

HABS No. NV-25

Peleg Brown Ranch (Louis Damonte Ranch)
12945 Old Virginia Road
Reno Vicinity
Washoe County
Nevada

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Western Region
Department of the Interior
San Francisco, California 94107

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

PELEG BROWN RANCH (Louis Damonte Ranch)

HABS No. NV-25

Location: 12945 Old Virginia Road, Reno Vicinity
Washoe County, Nevada

U. S. G. S. Steamboat, Nev. 7.5' Quadrangle Universal
Transverse Mercator Coordinates:

A. 11/263340/4366010, B. 11/263380/4365820

C. 11/263300/4365800, D. 11/263240/4365970

Present Owner: Ben Damonte, Jr. and Anna Maria Damonte

Present Occupants: owners

Present Use: residential

Significance: The Brown/Damonte Ranch is eligible to the National Register under Criterion A for its association with the development of agriculture and irrigation in the Truckee Meadows in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the early years of the Brown Ranch, the Truckee Meadows was a primary source of agricultural products and wood supplied to the Comstock Mining District. The Brown Ranch served as a stage stop on the road between Reno and the Comstock. The Comstock Mining District of Nevada is significant in United States history for the wealth of gold and silver that was mined and milled there and for the personalities and events associated with that wealth. For its significance, the area was designated the Virginia City National Historic Landmark in 1961. The ranching and necessary irrigation established by two generations of the Brown family has been continued by Louis and Louise Damonte and family from 1940 until the present. The Damonte family began ranching in the Truckee Meadows in 1913 and worked and owned several ranches prior to purchasing the Brown Ranch. Louis Damonte purchased additional water rights and maintained the irrigation canals originally developed by Brown.

The Brown/Damonte Ranch is eligible to the National Register under Criterion B for its association with Peleg Brown, a locally prominent rancher who is credited as one of the first in the area to grow alfalfa and was instrumental in bringing irrigation to the southern Truckee Meadows.

The Brown/Damonte Ranch House is eligible to the National Register under Criterion C as a rare example of Greek Revival residential architecture in Nevada.

Part I: Physical Setting of the Brown/Damonte Ranch

The Brown/Damonte Ranch originally encompassed approximately 620 acres in the southern Truckee Meadows at the north end of the Steamboat Valley. The core of the Brown/Damonte Ranch today is a collection of four nineteenth-century buildings. The property is south of Reno, Nevada within Section 21 of T.18N. R.20E. and was last divided in 1977 (APN 16-040-62). The buildings are now located on a 15.1 acre parcel. The property is bounded by South Virginia Street (U. S. Highway 395) on the west and Old Virginia Road on the east.

The four buildings, a two-and-one-half story main house, a smaller foreman's house, a granary, and a stone cold storage building are clustered together. The buildings face east, enclosed by a fence, and surrounded by an irrigation ditch. Tall, old cottonwoods stand among the buildings.

The property is located in an area which is changing from agricultural use and character to residential use. Many of the nearby ranches have sold their land and water rights to developers and subdivisions have been and are being built. The land directly to the east of this property is presently used for grazing cattle, the land to the west is zoned commercial along South Virginia Street and residential farther to the west.

The Brown/Damonte Ranch is on the southwest edge of a proposed development, named the Damonte Development, which is to be a residential subdivision. Located further north, the Double Diamond Development will occupy 1802 acres within Sections 16, 9, and 4 and dramatically change the rural character of the southern Truckee Meadows. 4,454 residential units are planned along with 40 acres of commercial development, an 18 hole golf course occupying 200 acres, and the schools, parks, and roads necessary for the development.¹

Part II: Physical Description of the Ranch

Main House

The main house, built in 1864, is a large, two-and-one-half story, Greek Revival style residence dominated by a typical side-facing gable roof. Previous occupants remodeled the house in 1940 and 1955. The house's early twentieth-century appearance will be described first and then the alterations will be noted.

The wood-frame, boxy, T-shaped house stands two-and-one-half stories. The original building was 44 feet across the front by 30 feet deep with a 20 feet by 20 feet ell to the rear. The exterior is sided with clapboards and finished with cornerboards and a wide sill board above the original stone foundation. The front and side facades are symmetrical. The windows are double-hung, wood-frame, six-over-six-light, sash windows set within slightly pedimented surrounds. The front facade has a central wooden door surrounded by narrow sidelights and a rectangular line of transom lights within a simple molded surround. A second-story, central door is wooden

¹ Double Diamond Proposal, Washoe County Building Department.

with one light and opens to the deck of the one-story porch. The three-quarter-length porch has a wooden deck, simple wooden balustrade, and six square posts supporting a flat roof trimmed in a simple wood balustrade. The wood shingled roof is finished with a boxed cornice and wide frieze and the gable ends are pedimented. Two tall, and narrow windows pierce each gable end. The symmetry of the house is supported by an interior red brick chimney near each gable end at the ridge line.

