

THE

DESERT

QUEEN

RANCH

15¢



By Reino and Wendy Clark

This is the story of an isolated, rock-bound canyon on the southern edge of the Mojave Desert. The trickle of water at its bottom has set it apart for thousands of years, making it special in a land of searing heat and dryness. From the first day of its discovery by wildlife taking advantage of its sandy pools, to the time when sunburned prospectors dipped their gold pans into the cool waters, the site has buzzed with activity. This desert alcove has meant life for untold numbers, and many generations of men and women have lingered here, all leaving their marks upon the land.

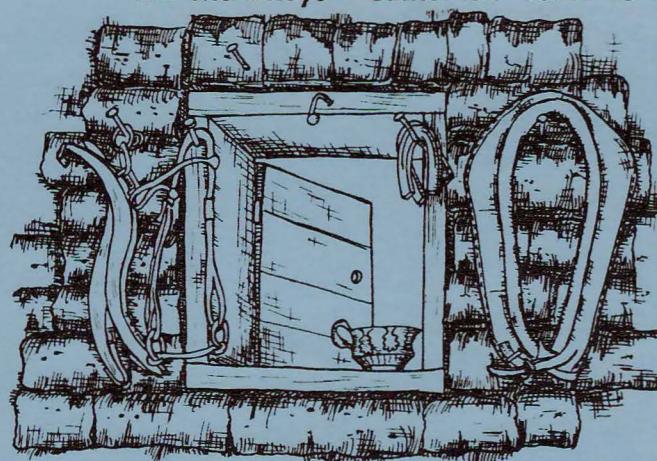
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Produced in Cooperation  
with the



NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
1975  
JOSHUA TREE NATIONAL MONUMENT  
74485 PALM VISTA DRIVE  
TWENTYNINE PALMS, CALIFORNIA 92277

The McHaneys — Cattlemen Come to the Desert

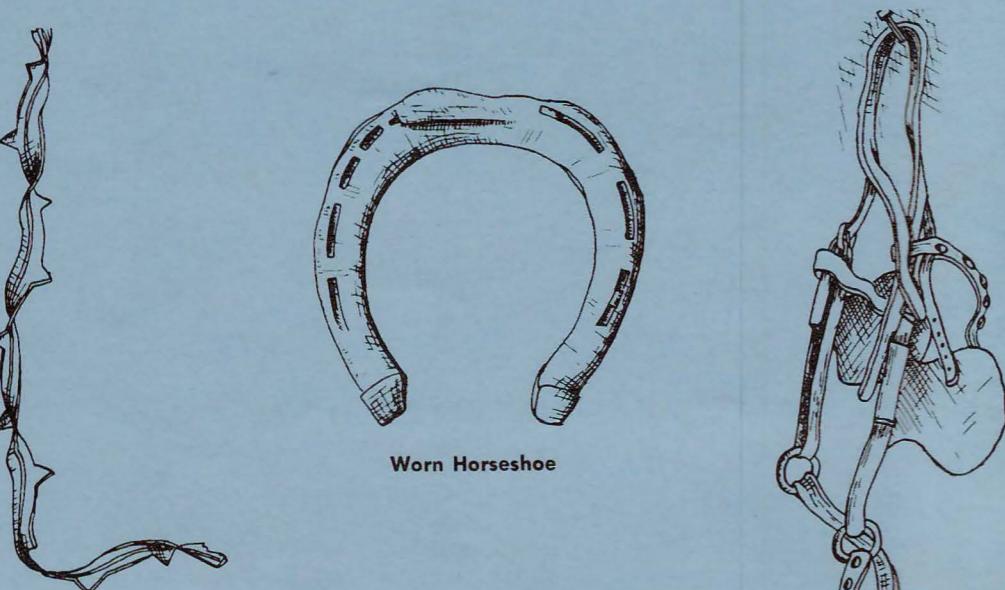


Scene in the Adobe Barn

Around 1850 the newly acquired land of California was luring many men to its new frontiers. At this time the higher elevations of the present-day Mojave Desert probably received more than ten inches of rain and snow a year. Grass was knee-high and plentiful, and several springs and ponds in the region contained water year round. Cattlemen began to take an interest in the area for its grasslands. This range was particularly good for winter feed when the higher mountain meadows to the west were snowed in.

The greatest disadvantage of the High Desert was that it lacked the many good water holes necessary for large herds of cattle. Wells and dams (tanks) had to be dug and constructed in critical areas to supplement natural water sources.

