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## A Brief History of the Area

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### **Camp Washington Ranch**

W.E. Washington, A.K.A. Bill Washington was known as Uncle Bill to his close friends. Uncle Bill was a colorful character with an equally colorful history. The following account has been pieced together from factual historical records and suspect stories passed down from generation to generation.

Bill's intermarriage into the Chickasaw tribe to May Ellen in the late 1800's started Bill down a road that would eventually make him a wealthy man. May Ellen's father was of high standing in the tribe and wealthy in his own right until he was forced into exile and marched over the Trail Of Tears from Mississippi into the Indian Territory now known as Oklahoma.

The marriage entitled Bill to certain privileges not available to others, such as grazing rights on Indian Land. Bill prospered under these conditions and invested his money into a commissary, a dry goods store, a scale house, and even printed his own money for use at his businesses.

By age 38 Bill was a millionaire. When Bill flaunted his wealth and perceived power, he ended up getting crossways with the Chickasaw people. Also in 1894 a law was passed that called for a grazing fee of \$1 per-head per-year to be paid for cattle grazing on the Chickasaw range. Bill refused to pay. The tribal leaders retaliated he received orders to leave the Chickasaw nation.

By 1908, history places Bill in the Hagerman, New Mexico area. By 1910 he had found Rattlesnake springs and settled on ranching in the Black River area. Some of the first homesteaders in the area were the Lucas family. Bill "purchased" large parcels of land from the Lucas' and started ranching.

Stories of Bill's under-handed double-dealings abound. He was rumored to have sold the same herd of cattle or horses to more than one unsuspecting buyer. Whoever got to the herd first was the owner and Bill was long gone with the money.

Bill was rumored to be a small man, some say around 5' tall. He was also rumored to be an insomniac and a relentless drunk. On nights when he couldn't sleep, he would send one of his cowboys into Carlsbad for a bottle. Upon his return, the rest of the cowboys would draw straws to see who would sit up with Bill. Getting the shortest straw meant joining Bill at the water tank at the top of the hill. The remains of this tank can still be seen today. The two would sit with their backs to the tank, Bill with rifle in hand. The duty of the unlucky cowboy was to sit and listen to Bill talk until he got tired or passed out drunk. Either way, babysitting a drunken man with a rifle was a dangerous task.

Bill paid his cowboys 50 cents a day, but did so with money (script) he printed himself, which in those days was considered legal. Bill's cowboys would save this script until they had enough to return to Mexico as rich men. They would turn in their resignation and trade the script for gold coins. Bill would present the gold, a fresh horse, and offer his private bodyguard to serve as "guide" to the border. Bill's bodyguard was an African-American cowboy who was first employed by Bill's father-in-law and joined Bill when he moved to New Mexico. The bodyguard was rumored to be fiercely loyal to Bill and his wife May Ellen.

Some say that Bill would instruct the bodyguard to take the cowboy through the mountains and later return with the horse and the gold. History records that the faithful bodyguard did prison time for murdering a member of the Merchant family, a murder that Bill was rumored to have committed.

The other side of Bill Washington is rumored to be quite different. For those that he called friend, he was kind, generous, and was said to do **anything** for the people he cared most about.

As time, age, and his reputation caught up with him, Bill made a last ditch effort to save his crumbling empire. He tried to raise money to finance his idea of capitalizing on the growing tourist trade. Carlsbad Caverns had recently been discovered and was attracting more and more people. At the time, the county road ran through the ranch, right through the existing atrium and Bill had visions of a luxurious resort, complete with cabins, a general store, a restaurant, and fueling station; a resting place for the weary traveler making the long journey to the remote Carlsbad Caverns. He did start building his dream, but it was cut short when the highway was constructed 2 miles east of the ranch, where it still runs today. The modern day motel rooms were once the mechanic bays; the cabins (or "motor courts" as Bill called them) were later incorporated into the main house and are currently available for rent; the stable house was renovated in the 1970's into what is now the bunkhouse.