The original accounts of the building described the first floor as containing a sitting room, parlor, dining room, kitchen, pantry, and two bedrooms. The second floor was divided into fourteen small bedrooms. The interior appears to have the original straight-run staircase which runs from just inside the front door up to the second floor. Also, all of the doors on the second floor are four panel wooden doors which could be original. One of the second floor doors has a one light transom above; this appears to have been a hallway door.

Alterations

A one-story rear addition appears on the house in an early twentieth-century photograph. The photograph shows a one-story, flat roofed porch with a row of six-over-six light windows on the south side. The roof is finished with a simple wooden balustrade. This one-story addition in the southwest corner of the building has been enlarged and the roof is currently hipped. A small, one-story addition also stands at the northwest corner of the building. All of the roofs are currently covered with asphalt shingles.

The house has been sided with steel siding and the windows have been replaced with similar windows with eight-over-eight-lights. First-floor windows on the south side have been replaced with similar windows but in paired arrangements. Two first-floor front facade windows have been replaced with a large picture window with multi-lights. The original front porch has been replaced by a one-story entry porch with fluted columns and a simple stick balustrade.

The 1940 remodeling of the house included lifting the building and replacing the original stone foundation with a modern concrete foundation. At that time, a modern furnace replaced the wood heat system and wood stoves and marble mantels were removed from many rooms. In addition, the first-floor interior was remodeled. In 1955 the second floor of the house was remodeled; twelve of the fourteen small rooms were joined to form larger bedrooms and one bathroom. Two of the original small rooms remain and are used for storage.

Outbuildings

Foreman's House (circa 1860s)

The Foreman's House is a wood frame, rectangular, one-and-one-half story house with a front facing gable roof. The main portion of the house is approximately 16 feet by 30 feet and stands one-and-one-half stories tall. The shed-roofed rear portion is approximately 12 feet by 16 feet and only one story tall. The building is

deteriorating. The exterior walls are covered with asphalt shingles pierced by simple, one-over-one-light, wood-frame, double-hung windows in the main portion and multi-light, wood-frame, casements in the rear kitchen portion. The front door is wooden with one light. The front facing gable roof is covered with wood shingles and finished with a boxed cornice and frieze which has been partially covered by the asphalt shingles. A full-length, shed-roofed front porch is supported by three square posts with a simple balustrade. A red brick chimney, exterior to the main house, is now sandwiched between the main house and the rear addition.

The main portion of the house is divided into a living room, bathroom, closet, and staircase on the first floor and a bedroom on the second floor. The shed-roofed rear portion houses the kitchen.

Granary

The wood-frame, rectangular granary is approximately 16 feet by 25 feet with a partially open, 9' by 25', shed roofed enclosure to the north. It sits on a stone foundation. The exterior of the building is sided with horizontal boards and finished with corner boards. There is one window opening in the east elevation which is now boarded up and a solid wooden door in the south elevation. The front facing gable roof is covered with wooden shingles as is the shed roof. The interior walls and floor are lined with tin to facilitate the storage of grain, both loose or sacked and to keep rodents out.

Stone Cold Storage (Garage)

The current double-car garage appears to have originally been a cold storage as it is constructed with heavy stone walls. It is rectangular, approximately 21 feet by 26 feet, with a large garage door centered on the east elevation. The four openings in the randomly laid rubble stone walls are now boarded up. A front facing, steeply pitched gable roof covered with wooden shingles dominates the building. The gable ends are covered by wooden shingles and are pierced with a one-over-one-light, double-hung, wood-frame, sash window.

The building is divided into two floors. Originally there was an exterior staircase on the rear elevation which has been removed.

Play House

The play house was supposedly built for Peleg's granddaughter, Ethel Tyler, who was born in 1893. It is approximately 8 feet by 10 feet and is designed in the Bungalow style.

Part III: Historical Context

Development of Agriculture and Irrigation in the Truckee Meadows (Criterion A)

The southern Truckee Meadows is the valley east of the Sierra Nevada Mountains, west of the Washoe Range, north of Steamboat Springs, and south of the Truckee River. This area lies within Washoe County, State of Nevada, in sections of Township 18 north, Range 19 east; Township 18 north, Range 20 east; Township 19 north, Range 19 east; and Township 19 north, Range 20 east.