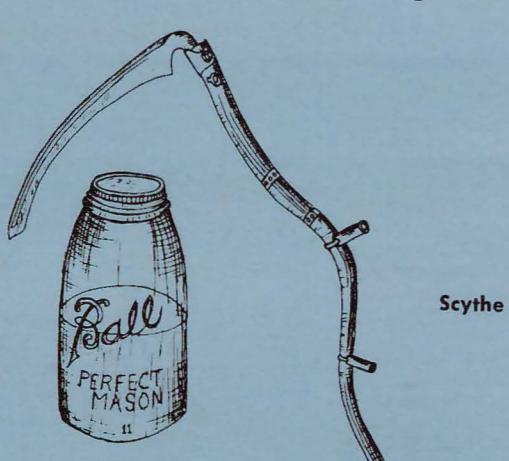
Two brothers, Jim and Bill McHaney, and a group of companions collectively known as the "McHaney gang," were among the first to move toward the area with an eye on its pasture. They were reputedly cattle rustlers, who were at times accused of carrying on a two-way trade of stolen cattle between California and Arizona. They were reported to have used Hidden Valley for some of their illicit activities, often rebranding stolen cattle there. The area was well-suited to their purpose. The nearest sheriff was in Banning, more than fifty miles away, and the jumbled masses of rock were easy to hide cattle in. The McHaney gang established a cow camp where the Desert Queen Ranch is located today. At their cow camp the gang dug wells to provide more water for their herds. They built two cabins and a barn out of one of the readily available natural building materials—adobe. Although the cabins have since been torn down, remains of the barn survive today. There was money to be made in cattle, but it was a slow business and the McHaney brothers began to look around for faster ways to accumulate the wealth they desired.



Barbed Wire

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Gardens and Irrigation



Scythe

Taking advantage of the substantial quantities of water that seeped from the rocks to the northeast of the Keys house, a concrete dam and an earth levee were built for storage. Pipe lines were laid to carry water from the resulting reservoir to gardens and orchards below. The main vegetable garden at the ranch, and the orchard, consisting of apple, peach, pear and plum trees, were located together. Irrigation water was used by the garden plants, before sinking deeper into the earth and being soaked up by the roots of the fruit trees. When the trees were first planted, the hard native soil had to be loosened with dynamite to enable the root systems of the trees to expand. Rich soil was hauled from around the ranch to improve the conditions of the garden. Traps were set and fences were built to further protect this produce, which was harvested and canned or dried when ripe. Fields of wheat and alfalfa were planted for livestock feed. This wheat and other grains could be milled at the

up by the roots of the fruit trees. When the trees were first planted, the hard native soil had to be loosened with dynamite to enable the root systems of the trees to expand. Rich soil was hauled from around the ranch to improve the conditions of the garden. Traps were set and fences were built to further protect this produce, which was harvested and canned or dried when ripe. Fields of wheat and alfalfa were planted for livestock feed. This wheat and other grains could be milled at the

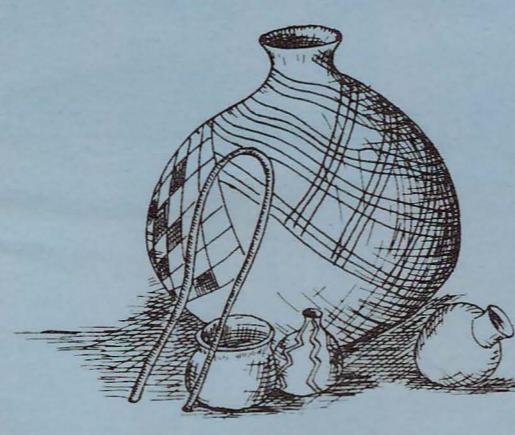
In the Beginning



More than six hundred million years ago this site was obscured by a Precambrian sea. Slowly, over a period involving millions of years, layer upon layer of sediments, silts, muds and sands were deposited at its depths. These sediments were gradually compressed and eventually solidified into rock. Geologic eras passed and successive seas continued to deposit more and more material until about one hundred and fifty million years ago. In the Mesozoic Era masses of molten rock flowing about beneath the Earth's restless surface pushed up some of these ancient sea bottoms into extensive mountain ranges. The newly exposed sedimentary material could not stand up to the erosional forces of the elements. Both wind and water fretted and wore away at it until the very body of rock responsible for the great uplift began to be revealed. This was a light-colored granite that we today call quartz monzonite.

