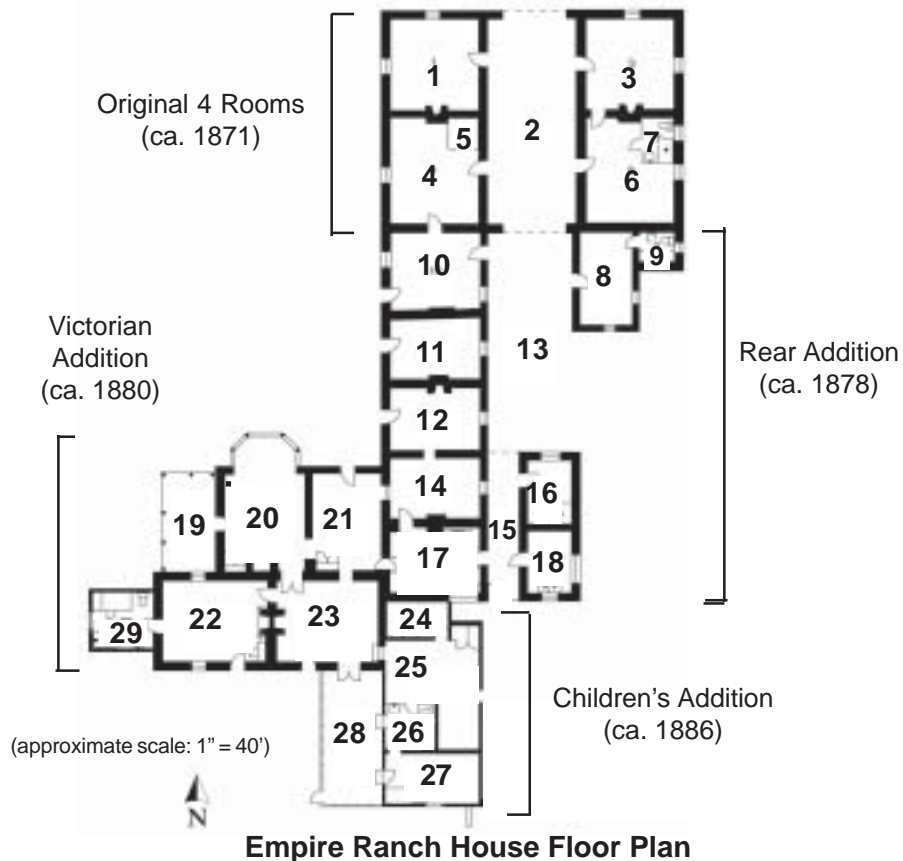


# ROOMS OF THE EMPIRE RANCH HOUSE: Past Uses, Future Plans, and Progress (as of Summer 2009)



**Introduction:** The Empire Ranch House originated as a simple, flat roof four-room house (Rooms 1, 3, 4, and 6 above), constructed of hand cast adobe blocks between 1871 and 1874. Located on a 160-acre homestead, in June 1876 it was sold by William Wakefield to Edward Nye Fish and Simon Silverberg, who sold it the following August to Walter L. Vail and Herbert S. Hislop. John N. Harvey joined the partnership two months later, bringing capital for purchasing more land and livestock.

Vail and his heirs operated the ranch until 1928, when it was purchased by the Boice, Gates and Johnson partnership, successor to the Chiricahua Cattle Co. Frank Boice managed the Empire Ranch and became sole owner in 1951. His heirs operated the ranch until 1975, when John Donaldson took over ranching operations. Ranching continues under a grazing permit with the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM), held by John and Mac Donaldson until March 2009 when the permit was assumed by the Tomlinson family, owners of the Vera Earl Ranch, Inc. The BLM acquired ownership of the ranch house in 1988, as part of what is now Las Cienegas National Conservation area, totaling over 45,000 acres. (For more information, please see companion pamphlet *The Empire Ranch House: A Brief History.*)

This pamphlet summarizes the time of origin and past names and uses of each of the rooms in the ranch house, plans for their future restoration and reuse, and progress made so far. Construction work to date has centered largely on stabilization repairs to stop deterioration and to preserve the buildings in a manner that is consistent with sound historic preservation.