Explorers, frontiersmen, and immigrants passed through the Truckee Meadows in the 1840s and 1850s. Thousands passed through the valley or along the Truckee River and stayed a few days to allow their animals to feed on the native grasses. The Donner Party stopped in the fall of 1846. It has been said that the water and forage of the Truckee Meadows beguiled them into a delay that was fatal. The 1850s saw the first permanent settlers homestead in the Truckee Meadows. A Mormon named Jamison is credited with establishing the first permanent white settlement along the Truckee River called Jamison's Station². The Mormon agricultural settlers sent to the western counties of Utah in 1855 by Brigham Young, the Utah Territorial Governor, settled in the Truckee Meadows, as well as in Washoe, Jacks, and Carson Valleys.

Settlers established scattered ranches and stations in the valley along the travel routes. Agriculture in the Truckee Meadows began as immigrants harvested the native grasses for fodder on their way to the California gold fields.

In 1858 Granville W. Huffaker drove the first herd of cattle into the Truckee Meadows³ and established his ranch/station. Huffaker selected his land at the intersection of the north-south and east-west travel routes. This location changed Huffaker Station from a ranch headquarters to the largest station in the valley, complete with a post office, hotels, saloons, express yards, and livery stables. As many as 300 people lived around Huffaker's Station in the mid-1860s. Huffaker planted alfalfa to feed the thousands of mules, horses, and oxen in the area. Peleg Brown, another early settler, built the first fieldstone house near Steamboat Springs, south of Huffaker's Station⁴.

The first settlers in the Truckee Meadows were northern Europeans from England, Germany, and the Scandinavian countries. With the discovery of wealth on the Comstock, the number of settlers increased, as did the demand for agricultural products and livestock. The rapid growth of Virginia City, Gold Hill, Silver City, Dayton, Washoe City, and other mill towns raised the demand for hay and grain for work animals and flour, potatoes, butter, cheese, milk, and beef for human consumption. As the area prospered, the demand for fruits and vegetables also increased. Apple and peach trees were planted and, in 1874, Washoe County produced 6,000 bushels of apples⁵.

²Angel, Myron, *History of Nevada*, 1881, 623.

³Hummel, N. A., *General History & Resources of Washoe County, Nevada*. 1888, 14.

⁴Townley, John, *Tough Little Town on the Truckee*, 1983, 41.

⁵Creel, Cecil W., *A History of Nevada Agriculture*, State Printing Office, 1964, 7.

In 1868 native forage provided approximately 5,000 tons of hay for grazing livestock.⁶ Alfalfa replaced native hay; it was first planted in the Truckee Meadows in the mid-1860s. Historians often credit Peleg Brown and Erwin Crane, of Steamboat, with pioneering alfalfa farming in the Meadows⁷. Potatoes were raised as a second crop, a cash crop, especially by the Irish settling in the Truckee Meadows in the 1860s.

Once the farmer possessed the land, he would set corners, dig a well, clear some land, irrigate it, and seed it. The farmer then would plant his orchard. In the Truckee Meadows, summer, autumn, and spring apples grew along with peaches, pears, cherries, and plums. In western Nevada valleys, from Susanville south past Genoa, fruit was grown as an industry and supplied the California towns with fresh produce. When California began developing its own fruit industry, many Nevada farmers abandoned their orchards as an industry. Today, orchards can be seen in the old areas where each ranch grew its own fruit.⁸

Water was first diverted from the Truckee River in the late 1850s. During the 1860s and 1870s, miles of ditches were built to irrigate thousands of acres. Ranchers, banding together to build and maintain their irrigation ditches, created a complicated system of water delivery. The ditches were financed by the profits from selling hay and feeding cattle. Among others, the Hatch & Lake Ditch was built in 1865, the Cochrane in 1862-64, the Southside and Last Chance Ditches in the mid 1870s, and the Steamboat Ditch in 1878⁹. The most important was the Truckee Ditch, seventeen miles long, running from the Mayberry Bridge and bringing water to Brown's Station¹⁰. Water is the life blood of agriculture in the Truckee Meadows; many of these ditches are still in use today.

The arrival of the Central Pacific Railroad in 1868 and its completion in 1869 created the town of Reno on the Truckee River as an important freight and passenger center. The railroad opened a greater market area for the agricultural products of the Truckee Meadows. Before the Central Pacific, the hay raised in the Truckee Meadows was sold to teamsters for the animals pulling wagons to and from the Comstock and over the Sierras to California. While the teamster trade was greatly diminished by the railroad, the Truckee Meadow's market for alfalfa continued to increase with cattle feeding more than taking up the slack. The market changed in the early 1870s with the shipping of cattle from Oregon, northern California, and eastern Nevada to Reno for a final fattening before shipment to the Bay Area of California. The decline of the Comstock demand was almost unnoticed by the Truckee Meadow ranchers. The California demand for beef was a larger market. During the mid-1870s half of San Francisco's beef supply - over 80,000 head per year - was supplied by Nevada¹¹.