As erosional forces continued, water courses began to cut their way through this granite mass to form washes and drainage patterns. Runoff water and water seeping from nearby rock-enclosed basins surfaced at the head of one of these small valleys, forming pools of open water that have served as an attraction to many forms of life over the years. This speck of greenery surrounded by granite hills has supported a specialized community of plants and animals whose populations fluctuate with the wet and dry cycles of the desert. This alcove has played an important part in the history of Joshua Tree National Monument and it is here that the Desert Queen Ranch is located today.

The Cahuilla and Serrano — Man First Comes to the Desert



Pottery Vessels

although rock overhangs were preferred for long-term storage. The specific occupations and duties of an individual member of one of these societies were probably determined by age and sex. The adult males were primarily hunters and their prey was varied. Mountain sheep and antelope provided the bulk of the meat and were hunted with bows and arrows. Smaller animals, such as lizards, rabbits and small rodents were also sought. These could either be driven from their burrows with smoke and captured, dragged out with hooked sticks, or snared using plant fiber cordage.

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The main groups of Indians known to have utilized this area in historic times were the Serrano and the Cahuilla. Both of these peoples were nomadic and had to keep on the move throughout much of the year to continue to find sufficient sources of food and water. They would often make their winter camps in the desert where it was relatively warm, moving during the summer into the cooler mountain regions of the area. These peoples and their predecessors, wandering across the desert in small family units, would have occasionally found their way into the rocky valley, discovering its small pools of water and varied, abundant vegetation.

The Cahuilla and Serrano would frequently plan to camp in a particular location when the majority of plants in the vicinity were producing edible fruits. They often followed the same routes of migration year after year, coming back and re-using many of their camp sites annually. At a camp site small brush shelters were constructed. These were used for sleeping, protection from weather and for storage,

A Fortune Gained and Lost

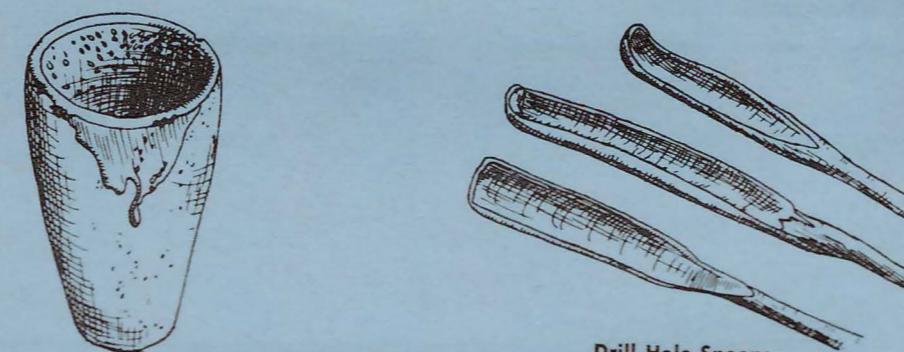


Adit at the Desert Queen Mine

The great mid-1800 gold rushes of the California Sierras were over. Many of the young men who had left their homes across the nation following their dreams to the gold fields of California, were returning disappointed eastward and homeward. As these men retraced their steps, many smaller pockets of gold and other ores were discovered or rediscovered. Minor strikes, rushes, and boom towns were the result. This activity resulted in two thousand mine shafts and prospect holes in

The ownership of the Desert Queen Mine eventually passed to a Mr. Morgan. Not much is known about Morgan, except that he is said to have put close to half a million dollars into the development of the mine. New shafts were opened, but the mine failed to produce the high grades of ore first removed by the McHaneys. Mr. Morgan hired William F. Keys as custodian and assayer of the Desert Queen Mine. Bill Keys was a man with a colorful past. Besides being an experienced hard-rock miner he had worked as a cow hand, a deputy sheriff, a body guard, a prospector, and had been involved in at least three gun fights. Bill had run away from home at the age of fifteen to join the Rough Riders. Changing his name and traveling west, Bill Keys lost all ties with his family. He worked in many of the old mining towns of the southwest and collaborated on several "deals" with Death Valley Scotty while working claims in Death Valley.

Mr. Morgan was losing money and owed Bill Keys months of back wages. The ailing Mr. Morgan died and Bill Keys filed claim to the Desert Queen Mine, as well as filing homestead on 160 acres of land including the old Queen Mill site in the desert alcove.

