



# Chiricahua National Monument

## Faraway Ranch

## OVERVIEW

Information for this overview was taken from the following sources:

Wegman-French, Lysa. 2006. Faraway Ranch Special History Study. Intermountain Cultural Resources Professional Paper No. 72. Santa Fe: National Park Service.

Torres, Louis and Mark Baumler. 1984. A History of the Building and Structures of Faraway Ranch. Denver: National Park Service.

### Introduction

In 1957 a journalist from the *Saturday Evening Post* stayed at the Faraway Ranch for several days, curious about the stories of a blind woman, Lillian Riggs, who managed the ranch. In the subsequent article, he wrote admiringly of the “Lady Boss” of Faraway: “Lillian was certainly a unique person. And she ran that ranch, make no mistake about it, and she knew what was going on at all times.” At the same time that she presented a public face of optimism, Lillian, who was blind and almost deaf, confided in her diary: “If only I could take [my horse] and go alone out into the hills where I have not been for years and years—it might make life worth living again.” Lillian had lost both her mother and her husband eight years earlier and struggled to run the Faraway Ranch, a guest ranch and working cattle ranch, by herself.

Lillian, her sister Hildegard, and her mother, Emma Erickson, all played a vital role in the creation and management of Faraway Ranch. Emma initiated the purchase of the original cabin and property. Hildegard started the guest ranching business, and Lillian oversaw the expansion of the business with her husband, Ed Riggs, and continued to manage the ranch by herself after her husband’s death. Faraway Ranch thus preserves a story important to women’s history, one that complicates traditional narratives of women’s lives in the West. The women of Faraway Ranch were individuals who, although they conformed to socially ascribed gender roles to some degree, also broke free of those roles.

The history of Faraway Ranch also is germane to the history of Chiricahua National Monument. Lillian and Ed Riggs built the first trails into the area that became the national monument



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The Erickson family. From left to right: Lillian, Ben, Hildegard, Neil, and Emma.

and supported the legislative effort to create the monument. As the only lodging for guests in the immediate vicinity, Faraway Ranch had a monopoly on the tourist trade that steadily increased after the monument’s creation in 1924. For many visitors, the ranch figured as an indelible part of their experience at Chiricahua National Monument. Faraway also remained a working cattle ranch until the early 1970s. Many facets of Western history—ranching, tourism, preservation—are part of the Faraway story.

### Arizona Homestead

The story of Faraway Ranch begins with the arrival of Emma Peterson, an immigrant from Sweden, in the United States. Unlike many immigrants, Emma Peterson’s family was well-off, owned a comfortable home, and employed several servants. Emma did not get along well with her step-mother, however, and decided to follow her brother and sister, who already had emigrated to the United States. In 1873, when she was nineteen years old, Emma left Sweden and found work as a servant for a family in Chicago. Emma gradually moved further west, and by 1883 she was working as a servant for an army officer at Fort Craig in New Mexico Territory. Despite the fact that she worked as a servant, Emma still considered herself part of middle class society and when a lowly sergeant began courting her, she scorned his advances.





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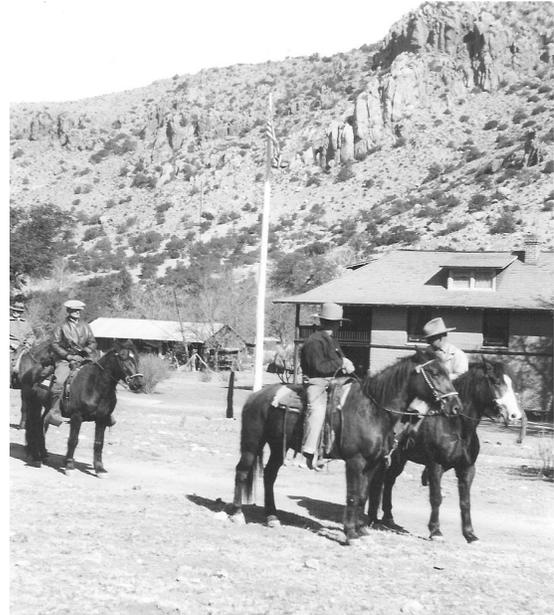
Emma Peterson Erickson.

