

Pete Kitchen's Ranch

During the Civil War, Union troops were withdrawn from Arizona and the Indians, thinking they had won the struggle, commenced a series of unopposed raids: killing, burning, and destroying most of the ranches in the southern part of Arizona.

Before long, there was only one place of sanctuary that was safe for man and beast – Pete Kitchen's ranch.

Pete was born in Kentucky in 1822, and in his early years quickly became an expert shot with both rifle and pistol. Joining the U.S. Army at the age of 22, he served with the mounted rifles along the Rio Grande and traveled across country with them to Oregon to increase United States presence in an area that Great Britain coveted. It was there he received his discharge.

He drifted south and finally arrived in Tucson at the age of 31, settling in the Santa Cruz Valley. By now he had acquired the reputation as a skillful Indian fighter and frontiersman, second to few in the annals of the southwest.

Observing the fertile fields that lay along Portrero Creek, five miles north of what is now the international boundary, but was then Mexico, he took possession and began building a stronghold on a hill. His home had 25-inch thick adobe walls. It developed into the sanctuary so badly needed by travelers on that dangerous road who feared not only Indians, but highwaymen as well.

Thirty Opata Indians joined Kitchen. They were recruited from Sonora to help work the ranch and to serve as guards against the men who coveted Pete's string of horses, his other livestock, and his possessions.

Manuel Ronquillo, an excellent rifle and pistol shot, joined him as well as another outstanding frontiersman, Francisco Verdugo. He arrived with his sister, a beautiful girl named Rosa. It wasn't long before Pete took her as his wife and she became the lovely Dona Rosa.

As his assemblage increased in number, Pete arranged to build bigger and stronger quarters atop his hill. Using the native ability of those around him, Pete Kitchen had a foundation laid of rock, mining the rock from a nearby canyon. Straight doorposts came from the oaks in the vicinity and were set into large stones at the bottom of the doors and into holes bored into mesquite logs at the top. Thus, even without hinges, the doors swung open and shut.

The thick adobe walls created a fortress effect. The house had a flat roof with a four-foot high parapet surrounding it, which made an excellent place for a sentinel to stand guard in relative safety. During the time of Indian hostilities, a sentry was always kept on the roof to watch for the approach of any enemy. When the alarm came, all available men were sent to the roof 24 hours a day to drive off the attackers. A hand dug well, 60 feet deep, and a small creek about 100 yards south, provided water. With his livestock and provisions from Tucson, the stronghold could survive a long siege.

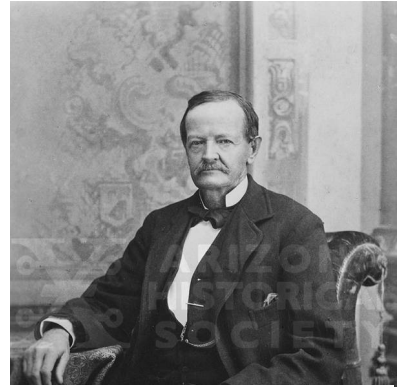
Pete Kitchen wasn't a very big man, but he looms big in the memory of most who knew him. Actually, he was just five foot, nine inches tall. But he was a spare, erect, physically fit individual. His eyes were bluish gray. He wore a broad-brimmed sombrero and a Mexican serape, along with his cowboy garb. He was always armed and appeared so hardy that he was more or less indifferent to hunger.

After finally selling the ranch, Kitchen moved to Tucson where he lived out the rest of his life. When he died, he had little in the way of a fortune but he had an unblemished reputation among scores of friends, admirers and Apaches.

Part of Southern Arizona's history, the building has been occupied by several restaurants over the years.

Prepared by Jean Huseman from an article by Jack Williams and modified by information from the High Chaparral Web Site. Photo courtesy of the Arizona Historical Society (<http://www.arizonahistoricalsociety.org>)

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