Plans for future restoration and reuse will be executed in successive phases, depending upon availability of funds. Major funding will be provided both through fundraising efforts of the Empire Ranch Foundation and through appropriations allocations to the U.S. Bureau of Land Management.

## Empire Ranch House, West View, 2005



Photo courtesy CactusHuggers Photography

**Rooms 1, 3** (built circa 1871, as part of E. N. Fish original 4-room ranch house)

### *Past names: Vail & Hislop Bedrooms, Cowboys' Quarters, Commissary*

These two rooms, located at the north end of the Empire Ranch House, were originally used as bedrooms by Walter Vail and Herbert Hislop when they established the ranch in 1876. It is not known which room was used by whom. A collection of rifle and pistol cartridges was found under the sill of the northeast window (Room 3) when it was stabilized in 1993. One .32 caliber cartridge was included in this collection. Hislop carried a pistol of that caliber, so this may have been his bedroom. In later years, about 10 cowboys shared these rooms. Vail primarily relied upon Hispanic cowboys, "vaqueros." After acquisition of the ranch in the late 1920's by the Boice, Gates and Johnson partnership, Room 1 was used as the supply commissary. Operated on the honor system, the commissary sold food, tobacco and cigarette paper, and mohair and leather material for repair of cowboy saddles. Boice employed mainly Anglo cowboys who used Texas style cowboy methods. Two cowboys and a foreman were employed year round; approximately 10 more cowboys were added for the spring and fall roundups.

**Plans:** Fully stabilize as historic house shell. Provide portable exhibits that interpret various functions of these rooms throughout the ranch history. These can be removed or revised to accommodate varying public uses. In the future, consider restoring these as specific period rooms.

**Progress:** Windows, doors, and door frames restored 1999; concrete chimney supports secured, 2001; roof system braced & anchored, hazardous debris above ceilings removed, exterior west wall and foundations repaired, 2001-02; door repairs, 2006; wall repairs, 2009.

**Room 2** (built circa 1871, as part of E. N. Fish original 4-room ranch house)

**Past names: Zaguan, Hall, or Breezeway**

This "breezeway" was the only entry to the corral that originally stood attached to the south end of the house. Stock was penned in the corral at night, and the only way for a thief or predator to reach the animals was to pass by the doorways to Vail's and Hislop's bedrooms. Living in frontier Arizona, both men were probably light sleepers. In the 1940's pickup trucks were driven through the zaguan when bringing supplies from town. A screened meat cooler stands in the shade of the Hall; its date of origin is unknown. A wood frame burlap-draped food cooler was also used, utilizing water evaporation for cooling, on the shallow concrete basin at the southeast corner of the zaguan.

**Plans:** Fully stabilize as historic house shell, leaving the meat cooler in place with interpretation. Reconstruct and interpret the evaporation cooler. Utilize the shaded space for events and portable exhibits.

**Progress:** Roof system braced & anchored, hazardous materials above ceilings removed, south lintel repaired and braced, 2001/02.

**Rooms 4 & 5** (built circa 1871, as part of E. N. Fish original 4-room ranch house)

**Past names: Kitchen, Cowboys' Dining Room & Meat Freezer**

In a letter to his sister in London, England, Hislop identified this room as the kitchen. Later, it was used as a dining room for the Vail and Boice cowboys. Between 15 and 20 men, including cowboys, muleskinners, a blacksmith and other hired help, ate their meals here at times. The Boices added a meat freezer (designated 5) in the 1950's.

**Plans:** Fully stabilize as historic house shell, leaving freezer in place; provide utilities for use as a media room to seat 12-15 people for viewing longer videos and other presentations, and furnish with historically appropriate benches. Portable exhibits and wall space will focus on the cowboy dining room function of the space.

**Progress:** Windows, doors, and door frames restored 1999; concrete chimney supports secured, 2001; roof system braced & anchored, hazardous materials above ceilings removed, exterior west wall and foundations repaired, 2001-02.