⁶Townley, 121.

⁷Angel, 632.

⁸Ross, Silas E. *Recollections of Life at Glendale, Nevada; Work at the University of Nevada; and Western Funeral Practice*, August 1965 - April 1969, 25-26, 33.

⁹Peckham, George E. "Reminiscences of an Active Life," 1917-1920, 64-65.

¹⁰Townley, 137.

¹¹Creel, 9.

D. C. Wheeler introduced sheep to Nevada and the Truckee Meadows in 1867. Wheeler, one of the State's authorities on the sheep industry, initially brought sheep from Oregon. He later imported Shrophires and French Merinos to his ranch located on Virginia Ranch Road.¹²

John Townley in his book, *Tough Little Town on the Truckee*, talks about the ranches of the 1870s:

1870's federal census provides interesting statistics on the valley. Only fifty-odd ranches shared the Meadows, each spread over hundreds of acres of pasture and alfalfa patches. Half of Washoe County's 3091 residents found homes in the valley, with two of three inhabitants counted in Reno's precincts. Of the 505 rural residents, men outnumbered women three to one. It was a young population, too, with almost a third of all locals under twenty-one years and only one in ten over forty-five. Occupations typified a farming area with only ten percent of valley residents employed at the hamlets of Glendale, Huffaker's or Steamboat - the rest were on the land.

The typical ranch, called farms by census enumerators, appeared almost self-sufficient. Headed usually by man and wife, including relatives and numerous children, many also kept two or more laborers and their families. Ranch headquarters often had carpenters or other craftsmen in residence. Chinese cooks were popular, as were female "housekeepers." The typical ranch contained a half-dozen residents at minimum, with blends of generations, birthplaces, and languages - a third were foreign-born.¹³

Reclamation of marshlands and the development of irrigation systems increased production of crops. Land prices doubled in the 1870s due to the demand for alfalfa. By the end of the 1870s, alfalfa production had tripled to 15,000 tons. All the public land in the Truckee Meadows was claimed by 1876.¹⁴ The 1860s and 1870s were good and simple times for agriculture in the Truckee Meadows. The hay harvest and winter feeding contracts were a dependable market.

Townley continues to describe agriculture in the Truckee Meadows:

Despite flirtations with truck farming, agriculture in the valley surrounding Reno kept to its hay crop during the 1880s, to feed 5,000-10,000 cattle and 30,000-50,000 sheep from December to May annually. Even if hay prices were no longer what they had been during the Comstock's heyday, this familiar, stable crop regularly provided satisfactory income for large and small ranches.¹⁵

¹²Creel, 10-11.

¹³Townley, 124.

¹⁴Townley, 125.

¹⁵Townley, 132.

The sheep industry continued to grow through the 1890s. The Governor reported in 1887 that 43,000 head of sheep and 3 million pounds of wool were sold out-of-state¹⁶.

As more people settled in the Truckee Meadows, water was no longer taken for granted. Steps were taken to protect water rights and insure enough water in dry years. Water litigation began. There was much discussion of upgrading the use of the water from alfalfa to more labor intensive cash crops. Truck farms and orchards were discussed. The Chinese grew vegetables and fruit in their in-town patches. The Italians, coming into the Truckee Meadows in the late 1870s, were accustomed to a similar environment in northern Italy. They had experience irrigating and fertilizing the land and became intensive farmers.

The community of Huffaker's gained further prominence in 1875 when it began serving as the loading point for lumber and firewood for the Comstock. Wood floated down a V-flume from Mackay & Fair's lumber operation on Mount Rose. Then workers loaded it onto V&T rail cars. Italian woodcutters worked the operation until it closed in 1881. Many of the woodcutters settled on land along South Virginia Road, built homes, and established ranches.

The production of beef and hay continued to be the major agricultural pursuit in the late nineteenth-century. Meat prices were low and there was a glut of beef in the West in the 1890s, so newcomer and ex-Texan John Sparks started shipping cattle east to the Midwest market. Truckee Meadows ranchers cooperated and sent whole trains of beef to the Midwest.