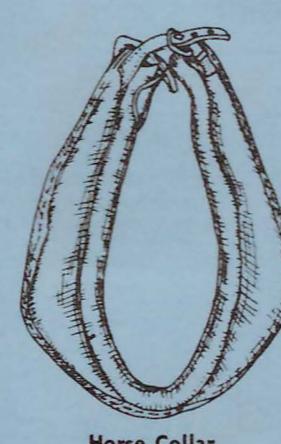


Crucible

Drill Hole Spoons

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Cattle and Other Livestock



Horse Collar

The Keys kept a maximum of 65-75 head of cattle on the ranch at any one time. The land could not have supported more than this and additional dams were built in the vicinity of the ranch to hold water for these cattle. Although several types of automobiles were usually available for transportation on the ranch, burros, mules and horses were still necessary for access into rough, isolated areas. These animals would either be hitched to wagons or packed individually, and were often confined or corralled in natural rock-enclosed valleys to the north of the ranch.

A few goats were usually kept around the Desert Queen Ranch for meat and dairy products. Keys once purchased over one thousand Angora goats, planning to produce wool on a large scale. But, as cactus and thorns became entangled in the goat's long hair and as coyotes decreased their numbers, the Keys realized the impossibility of the venture and sold the flock. While on the ranch, the goats had worn pathways across the earthen levee nearest the house while going for water. These pathways served to weaken the levee and it broke during a severe rainstorm. A deep wash was cut, and later a high concrete dam was built to replace the original one of earth. The Keys stocked the reservoir with bluegill, bass and catfish. The fish survived until a decrease in the annual rainfall in the area began to cause the reservoir to go dry some summers.

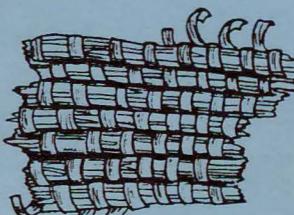
Women were responsible for the processing of meat, either drying or smoking it, as well as gathering all edible plant materials. This would depend upon what was in season, as well as what was available in the area that particular year. Women and children gathered whatever edible food they came upon, including insects, which were sometimes ground with seeds and nuts. Pinyon nuts, grass seed, mesquite beans, acorns and cactus fruit were a few of the plant foods eaten by the Cahuilla and Serrano. These were often ground in bedrock mortars, using a long stone pestle. After the meal had reached a fine consistency, it was mixed with water to form a gruel and eaten.

The area of the alcove had other resources of value besides its food and water. Portions of trees and shrubs were useful in the construction of weaponry and shelters, as well as for providing fuel for fires. Mohave yucca and nolina leaves were woven into sandals and baskets, or they were pounded down and the fibers were removed to be twisted into cordage or string. Animal skins provided clothing, and pieces of local vein quartz could be made into arrow points and knife blades.

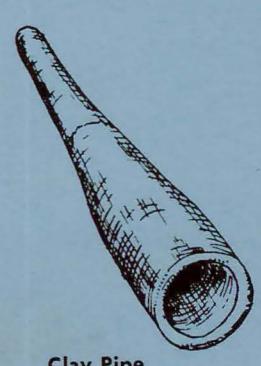
These people left behind few traces of their ancient life style. A pictograph painted on the wall of a rock shelter during some religious ceremony, a scattering of charred bones washed out of a cremation pit, a few shreds of pottery and an occasional bedrock mortar are all that remain. The marks on the land left by generations of these wandering tribes are slight. After the first Caucasian explorers and settlers began to arrive in the area of southern California, the numbers of these peoples declined sharply.



