

## **APPENDIX A: HISTORICAL OVERVIEW**

The following pages are excerpted from the *Walking Box Ranch Master Plan and Preservation Plan Report* (June 2008). This report was prepared by Architectural Resources Group (ARG) of San Francisco, California.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW AND CONTEXT

Walking Box Ranch, located just west of Searchlight in Clark County, Nevada, was operated as a cattle ranch. Originally carved from the massive Rock Springs Land and Cattle Company, the ranch was purchased by Rex Bell in May 1931. The property continued as an operating cattle ranch, under Bell and the subsequent ownership of Karl Weikel, through the 1980s until it was sold to Viceroy Gold Corporation in 1989. Viceroy used the property to access their local mine and rehabilitated the ranch headquarters to serve as an executive retreat. Since the mid-1990s, the property has changed hands several times and is now located in the midst of an expansive desert tortoise conservation area.

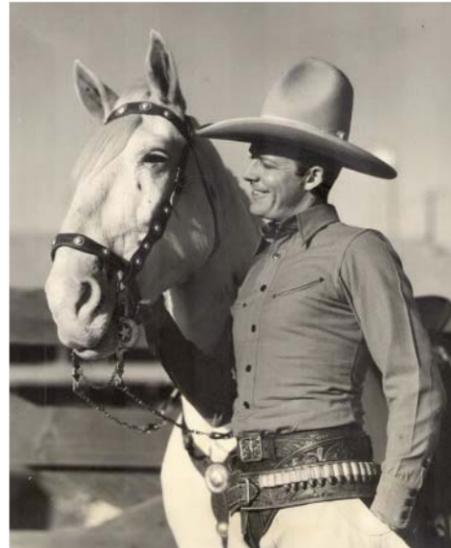
Cattle ranching in the eastern Mojave began in earnest following the 1883 construction of the Southern Pacific rail line between Needles, California and San Francisco. Beginning in 1886, T.L. Blackburn and Co. began obtaining water rights throughout the region and in 1894 incorporated as the Rock Springs Land and Cattle Company (RSLCC). RSLCC was headquartered in Barnwell, California with operations in a roughly fifty-mile square area of the eastern Mojave that supported approximately 10,000 head of cattle in its heyday. RSLCC began to move cattle across the Nevada border and into the Piute Valley in the first decade of the twentieth century. John Woolf served as Rock Springs long-time ranch manager.

Rock Spring Land and Cattle Company suffered financial reverses as a result of several seasons of drought in the 1920s and decided to sell its assets, including land, livestock, grazing and water rights. As part of this disposition, the Nevada ranch lands were given to John Woolf. At least one local newspaper account indicates Woolf's association with the ranch as early as 1927; however, the deed to the property was signed over to Woolf in February 1930. The grazing rights associated with the original ranch extended north from the ranch headquarters to Railroad Pass, east to Highway 95 and the Colorado River, south to the Newberry Mountains and west across Crescent Peak and the California border. Woolf sold the ranch, including water and grazing rights, to cowboy actor Rex Bell (born George F. Beldam) in May 1931.

At roughly this same time, silent screen star Clara Bow, Rex Bell's future wife was suffering mental and physical health problems, in part related to a legal suit against her former friend and manager Daisy Devoe and a separate public scandal. After suffering a nervous breakdown and short recuperative stays at two Southern California sanitariums, Bow broke her contract with Paramount



Karl Weikel. Courtesy of Dennis Casebier.



Publicity photos of Rex Bell and Clara Bow. Courtesy of Rex Bell.



The Bell's pet goat with what may be the original ranch 'shack' in the background. Courtesy of Rex Bell



## II. BACKGROUND

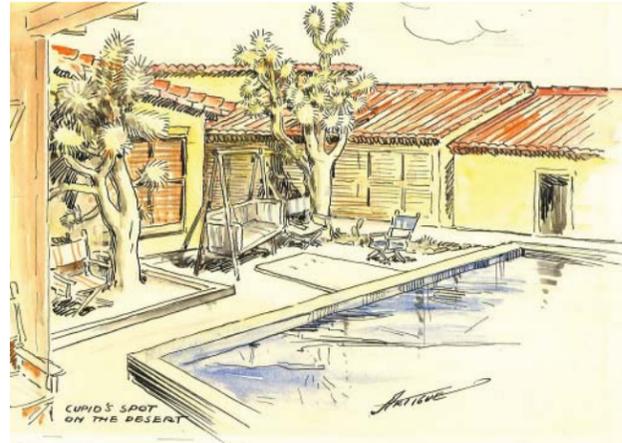
Studios. In her letter of resignation to Paramount, Bow indicated that she could be contacted at Woolf Ranch in Nipton, California where she intended to continue her recuperation.

