THE PASTORAL AND
THE SUBLIME"
The Pendley Family Homestead and
the Creation of Slide Rock State Park

by
David Diamond

In 1907, Frank Pendley, a down-and-out Texan trying to eke out
a living in Los Angeles, heard of fish and game ready for the
taking in northern Arizona’s Oak Creek Canyon. A man of grit
and vision, Pendley staked out a claim along scenic tree-lined Oak
Creek where, over the next seven decades, he and his descen-
dants worked hard to make the canyon floor blossom into bount-
iful gardens and orchards. As time passed, more and more
people stopped by to enjoy the beauty of the canyon and cool off
in the natural water chute that gave the place its name—Slide
Rock. One of the latter-day visitors was Governor Bruce Babbitt,
who as a child had played near the Pendley homestead and as an
adult witnessed with alarm the degradation that increasing
tourism was inflicting on one of the Southwest’s choicest recrea-
tional areas. The result was the creation of Slide Rock State Park,
the first step in a new era of park expansion in Arizona. How it
came to be is a fascinating story of one family’s bold and exhaust-
ing work to establish a profitable business, and of an innovative
governor’s determination to preserve some of the state’s most
awe-inspiring landscapes.

Oak Creek Canyon is the surface geological scar left by the
subterranean Oak Creek Fault that tore a fissure into the Mogol-
lon Rim, piercing water-bearing strata that feeds its twelve-mile-
long perennial creek. The natural chemistry of the water, borne

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Oak Creek. (AHS/SAD #58593)
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deep in layers of limestone cobbles and gravel, is ideal for agriculture, when it can be delivered to the elevated soils that have accumulated in parts of the canyon. The lower canyon’s red sandstone walls—composed of a mineral complex known as the Schnebly Hill Formation—shelters the eroded thirty-foot water chute.¹

A linear oasis within the Upper Sonoran Life Zone, the canyon provides a well-watered habitat for diverse plant and animal populations. While desert plants like hedgehog cactus and yucca can be found, this riparian zone is characterized by a mixed, broad-leaf and conifer forest with a richly various understudy growth. The Ponderosa pines that dominate the upper plateaus are scarce along the creek, where Douglas fir, Gambel oak, bracken fern, Arizona walnut, Arizona sycamore, canyon grape, horsetail, sumac, and introduced Himalaya blackberry all thrive. Bear, bobcat, cougars, and other fur-bearing animals once flourished in the canyon. Alluvial deposits left behind by the creek and by runoff from side canyons and washes formed natural terraces for cultivation, while accumulated organic material from above and within the canyon contributed nutrients to the well-drained loam soil, making it ideal for agriculture.²

Frank Pendley had few neighbors when he arrived at Oak Creek Canyon in 1907. The legendary Bear Howard had been “proving up” a homestead at the mouth of West Fork Creek, north of Slide Rock, since about 1880; Jesse Purtymun filed on his downstream homestead in 1908. Albert E. Thompson, a lifelong resident of Oak Creek who homesteaded three miles below Slide Rock, recalled three residents at the site before Pendley. A man named Warner may have camped there, followed by future justice of the peace and Coconino County sheriff J. O. “Jack” Harrington, who built the first cabin and constructed a trail from the creekside to the rimrock, where he could continue on to Flagstaff. To make his property productive, Harrington envisioned digging an irrigation ditch from a point upstream that would enable gravity to carry water to the terraces fifty to eighty feet above Oak Creek. Prominent cliff outcroppings blocked Harrington’s plan, however, and he abandoned the place in the late 1890s. Dorsey Ellsworth Schnebly, a school teacher and future Sedona postmaster, lived in Harrington’s cabin for about a year,
until mid-1900, and the James family tried to make a go of it about 1903. But without an irrigation system, the land would not produce enough crops to support a family.5

By the time he settled on the banks of Oak Creek, Frank Pendley was a skilled farmer, quarryman, and miner. Born in Austin, Texas, in 1877, he had learned to dry-farm the state’s arid fields before setting out for the Far West after the turn of the century. He rode the rails and worked at various jobs in Arizona and California. He became an expert in blasting techniques while working as a driller in the quarries that produced stone for the construction of Arizona’s Roosevelt Dam in 1903. The onset of the nationwide financial panic of 1907 found him in Los Angeles, where jobs were few and cash was scarce. Responding to the suggestion of an acquaintance who informed him that Oak Creek Canyon in the Arizona Territory was full of game and fish for the taking, he headed east and arrived in the canyon later that year. While working at the Blue Bell mine in Meyer, twenty-five miles southeast of Prescott, Pendley developed the habit of packing his burros into the cool shade of Oak Creek Canyon during the hottest summer months.4

At first unable to irrigate crops, Pendley relied on other activities to earn cash. By 1890, about 40,000 cattle and 200,000 sheep were foraging the country around Flagstaff, and stockmen were willing to pay for controlling the predators who preyed upon their herds. Pendley saw opportunity in the $5.00 bounty that the territorial government paid for bobcat hides, and he hunted the animals as far south as upper Black Canyon. His neighbor Bear Howard had learned a similar lesson a quarter century earlier, when Flagstaff butchers paid him approximately $50 for every bear he brought in. As elsewhere on the shifting North American frontiers, meat, pelts, and bounties were important sources of income for the first modern settlers in Oak Creek Canyon.5