Ranches diversified in the 1880s. Ranchers supplemented alfalfa crops with wheat, and established flour mills. At the 1893 Chicago World's Fair, H. H. Beck, of the Riverside Mill, took first place for his flour. A few ranches specialized in potatoes, vegetables, fruit, berries, or poultry; the production and marketing of these products were much more complicated than alfalfa. The 1890s saw the development of dairy herds and creameries. The invention of the milking machine in 1902 modernized milk production.¹⁷

David Thompson in *Nevada: A History of Changes* talks about the Italians ranching in Nevada:

During the late nineteenth century, many new settlers of Italian origin arrived in Nevada. They raised garden vegetables along the Carson River, on the Truckee Meadows, and along the Walker River, using land they leased or rented from other ranchers. By saving their profits, these Italian-American ranchers were able to buy the land they were farming.¹⁸

John Townley describes Italian settlement in the following paragraphs:

¹⁶Creel, 11.

¹⁷Bell, Walter R., *The Production of Market Milk*, 1934, 4.

¹⁸Thompson, David, *Nevada: A History of Changes*, 1986, 129.

First attracted to logging work on Mount Rose in the mid-1870's, families took up ranches in an Italian belt south of Reno around Brown's and Steamboat once Comstock lumber demands dropped dramatically after 1878 and Mackay & Fair's camps shut down. Relatives and others arrived in a steady stream that made them the largest foreign-born minority - but for northern Europeans - in the valley.

Obvious is the widespread prejudice toward the Italian immigrant within the Meadows. Their failure to assimilate, learn English, and lose an ethnic distinction, was resented by older residents. The Italians arrived at a time when open immigration began to be questioned nationally. Outside the earlier English-German pattern of behavior, attitudes and customs, Italians were seen as ignorant, unsanitary and Roman Catholic. Suspicious of their neighbors - with good reason - initially the Italians clustered together, visited and married among themselves, kept their children from local schools and did little to relieve an almost universal illiteracy brought direct from the old country.

Prejudice was overcome by hard work and plenty of it. Alone, among a valley filled by hay ranchers, the Italians practiced that intensive agriculture preached by reclamationists. From the first, they carefully and unceasingly plowed manure into their fields, collecting it from all over the Meadows by wagon. Less ambitious neighbors chortled at the sight of Italian husband men cleaning out stables and corrals anywhere in the valley, thinking them crazy, but crop yields jumped in the Italians' fields and proved the point. Only a few years were necessary to demonstrate that the valley's potential for truck farming had barely been tapped.

There were occasional exchanges between Italians and the early settlers, usually during political campaigns, yet despite obvious discrimination they prospered. Slowly, their children entered the schools and found their way into business. By the end of the century, Italian families acquired much of the croplands of the western half of the valley from Steamboat to Verdi.¹⁹

Ranching and farming continued to grow in Nevada and in the Truckee Meadows both in numbers of farms and number of acres cultivated. The following figures were reported in the Census of Agriculture by the Department of Commerce, Bureau of Census.

Date	# Farms in NV	Total Acreage	Avg. Size of Farm (acres)
1860	91	14,132	616
1870	1,036	92,644	201
1880	1,404	344,423	378

¹⁹Townley, 232.

1890	1,277	723,052	1,301
1900	2,184	572,946	1,174
1910	2,689	752,117	1,009
1920	3,163	594,741	745

At the turn-of-the-century, agriculture was the largest industry in Washoe County, and Reno was the largest town in the state. The predominance of agriculture in the Truckee Meadows during the nineteenth-century continued into the early twentieth-century. Then it began to fade with the urbanization of the area, the development of the tourism industry, and the opening of other agricultural lands through increased irrigation.

World War I was a boon to agriculture throughout the country and the Truckee Meadows was no exception. Herds of cattle and flocks of sheep increased and all irrigable land was brought into production.²⁰ The principal products of the Truckee Meadows were alfalfa, potatoes, onions, and dairy products. The demand for all agricultural products was high, but as labor was short, labor costs were also high, thus reducing profits. Most farmers and ranchers weathered the post World War I recession. The 1920s were good times for Northern Nevada agriculture; sheep, cattle, and dairy products produced the most revenue. The Northern California market continued to grow much faster than Nevada could supply.

After the turn-of-the-century, Reno and the Truckee Meadows were areas where the Italians invested. Both the ranches of the Truckee Meadows and the "Little Italy" area of downtown Reno were concentrations of Italian wealth. The 1910 census records 372 Italians in Reno. In 1930, 637 were recorded. The Italians were the largest foreign born ethnic group in Reno and Washoe County, as well as the largest native born of foreign born parents. Twentieth-century Italians assimilated quickly unlike their nineteenth-century counterparts.