The sergeant's name was Nels Erickson, although he often used the Americanized version of the name: Neil. Neil Erickson's family had been poor farmers in Sweden, and Neil had emigrated to the U.S. in 1879 to look for work. He joined the army and ended up in the Southwest, drawn into the midst of the army's long conflict with the Apaches. Not to be dissuaded by Emma's initial coldness, Neil continued courting her. In 1884 Emma moved with her employer to Fort Bowie, in the Arizona Territory, and Neil volunteered to bring mail and supplies to the fort so that he could visit her. Neil was discharged in 1886 soon after the last Apache resistance had been quelled. Emma had refused to marry him while he was in the army, but after his discharge she accepted his proposal.

Nineteenth-century society idealized women's roles as wives and mothers—getting married and having children was supposed to be a woman's highest aspiration. This ideal obscured the fact that many women entered the workforce. Emma had been employed for several years as a servant, and she also pursued other avenues of economic self-sufficiency. While living at Fort Bowie, Emma had purchased a small cabin located in Bonita Canyon, approximately ten miles south of the fort. Although she initially went to the Land Office to claim a 160-acre homestead in her own name, she decided to let Neil file the claim instead, fearing that he might be embarrassed if his wife owned the homestead. Single women did own homesteads in the West, but they were definitely in the minority. Emma's actions exhibited a sensitivity to gender roles, but also a willingness to push beyond the social boundaries placed around her.

Neil and Emma did not move to the homestead immediately, but by late 1888 they were living in the canyon, along with their daughter, Lillian, born earlier that year. Two more

children, Ben and Hildegard, would follow. In Bonita Canyon the Ericksons had several neighbors, including the Riggs family and the Stafford family. Emma and Neil began planting a garden and orchard, starting a cattle herd, and making improvements to their home. The income from their ranch alone was never sufficient to provide the family with a comfortable life, and Neil often worked away from home. He finally managed to secure a position with the U.S. Forest Service that allowed him to live in Bonita Canyon while patrolling the surrounding national forest.



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The Faraway Ranch in 1919.

## The Guest Ranch Business

Like her mother, Lillian did not sit at home waiting to be married. With her siblings, she attended school in Galesburg, Illinois and in 1906 started teaching at local schools. Despite her young age, Lillian began to have problems with her hearing. Undeterred, she went back to Illinois in 1911 to attend Knox College. In 1917 Neil and Emma had moved away from Faraway Ranch due to Neil's employment with the Forest Service, and the ranch was left in the hands of their three children. Lillian returned to the area and began teaching again, but when Hildegard started boarding guests at the ranch on weekends that same year, Lillian quit teaching and started helping her sister. Their business proved a success, and a year later they purchased the Stafford cabin and property, which was adjacent to the Faraway Ranch. Hildegard moved away in 1920 when she got married, but Lillian remained. Soon, she began seeing Ed Riggs, an old neighbor whom she had known when they were both children.

Lillian was not certain that she wanted to continue living and working at the ranch. In the summer of 1922 she went to Los Angeles to take a course in writing. She may have attempted to



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Guests horseback riding at Faraway Ranch.

get some work published as well. But at the end of September, she returned to Arizona and married Ed shortly thereafter. By this time, the Faraway Ranch was an established business. Ed and Lillian continued to keep cattle and grow fruits and vegetables in addition to boarding tourists. Although Lillian always had to be a gracious hostess to her guests, a role that emphasized the stereotypical qualities of a housewife, she also managed many details of the business. In a letter to her niece, who had expressed interest in one day running a guest ranch herself, Lillian enumerated the many tasks that fell under her purview:

