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HEMET, CALIFORNIA

Feb 5th., 1954.

Dear Mary:-

We came home slowly stopping over in Imperial Valley to visit some friends. We sure had a good time at the convention, Mrs Heffner was slowed down by a cold and I guess I talked too much otherwise it was perfect.

Now for the Empire Ranch. Walter L. Vail arrived in Tucson June 1876 from Plainfield, New Jersey, via boat from the East Coast to San Francisco, stage from San Francisco to Los Angeles, to San Diego, to Vallecitos, to Yuma, to Florence, to Tucson. In Tucson he enquired about cattle and ranges for sale, finally met a merchant by name E.N. Fish who convinced Mr Vail he had just the ranch and cattle Mr Vail should have and they drove out to your present home to look things over. The ranch house at that time consisted the main old building with the big wide hallway running north and south, 2 large rooms on the east wing and one large room on the north west corner, south of which was the general dining room for all hands, south of that a large kitchen, then the office, then the cooks room and across east of the cooks room the storehouse for provisions, by this you see the west wing was much longer than the east wing. At the south end of the building an adobe walled barn, roofed, (where Mr Vail always kept his top horse and Tom Turner kept his also and of course the wranglers horse) from the eastern end of the barn an adobe wall ran north to the northerly line of the main house and then westerly to the House, with a massive gate for entrance. The cow boys home was in a frame structure mounted on a one story adobe building of which the easterly adobe wall helped support, (this by the way was my first home on the ranch) All the other buildings at headquarters including the house you live in and the barn etc in the rear were added when Mr Vail brought Mrs Vail to the Empire as a bride which I think was 1884. So much for the headquarters buildings. Fish told Mr Vail that he had acquired the ranch, horses, cattle about 1870 from a Mexican who owed him considerable money for merchandise purchased and money loaned from time to time, he did not know how many cattle or horses he had in the F brand or just how many acres of land there were in the title but they finally made a deal for \$3000.00 for 160 acres of land more or less located at the head of the Big Cienega Creek and 350 head of cattle more or less in the F brand and would throw in all the horses in the F brand and their colts free as well as all unbranded calves. Mr Vail finally succeeded in getting about 400 acres in fee from the filings by Fish and his predecessors gathered 600 head of cattle and he never counted the horses, but said there were too many.

Mr Vail started the Heart Brand on the cattle at once and V on the horses. In 1877 he took on a partner by the name of Harvey, then he made the horse brand VH 2 years later a man by the name of Hislop bought out Harveys interest then the partnership was Vail & Hislop. In 1880 Vail bought out Harvey and ran the outfit as his own till 1886 when the partnership of Vail & Gates was formed a long lease was made of the Warners Ranch in Calif. the Whetstone Land & Cattle Corporation was organized with land and cattle on the San Pedro River west of Benson with Oscar F. Ashburn owning 50% of the stock and manager with Rail X as the brand, the Gardner Ranch at the head of Gardner Canyon and brand purchased, the Hilton and Lopez holdings in the big draw east of the Headquarters bought, the Happy Valley Ranch North of the Rincon Mountains, purchased and some additional land in the vicinity of Pantano purchased, Tom Turner had been hired by Mr Vail to act as foreman

H.L. H. to Mary Boice.

2-- partial history of Walter L. Vail's acquisition and start of the Empire Land & Cattle Company holdings, cattle & horses in Pima County, Arizona.

in 1885 and the Empire Land & Cattle Co., was on its way to be one of the major cattle spreads in South Eastern Arizona. In 1886 Mr Vail could not get the So. Pacific to make a satisfactory rate from Pantano to Beaumont, Calif for cattle and horses destined for Warner Ranch, San Diego County, so he had Tom Turner gather 1200 head and in February left Pantano and drove these cattle down the Cienega to the Rillitto, down to the Santa Cruz, down to the San Pedro, down to the Gila to Yuma, down the Colorado about 12 miles to the Pilot Knob crossing then across the desert to San Felipe Creek up the creek to Warners, they were in luck all the way, one of the unusual wet winters and green grass and feed all the way and Tom told me the cattle actually gained flesh on the drive. In 1886 Mr Vail started placing mill site filings on all the springs, seeps and free running water that had not heretofore been filed on in the general area bounded on the south by the Canelo Mountains, the south east by the Fort Huachuca holdings and the Babacomorie Grant east of Elgin, the Whetstone on the East line and the east, north and south sides of the Rincon Mountains, thence back southerly to Vail Station the Punta de Agua of the Big Cienega Creek thence southerly following the Helvetia and Rosemont Range to their Junction with the Santa Rita Range on the Old Fort Crittenden and the Range of Rollin R. Richardson, known as the Pennsylvania Ranch, later known as the Rail X Ranch owned by Ashburn & Vail & Gates. (These parties sold out the Whetstone Land & Cattle Co holdings on the San Pedro about 1900 and purchased the Richardson Ranch.) This program of filing on water was in full force when I arrived ~~XXX XXX~~ June 1893 and purchases of small holdings were in order when they could be obtained at a fair price. The Leon Conyers Ranch and cattle in the Whetstone Gap with its good spring was the most important buy that I remember and it controlled all the area in the Gap. There were no windmills or pumping plants in the entire area above mentioned, except the windmill at headquarters, used for domestic purposes, and the various steam plants located on the Rail Road to supply water to the engines, section crews and water troughs in the shipping corrals. I forgot one important purchase in 1893, The Dan Sanford place at the lower end of the Big Cienega where the road turned up the hill to go to Total Wreck Mine and then on to Pantano. Squatters had not bothered and when I left for the California Ranches in 1905 we were branding 10,000 calves a year, The only neighbors with a few head of cattle were J.S. Hopeley at Pantano, Andrada at the mouth of Davidson Canyon, George Scholefield on the East side of the Rosemont Range, E.L. Vail (brother of W.L. Vail at Rosemont, Lander Young, (son in law of Tom Gardner of Gardners Ranch) with a very small bunch at the mouth of Gardners Canyon, Rollin Richardson at the Crittenden Ranch, or Pennsylvania Ranch, W. H. Igo on the North west corner of the Huachuca, the Perrin Grant otherwise known as the Babacomorie, under lease to L. C. Greene and operated by Frank Moson of Hereford and that is the story as close as I can remember.

I hope this rather long and rambling recital will give you the information you want and if you have any corrections or want additional information will try and furnish the same. Regards to all of you

Yours

Harry L. Heffner
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