

EMPIRE RANCH

East Empire Ranch Road, three miles east of the intersection with
State Highway 83 (between mile markers 39 and 40)
Greaterville vicinity
Pima County
Arizona

HALS AZ-19

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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY

National Park Service
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HALS NO. AZ-19

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31.785602, -110.642214 (Northeast corner of the original Ranch House, Google Earth, Simple Cylindrical Projection, WGS84)

Empire Ranch is located about 30 miles southeast of Tucson; 31 miles north of the international border with Mexico; and within the Las Cienegas National Conservation Area. Listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1975, the nomination included only the main building of original ranch headquarters. Because of the importance of the surrounding landscape, the boundary for this report has been expanded to include the Empire Gulch, the remaining headquarter structures and features as well as additional noncontiguous features significant to the understanding of the resource. These noncontiguous features include a second ranch site, agricultural fields and irrigation system, an airstrip, an orchard and pump house, and one of many stock-watering tanks.

Significance: The Empire Ranch represents one of the most successful, long-lived, cattle ranching enterprises in the Southwest. Located in the ecologically rich Cienega Valley in Southeast Arizona, ranch owners made full use of, but husbanded well, all of its natural resources – grass, water and soils – in support of their livestock business. The landscape retains a remarkable degree of integrity of its natural resources and its built structures and features. Those ecological and historic values were recently recognized by Congress when the landscape was designated as the Las Cienegas National Conservation Area in 2000. Now administered by the Bureau of Land Management, the Empire Ranch landscape still functions as a working cattle ranch and its historic headquarters are being stabilized and preserved.

The story of the Empire Ranch is inextricably linked to the availability of the high desert grasslands and the marshlands of the Cienega Valley. The original 160-acre homestead claim was sited near Empire Gulch, a tributary of Cienega Creek, an essential perennial water source in the early 1870s. The economic and financial success of the Empire Ranch was dependent upon the ingenuity and determination of two ranching families – Walter L Vail and relatives and, later, Frank Boice and his descendants. Walter Vail expanded the original homestead through a series of strategic acquisitions of land parcels and water rights and effectively secured control of several hundred thousand acres to support over 40,000 head of cattle. Possession and control of these valuable lands and water sources allowed the Vail family to protect the ecological integrity of their most important natural resources – soil and grass – when other ranchers regularly overused and ultimately damaged theirs. Like other entrepreneurs of the time, they invested in other resources and land uses. The discovery of silver at the Total Wreck Mine provided additional financial support for the Vails' cattle empire.

Frank Boice and his family acquired the Empire Ranch in 1928. They used the superior grasslands to support their purebred Hereford cattle for which the Boices were known throughout the Southwest. Both the Vails and the Boices harvested hay from the Cienega Creek floodplain; they also used those rich soils to grow grains for cattle feed as well as fruits and vegetables.

Water availability and management were critical to a successful ranch and agricultural operation. Today the Empire landscape contains many storage and transport structures, historic and modern, designed to provide water to important activity sites.

In the 1940s, the Boice family began to divest portions of the ranch; finally, in 1969 the property was sold to a residential development corporation that planned to build a large housing project. With the economic downturn of the 1970s, the property changed hands yet again. Anamax Mining Corporation foresaw a lucrative mining venture by combining an adjacent mineral body with the Ranch's extensive water rights. Throughout ownerships by alternative corporations, cattle ranching continued on the landscape.

By the 1980s, the surrounding community had come to recognize the historic and ecological importance of the property. A series of land exchanges enabled the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to acquire the historic ranch. The Empire Ranch Foundation was created to preserve and maintain the ranch headquarters. Under the BLM and its numerous federal, state and local partners, the century and a half of environmental respect continues with active ranching and careful oversight to preserve natural and cultural resources while providing opportunities for public recreation.

Description: The Empire Ranch is located in southeastern Arizona approximately 44 miles southeast of Tucson and 10 miles north of Sonoita in the Cienega Valley (Figures 1 and 2). At an elevation of 4,626 feet above sea level, the Ranch resides amidst rolling grasslands at the transition between the Sonoran and Chihuahuan deserts. The Valley is surrounded by the Santa Rita, Huachuca, Whetstone, Mustang and Empire Mountains (Figure 3). Many ephemeral and some perennial drainages, washes and tributaries, including Cienega Creek and Empire Gulch, traverse the area creating a variety of distinct habitats. The most prominent of these habitats is the semi-desert grassland, but cienegas, sacaton grasslands, mesquite bosques, and cottonwood-willow riparian areas are also found. The average rainfall in the area is 18 inches, but over the past 8-10 years, the area has experienced drought conditions. Temperatures range from lows in the mid-20s to highs near 100 degrees.

The natural landscape of the Empire Valley was impacted during the period of significance by ranching and agricultural activities. Impacts include the introduction of invasive grass species, erosion and arroyo cutting, grassland, cienega, and riparian area degradation, ground and surface water extraction, and changes in the populations and distribution of predominant plant species.

Ongoing environmental rehabilitation projects under the Bureau of Land Management, Pima County, State, and other land agencies are restoring several native plant and animal species as well as Cienega Creek, washes and other water courses.

The original tract of land upon which the Empire Ranch was established was a 160-acre parcel purchased by Edward Nye Fish in the 1870s. The land holdings were expanded by different owners over the years to include over 100,000 acres by 1906. The site is now part of the Las Cienegas National Conservation Area (NCA) which comprises 42,000 acres. The majority of the Empire Ranch historic landscapes are under management by the Bureau of Land Management; however, multiple owners, including the Arizona State Land Department and private property owners, control some land within the Las Cienegas NCA.

The historic landscapes at Empire Ranch include family landscapes around the main ranch house, working landscapes near the ranch house and in outlying areas, and surrounding rangelands. For the purpose of this report, the Empire Ranch is geographically divided into four main character areas: A, B, C, and D. Character Areas A, B, and C are located in and near the Empire Ranch headquarters area (Figures 4 & 5) and Character Area D contains noncontiguous features that represent locations and resources significant to the history of Empire Ranch and its relationship with the surrounding landscape (Figure 6).

Character Area A (Main Ranch House and Domestic Areas)

Figures 7 and 8 depict the Main Ranch Area in the years 2016 and 1900 including domestic and working structures and surrounding landscape. Character Area A includes the Main Ranch House, the Huachuca House, and the New Ranch House or Pancho's house. The **Ranch House** today has twenty-nine rooms, consisting of the original four-room adobe house and later additions (Figure 9). The original structure was constructed between 1871 and 1874 of handmade adobe bricks and finished with a flat roof (Figure 10). It includes a central zaguan – a covered entryway – on the north-south axis to provide airflow in the residence, a common design feature in houses of this period and type. The house was expanded southward beginning in 1878 with the Victorian Addition for the Vail and Harvey families. Like the original section, this part of the house was also made of adobe brick and included six rooms. The Children's Addition was constructed of wood. Other building modifications included the foreman's quarters, and a cowboy cook's wing. The Ranch House served both the needs of the family as well as the needs of a working ranch that included housing and feeding cowboys, ranch management, and caring for horses.

The Ranch House is surrounded by a landscape shaped by the families who lived there over the years. On the west side of the Main Ranch House and south side of the Victorian Addition is the **Family Landscape**. The yard to the north is today covered in Bermuda grass and contains the stump of a chinaberry tree (Figure 11), a Siberian elm (*Ulmus pumila*) sapling growing at the base foundation of the original house's west façade and a pyracantha (*Pyracantha*

sp.) bush at the northwest corner of the house. At the front door entrance to the Ranch House, west of the Victorian Addition, is a two-trunk mulberry (*Morus sp.*) tree with a concrete planting bed around it. Near the front entrance of the house, vinca (*Vinca major*) grows in a concrete flowerbed that wraps around the north and west sides of the porch. In the 1930s, the Family Landscape featured a cactus garden north of the Victorian Addition (Figure 12). It had a number of mature trees, paths, and vines that now no longer exist (Figure 13).

The south yard, constructed in the 1940s by Mary Boice, was lush and shaded with numerous planting beds and a rose trellis. Only vinca (*Vinca major*) remains against the Adobe Haybarn wall to the south. The Victorian Addition to the north, the Children's Addition and concrete wall to the east encloses the south family garden on three sides, and the Adobe Haybarn to the south is now an open, grassy area (Figure 14) with several remnant features. The concrete wall, where an adobe wall and a wood fence once stood, offers a good example of vernacular concrete construction methods. An early Vail era photo indicates that the south yard was fenced to enclose a kitchen garden north of the Victorian Addition (Figures 15 and 16). Remains of the small swimming pool and fountain are evident today.

The swimming pool, built around 1940 during Frank and Mary Boice's ownership (Figure 17), was filled by the Bureau of Land Management in the 1990s for safety reasons although the edge of the pool remains visible (Figure 18). The circular fountain - not now operational - is set on a concrete pad (Figures 19 and 20). Located east of the fountain is a Cedar tree (*Cedrus sp.*). At the northwest corner of the Adobe Haybarn is a row of overgrown boxwood shrubs (*Buxus sp.*) now grown to tree size.

The **Huachuca House** is located across a parking area just west of the Main Ranch House. Its front facade faces the west exterior of the Ranch House. This small structure has a stucco exterior, and a front-gabled, standing-seam metal roof (Figure 21). Originally constructed at Fort Huachuca as officer housing, it was relocated to the Empire Ranch as a home for Bob and Miriam Boice; a three-room addition was completed in 1950. This building is now used as the Visitor Center and office space by the Empire Ranch Foundation and by the BLM for meetings and other functions.

Approximately 160 yards north of the Huachuca House is the **New Ranch House (or Pancho's House)** that was built for Pancho and Sherry Boice in 1954 (Figure 22). The front of the home faces south toward the Main Ranch and Huachuca Houses. It is set on a hill with views of the Empire Gulch and massive cottonwoods to the north. From the north side of the house a path leads to a garage on the east and a rock-lined path to the backyard area located down the hill to the north (Figure 23). The vegetation surrounding the home includes hackberry trees (*Celtis reticulata*), yucca (*Yucca sp.*) and grasses such as sacaton (*Sporobolus airoides*). The house has several features that were constructed to draw and hold water from Empire Gulch including a pool-like structure, water spigots (Figure 24), and pipes. The New Ranch House was used by BLM

employees for housing and office space; it is currently boarded up and not accessible to public for structural reasons.

Character Area B (Main Ranch Working Area)

Character Area B, Main Ranch Working Area, is located to the south of the main Ranch House. It includes buildings, structures and landscape features designed to accomplish the necessary tasks of a working cattle ranch. The **working landscape** is surrounded by buildings on three sides: the Ranch House on the west, the Stone Corral on the south, and the Tack Room and Loading Chute on the east. A wood fence on the south side and northwest corner completes the enclosure of this section of the landscape. This area includes a Mesquite tree (*Prosopis sp.*) in good condition. Between the Stone Corral and the Ranch House kitchen is an Ash tree (*Fraxinus sp.*) and the remains of a Walnut tree (*Juglans regia*).

The **Stone Corral**, built around 1870, adjacent to the southeast corner of the Ranch House, is open on the north and east sides, with a rough-hewn stone wall on the south side (Figures 25, 26 and 27). Rough-hewn logs support a gabled roof covered with corrugated metal. By 1915, the Corral was used to house horses; during the Boice era, the structure was converted as a wood shed. A concrete slab at the south end was used to mount a large circular saw and gasoline engine for this purpose. Today its shade and concrete surface lend themselves to presentations and educational events.

Immediately east of the Ranch House are the **Tack Room** (Figure 28) and **Loading Chute** (Figure 29). The Tack Room, a wood structure with board and batten siding and a gabled metal roof, was constructed about 1900. It was used originally as the farrier's shop; by the Boice era and since it has been used to store saddles and bridles. The Tack Room is accessed by doors on both the east and west sides. To the east is a view of the Whetstone and Mustang Mountain Ranges. On the south side of the Tack Room, the Loading Chute, added in 1955, was used to load horses onto trucks for transportation to other parts of the ranch. This Chute is a wood structure in good condition.

South of the Ranch House is a pasture with small corrals containing several independent structures and buildings that accommodate various functions of cattle ranching. These include the **Adobe Haybarn, Shed, Mechanic's Shop/Feed Barn, South Barn, Covered Feed Trough, Water Tank, and Windmill**.

The 1880 **Adobe Haybarn** is a large, 2-story structure with 12-foot high walls made of adobe brick and located immediately south of the Ranch House family garden (Figures 30 and 31b). The Haybarn had stalls for horses and provided a storage area for cut hay. Its original door and windows were oriented north toward the Ranch House, but these openings were eventually filled in to provide greater privacy for family space. Later, new doorways were constructed on the east and south sides. East of the Adobe Haybarn is the **Covered Feed Troughs**

built around 1900 and divided down the center to feed milk cows and horses. During the Boice era, it was used to feed the “night horse”. Southeast of the Covered Feed Troughs is the **Mechanic’s Shop/Feed Barn** which was used for equipment repairs during the Vail era. The Boices used the structure for storage of salt, bone meal, cottonseed cake, and rolled barley as well as tools and a stake truck. West of the shop is the **Feed Shed** that was used for grain storage. The Haybarn, Covered Feed Troughs, Feed Shed and Mechanic’s/Feed Barn define the boundaries of a series of small, wooden-fenced corrals through which animals were introduced.