Can you write letters that will bring desirable guests who have never seen or heard directly of your place?... Can you take an ordinary good cook, who is more than apt to be at the same time ignorant of calories, food combinations, and attractive serving and get her to serve the kind of meals you want without antagonizing her and having her quit when there are thirty hungry guests to be fed? ... What will you do in...emergencies[?] Remember you are not in town where you can call a plumber, an electrician, a carpenter, a mechanic, or a blacksmith, whenever you need one. . . . When the water pipes freeze on the coldest night in forty years? When the drains from the main house refuse to function? When the horses need to be shod and the saddles repaired? . . . It is a very cold night and the butane tank fails to deliver gas. What do you do? Since you have fireplaces, where and how do you get the wood? How and where are you going to get your milk and fresh vegetables? Who keeps your refrigerator plant in operation? You can do the marketing and plan the meals. Take care of the laundry. . . . Who will take care of your cars and trucks? Who will keep your books? Pay sales taxes, income taxes, and unemployment compensation tax?

In many years the guest ranch produced a sizeable profit, but Lillian and Ed continued to keep cattle as well. Having two sources of income provided a buffer for years when tourist numbers were down or when cattle prices slumped.

Keeping cattle also meant that the Faraway Ranch exuded the atmosphere that many tourists sought in the West—an atmosphere of cowboys, cattle drives, and the rugged frontier. Throughout the West in the 1920s and 1930s, dude ranches became popular tourist destinations. At dude ranches, tourists could participate in the actual work of a ranch—or simply observe from the sidelines. Lillian always preferred the term “guest ranch” to “dude ranch,” but she and Ed emphasized the homey, simple pleasures, far removed from the hectic bustle of modern life, that could be found at Faraway.

Guests wanted to find an approximation of a more rugged, primitive existence at Faraway Ranch, but they didn’t want to give up their comforts entirely. In a brochure for the ranch, Lillian assured visitors that “although life at Faraway Ranch is a thing apart from the hurry of city life it keeps in touch with the world’s doings by means of the radio and current periodicals.” Many of the guests stayed in the main ranch house itself, and Ed and Lillian installed running water, two indoor bathrooms, and electricity in the house to meet the expectations of guests who did not want to go entirely without modern conveniences. The old Stafford cabin and another small cabin provided lodgings for those who did not mind a rougher lifestyle. By the early 1930s, up to thirty-two people at one time could be lodged at the ranch, although the numbers of guests were usually much smaller. While at the ranch, guests could take part in a variety of activities. If they were feeling adventurous, they could ride along on cattle round-ups. Tamer horseback riding trips also were popular, and Lillian often led sing-alongs at the piano in the evening. Ed served his special homemade ice cream on Sundays, and on hot summer days, guests could swim in a small pool that the Riggsses had constructed.

## Chiricahua National Monument

Guests at Faraway also enjoyed excursions into the area that Lillian called a “Wonderland of Rocks.” Here, spires and pinnacles of rock clustered together, forming fantastic geologic formations. A volcanic eruption twenty-seven million years before had left behind layers of pumice and ash two thousand feet high. The ash and pumice fused together to create a rock called rhyolitic tuff. Over time, the rhyolite weathered into a maze of rock columns. The Chiricahua Apaches called the area “The Land of Standing-Up Rocks,” but surprisingly few Anglo-Americans knew of the area until the twentieth century. Lillian’s father had stumbled upon the formations, but it wasn’t until 1921 that Ed and Lillian began an extensive exploration of the area. They quickly realized the commercial potential inherent in the dramatic scenery and hired an amateur photographer to take several panoramic photos. Ed and Lillian sent the photos to the county fair and to the chambers of commerce of several local towns.



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Visitors posing by a sign for Faraway Ranch.

The photographs aroused interest in the rock formations, and soon a grassroots movement developed to have the area officially preserved. The Antiquities Act, passed in 1906, allowed the president to set aside areas of “historic or scientific interest.” Numerous national monuments, including Casa Grande, Chaco Canyon, and Tumacácori already existed in the Southwest. By the 1920s, the national monuments were becoming popular tourist attractions, particularly as the rise in automobile ownership allowed more people to reach the monuments, often located in isolated areas. When the governor of Arizona, George W. P. Hunt, visited the “Wonderland of Rocks” in 1923, he supported the creation of a national monument. On April 18, 1924, President Calvin Coolidge signed the legislation creating Chiricahua National Monument.

