

Historic Property and Preservation

The Los Alamos Historical Society is proud to lead preservation efforts in the National Landmark Historic District of Los Alamos. As owners of the Oppenheimer House, the Hans Bethe House, and homestead-era Romero Cabin, the Historical Society is committed to preserving and maintaining these unique, historic structures.

The Los Alamos Historical Society is planning for public uses of the Oppenheimer House, but the family who generously donated it may live there as long as they desire. As part of the preservation process, volunteers have developed a Historic Structures Report, based on guidelines from the National Park Service.

With very few exceptions, wartime housing in Los Alamos — dormitories, barracks, apartments, trailers, Quonset huts — was built with showers but no bathtubs. Because of the scarcity of iron during the early phases of the war, Congress had limited the types of bathroom fixtures that could be included in new construction, thus tubs were not permitted. It soon became obvious to all residents that the only persons who could enjoy the luxury of a bath were the families living in the former Los Alamos Ranch School masters' cottages. The homes soon became known as "Bathtub Row," an affectionate term still used today.

A certain social status went with living in the attractive, well-built houses on Bathtub Row. "In the beginning only the most important persons lived there," Laura Fermi, wife of Nobel Prize winner Enrico Fermi, wrote: "As the months went by, it became uncertain in envious minds whether Bathtub Row derived its luster from its residents or whether the residents acquired distinction from living in it." Fermi credits Alice Kimball Smith, the wife of another Manhattan Project scientist, with coining the term "Bathtub Row."

The Romero Cabin, relocated to the Historic District in the 1980s, underwent a restoration in 2009 thanks to a grant from the National Park Service and assistance from Los Alamos County. The Historical Society is proud to play a part in the preservation of this treasure from the years of Hispano homesteading on the Pajarito Plateau.