



EMPIRE RANCH FOUNDATION NEWS

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President's Message

The past six months have allowed us to experience first-hand the isolation and uncertainty that Empire Ranch families and staff must have felt at times. Apache raiding in the early Vail years, roads made impassable by seasonal rains, or just days of non-stop work to keep the grasslands and cattle healthy.

The COVID-19 pandemic required us to cancel in-person activities and events starting with the Spring Trail Ride. In August we made the difficult decision to cancel the Cowboy Festival, slated for November 7-8. In these uncertain times planning and hosting such a large and complex gathering would not be wise, and we are conscious that many volunteers and guests who make the event possible are in the high-risk age group.

In 2019 43% of ERF's income was generated by our events. Thus far we can maintain the general business of the Foundation with volunteer effort, but your financial support is more important now than ever. Would you please consider a special donation at this time? You can use the envelope enclosed or visit the ERF website to make a secure donation.

We are optimistic that it will be possible to reinstate a few lower risk activities soon, such as opening our Gift Shop and providing docent-led tours, when it is safe to do so. We will keep everyone posted via our website, Facebook, and our electronic newsletter. And we'll continue to share Empire Ranch history stories like those of Empire Ranch cowboys featured in this issue.

Faith Boice
ERF President

Cowboys of the Empire Ranch

From the 1870s to the present, cowboys have cared for cattle on the Empire Ranch. When the Vails owned and operated the Empire Ranch, from 1876 to 1928, vaqueros (cowboys of Mexican descent) worked with cattle that grazed on rangeland from the Rincon Mountains to south of Sonoita. They moved the stock, branded, doctored, and castrated the calves, doing all the jobs involved in ranching.

From 1928 to 1974, when the Boice family owned or leased the Empire Ranch, most of the full-time cowboys were from Arizona or other southwestern states. Their work changed somewhat as time passed; the Boice cowboys provided additional types of medical care for the cattle. But like earlier cowboys, they were involved in roundups, training horses, and working cattle.

In this issue of the Foundation's newsletter we'd like to tell about a few of the vaqueros and cowboys who worked for the Vail and Boice families.

Tomás López

Tomás López was born in Hermosillo, Sonora, Mexico in 1827. He emigrated to Los Angeles in 1850. In 1873, he, his wife, Sacramento, and seven children including son Blas López, began a trip



Vail vaqueros gathering prior to cattle drive to California in 1890 (above); Boice family branding cattle, in 1950s (below)

from Los Angeles to Hermosillo via Arizona. While traveling south of Tucson their wagon was attacked by Chiricahua Apaches and they lost everything, forcing them to stay in Arizona. Tomás later homesteaded in the Cienega Valley, near the Empire Ranch. He is listed in the 1880 U.S. Census as a herder working at the Empire Ranch.

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