When the highway moved, Washington Ranch was too far off the beaten path to survive as a tourist destination. A judge finally ordered Bill to sell his cattle herd

to satisfy his debts with the Lucas family. When he sold the cattle, he didn't need the cowboys, but also didn't have the money to pay them.

Bill eventually lost the property and it has changed hands many times since then. Several families has ranched or farmed the land. The New Mexico Game & Fish department even operated the ranch for a short time as a picnic area and experimental wildlife refuge. As it often does, Black River dried up, killing the shade trees and vegetation, turning the land into dry desert. History records both Black River and Rattlesnake springs as being notoriously fickle, running dry for years at a time, only to return just as quickly as it left.

After a period of uncertainty and disrepair, the ranch was purchased by Texas businessman J.W. Miller . J.W.'s brother, Forrest convinced him that the land was rich with natural gas. We now know that Forrest was very right, as the area has an abundant supply of oil and natural gas.

J.W. eventually moved his family to the ranch and made it the headquarters of his oil and gas operation. Miller is credited with building the main house by incorporating the existing mechanics bays and existing atrium. The house was a modern marvel by 1970's standards, equipped with central vacuuming, central intercom and radio, custom stone fireplace, ultra modern appliances, and TV. J.W. also constructed the ponds and irrigation system.

Mr. Miller was a charismatic personality and considered by many to be a genius in the field of geological and seismic studies and application. Many of his business connections extended internationally and he built a home capable of entertaining on a grand scale. Several businesses that he founded are still around today.

Mr. Miller was an avid pilot and constructed the existing airplane hanger and airstrip. They traveled almost exclusively by plane, somewhat a necessity when living so remote. It was this necessity and love of flying that caused the tragic and untimely death of both Mr. & Mrs. Miller. They died in a plane crash in April 1980.

CARC, INC purchased the ranch and constructed 2 group homes where 16 clients live. They commute to Carlsbad each day where they work at one of several job sites including the CARC, INC greenhouse, Recycling Center, etc.

Over the years CARC, INC has added new amenities including four dormitories and a commercial grade kitchen. A ropes course or "challenge course" was built in the early 1990s and operated for several years hosting corporate retreats, Boy and Girl Scouts, church groups, etc. Due to insurance concerns the Challenge Course is no longer operational and scheduled to be removed in 2014.

Throughout the 1990's the abundant water, large staff, and newly constructed amenities made Camp Washington Ranch a premier camp and recreation destination. Over time, the Ranch was subject to the changing economics of the area, and as it's known to do, Black River went dry. As a result, the camp fell into disrepair. But in 2013 the CARC, INC board of directors began a concerted effort to rebuild the ranch. The motel rooms have been remodeled with improved lighting, HVAC, and bedding. An RV Park was added and continued renovations are scheduled throughout 2014, including remodel of the bunkhouse, cabins, and lining of the ponds to maintain a consistent water level.

Washington Ranch has had a long and rich history. It is the hope of CARC, INC to shepherd the ranch into the next phase, and that the story of the ranch has many, many more chapters.

### **Native American Encampments Near Camp Washington Ranch**

Geronimo and his Apache tribe lived in the Chiricachua Mountains in southeast Arizona until they were driven out by the Buffalo Soldiers. After they were driven out they camped at Rattlesnake Springs and Pine Springs. Geronimo and his people lived here until the 1880s. One of the last major battles fought was not far from the ranch, by the peak at Manzanito Springs. In the battle mostly women and children were massacred by Buffalo Soldiers.

The people of this area dug ceremonial pits and buried mescal roots, covering them with rocks. They built large fires to heat the rocks and cook the mescal. After it was cooked and cooled, the pits were uncovered and the mescal roots eaten. These pits appear today as approximately 20-foot wide rings of burnt rock. Just east of the main gate you can find the remnants of a mescal pit.