Once at the ranch, Bell and Bow quickly began construction of a large Spanish Colonial Revival style ranch house. The style of the house was atypical for ranch house construction in the area, which had long relied on locally available building materials such as discarded railroad ties. Instead, Bell and Bow constructed a large stucco house typical of period revival style architecture popular in Southern California in the 1920s and 1930s. The plan and form of the house, however, suggest an interest in creating an appropriate building to serve as a ranch headquarters. The architect of the structure could not be identified. The rock chimney and now demolished rock gardens were designed and installed by long-time Searchlight deputy, “Big John” Silveria.

After much public speculation, Bell and Bow were married in Las Vegas in early December 1931. The Bells raised two young sons (born in 1934 and 1938) at Walking Box Ranch. A two-story addition and pool were constructed around 1935 to accommodate the needs of the growing family. Bell also cooperated with the Civilian Conservation Corps (C.C.C.), a New Deal work program, to construct two wells on the grazing lands associated with the ranch.

Rex Bell was not a seasoned rancher or rider. He continued to make movies in Hollywood during his time at Walking Box Ranch, and a ranch manager handled the daily ranching operations. Red Verzani and later Al Marshall were each employed as ranch manager. There were no other full-time cowboys, but they were hired as needed during the year. Ranch hands, including Al Marshall’s family, lived in the original bunkhouse. A carpenter employed by the family lived in a small house that stood in front of the carpenter’s shop. (Both structures have been demolished.) In addition, the family generally employed cooks who lived in the main house with the family.

While not a hands-on rancher, Bell did begin a successful political career as a leader in local ranching, serving on the first advisory board for Nevada Grazing District #5. In the early 1940s, Bell sold the northern half of his grazing rights, north of the old Nipton Road, to his ranch manager Al Marshall. By the mid-1940s, Bell moved his family to Las Vegas, where he had opened a western wear store. At that time, the property was leased to Wyatt Marshall and a business



Undated watercolor done at about the time of construction of the ranch house, signed ‘Artigue’. Courtesy of Rex Bell.



Clara Bow and Rex Bell in the ranch house great room. Courtesy of Rex Bell.



Clara Bow and one of several ‘rock gardens’ built by John Silveria. Courtesy of Rex Bell.



A 1930s winter view from the ranch house. The ‘shop string’ is on the right, with the original bunkhouse beyond. Courtesy of Rex Bell.



2006 aerial survey photo of the developed portion of Walking Box Ranch. Later features, such as the tennis court, are clearly visible, as are the heavily degraded areas of the site.

partner for a five-year period. After a failed bid for a Congressional seat in the 1940s, Bell was elected Lieutenant Governor in 1954 and served until his death in 1962. Bell died suddenly just as he began his campaign for governor.

Following the lease period, Rex Bell sold Walking Box Ranch to Karl Weikel, a former Navy officer, in 1951, and the property became known as the YKL Ranch. Weikel continued cattle ranching operations through the 1970s. Weikel eventually sold the ranch to Viceroy Gold Corporation in 1989. Viceroy interest in the property stemmed from their need for better access to local mines; however, the ranch itself was rehabilitated for use as an executive retreat. Alterations to the main house, demolition and relocation of outbuildings, and alteration to landscape features date from the period.

In the last fifteen years, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service and The Nature Conservancy have established the area around Searchlight as a desert tortoise conservation habitat, effectively ending the remains of cattle ranching in the area. The Bureau of Land Management acquired Walking Box Ranch with Round 3 SNPLMA funds. The Nature Conservancy holds two separate easements on the 160-acre parcel. UNLV received a Save America's Treasures grant to prepare a preservation and master plan for the property in 2004.

