



Vail Preservation Society

Connecting Community Through Local History Since 2006

ESMOND STATION

Variant Names: Papago Station prior to 1880 - 1890.

Renamed in 1890 for a resident who lived nearby at the time the SPRR arrived in 1880.

Location: East of Houghton Road on Esmond Station Road, south of Rita Road.

Structures and Buildings:

1. Esmond Station Section House functioned as SPRR employee living quarters. Adobe construction with concrete floor, the exact date of construction is unknown. Earliest known photograph is dated 1912. Lopez family used it as a barn. Stabilized by Pima County in 2016.
2. Section Foreman House-burned Nov. 28, 2003, this building was a standard SPRR building.
3. SPRR employee house – unknown when this building was moved or demolished
4. Station-some reports say that a portion of the resident's (Esmond) ranch house was converted to function as a station.
5. Pump house. Built 1907? Earliest photo is dated 1909.
6. 70' diameter refilling water holding tank. Only the supporting concrete footers remain.
7. Stone masonry ramada base c1950. Ramada structure removed c2013.

Well: The Esmond well was drilled in 1907 by the Southern Pacific Railroad. 612' deep

Period of Use:

1. 1880 until 1952 when the track was relocated about one mile south to accommodate Davis Monthan Air Base in 1952.
2. The Lopez family held a grazing lease from the 1950s through 2013.
3. Esmond Station located on State Land until 2013 when it was purchased by Pima County.. In 2013 Pima County purchased the property. It will become part of the Esmond Station Regional Park.

Associated Events and Reports

:

1. March 5, 1880, Arizona Weekly Star. Papago Stage Station
2. July 1880, Arizona Weekly Star. SPRR has abandoned well drilling at Papago Station
3. "It is reported that some very striking cures have been effected by an old woman living at Papago Station. Her remedies are of the simplest kind and she is fast gaining the reputation of being a witch." Arizona Weekly Citizen, February 15, 1890.
4. Later that same year Papago Station's name was changed by the SPRR to Esmond Station.
5. The worst train wreck in Arizona history occurred on January 28, 1903; about six miles west of Vail near Esmond Station.
6. Esmond Station Area Plan, City of Tucson, 1986, revised 2005.
7. Terracon Phase One Environmental Report, 2011

References

Myrick, David. Railroads of Arizona vol. 1

Kalt, William D., III. I'll meet you in the cornfield: Southern Arizona's Tragic Train Wreck of 1903. Journal of Arizona History, Winter 2004, pp. 357-374.

Arizona Daily Star articles

Planning Department, City of Tucson. Esmond Station Inventory. 1986.

Personal Communication: Vera Harris Duncan, Katie Dusenberry, Eddie B. Lopez

J.J. Lamb, Vail Preservation Society 2017



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The 1903 Esmond Train Wreck

Daybreak revealed a horrific tangle of metal, hot fuel oil, flesh and fire. Just minutes before the impact a chain of events that would end in a wall of flame was set in motion when the Sunset Limited, already two hours behind schedule, pulled into the Vail Station. By sunrise, a temporary track had been quickly built to bypass the accident so that trains could continue on schedule. Southern Pacific Railroad officials, reporters, family members and curiosity seekers surveyed the devastation. Engineer Wilkey's 10 year old son was seen searching the wreckage for his father. Newspaper accounts estimated up to 22 fatalities. Authorities were fearful that an exact count was not possible due to the fire's intensity. Final reports listed 14 dead, seven sent to the hospital, and twenty more injured in the crash.

Today little evidence of that fateful January 28, 1903 night remains. A new layer of history is being built by another generation. The location where the accident occurred are busy places of commerce; Fry's Grocery Store, Pyramid Credit Union and Leber Dentistry Office. The worst train wreck in Arizona history occurred at about 2:50 a.m. just west of Esmond Station. The eastbound Crescent City Express freight with Engineer Rob Wilkey at the throttle met the westbound Sunset Limited, with Jack Bruce in the engineer's seat. Bruce had brought the very first train into Tucson in 1880.

