

KALLISON RANCH COMPLEX

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Historical Background

Kallison Ranch was purchased in 1910 by Nathan Kallison from two tracts that were originally part of the Jacob Hoffman Ranch, one of the earliest ranches in western Bexar County. Nathan and his wife, Anna, were Jewish immigrants from Russia who came to San Antonio in 1899 by way of Chicago. They operated a one-room harness shop which eventually became the largest farm-and- ranch supply business in the Southwest. The 1,683-acre ranch consisted of flat farmland on the southern end, with rolling, chalky pasturelands to the north. (Nick Kotz, *The Harness Maker's Dream: Nathan Kallison and the Rise of South Texas*, Fort Worth: TCU Press, 2013)

The ranch was used to experiment with progressive farming and ranching techniques. Nathan Kallison utilized the expertise of Texas A & M College, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Soil Conservation Service to implement new techniques, equipment, agricultural practices, livestock breeds, and crops. He posted a sign at the Ranch's entrance that read, "Established in 1910 for the development of better farming and ranching." As one of the first farmers in southwest Texas to plant wheat and flax in the 1920s, he proved that these species were sufficiently hardy to thrive in the unpredictable south Texas climate, despite the area's reliance almost solely on cotton production. Demonstrations of the revolutionary Harvester Thresher helped mechanize wheat farming. In later years, the farmland was converted to growing feed crop for their cattle.

By the 1930s, the Kallison ranching practices were transformed by establishing a stable Hereford calf herd, as opposed to shipping steers to market over long distances. During the Great Depression, families who had fallen on hard times were allowed to camp in tents on the grounds and work for a small stipend. The ranch was also used to entertain members of the armed forces and their families. In the years after World War II, the Kallison Ranch was the site of many mini-expositions, such as a 1947 picnic when more than ten thousand people lined up to eat barbeque, drink

local beer, and enjoy the rodeo. Attendees toured displays of new farm products available for sale at the Kallison store, while learning the latest farming and ranching innovations. As a community service, the ranch was also used for many other demonstrations and events by local and regional high school 4-H / Future Farmers of America (FFA) programs.

Following Nathan's death in 1944, Perry Kallison continued the tradition his father had established. He worked in the store and ranch businesses from an early age, as well as hosting his own radio show, "The Old Tradin' Post." For decades, he exhibited the ranch's prized bulls in every major exposition in the country, using the show circuit to bring Kallison purebred cattle to the attention of others. The herd became the heart of this ranching venture. By the 1950s, the Kallison Ranch was a carefully-planned operation, bolstering cattle production with feed crops grown on the farm. "Because Nathan Kallison was one of the earliest Texas ranchers to embrace new concepts of scientific farming and ranching, his success in the field led the *San Antonio Light* to dub him a Pioneer agriculturalist." (Kotz, *The Harness Maker's Dream*, p. 63). Perry's wife, Frances, not only hosted many social events at the ranch, but was very involved in the ranch's financial management. She also raised white Arabian horses, riding and exhibiting them throughout Texas.

In 1967, Perry Kallison auctioned the registered Hereford herd to settle the estate of his brother, Morris Kallison, who died in 1966. By 1969, the Kallison family ran a newspaper ad to rent the Rock House. During the ensuing years, the ranch was leased for deer hunting while much of the flat farmland was sold to developers. In 1994, the Government Canyon Coalition enlisted the support of the Trust for Public Land to reserve land for the future state natural area until the property could be transferred to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department through funding by the City of San Antonio and the Edwards Underground Alliance (now the Edwards Aquifer Authority) (*City of San Antonio Landmark Designation Nomination* for the Zizelmann House, 9/18/08). Understanding the recreational, wildlife conservation, open space and water protection goals of Government Canyon State Natural Area, the Kallison descendants decided to convey the most scenic 1,162 acres of their ranch to

Government Canyon in 2002, through a combination gift and sale. (Nick Kotz, "Legend, Lore & Legacy", *TPWD Magazine*, Aug-Sep 2014).

Ranch Structures

There are four main structures on the Kallison Ranch Complex at Government Canyon, and the remains of a few that have succumbed to the ravages of time. Currently none are accessible to the public, although the park hopes to enact a multi-phase plan for interpretation and provide limited access for tours and special events.

