



# VaRRA News

Publication from the  
**Vail Ranch Restoration Association**

Copyright 2011, Temecula, California

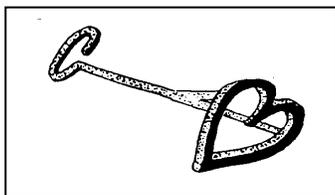
2nd Qtr. 2011 – Volume 2, Issue 2

*“Dedicated to the preservation  
and restoration of the Historic  
Vail Ranch Headquarters.”*

**Little Temecula  
History Center is  
Open on Sunday –  
In Red Implement  
Barn next to Kohl’s  
At Margarita and  
Temecula Pkwy.**

**Sundays 12 – 5 pm**  
*Or by Appointment*

***Come see the results of  
our efforts, and perhaps  
volunteer to be a docent.***



## **Vail Ranch Restoration Association**

41403 Bitter Creek Ct.  
Temecula, CA 92591

Phone: 951-699-5148

Cell: 951-552-3516

E-Mail: [info@vailranch.org](mailto:info@vailranch.org)

On the web at  
[www.vailranch.org](http://www.vailranch.org)

## *A Major Cattle Drive in the West*

# Part 2 of Desert Trail Diary

*(Editors Note: Edward, brother of Walter Vail, wrote a series describing a cattle drive that began January 1890 from Vail, Arizona to Temecula, California. The first part of this printing was published last Quarter in the VaRRA News. The series was originally published in TEXASLAND – The Pioneer Magazine, years ago, and later in The Arizona Daily Star. The saga continues as the thirsty herd senses water ahead. . .)*

**By Edward L. Vail**

The next day we drove the cattle about ten miles down the winding canyon along the railroad towards Gila and made our third dry camp west of Maricopa. Before leaving Estrella I begged water enough from the section foreman there to water our wagon team.

My brother, Walter Vail, and I had many warm friends among railroad men of the Tucson division and often when driving or holding our cattle along the railroad track, the conductor and trainmen would wave their caps at us from a passing train and sometimes throw us a late newspaper.

We expected to reach Gila Bend on the river the next evening and started the cattle early in the morning toward the Gila Valley. When we had reached a point which was clear of the hills on a big flat that gradually sloped towards the river, the big steers in the lead suddenly threw up their heads and commenced to sniff the breeze, which happened to be blowing from the river, and a weird sound like a sigh or a moan seemed to come from the entire herd. I had been driving cattle many years then, but had never heard them make that noise before. They were very thirsty and had suddenly smelled water! They had been dragging along as if it were hard work even to walk, but in a minute they were on a dead run. Every man but one was in front, beating the lead cattle over the head with coats and slickers trying to check them. As we feared they would run themselves to death before the water was reached. Close to the river we turned them loose, or rather, they practically made us get out to the way.

Then we found that one of our men had been caught in the rush of cattle. They had outrun his already tired horse but he was doing his best to keep it on its feet. If it had fallen with him the cattle would probably have trampled the man to death. Here several of our men showed quick action. Pushing their horses against one side of the string of cattle that was rushing towards their companion they pressed it back far enough to release him from his dangerous position. The lead steers plunged into the Gila like fish-hawks, drinking as they swam across to the other side. The drags (or slow cattle) must have been at least three miles behind us when the first steers reached the river, and after watering our horses, which we did carefully, some of the cowboys went back to help the man we left behind to follow them in.

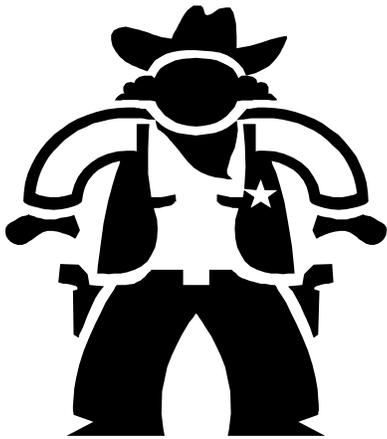
We grazed our cattle and horses at Gila Bend for several days and gave them a chance to rest. Turner or I generally did some scouting ahead to find a good watering place for our cattle and the next day’s camp.

