

Observations of the Westmorland Earthquake

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Sunday, April 26, 1981, at 5:00 a.m. PDT the Town of Westmorland, California was struck by an earthquake measuring 5.6 on the Richter Scale. During the previous several days over 40 quakes measuring above 3.0 had shaken the city.

On Monday morning, the 27th, The Arizona Daily Star published the news of major damage to the town and especially the adobe structures. "Anything with adobe in it is in trouble, and any buildings that are damaged are being condemned" according to Ron Rogríquez, Mayor of Westmorland.

Bill White and I, curious about the effects of earthquake on adobe, left Tucson at 10:00 a.m. Monday and drove to Westmorland with the intention of recording and perhaps analyzing the effect of the quake.

Upon arriving at approximately 4:00 p.m. we noticed two severely damaged structures along the main street. One structure was of frame construction (FIG.1) and the other was an abandoned adobe (FIG.2).

FIG. 1



FIG. 2



Conversations with neighbors and later the police department told us the adobe structure had been abandoned for several years and was in structurally poor condition before the quake.

Detailed photographs (FIG.3) show the wall/roof connection, no bond beam or anchors were used and all materials showed signs of rot and deterioration. The wall immediately south of the wall failure was severely under cut from rising damp. There was no indication of a foundation.