

COLORADO CULTURAL RESOURCE SURVEY

Architectural Inventory Form

Page 1 of 5

- Date _____ Initials _____
- _____ Determined Eligible-NR
- _____ Determined Not Eligible-NR
- _____ Determined Eligible-SR
- _____ Determined Not Eligible-SR
- _____ Need Data
- _____ Contributes to Eligible NR District
- _____ Noncontributing to Eligible NR District

I. IDENTIFICATION

1. Resource Number: 5CF.2874
2. Temporary Resource Number: N/A
Parcel Number: 326924200164
SHF/CLG Grant Number: 2010-02-003
GARNA Survey Number: 282
3. County: Chaffee
4. City: Buena Vista
5. Historic Building Name:
Comanche Drive-In
6. Current Building Name:
Comanche Drive-In



7. Building Address: 17063 County Road 306
8. Owner Name and Address: Groy, John L. and John D., P.O. Box 1046, Buena Vista, Colorado 81211

II. GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

9. P.M. 6th Township 14 S Range 79 W
NW 1/4 SW 1/4 NW 1/4 NW 1/4 of Section 24
SW 1/4 SW 1/4 NW 1/4 NW 1/4 of Section 24

10. UTM Reference(s): 13, 397301, 4297742

11. USGS Quad Name: Buena Vista West, Colo. Year: 1982 Map Scale: 7.5'

12. Lot (s): N/A Block(s): N/A
Addition: N/A Year of Addition: N/A

13. Boundary Description and Justification:

The surveyed area includes the 7.9 acres containing the drive-in. The remaining 32.1 acres of the parcel are in other unrelated uses.

III. ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

NOTE: For complexes, Items 14 through 22 apply only to Resource 1.

14. Building Plan (footprint, shape): Rectangular
15. Dimensions in Feet: Length 30 X Width 20
16. Stories: 2
17. Primary External Wall Material(s) (enter no more than two):
Stucco Wood/Weatherboard/Vertical Siding
18. Roof Configuration (enter no more than one):

Shed

19. **Primary External Roof Material (enter no more than one):** Asphalt

20. **Special Features (enter all that apply):**

Fence.

21. **General Architectural Description:**

The two-story, rectangular projection/snack bar/restroom building (Resource 1) (30' x 20') is located near the south edge of the property. The widely overhanging shallow shed roof slopes from north to south. The second story walls are clad with wood board and batten siding, while the first story is covered with textured stucco.

South Wall. The south wall second story contains a center inset area with an angled wall; there is a paneled door on the angled north wall and a flush door on the east wall. The entrance opens onto a wood deck, accessed by wood stairs from the west and supported by two square wood posts. A short two-light sliding window lies west of the entrance. The first story contains a center flush door with a short two-light sliding window to the east.

West Wall. The second story contains a short two-light sliding window near the south end and a tall two-part window at the north end. A narrow full-width pent roof is present at the bottom of the upper story. The first story has a plate glass and two-part window to the south and a pedestrian door at the north end.

North Wall (Facing the Screen). The west half of the upper story has a tall two-part window at the west end and then a short two-light sliding window. The east half has two short two-light sliding windows alternating with square film projection openings. On the first story is an off-center flush door (with a sign reading "SNACK BAR") with a tall two-part window to the west. A flat hood at the bottom of the second story extends across this section of the wall to shelter patrons waiting for snacks. East of the door is a short two-light sliding window.

East Wall. The second story of the east wall has two short two-light sliding windows. The first story contains the drive-in's restrooms, accessed by wood paneled doors (the north one for women and the south one for men). At the south end of the wall is a short two-light sliding window.