Having decided to make the canyon his permanent residence, Pendley used his two burros to drag logs onto the homesite where he built a cabin. Next, he had to cultivate a significant portion of the land in order to secure title to the fifty-eight-acre homestead. Convinced that the approximately fifty-acre terrace could be farmed, Pendley decided to plant orchards. While more Arizona homestead claims failed than succeeded, Pendley found
a way to transform his dry terraces into productive fields, and successfully proved up his claim.⁶

Like others before him, Pendley found it was no simple matter to irrigate the river benches above Oak Creek. Two massive vertical sandstone outcroppings frustrated his early efforts to build a sluice-way to carry water downstream to his property. So, he built a wooden shoulder yoke, to which he attached two five-gallon buckets, and watered his gardens by hand. Recognizing that bucket irrigation was an unsatisfactory solution to his problem, Pendley set about engineering and constructing an aqueduct from the creek to his fields.

But first, he needed dynamite in order to blast tunnels through the two sandstone parapets. On his visits to Flagstaff, Pendley had become acquainted with Milt Ferrel a sociable bean and potato farmer at Doney Park. Ferrel knew where the Santa Fe Railroad kept an unsecured cache of dynamite and he wanted help in taking some for personal use. In short order, the two men drove a pair of wagons to the igloo-shaped warehouse west of Flagstaff and helped themselves to the explosives. Frank never knew what Ferrel did with his portion of the stolen dynamite, but Pendley used his share to create an irrigation system for his fields.⁷

In 1909, Frank Pendley began to significantly alter the Oak Creek landscape. From the upstream corner of his claim, he used a level and a rifle sighted-in for adequate grade to shoot his way up the creek, leaving bullet hole markers on trees and on the cliff walls, until he reached a place where water diverted from Oak Creek would flow unimpeded to his gardens. When completed two full years later, the flumes, ditches, masonry sluices, and blasted tunnels that made up the aqueduct extended more than a mile. A masonry-lined ditch that Pendley dug into the convenient creekside bar easily carried water for the first third of the distance where, beginning across from today's Half Way campground, the sheer canyon walls descended straight to the creek bed.⁸

Frank drew on his skills as a miner and quarryman to construct the final two-thirds of what came to be called “The Pendley Ditch.” In order to carry water across the face of the sheer sandstone cliffs, Pendley had to suspend flumes by cables from steel anchors driven into the rock face of the canyon walls. Using a
precarious homemade ladder, and in some places suspending himself from overhead, he gripped a four-pound sledge in one fist and a hardened-steel star drill in the other to pound holes in the sandstone into which he inserted metal anchors. After drilling hundreds of these holes, he suspended cables from the anchors to fashion a cradle. The cradle, in turn, supported a wooden framework through which the sheet-metal flume snaked its way across the face of the red sandstone walls until it reached the two promontories.9

Pendley halted here in order to blast tunnels through the stone. In the same way a mine drift is blasted through rock, Pendley drilled holes in the first promontory and detonated dynamite for 120 feet, creating a passageway large enough for a man to pass through. He used the same process to blast his way sixty feet through the second promontory, about twenty yards downstream. Between the two tunnels, nearly 100 feet above the creek bed, Frank constructed an artfully angled sluice that still overlooks the creek today.

With a steady supply of water, Pendley began cultivating fruits and other crops. First, he planted strawberries and peach trees, both of which required three years of growth before they produced marketable crops. Pendley began orcharding in earnest in 1912, when he planted 300 apple trees, mostly ‘Jonathan’ and an early superior variety of ‘Delicious.’ Pendley’s trees thrived in the silty loam, as did those of his neighbors. Still, it would take from five to eight years before the newly planted trees produced reliable crops.10

At the time, mining and other activities were fueling economic growth in the Verde Valley and providing markets for farmers in the Sedona-Oak Creek area. Marketing the produce, however, was troubling and time-consuming in the days before paved roads connected the canyon with Verde Valley settlements. Because the orchards closest to Sedona could more easily supply the mining and ore-processing towns of Jerome, Cottonwood, and Clarkdale, Frank Pendley set his sights on markets to the north. At a time when fruit-selling trips from Sedona to Flagstaff consumed a day and a half over primitive roads, Pendley hauled his produce by team and wagon to the dusty towns of Williams, Flagstaff, Winslow, and Holbrook strung along the tracks of the
Atlantic & Pacific (later the Atchison-Topeka and Santa Fe) Railroad across the Mogollon Plateau. He may even have traveled as far west as Kingman and Grand Canyon, selling his produce “to small stores, some here some there,” along the way.\textsuperscript{11}

Winslow and Flagstaff were the most important markets, and for many years Frank Pendley’s most important commercial relationship was with the Babbitt Brothers Mercantile in Flagstaff. On March 11, 1911, he opened an account at the store with an eighty dollar cash deposit. Over the ensuing decades, the Babbitt Brothers provided a market for Pendley’s fruit and, in turn, sold him goods to improve his homestead. When times became tough, the Flagstaff merchants provided Frank with credit.\textsuperscript{12}