We were looking for a short cut to Oatman Flat as we did not want to drive the cattle over the long, winding, rocky road. On the south side of the river and about thirty feet above it there was a narrow trail cut in the side of the mountain. This had formerly been the old stage road but was so badly washed out by high water that in places it was barely wide enough for the steers to travel single file. On the other side of the river was a steep mountain. We finally decided to drive the cattle over the narrow trail by the river and send the wagon by the longer road. So we started them on the trail with a rider leading, as usual, and as soon as a few of the lead steers were on the way the others followed like sheep. So many cattle walking single file was an unusual sight. All reached Oatman Flat safely. There we met the Jourdan family with whom we were acquainted. They were farming and also had some cattle. Turner and I spent the evening rather pleasantly at their house.

**(Continued on Next Page)**

## Friends of VaARRA Associate Members

Robert & Carol Anderson  
Otto & Nancy Baron  
Audrey & Vince Cilurzo  
Robert & Kathryn Curtis  
David Elliott & Anne Miller  
Walt & Jean Dixon  
Elaine Eshom  
Dale Garcia  
Phil & Connie Harris  
Sue & Jim Jeffrey  
Pat Lallou  
Bonnie Martland  
John Moramarco  
Beth Paden, Discovery Works  
Duane & Judy Preimsberger  
Lyz Quinn  
Rosemary & Ray Smith  
Karen & David Strauss  
Catherine Swetavage  
Roger Weber  
Lisa Woodward



### VaARRA Board of Directors

Darell Farnbach, President  
Rhine Helzer, Vice President  
Rebecca Farnbach, Secretary  
Sandy Helzer, Treasurer  
Dick Fox, Newsletter  
Charolette Fox  
Malcolm Barnett  
Loretta Barnett  
Bill Harker  
Dave Wilson  
Toni Benson

## Diary of a Desert Trail (continued from Page 1)

Oatman Flat is a nice piece of land that was named for the Oatman family, nearly all the member of which were killed by Apaches in 1852.

Gila Bend is about half way from Tucson to Yuma and from what I saw of the Gila Valley I did not think much of it as a cattle county. We had some trouble with quicksand when watering cattle in the river. If a steer got stuck in the sand the only way to get him out was to wade in and pull out one leg at a time and then tramp the sand around that leg (this gets the water out of the sand which it holds in suspension). When all the legs were free we would turn the animal on its side and drag it back to the bank with our riatas. I never saw so many quail in my life as I saw in that county. Frequently John, the cook, would take my shotgun and kill a lot of them. At night when he called us to supper he would say, "All the boys come plenty quai tonight." He could not say "quail".

There were very few incidents of particular interest on the trail down the Gila Valley to Yuma. One evening when we were ready to camp for the night, John drove his team down on a little flat near the river where there were quite a number of willow and cottonwood trees. When Tom rode over and saw the place he told the Chinaman to hitch up his team and drive up on higher ground near where the cattle were to be held that night. But the cook did not want to go and said, "See what a pletty place this is, Mr. Tom!" Tom replied that it was a "Pletty" all right, but too far from the cattle in case of trouble, and too far for the men to go in the night when the guards changed.

The next morning when we awoke we heard a great roaring from the river. We lost no time in riding over to see what had happened and found the Gila was a raging flood, and the place John had picked out to camp was eight or ten feet under water. If we had slept there that night the men on guard would have been the only survivors of our outfit. Later we heard that the Walnut Grove Dam, situated on a branch of the Gila River, had given way, and quite a number of people were drowned in the valley below the dam.

We were compelled to leave some of our cattle before we reached Yuma, as there was scarcely any grass or weeds and the mesquite and other forage had not yet budded out. Some steers died, but most of them gave out and we turned them loose. I kept a list of those we left. I think there were about twenty-five or thirty in all.

While we were at Gila Bend I went with the cook and his wagon to Gila Station and bought barley for our horses, also provisions. Before we reached the Agua Caliente (Hot Springs), near Sentinel, I rode ahead, as we had heard there was a store there, and laid in another supply. The Hot Springs are on the north side of the Gila River and as there was considerable water in the river, a man with a boat rowed me over. I took advantage of the opportunity and enjoyed a good bath in the warm water, which is truly wonderful. I doubt if there is any better in the country. At that time the accommodations were very poor for persons visiting the Springs especially for those who were ill.

About thirty miles from Yuma, Jim Knight and one of his cowboys met us. Knight was foreman of the Warner Ranch and a cousin of Turner's. He brought us saddle mules and horses and they were all fat. These were to take the place of some of the horses we had ridden ever since we left the Empire Ranch.