South of the camp on Chapel Hill is an area once used to grind seeds into flour. In this area are holes ground into solid rock called "metatees." These holes about 6-8 inches in diameter and 6-12 inches deep. With a hand held rock called a "mano" or a hard stick, the seeds were smashed against the bottom of the hole to make flour. Some matatees were portable, an example of which is sitting outside the front door to the main house.

There is a legend that exists about Black River and Apache buried treasure. It is said that Geronimo buried treasure in a cave at the head of Black River, but there are over 300 caves known to have been used by the Apaches. Some of the local caves and rock overhangs have extensive paintings. The legend of the Apache gold is so strong that one local family has searched for it for over 4 generations.

### **Black River**

Black River is approximately 80 miles long and starts approximately 10 miles up the Guadalupe Mountains. It travels northeast where it finally meets the Pecos

River, just south of Loving. The spring where Black River seeps out of the ground is very near McKittrick Canyon. It passes several very large caves, one of which has an opening over 100 yards in diameter. The river goes underground for a very long time before popping up again near the Cottonwood Day use area. In 1926 Washington Ranch's founder, Bill Washington built a concrete dam just south of the current day-use area, his name still carved in stone. The dam was used to help irrigate the nearby fields. The irrigation canals he built are still used today.

From the Washington Dam, the river flows through a series of pools, swamps, and eventually underground until it appears again near Rattlesnake Spring road. At one time the river that ran through the ranch was wide, deep, and crystal clear. The river had several small dams that created large swimming pools and waterfalls.

Today the river is unfortunately dry, but we watch for it to return one day!

## **Rattlesnake Springs**

*Rattlesnake Springs: An oasis in Southeast New Mexico's dusty desert  
From a dusty dugout to wellspring of water for Carlsbad*

Carlsbad Current Argus  
1/26/2014  
by Valerie Cranston

The isolated unit of the Carlsbad Caverns National Park known as Rattlesnake Springs Picnic Day Use Area located 26 miles southwest of Carlsbad is a tree-shaded riparian oasis in the Chihuahuan Desert. Although it has historically been a welcomed water source for many dating back to 1500, it wasn't always a tree-shaded haven.



*The photo was taken in April 2013. (Photo copies from cachinin.blogspot.com)*

Rattlesnake Springs is a natural seep between low hills in the desert. This seep is where groundwater percolates through bedrock from the nearby Guadalupe Mountains and oozes slowly to the surface as a cluster of springs. The water that flows from the springs forms a small pond, a creek and a swamp. It drains toward the Black River less than a mile east of the spring.

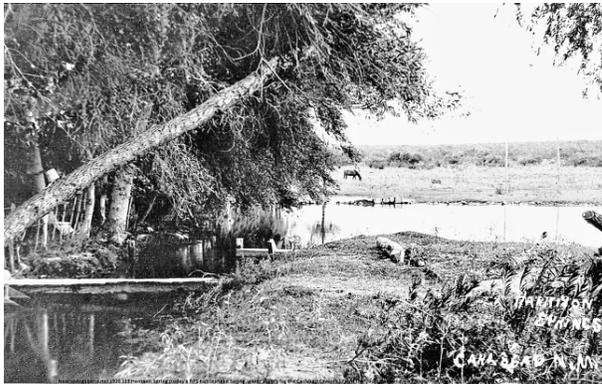
## **Early History Water Use**

The early cultural and historical background usage of the Rattlesnake Spring area is broken down into four time periods. Those are Indian Subsistence and

Trade 1300-1846; Hispanic American Exploration 1535-1903; Anglo American Settlement 1832-1880; and Anglo American Homesteading and Open Range Ranching 1862-1934.

The Mescalero Apaches and other American Indian groups used the spring and surrounding area long before the arrival of travelers and settlers. However, no archaeological artifacts or evidence exists today in the area because of drastic changes to the natural landscape since the homestead era.

Spanish and Mexican travelers created a wagon road following the Black River from the Pecos River to Guadalupe Pass and on to El Paso. An 1849 map shows the Black River as "Todos Santos" meaning all saints' creek and Rattlesnake Spring as "Ojo del Camino" meaning the spring of the road. An 1881 map drawn by Livermore and Butterfield identified Rattlesnake Spring by its present name.