It took many years for the residents of Oak Creek Canyon to engineer and quarry a serviceable roadway between the Verde Valley and Flagstaff. In the early days, homesteaders had hacked their own steep wagon trails up to the rimrock. By 1906, Lewis Thomas, uncle of Frank Pendley’s future wife, Jane Hutchinson, had punched through “a sort-of road” from Flagstaff to his West Fork farm. This road was extended downstream to his neighbor Albert Purdyman’s in 1908, but the roadway’s “missing link” that
passed by Slide Rock was not completed until 1914. Coconino County paid local workers three dollars per day to connect the fragments of rutted trail along the canyon floor. One worker on the project recalled that the trails “met at the Falls, also named Lizard Head and Indian Head, now called Slide Rock,” where the county constructed a bridge across the creek. Although the new road crossed Oak Creek sixteen times, this bridge at the Pendley homestead was its only span. A fully paved and bridged road from Sedona to Flagstaff was finally completed in the mid-1930s.\footnote{13}

In 1921, Frank Pendley married Jane Hutchinson, the young granddaughter of his neighbor, John L. V. Thomas. Jane, whose mother had died of consumption shortly after coming to Oak Creek to recuperate, had been raised from age seven by her Aunt Kathryn Thomas. Frank Pendley and the Thomases were friendly neighbors, and he and Jane grew close. On her eleventh birthday, Frank gave Jane a donkey. Jane was eighteen at the time of her marriage; Frank was forty-four.\footnote{14}

By the mid-1920s, the Pendley homestead was producing sufficient foodstuffs to feed a growing family and enough fruit to sell

*Thomas house. (AHS/SAD #43651)*
Frank Pendley and Jane Hutchinson on their wedding day.
to distant markets. Frank expanded his orchards, while also cultivating gardens and berry patches. The family owned milk cows, kept a few steers for beef, and butchered several hogs every year.

As the Pendleys’ main commercial outlet, the orchard was still a promising, but precarious, enterprise. Oak Creek Canyon was vulnerable to late-spring frosts that could kill apple, peach, and pear blossoms, as well as young fruits, destroying a year’s entire crop. Insects, especially codling moths and thrips, also caused serious problems. In 1923, the year his first child was born, Frank Pendley purchased a John Bean Triplex sprayer, with a 200-gallon tank, to defend his orchard and his profits from insect pests. In some years, summer hailstorms pelted the ripening fruit, inflicting costly blemishes that greatly reduced an apple crop’s value. Still, Frank persevered, planting new blocks of fruit trees and expanding the terrace ditch irrigation system, particularly in the early 1930s. He added to the size and diversity of the homestead’s produce by installing a large block of pear trees at the foot of the cliffs, planting apple trees near the original peach orchard at the south end of the property, and harvesting vegetables from a large truck garden. All these crops found ready markets.
Meanwhile, Frank’s growing family and business demanded a substantial investment in buildings and equipment. In 1927, he constructed a pink sandstone house that today houses the state park’s water-testing laboratory. As proof of his expectations for continued commercial success, in 1932 Frank erected a large fruit-packing shed with a distinctive Alamo-like stucco facade. That same year, he opened a grocery/service station/fruit stand along the highway across from the orchard. The following year, he built three substantial rental bungalows to attract tourists. Also in 1933, he installed a Cutler Grader-Sorter that sized fruit and packed it into his “Falls Brand” boxes.17

By the mid-1930s, Pendley’s orchard, now the largest in the region, was producing more fruit than the depression-era niche markets along the Santa Fe Railroad could absorb. A Dodge van with screened side panels had replaced the team and wagon, but it was a one-and-one-half-ton International Harvester truck that carried the first Slide Rock fruit to busy Phoenix and Tucson markets, beginning about 1934.18

The late thirties were a difficult time for the Pendley operation, as the nationwide depression continued to throttle the marketplace. The sudden collapse in demand for apples struck at a time when the family was most vulnerable. A disastrous flood in 1938 washed away cabins and even some farmland in Oak Creek Canyon. Then, in 1939, Frank and Jane’s ninth child was born. Even in bad years, the orchard required continual investment and the Pendleys were out of cash. Frank turned to the Babbitt Brothers, who loaned him a badly needed $5,000, taking out a mortgage on his homestead.19

The Pendley farm was a family enterprise. Frank and Jane, with their six daughters and three sons, all participated in the seasonal rhythm of pruning, thinning, spraying, and harvesting. Moreover, the flume, sluice, tunnel, and ditch irrigation system—the lifeline of the business—required constant maintenance. But there was also time for learning and socializing. As they grew up, the Pendley children attended the one-room Falls School just across the road from the family orchard. The schoolhouse also was the scene of occasional Saturday-night dances. Frank and Jane may not have attended these socials, which reportedly were enlivened by local wine and moonshine during
Prohibition days. The Pendley children attended high school in Flagstaff.20

