

SANTA ROSA ISLAND HISTORIC RANCHING DISTRICT
Channel Islands National Park
Santa Rosa Island Historic Ranching District
Santa Rosa Island
Santa Barbara vicinity
Santa Barbara County
California

HABS CA-2738
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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

**HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
SANTA ROSA ISLAND HISTORIC RANCHING DISTRICT**

HABS No. CA-2738

Location: Channel Islands National Park
Santa Rosa Island
Santa Barbara Vicinity
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California

UTM Coordinates: 10S 767186 3762119

Significance:

The Santa Rosa Island Ranching District is significant on a local level as an intact nineteenth and twentieth century California sheep and cattle ranch. Its period of significance is 1873-1955, starting with the construction of the main house at Bechers Bay and ending with the close of the National Register fifty year rule. The vernacular landscape at the Vail & Vickers Ranch on Santa Rosa Island retains historic integrity and is in fair condition.

Vail & Vickers and its predecessor, the More family, created and operated one of the largest and most productive livestock ranches in the state, contributing to the growth of agriculture and the continued economic development of Southern California and the West. Island owner A. W. More, as well as members of his immediate family, was a prominent landowner and early agriculturalist and businessman in Santa Barbara County; Walter L. Vail and J. V. Vickers and their heirs owned a handful of large ranches in California and Arizona, being among the important men in the livestock industry during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The three owner families constructed buildings, structures, and a complex system of ranch roads, watering features, and roundups that now stand as good examples of rural vernacular architecture, showing how the ranchers adapted to the unique island environment to develop a large stocker cattle ranch within the context of shrinking ranches along the California coast and the general conversion to feedlot ranching throughout the United States.

The property's significance in agriculture in the southern coastal area of California can be seen in the extant historic features that can be located across the island. A complex of buildings at Bechers Bay acted as the headquarters and includes houses, barns, sheds, utility buildings, corrals, water systems, a long pier and historic vegetation. On the outer parts of the island are two "line camps" and a vast network of corrals, fencing and roads, all of which played important parts in operating the ranch. Water systems, including wells, springs, pipelines, tanks, troughs and reservoirs are found at numerous locations on the island. Many of these resources were developed in the nineteenth century, while other buildings and structures originated during periods of change, upgrading and modern improvement during the twentieth century. The reuse of available materials during the latter part of the period of significance embodies the unique situation of operating an island ranch.

These features, which possess cohesion of purpose and historical integrity, represent the important livestock industry of California, which had its start with the Spanish missions of the late 1870s and blossomed during the Gold Rush and early statehood. The ranches contributed to the local and state economy through depressions, wars and during the unprecedented growth of post-war America. Until the end of ranching on the island in 1998, the ranch was operated under the traditional system of vaqueros

(Spanish: cowboys) on horseback tending cattle, which would be shipped to and from the mainland using a unique system of wooden cattle boats and barges.

Significance Context

In making the second-largest land grant in Santa Barbara County (neighboring Santa Cruz Island was the largest), the Mexican governor granted Santa Rosa Island to the Carrillo brothers, two men prominent in the development of Alta California. These men immediately passed the property to the daughters of one of them, who in turn allowed their American husbands to develop a ranch. Alpheus Thompson and John C. Jones had also made a place for themselves in the history of Mexican California as traders and businessmen. In 1844 Thompson and Jones stocked the island with cattle, sheep and horses and began to develop facilities including houses and corrals. All commerce with the mainland was by boat. By 1868 the island had passed into the ownership of the More family, who were prominent in Santa Barbara-area commerce. The Mores constructed a well-defined complex of ranch buildings, including houses, barns and corrals, and stocked the island entirely with sheep in numbers that ranged up to 80,000 at one time, becoming one of the largest sheep ranches in the state. Although successful in these endeavors, after the death of A. P. More in 1893 the family's interest began to dwindle and in 1901 the island was sold to a pair of Los Angeles cattlemen, Walter L. Vail and J. V. Vickers.

