

GARDNER CANYON

Gardner Canyon is named for Thomas Gardner who was an early resident of the Canyon. Gardner was born in Buffalo New York on 13 April 1820. He arrived in southern Arizona in 1859 and settled along the Mexican Border in the area that was to become the future site of the town of Lochiel. He married Gertrude Apodaca (Tula) from Santa Cruz, Sonora in 1861 and they had twelve children. He grew vegetable crops and raised beef that he sold to miners at the Mowry Mine. Although the Apaches were always considered to be a threat, the Chiricahua Apaches under Cochise did most of their raiding in Mexico until February 1861 when Cochise and Lt. George Bascom had their infamous altercation at Apache Pass. After that, Cochise went on the rampage and vowed to wipe out all of the American Settlers. Gardner was shot twice by the Apaches and nearly killed. In 1867 he decided to leave that area and moved his family to the Sonoita Valley where they would be under the protection of the U.S. Army at Fort Crittenden. At times, up to eight soldiers were billeted at the Gardner Ranch for 2-week periods to provide additional protection.

In 1872, Gardner gave up his holdings in the Sonoita Valley and moved his family to the eastern slopes of the Santa Rita Mountains. Using the provisions of the Homestead Act of 1862, he established the Apache Springs Ranch in the canyon that would eventually bear his name, Gardner Canyon. He raised horses and cattle and also operated a sawmill. Gardner occupied the Apache Springs Ranch until 1896 when he sold it to Walter Vail of the Empire Ranch and moved to Patagonia where he lived until his death in 1906. He is buried in the Patagonia Cemetery.

An article in an 1888 issue of the Philadelphia Times described Gardner as follows: “He can neither read nor write, but he is well informed on all current topics, and is sharp and shrewd on any type of trade. He is a tall heavily built man, with long iron-gray hair and grizzled beard. His whole appearance betokens a robust constitution, and people in the mountains say that, not withstanding his age, in a rough and tumble fight, he can whip any man for miles around.” “He is known far and wide for his sterling integrity and when Arizona eventually takes its stand among the other states of the union his name will rank among the foremost pioneers.”

The Apache Springs Ranch that Gardner founded was the home of the Epona International Study Center and Equestrian Retreat from 2005 to 2009. The owners were author and horse trainer Linda Kohanov and her husband, recording artist Steve Roach. The ranch featured a large covered and lighted arena, conference center, cantina and guest quarters which were open for public bookings. The facilities were available for equine events, single day meetings, weddings, family gatherings, team-building events, concerts and anyone looking for a renewing destination environment. It is interesting to note that one of the buildings on the ranch is an adobe structure originally built and occupied by Thomas Gardner. The original Gardner house was built with two foot thick adobe walls and consisted of a kitchen, living room, two bedrooms and a bathroom. Subsequently, a large bedroom, laundry and second bathroom were added to the original building. Figure 1 depicts the Gardner cabin as it appeared in 2018.

However, after operating at Apache Springs for four years, the Epona Center at Apache Springs was forced to cease operations due to the recession and in July 2009 the ranch was placed on the market. In 2013, the ranch came under new ownership and has been extensively restored to retain its original character. Photos of the ranch including the Tom Gardner cabin and more history of the Apache Springs Ranch may be found at

<http://www.apachespringsranch.com> . After accessing the ranch home page, click on “History” on the menu bar for brief biographies of Thomas Gardner and some of the major participants in the Apache wars and on “Accommodations” for pictures of the Gardner house interior and other facilities.



Figure 1. Thomas Gardner House

A portion of the ranch is operated as a Boulder Crest Retreat and is one of two retreats that were established to solve the mental health crisis and to heal our military members, veterans and their families dealing with post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and combat related stress so they can live productive, fulfilling and service-oriented lives at home. The other Boulder Crest Retreat is located in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia. For further information on the Boulder Crest Retreat, click on the following link or copy and paste it in your browser www.bouldercrest.org/familyrestandreconnection

Summarized in 2007 by T. Johnson from the Apache Springs Web Site and an Arizona Archaeological & Historical Society article on Thomas Gardner. Updated in 2010 and again in 2015 by T. Johnson from information provided by Susan Jensen, webmaster for the Apache Springs Ranch. Updated in 2020 by T. Johnson

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