

# EMPIRE RANCH FOUNDATION NEWS

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## Help Us Rehabilitate the New Ranch House



*New Ranch House constructed on the Empire in 1950s (photo: N. Olmsted)*

The New Ranch House is located in the shade of majestic cottonwoods, north of the Empire Ranch House, on a hill that overlooks the Empire Gulch. In December 2018 the Foundation sent a letter to the Bureau of Land Management indicating the Board's intent to work with BLM to rehabilitate the New Ranch House to make it to be safe and useable. The Foundation is committed to raising \$350,000 for this project.

The New Ranch House was constructed by Pancho and Sherry Boice around 1955 as their home. It is a 2,000 square foot single story, block construction ranch house. The floor plan includes three bedrooms, two baths, a large kitchen and dining room, and an office. It has also served as a residence for Empire Ranch staff, Mac Donaldson and his family, quarters for BLM staff, and as a field lab for researchers.

Pancho and Sherry Boice's children, Steve, Kitty, Sherry, and Carol, grew up in the house. Carol was an infant when the house was being constructed and she recalls stories of being put to sleep in a

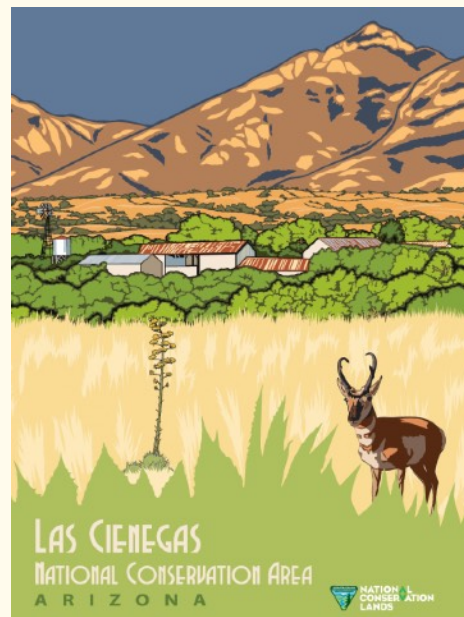
## Celebrating 20 Years of Shared Conservation Stewardship

Twenty years have passed since Representative Jim Kolbe introduced the Las Cienegas National Conservation Area Establishment Act of 1999 in the House of Representatives. The bill was unanimously passed in September 1999, becoming law in December 2000, establishing the more than 42,000-acre Las Cienegas National Conservation Area (NCA). "The designation wouldn't have been possible without the efforts of Representative Kolbe and interested parties from Sonoita, the State of Arizona, Pima County, and federal land managers," said Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Tucson Field Manager Jayme Lopez.

The legislation charged the BLM with conserving, protecting, and enhancing the NCA's unique and nationally important natural, cultural, and historic resources while allowing livestock grazing

triangular closet while her parents worked on the house. She and her sisters shared two of the bedrooms and Steve had the room that was later converted into an office.

Once rehabilitated the New Ranch House will provide space for meeting and educational activities and temporary accommodations for researchers/visitors. We hope you will consider making a year-end gift for the New Ranch House fund. Additional information about the project is included in the letter inserted with this issue.



and recreation to continue in appropriate areas. It created a shared conservation stewardship framework to ensure the BLM managed the NCA in collaboration with interested stakeholders and local, state, and federal agencies. That framework still exists today through partnerships between the BLM, the Cienega Watershed Partnership, the Empire Ranch Foundation (ERF), the State of Arizona, Pima County, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, the grazing permittee, and academia.

The BLM and its partners developed the NCA's collaborative management plan that conserves and protects cultural and natural resources, provides for traditional uses and appropriate recreational opportunities, and preserves the Historic Empire Ranch.

Strong partnerships resulted in the restoration of the NCA's native grass-

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lands, one of the finest grassland valleys left in the southwestern U.S., creating better wildlife corridors, and restoring the area's natural fire regime. Almost two decades of monitoring has supported successful water restoration efforts resulting in thriving riparian areas with robust populations of endangered Arizona native fish species and Chiricahua Leopard Frog. A BLM/State agreement made it possible to take fish and frogs from the NCA's thriving populations and re-populate other agency operated water bodies such as Pima County's Aqua Caliente ponds.

The BLM and the ERF restored the adobe haybarn, historic ranch house, and Huachuca House. "We are now in the planning stages to renovate the New Ranch House that my Grandfather, Pancho Boice, built at the Empire Ranch Headquarters in the 1950s," shared ERF President Faith Boice. "My father, Steve Boice, grew up in the house and it's very important to me personally."