Both Annie Estelle Prouty and Alice Frances Trout, in penning their master theses in 1917 and 1916, wrote about the Italian development in the Truckee Meadows. Ms. Prouty wrote that although the Truckee Meadows was once a hay stop for the overland traveler, today, "Many of the ranches are owned by Italians who are excellent gardeners, thrifty and make good citizens."²¹ Ms. Trout wrote: "Our sturdy Anglo-Saxon settlers are being rapidly replaced by Italians, particularly in the Truckee Meadows. Four-fifths of the land is now owned by Italians. The reason is not far to seek. As a people the latter are content to begin on a small scale, live below our standard until their financial condition will warrant a home and an automobile."²²

A 1921 ditch map of the southern Truckee Meadows shows a large number of Italian landowners.

Angelo Balsi
H. Bersani
Capurro & Laiolo

²⁰Creel, 19-20.

²¹Prouty, Annie Estelle, "The Development of Reno," *Nevada Historical Society Papers*, 1924, 123.

²²Trout, Alice Frances, "Religious Development in Nevada," *Nevada Historical Society Papers*, 1917, 148.

B. & A. Casazza
David Casazza
Paulo Casazza
A. Cerfoglio
D. & P. Cerfoglio
Angelo Faretto
A. Faretto & Sons
Catherine Faretto
Domenigo Fillpelli
N. Fillpelli
S. Geravanta
Nick Ginnochio
Guilo Lombardi
J. P. Maddalena
F.A. Pecetti
J. B. Pecetti
Pietro Pecetti
Domingo Pezzi
A. Pincolini
John Prosole
Louis Prosole
E. F. Questa
Quilici & Company
G. Zolezzi.

Washoe County agriculture was still important in the 1920s. The following summary was written in the *Nevada Newsletter* in 1927:

Agriculturally Washoe county ranks as one of the richest counties in Nevada according to the Department of Commerce census of agriculture for the year 1925. Of the 17 counties in the state, Washoe ranked first in the total number of farms, second in the value of farm lands and buildings, second in the value of livestock on farms, third in the land area in crops, second in the land area in farms, first in value of dairy products, third in the value of wool production and first in the value of poultry and poultry products.

The following statistics on agriculture in Washoe County may prove of interest. In 1910 there were 367 farms in the county, while in 1925 there were 566 with 84% of the farms owned by the operators in the latter year. In 1910 there were 195,286 acres in farms as against 607,502 acres in 1925. In the year 1925 the value of farm property, including livestock, in Washoe County amounted to \$14,919,283. of which \$3,654,354 was livestock. The value of various commodities produced in 1924 was as follows:

Dairy products	\$485,382.
Wool	\$630,220.
Poultry	\$238,195.
Farm Crops	\$911,925.

Grand total

\$2,265,722.²³

Nevada, particularly Reno, became a mecca for the divorce trade in the 1920s and 1930s. The combination of press coverage of the 1906 divorce of the President of the U. S. Steel Company and the 1920 divorce of Mary Pickford, and the "loose" legal grounds for divorce in Nevada, attracted many to become residents of Nevada for a short time. Before 1927 the residency requirement was six months; in 1927 that was changed to three months, and in 1931 reduced again to six weeks. These soon-to-be divorcees needed a place to stay and many chose dude ranches and the rustic accommodations of the Truckee Meadows. Some of the agricultural ranches of the Truckee Meadows accommodated this trade. "US 395 goes south through the fertile Truckee Valley with signs on both sides of the road advertising 'Guest Ranches' for divorce-seekers who prefer the moonlight and tree toads and the smell of the countryside to the gay spots of the Biggest Little City in the World"²⁴. Eventually, other states passed more realistic divorce laws and the dude ranches disappeared.

The 1930-1932 years were the low point for many Nevada farmers and ranchers; the worldwide depression and the 1931 drought caused a \$12 million loss in revenue in Nevada agriculture between the years 1929 and 1932²⁵. In October 1932, many of the Nevada banks with agricultural loans were forced to close and many of the established farmers and ranchers went bankrupt. In 1933, state and federal agencies helped many farmers and ranchers refinance their loans. Water pumped from Lake Tahoe into the Truckee River saved the Truckee Meadows operations in 1934.²⁶

The Truckee Meadows was still considered a prime agricultural valley in the 1930s and 1940s, known for dairy products, alfalfa, grain, fruit, vegetables, hogs, cattle, sheep, and turkeys. World War II brought another time of high production. Labor was short and Mexican nationals assisted in putting up hay, irrigating fields, and planting and harvesting crops.

The number of farms in Washoe County increased and then decreased during the twentieth century. The following figures were reported in the Census of Agriculture by the Department of Commerce, Bureau of Census.