There was one very important thing that Jim failed to do however – and that was to find out if there was any water on the Colorado desert for our cattle, and where it was. I think he said he only watered his horses once between Carrizo Creek and the Colorado River, a distance of over one hundred miles, and he knew of no other water out there. As we were then only about half way on our road to the Warner Ranch, and the worst yet to come, Knight's report did not cheer us much.

The mules Jim brought were young and unbroken and as stubborn as only mules can be. It was hard to turn one around on a ten-acre lot. Two of our boys refused to ride them. We told them if they would go as far as Yuma we would pay their fare back to Pantano, as that was the agreement we made with our men before leaving the ranch. But I think they were homesick and I could not blame them much. So we paid them off and they took the next train for Tucson at the nearest station to our camp.

Those mules had a surprise in store for them, and I will admit it was new to me at that time. On the ranch when breaking colts we use either a hackamore or an American snaffle-bit until they become well reined, so that by pressing the rein to one side of the neck they will turn in the opposite direction. Tom took a piece of rope which was long enough to pass through the rings of an American Snaffle-bit, allowing enough slack for the rider to use as reins, and fastened the ends to the cinch rings of the saddle on either side. If one of those California mules got fresh and took it into his head to run through a mesquite thicket with you all you had to do was pull hard enough and you could double his nose back on the saddle on either side as the rope ran freely through the rings in the bit, which acted as pulleys. Before long those Warner mules were doing their share of the work, which helped us very much during the rest of the trip.

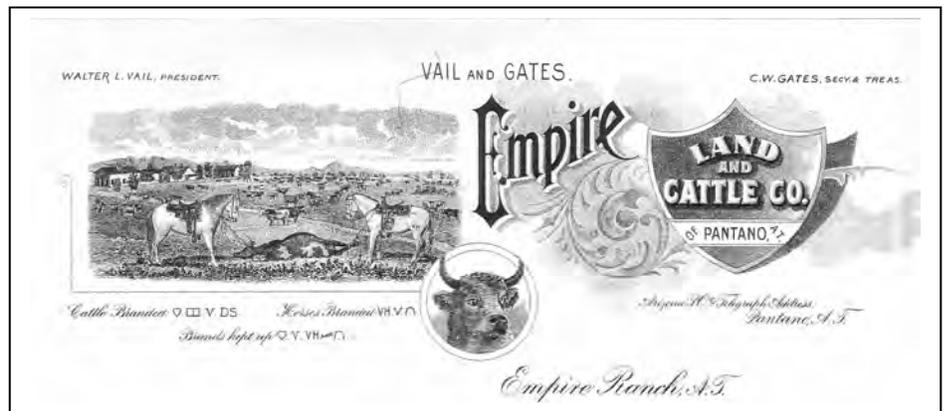
A few days later we reached Yuma and camped on the Colorado River, about three miles southwest of the town. The river was rather high owing to the unusual amount of

(Continued on Page 3)

# Brief Notes . . .

We want to thank *Charlie Strauss* for choosing to do service for VaRRRA as his Eagle Scout project. Charlie and his parents have been members and supporters of VaRRRA for a number of years. His generous contribution of materials and labor done with the help of fellow Scouts can be seen under the Sycamore trees at the left side of the front of the Vail Ranch historic property. They cleared weeds, put down weed barrier, and are in the process of building a performing stage to enhance the storytelling feature area. Thank you for your dedication and fine work that will make visiting groups more comfortable.

*John O'Brien* (a Senior at Great Oak) is organizing a team of volunteers from Great Oak High School to help VaRRRA with maintenance of the landscaping and buildings on the Historic Vail Ranch property. We look forward to working with these students. John was one of the Sparkman third-graders who visited the property in 2002. He and his parents have donated many items to VaRRRA since then. Their most recent donation is the beautiful doctor's buggy that we have recently completed restoring and proudly display at the History Center.