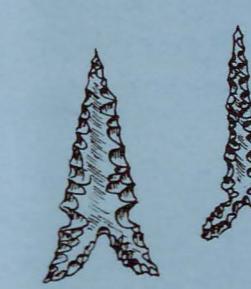
Arrow Tip



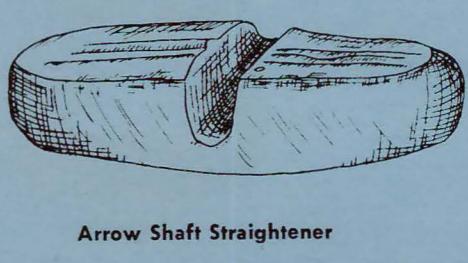
Basket Fragment



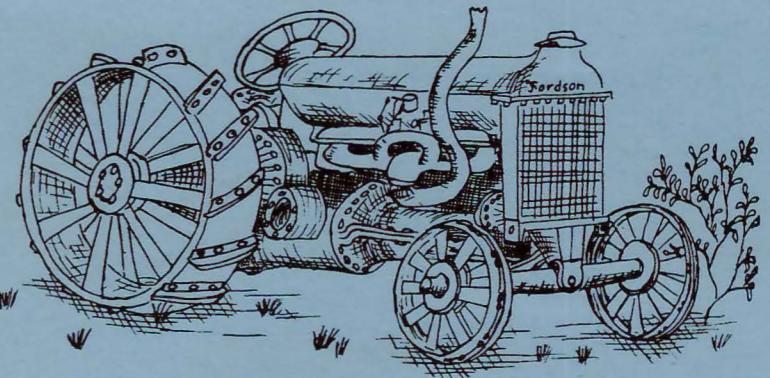
Clay Pipe



Arrow Shaft Straightener



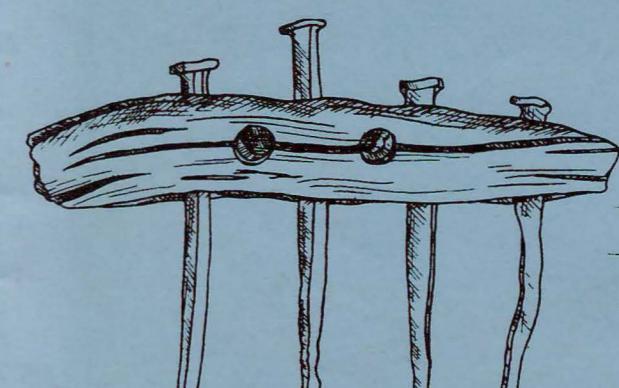
Arrowheads



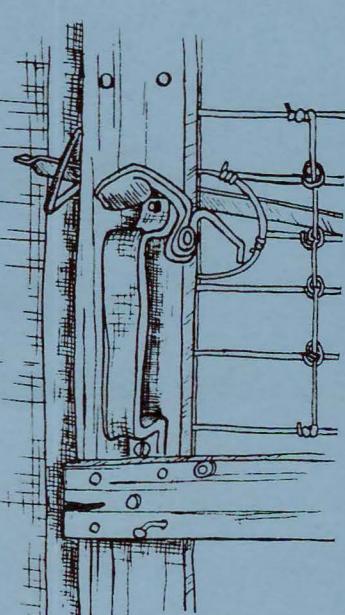
Fordson Tractor from the 1920's

Bill Keys the Homesteader

In 1917, William F. Keys built a high stone fireplace for his new board house, and made a plaque to commemorate it. The next year he married Frances Lawton from Los Angeles, who joined him on the ranch. From the Keys homestead to the nearest town of Banning, one had to travel over fifty miles of rough, deeply rutted dirt roads. Food and supplies were difficult to come by and the Keys were forced to depend to a large degree upon their ingenuity for survival. Together they raised a family of five children and for years the confines of the alcove resounded with life and activity. In these early years, with the exception of a few wandering prospectors and cowboys, the Keys lived in relative isolation. They did well in adapting to this life style and survived where others had failed. They worked with the desert, not against it. They took advantage of its assets, molding them to suit their needs when it was practical to do so, and they in turn were molded by the desert.



Homemade Rake

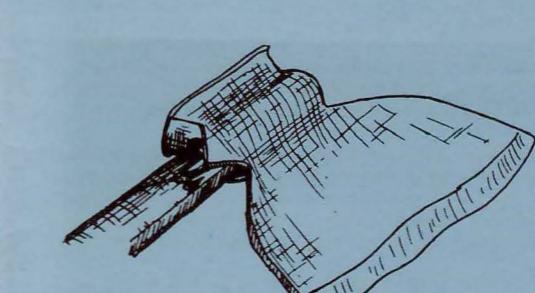


Homemade Gate Latch

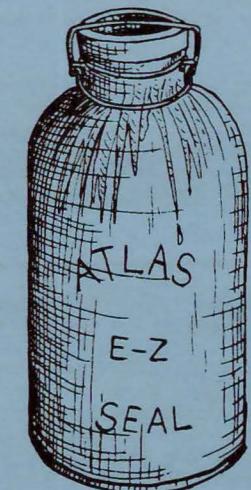
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The Desert Queen School

Bill and Frances took as good care of their family as was possible in the isolated region where they made their home. They often read medical journals and treated themselves for less serious afflictions, as the nearest doctor was more than 50 miles away and could not always be reached when necessary. As the children grew, the Keys realized that their need for an education grew also. They had learned the elements of survival and picked up with the world around them. In 1932 a hired hand working at the ranch, who was qualified as an instructor, started the first formal classes for the Keys' children. Later, when enough of the Keys' neighbors agreed to send their children to school at the ranch, a schoolhouse was built and the county took over the payment of the teachers.