22. **Architectural Style/Building Type:** Modern Movement

23. **Landscaping or Special Setting Features:**

This drive-in theater, lying three miles west of the center of Buena Vista, covers about 7.9 acres at the southeast corner of Chaffee County Roads 306 and 339. Cars enter and exit from County Road 339 on the west; the entrance is near the south end of property and the exit is at the north. The gravel two-lane entrance driveway, flanked by a wood post and rail fence, extends east to two steel ranch gates just west of the ticket booth. One lane passes to the north and the other to the south before merging east of the building. The projection/snack bar/restroom building lies just northeast of the ticket booth; shrubs are present to the west and south and a cluster of small trees lie to the east. The large vehicle parking/viewing area contains ten shallow concave arced rows facing the screen at the north edge of the property. Parking in the rows is ramped to orient vehicle sightlines to the screen; steel speaker posts are present but no speakers are attached. Gravel perimeter drives pass along the east and west sides of the parking area and pass north of the screen, providing access to the exit northwest of the screen. A barbed wire fence on metal posts borders the outside edge of the perimeter drives. A sign with a marquee is present near the northwest corner of the property next to County Road 306.

24. **Associated Buildings, Features, or Objects:**

2. **Ticket Booth (1967).** This square one-story ticket booth (6' x 6') stands in the center of the entrance driveway from County Road 339 and has a flat roof with widely overhanging eaves. The west wall contains a picture window with a plain wood surround (now partially covered with three horizontal boards). The north and south walls each have a small two-light window (lower part slides upwards) with a projecting counter with rounded corners. The east wall has a center flush door. The arrangement permitted two lanes of cars to enter at the same time, with tickets dispensed from both sides of the booth. Slender white neon lights are present along the top of the north, south, and west walls.

3. **Drive-in Screen (1967).** The 80' x 40' projection screen stands near the north edge of the property and is composed of white corrugated metal panels. The screen is attached to five 6" steel posts anchored in concrete; five angled steel posts also set in concrete are attached to the vertical posts to provide more support against high winds.

4. **Sign (1967).** A free-standing sign is located at the north edge of the property adjacent to County Road 306. The sign reads "COMANCHE" and includes a circle containing the profile of a Native American with braids wearing a headband with two feathers; an arrow emerges from the bottom of the circle and points south toward the drive-in. The bottom portion of the sign is a grid where the titles of films can be displayed. Two posts support the sign; board

walks with triangular braces are present just below the marquee.

IV. ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY

NOTE: For complexes, Items 25 through 30 apply only to Resource 1.

25. **Date of Construction:** Estimate

Actual 1967

Source of Information: Mark Wolfe, The Comanche Drive-In, 2011

26. **Architect:** John L. Groy

Source of Information: Mark Wolfe, The Comanche Drive-In, 2011

27. **Builder/Contractor:** Unknown

Source of Information:

28. **Original Owner:** John L. and Pearl Groy

Source of Information: Mark Wolfe, The Comanche Drive-In, 2011

29. **Construction History (include description and dates of major additions, alterations, or demolitions):**

The drive-in opened in 1967. The roof originally appears to have been flat and was later modified to produce a slight slope. The speaker stands once held wired speakers that attached to vehicle doors; the advent of broadcasting film audio over vehicle radios made the speakers unnecessary. Horizontal boards have been nailed across first story windows on the projection buildings and across the windows on the ticket booth.

30. **Original Location:** Yes

Date of Moves: N/A

V. HISTORICAL ASSOCIATIONS

31. **Original Use(s):** Recreation and Culture/Theater

32. **Intermediate Use(s):** Recreation and Culture/Theater

33. **Current Use(s):** Recreation and Culture/Theater

34. **Site Type(s):** Drive-in theater

35. **Historical Background:**

This 300-car drive-in theater opened in 1967 and continues to serve the Buena Vista area. Local newspapers described it as "the first drive in theater to hit the pike in the Buena Vista area." The first drive-in theater opened in the United States in 1933 in Camden, New Jersey. The move to build outdoor film venues accelerated after World War II, stimulated by increased emphasis on automobiles and the rise of the Baby Boom generation. The number of drive-ins peaked at 4,063 in 1958. The popularity of television was one factor in the decline of drive-ins. Another was the growing land values of drive-in facilities; making them ripe for redevelopment into other uses. By 2008, only an estimated 400 drive-ins in America remained; very few still operate in Colorado.