It was not quite 4:00 a.m. that cold January morning in Vail. Alma and Florence Harris usually stayed under their warm quilts until at least 4:30. The cow could wait a little longer for milking and the rooster was not nearly ready to crow. Something drew them out to the front porch of their home near the Pantano wash that morning. Expecting to see a clear, crisp sky filled with stars they were surprised to see the western horizon blazing orange like a vermilion brushstroke across the sky. Something terrible must have happened. As he did every day Alma hitched up his team to the lumbering ore wagon he drove to Helvetia to transport copper ore back to Vail to be shipped by rail for processing. As he passed the Vail Station on his way to Helvetia, he could see Station Master Harry Man and E.F. Clough, Vail's new night operator, talking in earnest. Not wanting to interrupt, Alma kept heading south on Vail Road towards the Helvetia mine. He would find out what had happened when he returned.

At about 2:50 a.m. the two engines had hit head on at full speed. A Pullman car attached to the end of the Crescent City Express was uncoupled from the eastbound Crescent City Express by the impact. The swaying of the car was dizzying as it rolled backwards at breakneck speed through the night. With no way to control the car, the terrified passengers' wild ride did not stop until the Pullman reached the Tucson station 15 miles to the west. Three people were on board, an SPRR Porter, Dr. Norton, the first veterinarian for the Arizona/New Mexico Territory and his five year old son. The veterinarian was on his way to Douglas to inspect cattle from Mexico for hoof and mouth disease. He often brought his young son along with him on official travels around the Territory. The three felt the impact, but had no idea of the enormity of what had just happened.

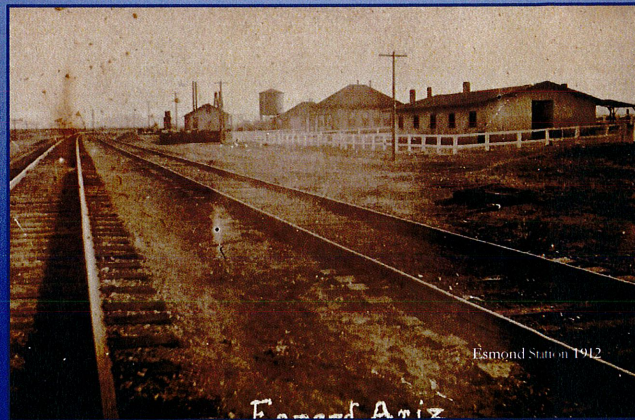
The SPRR main line held two way train traffic. Communications followed specific, defined procedures designed for safety. Messages and orders were typed or written on onion skin paper, thin enough to see through, in duplicate. Vail Station night operator E.F. Clough had two separate messages for the westbound Sunset Limited that night. The first instructed the conductor that they would meet an oncoming train at Wilmot station (west of Esmond); the second message instructed the train to pull onto the siding track at Esmond Station to permit the Crescent City Express to pass. The conductor never received the second order.

Clough disappeared the next day after declaring that the blame was the conductor's and not his. Clough was never heard of again. Initial reports held the conductor, G.W. Parker, partially responsible. Later coroner's juries found Clough at fault. Clough may have realized the second order was not received because he wired Tucson, soon after the train left Vail, but it was too late. About five minutes later Clough again wired from Vail Station that, "There was a large sheet of flame ahead on the track."

Both engineers were killed, along with George McGrath, fireman on the Sunset Limited, who was to be married on February 1st. George's fiancé had begged him not to make this run because of a premonition and dream he had had. Years later the five year old son of the Territorial Veterinarian, Dr. Norton, would share the experience with his daughter, Katie (Norton) Dusenberry, observing that he had never seen anyone turn as white with fear as the Porter on board the Pullman car had that night. And, Vera Harris Duncan would share the story passed down for over 100 years about the night the horizon to the west of Vail glowed orange from the burning wreckage.

ESMOND STATION

PROVIDING A SENSE OF PLACE THAT STRENGTHENS COMMUNITY



Esmond Station 1912

Esmond, Ariz

Southern Pacific Railroad Station-originally named Papago Station. Home to railroad families, cattle ranch and future regional park.

Before 1880

Homeland of Tohono O'odham
Papago Stage Station



Tohono O'odham family near Esmond Station location, 1895 watercolor Courtesy Arizona Historical Society.



Stage lines provided transportation, stations provided rest for travelers and horses.

Esmond Station



Chinese Railroad workers were among those who built the Main Line across Arizona. 500 were brought in by box car in 1880. Some stayed, making a life and shaping their communities.