Frank Pendley gradually modernized his orchard operation throughout the 1930s and '40s. Hired help supplemented the family workforce during the busy fall harvest season. The large packing shed was the center of harvest activity, as workers and family members collected, sorted, graded, and packed the fruit. Some of the fresh produce was marketed directly to buyers who dropped by to purchase apples. Meanwhile, Frank designed and installed the first electrical system along Oak Creek, powered by a water wheel that he fitted into his irrigation ditch. Later, he constructed a powerhouse on the creek bank in which he mounted a Pelton wheel driven by water from the sluice. Finally, Frank installed small compressors in the packing shed to provide refrigeration to the storage area on the ground floor.21

Although business conditions improved during World War II, Frank Pendley remained deeply in debt, unable to make the payments on his mortgage note. By the end of the war, he owed the Babbitt Brothers $8,000. Fortunately, the Babbitts ignored the advice of their bookkeeper and refused to foreclose on the Pendley homestead.22

In 1946, Frank Pendley's orchard produced its best crop in decades. Coinciding with the beginning of a buoyant postwar economic boom, it marked the dawn of an era of modest prosperity for the Pendleys. The bumper harvest found eager customers at the wholesale produce market on Adams Street in Phoenix, and elsewhere. The Phoenix Safeway stores became important buyers, and in some years, Frank even shipped one or two semi-loads of apples to Los Angeles. The 1946 crop was so successful that Pendley paid off his entire debt to the Babbitts, and had enough money left over to purchase a new Chevrolet truck, a sprayer, and a tractor for the orchard.23

The 1950s were a transitional decade for the Slide Rock Orchard. In 1952, Frank Pendley planted his last block of apple trees, mostly 'Starkspur Red Delicious,' on a bench overlooking State Route 89A. The Sedona-Oak Creek area was drawing an increasing stream of tourists and the highway had become a busy thoroughfare. The breathtaking scenery and dry climate also appealed to motion-picture makers, who enhanced the canyon's
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tview of Pendley homestead from canyon rim.

reputation as a tourist destination. In 1954, Frank Pendley died of
a heart attack while helping his son Frank, Jr., castrate a steer on
the homestead. Jane was left alone to raise her two teenage
daughters (ages sixteen and fifteen), and to run the family
farm.24

Care of the orchard passed from hand to hand in the decade
after Frank Pendley’s death. At first, the youngest son, Frank Jr.,
rans the business for his mother, but eventually the family hired
managers to oversee the enterprise. In 1963, Jane asked her old-
est son, Tom, and his wife, Dorothy, if they would operate the
firm. Tom already had a career selling agricultural chemicals.
Nonetheless, he and Dorothy agreed to take over the orchard
business. They began dividing their lives between Oak Creek and
their home in Phoenix.

The produce business had changed since Frank Pendley’s
ey early days at Slide Rock. A revolution in marketing was underway
as specialty shops that featured exclusively meats, or fruits, or
vegetables gave way to large combination markets. In 1929, there
were nearly 23,000 fruit and vegetable shops nationwide; by 1958,
there were only 12,000. In the 1950s supermarkets appeared,
Oak Creek bridge. (AHS/SAD #48570)
offering an even more comprehensive array of merchandise. Fruit growers and wholesalers could no longer sell directly to neighborhood produce shops that purchased diverse varieties of seasonal fruits and vegetables. The larger stores looked for uniformity in their produce, placing a higher value on appearance than on taste and seasonal variety. Scores of long-favored apple varieties disappeared from store shelves as these combination stores and supermarkets limited their purchases to a relatively few visually attractive types.  

For the Pendleys, these trends meant changes in marketing their produce, as well as changes in the orchard itself. Out-of-favor varieties had to be replaced with the kinds of fruit preferred by the supermarkets’ wholesale buyers. Old fruit-bearing limbs were removed from trees that had produced the venerable ‘Jonathan’ and ‘Arkansas Black’ apples, and new varieties were grafted in their place to produce ‘Golden Delicious,’ ‘Rome Beauty,’ and the inferior modern ‘Red Delicious.’ Tom Pendley, meanwhile, decreased the family’s reliance on wholesalers and cultivated a new relationship with the Safeway chain of grocery stores in Phoenix. He also installed advanced refrigeration units in the old packing shed, doubling its storage capacity and enabling the farm to sell apples year round. Before long, Safeway was the principal buyer of Slide Rock Orchard fruits.  

Rearing their children in two different homes while meeting the demands of operating an orchard placed a tremendous burden on Tom and Dorothy Pendley. The family lived together in Oak Creek Canyon during the summer, but split up for much of the spring and fall so that the children could attend school in Phoenix. Tom had quit his regular job and relied entirely on profits from the orchard to support his family. Beginning in 1976, Dorothy worked at a job in Phoenix and, whenever possible, drove to the orchard on weekends. “She was the backbone for those years when I didn’t make any crops,” Tom recalled.  

