

Gann House
Colorado-Concho Rivers Confluence Area
South Bank of the Colorado River
West of Leaday Crossing
~~West~~ Vicinity ~~Colorado~~
Concho County
Texas

HABS No. TX-3358

HABS
TEX
48-CONC.V,
5-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

~~SKETCHES~~

Historic American Building Survey
National Park Service
Rocky Mountain Regional Office
Department of the Interior
P.O. Box 25287
Denver, Colorado 80225

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
GANN HOUSE

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48-CONC.V.
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PART I. INTRODUCTION

Location: Located on the south bank of the Colorado River, .8 miles west of Leaday Crossing, .2 miles west of Gann Cemetery, .4 miles north of Farm/Ranch to Market Road #2134, ~~Voss~~ vicinity, Concho County, State of Texas
CONCHO

USGS Leaday Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator
Coordinates: 14.434369.3490954

Present Owner: Curtis T. Halfman. No grant of permanent easement to the Colorado River Municipal Water District on record; note: the easement documents on several Concho County sites have not yet been recorded (August, 1989)

Present Occupant: Abandoned

Significance: This 1930s period house is a typical catalog-type house with very little relationship to vernacular architecture in its region, or, for that matter, to any particular climatic adaptation or orientation. As the second Gann house on the site it represents the last headquarters of the well-known Gann Ranch, one of the last large parcels of land to be developed in the region for the purpose of livestock ranching. The property is culturally significant as a ranch operated until the 1970s by the Gann family, whose marriages and various community relationships affected life in the area of the confluence of the Concho and Colorado Rivers for a century, from the 1880s to the present.

PART II. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: The house dates from the early 1930s. Dating is based on family tradition and stylistic evidence.

There is the date "1932" scratched into a concrete-slab terrace north of the house.

2. Original and subsequent owners: The Gann ranch structures and family graveyard are located on lands which are part of Abstract 950 of the 1856 Wilke and Daren Survey. Unless otherwise noted, reference is to Deed volumes, Concho County Courthouse, Paint Rock.

1855 22 June 1855, D:369, Gustave Theisser to David Alexander

1869 22 March 1869, H:155, Robert Alexander to E. A. Stribling

1873 16 September 1873, D:576, David Alexander to E. A. Stribling

1904 16 March 1904, Y:331, Eleanor A. Stribling to W. O. Gann

1918 3 January 1918, 16:128, ranch inherited by the various children of W. O. Gann ("Matter of Estate of W. O. Gann, deceased")

1974 16 April 1974, 117:265, Don Gann to D. L. Lester

1975 24 September 1975, 119:166-170, K. L. Lester to Jack Rice

1987 6 January 1987, 140:483, Jack Rice to Curtis T. Halfman

3. Original plans and construction: No original plans or drawings have been located. The design for the house was no doubt taken from a catalog of the 1920s-1930s period.
4. Alterations and additions: The house appears to have remained relatively unaltered since its construction.

B. Historical Context:

For the general historical overview which places the property in the context of the development of cattle ranching at the confluence of the Colorado and Concho Rivers, please see HABS No. TX-3350.

The present-day Cann ranch house, which replaced an earlier house on the same site, was built in the early 1930s by descendants of W. O. Cann, the first of that family to settle in the region.¹ Cann had ranched in McCulloch County before moving to Coleman County. The 1880 Coleman County Census lists Cann and his family as residents in the vicinity of the famous Day Ranch, located across the Colorado River from the present Cann Ranch (HABS No. TX-3351). He purchased his Concho County lands, over one thousand acres, in 1904 from Eleanor Stribling, an heir of the family who had owned this property since 1869; Mrs. Stribling was a well-to-do San Antonio businesswoman, the first female bank director in the country.²

A Gann son, who later became a prolific local historian, noted that there were no improvements on the new Concho County land at the time of purchase. In 1905 Gann built a house on the site of the present house and began the operation of the ranch.³ His attempt to ranch on a large scale was rather contrary to the movement in the region in the first years of the twentieth century toward small-scale tenant farming; his neighbors across the river, the Padgitts and Millers, were breaking up their large properties into a different land use policy.⁴ However, his endeavors were successful in that he was able to retain his land for the sustenance of his large family from two marriages; many of these children grew up on the place and married into local families. Cann died in 1913; the ranch continued to be operated by his son Walter, the historian. It remained in Cann ownership until 1974.