Messrs. Vail and Vickers both had been pioneers in the Arizona cattle industry, having been neighbors on their vast holdings in and around Tombstone. The two had, separately, established themselves in the California cattle and land business in the late nineteenth century, buying large ranches in southern part of the state. Their activities mimicked, but on a smaller scale, the business of Miller & Lux, a partnership of German immigrants that grew to dominate the cattle and irrigation industry in the West. Miller & Lux owned and/or controlled millions of acres of land between the 1860s and 1930s but eventually failed after neglecting economic threats from outside packing houses and corporate ranch operators. Smaller, but still relatively huge ranches such as General Beale's sprawling 200,000-acre Tejon Ranch, the 100,000-plus acre Irvine Ranch, the million-acre Rock Springs Land & Cattle Company in the Mojave Desert (mostly operating on public lands) and the varied operations of Vail and Vickers, continued to prosper through much of the twentieth century.

On Santa Rosa Island Walter Vail and J. V. Vickers incorporated their partnership as Vail & Vickers, Inc., and commenced stocking the island with beef cattle while removing the sheep. Eventually the island supported between 6,000 and 8,000 head of cattle on its 52,000 acres, all shipped to the island as calves and shipped off ready for fattening and market. Vail & Vickers expanded the Mores' network of roads, fence lines and water systems, and developed a number of roundup grounds and line camps on the island. Although incorporated, the Vail family managed the ranching operation through three generations, following island traditions laid down as early as the Thompson era. The isolation of the island ranch supported the preservation of its traditions and features, and kept twentieth-century subdivisions and non-ranching development at bay.

The Vail & Vickers Ranch was a major part of Santa Barbara County's cattle industry, raising between 15 and 20 percent of the county's beef cattle at various times between 1940 and 1980. Most large local beef cattle ranches, such as the 34,000-acre San Fernando Rey Ranch and the 28,000-acre Bixby Ranch, operated as cow-calf farms with small numbers of stockers adding up to a maximum of three to four thousand head. Even among those, Vail & Vickers remained the largest with five to eight thousand head on the range at any one time. Santa Barbara County, while never a leader in California's beef industry, nevertheless held a position among the top ten or twelve cattle producers throughout the twentieth century and usually led production in coastal Southern California. California became the nation's largest agricultural producer by 1948, with cattle the major commodity of the state's production. California cattle production followed only Texas and a few other Western states in economic importance nationwide. Vail

& Vickers proved to be among the last of the large ranches in operation in the state, as most of the prominent cattle ranches such as the Irvine Ranch and the Hollister Ranch fell to subdivisions. At the time of its closure in 1998, the Vail & Vickers Ranch was the largest undivided land grant rancho in Santa Barbara County. Its greatest significance in relation to the cattle industry, however, lies in the period during the 1940s and 1950s as California's feeder cattle industry boomed. While historic resources such as buildings and circulation routes remain from the More era, the ranch gains much of significance in the evolution into a prominent and successful cattle ranch during the twentieth century.

Livestock ranching in northern Santa Barbara County took a downturn in the 1920s through the 1940s with the development of row crop farming, a result of improved transportation opportunities, organized marketing and irrigation. Military acquisitions of coastal ranches around Point Conception to the northwest also contributed to the demise of many family ranches, mostly dairies; beef cattle ranching continued in the Santa Ynez Valley, along the coast between Vandenburg Air Force Base and Goleta, and on Santa Rosa and Santa Cruz islands. The industry revived during and after World War II. While the number of cattle and prices for cattle sold steadily rose in Santa Barbara County during the 1940s and 1950s, the acreage devoted to stock raising dipped from 610,000 acres to 426,000 acres between 1955 and 1958, and continued to decline through the 1960s and 1970s.

Per capita consumption of beef in California more than doubled between 1940 and 1970, and the number of cattle on state farms reflected this rise, although national growth of cattle numbers did not match that of California's. Prices for beef off the farm rose almost 400% during the same period, with the most dramatic growth between 1940 and 1959. The industry took a dramatic downturn during the 1970s, which opened a period of instability that lasted two decades.

A science- and economy-driven revolution in production took place in the 1950s as cattle fattening in feedlots became popular with surpluses of grain and dwindling quality grazing land. Cattle feeding started in the 1930s but exploded after World War II, focused especially in the Midwest. In the twenty years following the war, the number of cattle on feed jumped by over 600%. Vail & Vickers followed this trend, switching in the 1950s from a cow-calf ranch (where cows produce calves for sale) to a stocker operation, in which steers are imported solely for preparation for feedlot finishing.