Southwest of the Adobe Barn is the **South Barn** built by Banning Vail, Walter’s son, around 1920. Initially a horse barn, it was used by the Boice family as a blacksmith and repair shop and for equipment and vehicle storage. This structure has two enclosed portions, one on the north side and another on the south, built in later years. The structure is still used for equipment and material storage today. Northwest of the South Barn is a divided concrete **Water Trough**; the Vails designed the Trough to straddle a fence and serve two separate pastures. On a slight rise to the south of the **South Barn** are the **Water Tank** and **Windmill** (Figure 32). They were originally located west of the Adobe Haybarn but were relocated to their present location. The windmill has been restored and repaired by the BLM to its original appearance and function.

Character Area C (Noncontiguous Features Near Main Ranch Area)

This character area consists of two buildings, the **Hired Man’s House** and **Grove House**, and a natural feature, **Empire Gulch**, which provided a perennial water source for the ranch.

The **Heritage Discovery Trail** is a modern footpath built by the BLM in 2008. It passes the **Hired Man’s House**, northeast of the Main Ranch House (Figures 33, 34, and 35). This adobe brick structure was constructed in 1906 as housing for ranch workers and their families. The house is unusual in that the adobe brick wall is unplastered. Today it has a peaked corrugated metal roof with a chimney. Significant deterioration of the adobe walls has occurred and the structure is undergoing a regimen of stabilization and repair. The house is buttressed on the south and east sides to provide structural support. To the north of the Hired Man’s House is a deteriorated water tank made of concrete, metal, and stone (Figure 36).

Northwest of the Main Ranch House is the **Grove House** (Figure 37 and 38). The building is known to have been in existence in 1881 and was probably part of Walter Vail and Herbert Hislop’s original purchase of the homestead (See Figure 58). The adobe structure supports a gabled corrugated metal roof and is located approximately 200 yards west of the New Ranch House. Its front porch faces the nearby grove of cottonwood trees along Empire Gulch. It once served as a residence for Pancho Boice and his family and subsequently by ranch families such as the Barnetts. It is currently in fair to poor condition and awaits stabilization by the Bureau of Land Management. The Grove House is now

accessed by a dirt trail that starts southwest of the New Ranch House. Located in a riparian environment along Empire Gulch, the Grove House is surrounded by juniper (*Juniperus sp.*), cottonwood (*Populus fremontii*), mesquite (*Prosopis velutina*), and sacaton grass (*Sporobolus airoides*). The property features a number of types of fencing and planter boxes. There is a chicken coop up the hill to the southwest. The Grove House is not accessible by the public for safety reasons. South of the Grove House is a pasture that held the valuable bulls owned by the Ranch.

Empire Gulch, a prominent and defining feature of the landscape, extends east and west on the north side of the Ranch (Figures 39 and 40). The ranch headquarters was located here because of the perennial water source and a high groundwater table for wells. Large cottonwood trees line both sides of the watercourse that provides a riparian habitat for wildlife ranging from frogs and fish to birds. The cottonwoods were planted at some time before 1881.

Character Area D (Outlying Noncontiguous Features)

Character Area D includes sites, structures, and landscape features that are noncontiguous and located away from the ranch headquarters. These features are located as far north as Fortynine Wash and as far south as Gardner Canyon. They include the **Agricultural Fields, Dam** (remnant landscape), **Airstrip, Pump House, Orchard** and **Cottonwood Tank**.

Located between BLM roads #6907 and #6901 and due west of the old Cienega Ranch are the **Agricultural Fields** (Figure 41). Fed by Cienega Creek and the high subsurface water table, the area was originally part of an extensive marshland. Archaeological evidence of prehistoric maize farming indicates that many inhabitants have recognized the potential of its rich soils and irrigation waters from Cienega Creek. The historic fields were established by Don Alonzo Sanford in the mid-1870s and were used to grow hay, alfalfa, and other crops until 1977. All later ranch owners have effected changes to the site in their attempts to control the Creek to suit their purposes. The area was significantly altered in 1972 when Sam Bell, owner of the Cienega Ranch, excavated a diversion ditch (The Grand Canal) (Figure 42). The excavated soil was used to create the Cienega Ranch road, elevated above the fields, that now separates the fields from the Canal. The fields are no longer in agricultural use; however, the BLM has designated a small area at the north end as a Camping Site.

Less than a quarter mile south of the present Cienega Creek crossing on BLM Road #6901 is the site of a former **Dam** used to redirect water to the fields. In 1998 the Bureau of Land Management, as part of a stream restoration project designed to restore natural ecosystem functions, removed the Dam, three dikes, and a levee. Now in place is a system of “cross-vein weirs” which allows Cienega Creek (Figure 43) to flow freely. The road crossing was rebuilt as a simple concrete slab and now intersects the Creek further north.

Less than a mile Northeast of the Empire Ranch Headquarters and on the north

side of BLM Road# 6901 is the **Airstrip**. Approximately ½ mile in length, the Airstrip was constructed by the Boice family who used their plane to travel between the various family ranch holdings (Figure 44). The BLM has closed access to the airstrip and now uses the area as a modern campground and restroom facility.

The **Pump House** is a small brick building with a simple peaked roof (Figure 45), is located 175 yards northeast of the intersection of Empire Gulch and BLM Road #6901, and covers an unused pump system for the adjacent well. The Gulf American Corporation constructed the Pump House and excavated its well in 1970 to provide water for its proposed residential community development.¹ GAC clearly chose this location for its well and associate Pump House because of the Gulch's perennial water supply.

The **Orchard** is also associated with Empire Gulch and the Ranch's use of its perennial waters. The historic Orchard was sited 2/3 mile east of the Ranch Headquarters on both the north and south sides of the Gulch. Walter Vail developed the Orchard in 1892 and built an irrigation ditch to convey water from the Gulch to the fields. The Orchard contained hundreds of fruit trees as well as fields of barley, corn, and alfalfa. The Orchard provided the ranch inhabitants with fruit; any surplus produce was sold to local groceries. Later in the early 1900s, Gulch water was rerouted via a 6" steel pipeline to an intermediate 50' double-sided concrete trough. The trough supported separate pastures for cattle and horses; excess water then overflowed from the trough to irrigate the Orchard below. Figure 46 is a historic photo illustrating the Orchard. Orchard artifacts include old tree stumps, remnants of the steel pipeline, and the unused 50' concrete trough (Figure 49).

The **Cottonwood Tank** is another noncontiguous site and is located three miles southeast on BLM Road# 6900 (Figure 47). The site has been an important water source since the late 1800s. Walter Vail purchased the area in 1883 to control access and to provide water for his cattle. This tank is typical of the many developed watering tanks dispersed across the ranch. The site contains a well, storage reservoir and two open stock ponds. In 2010, the BLM with the help of volunteers divided a single stock pond into two. The southern pond is sequestered by an iron fence to provide habitat for native species, while the lower one remains accessible to cattle. If the water level falls, a pump feeds water into the lower pond from the reservoir. Diverse tree and grass species grow along the banks, a result of the BLM's environmental restoration projects. A photograph of a historic cattle-watering tank is illustrated in Figure 48.

Many smaller features can be found throughout the ranch landscape. These features were constructed out of the necessity born from ranching and raising a family in a remote, arid region and are representative of many eras of ranching on the Empire Ranch (Figures 49-55).

¹ Boice, Steve. October 23, 2016. Personal communication; Gerald Korte. October 23, 2016. Personal Communication.

History: The Empire Ranch, situated in the Cienega Valley in southeastern Arizona, was one of the most economically successful, long-lived, and well known ranch operations in the Southwest. That longevity and success was partly the result of the courage and ingenuity of two ranching families during the 19th and 20th centuries and partly a consequence of the unusual landscape and its natural resources upon which the ranch operations were dependent. The beauty of the grasslands, the abundance of water within the desert environment, and the fertility of its soils attracted prehistoric communities over 3,000 years ago. Today they continue to inspire organizations from federal agencies to non-profits who collaborate to preserve the historic and ecological resources and to use that landscape wisely.

Early reports by explorers travelling through the Cienega Valley describe a landscape populated with bountiful grasses. Waters emerged from numerous springs from the surrounding mountain ranges as well as throughout the grasslands below. Those springs fed extensive marshlands (cienegas) and some open, moving waters. Even three decades following settlement, the Cienega Valley remained broad and flat without entrenchment so common in other grazed grasslands. Residents drove their wagons and cars across Cienega Creek without the need for crossing structures.² The rich landscape produced beef, wool, hay, grains, fruits and vegetables for those early settlers.

The original Empire Ranch was homesteaded in the early 1870s and later purchased by Walter Vail in 1876. Vail had numerous business partners who provided financial assistance and advice. However, it was the tightly knit, supportive, three generations of the Vail family who succeeded in creating and maintaining the Empire as a ranching, mining, and land-holding operation lasting over 50 years. In 1928, the Empire was sold to the Boice family of the Chiricahua Ranches Company.

The Boices, Henry, Charles, and Frank, were another highly successful, generationally interdependent, ranching family. Like the Vails, the Boice family had acquired numerous ranch lands in the Southwest. And like the Vails, the Boices carefully managed their herds among the different ranches in order to protect their grass resources. However, the Great Depression, droughts, and use restrictions on Forest Service lands seriously challenged the enterprise and initiated the dissolution of the company and divestment of many ranch parcels. In 1969, the Boice family sold the much-reduced Empire Ranch to a residential developer, GAC Properties. Cattle grazing, however, continued on the Empire's ranchlands under a series of lease agreements.

Over the next two decades, the Empire was transferred twice in rapid succession. In 1988, the historic ranch lands were returned to public ownership once again when they were acquired by the Bureau of Land Management. Today the BLM,

² Frank W Eddy, Maurice E. Cooley, Paul S. Martin and Bruce B. Huckell. "Cultural and Environmental History of Cienega Valley Southern Arizona." Anthropological Papers of the University of Arizona, # 43. Tucson, University of Arizona Press, 1983: 6.

in cooperation with federal, state and local agencies and university and non-profit organizations, manages the landscape as the Las Cienegas National Conservation Area, so designated by Congress in 2000. Las Cienegas is nationally recognized as a premier example of scientifically based adaptive management. The BLM continues the historic tradition of cattle grazing, is restoring important ecological components within the Valley, has preserved the original historic ranch buildings and, at the same time, keeps the stunning grasslands open for public enjoyment and recreation.

Early Homesteaders in the Cienega Valley

Don Alonzo Sanford settled in the Cienega Valley in the early 1870s in Township 18 South Range 17 East, Section 23, at the confluence of Wood, Stevenson, and Cienega Creeks.³ A canny businessman, Sanford invested in land, mines, built properties, and livestock, including both sheep and cattle.⁴ Sanford's two brothers also came to Pima County; Franklin claimed land two miles south of Don in the area now known as the "Agricultural Fields." Denton acquired ranchlands 20 miles south in the Sonoita Valley. Once established on Cienega Creek, Don Sanford brought his fiancé, Louisa Bloxton, and two of her brothers, John and Robert, to join his Cienega settlement in 1874. All homesteaded or purchased lands along the Creek and claimed water rights. Their choice of claims provided the family with some of the richest grazing and tillable lands within the Valley.⁵ Their family control of land and water essentially excluded any competing ranching enterprise in the area. An 1874 General Land Office map of Township 18 South Range 17 East in the Cienega Valley identifies the location of the Sanford Ranch and buildings adjacent to Cienega Creek in Section 23. (Figure 56).

Under federal contract, Sanford provided substantial quantities of beef and barley to nearby Forts Huachuca and Lowell and to the San Carlos Indian reservation.⁶ By 1880, he was running 1,000 head of cattle and 23,000 sheep on his lands between the Empire and the Whetstone Mountains as far north as the Pantano Valley.⁷ Sanford used the floodplain of the Cienega Creek to raise feed crops and maintain an extensive orchard of fruit trees.⁸ Sanford apparently watered these agricultural lands from an irrigation system of his own construction.⁹

Edward Nye Fish was another enterprising pioneer businessman.¹⁰ Like Sanford, Fish invested in a variety of industries including cattle ranching, horse breeding, mining, freighting and trading. Fish also recognized the value of the natural

³ Theodore H. White, General Land Office Map. Township 18 South Range 17 East, Gila and Salt River Meridian, October 1874.

⁴ Don Alonzo Sanford Papers, MS 451. University of Arizona Special Collection Library, Tucson AZ.

⁵ Arizona Weekly Star, August 15, 1880.

⁶ Sanford Papers, Box 36, Folder 7.

⁷ Jay J. Wagoner. "The Cattle Industry in Southern Arizona, 1540-1940." Social Science Bulletin, University of Arizona. Tucson, University of Arizona Press, 1952: 41.

⁸ Sanford Papers, Box 42, Folder 3.

⁹ James E. Ayres, Laurie V. Slawson, and Mark E. Sullivan. "A Cultural Resources Overview of the Cienega Creek Natural Preserve." Pima County Natural Resources, Tucson AZ, 1994. Unpublished Document.

