

Empire Ranch House Room Descriptions

Updated 2019

Room 1 (built circa 1871, as part of E. N. Fish original four-room Ranch House)

Past names: Vail or Hislop Bedrooms, Cowboys' Quarters, Commissary

This room, located at the north end of the Empire Ranch House, was originally used as a bedroom by Walter Vail or Herbert Hislop when they established the ranch in 1876. After the Boice family acquired the ranch in 1928 they used this room as their 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.

Room 2 (built circa 1871, as part of E. N. Fish original four-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 (see drawing, p. 5-3). Living in frontier Arizona, both men were probably light sleepers. The concept of this close-in corral arrangement was retained over the years, as may be seen in house corral east of the Ranch House, that gives direct access from Room 13 (see photo p. 6-5). 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 zaguan; 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.

Room 3 (built circa 1871, as part of E. N. Fish original four-room Ranch House)

Past names: Vail or Hislop Bedrooms, Cowboys' Quarters

This room, located in the northeast corner of the Empire Ranch House, was originally used as a bedroom by Walter Vail or Herbert Hislop when they established the ranch in 1876. A collection of rifle and pistol cartridges, including one .32 caliber cartridge, was found under the sill of the northeast window when it was stabilized in 1993. Since Hislop carried a pistol of that caliber, this may have been his bedroom. By 1881 the room was used by the Vail, Boice, and Donaldson cowboys. Vail primarily relied upon Hispanic cowboys, "vaqueros." 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.

Rooms 4 & 5 (built circa 1871, as part of E. N. Fish original four-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.

Rooms 6 & 7 (Room 6 built circa 1871, as part of E. N. Fish original four-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.

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 Harry Heffner, Blas López, and Tom Turner. Turner became foreman in 1885. Heffner hired on with Vail in 1893 to help gather a herd of cattle off California's Catalina Island, and then ship them by rail to Kansas. Impressed with Heffner's abilities, Vail hired him to work on the Empire Ranch. He became manager of the Empire Ranch around 1900. López worked on the Empire Ranch from 1895 to 1928. He became foreman in the late 1910s. In the 1930's the Boices made this room the cook's quarters, and the Grove House became the foreman's quarters. The cook's bath was added in 1948.

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 cobbles, pies or pudding. During the summer months chicken fryers were also used along with canned cow meat and jerky. A dinner bell hung outside the east door of the kitchen.



Kitchen Door with Dinner Bell

B350-30

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.

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

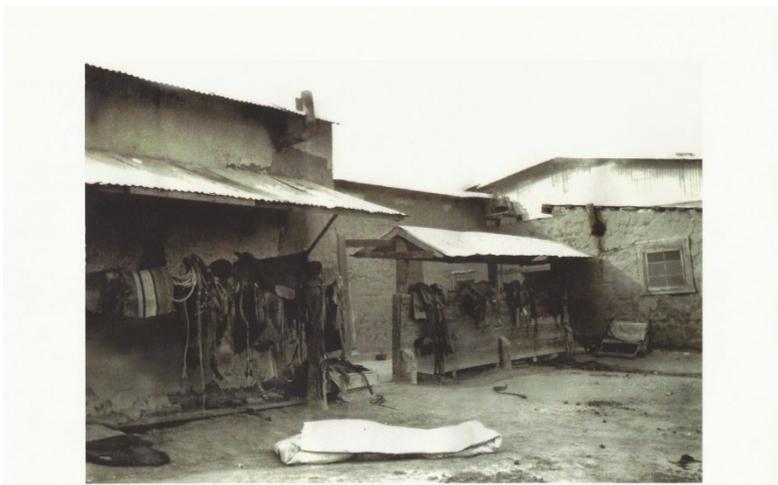
Past names: Bookkeeper's Quarters, Guest Room

The Empire Ranch eventually grew to cover approximately 100,000 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.

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.



Saddle Rack, 1950s

B350-01

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. It is not known when the doorway leading into the Dining Room (Room 21) was covered.

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. A wood frame burlap-draped food cooler was also used, utilizing water evaporation for cooling, on the shallow concrete basin between the doors to rooms 16 and 18.

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.

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.

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

Past names: Pantry & Storage Area, Laundry

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 into a pantry, it was used as a laundry room.

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.



Front Porch c 1880s.
A536-168



Front Porch c. 1920
A240-1a

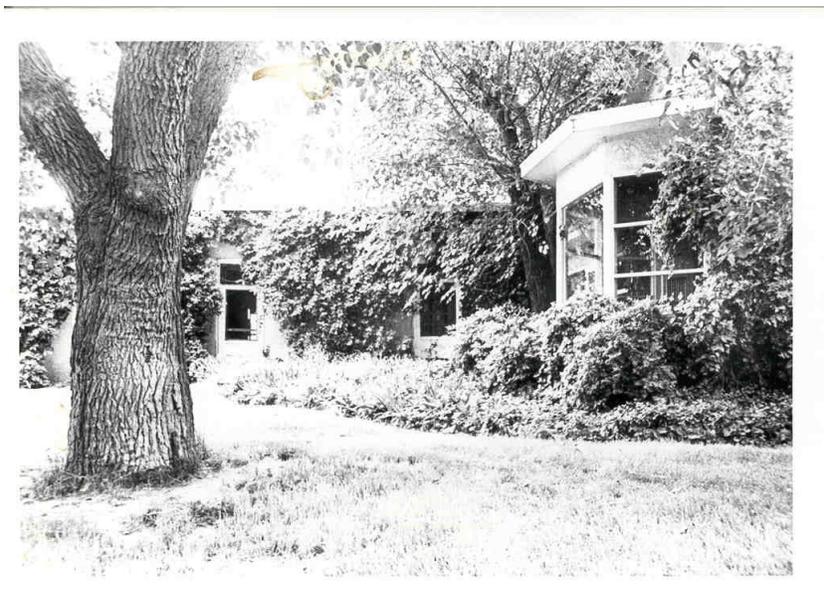
Room 20 (built circa 1880-81, as addition to Rooms 23 and 22 which were constructed circa 1878, originally as a home for John Harvey and his bride)

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 Boice's remodeled this room in the 1950's. A doorway to the Master Bedroom (Room 22) was closed and covered by the bookcase unit on the west side of the fireplace, a new doorway into the Middle Room (Room 23) was added, the bay window was enlarged, the ceiling lowered, and wood paneling added.



Bay Window, 1905
A300-102



Bay Window, 1950s
B300-010

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.



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. The door leading into the Living Room (Room 20) was closed and replaced by a bookcase by the Boice's in the 1950s. In addition to a fireplace, this room features a bathroom which was added by the Vails by the early 1910's, and was later remodeled by the Boice family.

Tea set in Living Room; Master Bedroom is through the doorway which no longer exists, 1880s
A300-077

Room 23 (built circa 1878, probably as part of home for John Harvey and his bride)
Past names: Middle Room, Guest Room, Family Room

During the Vail era 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. In the 1940s it was Pancho and Bob Boice's bedroom. A closet was located in the northeast corner where the double doors to the living room are now. The opening to the living room was added by the Boices when they remodeled the living room and dining room in the early 1950s.

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 (two bedrooms, a storage closet, and bath) were used by the Vail children. Room 27 was used primarily as a guest room. Bob and Miriam Boice lived here while the Huachuca House was installed and remodeled.

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.



McFadden Family south of Ranch House, note the open frame porch on the Children's Addition, ca 1905

A536-32



Frank Boice relaxing in front of screened sleeping porch of the Children's Addition, 1950s

B300-059