

## Deep Well Ranch - History

Our Coachella Valley was first settled centuries ago by members of the Agua Caliente tribe of the Mission band of Cahuilla Indians and later by Mexican immigrants. In the 1880s, the first Caucasian men into the Valley purchased a ranch where downtown Palm Springs now stands. Shortly thereafter, these first speculators sold another immigrant, John Guthrie McCallum, a San Francisco lawyer, a fifth interest in their over three hundred acres. He in turn leased the land to Welwood Murray for a small abode and wood hotel which was built in 1886. Supply of water was moved across the desert through a stone-walled canal then called 'the Whitewater Ditch.' McCallum also bought a one-fifth interest in the newly formed water company. Large numbers of fruit orchards were subsequently planted with alfalfa, grapes, corn, figs, apricots, grapefruit and oranges, and soon thereafter with date palms. About this time, a small settlement began in this area under the name Agua Caliente, a place where the Indians had an oasis and hot springs. By 1884, the settlement was renamed Palm City. In 1885, the McCollum's built an abode house in the settlement, and it now it serves as headquarters for the Palm Springs Historical Society. McCallum had a grand design for the area becoming a major agricultural center.

By the late 1880s fortunes hit the skids and McCallum's dream ended when many settlers moved away as a result of a torrential rain pour in 1893 which damaged crops and ruined irrigation ditches. Though disheartened, some settlers remained with Welwood Murray who was determined to hold on to his hotel. New immigrants to the area thought the place was a good spot for those suffering from asthma, arthritis and similar ailments and it wasn't long before the small hamlet became known for 'cures.' With those seeking the healthy aspects of desert life, came others who saw the area as a place of beauty and beneficial climate. Word traveled fast and by the early 1900s developers were beginning to establish housing for the newly arrived.

It wasn't long before small hotels and guest houses sprang up in the area and the town of Palm City was renamed Palm Springs to focus interest on the Indian springs in the area. In 1926, a scientist and rubber authority named Henry Pearson purchased property off the eastern leg of Palm Canyon Drive where Deep Well Ranch now stands. He drilled a well and hit water at some 100feet down. Driven by his scientific curiosity, Pearson drilled even further and passed other layers of water to the depth of 630 feet. Thus the name 'Deep Well' was coined. A ranch house with a guest house was soon built by Alva Hicks.

In 1928, what was to become Deep Well Ranch, a guest ranch with a strong cowboy/dude ranch motif, was begun by Charlie Doyle who bought the property and converted the existing structures into the Deep Well Guest Ranch with accommodations for twenty-two guests. Despite its marketing claims, the new ranch was more a resort than a 'dude ranch.' The following year Doyle sold the property to Major Everett and Carroll Smith. These gentlemen built hacienda-type buildings around patios on the property. Two years later, the Bennett and Boyd families first managed and then bought the ranch. Frank and Melba Bennett would run the ranch, with its notable horse stables, for the next eighteen years, or until 1947. Phil Boyd, a local banker, and his wife Dorothy lived in the town and soon thereafter built the first few homes next to the ranch and named the streets after horses, e.g., Pinto and Palomino.

In 1949, the ranch and twenty surrounding acres were leased to Yoland Markson of Boston. Then the acreage was subdivided. Bill Grant, a locally popular developer of Thunderbird Ranch was the purchaser and developer. Soon, streets were named after desert flora e.g. Cactus, Manzanita, Ocotillo, Mesquite, Palm Tree, Driftwood and Sagebrush. This area is Deep Well Ranch's neighbor on the east, now known as the upscale

Deep Well Estates neighborhood.

Perhaps it wasn't strictly a 'dude ranch,' but Deep Well Ranch delivered a strong dose of Western-flavored adventure for those who stayed there. In its heyday, the Ranch was a 'labor of love' for Frank and Melba Bennett. Both were Southern Californians, Melba being a sixth-generation Californian who came from a family who raised some of the most prized trotting horses in the country. Horses were her passion and activities for her guests were carefully planned around horseback riding and evening sitting around the camp fire.

As time went on, the Ranch became a spot where the famous, nearly famous and just regular tourists came together to experience a Western-style adventure in the desert. Activities at the Ranch also included swimming and sunbathing around the pool. During the Great Depression, industrialists and other notable entrepreneurs came to the desert looking for fun in the sunshine and the Ranch amply provided the rich Western atmosphere portrayed primarily in cowboy films made in Hollywood and in the Palm Springs area that they craved.

Keeping the Western motif became harder for the Bennetts as subdivisions in the larger Deep Well area began to sprout in the late 1940s. As time went on, the concept of 'dude ranch' and semi-rustic Western adventure resort fell from favor. By the late 1960s, the Ranch had had its run, the old cowboy mystique started to fade. Visitors had slowed and people became more interested in buying houses in the area. Air travel into Palm Springs engendered longer stays by visitors and those seeking a 'seasonal' place to live. Architects Barry Berkus and William Bone soon produced architectural plans for a new development on the site of the old Ranch.