The 1965 year of construction provided by the County Assessor appears to be incorrect. The facility opened on 13 July 1967 with a showing of "Island of Terror." The venue showed two different films each week and was open from Memorial Day to Labor Day. The high elevation of 7,955' and short summer season dictated the truncated operating months. John L. and Pearl Groy, who owned the larger 40-acre parcel, built the drive-in on its southwestern corner. Mr. Groy designed the theater and assisted in its construction. The Groys also operated the Pearl Theater in Buena Vista and the Unique Theater in Salida. Groy and his son, John D. Groy, still own this facility. John D. Groy and his wife now manage the drive-in. In 2004, only 12 drive-in theaters still operated in Colorado.

36. **Sources of Information:**

Chaffee County Assessor, real property information and appraisal card, Salida, Colorado; Robin T. Reid, "The History of the Drive-In Movie Theater," Smithsonian.com, 28 May 2008 (accessed 10 October 2012); Mark Wolfe, "The Comanche Drive-in," email to Thomas H. Simmons, 25 September 2011; Jennifer Sherer Janisch and Kipp Sherer, "The Pocket Drive-In Locator" (Trafford Publishing, 2006); Bert Bedeau and Tricia Canaday, Drive-in Theaters in Idaho (draft), National Register of Historic Places, 31 January 2003.

VI. SIGNIFICANCE

37. **Local Landmark Designation:** No

Date of Designation: N/A

Designating Authority: N/A

Applicable State Register of Historic Properties Criteria:

- A. The property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to history.
- B. The property is connected with persons significant in history.
- C. The property has distinctive characteristics of a type, period, method of construction or artisan.
- D. The property has geographic importance.
- E. The property contains the possibility of important discoveries related to prehistory or history.
- Does not meet any of the above State Register criteria.

State Register Field Eligibility Assessment Eligible**38. Applicable National Register Criteria:**

- A. Associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad pattern of our history.
- B. Associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C. Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or represents the work of a master, or that possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction
- D. Has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important to history or prehistory.
- Qualifies under Criteria Considerations A through G, as specified: G
- Does not meet any of the above National Register criteria.

National Register Significance: Area, Period, and Level:

39. Area(s) of Significance:	40. Period(s) of Significance:	41. Level(s) of Significance:
Entertainment/Recreation	1967-2012	Local
Landscape Architecture	1967	Local

42. Statement of Significance:

This mid-century drive-in theater is significant in the area Entertainment/Recreation for its role in bringing outdoor cinema to the Buena Vista area since 1967. This is the only remaining drive-in in Chaffee County. The property is also significant in the area of Landscape Architecture, as an example of the functional layout and components of a mid-twentieth century drive-in theater, as reflected in the massive screen, rows of parking, roadway signage, and support buildings. Drive-in theaters are a rapidly vanishing property type; to date, only three drive-ins have been listed in the National Register throughout the country. The drive-in will not be fifty years old until 2017. However, given the rarity of the resource type, an argument can be made for exceptional significance under Criteria Consideration G.

43. Assessment of Historic Physical Integrity Related to Significance:

The Comanche Drive-In maintains excellent historic physical integrity of location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. The drive-in is in the same location, has an unaltered setting, and displays the same layout of features and buildings. The Comanche Drive-in is potentially eligible for listing in the National and State Registers for its historical and landscape architectural significance.

VII. NATIONAL REGISTER ELIGIBILITY ASSESSMENT

44. National Register Field Eligibility Assessment: Eligible

45. Is there National Register district potential? Discuss. Yes

The Comanche Drive-in comprises a historic district encompassing all of its original elements. This resource was surveyed as part of a scattered intensive survey throughout Chaffee County. There does not appear to be other properties in the vicinity that could logically be included within the district.

