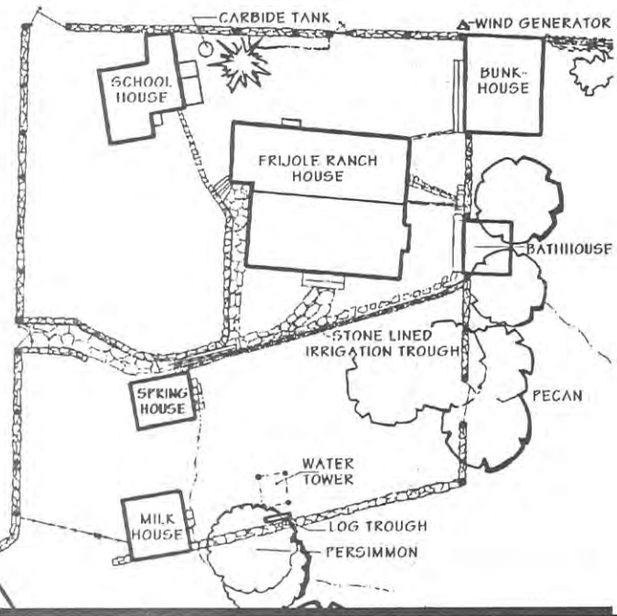
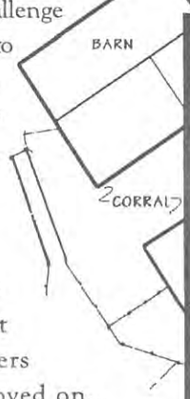
Frijole Ranch





Early settlement in the trans-Pecos area was restricted by limited water and timber, poor transportation routes, and conflicts with Apaches. When the Texas and Pacific Railroad established a transcontinental line in the 1880s, towns such as Van Horn were established as refueling and watering stations. Railroad access made settlement more feasible; still, the scarcity of resources in the desert limited the number of settlers and presented a constant challenge to those few who came. Newcomers gravitated to widely dispersed water sources. The six springs within a three mile radius of the Frijole Ranch made it a magnet for early travelers and settlers.

In the West it is impossible to be unconscious of or indifferent to space... it engulfs us. And it does contribute to individualism, if only because in that much emptiness people have the dignity of rareness and must do much of what they do without help, and because self-reliance becomes a social imperative...
Wallace Stegner

The Rader Brothers

The Rader brothers built the first substantial house at the Frijole Spring around 1876. These two bachelors operated a small cattle ranch out of their sturdy rock home. The Rader brothers never filed a deed on the land, and soon moved on.

The Smith Family

In 1906, John Thomas Smith filed on the Frijole site as vacant land, calling it the Spring Hill Ranch. Smith had moved from Wisconsin to Texas, where he married Nella May Carr in 1889. Eventually, they moved to Van Horn, Texas, and from there acquired the Frijole Ranch. The Smiths raised ten children during their thirty-six years at the ranch.

During that time, the Smith family produced a wide variety of crops in their fifteen acre orchard and garden, including apples, peaches, apricots, plums, pears, figs, pecans, blackberries, strawberries, and corn. Periodically, the Smiths would load up their wagons in the evening, covering the fresh produce with wet paper and linen, and travel for two days to Van Horn, sixty-five miles south, to sell their produce.

The Ranch served as a gathering place for community activities. Up to eight children from the Smith family and nearby ranches attended classes in the red school house. The Smiths provided room, board, and a horse, in addition to a $30 per month salary for the teacher.

The Frijole Post Office was established at the Ranch in 1916. Initially, mail was brought south from Carlsbad three times per week. Nella May Smith served as the postmaster until 1941, when the post office moved to the Glovers' store at Pine Springs.

J.C. Hunter and the Guadalupe Mountains Ranch

The Highway 62/180 alignment was established in the late 1920s and paved in the late 1930s. As transportation through the area improved, the Smith family took in travelers who came to hunt. J.C. (Jesse Coleman) Hunter was a frequent guest. Hunter first moved to Van Horn, Texas in 1911, to serve as Superintendent of Schools. He began buying land in the Guadalupe Mountains in 1923, and developed his Guadalupe Mountains Ranch into a commercial enterprise, raising principally angora goats, along with sheep, cattle and horses. In 1942, John Smith sold the Frijole Ranch to J.C. Hunter for $5,000, and moved his family to Hawley, Texas, near Abilene. Smith's property became part of Hunter's commercial ranching operation.