All of the historic California ranches mentioned above operated in a similar fashion that changed little since its beginnings as an industry, but few remained into the 1990s with integrity such as that found on Santa Rosa Island. Phases of economic expansion in California, especially during post-war booms, caused the breakup of most of the large old ranches, as family-run operations gave way to subdivisions and corporate ownership. For example, the decades following World War II saw explosive growth in the state that led to the decline of cattle ranching as a family enterprise, as real estate-oriented land and cattle companies purchased many of the remaining large acreages, to be operated under temporary leases to ranchers while awaiting development. During this period, ranch buildings deteriorated or were torn down. The typical layout of house, barns, supporting structures, fenced fields, rangeland, water distribution systems, cattle control structures was often fragmented with the coming of new uses to the property. The Vail & Vickers Ranch saw changes that only reflected the evolution of cattle ranching in a working landscape. While retaining most of the nineteenth century structures dating from the More period, Vail & Vickers constructed a few buildings specific to the needs of a cattle ranch, and replaced a major building lost to fire. They made use of available materials on the island, building structures with lumber, doors, windows, siding and guardrail scavenged from abandoned island military developments.

The U. S. government recognized the strategic importance of Santa Rosa Island and its neighbors in the Santa Barbara Channel. The U. S. Army and U. S. Air Force established early warning and tracking radar bases there during World War II and the Cold War, respectively. Ranching operations continued with

little disturbance during these periods, and Vail & Vickers reaped a bounty in building materials when the armed forces abandoned the facilities.

The government also recognized the potential of the island and its neighbors as natural areas worthy of preservation. The National Park Service established Channel Islands National Monument in 1938, which was expanded to include Santa Rosa Island into a new Channel Islands National Park in 1980. Vail & Vickers sold Santa Rosa Island in 1986 to the United States government, and operated their historic ranch until 1998.

Description:

Santa Rosa Island is the second largest of the east/west-trending northern Channel Islands and sits between San Miguel Island on the west and Santa Cruz Island on the east. It is located 26.5 miles from the closest mainland point at Goleta, roughly thirty-five miles from the city of Santa Barbara and fifty miles from Ventura, headquarters for Channel Island National Park.

Santa Rosa Island measures approximately 53,364 acres or eighty-four square miles and elevations range from sea level to 1,589 feet. The island is distinguished by seven points of land ranging in character from a broad, sandy spit (Skunk Point) to a blunt and steep protruding promontory (South Point). Surrounded by the sea, the island is dominated by a ridge of bare mountains with dozens of drainages leading in all directions to the ocean and channel. The north side of the island, facing the mainland, consists largely of gentle plateaus cut by steep canyons, while the south side has a more dramatic drop from mountain peaks to ocean. Sandy beaches are found around the island, and marine terraces characterize the east and west sides. Most of the land area is covered in native and imported grasses, with large patches of chaparral in the Black Mountain vicinity and a forest of rare Torrey Pines above Bechers Bay. The grassland landscape reflects the historic agricultural/grazing uses of the island. Island oak and coast live oak grow in pockets, and various varieties of coastal scrub such as lupine, sage and coyote brush are found all over the island. There are numerous perennial streams.

Most extant historic features date from the 1870s through the 1990s. These include buildings, roads, fence lines and corrals, and domestic and native vegetation. Owing to physical isolation and entrenched traditions in coastal stock raising, relatively few changes occurred in the organization and function of the ranching operation and landscape during the last 130 years; change is seen in the appearance of a handful of newer structures, a realigned road or fence line, or vegetation. Although few constructed attributes remain of the pioneering period on the island (1844-1860), characteristics originating during that period include natural systems and features, land use, topography, vegetation, views and vistas and archeological sites. The potential for archeological study of this early period is strong. Most prevalent on the island are the remaining features of the More Family (1860-1901) and Vail and Vickers (1901-1998) eras associated with sheep and cattle ranching.