*Empire Ranch Land and Cattle Co. letterhead showing partners Walter Vail and C.W. Gates, and the location of the ranch being in Pantano, Arizona Territory. Pantano is southeast of Tucson.*

## Diary of a Desert Trail (continued from Page 2)

water flowing into it from the Gila, which joins it on the north side of the town. The next day we let all our cowboys go to town to buy clothing, which some of them needed badly, and we gave them free rein to enjoy themselves as they pleased. Of course, they did not all go at once as some had to stay and herd the cattle. Among the last of our men to get back to camp that night was Servero Miranda, know among the cowboys as "Chappo," which is Spanish for "Shorty." He was somewhat lit up and made a short speech to Tom Turner in Spanish, which translated amounted to this: "Mr. Tom, I am sorry that I am pretty full tonight, but you know that no matter what you tell me to do I am always ready and willing to do it – riding mean mules or anything else."

"Pa Chappo," as he is now called, commenced working at the Empire Ranch about 1880, and is still on the payroll. In February, 1922, his grandson was buried in Tucson, a victim of the World War. He had served in the U.S. Navy and contracted tuberculosis at that time.

Turner and I got a boat, with an Indian to row it, and spent the day looking for the best place to swim the cattle across the river. We rowed two or three miles up and down the Colorado and prodded the banks with poles to see how deep the quicksand was. We found it very bad, especially on the west bank where the cattle would have to land.

Finally we found an island near the west bank of the river where the landing was better. The water was not very deep on the other side of the island, with a good landing on the California side. We then returned to the Arizona side of the river and found it was impossible to drive the cattle into the river there, as the bank formed a ten-foot perpendicular wall above the water. So we hired a lot of Yuma Indians with picks and shovels to grade a road to the water. This work occupied a day or two. We were then ready to attempt to swim the cattle across. The herd had not been watered since the day before as we were anxious to have them thirsty. The current was very strong and the river very deep, and because of the swift current we found it would be impossible for men on horseback to do anything in guiding the cattle across, so we hired Yuma Indians and three or four boats. We placed them so as to keep the cattle from drifting down stream. The idea was not to let them turn back nor land down far enough to miss the island. We got the cattle strung out and travelling as they had on the trail, with the big steers in the lead and men on each side to keep them in position to go down the grade which we made to the river. Most of the large cattle reached the island all right.

Then our troubles began! Two or three hundred of the smaller steers got frightened as the current was too swift for them and they swam back to the Arizona side. About this time the Sheriff from Yuma showed up and said he had orders from the District Attorney to hold our cattle until we paid taxes on them in Yuma County. I told him I thought the District Attorney was mistaken, but we were too busy to find out just then. Cattle were scattered all along the river on the Arizona side and as they could not climb the banks and get out, many of them were in the water just hanging to the bank with their feet. We hired all the Indians we could get and with the help of our own men we pulled all except two or three of the cattle up that steep bank.

It was about ten o'clock at night. The Yuma Indians quit and said they were hungry and tired. I did not doubt them a bit, as we had eaten nothing since breakfast before daylight. So we made it unanimous and all quit and went to Yuma. We were all terribly dirty so we went to the hotel at the depot, got a bath, some supper, a bed and a good sleep!

In the meantime this is the way we were situated. Our chuckwagon, cook and blankets were across the river; our six hundred cattle were loose on the island in the river where we could not herd them; nearly three hundred steers were loose on the Arizona side in

(Continued on Page 4)

# More Brief Notes . . .

On any given Sunday you will find 2 - 4 volunteers at the history center combing through copies of a ledger book from the Machado Store once located in the terra cotta building also known as The Shire on the Southeast corner of Main and Front Streets in Old Town Temecula. These volunteers from a history class at Mt. San Jacinto College are transcribing the data on Excel spreadsheets for easy access to the information that tells who frequented the store and what provisions were purchased.

VaARRA was pleased to host the venue for the annual 3rd Grade local history contest, a joint effort between the Temecula Valley Museum, VaARRA and the Temecula Valley Historical Society. Visitors enjoyed viewing 230 creative projects that included dioramas, posters and notebooks. We look forward to seeing these students grow up and hope they will help us design new displays.

## What's happening At the Old Ranch?

Arteco Partners has requested an extension on the permits while funding for the project is still being sought. The haywagon donated for use as a performing stage has been moved onto the property.

**VaARRA News 2<sup>nd</sup> Qtr. 2011  
Page 4**

## Diary of a Desert Trail (continued from Page 3)

the thickest brush I have ever seen; and we were in the hands of the Sheriff of Yuma County!