The Kincaid Family

After the Smith family left the area, the Frijole house served as home and ranch headquarters for Noel Kincaid, J.C. Hunter's ranch foreman. Kincaid's father settled in the Dog Canyon area in 1912, and Noel Kincaid lived there until he moved to the Frijole house in 1947 with his wife, Lucille and family. In 1945, J.C. Hunter's son, J.C. Hunter, Junior, inherited the ranch. He sold the 72,000 acre property to the National Park Service in 1966. The Kincaid family continued to live in the Ranch house until their lease expired in 1971.

The National Park Service

Guadalupe Mountains National Park was officially established in 1972. The park's first ranger, Roger Reisch, lived in the Frijole house from 1972 until 1980. It was then renovated and used as office space from 1983 until 1991. In 1992, the Frijole Ranch House was again renovated and opened to the public as a history museum.

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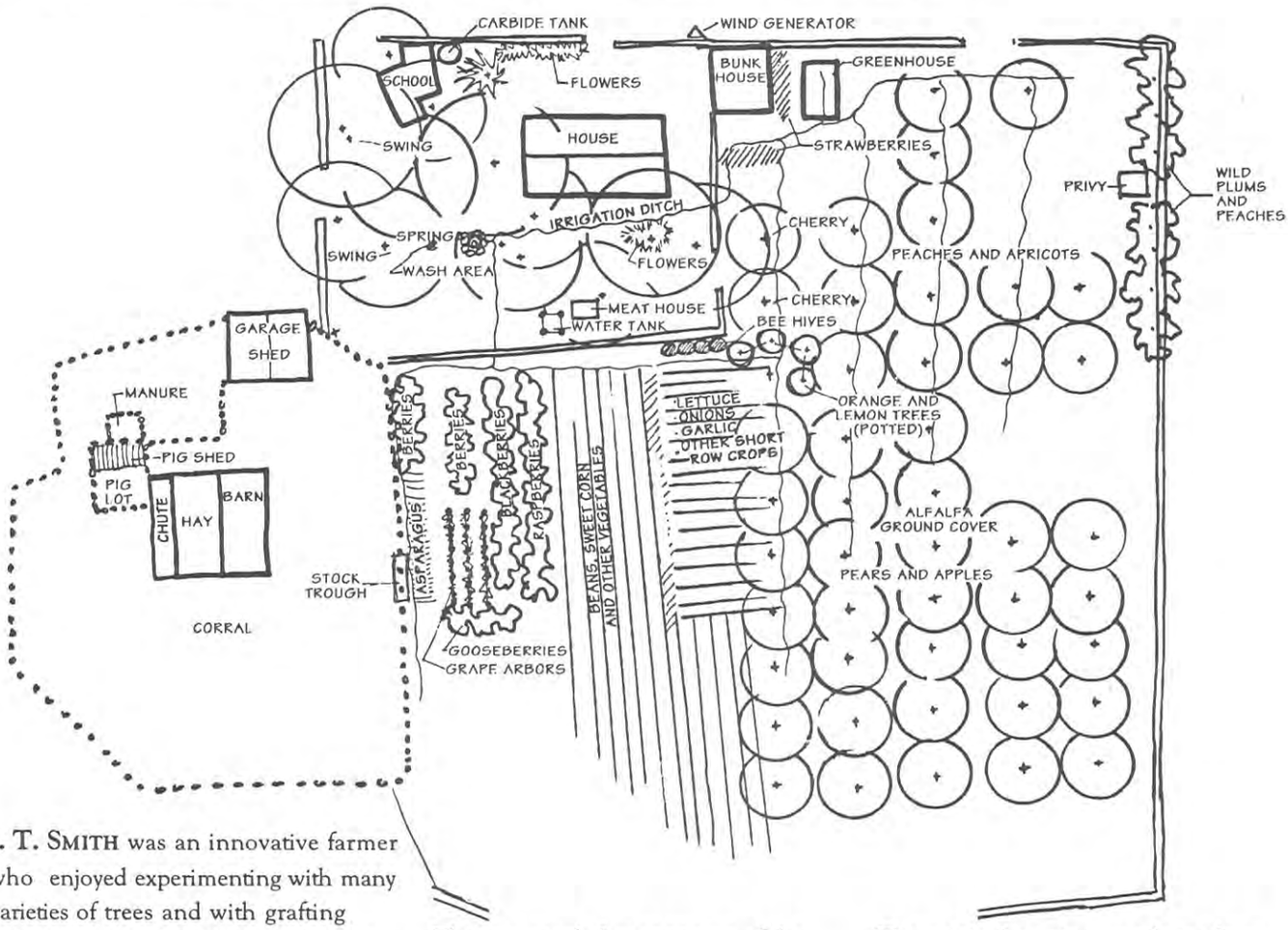
Frijole Ranch During the Smith Years