One of W. O. Cann's daughters, Elizabeth Gann Ransbarger, has provided valuable information regarding life on the ranch in the early 1900s, recounting trips to the stores in the new little town of Leaday nearby and trips to Millersview to attend school and church.⁵ The Canns were involved primarily with raising livestock, but they periodically cultivated sugarcane and cotton, making use of the gin on the Padgitt Ranch across the river. They installed a water pump on the river for their garden, as was the case at other ranches in the neighborhood, for instance, at the McLane-Hafner and Day-Miller Ranches.

Cann established a family graveyard east of the present house at a location he had chosen as a future housesite; however, the new house was constructed long after his death and on the site of his first permanent dwelling on the ranch.⁶ The graves were removed from the ranch to higher ground in 1989.

In 1979 the Texas Water Commission granted permission to the Colorado River Municipal Water District, an entity based in Big Spring, to construct a large dam on the Colorado River. The site chosen was a location several miles downstream from Leaday, sixteen miles below the confluence of the Colorado and Concho Rivers. Early

in the planning stages, a program was developed to address environmental concerns, including the impact of the proposed flood area on prehistoric and historic cultural resources. In 1980-1981 a survey of historic cultural resources was conducted by Freeman and Freeman under contract to Espey, Huston and Associates, a firm of Austin environmental consultants. Subsequently a number of other studies and amplifications of previous studies have been conducted. In early 1988 an Albuquerque, New Mexico, firm of environmental scientists, Mariah Associates, Inc., began further assessment of the area of the flood plain, including various archaeological investigations and assessments. Mariah has also acted in the role of coordinator of related projects, including this project: the recordation of nineteen endangered historic sites in the confluence area for the Historic American Buildings Survey and the Historic American Engineering Record. The sites were selected from a list compiled under the guidance of the Texas Historical Commission.

Construction was finished on the dam in the late summer of 1989. Called the Stacy Dam and Reservoir, the project will inundate approximately 19,200 acres, and the threat of inundation of the Gann house is probable in the near future.

PART III. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The house is a typical one-story catalog-type house from the 1930s period, in the mock Tudor style, woodframed, with a fossiliferous limestone veneer. Aside from its southern orientation, presumably to catch the prevailing breeze, it has little climatic adaptation and bears no relationship to the older vernacular architecture in the region, employing no use of the local building stone for structural purposes; beyond a little entrance porch, there are no wide porches or verandas to protect it from the heat on its rather barren site. Simply, it represents a popular urban bungalow type for its period, not particularly suitable as a country or ranch house, but certainly common as second or third phase houses on farms and ranches in this area; in this manner it is related to the similar and contemporary house built on the Tickle Ranch nearby (HABS No. TX-3359).

2. Condition of the fabric: Although the house is at present abandoned, it is in remarkably good condition.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The one-story house is roughly rectangular in form, approximately 30 feet across the south front and 48 feet deep, with a slightly projecting southeast porch.
2. Wall construction: The construction is typical twentieth-century woodframe construction with a thin exterior veneer of fossiliferous limestone.
3. Porches: The south entrance porch, 13 feet across the front and 8 feet deep, projects 3 feet to the south and is encompassed in a wide arch, the entire arched projection covered by a large front-facing gable; there is a smaller arch to the east side of the porch. At the northwest corner of the house is a narrow enclosed screened porch. There is a concrete terrace of the north porch with the date "1932" scratched into the slab.
4. Chimneys: The one fireplace of the house, located in the living room, is on the south face of the house, of the outside projecting type, its firebox and chimneystack of brick faced with the fossiliferous limestone used to veneer the rest of the house.
5. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The door to the south front porch is glazed in a simple pattern.
 - b. Windows: Typical windows are double-hung wood sash, frequently paired, in glazing patterns of either 3-over-1 or 6-over-1.
6. Roof:
 - a. Shape covering: The roof is essentially two wide low intersecting gables with a rather more steep-pitched gable over the south entrance porch. The covering is wood shingles.