Forces beyond human control are often the orchardist’s worst adversaries, and Tom Pendley had grown up observing these threats firsthand. In particular, he had seen insects and weather destroy crops in Oak Creek Canyon. To combat the former, he sprayed an insecticidal cover spray every twenty-eight days during the growing season, a typical spraying schedule for that
era. And, like his father and other apple growers in regions susceptible to early- or late-season frosts, he burned fuel oil in smudge pots on cold nights. Even so, Tom and his neighbors were sometimes helpless in the face of freezing weather. During the last week of April 1970, while most apple trees were still in full bloom, a severe cold snap settled on the canyon destroying the fruit in orchards all along Oak Creek. Agricultural extension agent Bill Brechan estimated lost revenues at $80,000.28

Shifting economic forces also conspired against small-scale fruit growers. Prior to about 1970, local workers provided the labor for pruning, blossom and fruit thinning, and harvesting—the most labor-intensive phases of fruit production. Most often these workers were neighbors, and the seasonal chores doubled as social occasions. This changed in the 1960s, as migrant workers began to replace the neighborhood workforce. Migrant laborers required housing and training, and seemed altogether more expensive to employ than traditional workers had been.29

In 1952, three years before his death, Frank Pendley took advantage of increasing land values in the canyon to supplement the uncertain revenue from his small and vulnerable fruit business. Even then, tourism was transforming the economics of the Sedona-Oak Creek area, prompting Frank to sell the southernmost parcel of his fifty-eight-acre homestead to investors who built a motel on the site. Located around a bend in the road, the new tourist lodging was almost invisible from the orchard.30

Productivity and profitability at Slide Rock Orchard fluctuated “very severely up and down” from the late 1960s through the 1970s. The quality of life, meanwhile, steadily declined. Tom and Dorothy Pendley’s children were grown, and heavy transient use was tarnishing the canyon’s allure. On some days, thousands of recreationists plummeted down the water chute in Oak Creek, with little or no regard for the family that owned the neighboring property. Nudity, litter, drugs, broken glass, human waste, vandalism, and reckless overuse threatened to destroy the Oak Creek corridor.31

As patentholder on much of the land in Oak Creek Canyon, the U.S. Forest Service exercised less-than-successful administration over public access and use of the Slide Rock waterway. Every day, thousands of vehicles passed along the narrow road between

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Flagstaff and Sedona, bringing 230,930 visitors to the natural playground in 1983, alone. The following year, more than a quarter of a million people (an average of 1,800 people every day) visited Slide Rock. In the absence of a safe designated parking area, drivers left their vehicles along the shoulder of the narrow roadway. The direct introduction of human waste into the creek increased bacterial concentrations that were already high because of runoff carrying wildlife excreta and refuse from old septic systems. The flood of recreationists became so dangerous that in 1985 the Sedona-Oak Creek Chamber of Commerce, after consulting with resource managers concerned about public health and safety, stopped featuring Slide Rock in its advertising.32

In the mid-1970s, Tom Pendley and his brothers and sisters began to seriously discuss selling the Slide Rock property. Following the death of their mother in 1979, the Pendley children listed the forty-three-acre tract with Sedona realtors. Although there were prospective buyers, selling the homestead would not be easy. Local planning agencies were in turmoil as they struggled to develop strategies for controlling growth and development in what had become a world-famous tourist spot. The "Keep Sedona
Beautiful" association lobbied against any further development at Slide Rock after the controversial enlargement of the nearby Junipine Resort. In an effort to rein in developers, in 1982 Coconino County placed a moratorium on zoning changes in Oak Creek Canyon. Potential buyers of land along the creek were put on notice that the laissez faire policies of the past no longer applied. Because the Pendley homestead was the largest parcel of privately owned land in the canyon, the moratorium appeared to be aimed directly at blocking its sale.33

Although dispersed and disconnected from the family homestead, the Pendleys themselves collectively hoped that developers would not be allowed to radically transform the property. Some of the children even hoped to retain a parcel of the homestead for the family’s future use. In the meantime, one of the prospective buyers who viewed the property was Michael Wayne, the son of actor John Wayne. It is unclear if the Wayne family was seeking a location for a museum dedicated to the deceased actor, or for a resort, or for some combination of the two. Regardless, the zoning moratorium apparently scuttled negotiations with the Waynes and the Pendleys began to hope that their homestead would become a park.34

Unknown to the Pendleys, Arizona governor Bruce Babbitt had envisioned that possibility for years. "Growing up in Flagstaff, Oak Creek Canyon was an important part of our lives," Babbitt later recalled. "In grade school, we spent summers swimming at the big pool facility (long gone) at Call of the Canyon and roller skating at the rink (also gone) at Indian Gardens. In our high school years those wholesome pastimes gave way to nighttime parties at various spots, among which my favorite was the creek at Slide Rock." Those memories returned to him on a hike along lower Oak Creek in November of 1980. He observed the encroaching subdivisions, fences, and newly painted "No Trespassing" signs. Finally, a caretaker ejected the governor and his entourage from an old, lower Oak Creek apple orchard that Babbitt had known since boyhood. "That moment," Babbitt wrote, "marked a new beginning for the Arizona park system."35

In 1982, the governor and his wife, Hattie, purchased a cabin on lower Oak Creek and began using it for weekend getaways with their sons. The Babbitt boys enjoyed playing at the
Slide Rock water chute, but their father was appalled by the conditions he observed at the popular recreation spot. He spoke with Tom about the future of the Pendley homestead, which Babbitt described as “quite simply . . . the most beautiful and evocative homestead landscape in Arizona—a combination of the pastoral and the sublime—much in the manner of Yosemite, but even more concentrated and compact.” Informed of the Wayne family’s interest in buying the property, Babbitt asked if Tom would consider selling the land to the state for the creation of a park. Pendley’s response was quick and firm: “I would never, ever sell my property to the government.”