J. T. SMITH was an innovative farmer who enjoyed experimenting with many varieties of trees and with grafting techniques. His family raised everything they needed for food except flour, coffee, sugar, tea, spices, and cornmeal.

The **YARD** was bare, packed earth with a few flower beds along the fence and house. Several swings hung from trees. Simple, dirt lined **IRRIGATION TROUGHS** carried water from the Frijole Spring. The stone lining in the main trough was constructed in the 1940s.

One of the large chinquapin oaks in the yard has an iron pin embedded in its trunk on which Nella May Smith hung cheese bags as she worked on a moveable tree stump below to press and process cheese. A grinding wheel, workbench, and large anvil were located in the shade of the trees between the barn and the house. Nearby was an open firepit with a large kettle for laundry and soap-making. Later, the Smiths had a double wringer washing machine in the same area.

The National Park Service planted lawn grass and built the stone slab access path to the side door of the house. All changes were made after 1971.

FRIJOLE SPRING was kept open and surrounded by stacked rocks. The children knew to stay out of the spring to keep the water clean. Around 1943, the Kincaid family built the **SPRING-HOUSE** for water protection and storage.

The two south facing rooms of the **HOUSE** were built by the Rader brothers in 1876. Double walls are of native stone with a filler of mud; interior walls were also plastered with mud. The Smiths greatly expanded the house in the 1920s, adding the rear kitchen and two bedrooms, as well as a second story and dormers. A gable roof with wood shakes covers the house.

The **STONE WALL FENCE**, constructed by 1909, was originally built with stacked cobblestones topped by a post and chicken- wire fence. During the Kincaid years, the stones were mortared, the wall was capped, and a new fence was installed along the top, made of posts and sheep wire with a pipe railing. The Smith's wooden plank gates were replaced with metal gates.

Around 1918, J.T. Smith developed a **CARBIDE GENERATOR** to pump acetylene gas into outlets inside the house to provide lights. A few years later, he built a wind-generated battery charger that powered additional luxuries, such as a radio for tuning in *The Grand Ol' Opry.*

A ram-operated pump was used to fill the elevated **WATER TANK** so water could be gravity-fed into the home. The corrugated metal tank and its support tower were constructed around 1918. The tower is all that remains on site.

The original **BARN** was of pine logs covered with second-hand metal sheeting painted red. Near the barn was a pig lot and chicken house. The present barn was built around 1944. Today, park livestock are kept in the corral and hay is stored in the barn.

The **BUNKHOUSE** was built in the late 1920s or early 1930s for visiting sport hunters. The Smiths called it the Hunter House, because J.C. Hunter was a frequent guest.

In the **BATHHOUSE,** two bathrooms served guests and family. It was constructed during the 1930s after the bunkhouse was built.

The **MILKHOUSE** was built around 1918. Spring water was diverted to flow through the stone-lined troughs inside, where perishable foods such as milk, meat, fruits and vegetables were stored.

The red **SCHOOLHOUSE** was built with vertical wood siding and a corrugated tin roof. Later, the schoolhouse served as a storage shed and bunkhouse.

The Smiths built a small **GREENHOUSE,** with a walkway down the center and planting tables running on both sides. A **MEAT CURING HOUSE** was located just north of the water tower. Nothing remains of these two buildings.