THE FIRST HOUSE (c.1920-30s) - Sometimes referred to as "the headquarters" by family descendants, this modest house hosted many Kallison family gatherings, as seen in historic photos and confirmed by family memories of sleeping on the open porch and Easter egg hunts. The board-and-batten (box frame) house has three rooms, one bathroom, a kitchen and a living room. The original portion of this building has a side-gabled roof. The existing porch was later enclosed with siding and windows, while a native limestone / brick fireplace was added to the west end. The last addition to the building was a metal shed on the west side of the house. Evidence of the house's evolution can be seen through the variety of window and door types, as well as exterior cladding of wood, metal, and asbestos shingle siding. A hand-dug open well is located adjacent to the house.

THE FOREMAN'S HOUSE (c.1920-30s) - This building remains intact, although severely damaged by termites. The original Craftsman-style, wood-frame structure consisted of four rooms enclosed with wood lap siding and wood sash one-over-one windows. A large wood-framed living room was added to the rear (north), while a concrete block utility room with modern restroom facilities may have been added when the Rock House was built. Both additions are faced ("rocked") with vertical slabs of limestone. A corrugated metal roof covers the entire front-gabled bungalow. A concrete porch with wood posts spans the front of the building, commanding a panoramic view of the farm below and cooled by seasonal breezes. The original two-bedroom structure was reportedly so drafty that Nathan hired a mason to build a fireplace

on the north end. It was constructed using an assortment of bricks and is partially rocked with limestone. A brick chimney located over the kitchen may indicate the historic location of a wood-burning stove.

THE POLE BARN (c.1940-50s) - This expansive equipment shed, framed with heavy timber posts and enclosed with corrugated steel, was built by Perry Kallison. Several storage rooms or offices were elevated and framed, but never completed. At the east end are two small tack rooms, one containing leather artifacts and saddle racks. Two circular concrete water troughs are located in front (south) and to the side (east) of this structure. The Kallisons' prized registered Herefords, including *Golden Nugget*, were reportedly groomed and fed in the small stock pen to the east of the tack rooms. A large corral once surrounded the front of this pole barn, with another barn and house now lying in ruins along the southwest perimeter of this area. One of the original rocked gates forms an entryway to the Rock House pasture southeast of the pole barn, however, much of the fencing and landscaping has been removed. In 2003-2004, hazardous materials were abated from a livestock dipping tank at this location as a condition of the state natural area's acquisition.

THE ROCK HOUSE (c.1940-50s) – This suburban ranch-style house was built by Perry and Frances Kallison. Since the property was acquired in 2003, this building has fallen into disrepair following the collapse of the hipped wood shingle roof. The sturdy concrete block walls, organized around the massive central chimney and fireplace, stand as a testament to the passage of time. The walls are rocked with vertical limestone veneer, while the fireplace combines cut and stacked limestone with red brick trim. The fireplace serviced the living room, as well as the expansive screened porch running nearly the extent of the east side of the house. The two-bedroom, two-bath house was ventilated by a series of steel casement windows on all sides. Little glass remains.

CONCLUSION

The Kallison Ranch is significant not only through its connection to an illustrious San Antonio family, but also as an example of the

evolution of ranching and farming in the Texas Hill Country. The intertwining of the Kallison family interests in merchandising, telecommunications, and progressive agricultural techniques provided a unique synergy in the post-WWII era in San Antonio and throughout south Texas. The ranch was one corner of an interconnected marketing triangle that included Kallison's Store and the Ol' Trader Radio Show. The ranch was more than a place for weekend entertainment. It served a vital function to keep the store and the radio show genuine and grounded as a showplace for agricultural experimentation and livestock breeding. It also gave the Kallisons a place to serve the public on a grand scale, from individual families during the Great Depression to open houses for servicemen during WWII and barbeque picnics for the public. It is fitting that this ranch be recognized by the City of San Antonio.

As growing numbers of heritage ranches disappear in the face of urban development, Kallison Ranch and a handful of other examples preserved on state property become ever more precious. While none of the buildings is unique or expertly-crafted, the ranch's collection of vernacular structures makes this place worthy of note. Experiencing the view from the front porch of the Foreman's House to the farmland below cannot be duplicated, nor can touching a scrap of leather in the tack room. What was once ubiquitous and ordinary has now become threatened by neglect and demolition throughout Texas. The Kallison Ranch provides visitors with a glimpse into authentic ranch living, unavailable to the general public by any other means.

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