History:

California holds an important place in American history for many reasons, not the least of which is its leading role in the country's westward expansion and its contributions through agricultural production. The first industry in California, predating even the American period, was stock raising for purposes of providing food and clothing. This industry grew to become one of the hallmarks of California's growth during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and helped it maintain its position as the country's leading agricultural producer since the 1950s. On Santa Rosa Island, owners and their employees developed a large stock ranch that evolved and contributed to these industries, especially on a local level as the largest and most productive stocker cattle ranch in Santa Barbara County, yet did so against the odds of operating from an isolated, weather-beaten island some thirty miles offshore of the southern California

mainland.

1844 to 1870: Thompson and Jones

In 1843 the Mexican governor granted Santa Rosa Island to Carlos Antonio Carrillo and his brother, Jose Antonio Carrillo, both prominent residents of Santa Barbara. Within a month, Carlos and Jose sold the island to Carlos' two daughters, Francisca and Manuela. The daughters' American husbands, Alpheus Thompson and John C. Jones, took an interest in the island. The two were experienced in the otter trade and other entrepreneurial endeavors on the Pacific coast and looked to Santa Rosa Island as an opportunity to establish a cattle ranch, thereby exploiting the lucrative hide and tallow trade.

Jones purchased livestock in 1844 and Thompson set to work building, with help from employees, a house and corral near East Point at a location that would become known as Rancho Viejo (Old Ranch), as well as another corral at an unknown location, perhaps either Bechers Bay or Arlington Canyon. Thompson's employees took up residence on the island and supervised the grazing cattle, sheep and horses. During the following decade, numerous routes were developed across the island as livestock, horseback and wagon routes, and a house was built near the west side of the island. In 1855, the owners constructed a house and corral—the first known developments at Bechers Bay—thereby establishing the future headquarters site. The latter location proved to be more reliable for shipping conditions and provided more level land for ranching and agricultural activities.

In 1859, T. Wallace More purchased part of Jones' interest in Santa Rosa Island at auction. That year, spurred by litigation between the partners over control of the island, a pier was constructed at Bechers Bay (it was soon demolished by a storm) and most of the cattle and sheep on the island were removed because of drought and litigation. Between 1865 and 1870, A. P. More and H. H. More, brothers of T.W., obtained full ownership of the island from Thompson's family and their brother.

1870 to 1901: More Brothers

Probably influenced by the disastrous drought that decimated California's cattle industry during 1863-1864, the Mores commenced development of a huge sheep ranch on the island, eventually owning between 40,000 and 80,000 head. They erected miles of redwood fences and planted crops. The Mores abandoned the old Thompson ranch near East Point, instead developing their headquarters at the location of Thompson's second building at Bechers Bay. The ranch complex included a two-story house, barns and a substantial pier. An iron pipeline brought water two miles from Water Canyon to the ranch house. The Mores imported fine breeds of sheep and employed trained goats to herd them. During a drought in 1876-78, the Mores were forced to slaughter tens of thousands of sheep, but profited from the situation by installing boilers and embarking on a *matanza*, meaning the sheep were slaughtered and their carcasses boiled down for fat.

The United States Coast Survey mapped Santa Rosa Island during the period of the Mores' initial development. One of the surveyors, William Greenwell, had previously visited the island, erecting seventeen survey signals that would aid mapping of the island and its neighbors. During 1872 and 1873, Stehman Forney of the Coast Survey lived on the island and eventually produced a detailed topographical map that depicted vegetation, roads and trails, corrals, fence lines and buildings.

H. H. More invited journalist J. Ross Browne to visit Santa Rosa Island in 1874. Browne described the valleys "filled with an almost impenetrable growth of alfileria, wild oats, bur-clover, native grasses, weeds, and various nutritional herbs, suitable for pasturage . . . No part of the island is unavailable for grazing purposes with the exception of a few narrow belts of sand-drifts near the beach." Browne recorded 60,000 sheep and noted the fields of barley, the roads "for wagons and carriages" that crossed the island, and spoke of the advantages to sheep raising, an attribute that the Mores were exploiting to

their benefit. The fine grasses, mild climate and lack of predators and disease produced mutton and wool of high quality. The isolation of island ranching had financial benefits: "Less fencing is required than on the main; the sheep can range at will and feed day and night, without care or the expense of supervision."

