



## HERITAGE GUIDE



### *History and Art on the Wall:*

#### *Livestock Brands along Oracle Rd (St Route 77) in Oro Valley*

As one drives north or south along Oracle Road between the Hilton El Conquistador Resort and the Oro Valley Market Place at the Tangerine Road intersection, it is hard to miss the unusual letters and marks depicted on the sound walls on either side of the highway. These livestock brands and marks can be seen by the casual observer. One must look much more closely however for the historic Ranch concealed behind large trees along the same road corridor with which the cattle brands are associated.

The historic Steam Pump Ranch, owned by the Town of Oro Valley, and the livestock brands placed on the sound walls by the Arizona Department of Transportation, are closely connected, not only within the few short miles of road but also in terms of their shared history.

The story of Steam Pump Ranch is becoming familiar to many in the Oro Valley area. Its founder, George Pusch, immigrated to the United States from Germany as a young man in 1867. After living in New York, San Francisco and places in between, he came to southern Arizona. Here, with his friend John Zellweger, a Swiss immigrant he met in New York, he purchased land along the Cañada del Oro and decided to become a cattle rancher. The two men registered the "PZ" brand and began ranching enterprises that lasted for decades. Today, a portion of one of their ranches is preserved in public ownership -- the Steam Pump Ranch. The "steam pump" name was acquired after the two men

installed a well and pump driven by steam to provide water for cattle.

The Territory of Arizona had a long history of open range grazing. Branding cattle was the main means of determining ownership during the era when Pusch and Zellweger developed their cattle operations. Livestock branding became law in the Territory in 1897 and a brand tax was passed in 1903. Over 11,000 brands were recorded in the Arizona Territory prior to statehood.

In 1908 *"Brands and Marks of Cattle, Horses, Sheep, Goats and Hogs, as They Appear of Record in the Office of the Live Stock Sanitary Board of Arizona at Phoenix, Arizona"* was published. It was the most comprehensive of the Brands and Marks books issued beginning in 1898. Over 11,000 brands are depicted, in addition to articles on contagious diseases of live stock and advice for ranchers. George Pusch was the Chairman of the Live Stock Sanitary Board at the time of the volume's publication.

The "PZ" brand is only one of at least eight brands Pusch registered, individually and with partners, beginning in the mid-1870s. John Zellweger, sold his interest in the "PZ" brand to Pusch in 1883 and the Pusch family continued to use it.

Stockmen typically kept records of live stock transfers because of the importance of knowing their livestock numbers for accurate assessment of taxes. Payment of

the brand tax was serious business in the early part of the 20th century. A brand owner annually had to submit a sworn statement with the number of head of stock for which he was assessed. If these requirements were not met and the tax not paid the brand was no longer considered evidence of ownership of the animals so branded.

Records were kept at Steam Pump Ranch and a ledger book listing some of the transactions was retained in Pusch family files. (Pusch's grandson, Henry Zipf, donated the book to the Oro Valley Historical Society in 2005). The ledger book has a handwritten title, "RANCH PROVISIONS AND CATTLE," and includes entries from 1898 until 1921.

All of the brands registered by George Pusch and listed in the 1908 "Brands and Marks" volume also appear in the Ranch ledger. His son, George Jr. also owned a brand, the "P swinging Z" that was clearly distinguished from the original "PZ". The "P swinging Z" brand remained in the Pusch family until 2010 when Henry Zipf sold it to the Oro Valley Historical Society.

The brands depicted on the Oracle Road sound walls were obtained from the Steam Pump Ranch ledger book. The brands one sees were owned by ranchers with whom George Pusch did business. Specific ones were selected for use on the wall for their aesthetic appeal rather than for proximity to nearby historic ranch lands, but they do represent brands registered in the early 1900s. Reading these brands involves a specialized system. Brands are read from left to right, top to bottom, and outside to inside. Capital letters, numbers and characters are among the combinations.

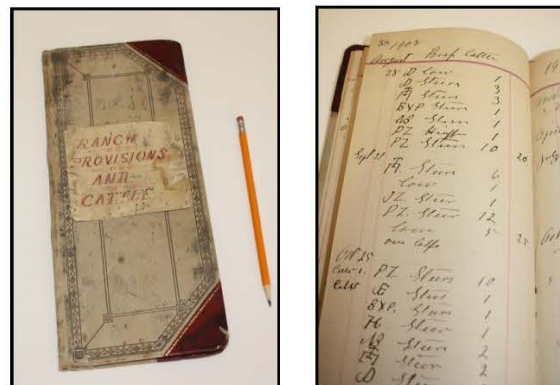
Letters can be vertical, sideways, reversed, or hanging.

One of the brands depicted on the walls was owned by Henry Feldman, brother of Matilda Pusch (George's wife). For many years he managed the PZ-Feldman Ranch along the San Pedro River near its junction with Aravaipa Creek. The Pusch family reportedly grazed cattle in the entire area between the Steam Pump Ranch and the PZ-Feldman Ranch.

The "JE" brand was owned by Noah Bernard and John Bogan who ran cattle in the Arivaca area southwest of Tucson. Pusch was a partner with them in the Arivaca Land and Cattle Company. Another brand depicted on the Oracle wall is the "7-6." It was owned by W.O. Ramsey from Tombstone, Arizona.

The story of brands and their uses is much more complicated than a single ranch and a single owner and there are numerous stories still to be uncovered about ranching partnerships and the brands associated with the Steam Pump Ranch.

*Text and photographs by Patricia Spoerl, 2012.*



RANCH PROVISIONS AND CATTLE  
(Steam Pump Ranch Ledger)