¹⁰ Edward Nye Fish, Hayden Files, Arizona Historical Museum Archives, Tucson AZ.

resources available in the Cienega Valley. In the late 1860s, Fish and neighbor Thomas Gardner, cut lumber at their sawmill on the nearby slopes of the Santa Rita Mountains to sell in Tucson.¹¹ By 1871, Fish had purchased, and was probably living in, the original four-room adobe core of the Empire Ranch's main house.¹²

TH White's 1874 General Land Office survey of Township 19 South Range 17 East locates "Fish's Ranch" just north of the junction of "Sawmill Road" from the Santa Rita Mountains with the Fort Crittenden Road to Tucson.¹³ (Figure 57) White's map notes another road departing northeasterly from Fish's ranch and labelled "Road to Sanford's." This same road later provided access to the Boice family airstrip and is still used today as BLM road #6901.

Two years later, Fish married Maria Wakefield and returned to a more civilized, and probably safer, life in Tucson. Fish allowed Maria's brother, William, to file a homestead claim on the 160-acre parcel surrounding the Empire Ranch house.¹⁴ Wakefield, even before gaining title, sold the property in June 1876 back to Fish who, in turn, sold the ranch in August to Walter L. Vail and Herbert Hislop, two newly arrived investors eager to enter the cattle business. Prior to his sale of the Empire Ranch property, Fish had been grazing 1,200 head of cattle in the Valley.¹⁵

Before Southeast Arizona's acquisition through the Gadsden Purchase, Anglo-American stockmen and entrepreneurs had recognized the stock-raising potential of those 'stirrup-high' grasslands. Expansion of the livestock industry into the area had been hindered, however, by the Chiricahua Apaches who resisted any intrusion into their territory. Apaches had repeatedly raided settlements, hampering any land-use activities and ultimately driving out all other cultural groups. Following the cessation of the Civil War, the U.S. military re-established an active presence in Arizona in order to impose greater security and stability. During a brief interlude from 1872 to 1876, the Chiricahua Apache were contained on their own reservation. That lull in hostilities created the opportunity for the most courageous and resilient stockmen to establish their ranching footholds.

The Homestead Act of 1862 created the first large-scale, legal mechanism for private individuals to acquire personal property. A formal survey of the area was required before a homestead claim could be filed. Prior to that survey, ranchers and farmers would 'squat' on the land they hoped to lay claim to later. Edward Nye Fish and probably Don Sanford did just that; they established a physical

¹¹ It is likely that timbers in the original Ranch core were manufactured from Santa Rita Mountain forests.

¹² Laura Soulliere Harrison and Paul J. Neidinger, "Heart of the Empire" Historic Structure Report, Empire Ranch, Arizona, 1992: 2-4. The original builder of the Main Ranch House is not known. It may not have been Fish.

¹³ Theodore H. White, General Land Office Map. Township 19 South Range 17 East, Gila and Salt River Meridian, October 1874.

¹⁴ Teresita Majewski, Scott O'Mack, Eric J. Means, and Matthew A. Sterner. Statistical Research, Inc. "Adaptive Reuse Plan for the Empire Ranch Headquarters." Technical Report, Tucson, Arizona, 2004:16.

¹⁵ Virginia Flaccus. Empire Ranch Foundation Oral History Interview. August 3, 2002; Harrison and Neidinger, 1992:7.

presence in a location and ‘improved’ the land by their built structures and their farming and ranching activities. That investment on the land was essential in gaining title to it.

Unclaimed lands — the rest of the public domain – were free for anyone to use as they saw fit. Cattle and sheep required water on a daily basis. Most animals were willing to travel a few miles for that necessity. In the West, waters were often limited to widely dispersed springs or cienegas. Ranchers used those distances between watering sites to keep out other livestock from ‘their’ grasslands. By claiming the 160 acres surrounding Empire Spring and Gulch, Fish and subsequent Empire Ranch owners controlled access to 1500 acres of high-quality grass without having to invest in additional infrastructure.¹⁶

The Vail Era

Both Walter Vail and Herbert Hislop were excited not only to gain entry in Arizona’s profitable cattle industry, but also by the quality of the Cienega Valley’s natural resources, especially its grasslands and water. Vail described that landscape in a letter written to his father in 1875.

“[The ranch is] in the middle of a splendid grazing country which is covered with grass the whole season. Mr. Fish’s title only covers 160 acres, but as he has all the water in his section of the country there is little danger of anyone settling there. The nearest water that lasts through the dry season is at least eight miles off, and every way you go for a radius of 15 miles is covered with fine bunch grass which will keep either horses or cattle rowling (sic) fat both winter and summer. . . . I think it is as fine a cattle country as there is anywhere in the world”¹⁷

The Empire Ranch house was constructed near Empire Gulch downstream from Empire Spring and upstream from another unnamed artesian source, two perennial waters that provided for Empire inhabitants and nearby cattle.¹⁸ The house was situated on a small hill offering a substantial view of the grasslands for miles around, an important consideration during periods of Apache aggression. The choice of house site was also important for its access to almost-constant breezes that reduced the risk of malaria carried by mosquitos from standing waters in the cienegas.¹⁹ The original Ranch house was a four-room, thick-walled adobe structure. Vail, Hislop, and a third partner John Harvey built other structures (the Victorian Addition, the Stone Corral, and the Adobe Haybarn) in close proximity to the original house to aid in defense of the site during a possible attack by Apaches.²⁰

A photograph taken in the early 1880s (Figure 58) shows the Gulch, devoid of any shrubs or trees; in the foreground with a small building adjacent is probably

¹⁶ Gregory P. Dowell. “History of the Empire Ranch.” Master’s Thesis, University of Arizona, Tucson AZ, 1978:8.

¹⁷ Edward L. Vail Papers. MS #0827, Folder “Family Papers,” Arizona Historical Society Archives, Tucson AZ.

¹⁸ Empire Gulch is one of the main tributaries of Cienega Creek.

¹⁹ Walter Vail Letter to his father, December 11, 1875. Edward L Vail Paper. MS #0827, Folder “Family Papers,” Arizona Historical Society Archives, Tucson AZ.

²⁰ Dowell, 1978:5.

the Grove House.²¹ That same image (also confirmed by White's map) shows the access road to the Ranch approaching from the Northwest. That road location remained unaltered until 1919 when it was extended southward to circle around the house and instead enter from the east.²²

Despite the continuing threat of Apache attacks, stock raising in southeast Arizona and the Empire Ranch expanded rapidly during the early 1880s. The development of the Southern Pacific Railroad and the New Mexico and Arizona Railroad opened the Southeastern Arizona cattle industry to Midwestern and Eastern markets. As the Vail cattle herds multiplied, other ranchers were eyeing the lush grasslands of the Cienega Valley. Vail family members decided to augment their control of the region through the acquisition of deeded properties. In 1881, Walter Vail filed numerous mill and mining claims on springs in the Empire and Santa Rita mountains. The Vail family purchased the Tom Gardner and Mary Kane Ranches for their access to water in Gardner Canyon; they acquired the Happy Valley Ranch north of the Southern Pacific rail line for its additional grazing ranges. Walter Vail also leased additional rangelands in the Pantano Valley and along the San Pedro river.²³

Another important acquisition by Walter Vail was a cash purchase of a small parcel of land two miles southeast of the ranch in Section 28, T19S R17E.²⁴ The site, known as 'Cottonwood' in 1893, sat at the well-used intersection where the road to Fort Huachuca passed across Gardner Canyon. A small structure, probably associated with a water source, is identified at that crossroad on an 1893 map of Pima County.²⁵ Today that same road, now BLM #6900, from the Empire Ranch leads to the same site, Cottonwood Tank. Cottonwood still operates as an important water source. A well and reservoir provide water to two recently divided ponds that separately supply cattle and wildlife.²⁶

Perhaps the Vails' most strategic move was their purchase of Don Sanford's ranch five miles to the Northeast in 1882.²⁷ That acquisition doubled the Vails' available grasslands within the Cienega Valley, eliminated unwelcome competition from thousands of sheep, provided important farmlands to raise livestock feed, and, most importantly, gained ownership of Cienega Creek surface waters. The Vails' silver mining operation at the Total Wreck site in the Empire Mountains had been stymied by the absence of water to power the ore-processing mill. The Vails extracted water from Cienega Creek and pumped it three miles uphill to the mine. Indeed, the silver revenues from the Total Wreck provided essential funds that financed the continued expansion of the Empire's ranching

²¹ Photograph #A450-1c. Empire Ranch Foundation Collection, circa early 1880s.

²² That cluster arrangement can also be clearly seen on George Roskrug's "Official Map of Pima County, Arizona" in 1893; Harrison and Neidinger, 1992: 33

²³ Dowell, 1978: 23-24.

²⁴ Patent for Cash Sale Land, entry no. 011670, 160 acres in Sections 21 and 28, Township 19 South, Range 17 East, Pima County, Arizona Territory, to Walter L Vail, issued August 8, 1883.

²⁵ George Roskrug, "Official Map of Pima County, Arizona." 1893.

²⁶ Shela McFarlin, Personal Communication, February 27, 2016.

²⁷ Tombstone Weekly Epitaph. November 11, 1882.

and land holding operations beyond Southeast Arizona and into the Mid-West and California.²⁸ Sanford's Ranch buildings were maintained as additional housing for Vail employees and later as a line camp for decades.²⁹

The same fertile marshlands fed by perennial spring waters within the Cienega Valley provided important agricultural opportunities. As early as 1874, hay was harvested in the floodplain for winter feed for livestock.³⁰ The Vails also harvested hay on the Gardner and Sanford ranches.³¹ In the 1890s, the Vails hired Mormon families from St David to cut sacaton grass from the Cienega floodplain. That hay was then stored in the Adobe Haybarn South of the Ranch House.³² At the Sanford Ranch, the Vails continued to use the extensive floodplain; they plowed a number of individual agricultural fields, each of which probably supported different crops.³³

In 1892, Walter Vail expanded his agricultural activities to the riparian area nearer the Ranch. Vail filed a Desert Land claim on bottomlands 2/3 mile east of the corral and adjacent to the Empire Gulch. With a 3/4 mile long ditch he conveyed waters from the Gulch during the spring and summer months. That irrigation system supported 250 fruit trees and annually produced five tons of corn, barley and alfalfa. It also provided stock waters for his horse and the newly weaned calf herds.³⁴

Henry Dojaquez, an employee who worked at the Empire Ranch remembers that in the 1930s during the later Boice era, the Orchard's water was transported from a pump in the Empire Gulch through a pipe down to fields west of the cottonwoods. The pipe filled a 50' long, double-sided trough; the water then overflowed and continued down to the fields. In the 1930s, the Orchard contained peach, pear, and apple trees. According to Dojaquez, the Vails boxed and sold their fruit to local grocery stores. Gerald Korte, an Empire Ranch cowboy, stated that the Orchard was no longer maintained in the 1940s and only a few apple and pear trees had survived.³⁵ Today, evidence of the Orchard is still discernable in the numerous old tree stumps, remnants of pipeline, and the 50' double-sided watering trough..

The Vail family designed a two-sided stock trough that when straddling a fence would supply water to livestock in adjoining fields. Two similar troughs can still be found on the ranch lands, one at the South Barn pasture, the other at a corral near the Cienega Ranch.

²⁸ Dowell, 1978: 18-25.

²⁹ Henry Dojaquez, Empire Ranch Foundation Oral History Interview, June 23, 1992.

³⁰ T.H. White on his 1874 GLO map of T19S R17E identifies a structure labelled "House at Hay Camp" and located halfway between the Empire and Sanford Ranches on Cienega Creek, Section 3 T19S R17E.

³¹ Dojaquez Interview, 1992.

³² Harrison and Neidinger, 1992: 39.

³³ Gerald Korte. Empire Ranch Foundation Oral History Interview, February 28, 2003.

³⁴ Patent for Desert Land Act, entry no 2004, Section 17, Township 19 South, Range 17 East, Pima County, Arizona Territory, to Walter L Vail (filed January 21, 1892) dated 1897.

³⁵ Dojaquez Interview, 1992; Korte Interview, 2003; Majewski et al., Statistical Research, Inc., 2004: B5.

Walter Vail's diversification and expansion of land holdings into other regions of the country came at a critical time in the cattle industry. Repeated droughts in Arizona killed thousands of livestock through starvation and dehydration. Always hoping for rain, many ranchers retained their animals too long on already denuded grasslands. Continuing overuse of the ranges permanently altered those plant communities and reduced the quality and density of the grasses. Other changes in the landscape were occurring at the same time. Expansion of mesquite into the grasslands and flooding and erosion events that initiated down-cutting and dewatering of creeks and tributaries were problems that challenged land managers in the Cienega Valley and beyond. While long-term variations in climate patterns have been contributing factors to landscape-wide changes, alterations initiated by grazing livestock, fire suppression, agricultural activities, well drilling, and water diversions have played a significant role as well.³⁶

In 1896, Vail moved himself and his family to Los Angeles to expand his corporate headquarters beyond the Empire Ranch and shift his business focus to new opportunities in California. Ten years later, Vail was killed by a Los Angeles street car. William Banning Vail, Walter's 4th child, returned to Arizona to manage the Empire until its sale in 1928. At the height of their ownership of the Empire Ranch, the Vail family controlled over one thousand square miles of grasslands extending from the Mexican border to the Rincon Mountains.³⁷

The Boice Era

Charles Gudgell, the Boice brothers' great-grandfather, had established the "greatest Hereford breeding establishment in America." Adapted to the Arizona environment, Herefords became the most improved and universal breed of cattle in the Southwest.³⁸ The Boice family was well known throughout the West for producing high-quality Hereford bulls; they used the Empire Ranch, with its fine grasslands, as the prime breeding location to raise the best Hereford cattle. Frank and Mary Boice took control of the Empire in 1929 after the Ranch had been acquired by the Chiricahua Ranches Company. Frank and Mary continued to manage the Ranch for the Company until they became its sole owners in 1951. Mary Boice was a valued hand at the Ranch; she participated in every aspect of ranch life including roundups, sorting, and shipping. She was also an avid gardener, transforming the previously spare habitat around the main house with lush lawns, shade trees, and flowerbeds of tulips, roses, and irises. In 1940, she and Frank added a swimming pool at the northwest corner of the Adobe Haybarn.³⁹

Frank and Mary's sons, Pancho and Bob, and their families assisted in managing

³⁶ See Jay J. Wagoner ("The Cattle Industry in Southern Arizona, 1540-1940." *Social Science Bulletin*, University of Arizona. Tucson, University of Arizona, 1952) for a detailed history of impacts of livestock grazing. See also Conrad Bahre (*A Legacy of Change: Historic Human Impact on Vegetation in the Arizona Borderlands*. Tucson, University of Arizona Press, 1991) for details of landscape impacts from other human uses in Southern Arizona.