Browne described the improvements on the island as he found them that year: "Every convenience exists for gathering up the stock, shearing, steeping, and shipping. Large and commodious storehouses, barns and boarding houses for the employés are situated near the place of shipment. A wharf, constructed at a cost of \$15,000, extends well out into the harbor, where vessels of large capacity can receive and deliver freight. The products of the island, whether wool, sheep, or grain, can be shipped direct to San Francisco, Santa Barbara, or any part of the world."

A. P. More acquired full interest in the island in 1881 and continued to increase the number of sheep on the island, to the detriment of the range conditions. A contemporary writer claimed that 80,000 sheep grazed on the island in 1888. A number of visitors recorded impressions of the ranch during the 1880s and 1890s that offer information on landscape features of the time. One book described a "village" with the ranch house standing near a "grove of cypress trees distorted and beaten down" by wind. "Here are great storing barns and shearing rooms, stables, pens, sheds . . . all not far from a little stream . . ." Other writers proposed grand agricultural schemes for the island and noted the scenery, one calling Santa Rosa Island "a garden out at sea."

The death of A. P. More in 1893 led to litigation and the eventual sale of Santa Rosa Island. Caretakers managed the sheep and the ranch was at one time described as run down. The ten heirs of More sold the island ranch in 1901 and 1902 to Vail & Vickers, a newly formed cattle ranching partnership based in Los Angeles.

1901 to 1986: Vail & Vickers

Walter L. Vail and John V. Vickers met in Arizona where both operated large cattle ranches. Their friendship and keen business sense led to the acquisition of Santa Rosa Island and its development into a prominent and unique coastal California cattle ranch. Vail had arrived in California from the east in 1875 and soon purchased an Arizona ranch that he built up into one of the largest cattle ranches in Arizona, the Empire Ranch. Vickers owned a ranch adjacent to the Empire. Both men moved to Los Angeles in the 1890s and expanded their interests, separately for the time, in the southern California area. On Santa Rosa Island, Vickers acted as a silent partner. Walter Vail and his sons managed the island ranch, a situation that continued for almost a century.

According to a Vail family member, at the time Vail & Vickers took control of Santa Rosa Island it was "divided into five or six large pastures with sheep-tight, board and wire fences which must have cost a lot of money." Being in the cattle business, Vail & Vickers proceeded to rid the island of sheep, a process that took many years. The firm purchased a new boat, repaired buildings and fences, and built additional fences and corrals. For the most part, Vail & Vickers ran a "stocker" ranch, one where young Hereford steers were shipped to the island, grown to full size and fattened, then shipped to the mainland and sold. For certain periods the managers attempted a traditional cow-calf operation, in which cows give birth to calves, which become the commodity. Vail & Vickers shipped their steers to Wilmington, near Los Angeles.

Vail & Vickers made use of the older pasture divisions of the island and enhanced them for cattle use. Each pasture, field or trap had a specific use. The ranch managers avoided overgrazing by moving cattle from area to area and by regulating numbers according to amount of feed and water available. All pastures, roundups and perennial streams were identified by name. Island place names largely carried over from the nineteenth century.

Vail & Vickers stocked the island on a double season strategy, giving cattle two full feed seasons (the best feed season was winter/spring) for growth. Depending on the season and forage quality, between 3,000 and 7,000 head of cattle grazed on the island's hills at any one time. Dry years would require removal of cattle (in 1948 virtually the entire herd was shipped from the parched island). Before the 1960s, cowboys (traditionally referred to as *vaqueros*, the Spanish term for cowboy) gathered cattle to roundup grounds across the island mostly without benefit of corrals. These sites provided centralized locations with enough reasonably level ground to herd 500 to 1,000 cattle into a bunch where they could then be separated and kept by a crew of cowboys. Only three sets of roundup corrals existed before 1929, at Arlington, Las Cruces and China Camp.

Line camps were developed at three locations on the island for housing cowboys during roundups and inventory. China Camp reportedly got its name from years of activity by Chinese abalone fishermen who used the somewhat protected site on the southwest coast of the island for processing and shipping dried abalone meat and shells. The plateau, squeezed between the beach, canyon and the steep hills, made a natural roundup ground for cattle, and probably for sheep previously. The Vails built a wire corral at China Camp before 1929 and a line cabin in the late 1930s. The Wreck roundup and trap, built in the late 1940s, also had a cowboy line shack. By the 1970s a trailer had been placed at the Arlington roundup for use as a line camp.