The next morning, C.W. Gates, my brother's partner, arrived on the train from Los Angeles. He went down with us to the scene of the previous day's operations. The first thing we did was to pull out the two steers we had left clinging to the river bank. Then we told Mr. Gates that if he would take what men we could spare and start to gather the cattle we had turned loose in the brush that Tom and I would go over in a boat to the island and swim the cattle over to the California side of the river. We threw our saddles into the boat, led the swimming horses and soon reached the island. The cattle seemed to be alright. We did not have any trouble in getting them over as we found the big steers could wade across but most of the younger ones had to swim a short distance. When we got them all across, we looked up at the best place we could find to hold them, and made camp.

When we got back to where we had left Mr. Gates, we found him and Chappo sitting on a boat on the river bank. Mr. Gates said that we could never gather the cattle in that brush, and I admit it did not look possible. At that time Mr. Gates had been only a short time in the cattle business and had never worked with cattle on the range. So, Tom and I told him if he would go to Tucson and see his attorney about the tax matter we would gather the lost cattle, if possible.

I forgot to say that our Chinese cook left for Pantano on the train soon after we arrived in Yuma. He said that if he crossed the river he would never get back again. The day before he left he bought a large Colorado salmon alive from a Yuma Indian who had just caught it. John took the fish, which was over two feet long, up to Mr. Gondolfo's store and got permission to put it in a large galvanized water tank as he wanted to take it back to the Empire Ranch for Mrs. Vail. When John went to get his fish the tank was full of water. So with the permission of the owner the water was drawn off, but John could not wait for all of it to run out. When the water was still two feet deep he could see the fish and became so excited that he jumped in, clothes and all. I was watching and it was quite a circus. He grabbed at that fish several times before he caught it; then his foot slipped and he rolled over in the bottom of the tank, but when he got up he had the fish. If anything, I think he was wetter than the fish, but all he said was, "Mr. Ned that fish pletty dam quick, but I catche him allite." John wrapped the fish in his slicker and was soon on his way to the Pantano. When he arrived there, in his anxiety to present the fish to Mrs. Vail in good condition, he telephoned for a team to meet him.

Before Mr. Gates left Yuma he telegraphed my brother who was at the Empire Ranch that we were swimming the cattle and that I was in trouble over the tax matter. When the message reached Pantano it was transmitted over the telephone to the Ranch. The line was not working well and the only thing that my brother could understand was, "Ned trouble, swimming river." He at once concluded that I had been drowned in the river. He saddled his fastest horse, "Lucero," and I am told, made the fastest time on record to Pantano. When he read the message and found that trouble was about taxes, he said: "That word never looked good to me before."

At first, we did not make much progress in gathering those steers. The brush was so thick we could not get through it on horseback. It was screw-bean mesquite which does not grow high but the limbs are long and drooping so that the ends lie on the ground. Between them arrow-weed was as thick as hair on a dog and higher than a man's head. We found that we could run some of the steers out of the brush afoot by starting near the river and scaring them up to the open mesa as the brushy only extends back a short distance from the river. After a few days the cattle commenced coming out themselves and we soon had quite a bunch together.

In the meantime, Mr. Francis J. Heney who at that time was acting as attorney for Vail & Gates at Tucson, decided our tax troubles as follows; viz, that the taxes had been paid on our cattle before they left the home ranch, and that cattle in transit were not subject to taxation any place in Arizona. Mr. Heney also advised the Yuma attorney to read the Arizona Statutes and let Pima County cattlemen alone.

Then the sheriff's deputy wanted us to pay him for holding our cattle but I told him we never hired him and as the sheriff put him there he had better collect from him. The deputy's name was Green. He had a livery stable in Yuma where we had kept our horses ever since we arrived. He was a pretty good fellow. I think Mr. Gates was in favor of paying him as we had worked him like one of our men holding the cattle. Tom and I were pretty sore by that time and said we would see that bunch of Yuma politicians in a hotter place than Yuma - if there was such a place - before we would pay any of them a cent.

After four or five days we had gathered most all the cattle on the Yuma side. Then I ordered cars and shipped them across the bridge. We made a chute of an old wagon box and railroad ties and unloaded them. It would no doubt have been cheaper to have shipped all our cattle across the bridge at \$2.50 a carload but we did not like the idea of depending on the railroad in any way on this drive.

*(Editors Note: The saga will continue with the next issue of VaARRA News to be printed in the 3rd Quarter of 2011, watch for its release. Finally leaving Arizona . . .)*