No explanation as to how it got its name was uncovered during research.

*This is a photo of a 1920-era postcard of Harrison Springs. Postcard photo courtesy of Jed Howard's web site [www.nearlovingbend.net](http://www.nearlovingbend.net)*

Today it is the National Park Service Rattlesnake Springs unit, which is the water supply for the Carlsbad Caverns

Rattlesnake Springs was used as a water source in 1866 for those on the Goodnight-Loving Cattle Trail. The Slaughter Cattle Trail also passed Rattlesnake Springs. Although it was blazed in 1877, this trail wasn't used until 1879.

In the fall of 1878 Company K of the 10th Cavalry from Fort Davis camped near Rattlesnake Springs. The troops were on reconnaissance in the Guadalupe Mountain region. In the spring of 1879, Company C of the 10th Cavalry also camped at Rattlesnake Springs.

During this time period and into the early homestead area, there were no trees at the springs to offer relief from the sweltering sun, just brush and grass.  
Homestead era (1880-1934)

In 1880, Henry "Hank" Harrison arrived at Rattlesnake Springs to homestead the area. Harrison lived in a dugout when he first came. The dugout or chosey was located south of Rattlesnake Springs outside the current day park boundary.

He and Charles Slaughter planned to graze horses and cattle in this area. Harrison mowed plots for hay and winter feed and planted corn, not only for personal use but also to feed his cattle.

Slaughter would later homestead the area known as Washington Ranch. That property would later be bought in 1900 by his sons-in-law, the three Lucas brothers.

Harrison was born in Indiana in 1848. He left home at the age of 17 with dreams of becoming a soldier and buffalo hunter in the Southwest. He settled at Seven Rivers in 1878. His claim to fame was that his father was a relative of Pres. William Henry Harrison.

Harrison's first order of business was to construct a gravity-fed ditch irrigation system at Rattlesnake Springs in 1881. His vision was to utilize the natural slope of the landscape. The system consisted of the north ditch, which ran north and east of the spring and the south ditch, which ran south and east. He then dug a lateral ditch from the south ditch to irrigate a smaller orchard to the south.

Construction on the ditches that edged the high sides of the draw was completed in 1882. Historical documents state that Harrison's system is the oldest continuously used ditch system in the region.

On the north side of the creek Harrison planted hay. Corn was planted on the south side. His fields extended from the spring east to Black River. He also planted a fruit orchard. It extended from the east side of the spring. Just east of the present day CCNP ranger residence are remnants of the plum orchard.

Harrison also planted vegetables for his personal use. The closest trading post at that time was Seven Rivers, some 50 miles away.

He built two homes while at Rattlesnake Springs. His first was a four-room clapboard house. It burned to the ground after a spark from the stovepipe ignited the roof. His second house was a one-story adobe structure with five rooms that was located directly across the road from the present-day ranger residence.

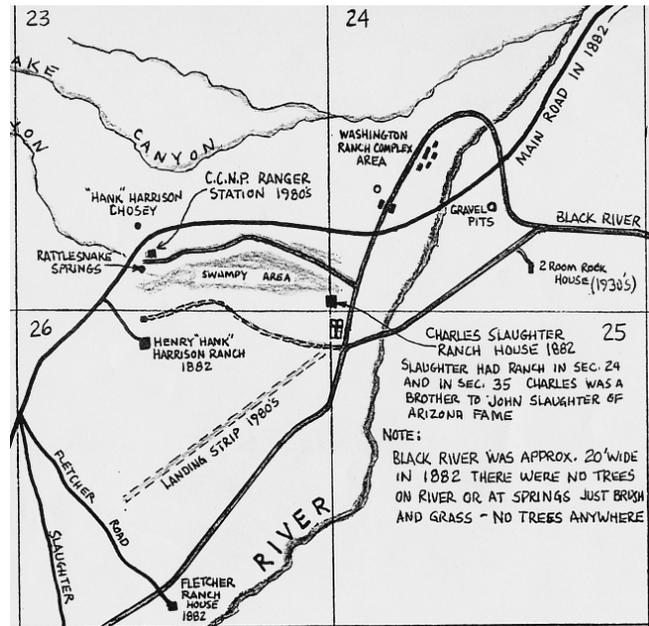
In 1889 Harrison received his first patent of 160 acres, which encompassed the spring drainage under the Homestead Act of 1864. His second and final 160-acre patent for all his holdings at Rattlesnake Spring was received in 1912, the year New Mexico became a state.