Working cattle required a good herd of horses. Vail & Vickers kept dozens of horses and gave them a one-square-mile pasture to live in. The horse barn, built in the 1870s and used for horses and sheep shearing until the turn of the century, was equipped with stalls, mangers and tack rooms to care for the indispensable horses. Grain fields planted on the level terraces near the ranch complex provided feed for the ranch horses.

Vail & Vickers kept up the More-era ranch buildings and constructed a few of their own. The upper ranch house remained much as it had been until some remodeling work in the 1960s and 1970s. The lower ranch house (possibly the old 1855 Thompson house) and the bunkhouse served as a residence for the ranch superintendent and a number of permanent cowboys. A schoolhouse, reportedly left over from the More era, provided a place for the education of ranch children during the 1920s. The barns remained in traditional use, with the exception of generators being placed in the blacksmith shop to provide electricity beginning in the 1930s. Vail & Vickers built a scale house and branding shed specifically for the cattle operation, and reconfigured the corrals near the barns.

Few developed roads existed on the island at the time of Vail & Vickers' purchase; numerous routes covered the island but these were likely horse and livestock trails rather than graded roadways. Vail & Vickers did not develop many roads until the late 1940s. The Smith Highway, named in honor of longtime ranch superintendent C. W. Smith, evolved out of a cattle trail as Smith and his cowboys blasted portions of roadways into the steep canyons on the north side of the island during the 1920s and 1930s. Standard Oil constructed the first substantial road in 1932 to reach their exploratory well near the summit of Vail Peak. Other oil companies constructed roads in the late 1940s, as did the military during the 1950s. Most of the extant roads on the island were not built by Vail & Vickers but inherited by them from non-ranching lessees who had developed the roadways for their own purposes. Cattle trails, on the other hand, were developed through the process of herding cattle from the range to the shipping pens at Bechers Bay, and so had their origins in the activities of the rancher.

Vail & Vickers hired a crew of permanent cowboys to run the ranch under a foreman. The employees lived in the bunkhouse or, if they had a family, in a small house nearby. When not tending cattle, the cowboys fixed fences, maintained buildings, broke horses and crafted tack items. Most cowboys were Mexican; ranch owners and foremen spoke Spanish much of the time out of necessity. Members of the

Vail family managed the ranch operations from Los Angeles (later Santa Barbara) but regularly visited the island. After Walter Vail's death in 1906, his son N. R. managed the ranch and was succeeded in 1943 by Edward, another of Walter's sons. "Uncle" Ed Vail passed the lariat to his nephew Al Vail in 1962; Al, the third generation to manage the ranch, oversaw operations until the ranch shut down in 1998.

A series of cattle boats, owned by Vail & Vickers, serviced the island ranch. The "Vaquero," moored in Wilmington, made the long trip regularly to bring supplies to the island. Shipping required numerous trips to and from the island. A chute mounted on the end of the pier allowed cattle to be dropped to the deck of the boat. Loading and unloading required skill, sharp timing and strength. When "Vaquero" was confiscated by the government for the war effort after Pearl Harbor, Vail & Vickers hired barges to ship their cattle, landing young steers on the beach after a short swim from the barge. In 1959, Vail & Vickers commissioned "Vaquero II," a wooden-hulled boat specifically designed for cattle with a wide beam and the hold divided into pens. Ranch workers reconfigured the shipping pens at the ranch to coincide with the pen arrangement on the "Vaquero II."

The first flight to Santa Rosa Island by a private plane occurred around 1930. Flyers landed on a grassy field south of the ranch complex. This site gradually evolved into a dirt landing strip, used by ranch owners and visitors, oil companies and various branches of the armed forces. Other locations had been used on the island but none attained permanent status. The National Park Service made improvements to the extant landing strip in the 1980s.

Santa Rosa Island developed into a fine hunting ground. Owners imported elk and deer to the island, possibly as early as the 1880s and definitely by the 1910s. Wild pigs also inhabited the island. Vail & Vickers invited friends to hunt, while the range-damaging pigs provided a full-time target for visitors and cowboys alike. Vail & Vickers eventually leased out hunting rights to a commercial outfit.

