



HERITAGE GUIDE

History and Art on the Wall:

Livestock Brands along Oracle Road (St Route 77) in Oro Valley

As one drives along Oracle Road between the El Conquistador Tucson, Hilton Resort and the Oro Valley Marketplace at the intersection with Tangerine Road it is hard to miss the unusual letters and marks depicted on the sound walls on both sides of the highway. They are historic livestock brands and marks associated with George Pusch who established the Steam Pump Ranch in the 1870s.



The historic Steam Pump Ranch, now owned by the Town of Oro Valley, and the livestock brands placed on the highway 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.

George Pusch, immigrated from Germany to the United States as a young man in 1867. After living in New York, San Francisco and places in between, he came to Tucson in 1874. Here, with his friend John Zellweger, an immigrant from Switzerland, he established a ranch along the Cañada del Oro drainage.

The two men registered the "PZ" brand and began cattle ranching enterprises that lasted for decades. Today, part of one of their ranches is preserved in public ownership -- Steam Pump Ranch. The name "steam pump" was acquired after the men installed a well and pump driven by steam to provide a dependable source of water for cattle.

By the 1880s the Territory of Arizona had a long history of open range grazing. The branding of cattle was the main means of determining ownership during the era when pioneer ranchers developed their cattle operations in southern Arizona.

George Pusch registered eight brands, individually or with partners, before 1898. They appear in the first *"Territorial Book of Brands and Marks . . . Cattle, Horses, Sheep and Hogs"* (1898) issued by the Live Stock Sanitary Board of Arizona. Livestock branding became law in the Territory in 1897 and a brand tax was instituted in 1903. Over 11,000 brands were recorded in the Territory prior to Arizona statehood in 1912. George Pusch was Chairman of the Live Stock Sanitary Board in 1908.

Ranchers typically kept records of their livestock transfers because they needed an accurate count of the number of stock owned for the assessment of taxes. Payment of the brand tax was serious business. Each year a brand owner had to submit a sworn statement containing the number of head of stock for which he would

be assessed. If these requirements were not met and the tax not paid a brand was no longer considered evidence of ownership of the animals so marked.

Records were kept at Steam Pump Ranch and a ledger book listing transactions remained with the Pusch family. George Pusch's grandson, Henry Zipf, donated the book to the Oro Valley Historical Society. The ledger book, entitled "RANCH PROVISIONS AND CATTLE," includes entries from 1898 until 1921.

All of the brands registered by George Pusch appear in the Ranch ledger. The "PZ" brand is the best known of his brands. John Zellweger, sold his interest in the brand to Pusch in 1883 and the Pusch family continued to use it for over 40 years.

Pusch's son, George Jr., owned a similar brand, the "PZ connected". This brand remained in the family until 2010 when Pusch's grandson sold it to the Oro Valley Historical Society to preserve as part of the historical record of Steam Pump Ranch and the Pusch family.

The brand images depicted on the Oracle Road sound walls were obtained from the Steam Pump Ranch ledger book. The brands are listed in sales records for George Pusch. They all represent brands registered by the early 1900s.

Reading brands involves a special system. Brands are read from left to right, top to bottom, and outside to inside. Capital letters, numbers and characters are among the combinations used to create brands. Letters can be vertical, sideways, reversed, or hanging.

One brand illustrated on the roadway walls was owned by Henry Feldman, brother of Pusch's wife, Mathilda. He managed some of the Pusch holdings in the San Pedro Valley near its junction with Aravaipa Creek. The Pusch family reportedly grazed cattle throughout the open range between Steam Pump Ranch and the San Pedro 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 illustrated on the Oracle walls is the "7-6." It was owned by W.O. Ramsey who lived in Tombstone, Arizona.

The story of livestock brands and their uses is much more complicated than a single ranch and a single owner. There are stories still to be uncovered that will help tell the history of cattle ranching associated with the historic Steam Pump Ranch.

Text and photographs by Patricia Spoerl, 2019.