# Farms in Washoe County		Avg. Size of Farm
1900	331 farms	
1910	367 farms	
1925	566 farms	
1945	509 farms	1221 acres
1950	420 farms	1825 acres
1954	465 farms	1942 acres
1959	244 farms	5070 acres
1969	203 farms	4290 acres

²³Walker, E. H., "Washoe County." *Nevada Newsletter: Reno, NV It's Sources*, 1927 Annual Magazine, June 25, 1927, 32.

²⁴Writer's Program of the Work Projects Administration, *Nevada: A Guide to the Silver State*, 1940, 193.

²⁵Creel, 21.

²⁶Creel, 22.

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1974	176 farms	5185 acres
1978	218 farms	4290 acres
1982	300 farms	2912 acres

Between the mid-1940s and the mid-1960s agriculture continued to grow in Nevada, but not in the Truckee Meadows. Urban expansion in the Reno area moved dairy, poultry, hay, potato, and onion production to more distant valleys. The spread of the urban portions of the Truckee Meadows has diminished the agricultural area in the last forty years, but especially in the last twenty years. Ranch lands have been sold to developers and subdivided into housing tracts and commercial and industrial areas. There are not many meadows left in the Truckee Meadows.

The Brown/Damonte Ranch is eligible to the National Register under Criterion A as one of a diminishing number of Truckee Meadows ranches which played an important role in the development of agriculture in the area. From 1858 when it was first developed until recently, it has served as a ranch. It is a rare extant example of a stage stop/boarding house from the 1860s with two original rooms intact on the second floor of the main house.

Part IV: History of the Brown/Damonte Ranch

Peleg Brown Family and Ranch History

The Brown Brothers, Joshua and Peleg (1836-1878), first settled in Nevada north of the "Brown Ranch" in 1857. Peleg purchased the "Brown Ranch" in 1858 and constructed the present buildings in 1864. This early ranch consisted of 620 acres, of which approximately 20 acres became rights-of-way for the Virginia & Truckee Railroad and U. S. Highway 395. Peleg Brown and Ervin Crane, his neighbor to the south, are credited with introducing alfalfa to the area. The ranch was operated by Peleg Brown until his death in 1878. His wife, Elizabeth Gill Brown (1835-1918), ran the ranch until her death in 1918. The ranch stayed in the family until it was sold to Louis Damonte in 1940 by the estate of Peleg and Elizabeth Brown's daughter, Laura Wilcox.

Born to Pardon and Sarah Sanford Brown of Middletown, Rhode Island, on July 14, 1836, Peleg Brown, was one of six children: Joshua, Peleg, James, George, Pardon Jr., and Lydia. Brothers Joshua and Peleg Brown arrived in the Truckee Meadows in September 1857 having left their home in Rhode Island in January 1857.²⁷ They first traveled south to Kentucky where they purchased stock to drive west. Their route took them across the plains, past Fort Laramie, around the Great Salt Lake, and finally along the Humboldt and Truckee Rivers. Joshua and Peleg arrived in Nevada with 170 of the original 211 head of cattle.²⁸

The Mormons, who had settled the Truckee Meadows and Washoe Valley (at that time part of the Utah Territory), were being recalled by Brigham Young during the fall of 1857. Joshua C. Brown bought three land claims, approximately 1,000 acres, for \$250.00 from the Mormons who were returning to Salt Lake. One claim was located in Washoe Valley, the other two in the Truckee Meadows.²⁹ The Washoe Valley claim was later jumped, as were many others that year in Washoe Valley. During the summer of 1858, Peleg Brown traded this claim to the claim-jumper for one plow.³⁰ One of the Truckee Meadows claims had improvements — a stone house.³¹ This claim became known in Territorial records as the Stone House Ranch and was sold in November 1859 to G. H. Beach. (This ranch once stood north of the current Brown/Damonte Ranch and its field stone house is widely cited as the first stone house in the Truckee Meadows.)³²

The Stone House Ranch served as headquarters for the Brown brothers during 1857 and 1858. Joshua left the Truckee Meadows in late September 1857 for Rhode Island and returned to the Truckee Meadows the following year with his family and more cattle. Peleg stayed to establish the ranch and, with the aid of hired help, produced butter for profit and kept the herd alive through the first winter. Peleg, in a letter to

²⁷Pardon Brown Family Letters, Letter written by Peleg Brown, September 16, 1857.

²⁸Letters, Letter written by Peleg Brown, April 21 and September 23, 1857.

²⁹Letters, Letter written by Peleg Brown, September 23, 1857.

³⁰Letters, Letter written by Peleg Brown, October 22, 1858.

³¹Letters, Letter written by Peleg Brown, October 10, 1857.