Other uses of Santa Rosa Island helped shape its features. The discovery of oil in the Santa Barbara area during the 1920s led to a string of exploration efforts on the island. Standard Oil Company developed a well in the high elevations of the island in 1932 but had no success. Signal Oil and its partners drilled in a number of locations and constructed the Signal Road and the South Road, both important routes on the island in later days. Oil development moved to the waters of the Channel where numerous successful wells were located.

The United States armed forces did not express any interest in Santa Rosa Island until America's entry into World War II intensified the need for Pacific coastal defenses. In 1943, the Army Corps of Engineers negotiated a lease with Vail & Vickers and constructed an early warning radar facility at a location later called Navy Hill. Engineers installed a Signal Corps Radar (SCR) system with operations taking place in a buried concrete building nearby. A cantonment was built about three miles away in a secluded dry lakebed near the head of Water Canyon. The facility included 16 wood frame buildings including barracks, mess hall and latrines, as well as a water system, communications and access road. The Military Police reportedly trained at this facility as an adjunct use. The Army also built a small number of buildings at Bechers Bay near the ranch house, and made use of the pier. The station closed by the end of the war and the buildings and materials were left for use by Vail & Vickers. Various oil companies used the cantonment area as a base camp, and eventually ranch workers used most of the buildings and materials for projects around the island.

As a consequence of the Cold War, in 1950, the U. S. Air Force leased 336 acres on the south side of the island to house the 669th Aircraft Control and Warning Squadron. Air Force engineers constructed an advanced technical outpost on the top of Vail Peak consisting of radar antennas and operating buildings. The residential area housing more than 200 personnel was located at Johnson's Lee and connected by a paved highway. The Johnsons Lee development included a concrete pier, five large dormitories,

recreation hall, motor pool, dining halls, dispensary, maintenance shops and administration buildings. A concrete and steel pier was located at the terminus of the highway; a short-lived airfield was built east of the facility but closed after a fatal crash. In 1952 the Navy joined the Air Force by constructing a series of missile-tracking transmitting and receiving facilities on Navy Hill, half way between the Air Force cantonment and radar base. Advancing technology led the Air Force base to close in 1963; again the buildings and materials were left for the use of Vail & Vickers, whose employees set to work dismantling utility systems and highway guardrails for construction of new corrals. Windows, doors and building materials were put to use in new buildings at the ranch.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt established Channel Island National Monument in 1938. At that time, the monument included Anacapa and Santa Barbara Islands. During the 1960s and 1970s, the National Park Service made agreements with the U.S. Navy to manage San Miguel Island. In 1980 legislation creating Channel Islands National Park was passed and the park boundaries were expanded to include Santa Rosa, Santa Cruz and San Miguel Islands. In late 1986, the federal government purchased Santa Rosa Island from Vail & Vickers for almost thirty million dollars. Vail & Vickers negotiated a twenty-five-year reservation of use and occupancy on less than eight acres at Bechers Bay, and a special use permit for continued cattle operations and commercial hunting activities.

1987 to present: NPS/Vail & Vickers

Vail and Vickers continued operations at the ranch under observation of the National Park Service. The superintendent placed NPS facilities in the abandoned Air Force base at Johnsons Lee. At Bechers Bay, NPS crews reconstructed the pier and water systems, built a generator building and fuel shed, established a campground and opened the island to limited public use. Eventually the NPS moved its operations to the main ranch area and constructed a maintenance facility and new housing complex on a hill above Bechers Bay.

Sources:

The text for this report is taken directly from the Cultural Landscape Inventory for the Santa Rosa Island Historic Ranching District (Channel Islands National Park, 2002). The Cultural Landscape Inventory paraphrased data contained in D. S. Livingston's draft "Historic Resources Study" for Channel Islands National Park (2006) and Livingston's draft Santa Rosa Island Ranching District Multiple Property Nomination Form. Particular references are noted where other sources were used.

Historian(s):

The Historic American Buildings Survey report was completed by Ann Huston, Historian, Channel Islands National Park, in February 2013, with data from the Santa Rosa Island Historic Ranching District Cultural Landscape Inventory (2002).