The BLM and partners began a "bio-planning process" in which they get together on the landscape to jointly review the condition of the NCA and discuss future management plans. "Agency faces have come and gone through the last 20 years, but we partners are still showing up for the Biological Planning days and still engaged," said Cienega Watershed Partnership/Retired BLM Field Manager Shela McFarlin. "The NCA is better for it."



*Biological Planning meetings 2012, 2014, 2015 (photos: S. McFarlin)*

## Growing Up on the Empire Ranch

Six sets of Vail and Boice children experienced life on the Empire Ranch. The photos and stories that follow reveal that despite the more than 75-year time span between the Vail and Boice children, their growing up experiences are remarkably similar.

### **Walter & Margaret Vail Family**

Walter and Margaret made their home on the Empire Ranch from their marriage in 1881 until 1896, when they relocated to Los Angeles.

The youngest of their seven children, Margaret "Margie", was born that year, and the eldest, Nathan Russell, "N.R." was 13 at the time they moved. In between N.R. and Margie were Walter, Jr., Mary, William Banning, Mahlon, and Edward.



*N.R., Walter, and Banning Vail on their horses in house yard, Empire Ranch, 1899 (photo: D. Ingram)*



*Mary, Walter and Banning on the front porch hammock, with Nathan Russell seated, ca. 1893 (photo: W. Wilkinson)*

In her oral history Mary Vail Wilkinson provided a glimpse into their activities while living at the Empire Ranch. "We did the homey things, you know. There was a great deal of company there, and there was a great deal of reading. Mother was musical, so we had that for entertaining. We rode. We each had our horses, and we loved the

roundups, and we were just growing up like any, to a certain point."

Walter and Margaret's children lived in the large L-shaped bedroom of the Children's Addition, which was added to the Empire Ranch House circa 1886. Mary Vail Wilkinson recalled: "We had a zinc bathtub, with a frame around it, with plenty of room for water fights and also a large closet that could be made pitch dark." They were home-schooled at the Empire Ranch by their mother and a series of governesses.

### **Banning & Laura Vail Family**

After Walter Vail's accidental death in 1906, his son Banning managed the Empire Ranch. In 1913 he married Tucson native Laura Perry and they lived on the ranch until 1928. Banning and Laura had three children: Laura Perry "Dusty," William Banning "Bill", and Thomas "Tom."

Dusty recalled their daily lives at the Empire: "The main thing involved was riding and playing. Our horses were available at all times. And we used to play [in the Adobe Haybarn] all the time.



*Aunt Margie, Dusty, Bill, and Tom Vail, with "Buttons," on Tom's horse "Molly," 1923 (photo: D. Ingram)*



*Jungle gym fun, Dusty, Tom and Bill Vail, 1923 (photo: D. Ingram)*

"What we did mostly was play robber and cops, games of that type. So we'd be busying ourselves climbing up in the trees, and then you'd climb from the tree onto the rooftop, and across the roof, and, you know, crazy stuff—unless you were riding. And if you were riding by yourself, you'd play games on horse-



back. If you were out with the men when they were working cattle, there were no games, you paid strict attention to the job you were supposed to do.”

Dusty and her brothers also used the Children’s Addition bedroom. They went to school in Tucson; Dusty always regretted not being able to attend the local Empire School, since she would have been able to ride her horse to school.

### **Frank & Mary Boice Family**

Frank S. Boice and his wife Mary Grantham Boice moved to the Empire Ranch in 1929. At that time their eldest son Frank “Pancho” was 3 years old and the youngest, Bob, was 1.



*Pancho and Bob Boice on horseback, ca. 1929 (photo: M. Boice)*



*Pancho and Bob Boice swimming in a water trough, ca. 1930 (photo: M. Boice)*

In his oral history Bob Boice recalled his childhood: “Just like a kid growing up in the country with cowboys around. Worked weekends, rode horses, did whatever we had to do. Didn’t have many vacations—we all worked on weekends.” “It was a good life; we had a great time. All my heroes were cowboys.”

Pancho and Bob’s bedroom was in the Middle Room of the Empire Ranch House. They attended the Empire School through the early grades, and then began to attend school in Tucson. The family purchased a house in Tucson “...and led two lives: had two kitchens, two dining rooms, two of everything.”