If there is NRHP district potential, indicate contributing status: N/A

46. If the building is in an existing NRHP district, indicate contributing status: N/A

VIII. RECORDING INFORMATION

47. Digital Image Reference(s): CF2874-01 to -11

Digital Images Filed At: GARNA, Salida, Colorado

Photographer: T.H. Simmons

48. Report Title: Chaffee County Historic Resources Survey, 2010-12

49. Date(s): October 2011

50. Recorder(s): R.L. Simmons/T.H. Simmons

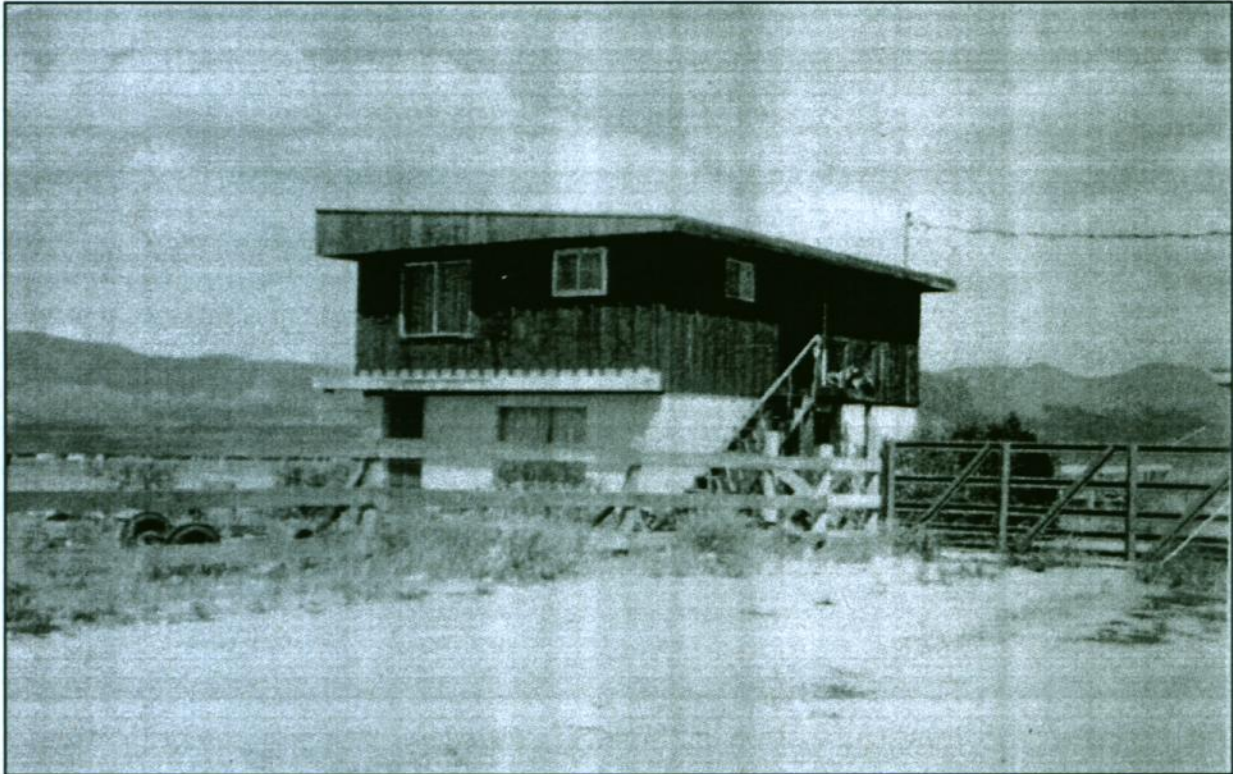
51. Organization: Front Range Research Associates, Inc.

52. Address: 3635 W. 46th Ave., Denver, CO 80211

53. Phone Number(s): (303) 477-7597

NOTE: Please attach a sketch map, a photocopy of the USGS quad map indicating the resource's location, and photographs.