**Rooms 6 & 7** (Room 6 built circa 1871, as part of E. N. Fish original 4-room ranch house; Room 7 added in 1948)

**Past names: Store Room, Company Store, Cowboys' Quarters & Cowboys' Bath**

Hislop described one of the original rooms in the house as a store-room. It was later used by the Vails as the company store. Goods such as tobacco, cigarette papers, tinned fruits, candy and other items were provided which the cowboys and staff could buy at wholesale prices. In the 1930's the Boices made the room into cowboy quarters, and Room 1 was used as their commissary room. In 1948 the cowboy bath (Room 7) was added.

**Plans:** Fully stabilize as historic house shell. Remove Room 7 partitions & fixtures to restore area as a single room. Provide portable exhibits that interpret such themes as Hollywood and the Empire Ranch, or traveling or temporary exhibits for special events. In the future, consider restoring this as specific period room.

**Progress:** Windows, doors, and door frames restored 1999; concrete chimney supports secured, 2001; roof system braced & anchored, hazardous materials removed, 2001-02; exterior wall patched, 2009.

**Rooms 8 & 9** (Room 8 built circa 1878, as part of Vail-Harvey rear addition; Room 9 added in 1948)

**Past names: Foreman's Quarters, Cook's Quarters & Cook's Bath**

Various men occupied this room as Empire Ranch foreman, including Tom Turner and Harry Heffner. Turner became foreman in 1885. Heffner hired on with Vail in 1893 to help gather a herd of cattle off of Catalina Island, California, and then ship them by rail to Kansas. Vail was impressed with Heffner's abilities and hired him to work on the Empire Ranch. Heffner accompanied a herd of Vail cattle and horses on the Southern Pacific Railroad from California to Pantano, Arizona. He became foreman of the Empire Ranch in 1900. In the 1930's the Boices made the room the cook's quarters, and the Grove House became the foreman's quarters. The cook's bath was added in 1948.

**Plans:** Fully stabilize as historic house shell, and utilize as central administrative office space.

**Progress:** Windows, doors, and door frames restored 1999; roof system braced & anchored and roof repaired, hazardous materials above ceilings removed, 2001-02; door repairs, 2006.

**Room 10** (built circa 1878, as part of Vail-Harvey rear addition)

**Past names: Lower Kitchen, Cowboys' Kitchen**

A cook prepared meals for the cowboys and staff in this kitchen. Cooking was done on a wood-burning stove. Steers were butchered regularly for meat. To prevent spoiling during the summer months, much of the meat was dried into jerky. In the winter, when the temperatures were cooler, the cowboys enjoyed more fresh meat. The Vail era fare centered around beef and beans and biscuits, with canned tomatoes and dried fruit, usually apples and prunes, about once a week. During the Boice period, fare included fresh meat (during cold months), coffee, eggs, biscuits, gravy, honey, fried potatoes or cooked pinto beans, rice, and fruit cobblers, pies or pudding. During the summer months chicken fryers were also used along with canned cow meat and jerky.

**Plans:** Fully stabilize as historic house shell, and furnish with portable exhibits focused on cowboy cooking. In future consider more extensive period exhibits and interpretation.

**Progress:** Windows, doors, and door frames restored 1999; roof system braced & anchored, hazardous materials removed above ceilings, exterior west wall and foundations repaired, 2001-02; door repairs, 2006 and 2009.

**Room 11** (built circa 1878, as part of Vail-Harvey rear addition)

**Past names: Office**

Walter Vail used this room as an office while conducting his business and political affairs. He locked his whiskey in the office safe when he was away from the ranch, but not money. He wasn't worried about any of the cowboys or staff taking money, but did not want them to drink while he was not around. Originally, the doorway was on the east side of the room. The Boice family also used this room as an office, and the safe was used to store the company's books and records for, at one time, four different ranches, as Frank Boice kept records for all operations. The combination for the safe was written on the door so anyone could open it.

**Plans:** Fully stabilize as historic house shell, and furnish with portable exhibits focusing on the ranch as a business to administer. In future consider more extensive period restoration.