Broad Axe



Canning Jar

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### The Society of the Desert Queen Ranch

In the 1930's when the depression hit the nation, some people moved to the deserts to weather the storm. Taking up homesteads, a few families attempted to eke out a living by working mines or running a few head of stock in the area around the Desert Queen Ranch. Consequently as more people became acquainted with the Keys, the ranch hosted more guests every year. Their friends were many and their need for hired hands to help out around the ranch was great. No fine distinctions can be made between guests and hired help, as guests often helped with the most menial tasks and those hired for help were often friends in need. Relations came to visit, as well as past acquaintances. The Keys even constructed several guest houses around the ranch.

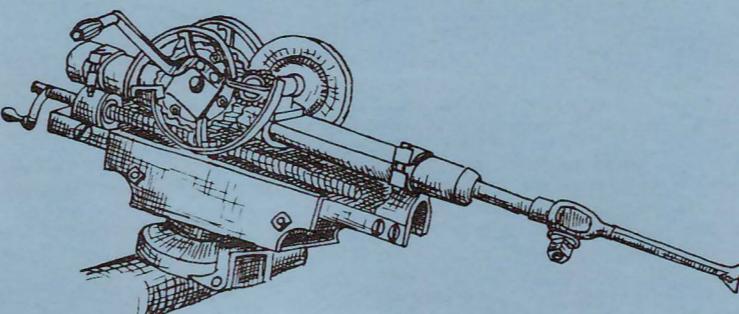
The aged and blind Bill McHaney finally retired from mining in Music Valley. He moved to the Desert Queen Ranch, his old home when it had still been called the Queen Mill, and the Keys looked after him in his last days. He died in a cabin at the ranch during a snowstorm in the winter of 1936 and was buried in the cemetery in Twenty-nine Palms, California. To show his gratitude to the Keys for their attention in his declining years, Bill McHaney willed his limited personal property to them.



Carving of Bill McHaney by W. F. Keys

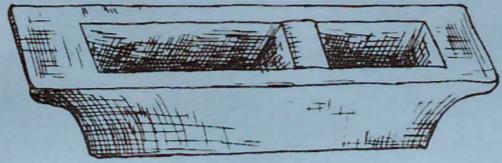
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### Bill Keys Continues His Search for Riches



Hand-cranked Rock Drill

vate companies. When some of these companies later went bankrupt and left the area, Keys acquired equipment from the abandoned sites. The Desert Queen Ranch is still strewn with mining equipment Keys collected throughout the years.



Bullion Mould

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Desert Queen Brand

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**The Ultimate Test of Survival for Bill Keys**

In 1943 when Bill Keys was sixty-two, ill feelings arose between him and a new neighbor, Worth Bagley. Bill claimed that Worth had shot some of his livestock and Bagley accused Bill of trespassing on his land. The main conflict was over the use of a roadway. Because it crossed his land, Bagley thought it was private, but because it had always been public, Keys continued to use it. One day while Bill was using the road to cross Worth's property there was a gun fight and Worth Bagley was shot and killed by Bill Keys, the only witness.

Keys turned himself in to the sheriff in Twentynine Palms. He was put on trial, convicted of manslaughter and sent to San Quentin Penitentiary. He was granted a full pardon and released after five years, with the help of Erle Stanley Gardner and a group of lawyers who made up the Court of Last Resort. The court, backed by popular opinion, attempted to free inmates believed to have been wrongly convicted.

Bill Keys was about seventy years old when he returned home. He thought of prison as an educational experience and called it his "college." Bill resumed work at home with as much zeal as before. His new interests were adobe-making and the firing of bricks. He also temporarily reopened and operated the Wall Street Mill in 1966. His new projects included the construction of a new dam and plans to build a new house. In 1969 at the age of eighty-nine, Bill died. He was buried in the family cemetery at his beloved Desert Queen Ranch beside his wife who had predeceased him in death six years earlier.

