



HERITAGE GUIDE

Steam Pump Ranch: An Overview

The Ranch known as “Steam Pump Ranch” was established by George Pusch and John Zellweger about 1874. The two young men had come from Germany and Switzerland respectively and, after living on both the east and west coasts, they found a place to put down roots north of Tucson. They bought cattle, and registered the “PZ” brand. They also purchased a steam pump to pump water into holding tanks. It was housed in an adobe building with an adjacent blacksmith shop. This ready supply of water, for both people and cattle, led to the name the property retains today.

The 1870s were a difficult time for new settlers along the Cañada del Oro drainage. Apache raids, primarily for cattle and horses, occurred on a regular basis. Bands left the confines of the reservations established by the US Government in an attempt to regain their freedom and traditional way of life. The "Apache Wars" did not end until after Geronimo's final surrender in 1886. This was the time when George Pusch began buying property in the San Pedro Valley for a second ranch.



Pump house and blacksmith shop in 1990s



Pump house ruins preserved in 2015

During the 1880s numerous ranches were established in southern Arizona. Steam Pump Ranch became a favorite stopping place for ranchers taking their cattle to the railroad stockyards near Tucson. Pusch charged 15 cents per head for water. Watering the cattle increased their weight, and thus their price, before shipment to various markets. A stage line also stopped at the ranch on a route from Tucson to Florence.

By 1891 lands in southern Arizona had become heavily overgrazed and a drought led to the loss of many cattle. Pusch and Zellweger seemed to prosper, having opened a butcher shop and later an ice storage facility in Tucson. Zellweger had sold his interest in the ranch to Pusch in 1883, but the two remained partners in business ventures. Pusch was also active in politics, serving in two Territorial legislatures and was a member of the Arizona Constitutional Convention in 1910. After that his health failed and his son took over management of the ranch. In 1917 the family established the *Pusch Land and Cattle Company* to manage their properties. Pusch died in 1921 at his residence in Tucson. The *Pusch Land and Cattle Company* sold its ranching properties in 1925. Pusch's wife, Mathilda, died in 1933.

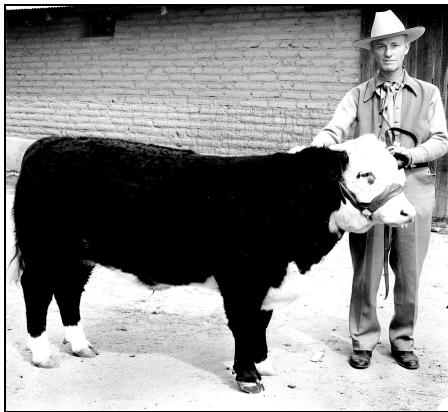


Pusch Family at the Ranch, early 1900s.



Pusch family at the Ranch, early 1900s.

A new era for Steam Pump Ranch began when John Monroe “Jack” Procter purchased the largely abandoned ranch. Procter had moved to Tucson in 1932 to manage the exclusive downtown Pioneer Hotel, a position he held until 1962. Procter is said to have called the ranch "my best diversion". In addition to ranching and breeding prize bulls as a hobby, Procter built a house there in the early 1940s, associated ranching structures, and a long row of chicken coops. He raised chickens to provide meat and eggs for the Pioneer Hotel dining room. Over the years the family often used the ranch as a leisure retreat from the city. Jack died in 1972 and ownership of the ranch passed to his grandsons, John and Henry Leiber.



Jack Procter and a prize bull.



Pioneer Hotel downtown Tucson

The ranch continued as a family residence and became a boarding place for horses. While the original ranch spanned over a thousand acres its headquarters remained near the Cañada del Oro crossing throughout its existence. A 15-acre parcel containing the two major residences (Pusch house and Procter-Leiber house), ranch out-buildings, and the remains of the original pump house now belongs to the Town of Oro Valley. The property was acquired in 2007 with Pima County Bond funds for historic preservation and interpretation. It was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 2009.

(by Patricia Spoerl 2019).