

DESERT QUEEN RANCH, MACHINE SHOP  
Joshua Tree National Monument  
Twentynine Palms Vic.  
San Bernardino County  
California

HABS NO. CA-2347-H

HABS  
CAL  
36-TNPALV,  
1H-

PHOTOGRAPHS

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  
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

DESERT QUEEN RANCH--MACHINE SHOP  
(William F. Keys Ranch--Machine Shop)

HABS No. CA-2347-H

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**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 Machine Shop is a long low building used as a blacksmith shop and for the storage of food, two activities related to the self-reliant nature of the site.

**PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION**

**A. Physical History**

1. **Date of erection:** 1936-37.
2. **Original and subsequent owners:** William Keys.
3. **Builders, suppliers:** William Keys.
4. **Original plans and construction:** materials scavenged by William Keys.

**B. Historical Information:**

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

The machine shop served as a blacksmith shop and as storage for canned food. Frances Keys stored canned food and crocks filled with corned beef, pickles, sauerkraut (very rarely), and home brews of wine or possibly beer. On the north end, Bill Keys had lines for making jerky by hanging it in gunny sacks and for hanging beef. The Keyeses also stored their canning jars

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and equipment in this building. Jars were also kept in boxes along the wall by the orchard.<sup>1</sup> The bottles that are in the machine shop now were recently placed there.<sup>2</sup> The shop was also used for storage of a variety of equipment and parts, such as bolts and nuts, nails, shovels, etc.<sup>3</sup>

The blacksmith shop occupied the area south of the door. Keys had a forge, a big drill press, a vise, an anvil, many blacksmith tools, and tools for forming metal. Keys was a very good blacksmith, according to his son Willis; Keys even made his own tools. He would weld metal parts together by forge-welding the parts; for example, he would weld the worn-out ends back onto picks.<sup>4</sup>

The old trunk closest to the blacksmith area probably came from an old mine and originally sat on the porch facing the shop. There were two of them, side by side, and each one had a gold scale in them. The scales were very fancy, in a glass case; the inside parts were all polished brass.<sup>5</sup>

**PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION**

**A. General Statement:**

1. **Architectural character:** A simple post-and-lintel frame with a skin of corrugated metal and wood board.
2. **Condition of fabric:** In a very fragile state.

**B. Description of Exterior:**

1. **Overall dimensions:** 56'-5" x 12'-10"
2. **Foundations:** None.
3. **Walls:** A skin of corrugated sheet metal inside and out with horizontal wood boards.

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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 7A.

<sup>2</sup>Meidell, tape 2B.

<sup>3</sup>Meidell, tape 7A.

<sup>4</sup>Willis Keys, son of William and Frances Keys, interviewed by Richard Vidutis at Joshua Tree National Monument, July 8-9, 1993, and at North Fork, CA, July 16-18, 1993, tape 4B.

<sup>5</sup>Keys, tape 4B.

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4. **Structural system, framing:** Post-and-lintel construction; posts set in the ground; rafters span from post to post.
5. **Doorways and doors:** Double sliding doors both sliding southward; small right-hand door (1" x 4"s nailed together) south of sliding doors; and a left-hand door on the north end also made of boards nailed together.
6. **Roof:** Shed roof (very low pitch) of corrugated sheet metal nailed to the rafters.

**C. Description of Interior:**

1. **Floor Plans:** one open space.
2. **Flooring:** Dirt floor.
3. **Hardware:** Unmortised hinges and door hooks made by a blacksmith.

**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.

ADDENDUM TO  
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Joshua Tree National Monument  
Twentynine Palms Vicinity  
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