Initially referred to as Deep Well Ranch Condominium, a newly designed community sprouted in the early 1970s in three phases. The first advertising brochures referred to the new development as having a 'Unique and verdant location' quiet, peaceful and rustic. Quail and Cottontail are your Neighbors! Yet even with this serene setting, Palm Springs' City Center and all activity is just a few minutes away.' Salesmanship touted Palm Springs as 'well known for its excellence in Condominium Design!' The housing was advertised as 'Red-tiled Roofed 2 Bedroom, 2 Bath' and as 'the best in overall design and in attention to detail.' The initial homes had approximately 1750 square feet plus some 460 square feet in the 'big Double Garage with 'Genie' Door Opener. In addition, the houses boasted 'high Cathedral-beam Ceilings, good separation of Bedrooms, a fine Kitchen, a Wet Bar, and excellent Wood-burning Fireplace and there's a beautiful Patio with Wrought-iron Railing.' All this luxury was offered at an initial price of only \$165,000. Unfurnished! Billed as homes 'not for everyone,' Deep Well Ranch sales took off and two subsequent phases were completed by 1972. But 'for those who appreciate an opulent year-around home or vacation residence in the fascinating desert environment, Deep Well Ranch is the ultimate answer. For those who are searching for the privacy and serenity so difficult to find in the crush and sprawl of today's world. For those who desire a totally new experience in elegant living, Deep Well Ranch is all this and more; a special place for people weary of the humdrum of ordinary existence.' [Deep Well Ranch sales brochure produced by the William Bone Companies and Alodex Corporation]

Since the lots within the development were called 'postage-size lots' by the City of Palm Springs, the developers acquiesced into calling the Ranch a PUD, planned unit development, and not a condominium development. In this scheme, the homeowner owned not only the house but also the land from the curb to the front of the house, beneath the house and extending at least twelve inches beyond the patio. In the thirty-one perimeter stand-alone houses, the homeowners own the surrounding land: being that land from the front curb

to the boundary wall behind the house and including the side yards.

Sales brochures not only praised the exteriors of Spanish Colonial architecture, but the interior amenities, novel features like 'Garden Bath, Sunken Roman Tub, custom-decorated hardware,' kitchens that were 'the ultimate in beauty, comfort and convenience. Easy-to-care-for pure vinyl floor, ash cabinets, luminous ceilings, the finest appliances, and a pass-through window leading to the patio' were offered in addition to the height of 1970s floor covering "thick shag carpeting.' The colors 'burnt orange' and 'chocolate brown' predominated in the model homes. Individual residence units offered several floor plans and were given names like 'The Cordova.' Three bedroom perimeter stand-alone houses had names like 'The Cabrillo.' All in all they subdivision consisted of 111 houses on twenty-four landscaped acres, including, in the common areas, three swimming pools, three hot tubs/spas, and a tennis court.

Deep Well Ranch was an inclusive community from the beginning. With some early developments having restrictive clauses in their deeds, the Ranch became a draw for many Jewish residents of the Valley. In the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s the Ranch was known for its convivial atmosphere and active scene of many social events planned and attended by most residents. Ranch residents, no matter whether year-round or seasonal, were always known for their friendliness and hospitality. This continues today as residents wave and stop and speak to other residents in cars passing by them on the Ranch's streets. In the early years, the homeowners essentially managed the community; there was no management company like in the present. Problems with 'temporary residents' caused the homeowner's association a myriad of challenges. By the 1990s a management company was hired to take responsibility for the day to day running of the Ranch community and oversight both of the legal issues occasionally raised and any disagreements regarding the rules and regulations.

Like the rest of Palm Springs, the Ranch was no stranger to celebrities. Leo Durocher, one of the foremost American baseball players and subsequent manager of the Brooklyn Dodgers, New York Giants, Los Angeles Dodgers, Chicago Cubs and Houston Astros, once lived in a perimeter house. Durocher died in 1991 at the age of 86 in Palm Springs. He was the author of a notable book titled Nice Guys Finish Last. Resident Grace Jablow, who has lived in the Ranch since the beginning of the housing development in the early 1970s remembers Durocher and tells a story that Leo was angry that the entry guard would not let him in without a sticker on his car one day, insisting on seeing his ID. Leo felt that he was famous enough that he didn't have to follow the same rules as everyone else.

Chris Gubin, current resident of the Ranch, tells of the American soprano Marguerite Piazza (d. 2012) having once lived in an attached residence on Primavera Drive. The more recent celebrity in the Ranch was Tatum O'Neal (b. 1963), the one-time child actress who continued her acting career into adulthood and also became an author. Tatum is the daughter of actor Ryan O'Neal and actress Joanna Moore. Tatum lived with her mother in Deep Well Ranch after her parents divorced in the 1970s. Oftentimes Tatum was joined by her childhood friend Jodie Foster, who also became an actress, to play at Tatum's house and in the neighborhood. A pair of handprints in the concrete curbing at the bend of Primavera Drive East are said by reliable witnesses to be Jodie's. Other well-known former residents included Milton Handelsman, the board chair of Van Huesen Shirt Company, a local TV station weather woman named Patty Beebe and the daughter of actress Loretta Young. Influential Mid-Century modern architect Donald Wexler was a Ranch homeowner for many years until 2012. He is known for 'pioneering the use of steel in residential design.' It is interesting that architect Wexler chose to live in Deep Well Ranch where the housing was anything but Mid-Century!

'Forty odd years and still thriving, the Deep Well Ranch homes have been a little hidden residential gem in

Palm Springs and, as they say, the rest is history.' --- Doree Goldstein

#### SOURCES

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Interview with Grace Jablow (original and current homeowner) by Mimi Fisher and Doree Goldstein, February 3, 2014.

Interview with Jim and Charlene Hopp (1974-2009 homeowners) by Mimi Fisher, February 8, 2014.

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Interview with Wilson McNary (homeowner since 1993) by Robert Semes, February 4, 2014.

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