Babbitt, however, was undeterred by Pendley’s refusal. Slide Rock fit perfectly into his vision of an energized and expanded state park system. By moving in this direction, Babbitt was challenging a conservative state parks board and long-entrenched institutional resistance to park expansion. As late as 1957, Arizona had only one state park—Papago Park in the greater Phoenix area.

Babbitt’s priorities were articulated in the 1982 report of the Governor’s Task Force on Parks and Recreation in Arizona.
Composed of chairman Robert Swanson, chairman/CEO of the Del Webb Corporation; Arizona Planning and Development executive director Larry Landry, who was also the governor’s executive assistant; Phoenician Bob Herberger; and others, the task force determined that the acquisition of water recreation sites ought to be the Arizona park system’s highest priority.  

Slide Rock fit this philosophy perfectly, and Babbitt began casting about for a plan to acquire the site for the state. “To show you what it meant to him,” Larry Landry recalled, “on 1982 election day, re-election day for the governor—imagine that, going to Oak Creek on your re-election day—Babbitt flew up to Sedona and spent the day talking about Slide Rock with Bob Herberger to buy and donate the property and donate it to the state.” Although Herberger supported park expansion, he declined to purchase and donate the Slide Rock property. No doubt disappointed, Babbitt nonetheless continued to periodically visit Tom Pendley, discussing their respective family histories and the future of the homestead. Although these meetings were cordial, Tom remained firm in his determination not to sell the property to the government. He hinted, however, that the family would consider an offer from a nonprofit conservation group.

When existing foundations seemed uninterested in helping the state acquire the Slide Rock property, Babbitt—in consultation with his aide, Larry Landry—moved to organize a private-sector foundation that would aggressively assist the state park system. In November of 1982, the Del Webb Corporation’s Robert Swanson agreed to chair the newly formed Arizona Parklands Foundation. Created to “rescue Arizona’s endangered outdoors,” the foundation was a collaborative effort between members of the Babbitt administration and powerful propark business leaders aimed at circumventing the legislature’s reluctance to fund state park expansion. Its primary mission was to acquire land and donate it to the Arizona State Parks board.

Negotiations between the Pendleys and the Arizona Parklands Foundation commenced in 1983 and proceeded into the fall of 1984. On Jane Pendley’s death in 1979, Tom’s sister, Jill Pendley Jonovich, had been named executor of the estate. An appraisal paid for by the Del Webb Corporation estimated the homestead’s value at $4 million. Foundation Chairman Swanson
and Executive Director Debra Howard then met with Jill Pendley Jonovich and Tom Pendley over a period of months before settling on a sale price of $3.6 million.41

Babbitt now had to orchestrate a minuet between the governor’s office, the legislature, and the Arizona Parklands Foundation, as well as come up with the approximately $4 million needed to close the deal. But first, he needed to obtain a guarantee that the legislature would ultimately appropriate funds to repay foundation expenditures on the Slide Rock property. On the cold clear morning of December 8, 1984, Babbitt toured the Pendley homestead with State Senate President Stan Turley (R-Mesa), Senate Majority Leader Bob Usdane (R-Scottsdale), and other lawmakers. Babbitt remembered the visit as “an easy sell.” Nevertheless, there was significant opposition to the acquisition. State Senator Hal Runyon led the critics of park expansion, arguing that the state already owned an excess of public land and that additional protected recreational areas were unnecessary.42

Fortuitously, Babbitt’s need to raise $4 million coincided with lobbying efforts by the state’s largest independent banks to encourage passage in Arizona of interstate banking legislation. In January of 1985, Babbitt, Larry Landry, and Robert Swanson gathered for morning coffee in the governor’s office to discuss the issue with the chairmen/CEOs of Arizona’s most important independent banks. “After assuring them that I supported the [interstate banking] concept and would work with them,” Babbitt explained, “we turned the discussion to the Pendley property and asked them to come together on a $4.5 [sic] million loan to the Park Foundation. ‘What security can the Foundation put up?’ they asked. ‘Only the property itself,’ I replied, ‘The Foundation has no assets.’ Naturally they wondered how the loan would be repaid, to which I replied, ‘you can help us lobby the legislature to fund a purchase from the Park Foundation to create a new state park.’ They left without making a commitment, but within a few days the loan was made.”43

Actually, the deal was not so easily concluded as Babbitt would have us believe. The bankers were reluctant to trust the legislature to fund the purchase and balked at a taking so large a risk. The discussion had reached a stalemate when Robert Swanson stepped in. “If the legislature doesn’t buy the property in one

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year,” he offered, “then my company will buy it.” At that point, Larry Landry recalled, the bankers “agreed to buy it [the Pendley homestead] proportionately, with BankOne (then Valley Bank) buying the largest part. They set up loan documents.” Swanson remembers phoning the bankers before the meeting to “prealert” them that state parks would also be discussed at the governor’s office, but they were not fully warned. The surprise was not so much that the issue of Slide Rock came up at the meeting, but its direct linkage to interstate banking. “The way Governor Babbitt made the linkage so direct in his discussion was where the blind-siding occurred,” Larry Landry explained. Fifteen years after the event, Robert Swanson described the conference as “the one time I really saw politics at work: I give full credit to Bruce.”