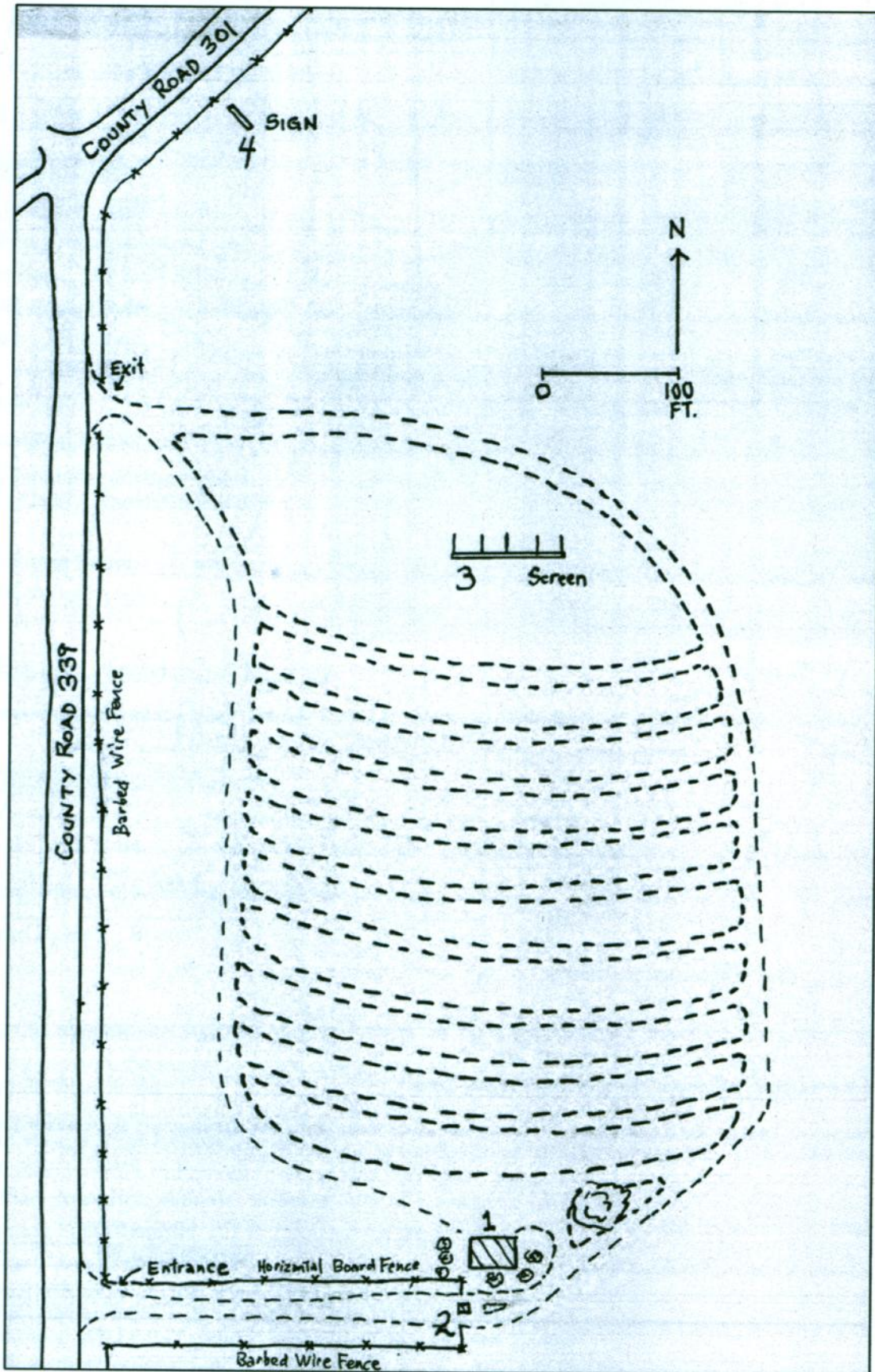
History Colorado-Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation
1200 Broadway, Denver, Colorado 80203 (303) 866-3395