As the only facility in the area that offered lodging and meals to visitors, Ed and Lillian had strong financial motivations for wanting the monument created. Lillian always included mention of the monument in promotional literature for the ranch. After 1924, business at Faraway increased and their clientele expanded, with visitors from New York, California, and many other states. Although the legislation creating national parks and monuments rarely mentioned tourism directly, attracting visitors and boosting local economies became a strong argument in favor of preservation. The tourism industry was intimately connected to the National Park Service. The lodges, hotels, and restaurants within or nearby national parks and monuments were an important part of each visitor’s experience. They became an integral element of the landscape and some, such as the Old Faithful Inn in Yellowstone, set national standards and expectations for the kinds of lodging visitors could expect in national parks. Although Faraway Ranch was an example of a vernacular architectural style as opposed to the formal architectural design of the Old Faithful Inn, the rustic, laid-back atmosphere of the ranch echoed that found in concessioner lodgings throughout the West.

## Faraway During the Depression

The late 1920s were some of the most successful years for the Faraway Ranch. The dude ranch industry in general was prospering, particularly in Arizona. In fact, the industry was so successful that it not only weathered the Great Depression but also grew during the 1930s. Despite the strength of the tourism industry, profits at Faraway Ranch fell. Some of the problems may have been due to improper management. Lillian’s parents criticized her and Ed’s management of the ranch and even suggested that they move out, but the disagreement was resolved, and Ed and Lillian remained. The construction of the Bonita Canyon Road, the first good road into Chiricahua National Monument, helped to boost guest numbers at the ranch. Seven thousand people attended the dedication of the road in 1934. Still, when a Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camp was located at the monument that same year, Ed took a job as a trail foreman for the CCC, a position that earned him \$1800 a year—a figure greater than the revenues from the guest ranch in 1936 and 1937.

The CCC camp structures, which included barracks for 200 men and a mess hall, were located on the Riggsses’ property from 1934 to 1940. The majority of CCC recruits were young, single men, but a provision for the hiring of “Local Experienced Men” allowed for the employment of men such as Ed Riggs. The CCC boys undertook a number of projects at Chiricahua National Monument. Ed was convinced that his crew could build a trail into the steep Echo Canyon, despite the fact that professional engineers said it couldn’t be done. Frank Pinkley, the Superintendent of Southwestern National Monuments, told Ed: “All right, you may have the job, but if you fail to put a trail through that area, just hand in your resignation. Don’t wait for me to fire you!” Undaunted, Ed and his crew persevered and in 1936 finished the trail. Ed’s gravestone bears the inscription: “He engineered the construction of Echo Trail. He wishes this to be his monument.”