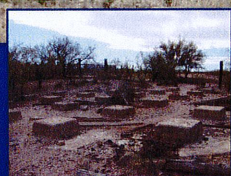
Esmond Station 1912

Home to SPRR workers and their families.



Gardens, fruit trees and chicken coops – signs of family life along the Main Line.

Esmond Station Pump House & Water Tank



Esmond Station Pump House 1909



Water
Always an important part of the story.

Local Lore

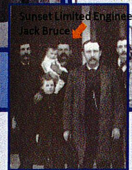
“Witch at Papago Station”

- “It is reported that some very striking cures have been effected by an old woman living at Papago Station. Her remedies are of the simplest kind, and she is fast gaining the reputation of being a witch.” February 15, 1890, Arizona Daily Star



I'll Meet You in the Corn-Field

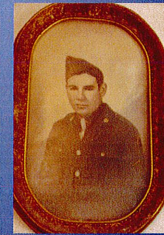
Arizona's Worst-The Esmond Train Wreck



January 28, 1903

ESMOND STATION

WHO LIVED THERE?



Willie Haro walked to WWII from his work at Esmond Station in 1940. His father was the Section Foreman at Marsh Station and Willie served in the CCC at Colossal Cave.



Clarence Lindquist's family lived at both Esmond Station and Payson. Clarence also served in the CCC at Colossal Cave.

Life Along the Main Line



Luciana with her children.



Esmond, Ariz



Marsh Station Section Foreman Jesus Haro, 1927-1954

Marsh Station Section Gang c1935



Vail Section Foreman Max Allen with children c1945



Luciana Haro, wife of Marsh Station Section Foreman

Esmond Station Lopez Ranch

26



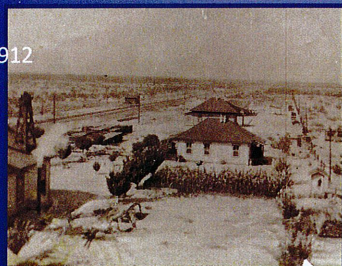
Rancher Eddie B. Lopez



c1988



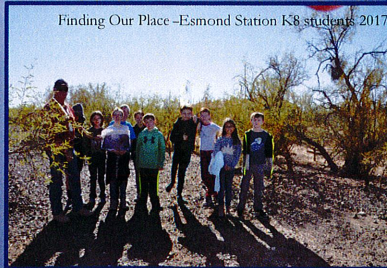
1912



Esmond Station

Esmond Station Section Foreman House Then & Now

Finding Our Place - Esmond Station K8 students 2017



Railroad Style & Colors

Standard Plans

Armor Yellow for Safety

Trim – Brown, Green, Maroon – What the Station Master had on hand

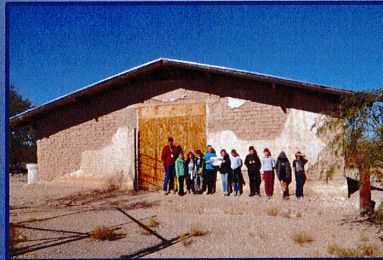
Esmond Section House – Adobe with lime plaster exterior, a very light gray.

Roof wood members and trim – armor yellow.

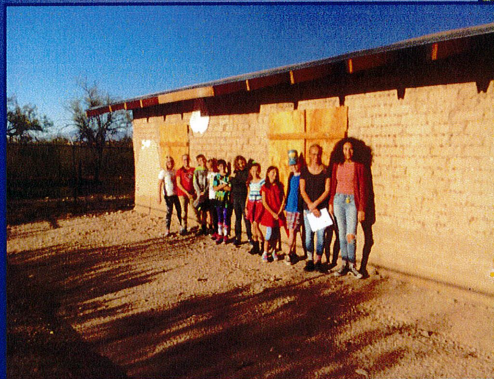
Type of housing/quarters determined by your job

Section House – Not just for single men, families lived there too.

1915 Marsh Station Section Foreman House



Esmond Station



Connecting Past to Future
It's about more than "saving old stuff" for its own sake.
It's about connections to each other, community and responsibility to the future.

Opportunities to Explore, Converse & Connect
to Local Heritage & the Rest of Our Story