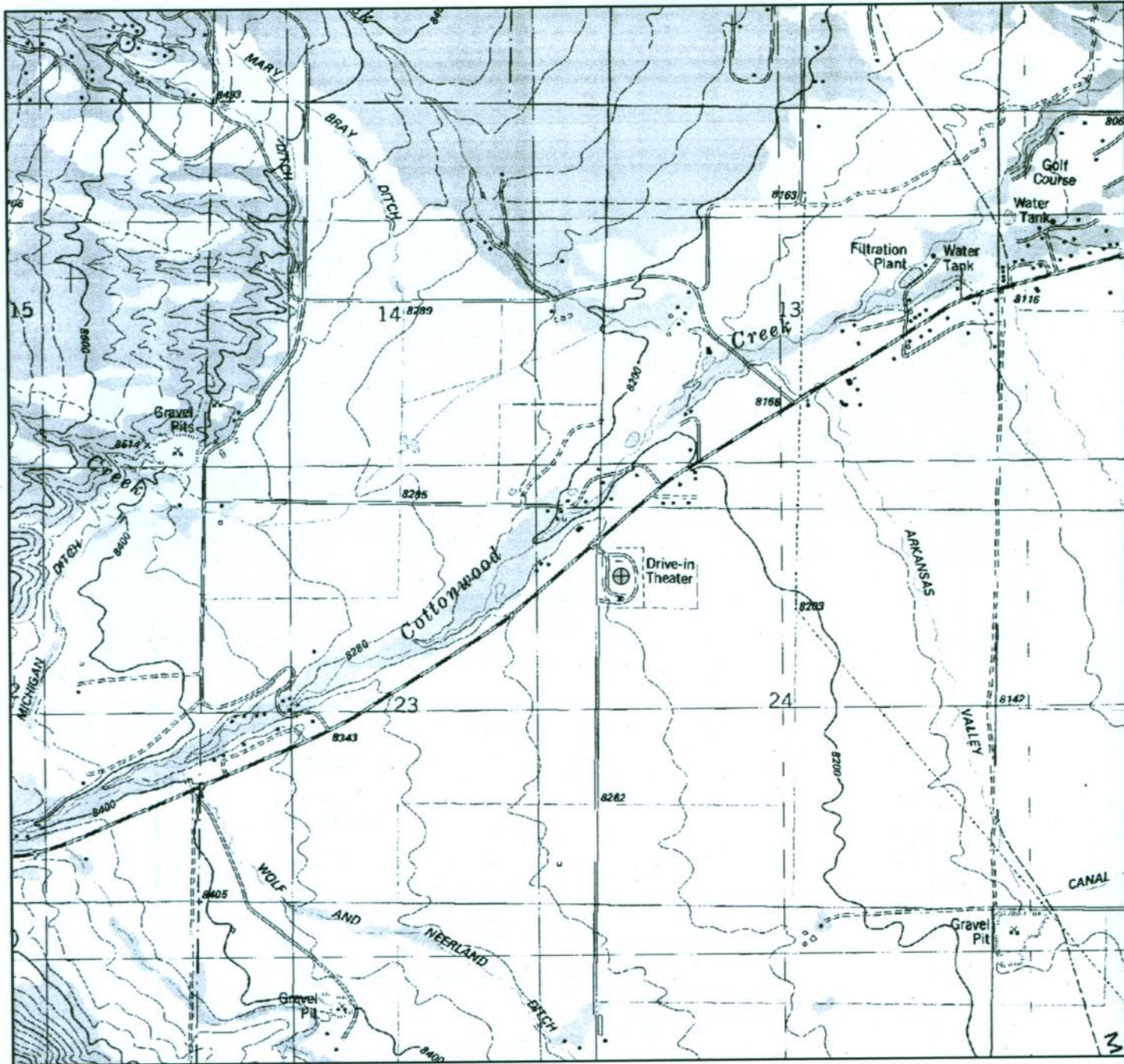
5CF.2874. This ca. 1970s-80s view northeast shows the projection/concession/restroom building at the drive-in.
SOURCE: Chaffee County Assessor, appraisal photograph, Salida, Colorado.

Architectural Inventory Form
Sketch Map

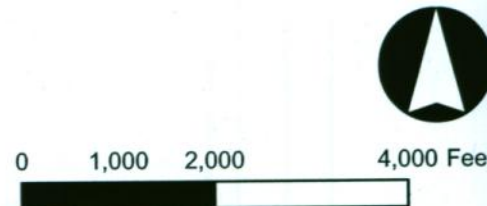
5CF.2874, 17063 County Road 306, Buena Vista Vicinity



Architectural Inventory Form
USGS Location Map



5CF.2874, 17063 County Road 306, Buena Vista Vicinity
Extract of USGS 7.5' quadrangle map: Buena Vista West, Colo.



NOTE: The crosshair indicates the location of the surveyed property. For properties greater than or equal to 10 acres a polygon is displayed with its vertices numbered corresponding to the UTM coordinates reported in this form.