With funding in place, events moved swiftly in transferring ownership of the Oak Creek Canyon property. In February 1985, the Arizona Parklands Foundation acquired title to the Pendley Homestead. On February 11, Arizona House Bill 2391, authorizing the state to purchase the site from the foundation, had its first reading. The bill passed both houses of the legislature on May 8 and, two days later, Governor Babbitt signed it into law.

On June 21, 1985, Tom Pendley and his family hosted 300 dignitaries and recreation enthusiasts at the dedication of Arizona’s newest state park. Governor Babbitt thanked the Arizona Bank, the United Bank of Arizona, and the Valley National Bank for lending the money that enabled the Arizona Parkland Foundation to purchase the Pendley homestead. The bankers’ note was torn up as the foundation transferred title to the land to the Arizona State Parks Board. Eight decades of the Pendley family saga in Oak Creek Canyon came to a close, just as a new era dawned for Arizona state parks.

The purchase of the Pendley homestead in Oak Creek Canyon sparked the 1980s’ revolution in Arizona recreational area acquisition that eventually included Catalina, Homolovi, Red Rock, and Slide Rock state parks. That it happened at all was the result of a fortuitous conjunction of at least three historical and political forces: an activist governor who was dedicated to expanding Arizona’s stagnant state park system; a pioneer family that was eager to sell, and yet anxious to protect, its ancestral homestead; and deteriorating ecological conditions in the Oak Creek corridor.
that threatened public health and safety. Together, they afforded Governor Babbitt the opportunity he needed to assert the public will against decades of institutional resistance to state park expansion.

If it is true that the public votes with its feet, then Slide Rock State Park is one of the most valued recreational and heritage sites in Arizona. Its producing orchards and historic buildings provide important interpretive and educational opportunities for thousands of visitors who come each year to reimagine the lives of the homesteaders who, from 1907 to 1985, created an agricultural oasis in an arid southwestern landscape. Incorporating the Pendley ranch into the Arizona park system has enabled the state to preserve a precious piece of its agricultural heritage at the same time that it enforces ecological, health, and safety standards at a popular recreation area. Arizonans ratify the wisdom of acquiring and preserving this priceless piece of landscape every time they visit Slide Rock State Park.47

NOTES


2. Slide Rock State Park Master Plan, Sec. 4, p. 2, and Appendix D.


4. Tom Pendley interview, October 8, 1999; and telephone conversation with the author, November 21, 1999. Joyce Pendley Odell to author, March 27, 2001. Memoranda of this and all interviews and phone conversations, as well as all correspondence, are in the Pendley Collection, Cline Library Special Collections and Archives (CLSCA), Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff. Apparently, the only interview with Frank Pendley is in "Oak Creek Fruit," Arizona Days and Ways, supplement to The Arizona Republic (Phoenix), September 26, 1954, pp. 4–5.