### **Pancho & Sherry Boice Family**

Pancho Boice and Sherry Bailey married in 1948. The couple initially made their

home in the small Grove House located northwest of the headquarters complex. About 1955 they moved to the “New Ranch House” on a small hill north of the Ranch House. Their four children, Steve, Kitty, Sherry, and Carol grew up on the ranch.



*Carol, Sherry, Kitty, Steve Boice, 1958 (photo C. Barleycorn)*



*Carol and Kitty at Shipping Corrals, 1957 (photo: Boice Family)*

Carol Boice Barleycorn recalled the fun they had playing in the Empire Gulch which was “down below” their home. They had to skirt the area where the baby purebred bulls were kept getting to the Gulch, which in those years always had running water. They explored the ranch on horseback and helped with ranching operations.

All four children attended the Empire School until 1963 when they switched to Tucson schools. They lived in Tucson during the week, returning to the Empire Ranch on weekends and during summer months.

### **Bob & Miriam Boice Family**

Bob Boice and Miriam Wilson married in 1950. They first lived in the Children’s Addition until a one-bedroom house purchased as surplus from the Ft. Huachuca army base was moved and remodeled for their use. Three of their children, Mary Elizabeth, Grant, and Martha were born while the family lived at the Empire. Their youngest daughter, Peggy, arrived

after the family moved in 1956 to the Slash S Ranch in Globe, Arizona.



*Mary Elizabeth and Grant Boice on front porch of Huachuca House, ca. 1955 (photo: M. Boice)*

All four kids grew up on the Slash S which was operated in partnership with the Empire Ranch. They were educated in Globe and were active in Gila County 4-H, which their Dad was instrumental in founding. In his oral history Grant Boice recalls: “I have several recollections of being there [Empire Ranch] through my childhood and early years—mostly with Steve, prowlin’ around and hunting rabbits and just doing stuff that boys did. And then helping my dad go down—we’d work the purebred cattle—and not so much the roundups but working the purebreds.”

### **Steve & Annie Boice Family**

Steve Boice and Annie Helmericks were married in 1972. They lived in the Empire Ranch House and Steve managed the ranching operations under a lease agreement with Gulf American Corporation which owned the ranch. Their first child Faith was born in 1976 and spent her first several months on the Empire Ranch.



*Steve and Faith Boice, 1975 (photo: A. Helmericks-Louder)*

## Working Calendar

*Note: Please check our website to confirm event details ([empireranchfoundation.org](http://empireranchfoundation.org)). We hope that by 2021 COVID safety procedures will be in place to safely offer the docent tours and volunteer workdays listed below.*

*Location: Meet at Visitor Contact Station, Empire Ranch Headquarters, unless otherwise noted. To volunteer, or for more information, call (888) 364-2829, or email [admin@empireranchfoundation.org](mailto:admin@empireranchfoundation.org).*

### January 2021

**2 Volunteer Work Day**, 8am-12pm. To volunteer call 888-364-2829 or email [admin@empireranchfoundation.org](mailto:admin@empireranchfoundation.org).

**9&23 Docent-Led Tour of the Empire Ranch House**, 11am-12pm. Free, open to all, no reservations req.

### February 2021

**6 Volunteer Work Day**, 8am-12pm. To volunteer call 888-364-2829 or email [admin@empireranchfoundation.org](mailto:admin@empireranchfoundation.org)

**13&27 Docent-Led Tour of the Empire Ranch House**, 11am-12pm. Free, open to all, no reservations req.

**19 ERF Board Meeting**, 9am-11am. All welcome! Call 888-364-2829 for meeting information.

### March 2021

**6 Volunteer Work Day**, 8am-12pm. To volunteer call 888-364-2829 or email [admin@empireranchfoundation.org](mailto:admin@empireranchfoundation.org)

**13&27 Docent-Led Tour of the Empire Ranch House**, 11am-12pm. Free, open to all, no reservations req.

### April 2021

**3 Spring Trail Ride. Save the date!**



## Dedicated Gifts

The Empire Ranch Foundation gratefully acknowledges gifts recently received  
*In Memory of:*

Bob & Miriam Boice,  
Mary Vail Boland,  
Edward F. Gardner

Gene & Alvessa Hummel,

Amy Schrock,

Ed & Mary (Brownie) Vail,

Edward Newhall Vail,

Nathan Russell Vail, Jr.

*In Honor of:*

Emil Franz's Voices of the West.net