

DESERT QUEEN RANCH, SOUTH HOUSE  
(Schoolhouse)  
Joshua Tree National Monument  
Twentynine Palms Vicinity  
San Bernardino County  
California

HABS NO. CA-2347-8

HABS  
CAL  
36-TNPAL.V,  
1G-

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

Historic American Building Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
P.O. Box 37127  
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## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

### DESERT QUEEN RANCH--SOUTH HOUSE (Schoolhouse) (William F. Keys Ranch--South House)

HABS No. CA-2347-G

- Location:** Joshua Tree National Monument, Twentynine Palms vicinity, San Bernardino County, California.
- Present owner:** National Park Service; Joshua Tree National Monument.
- Present Occupant:** Unoccupied.
- Present Use:** Restoration of site; occasional summer tours.
- Significance:** The Keys Desert Queen Ranch in the Joshua Tree National Monument is an outstanding historical site of desert-based vernacular technologies displaying a range of architectural and engineering artifacts associated with the Euro-American era of settlement in the Mojave desert. The site is largely intact with nine buildings and four ore mills surviving. The South House served as the schoolhouse for a time.

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#### PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

##### A. Physical History

1. **Date of erection:** 1935-36.
2. **Original and subsequent owners:** William Keys.
3. **Builders, suppliers:** William Keys.
4. **Original plans and construction:** materials scavenged by William Keys.
5. **Alterations and additions:** kitchen cabin on west gable end was previously the first kitchen at the house (HABS No. CA-2347-A). It came from the Tully Mine.

##### B. Historical Information

For more information on the Desert Queen Ranch, see HABS No. CA-2347.

The South House served as a schoolhouse for as many as eighteen children, including transient children. The teachers were Mr. and Mrs. Howard Dudley, who lived in the North House (HABS No. CA-2347-E). The children who attended the school were Diane, Don and Zelda McRoberts, Vernon Stephen, Sherman Randolph, all the Eaton children (Clifford, John, two girls, another boy), and two McRoberts cousins (who were remembered as red-haired girls named Joannie and Bettie Malot from Missouri whose stepmother was killed at the

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McRoberts' Quail Springs ranch by being run over by a water trailer with a water tank; they then all moved away). Diane, Donny, and Zelda McRoberts also moved after school was over. And eventually the Heddingtons moved out. The school building shut down in about 1945-47.<sup>1</sup>

In the west addition of the schoolhouse, which was the old house kitchen, there was a water cooler with a glass bottle on a metal stand. Each child had a metal cup with his or her name on it made by Bill Keys. There may have been a table and several chairs in the addition and some kind of cooler for food. On the east wall of the teaching room there was a blackboard and a map of the U.S. On the north side of the room there were as many as eight large desks by the windows and in the middle of the room there were the small desks now stored in the west schoolhouse (HABS No. CA-2347-D). The schoolhouse had a tall heater, one of two on the ranch that Bill Keys ordered from Montgomery Ward. The white cooking oven in the school today was not there when Phyllis Keys went to school in the building, but was brought there later. It was located where the white stove-oven is now. In the corners there were cupboards for books, papers, and school materials. The county furnished the students with books, paper, erasers, maps, etc.<sup>2</sup>

Outside of the new schoolhouse Keys built a cactus garden by the south wall where a juniper bush grows now; a croquet court southeast of the cactus garden; a swing set with large wooden posts east of the school; and east of the swing set, an outhouse.<sup>3</sup>

**PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION**

**A. General Statement:**

1. **Architectural character:** Typical wooden mining cabin, constructed of posts in walls and a skin of boards for a wall. Unusual feature is the absence of an outside wall--the boards were used to cover the post from the inside instead.
2. **Condition of fabric:** Extremely dry and fragile.

**B. Description of Exterior:**

1. **Overall dimensions:** 33'-6" x 14'-7"

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<sup>1</sup>Phyllis Keys Meidell, daughter of William and Frances Keys, interviewed by Richard Vidutis in Hesperia, CA, August 24-25, 1993, tape 4A.

<sup>2</sup>Meidell, tape 6A.

<sup>3</sup>Meidell, tape 6A.

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2. **Foundations:** School room rests on boulders set on the ground; kitchen rests on pipe set on the ground.
  3. **Walls:** No exterior wall boards; posts are exposed.
  4. **Structural system, framing:** Wood frame.
  5. **Chimneys:** Stovepipe hole visible in south wall.
  6. **Openings:**
    - a. **Doorways and doors:** One right-hand paneled door on the south wall of the schoolroom section.
    - b. **Windows and shutters:** One casement window (two lights) on the south wall opening inward; three casement windows (two lights each) on the north wall opening inward; and one window (three lights, glass missing) on the south wall of the kitchen addition.
  8. **Roof:** Gable roof on schoolroom has a ridge pole, rafters, ceiling joists (no ceiling), and horizontal boards showing remnants of tarpaper and fiberglass cloth over the boards. The roof over the kitchen addition is also gable; ceiling prohibits viewing of roof system.
- C. Description of Interior:**
1. **Floor Plans:** Two rooms.
  2. **Flooring:** Wood board.
  3. **Wall and ceiling finish:** Kitchen addition has a vaulted ceiling of thin plywood covering the ceiling and the interior walls. The schoolroom section has 11" horizontal boards for walls, with the edges coming together with shiplock joints.
  4. **Doorways and doors:** Doorways of the kitchen addition and the schoolroom are aligned, although the two structures do not actually touch. The door on the kitchen has been removed.
  5. **Hardware:** All windows are mortise hinged as well as the doors.
  6. **Mechanical equipment:**
    - a. **Heating, air conditioning, ventilation:** A pipe hole on the south wall probably was hooked up to the kitchen oven inside.

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- b. **Plumbing:** One 2" pipe extends from the sink in the kitchen addition through the west wall.

**PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION**

See Desert Queen Ranch, HABS No. CA-2347.

**PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION**

See Desert Queen Ranch, HABS No. CA-2347.