Sanchez of the Diocese of Santa Fe. Its members mostly work at outside jobs.

A small group had a commune for about a year at Mimbres Hot Springs in the southern part of New Mexico. Although the cooperative society has disbanded, former residents continue an annual arts and crafts fair. Then there was the utopia dreamed of by Henry McCowan of Elida, south of Portales. He planned to establish a moneyless society within Elida, but local hostility, especially that of his wife, caused him to stay his plans.

There have been rumors of many other communities, alternative communities, and cooperative groups, which cannot be verified. Some were not in existence for longer than a few months. Many are hard to pin down; after all, that was why they left the mainstream.

Carolyn C. Bennett