5. Thompson, "History of Homesteads of Upper Oak Creek," p. 9; George Tinker, Northern Arizona and Flagstaff in 1887: The People and the Resources (1887; reprint, Glendale, Calif.: [151]
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Arthur H. Clark Company, 1969), pp. 17, 24; Bense, "The Bear of Oak Creek Canyon," pas-
sim; Tom Pendley to D. H. Diamond, November 21, 1999.
7. Pendley to Diamond, November 21, 1999. Milt Ferrell’s photograph with Bear Howard in Cline, *Mountain Town*, p. 15. There are different versions among the surviving Pendleys explaining where the dynamic came from. This is the story Frank Pendley told his oldest son. In all the versions, this famously principled pioneer resorted to desperate measures in a time of need.
8. Pendley to Diamond, October 23, 1999. The diversion point, just below today’s Banjo Bill Campground, was visible until the 1993 flood swept away most of the rock channel. Pieces of rusted steel reinforcing bars were found at the site in the winter of 1999.
10. Tom Pendley interview, October 8, 1999. "Oak Creek Fruit," pp. 4–5. This may have been the ‘Hawkeye,’ the first red ‘Delicious’ that was marketed commercially. Tom Pendley, like many apple growers, laments the transformation of the flavorful ‘Delicious’ variety through breeding programs that sacrificed superior taste and texture for redder color and a distinctive shape.
11. Don Willard, *An Old-Timer’s Scrapbook* (Sedona: Sedona Historical Society, 1984), pp. 54–55; Tom Pendley interview, October 23, 1999. Flagstaff’s population in 1939 was 3,007, compared with Winslow’s 3,917. Winslow was a division point on the railroad, where "engine sheds, machine shops, a large depot and eating house" supported a bustling community with a steady payroll. Tinker, *Northern Arizona and Flagstaff in 1887*, p. 32. Tom Pendley confirms that Winslow’s railroad workers made the town one of his father’s most important markets.
15. Tom Pendley interview, October 8, 1999.
16. Ibid., October 2, 2, 1999.
17. *Slide Rock State Park Master Plan*, Sec. 4, p. 28.
22. Tom Pendley, telephone conversation, November 21, 1999. Bruce Babbitt recalls hearing only of the $5,000 debt. It appears, however, that the Babbitt Brothers may have extended other loans after the mortgage.
23. Paul Thompson, telephone conversation, November 21, 1999; Tom Pendley, telephone conversation, November 21, 1999; Babbitt to Diamond, n.d. Paul Thompson, the son of Albert Purrymum Thompson, was raised in Oak Creek Canyon and grew up a close friend of Frank and Jane Pendley’s children. He worked on the Pendley ranch as a youth and remembers the work involved in loading the large trailers with produce. Tom Pendley recalls that "With the crop of 1946 he [Frank Pendley] paid that note to Babbitts and paid that International 4-4 (tractor) and bought a new Bean Sprayer—the Royal 35 pump with a 500 gallon tank. We were running trucks to Phoenix just as fast as they could go. We
were pushing at least a thousand boxes [of apples] a week at $6.00 a box." Tom's sister, Joyce Odell, remembers getting only $.04–$.05¢ per pound that year.
27. Ibid., October 8, 1999.
30. Ibid., November 21, 1999. The original homestead patent describes the property as containing fifty-eight acres, while the property acquired for the park amounted to forty-three acres. Therefore, Frank Pendley must have sold fifteen acres in 1952.
31. Ibid.
32. Slide Rock State Park Master Plan, Sec. 2, p. 3; Sec. 4, pp. 14 and 32. Bill West, Battle at Oak Creek (Sedona: Pronto Press, 1975), pp. 1–5. West describes the alarming abuse of Oak Creek prior to its becoming a state park. As the focal point of recreational activity, Slide Rock experienced some of the worst misuse along the entire stream.
35. Bruce Babbitt, "Draft 2, August 21, 1985," Folder 397, box 3, Position Papers, Bruce Babbitt Collection; Babbitt to Diamond, n.d. The sandstone remains of the burned-out Call of the Canyon resort are accessible on state highway 89A through the U.S. Forest Service West Fork Recreation Site.
39. Larry Landry, telephone conversation, December 3, 1999; Babbitt to Diamond, n.d.; Tuesday, November 2, 1982, in "The Governor's Daily Calendar: Daily Schedule September 1982–December 1982," Bruce Babbitt Collection. Tom Pendley, telephone conversation, November 21, 1999, acknowledged his unwillingness to sell the homestead to the government. He also stated that he is generally pleased with the state's stewardship of the park. For background on pioneering park expansion in Arizona, including the signal concept of prescriptive (the intermediate purchase by a private party of lands ultimately destined for transfer to public park agencies), see John L. Crompton, Financing and Acquiring Park and Recreation Resources (Champaign, Ill.: Human Kinetics, 1999), 478, 480–82.
40. Arizona Parklands Foundation brochure, folder 337, box 3, Position Papers, Bruce Babbitt Collection; Price, "Arizona State Parks Board," p. 188. Karen Pendley Harkey recalls that by 1982, the Wayne family had withdrawn from negotiations because of the muddied zoning situation. While this may have been true, Governor Babbitt was convinced after his conversations with Tom Pendley that the Wayne family's offer was still pending. The Wayne family has declined to respond to inquiries.

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43. Babbitt to Diamond, n.d. Howard McCrady and Robert Swanson state that the three bankers were McCrady of Valley Bank; Don Tostenrud of Arizona Bank; and James Simmons, chair of United Bank of Arizona. Larry Landry confirms the presence of McCrady and Tostenrud, but he recalls that Ed Carson represented First Interstate Bank. It is more likely that First Interstate was not represented at the meeting, and that James Simmons of United Bank of Arizona was the third banker. Larry Landry memorandum, May 16, 2000, Pendley Collection; Robert Swanson and Howard McCrady telephone conversations, December 12, 2000.

44. Larry Landry to Diamond, May 16, 2000, and February 1, 2001; Landry, telephone conversation, December 3, 1999, recalls that Governor Babbitt met with the bankers, in his office, during the fall of 1983, and that an agreement was reached before the end of the year. A careful reading of the governor’s files, however, reveals only one meeting between the CEOs and Babbitt, in early 1985. McCrady and Swanson telephone conversations, December 12, 2000, agree that the bankers were “surprised” by the explicit linkage between Slide Rock and interstate banking, but suggest that they were not truly “blindsided.” Landry to Diamond, February 1, 2001, points out that Babbitt’s “reluctance to fully embrace the concept of interstate banking was known in banking circles. This heightened the bankers’ anxiety on where the Governor would be on interstate banking.”


47. Despite heroic efforts by the small uniformed park crew, most of the original structures presently are crumbling. The orchards, however, are being restored.

CREDITS—Photos on pages 130, 135, 136, 142, 145, and 147 are courtesy of the Arizona Historical Society, Tucson. Photos on pages 137, 138, and 141 are courtesy of the Pendley family.