**Progress:** Windows, doors, and door frames restored 1999; roof system braced & anchored and roof repaired, hazardous materials removed above ceilings, exterior west wall and foundations repaired, 2001-02.

**Room: 12** (built circa 1878, as part of Vail-Harvey rear addition)

**Past names: Bookkeeper's Quarters, Guest Room**

The Empire Ranch eventually grew to cover nearly one million acres of land and supported some 40,000 head of cattle. Vail also had other interests, including real estate in California, Colorado and Kansas, along with the Total Wreck Mine in the Empire Mountains. His many enterprises required the services of a full-time bookkeeper. The Boice's later converted this room to a guest room, cutting a doorway in its south wall to allow access from Room 14 off of the kitchen.

**Plans:** Fully stabilize as historic house shell, and furnish with portable exhibits possibly focusing on the roles of professional staff such as cooks, bookkeepers, etc., or for other historical theme interpretations.

**Progress:** Windows, doors, and door frames restored 1999; roof system braced and anchored and roof repaired, hazardous materials removed above ceilings, exterior west wall and foundations repaired, 2001-02.

**Room: 13** (created circa 1878, as part of Vail-Harvey rear addition)

**Past names: Corral, Zagan, Hall**

This open area was originally part of the corral. The current concrete was laid in the 1930's, replacing concrete from earlier years. A covered saddle rack was present along the northeast side for many years. Commercial electric power reached the Empire Ranch Headquarters in 1957. Although the associated external electrical wiring and power poles were removed and wiring put underground in 2002, the base of the original central power pole located on the zaguan has been retained to mark the previous fixture.

**Plans:** Fully stabilize surrounding walls as historic house shell, and utilize this outdoor portion of the zaguan as a multipurpose space, to be used as venue for outdoor events or a location for mobile exhibits. In future, consider reconstruction of a tin-roofed, saddle rack railing that formerly stood along the north east side and abutted the southwest corner of Room 8.

**Progress:** Windows, doors, and doorframes of surrounding rooms restored 1999; telephone pole and related wiring removed and put underground, 2002.

**Room: 14** (built circa 1878, as part of Vail-Harvey rear addition)

**Past names: Family Cook's Quarters, Kitchen Pantry**

A full-time cook prepared family meals, and for much of the Vail period these were the family cook quarters. During the Boice period this room was made a kitchen pantry, and Room 12 became a guest room.

**Plans:** Fully stabilize as historic house shell, and utilize for administrative storage space

**Progress:** Roof system braced & anchored and roof repaired, hazardous materials removed above ceilings, sewer pipe sleeve installed below floor, 2001-02.

**Room: 15** (created circa 1878, as part of Vail-Harvey rear addition)

**Past names: Rear Hall**

During the Boice period (and probably earlier) there was a door at the south end of this hall. A north door and roof were added to the hall in the 1950's.

**Plans:** Fully stabilize as historic house shell, with simple descriptive signage. In future consider reinstalling northern door.

**Progress:** New metal ceiling installed, 2001-02.

**Room 16** (built circa 1878, as part of Vail-Harvey rear addition)

**Past names: Cowboys' Cook's Quarters;  
Cowboys' Shower & Laundry**

The cook on a ranch the size of the Empire played a key part in the operation. It was the cook's job to keep the cowboys and hired help nourished and satisfied with the food. The cook was important enough to rate his own quarters. During the 1930's the Boices made this room into the cowboy laundry room and shower, and Room 8 became the cook's quarters.

**Plans:** Fully stabilize as historic house shell. Provide portable exhibits that interpret various functions of rooms throughout the ranch history.

**Progress:** Windows, doors, and door frames restored 1999; roof system braced & anchored and roof repaired, hazardous materials removed above ceilings, 2001-02; door repairs, 2006.