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Ed Riggs

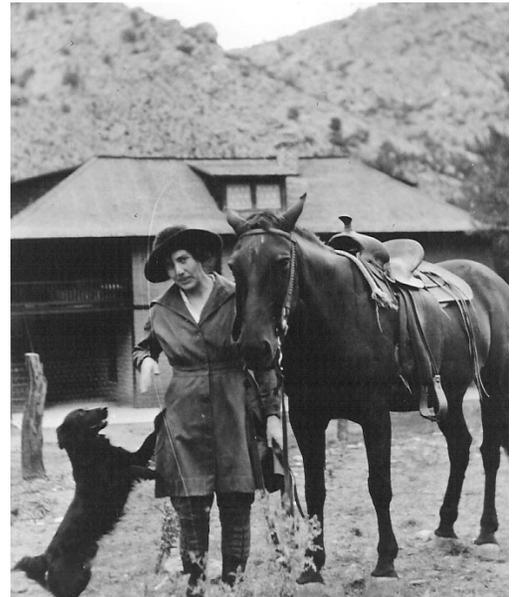
## Perseverance In the Postwar Era

When the CCC camp closed in 1940, all of the structures were left on the Riggsses' property. Ed and Lillian turned the structures into lodgings for large groups of tourists and called it "Camp Faraway." They leased the camp out to a businessman named William Sprague. World War II impacted the guest ranch business, and Camp Faraway initially struggled to turn a profit. Ed and Lillian were having troubles with Faraway Ranch as well. By the mid-1940s, Ed and Lillian started to consider leaving the business. Both were growing older, and Lillian, who had been steadily losing her hearing also lost her eyesight. By 1942 she was blind. In 1945 they sold Camp Faraway, the upper portions of the ranch, and a portion of the Stafford property to William Sprague and his partners. As part of the deal, the Riggsses agreed to remain out of the guest ranch business for ten years, although they could still rent cottages to a few people on a limited basis.

Despite the agreement, Ed and Lillian remained very involved in the tourism industry. They still greeted visitors to the national monument and led horseback riding trips. Lillian admitted that they missed many aspects of operating a guest ranch, particularly the opportunity to meet new people, and the couple discussed buying back the portions of the ranch that they had sold. In 1950, however, Ed died of a cerebral hemorrhage, and a few months later, Lillian's mother, Emma, died as well. Her father had passed away in 1937. Lillian was now alone at Faraway, faced with the prospect of managing the ranch by herself.

Lillian sank into a depression and considered moving away from Faraway. Ultimately, she decided to reopen the ranch as a guest lodge in 1955, when the ten year agreement with Sprague expired. After suffering a recession during the war, the tourism industry had exploded in the 1950s. More Americans than ever before were taking vacations, and the West remained a popular destination. The old model of dude ranches had fallen out of favor—most guest lodges no longer offered the opportunities for tourists to actually participate in ranch work and many were no longer working ranches. They became resorts, housing large numbers of guests, and offering activities that recreated a mythical approximation of Western life. Lillian did not try to resurrect Faraway as it had been back in the twenties and thirties; she simply provided lodging and meals for guests. Still, although the numbers of cows steadily diminished, Lillian continued to keep a cattle herd.

Lillian often struggled with the demands of the business, and in the 1960s she leased out the guest ranch to other entrepreneurs. None of the leases lasted long, and Lillian began thinking of selling the ranch, perhaps to a national chain like the Holiday Inn. She soon realized, however, that Faraway's long relationship with the Chiricahua National Monument



Lillian Erickson Riggs

precluded this possibility. In 1938 the monument had been expanded by 8,000 acres, and Faraway Ranch became an inholding, surrounded on all sides by monument land. By the 1960s, the National Park Service was seeking to acquire all remaining inholdings. In 1970, at the age of eighty-two, Lillian closed the guest ranch. She continued to keep over seventy head of cattle. As her health declined, Lillian expressed her wish to die at home and be buried in her wedding dress. Ultimately, she had to move to a nursing facility in the Willcox hospital at a nearby town, where she died in 1977. The National Park Service acquired the Faraway Ranch in 1979, thus preserving a landscape that had been a de facto part of the monument for decades.

## The Faraway Ranch Landscape

Historians often have depicted the tourism industry in the West as superseding productive relationships with the land. As the economy changed in the twentieth century, many communities that had started off in the mining, logging, or ranching industry looked to tourism as a way to survive. The Faraway Ranch complicates notions of the relationship between tourism and the environment. Even as the ranch became a guest facility, the Riggsses never abandoned their productive relationship with the land. They continued to run cattle, irrigate fields, and raise fruits and vegetables. Indeed, these activities were central to the guest ranch. Visitors enjoyed watching the livestock, and Lillian incorporated the fruits and vegetables they produced into the daily menu. Faraway Ranch operated on a mixed economy for most of its existence. In part, this was due to the fact that the ranch was not initially intended as a guest ranch, and the tourism business developed in an ad hoc fashion. But



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The corral at Faraway Ranch.

the inhabitants and guests of Faraway Ranch related to the environment in a variety of ways and not simply through the medium of consumption common to the tourism industry. The landscape reflects this mix of relationships to the land.