³⁷ Empire Ranch Foundation Docent Manual, Empire Ranch Foundation, January 2015: 5-7.

³⁸ Richard Schaus. "The Hereford Tradition of Arizona's Boices." *American Hereford Journal*. July 1959:1-24.

³⁹ Harrison and Neidinger, 1992: 39.

and operating the Ranch. Pancho and his wife, Sherry, briefly inhabited in the Grove House until the mid-1950s when the New Ranch House was built. In 1950, the Boice family purchased an Officers Quarters house from Fort Huachuca for Bob and his family and moved it to form a western boundary for the Domestic Area.⁴⁰

In the 1930s, ranchers noted with concern the expansion of mesquite's range from its historic limits within washes up onto prime grasslands. That expansion marked a corresponding decline in available forage for livestock. Many hypothesized that the expansion was the result of overgrazing and fire suppression on the ranges. Frank Boice began a program on Empire ranges to control mesquite using arsenic and diesel fuel to poison the shrubs and hand-removal to restore the grasslands.⁴¹ That control program (without the poisons) continues today. The Bureau of Land Management and volunteers have cleared 20,000 acres to improve range quality and to open grasslands for the reintroduction of prairie dogs and pronghorn antelope.⁴²

Unlike the Vails, Frank Boice did not plant crops in Sanford's Agricultural Fields. Instead, he leased those fields to a farmer; Boice retained 20 tons of hay each year as payment. An aerial photograph of the agricultural fields taken in early 1936 shows numerous separate field units, some of which were irrigated by waters diverted from the main flow of Cienega Creek.⁴³ Though Boice did not manage the fields, he was interested in storing water from the Cienega Creek. In the summer of 1936, Boice built a reinforced concrete dam, 55' long and 12' high, across the Creek in the northwest corner of Section 35 T18S R17E. The structure created a large reservoir from which the fields were irrigated. The dam and reservoir lasted only two years, however, before being washed away by one of the largest monsoon floods. Concrete remnants of that dam are still visible on both sides of the Creek channel.⁴⁴

In 1939, the US Forest Service steeply reduced the number of cattle permitted to each rancher on forest ranges. As a consequence, many corporate ranches, including the Chiricahua Ranches Company, which depended upon forest range for seasonal forage, were forced to break up their ranch holdings.⁴⁵ The Boice family sold a number of Empire parcels including the Ingram Ranch south of the Pantano in 1941 and the Andrada Ranch in Davidson Canyon in 1944. One of their last ranch sales was the original Sanford Ranch and Edward Vail's VR Ranch in nearby Rosemont.⁴⁶ Jack Greenway purchased both ranches in 1950 and

⁴⁰ Empire Ranch Foundation Docent Manual, 2005: 5-18.

⁴¹ Frank S. Boice, "A Southwestern Rancher's Viewpoint of Shrub Control." *Journal of Range Management*, 8:103-104. 1955.

⁴² Shela McFarlin, Personal Communication, February 27, 2016.

⁴³ Matthew King, Elizabeth Taddiken, Ron Tiller, and Gita Bodner, 2012. "Revealing the Past to Examine the Present: Compiling and Overlaying Historical Aerial Imagery for the Cienega Creek Watershed and Sonoita Plain; Final Report to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, the Nature Conservancy, Tucson, AZ. July 2012. It is likely that 1936 image was made before the dam was constructed.

⁴⁴ Dojaquez Interview, 1992; Jeffrey Simms, Personal Communication, July 25, 2016.

⁴⁵ Schaus, 1959.

⁴⁶ Edward Vail was Walter Vail's younger brother.

renamed them the Cienega Ranch. Shortly thereafter, Greenway built his ranch headquarters in Section 35 T18S R17E, East of the Agricultural Fields on Cienega Creek. Greenway chose not to produce crops in the Agricultural Fields but instead use them only for pasture.⁴⁷

In 1969, Greenway sold the Cienega Ranch to Sam Bell. According to Gerald Korte, Bell reworked the Agricultural Fields in 1972; he plowed all of the fields to one level and excavated a two-mile-long ditch now called the “Grand Canal.”⁴⁸ Soil excavated from the Canal was used to build the raised roadway (#6901) that parallels the Canal. Monsoon floods frequently caused damage to the crops and Agricultural Fields. Bell created a temporary berm with sandbags at the southern end of the field to divert Cienega Creek floodwaters into the Canal. Immediately downstream of that berm was a road with culvert that crossed the reduced Creek and provided access to the Cienega Ranch. Bell’s redirection of floodwaters initiated significant erosion, Canal enlargement, and other flooding problems near the Agricultural Fields site.⁴⁹

Bell also built a series of earthen and concrete dikes and an earthen levee to manipulate the non-flood waters of Cienega Creek. That water was distributed to the fields to irrigate alfalfa and hay crops. In 1998, the BLM removed the dikes and levee and blocked the flow of water into the Canal. This restoration and stabilization project redirected the Cienega Creek back into its original channel and permitted an unfettered flow of the Creek again.⁵⁰ The marshlands, once extensive even in 1936, have been reduced to small half-acre remnant east of the Canal, as a consequence of this long history of agricultural modifications.⁵¹ The new Creek-crossing roadway was moved downstream ¼ mile and rebuilt as a concrete slab designed to have minimal impact to Creek flows.⁵²

When Frank Boice died in 1956, his son, Pancho, took over the management of the Empire Ranch. In 1972 Pancho’s son, Steve, assumed control.⁵³ Repeated droughts in the 1960s and 1970s added additional challenges to the Empire’s grazing operation. In 1969, Pancho Boice sold the remaining Empire lands to GAC Properties, a residential developer intent on building a community of 180,000 people in the Cienega Valley. While awaiting planning decisions from both Santa Cruz and Pima Counties, GAC Properties leased the Empire grasslands back to Pancho and Steve Boice. That lease benefitted GAC Properties by reducing its tax liability.

The Corporate Era

⁴⁷ Korte Interview, 2003.

⁴⁸ Korte Interview, 2003.

⁴⁹ Jeffrey Simms, Personal Communication, July 8, 2016; Paul Allen, “The Bureau of Land Management Wants to Make the Empire-Cienega Conservation Areas a Special Place for People and Wildlife,” Tucson Citizen, December 26, 1992.

⁵⁰ Bureau of Land Management, “Cienega Creek Stream Restoration Project Environmental Assessment” #AZ-060-98-01; Jeffrey Simms, Personal Communication, July 8, 2016.

⁵¹ King et al., 2012; Jeffrey Simms, Personal Communication, July 25, 2016.

⁵² Bureau of Land Management, 1998.

⁵³ Pancho Boice was killed in an airplane crash in 1973.

GAC Properties purchased the Empire Ranch for its open space, its scenery, and primarily for its water.⁵⁴ The GAC Properties' proposed city was to contain thousands of single- and multi-family units, numerous schools, shopping areas, and open spaces and parks. The planned area of development extended south from the Empire Ranch to the town of Sonoita.⁵⁵ There was no mention of the historic Empire Ranch in the land use plan.⁵⁶

GAC Properties' development proposal, however, encountered substantial resistance from both Santa Cruz and Pima County planning agencies. The anticipated water requirements for so many inhabitants would threaten water supplies; its physical development likewise threatened flood control for Tucson and metropolitan areas of Pima County in the watershed downstream.⁵⁷ When GAC's plans were denied, the Company sold the Empire Ranch in December 1974 to the Anamax Mining Company.⁵⁸ Like GAC Properties, Anamax was interested in the Empire Ranch for its water. Just as the Vails' Total Wreck milling operations 90 years earlier, the mining company planned to extract Cienega Creek groundwaters to develop the enormous copper ore body at Rosemont, East of the Empire Ranch.⁵⁹ In addition to those created earlier by GAC Properties, Anamax began drilling wells throughout the Valley; 88 are now in existence.⁶⁰ Three years later, Anamax acquired the Cienega Ranch from Sam Bell, again for its water and water rights. In doing so, the mine company reunited the Empire and Sanford/Cienega ranchlands that had been divided 27 years earlier.

Anamax, like GAC Properties, leased the ranchlands for cattle grazing. Instead of continuing the arrangement with Steve Boice, however, the mine administration leased the property to John Donaldson and his son, Mac. The Boice family rounded up the last of their purebred Hereford herd for final sale in 1975.⁶¹

Unlike the Vail and Boice families who allowed their animals to roam across the ranchlands between roundups, John Donaldson utilized a rest/rotation method of grazing, keeping the herd as a collective unit and moving them regularly between different pastures throughout the year. Grazed grasses were allowed to rest and recover for extended periods of time. This method of grazing permitted a higher use factor, as much as five times as many cattle as the Empire had traditionally supported.⁶² In 2009, the Donaldson family chose to end their lease of the Empire/Cienega ranchlands. Ian Tomlinson of the Vera Earl Ranch in the

⁵⁴ Harrison and Neidinger, 1992: 38.

⁵⁵ Empire Ranch Foundation Docent Manual, 2005: 5-20.

⁵⁶ Harrison and Neidinger, 1992: 38.

⁵⁷ Thomas Sheridan. 2008. *Landscapes of Fraud: Mission Tumacacori, the Baca Float, and the Betrayal of the O'odham*. Tucson, University of Arizona Press: 214-216

⁵⁸ "The Trade-Off at the Empire Ranch." March 16, 1975. Ephemera file "Arizona – Ranches – Empire." Arizona Historical Society Archives, Tucson AZ.

⁵⁹ "Mine Company Buys Ranch Land." Kingman Daily Miner. January 20, 1977: 3.

⁶⁰ "The Trade-Off at the Empire Ranch." March 16, 1975. Ephemera file "Arizona – Ranches – Empire." Arizona Historical Society Archives, Tucson AZ; Jeffrey Simms, Personal Communication, July 8, 2016.

⁶¹ Empire Ranch Foundation Docent Manual, 2005: 5-22

⁶² Harrison and Neidinger, 1992: 39.

Cienega Valley now holds that lease. Like the Donaldsons, the Tomlinson family uses the rest/rotation method of herding and grazing their cattle.⁶³

The Anamax Mining Corporation nominated the original Empire Ranch building with its two wings to the National Register of Historic Places.⁶⁴ It was approved in May 1975.

The Federal Era

A significant decline in copper prices led Anamax to forgo development of its ore body and divest its Empire/Cienega Ranch holdings. As Anamax searched for a buyer, Pima County, interested in protecting an important water source, considered floating bonds to purchase the property. However, Arizona Congressman Jim Kolbe and Senator Dennis DeConcini were convinced that the ranchlands should be managed at the Federal level. They petitioned the Bureau of Land Management to acquire the property and preserve the remaining marsh and riparian environments along with the threatened fish, animals, and birds dependent on those critical habitats.⁶⁵ In a complicated transaction involving a third party and numerous parcels of land, Anamax traded the Empire, Cienega, and Rose Tree Ranches to the Bureau of Land Management on June 8, 1988. The BLM's acquisition of the 42,000 acres returned the Empire landscape to public ownership and opened opportunities for public access, recreation, and wildlife protection that had not been available for over a century.⁶⁶ While the grasslands had been well cared for, the tasks facing the BLM to restore other environments within the Valley and to preserve the historic Ranch structures were enormous – far beyond the abilities of the Tucson office's limited number of personnel. However, many others throughout Arizona were eager to support the BLM and its objectives. From the outset, the BLM fostered an open approach to its resource management and planning in the Cienega Valley and invited interested parties and organizations to participate.⁶⁷

The Sonoita Valley Planning Partnership, a nonprofit, volunteer association of federal, state, and local agencies, organizations, and private citizens was established in 1995. Its purpose was to assist the BLM “to resolve national and local issues affecting the public lands in the Sonoita Valley.”⁶⁸ In cooperation with the BLM, SVPP began the early efforts to develop the first management plan and to encourage designation of the lands as Las Cienegas National Conservation Area, finally established in 2000.

⁶³ Empire Ranch Foundation Docent Manual, 2005: 4-11.

⁶⁴ Marjorie Wilson. 1975. National Register of Historic Places Inventory – Nomination Form: Empire Ranch. U.S. Dept. of Interior, National Park Service. There have been numerous recommendations to extend the period of significance and increase the level of significance for the Ranch.