The Walking Box Ranch has been nominated to the National Register of Historic Places, as part of the Save America's Treasures grant, for two aspects of historic significance: for its association with cattle ranching in Clark County and the Mojave; and for its architectural significance. Architecturally, it has been documented as an example of the cattle ranch property type as a whole, including the main house, outbuildings and structures, and associated landscape features. In addition, the main house has been documented as an example of Spanish Colonial Revival architecture and the barn and elements of the corrals as examples of a railroad tie construction. The period of significance for Walking Box Ranch extends from 1931-1958. A draft nomination was submitted the Nevada Historic Preservation Office in March 2008 and is currently under review.

## II. BACKGROUND

### CHRONOLOGY OF DEVELOPMENT AND USE

Information related directly to the physical ranch and its improvements are indicated in **boldface**.

- 1894 Rock Springs Land and Cattle Company (RSLCC) incorporated, forming approximately one million acre cattle ranch in the eastern Mojave Desert
- 1909 Clark County created from Lincoln County
- c. 1927 Break-up of RSLCC, creating several smaller ranches including OX, 88, and Woolf Ranch
- 02/21/1930 John Woolf acquires Nevada ranch from RSLCC**
- 09/22/1930 John Woolf acquires Nevada stock watering permits, including Bullion Spring and Borbridge Big Springs, from James M. Borbridge
- 10/30/1930 Los Angeles Times reports that Clara Bow and Rex Bell are “said to be” engaged
- 05/01/1931 John Woolf sells ranch to George F. Beldam (Rex Bell), “a single man”
- 05/06/1931 Clara Bow admitted to Glendale Sanitarium after collapsing previous Sunday evening, following nervous breakdown related to legal suit and public scandal (reported in *Los Angeles Times*)
- 06/1931 Bow’s six-year contract with Paramount Pictures terminated
- 06/05/1931 Bow leaves La Crescenta Sanitarium
- 06/10/1931 Bow closes her Beverly Hills home on Saturday and departs for Walking Box Ranch (WBR)
- 12/03/1931 Bell and Bow married in Las Vegas
- 1931-32 Spanish Colonial Revival style ranch house constructed at ranch headquarters site**
- 06/28/1934 Taylor Grazing Act of 1934 passed
- 12/16/1934 Birth of Bell and Bow’s first child
- c. 1934-35 Construction of two-story addition to the house, including a new master bedroom and bath, children’s room and bath, and pool



Clara Bow and Rex Bell at Walking Box Ranch. Courtesy of Rex Bell.



Walking Box Ranch in 1932 before addition of bedroom wing. Courtesy of Rex Bell.



Walking Box Ranch in 1935, with bedroom addition at right. Front and side porches have been enclosed with screens. Courtesy of Rex Bell.





1980s aerial view of Walking Box Ranch. This is prior to Viceroy Gold Corporation's demolition of the 'shop string' of three small structures at left and the blacksmith shop, lower center of photo. Courtesy of Dennis Casebier.