The main ranch house demonstrates the evolving nature of the guest ranch business at Faraway. Beginning as a small, two room cabin, the Ericksons initially added a third room and then a small stone house. This single room structure was intended to provide both cold storage for food and protection in the event of an Apache raid. Although false alarms occasionally sent the Ericksons fleeing into the shelter, no Apaches ever attacked their homestead. By 1900, as the Erickson family grew with the addition of Hildegard and Ben, Lillian's younger sister and brother, the Ericksons added a two-story frame structure onto the original cabin. Around 1915 a remodeling project was started. The Ericksons had the old log cabin razed, extended the west wall of the house, and built a second story above the cellar. Between 1924 and the early 1930s, Ed and Lillian modified the structure extensively, including closing in one of the porches to create a dining room, installing an electric lighting system, and covering the entire house in stucco. Modernizing and routine maintenance occurred over the subsequent decades, but the Riggsses were always plagued by a lack of space for guests.

The mix of uses that prevailed in the house continued in the landscape. A swimming pool for guests existed nearby the corrals for the cattle. On their horseback trips into the surrounding countryside, guests rode past the gardens and orchards, where the Riggsses grew apples, carrots, lettuce, and other produce. Irrigation ditches carried water to fields and trees.

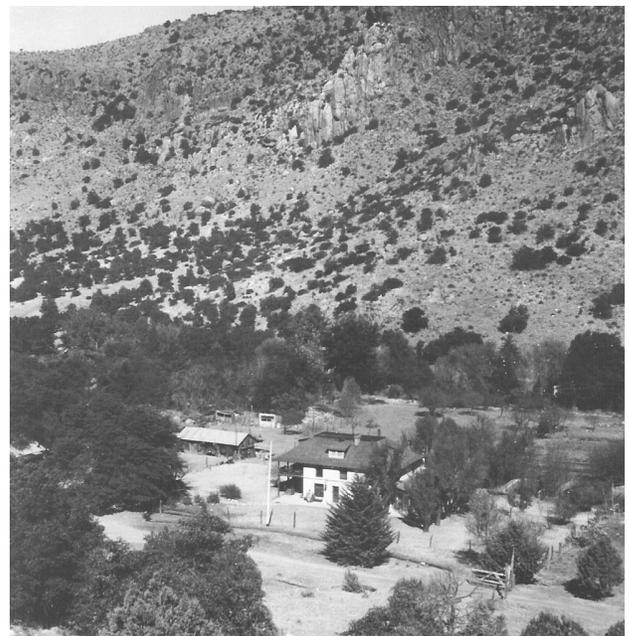
## Current Preservation Projects

The National Park Service acquired the Faraway Ranch in 1979 and has preserved the main ranch house, Stafford cabin,

and other elements of the landscape. Today, visitors can tour Faraway Ranch and see the house as it looked during the postwar decades when Lillian managed the property. Recently, the Park Service improved the corrals and replaced several fence posts. Routine maintenance on the structures is ongoing. A Cultural Landscapes Report for Faraway Ranch currently is underway, and the Park Service is also updating the Long Range Interpretive Plan, which will include strategies for interpreting the ranch to the public.

## Conclusion

Faraway Ranch would not have existed without the actions of the women in the Erickson family. Emma initiated the purchase of the property, Hildegard started boarding guests at the ranch, and Lillian managed the ranch for much of the twentieth century. In many ways, the Erickson women conformed to gender roles—they all married, Emma allowed her husband to file the homestead claim in his name, and Lillian often played the role of the gregarious hostess seeing to the needs of her guests. But by pursuing their own economic prospects and running a business, the Erickson women also moved beyond socially ascribed gender roles. Many other women did so as well, but society rarely acknowledged their contributions. By preserving their story, Faraway Ranch helps to tell the full history of women in the West. Faraway's long history as a guest ranch, and the involvement of the Riggsses in the creation and promotion of Chiricahua National Monument also makes the ranch important to the story of the Western tourism industry and preservation movement. The physical landscape—the ranch house, the remains of irrigation ditches, the old corral—helps communicate this history to visitors today.



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Aerial view of Faraway Ranch in the 1930s.