**Room 17** (built circa 1878, as part of Vail-Harvey rear addition or original Harvey home)

**Past names: Upper Kitchen or Family Kitchen**

The Vail family's meals were prepared in this kitchen. Their fare may have been a bit more palatable than that of the ranch hands. Oyster shells have been found in trash piles near the house, indicating that the Vails were among many frontier Arizonans who enjoyed shellfish packed in barrels of brine on the coast of California and shipped inland by rail. Such delicacies, in addition to fine wine, were probably consumed on special occasions. Modernizations, including a gas range and breakfast nook, were made by the Boice family in the 1950's.

**Plans:** Fully stabilize as historic house shell with portable exhibits that interpret the kitchen functions and remodeling over time. In future, consider restoring as a 1950's period room.

**Progress:** Windows, doors, and door frames restored, 1999; roof system braced & anchored and roof repaired, hazardous materials removed above ceilings, 2001-02; deteriorated linoleum floor covering removed, 2007.

**Room 18** (built circa 1878, as part of Vail-Harvey rear addition)

**Past names: Pantry & Storage Area, Unknown**

The Vail family used this room as a pantry and storage area for the kitchen. After the kitchen was remodeled by the Boice family, and Room 14 made a pantry, it is unclear what this room was used for.

**Plans:** Fully stabilize as historic house shell. Provide portable exhibits that interpret various functions of rooms throughout the ranch history.

**Progress:** Windows, doors, and door frames restored 1999; roof system braced & anchored and roof repaired, hazardous materials removed above ceilings, 2001-02; door repairs, 2006; contact paper removed from cabinets, 2009.

**Room 19** (built circa 1880-81, as part of additions made to Rooms 22 and 23,

**Past names: Front Porch**

The front porch to the Victorian Addition was a focal point for visiting and relaxing, and continues to provide primary access to the Victorian Addition. Photographs reveal changes made to handrails and posts since Victorian times.

**Plans:** Restore/rehabilitate to the Boice-era and Donaldson family eras, and provide appropriate signage and exhibits to convey how all families who lived on the Empire used this space and how they changed the architecture to reflect their needs

and tastes. Retain the usefulness of the room for access to Victorian Addition.

**Progress:** Roof cedar shingled, 1997; windows, doors, rails, balusters, and door frames restored, 1999; roof system braced & anchored, 2001-02; repainted 2005 and 2009.

**Room 20** (built circa 1880-81, as addition to Rooms 23 and 22 which were constructed circa 1878, originally as a home for John Harvey and his bride)

**Past names: Living Room**

The focal point of this room is the bay window, which Walter Vail had installed as a wedding present to Margaret in 1881. The window was enlarged, the ceiling lowered, and paneling added when the Boice's remodeled the house in the 1950's.

**Plans:** Restore/rehabilitate to the Boice-era and more recent Donaldson family use of the house, and provide portable signage and exhibits to convey how all families who lived on the Empire used this space and how they changed the architecture to reflect their needs and tastes. Retain the usefulness of the room for public meeting space, temporary exhibits, art shows and other events and functions.

**Progress:** Roof cedar shingled, 1997; windows, doors, and frames restored, 1999; roof system braced & anchored, hazardous materials removed above ceilings, adobe walls braced, 2001-02; drywall surfaces painted 2005; door repairs, 2006; wall and ceiling surfaces repaired and painted, deteriorated carpet removed, 2007.

**Room 21** (built circa 1878-81, likely a porch that was later enclosed.)

**Past names: Porch, Dining Room**

The Boice and Vail families took their meals in this room. It likely was originally a porch that was enclosed during the Vail era. Carpeting, wood paneling and the large glass windows and door were added by the Boice family in the 1950's, at which time the ceiling was also lowered. Above the current ceiling lies an older Victorian-era ceiling. This ceiling as well as the siding on the south wall was constructed of "railroad car"-type siding, a Victorian detail that reflects the Vail-Harvey era.

**Plans:** Restore/rehabilitate to Boice-era and more recent Donaldson family use of the house, and provide portable signage and exhibits to convey how all the Empire families used this space and how they changed the architecture to reflect their needs and tastes. Retain the usefulness of the room for public meeting space, temporary exhibits, the art show and other events and functions.