⁶⁵ Paul Allen. “Preserving Empire.” Tucson Citizen, December 2, 1992; Chris Limberis. “Anamax to Swap Empire, Cienega for BLM Land.” Arizona Daily Star, December 12, 1987.

⁶⁶ Pete Cowgill. “BLM Lands for Recreation, Wildlife.” Arizona Daily Star, September 22, 1991.

⁶⁷ Bureau of Land Management, “Approved Las Cienegas Resource Management Plan and Record of Decision,” Tucson Field Office AZ, US Department of Interior, Bureau of Land Management, 2003: 3; Jeffrey Williamson. Vimeo Interview, June 2010. <https://vimeo.com/16782239>.

⁶⁸ BLM, 2010: 3.

The Empire Ranch Foundation was established in 1997 to assist the BLM with the protection and preservation of the historic ranch, its buildings and structures. The Foundation raises funds and organizes volunteers to complete preservation projects and share the history of the ranch with the public in a variety of educational activities. In 1999 the BLM, in cooperation with the Empire Ranch Foundation, was granted \$95,000 from the Department of the Interior's Save America's Treasures program to begin the structural stabilization and material preservation on the 120 year-old buildings.⁶⁹

The Cienega Watershed Partnership, founded in 2005 as a 501(3)c, was an expansion of and replacement for the Sonoita Valley Planning Partnership. CWP facilitates cooperative action across the Cienega region and its many jurisdictions in order to more effectively implement cultural and natural resource management plans. Its partners include the BLM, The Nature Conservancy, Pima Area Governments, Appleton-Whittell Research Ranch, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Coronado National Forest, Arizona Fish and Game, Empire Ranch Foundation, other non-profits, and numerous individuals who live and work in the greater watershed. These stakeholders now participate in collaborative adaptive management and raise funds to protect this larger landscape.⁷⁰

What began as a handful of homesteaders and ranchers in a challenging but ecologically rich landscape 140 years ago has evolved to become an interdependent community sustaining one of the most successful collaborations in adaptive management. Having been carefully husbanded for so many decades, those landscape resources still shine. The values that drew the original and subsequent ranching families to the Empire's grasslands and the Cienega Valley inspire the same passions in those who preserve those traditions and landscapes today.

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⁶⁹ Paul Allen. "Ranch's Historic HQ to be Restored." Tucson Citizen, June 7, 1999.

⁷⁰ Williamson Interview, 2010.

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First Place Winner - 2016 HALS Challenge: Documenting National Register Listed Landscapes



Figure 1. Location of Empire Ranch in Arizona. Helen Erickson, 2016.

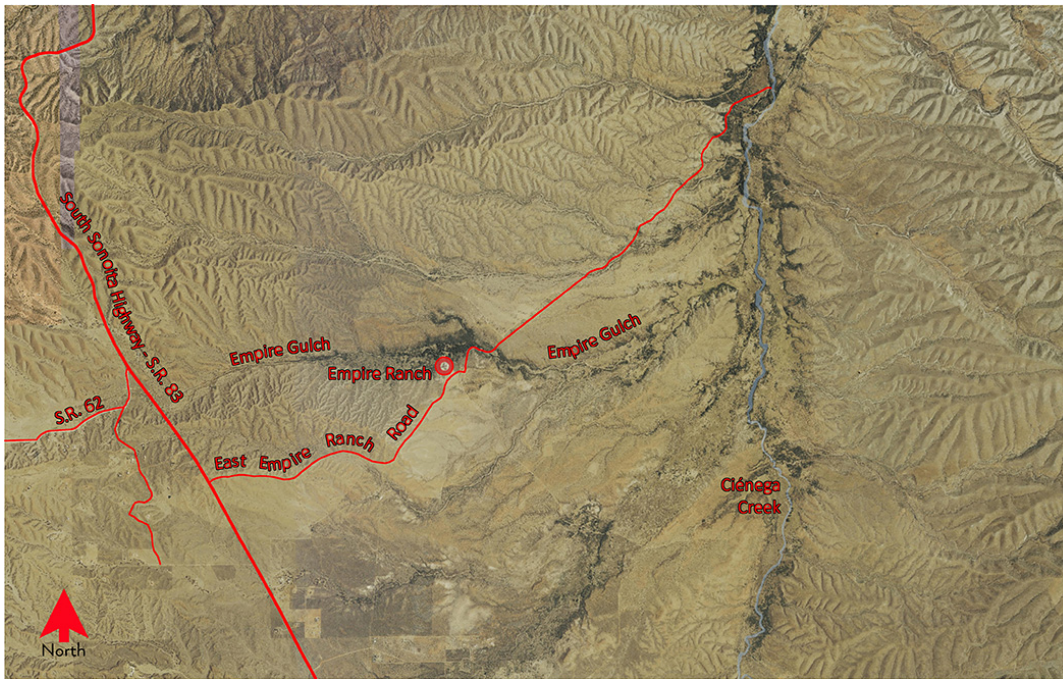


Figure 2. Empire Ranch Location. Pima County (AZ) GIS with Overlay by Helen Erickson, 2016.



Figure 3. Rolling Grasslands of the Empire Ranch and Mustang Mountains. View Looking Southeast. Gina Chorover, 2016.

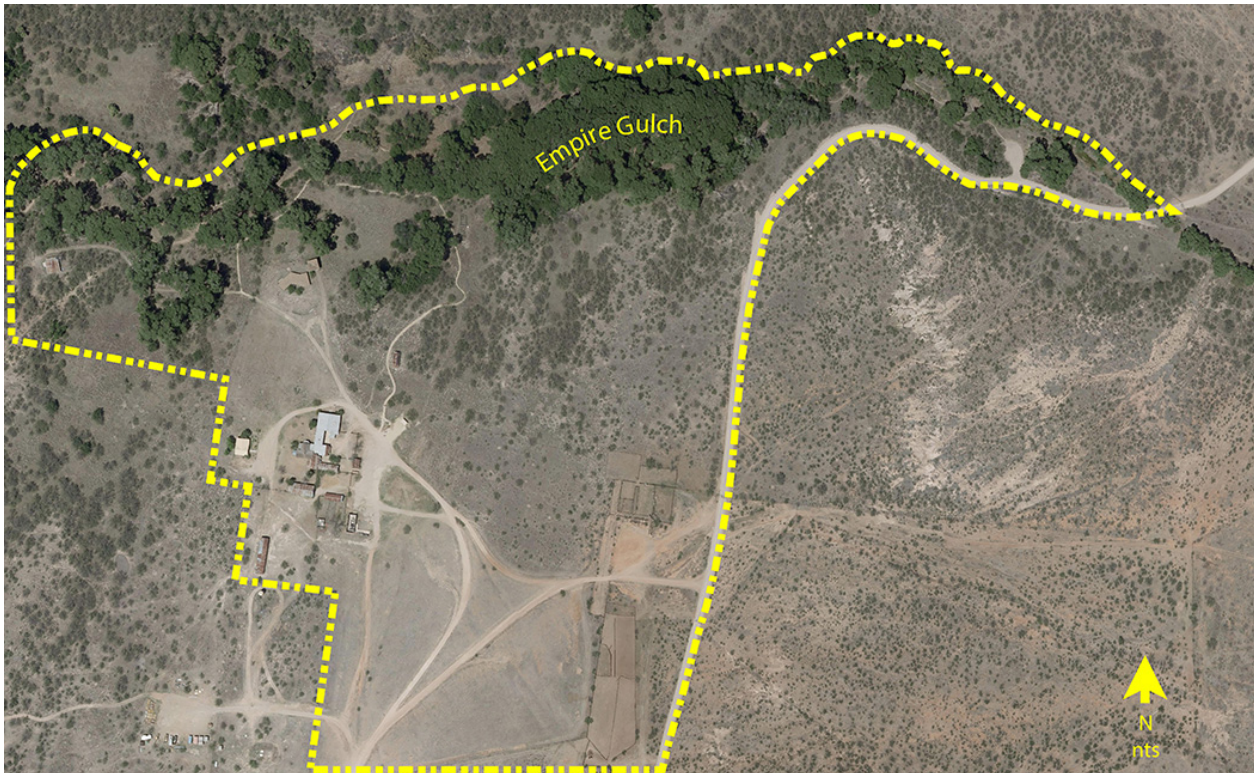


Figure 4. Boundary for Main Ranch Headquarters Area. Pima County (AZ) GIS. Map Overlay by Helen Erickson, 2016.

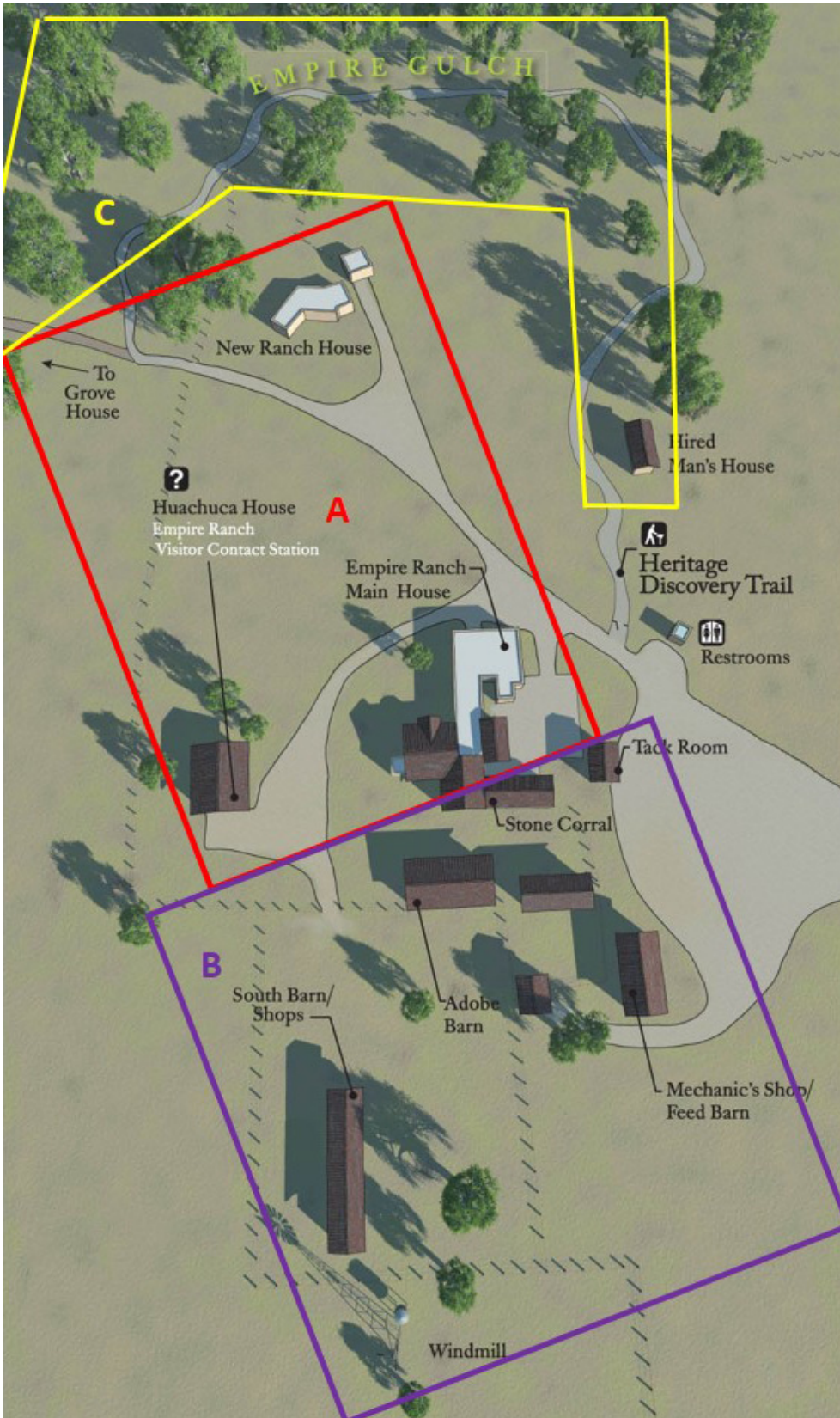


Figure 5. Main Ranch Character Areas A, B & C. Map Courtesy of Ormsby and Thickstun Interpretive Design. Overlay by Gina Chorover, 2016.