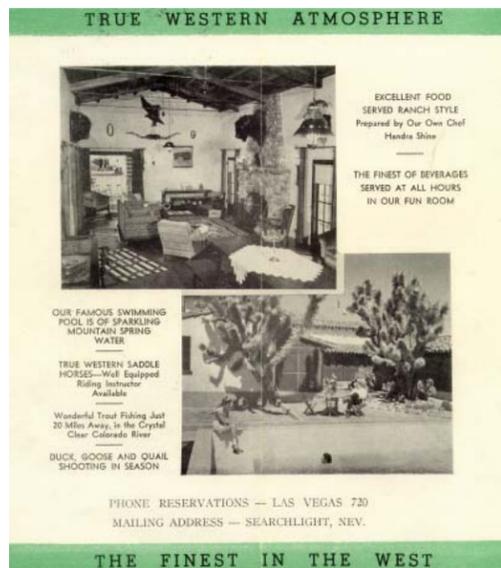
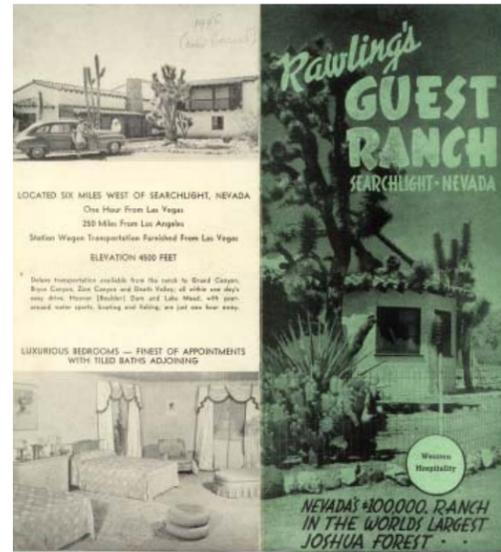
- c. 1936 Bell Ranch becomes known as Walking Box Ranch
- 11/03/1936 Nevada Grazing District #5 (Clark County) established, following Amendment to Taylor Act. Rex Bell named one of original eleven Grazing District #5 Advisory Board members
- 1937-38 Six Mile Well and Ten Mile Well constructed by the Civilian Conservation Corps (C.C.C.)**
- 1940 Grazing District #5 name changed to Searchlight District
- c. 1941-42 Grazing rights north of Old Nipton Road sold to A.C. Marshall**
- c. 1941 General Patton and troops visit WBR
- c. 1945 Rex Bell moves family to Las Vegas and opens Rex Bell's Frontier Stylings and Sportswear store; WBR leased on a five-year basis to Wyatt Marshall (son of Al Marshall) and Kenneth Jay of Northrop Aircraft Company
- 1946 Bureau of Land Management created from General Land Office and Grazing Service
- c. 1948 WBR intended for use as Rawlings Guest Ranch
- 4/06/1951 Walking Box Ranch sold to Karl "Cap" Weikel, including base property and grazing rights; name changed to YKL Ranch
- YKL period (no specific dates) - alterations included removal of original rock gardens and guesthouse and installation of small shooting range.**
- 1955-1962 Rex Bell serves as Lieutenant Governor of Nevada
- 03/04/1976 BLM orders 75% cutback in grazing
- c. 1979 Caretaker's trailer installed on site**
- 10/1980 Property sold to Nevada Silver Refinery; Weikels move to Searchlight
- 01/1982 Property repossessed by Weikel
- 1989-1991 YKL Ranch sold to Viceroy Gold Corporation



## II. BACKGROUND

- c. 1990 Conversion of ranch for use as Viceroy executive retreat. Rehabilitation of the ranch house, including replacement of the original roof tiles, installation of red clay tile over original red linoleum throughout first floor and reconfiguration of garage and service wing as apartments; pool re-surfaced and deck tiled; barbeque area constructed.; bunkhouse re-built; tennis courts constructed; carpenter's house and shop demolished; blacksmith shop demolished; ice house relocated; and rehabilitation tax credit application abandoned
- c. 1990 Realignment of access road around west side of ranch headquarters to re-connect with pipeline road
- 08/1991 US Fish and Wildlife Service creates 400,000-acre desert tortoise preserve in southern Clark County as part of land swap to allow development in Las Vegas Valley; remaining cattle ranching in region effectively ended
- 1993 Viceroy Gold Corporation sells ranch property grazing rights to The Nature Conservancy (TNC)
- 12/21/1993 40-acre conservation easement granted to TNC by Viceroy Gold Corporation
- 12/18/2000 Viceroy Gold Corporation sells ranch property to Las Vegas Gaming Investments
- 07/21/2001 Walking Box Ranch, LLC established as property owner
- 7/15/2004 Walking Box Ranch, LLC grants TNC a conservation easement on the remaining 120 acres of ranch
- 2004-2005 BLM purchases ranch and surrounding ranch site

Demolitions with dates unknown—original house (unconfirmed) and dog kennels.



Brochure promoting the Walking Box Ranch as a guest ranch in the 1940s. Courtesy of Rex Bell.



Ranch house courtyard prior to c. 1990 renovation by Viceroy Gold Corporation, with swimming pool in foreground. Note original handmade roof tiles.



Ranch house living room during renovation by Viceroy. Most original features were retained. Linoleum flooring is visible prior to installation of quarry tile.