**Progress:** Roof cedar shingled, 1997; windows, doors, and door frames restored, 1999; roof system braced & anchored, hazardous materials removed above ceilings, adobe walls braced, 2001-02; wall and ceiling surfaces repaired and painted, deteriorated carpet and asbestos floor tile removed, 2007.

**Rooms 22 & 29** (Room 22 built circa 1878, probably as part of home for John Harvey and his bride; Room 29 added 1890-1900)

**Past names: Master Bedroom & Master Bath**

This functioned as master bedroom for the Harvey, Vail, and Frank S. Boice families, and John Donaldson's father spent his last days here. The bedroom's plastered ceilings were probably done to add to finished Victorian effect, and the room represents a copy of the earliest Territorial-style construction on ranch, similar to Rooms 1 and 4. In addition to a fireplace, this room features a bathroom which was added by the Vails by the early 1900's, and was later remodeled by the Boice family.

**Plans:** Fully stabilize as historic house shell, essentially as room is now, with structural issues resolved. Provide portable exhibits interpreting how all families who lived on the Empire used this space and how they changed the architecture to reflect their needs and tastes. Retain the usefulness of the room for public meeting space,

temporary exhibits, the art show and other events and functions.

**Progress:** Roof cedar shingled, 1997; windows, doors, and door frames restored, 1999; roof system braced & anchored, repaired, hazardous materials removed above ceilings, installed ridge gussets, braced adobe walls, exterior south wall and foundation repaired, 2001-02. Master Bedroom west gable wall: shored, exterior adobe repaired, and surface protected, 2006; foundations stabilized, wall cracks repaired, lintel & gable reinforced, 2007; wall and floor cracks patched, 2009.

**Room 23** (built circa 1878, probably as part of home for John Harvey and his bride)

**Past names: Middle Room, Guest Room, Family Room**

Various members of the family and guests used this room. The fireplace provided warmth and atmosphere to the room. Plastered ceilings were probably done to add to the Victorian effect. This room represents a copy of the earliest Territorial-style construction on the ranch, similar to Rooms 1 and 4.

**Plans:** Fully stabilize as historic house shell, essentially as they are now, with structural issues resolved. Provide portable exhibits interpreting how all families who lived on the Empire used this space and how they changed the architecture to reflect their needs and tastes. Retain the usefulness of the room for public meeting space, temporary exhibits, the art show and other events and functions.

**Progress:** Roof cedar shingled, 1997; windows, doors, and door frames restored, 1999; roof system braced & anchored and roof repaired, hazardous debris removed above ceilings, installed ridge gussets, braced adobe walls, exterior south wall & foundation repaired, 2001-02; door repairs, 2006; interior walls repaired, 2007, 2009.

**Rooms 24-27** (built by circa 1886, as Children's Addition)

**Past names: Children's Rooms, Children's Addition, Guest Room**

The only portion of the house constructed of wooden frame (by some accounts removed from the Total Wreck mining town), these rooms (2 bedrooms, a storage closet, and bath) were generally used by the Vail and Boice children. Occasionally Room 27 was used as a guest room.

**Plans:** Fully stabilize as historic house shell, essentially as rooms are now, with structural issues resolved. Provide portable exhibits interpreting childhood and growing up on the Empire. Restore bath appearance, but not functionality.

**Progress:** Roof system braced & anchored, and roof members screwed together, installed ridge gussets, braced adobe walls, exterior south wall and foundation repaired, 2001-02.

**Room 28** (erected circa 1886 as part of Children's Addition; remodeled as screened sleeping porch in 1920's,

**Past names: Porch, Screen Porch, Sleeping Porch**

This was originally an open, wood frame porch. Cement floors and screening were added in the early 1920's. Called an "Arizona Room," such screened porches were popular and a welcome addition during the hot summer months. People often slept on the porch.

**Plans:** Preserve room as is. Interpret as a place where people relax by using it as an informal meeting or relaxation space next to the garden. Interpret the sleeping porch function with signage.

**Progress:** Roof system braced & anchored, and roof members screwed together, installed ridge gussets, braced adobe walls, exterior south wall and foundation repaired, 2001-02; screening repairs, 2005; door repairs, 2006.