

NORTHERN CANAL
Starts at the Rio Hondo and runs south in Chaves County
Roswell vicinity
Chaves County
New Mexico

HAER NM-23
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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

NORTHERN CANAL

HAER No. NM-23

- Location:** Starts at the Rio Hondo and runs south in Chaves County, Roswell vicinity, Chaves County, New Mexico
- Dates of Construction:** 1889-1890
- Builders:** Pecos Valley Irrigation and Investment Company
- Original Owner, Use:** Pecos Valley Irrigation and Investment Company, irrigation
- Current Owner, Use:** Private owner, irrigation
- Significance:** The Northern Canal was the first large irrigation project in the Roswell, New Mexico, area, and the first large cooperative irrigation effort in the Pecos River basin.
- Description:** The flow of the Rio Hondo is carried by a channel to the old wooden headgates of the Northern Canal. The water enters the canal at this point and flows west within 20' of the rear of the Pat Garrett farmhouse.¹ The canal then turns south and continues 30 to 40 miles to the Hagerman area. This canal is also known as the Hagerman Canal as a result. The canal is used for irrigation in the Pecos Valley between Roswell and Hagerman, New Mexico. The wooden headgates are still in use but the rest of the system has been altered through maintenance and improvement throughout the years.
- History:** The Pecos Valley Irrigation and Investment Company built the Northern Canal and later projects like Lake Avalon and Lake McMillan near Carlsbad, New Mexico. It was dug during 1889-1890 by workmen using plows to outline the area to be dug and to remove the sod. As soon as the sod was removed, a large machine (somewhat like a ditcher or grader) pulled by sixteen to twenty horses or mules was put to work in the area previously plowed over. Then scrapers or slips, two and four horse size, moved loose dirt and shaped the canal. Most of the dirt was thrown on the

¹ Pat Garrett was the sheriff who killed Billy the Kid in Fort Sumter in 1881 and was a stockholder in the Pecos Valley Irrigation and Investment Company.

east or down side of the canal and made a kind of dam.² By 1891, the canal had reached the Feliz River, a distance of 25 miles, and a small diversion dam constructed on the Hondo River east of Roswell. The dam was located below the points where the Berrendo and North Spring rivers join the Hondo. No effort was made to store the water since these spring-fed rivers were very reliable.

Sources:

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Historians: Steve Rae and T. Lindsay Baker, June 25-26 and October 21, 1971

Project

Information:

The Northern Canal was inventoried for the Historic American Engineering Record as part of the Southwest Water Resources Project, a joint project with the Texas Tech Water Resources Center. The survey was subsequently published as *Water for the Southwest: Historical Survey and Guide to Historic Sites* by the American Society of Civil Engineers in September 1973.

² James D. Shinkle, *Fifty Years of Roswell History—1867-1917* (Roswell, NM: Hall-Poorbaugh Press, 1964).