In June 1921 his ditches were surveyed and officially registered with the state of New Mexico. The survey stated the ditches averaged 12 inches deep, 6 1/2 feet wide at the water line and 2 1/2 feet wide in the bottoms. The maximum capacity for Harrison's ditches was 5.35 cubic feet per second.

Harrison died on July 20, 1931, in Carlsbad and is buried in the Carlsbad Cemetery. His tombstone reads, "Henry Harrison/Silent Sage of Rattlesnake Springs."

Federal Government, WPA and CCC

The U.S. Government purchased nearly 80 acres of the Harrison homestead in 1934 and a 1/2 second of water from Ida May Ward Harrison (first time his wife is mentioned). The government paid Ida Harrison \$7,350. It was to be the only water source for the Carlsbad Caverns residents and visitors. The water pipeline from Rattlesnake Springs to the Carlsbad Caverns was completed in April of 1935.



As part of a Public Works Administration project, the pump house and spring house were also built in 1935. In June of 1938 Civilian Conservation Corps Camp NP-1-N was established at Rattlesnake Springs.

While there, the CCC boys built living quarters, a kitchen and dining facility, a recreation hall, a school and an infirmary. The men of the CCC also tilled and landscaped the area, planted cottonwood trees, made trails for visitors and extended Harrison's existing irrigation ditch.

The Carlsbad Army Air Base used the buildings built by the CCC during World War II.

Most of these structures are no longer at Rattlesnake springs, but the cottonwood trees that line the picnic grounds remind all of us that the CCC boys were there.

### Site Protection and Designation

The Nature Conservancy purchased nine acres of land on the south boundary of Rattlesnake Springs unit as part of its New Mexico Critical Lands Campaign in 1983.

In 1984 the NPS and The Nature Conservancy signed a Memorandum of Agreement to protect the area's stream and riparian habitat, including the native flora and fauna. The agreement states agreed protection from uses and activities that in any way would threaten the health of the habitat.

In 1985 TNC also purchased 4 1/2 acres from Washington Ranch. These purchases included an area of Harrison's south ditch that was not in the 1934 NPS purchase. It was fenced by volunteers in 1986.

Half of the 79-acre Rattlesnake Springs unit was nominated by the NPS as a National Historic District. On July 14, 1988 Rattlesnake Springs Historic District was formally designated.

Features protected in this designation are the pump house, the ranger residence, the rock-walled spring pond and associated spring creek, the irrigation ditches, the orchard and pastures, the tree-lined terraces and rock foundations of the CCC camp, the roads and the homestead house site. Another condition of the designation is that the landscape remain maintained.

Although Harrison's adobe home and other homestead era structures were demolished by the National Park Service in 1934, his unique ditch system is still legally known as the Henry Harrison Ditch System.

And the very spring water source that enticed Harrison to homestead the area back in the 1880s continues to supply water to thousands of CCNP visitors from around the world.

*Sources: Documents from Carlsbad Caverns National Park: National Register of Historic Places Inventory Nomination Form , Rattlesnake Springs Chronology, Historical Background Rattlesnake Springs & Caverns Cultural Landscapes and Rattlesnake Springs History compiled by John Lujan. Bill Balgemann file on Washington Ranch and Rattlesnake Springs from the Family History Center.*