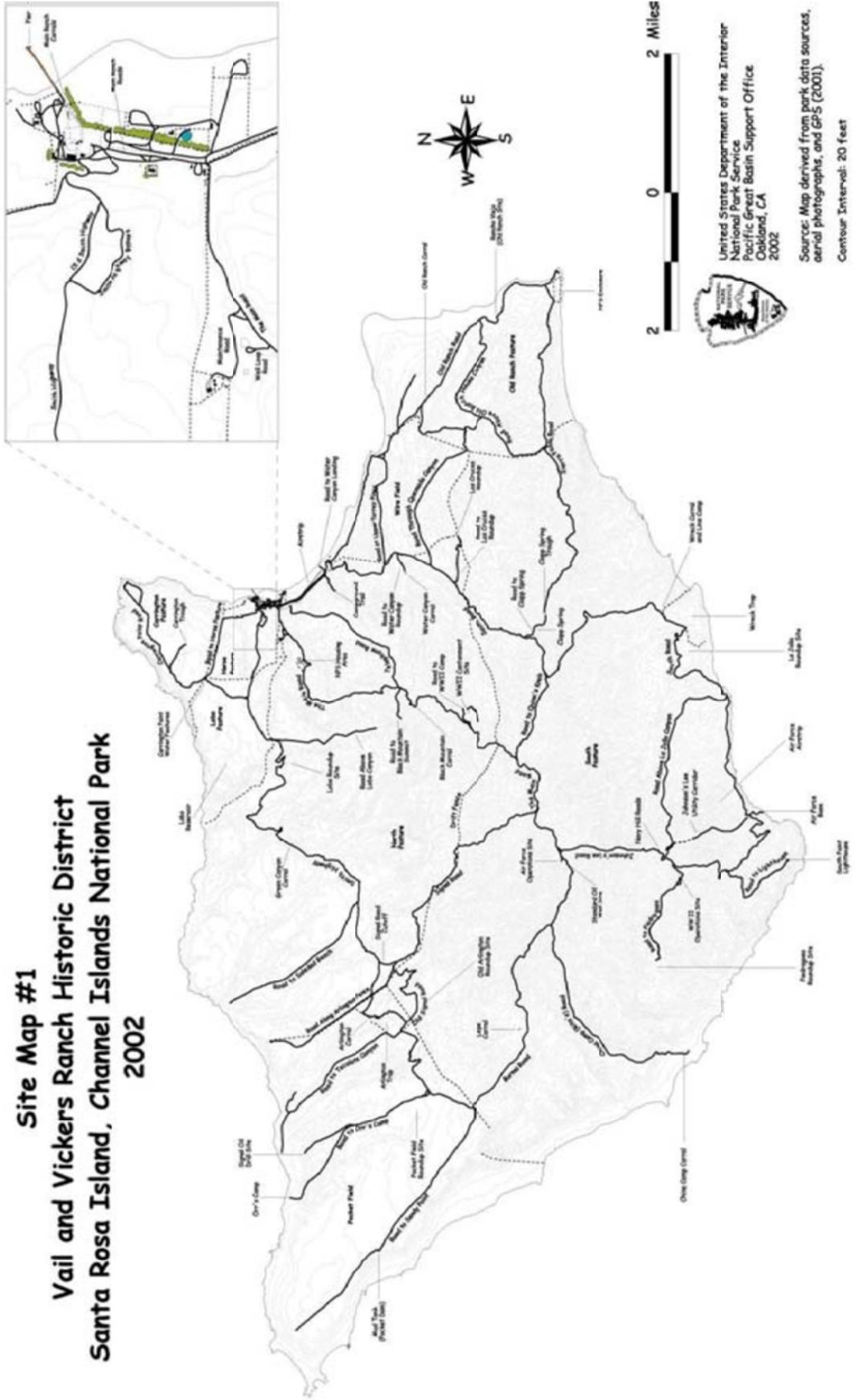
Project Information:

Historic American Buildings Survey photography was carried out in 2002 through a cooperative agreement between Channel Islands National Park and the Santa Cruz Island Foundation. The photographic documentation was prepared for transmittal to the Library of Congress by Student Conservation Association Intern Sara Justin in 2013, at which time the historical and descriptive data was added to the documentation package.

LOCATION MAP

CHANNEL ISLANDS NATIONAL PARK





Site Map #2 - Main Ranch Area
Vail and Vickers Ranch Historic District
Santa Rosa Island, Channel Islands National Park
2002