Grass and shrubbery have taken root in the old corrals, and mice and woodrats share homes in many of the old buildings around the Desert Queen Ranch today. High winds blow sheets of tin off the roof tops and machinery silently rusts. What will become of this small desert alcove in the years to come? The present aim of the National Park Service is to preserve the Desert Queen Ranch much as you see it now. We will work to slow down the action of the elements, preserving it as long as possible as a monument to man's adaptation to the desert.

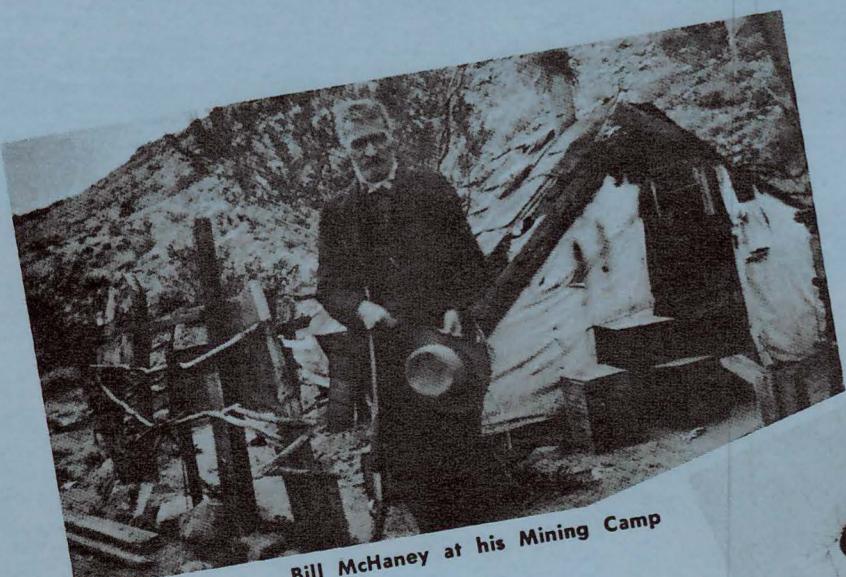


### POINTS OF INTEREST FOR OVERVIEW

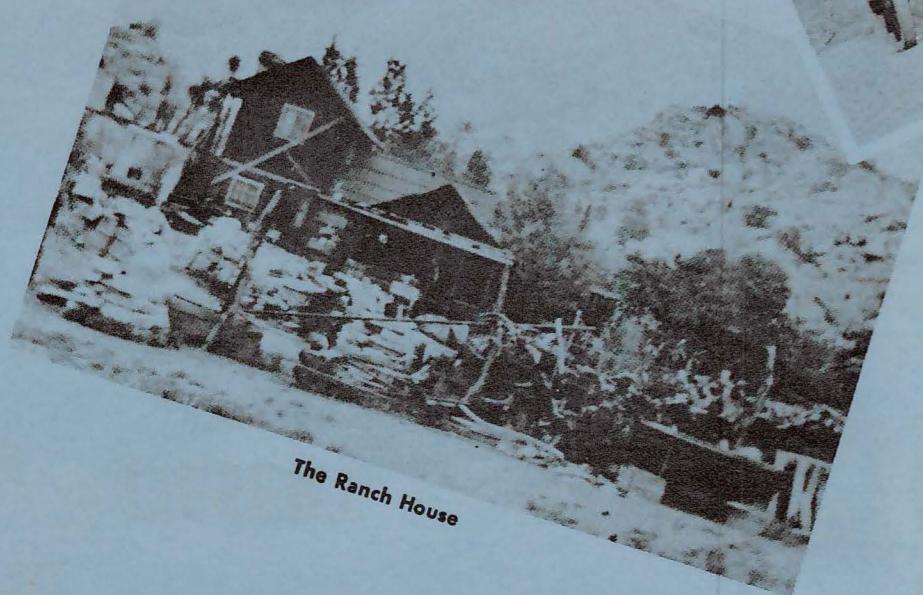
- |                                  |                                     |                                   |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. Bedrock Mortars and Cave Site | 11. Well for Domestic Use           | 21. Stamp Mill                    |
| 2. Joshua Tree Fence             | 12. Jeep                            | 22. Adobe Mixing Machines         |
| 3. Adobe Barn                    | 13. Fordson Tractor and Wood Cutter | 23. Stick Corral                  |
| 4. Adobe Shop                    | 14. Old Wagons                      | 24. Grist Mill                    |
| 5. Wood Tick                     | 15. Cyanide Vat                     | 25. Unfinished Adobe              |
| 6. Adobe Hopper                  | 16. School Teacher's House          | 26. Foundation of Five-stamp Mill |
| 7. Windmill                      | 17. Desert Queen School             | 27. Arrastra                      |
| 8. Garden Site                   | 18. Junked Cars                     | 28. Southern Schoolhouse          |
| 9. Winch and Boom                | 19. Mac Truck                       | 29. Concrete Dam                  |
| 10. Ranch House                  | 20. Arrastra                        |                                   |