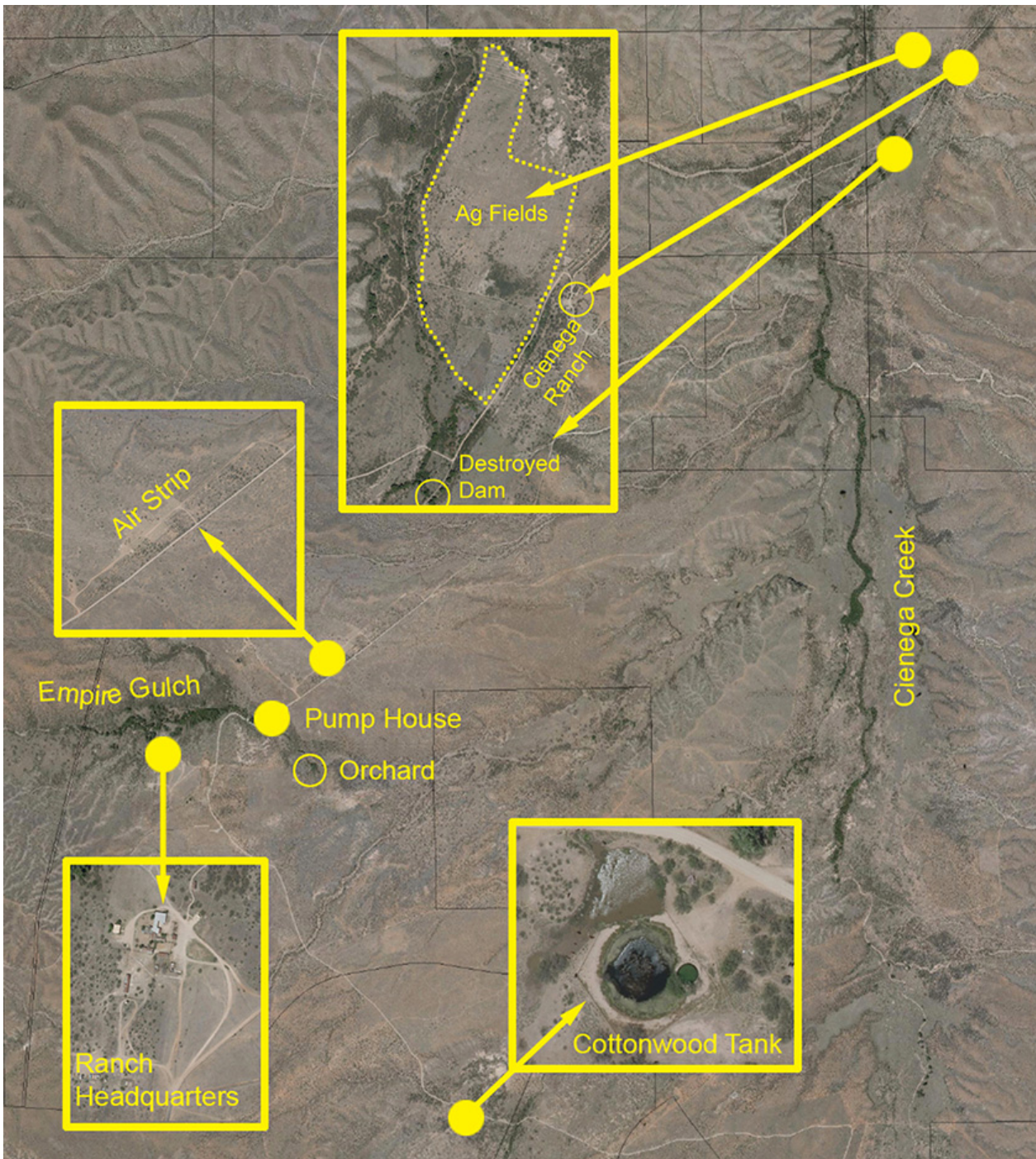


Figure 6. Empire Ranch Landscape Areas. Pima County (AZ) GIS. Map overlay produced by Helen Erickson based on information from Steve Boice, Jeff Simms, Shela McFarlin, and Gerald Korte, 2016.



Figure 7. View of Main Empire Ranch House Area Facing West. Taira Newman, 2016.



Figure 8. Empire Ranch Area Facing West. Circa 1900. Courtesy of the Empire Ranch Foundation (A300-107b).



Figure 9. Main Ranch House with Original Ranch House (left) and Victorian and Children's Additions (right) Facing East. Gina Chorover, 2016.



Figure 10. Main Ranch House, Facing East. Circa 1920. Courtesy of the Empire Ranch Foundation (A240-1c).



Figure 11. North Yard with Victorian Addition and Stump of Chinaberry Tree. View Looking South. Abrar Alkadi, 2016.

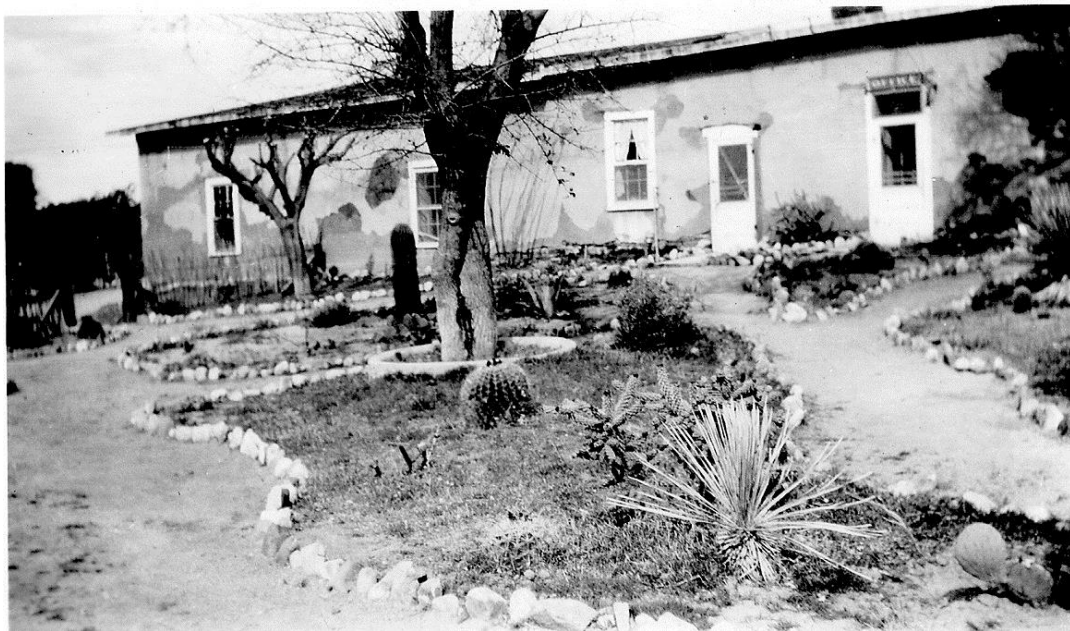


Figure 12. Cactus Garden in North Yard. Circa 1931. View Looking Southeast. Courtesy of the Empire Ranch Foundation (B203-05).



Figure 13. View of Bay Window of Victorian Addition with Lush Landscaping. Date Unknown. Courtesy Empire Ranch Foundation (B350-97).



Figure 14. South Yard with Children's Addition and Screened-In Porch Right. View Looking North. Abrar Alkadi, 2016.



Figure 15. West View of Victorian Addition and Children's Addition. Circa 1880s. Photographer Edward Vail. Courtesy Empire Ranch Foundation (Vail Album 1, #10).

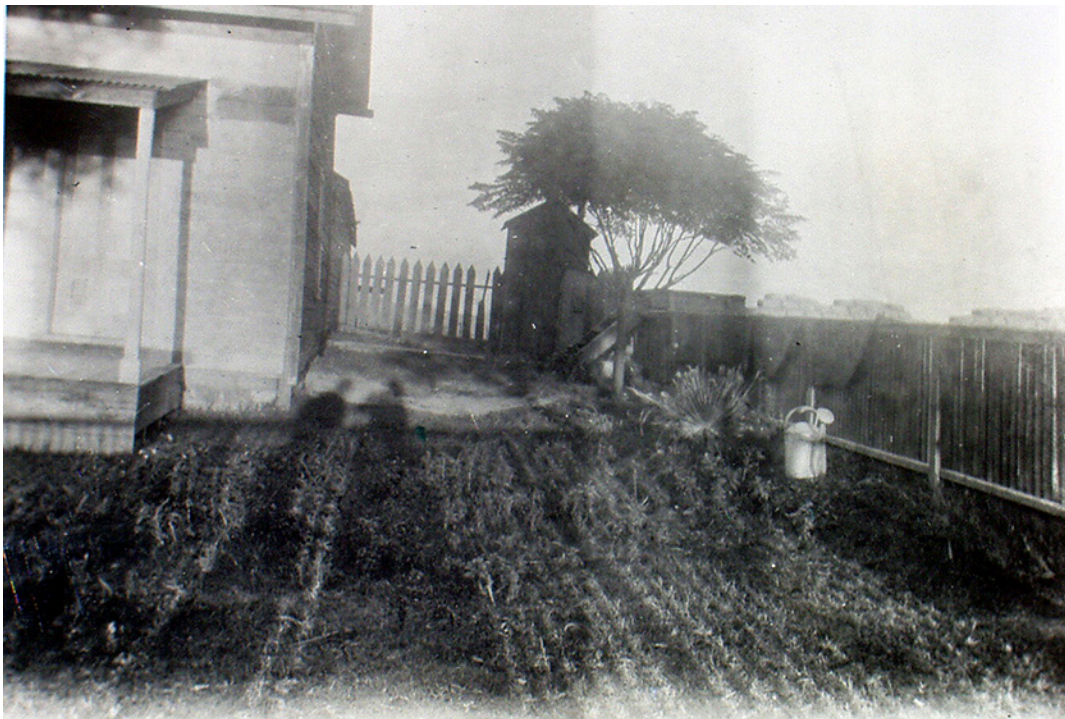


Figure 16. View of Garden South of Victorian Addition Looking East. Circa 1900. Courtesy Empire Ranch Foundation (A500-100a).



Figure 17. Garden and Pool, Looking South from Master Bedroom with Water Tank in Background. Circa 1950. Courtesy Empire Ranch Foundation (B300-049a).



Figure 18. Remains of Concrete Swimming Pool in South Yard, View Looking East. Robin Pinto, 2016



Figure 19. Fountain in South Yard with Adobe Haybarn in Background. View Looking Southeast. Abrar Alkadi, 2016.



Figure 20. Child in Garden in South Yard with Fountain. Circa 1943. Courtesy Empire Ranch Foundation (B201-04).



Figure 21. Huachuca House and Empire Ranch Visitor's Center. View Looking West. Abrar Alkadi, 2016.



Figure 22. The New Ranch (or Pancho's) House, Facing North, with Empire Gulch and Cottonwoods in Rear. Robin Pinto, 2016.



Figure 23. Stone Retaining Wall and Garage on North Side of New Ranch House. Kathryn McKinney, 2016.



Figure 24. Water Spigot South Side of the New Ranch House. Jessica Estrada, 2016.



Figure 25. 1870 Stone Corral, Roof Structure Supported by Rough-Hewn Logs. View Looking East. Gina Chorover, 2016.



Figure 26. Stone Corral (Center), Back of Cowboy Cook Wing on Right, Mechanic's Barn/Feed Shed (Left). View Looking South. Heather Havelka, 2016.

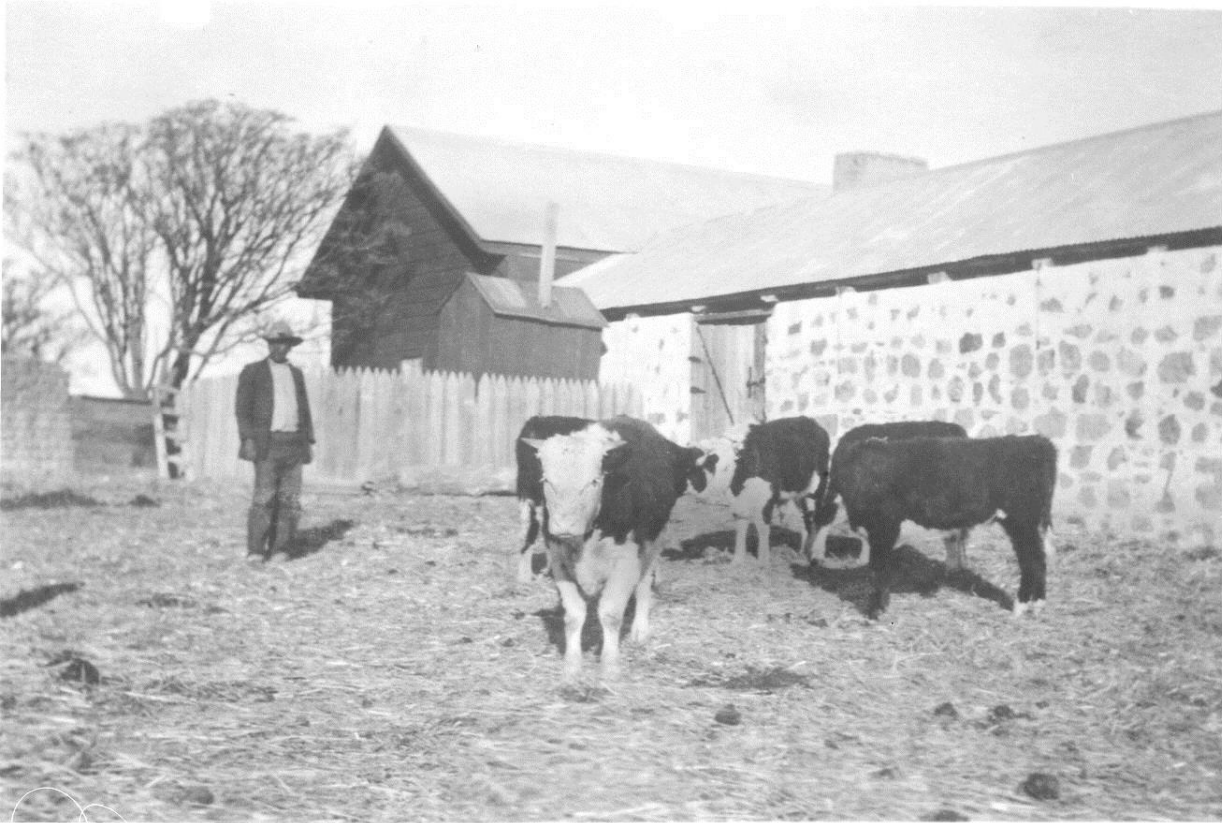


Figure 27. Cattle in Front of South Side of Stone Corral. View Looking Northwest. Circa 1920. Courtesy Empire Ranch Foundation (A121-1a).