- b. Cornice: There is a very shallow wood cornice composed of a small boxed eave over a wood strip.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plan: The plan of this one-story house is a simple and typical straight-forward bungalow plan with a file of rooms to the east and to the west. The west rooms are the living room, entered from the southeast porch; behind it the dining room; and last, the kitchen, with a narrow screened porch beyond. The row of rooms to the east are reached by a narrow passage opening off the living room; they are three bedrooms and a bathroom.
2. Flooring: The flooring is tongue-and-grooved hardwood flooring.
3. Wall and ceiling finish: The living room walls and ceiling are gypsum board over wood sheathing and painted. All other walls and ceilings are wood sheathed and hung with wallpaper.
4. Openings: There is a set of glazed doors between the living room and dining room, glazed in a simple pattern. All other doors are of the five stacked panels type. Window and door trim are simple wood frames with no moldings, varnished.
5. Decorative features and trim: There are no decorations. The living room fireplace is faced with heavy protruding limestone with a varnished pine mantelshelf.

D. Site:

1. General setting: The house faces south, with its approach road from the east; the road continues on to the west toward the working part of the ranch. The little house compound is surrounded by a low fossiliferous limestone wall. On the north face of the house a concrete terrace provides a dramatic view of the river down the sharp bluff. The house, therefore, is located directly on the bluff with a wide flat plain to the south and east.
2. Outbuildings and other elements on the site: The little house compound, linked with the low stone wall, is composed of a stone-based watertower, approximately 10 feet square, and a storm cellar 12 feet directly north of the kitchen porch.

The roof of the stone-and-concrete cellar forms the top of a small terrace, and steps descend on its east side to its base and down beyond to a small terrace with a river view.

Prepared by:
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September 1989

PART IV. ENDNOTES

1. Cann genealogy and family history is from various sources, chiefly Walter Gann, W. O. Cann's son, quoted in: Martha Doty Freeman and Joe C. Freeman, A Cultural Resource Inventory of the Proposed Stacy Reservoir, Concho, Coleman and Runnels Counties, Texas, vol. II: Historical Cultural Resources, report prepared for the Colorado River Municipal Water District by Espey, Huston and Associates, Inc., Engineering and Environmental Consultants (Austin, Texas, March 1981), 5-13.

2. Ibid.

3. Donald R. Abbe and Joseph E. King, "A Preliminary Report: Historical Resources within the Stacy Dam Project Area," draft of a report prepared for the Colorado River Municipal Water District by Mariah Associates, Inc., Environmental Consultants (Lubbock, Texas, June 1989), 55 and 56.

4. For a discussion of the subdivision of the Day Ranch into a series of tenant farms, see HABS No. TX-3351.

5. Interview with Elizabeth Cann Ransbarger, Concho, Texas, 25 June 1989: interview by Patrick L. O'Neill, Mariah Associates, Inc.

6. Ibid.

PART V. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was sponsored by Mariah Associates, Inc., archaeologists; recorded under the supervision of Greg Kendrick, HABS regional coordinator, Denver. The project was completed during the summer of 1989 at the project field office at Houston and College Station, Texas. Project supervisor was Graham B. Luhn, A.I.A., architect; project architectural historian was Gus Hamblett, Texas A&M University; intern architects were Debbie Fernandez and Paul Neidinger; student architects were Brian Dougan, Robert Holton, Janna Johnson, Wayne Jones, and Pat Sparks, Texas A&M University; project photographer was Paul Neidinger, photographic processing by Laura McFarlane.

SITE PLAN

FEET 1/4" = 1'-0"
METERS 1/4" = 1'-0"