Bill Keys



Bill McHaney at his Mining Camp



The Ranch House



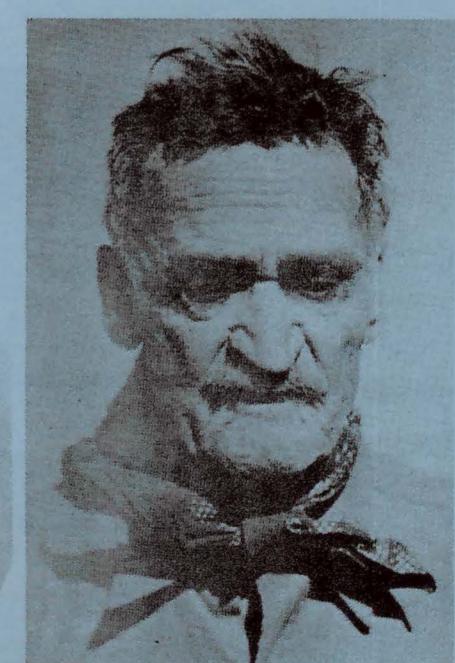
Bill Keys and Daughters  
En Route to Banning.



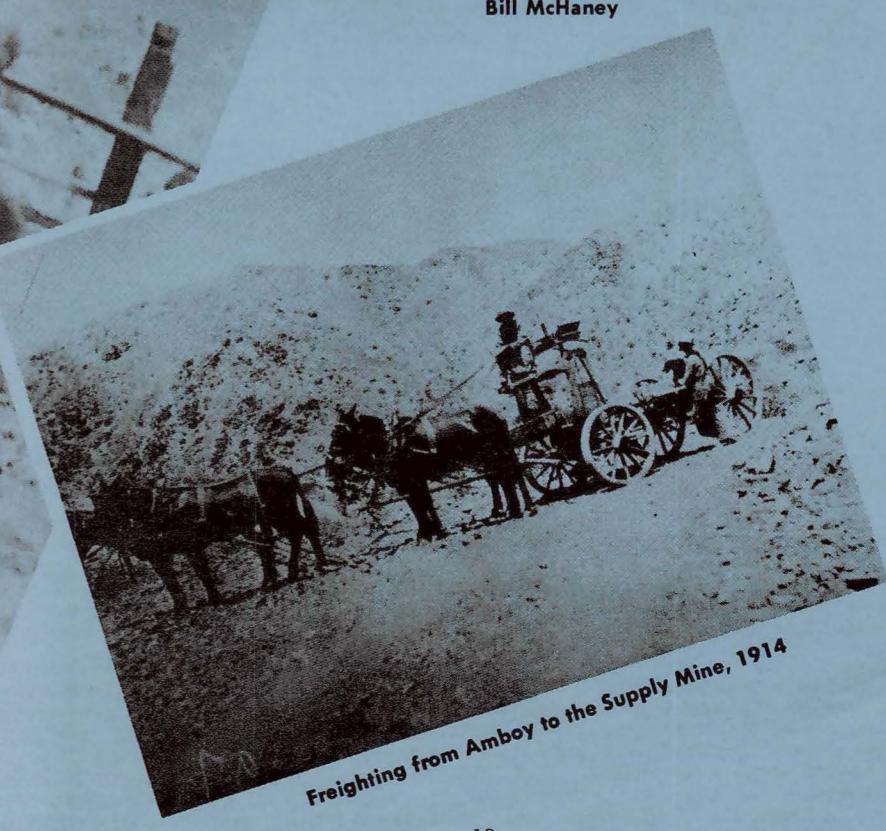
Bill Keys



Donkey and Foal at Keys Corral



Bill McHaney



Freighting from Amboy to the Supply Mine, 1914