Figure 28. Exterior of Tack Room, Facing East. Abrar Alkadi, 2016.



Figure 29. Loading Chute on South Side of Tack Room, Facing East. Abrar Alkadi, 2016.



Figure 30. Adobe Haybarn, Right; Covered Feed Trough with Corrals, Left; South Barn in Background. View Looking Southwest. Taira Newman, 2016.



Figure 31a. House Corral near SE Corner of Original Building with Adobe Corral Wall. Circa 1880s. Photographer Edward Vail. Courtesy Empire Ranch Foundation (Vail Album 1, #4).



Figure 31b. Facing West, Left to Right, Windmill, Water Tank, and South Barn. Taira Newman, 2016.



Figure 32. Modern Cattle Water Trough, Water Tank and Windmill. View looking South. Taira Newman, 2016.



Figure 33. Hired Man's House, Facing Northeast. Gina Chorover, 2016.



Figure 34. Plywood and Posts Used to Support Unstable Adobe Brick Wall. Taira Newman, 2016.



Figure 35. Restored South Façade of the Hired Man's House. Jessica Estrada, 2016.



Figure 36. Remains of Concrete Structure near the Hired Man's House. Jessica Estrada, 2016.



Figure 37. East Façade and Front Yard of the Grove House. Kathryn McKinney, 2016.



Figure 38. Grove House Looking North Towards Empire Gulch. Jessica Estrada, 2016.



Figure 39. Water in Empire Gulch near Grove House, Heritage Trail on the Left. Kathryn McKinney, 2016.



Figure 40. Mature Cottonwoods along the Empire Gulch. Kathryn McKinney, 2016.



Figure 41. Agricultural Fields. View looking West. Robin L Pinto, 2016.



Figure 42. Grand Canal, Water Diversion Remains, on the East Side of Agricultural Fields and Raised Road. Looking Northeast. Nicole Lavelly, 2016.



Figure 43. Cienega Creek near Agricultural Fields. View South. Robin Pinto, 2016.



Figure 44. Airstrip, Facing North. Nicole Lavelly, 2016.



Figure 45. Pump House, North of Empire Gulch. View looking West. Nicole Lavelly, 2016.



Figure 46. Bill Vail, Historic Orchard in Background, and Barley Field in Foreground. Circa 1925. Courtesy of Empire Ranch Foundation (A067-2)..



Figure 47. Panorama of Cottonwood Tank with the Open Restored Wildlife Habitat Area. Nicole Lavelly, 2016.



Figure 48. Edward Vail's VR Ranch Water Tank. Circa 1890s. Courtesy of the Empire Ranch Foundation (A448-1A).



Figure 49. Double-Sided Concrete Watering Trough at Orchard. Robin Pinto, 2016.



Figure 50. Gas Pump on Southwest Side of Adobe Haybarn. Gina Chorover, 2016.



Figure 51. Remains of Wooden Feed Trough, South Side of Adobe Haybarn. Gina Chorover, 2016.



Figure 52. Water Tank or Pool, North Side of the New Ranch House. Jessica Estrada, 2016.



Figure 53. Planting Boxes, North Side of the Grove House. Jessica Estrada, 2016.



Figure 54. Remains of a Chicken Coop, Southwest Side of the Grove House. Jessica Estrada, 2016.



Figure 55. Old Ranch Equipment near Main Ranch Area. Heather Havelka, 2016.

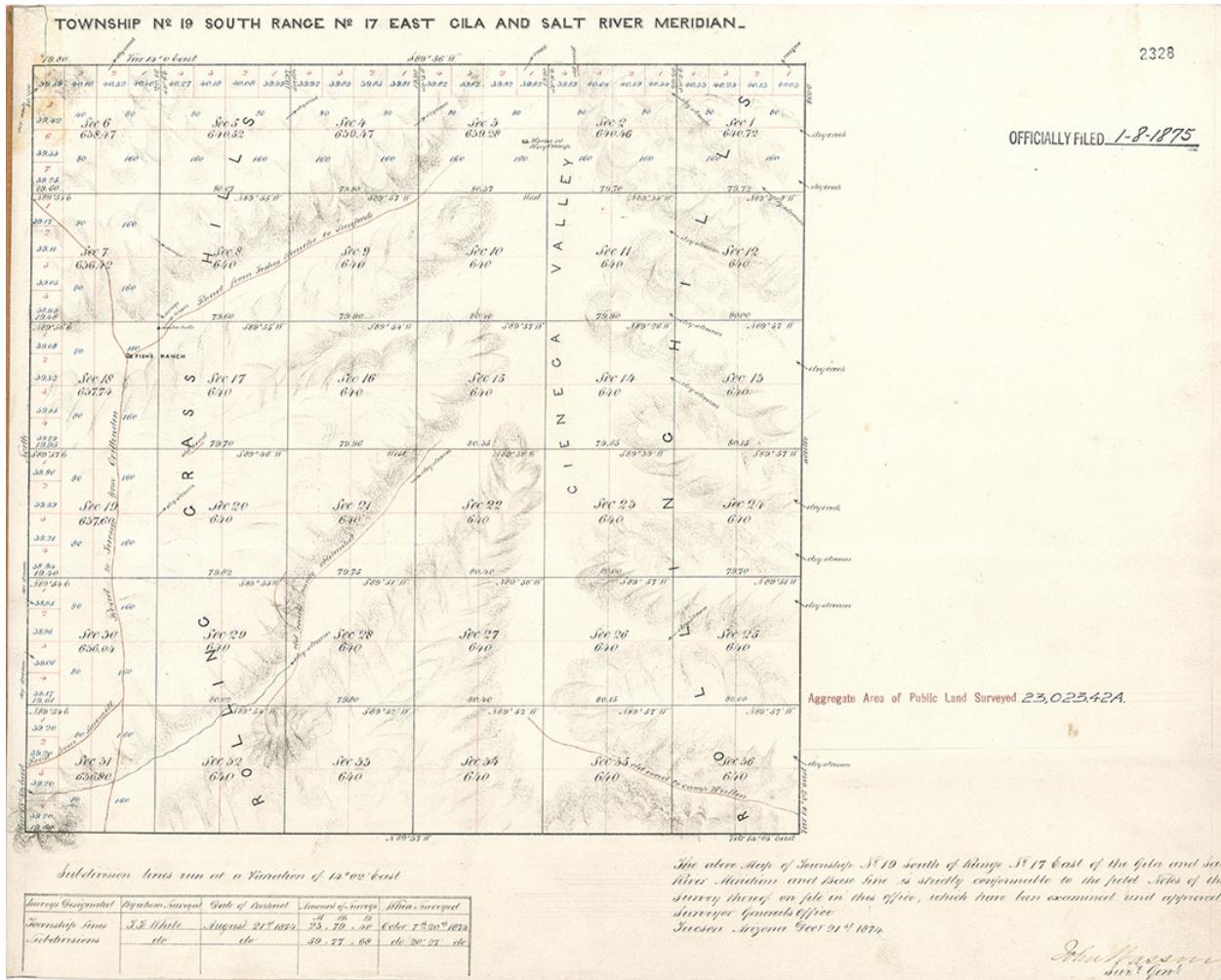


Figure 56. An 1874 General Land Office Map of Township 18 South Range 17 East in the Cienega Valley Identifies the Location of the Sanford Ranch and Buildings Adjacent to Cienega Creek in Section 23. www.glorerecords.blm.gov

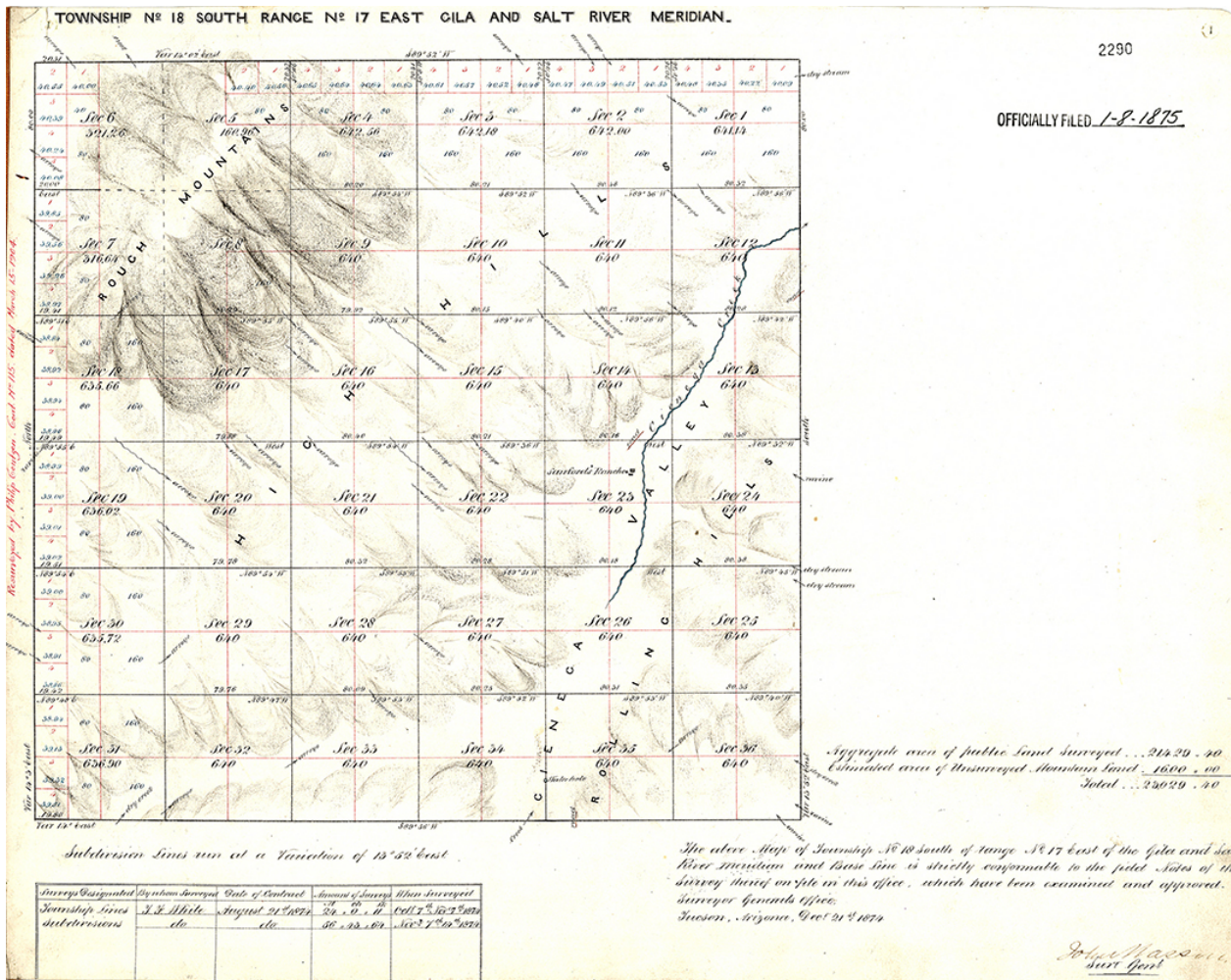


Figure 57. TH White's 1874 General Land Office Map T19S R17E Identifies the Early Establishment of the Empire Ranch (Fish's Ranch) and Other Improvements.
 www.glorerecords.blm.gov



Figure 58. Empire Ranch in the Early 1880s Surrounded by Open Grassland. Original Ranch House (left), the Victorian Addition (center), and the Adobe Haybarn and Water Tank (right rear). Original Grove House (right front) Resides Near the Open Water of the Unforested Empire Gulch. The Road Traverses the Ranch behind the Grove House. Courtesy of the Empire Ranch Foundation (A450-1c).

Appendix A Empire Ranch Eras*

Edward Nye Fish era, 1871–1876. From Fish's first settlement of the Empire Ranch to his sale of the property to Walter Vail and Herbert Hislop.

Vail-Hislop-Harvey era, 1876–1878. From Vail and Hislop's purchase of the Empire Ranch to Hislop's return to England. John Harvey became a partner several months after Vail and Hislop purchased the ranch. The original four-room adobe was improved by adding windows and doors to existing openings and by plastering the interior walls.

Vail-Harvey era, 1878–1884. John Harvey married in 1878 and built a house at the ranch for his wife. The house probably consisted of Rooms 22 and 23 of the Victorian Addition, and perhaps also Room 20. Vail and his wife Margaret bought the house from Harvey in 1881, when Harvey and his wife left the ranch. Vail built or at least modified Room 20 for Margaret. Most of the other adobe rooms were built in this era (Rooms 8–19).

Vail Expansion era, 1884–1896. Vail's interests in the cattle industry and other enterprises expanded greatly in this period, and the Ranch House served as his base of operations. During this period, the wood-frame Children's Addition (Rooms 24–27) was built, and earthen roofs were replaced with wooden gable roofs. In 1896, Vail left the Empire for Los Angeles in order to turn his attention more fully to growing holdings in California.

Vail Company era, 1896–1928. After Walter Vail's departure, changes continued to be made to the house, especially after the arrival of William Banning Vail in 1907 and his marriage in 1913. The master bathroom (Room 29) was added, concrete floors were added, the Ranch Hand's House (Building N) was built, and the main house and Rear Addition (Rooms 10–12, 14, and 17) were reroofed with rolled or corrugated metal roofing.

Boice era, 1928–1969. The Boice era extends from the purchase of the ranch by the Chiricahua Cattle Company to its sale by the Boice family to the Gulf American Corporation. When Frank Boice became sole owner of the Empire in 1951, the Victorian Addition (Rooms 19–23) and kitchen (Room 17) were remodeled.

Corporate era, 1969–1988. The Boice family continued to operate the ranch under a lease until 1975, when the Anamax Mining Company purchased the ranch from the Gulf American Corporation. The Donaldson family then began to lease the ranch. In this period, no additions were made to the house, and the condition of the house declined.

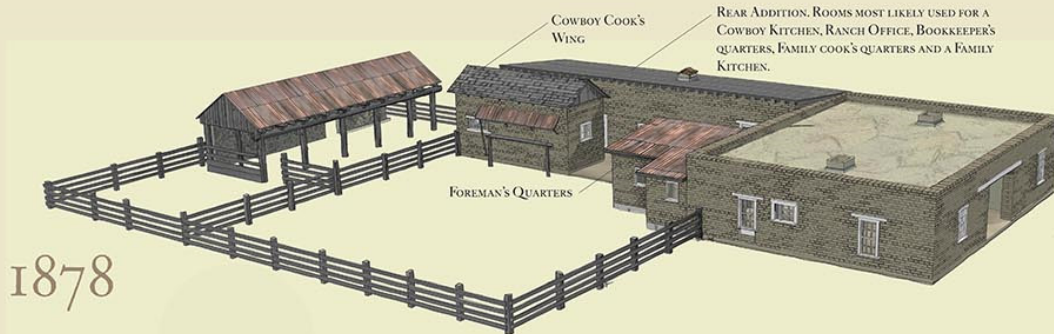
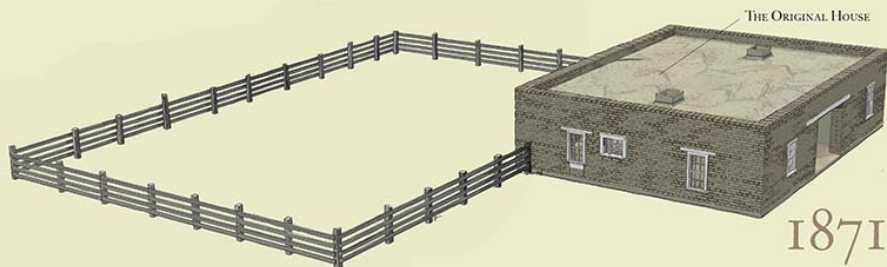
Bureau of Bureau of Land Management era, 1988–present. The BLM acquired the ranch and administered it as the Empire-Cienega Resource Conservation Area. In 2000, the ranch became part of the Las Cienegas National Conservation Area. Efforts to stabilize the house began in earnest in 1998 and continue today.

*Excerpted from Majewski, Teresita, Scott O'Mack, Eric J. Means, and Matthew A. Sterner, Adaptive-Reuse Plan for the Empire Ranch Headquarters. Statistical Research, Inc. Technical Report 03-64, June 11, 2004.

Appendix B
Timeline of Empire Ranch Development. Courtesy of Ormsby and Thickstun Interpretive Design.

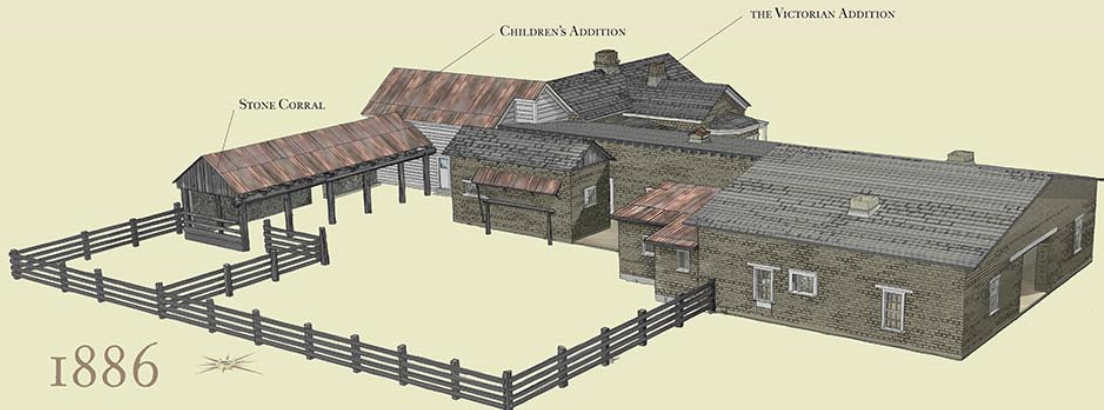
EMPIRE RANCH HEADQUARTERS

The Empire Ranch has been a working cattle ranch since the 1870s. The ranch headquarters you see today has undergone several phases of expansion, particularly in the late 1800s.



Between 1876 and 1878, Vail and Hislop purchased more land and livestock. When Hislop left in 1878, Walter Vail bought Hislop's share and continued to expand with his other partner, John Harvey. The five rooms of the rear addition were built, adding a kitchen, offices, and living quarters.

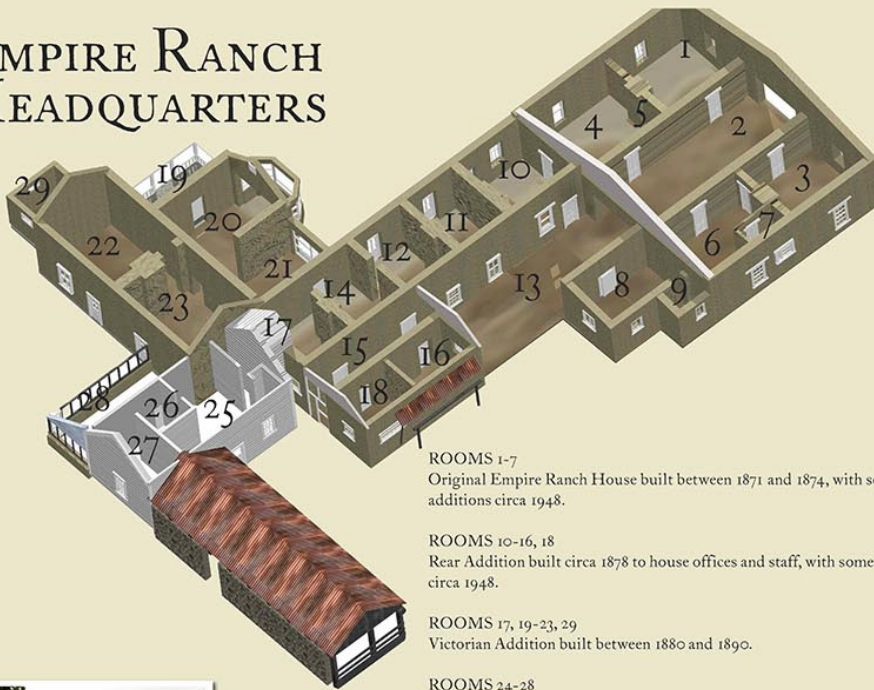
John Harvey built a separate three-room house with a Victorian gabled roof for his bride, Alice. They married in 1881 and only lived in the house a few months. Harvey sold the house and its contents for \$1,000 to Walter Vail in 1881.



Walter Vail's success in the cattle business from 1884 to 1896 led to an expansion of the ranch's structures. During this period, the Children's Addition was added to accommodate Walter's growing family, and

the earthen roofs were replaced with wooden gabled roofs. Walter's son, William Banning Vail, added a bathroom and concrete floors to the Victorian Addition circa 1900.

EMPIRE RANCH HEADQUARTERS



ROOMS 1-7
Original Empire Ranch House built between 1871 and 1874, with some modern additions circa 1948.

ROOMS 10-16, 18
Rear Addition built circa 1878 to house offices and staff, with some modern additions circa 1948.

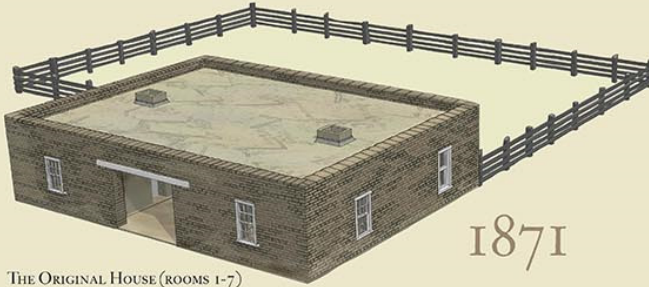
ROOMS 17, 19-23, 29
Victorian Addition built between 1880 and 1890.

ROOMS 24-28
Children's Addition, added circa 1886, the only portion of the house constructed of wood frame.

Empire Ranch Headquarters was the center of life for numerous families throughout several eras. Historical photographs allow us to better envision the lifestyles of the people that lived here.



EMPIRE RANCH HEADQUARTERS ROOM USES

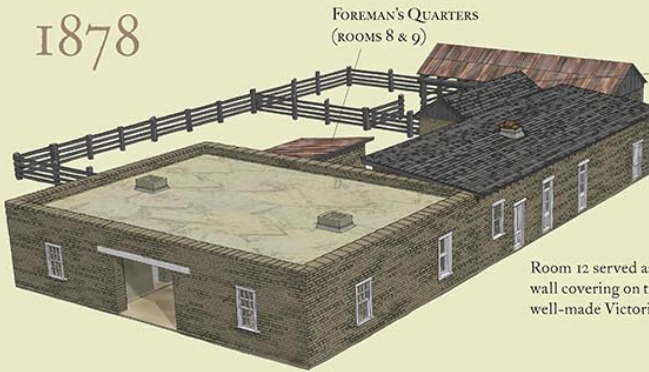


THE ORIGINAL HOUSE (ROOMS 1-7)

1871

The adobe structure first built here has been used by all eras of ranch families. The hallway in the middle of the four rooms is known as the Zaguán. This interior hallway design feature provided an added level of protection for the corral. With stock penned in at night, the only way a thief or predator could reach the animals was to pass by the doorways that faced the wide hall. These early ranchers had to be light sleepers to successfully protect their assets in frontier Arizona. The Zaguán houses a screened cooler that allowed the ranchers to keep beef and other food stock chilled. The four rooms were used as bedrooms, a kitchen, and a storeroom.

1878



FOREMAN'S QUARTERS
(ROOMS 8 & 9)

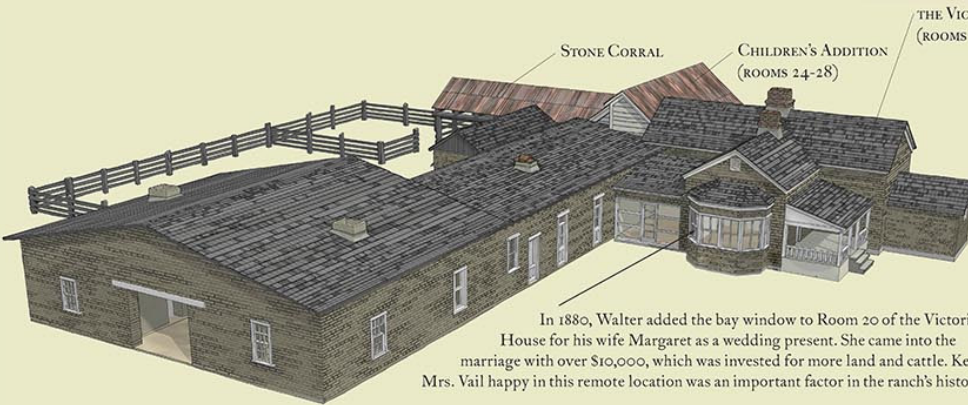
COWBOY COOK'S WING (ROOMS 16 & 18)

Room 16 served as the the Cowboy Cook's Quarters.

REAR ADDITION (ROOMS 10-17)

Room 11 served as the administrative hub of the ranch, where business was conducted and the safe was kept.

Room 12 served as the Bookkeeper's Quarters and a guest room. It has a wall covering on the south end known as a "railroad car" siding, a rare and well-made Victorian detail.



STONE CORRAL

CHILDREN'S ADDITION
(ROOMS 24-28)

THE VICTORIAN ADDITION
(ROOMS 19-23, 29)

In 1880, Walter added the bay window to Room 20 of the Victorian House for his wife Margaret as a wedding present. She came into the marriage with over \$10,000, which was invested for more land and cattle. Keeping Mrs. Vail happy in this remote location was an important factor in the ranch's history.

The Master Bedroom (Room 22) and Middle Room (Room 23) retain the original Territorial-style construction of the ranch.

1886

The Children's Addition (Rooms 24-28) is the only portion of the house constructed of wood frame and was probably moved from the Total Wreck mining camp circa 1886.