³²Townley, 41.

his mother, described the stone house as being 20 feet by 18 feet with two doors and two windows, one room and one story. He mentions adding an upper story. Later, Peleg writes of building a new house in front of the stone house, this one to be 12 feet by 28 feet with two rooms. The stone house was then used for milk storage. He describes the location of the Stone house as follows "[It] stood on the west side of a mound from the top of which the whole valley could be seen; and being four miles from the Truckee [River]." He also mentions having an Indian Camp about one mile away.³³

In Peleg's letters to his parents, he states, "I would like to settle here if there was some sort of society."³⁴ The winter of 1857-58 was lonely for him without family. Peleg's one neighbor in the immediate area of the Truckee Meadows during the winter of 1857-1858 was Louis P. Drexler.³⁵

Peleg was appointed a delegate from the Truckee Meadows to make laws in Carson Valley in 1858.³⁶ Peleg Brown purchased the first piece of the property now known as the Brown Ranch in 1858 for \$6.56 and 12 heifers.³⁷ He wrote to his parents and said "I'd rather have it than any ranch this side of the mountain." and described the ranch as being three miles south of Joshua's Stone House Ranch.³⁸ Peleg stated in a letter dated April 15, 1859, that his ranch had 138 head of cattle, five oxen, five bulls, and five horses. He told his father that he enclosed five acres of garden to plant corn and potatoes.³⁹ In June of that same year, he lists the vegetables he has as radishes, lettuce, melon, green peas, new potatoes, beets, carrots, and corn.⁴⁰

Peleg wintered alone waiting for Joshua and family to arrive; they finally arrived in October 1859.⁴¹ It was too late for Peleg to return east that year. Peleg, his brother Joshua, and Joshua's family wintered in the Steamboat Valley.

Peleg left for Rhode Island in the fall of 1860. He and his brother Pardon, Jr. returned to the West in February 1861. They sailed from New York on the Steamship "Champion;" rode the railroad across the Isthmus of Panama; and sailed to San Francisco on the Steamship "Contest." They crossed the Sierra Nevadas via the Placerville route and arrived in the Truckee Meadows in late April.⁴² Peleg and Pardon, Jr. joined Joshua in the work on the ranch. The ranch had milk cows (some rented out by the month), hens, and cattle. They grew fruit and vegetables and produced pounds of butter and some cheese.⁴³

³³Letters, Letters written by Peleg Brown, January 18 and February 16, 1858.

³⁴Letters, Letter written by Peleg Brown, February 15, 1858.

³⁵Letters, Letter written by Peleg Brown, April 29, 1858.

³⁶Letters, Letter written by Peleg Brown, April 18, 1858.

³⁷Letters, Letter written by Peleg Brown, July 28, 1858.

³⁸Letters, Letter written by Peleg Brown, July 28, 1858.

³⁹Letters, Letter written by Peleg Brown, April 15, 1859.

⁴⁰Letters, Letter written by Peleg Brown, June 24, 1859.

⁴¹Letters, Letter written by Peleg Brown, October 8, 1859.

⁴²Letters, Letters written by Peleg Brown, February 27, March 10, and April 21, 1861 and letters written by Pardon Jr., March 7 and 10, 1861.

⁴³Letters, Letter written by Peleg Brown, May 12, 1861.

In January 1863, Peleg Brown married Elizabeth Gill in Washoe City. Elizabeth was born in Fort Wayne, Indiana, and came west in 1861 with her sister and brother-in-law. The Browns began improving their ranch. In 1864, Peleg built a three-story residence; in 1865, he built a barn. Peleg used lumber from his wood ranch but contracted out the actual construction. According to his letters, Peleg spent \$4,000 on the construction of the house, which was 44 feet by 30 feet on the main floor and 20 feet by 20 feet on the two upper levels. There were 20-foot-high porches on the north and east sides. The house had 14 bedrooms upstairs and the following rooms downstairs: sitting room, parlor, dining room, kitchen, pantry, and two bedrooms. He described the house as having a "hard finish" and claimed it was one of the best in the county.⁴⁴ Peleg spent \$800 to have a barn built in 1865 and spent \$2,400 on the Truckee Ditch.⁴⁵

Peleg described the plan for the ditch in a letter he wrote on January 12, 1865:

The plan that wee now design to opperate opporn that each man should build his perpotion his self that is with his own laybor my portion will bea one and half miles the dimention of the ditch are as follows 7 feet wide on top fifteen inch deep and five feet wide in the bottom and the dirt to bea thrown on the lower side ... I think the most work can bea don with plough and scrapers ... to build my part of the ditch is not going to cost very much money⁴⁶

The Brown Ranch headquarters was oriented to the east, facing the Reno-Virginia Road. The site selection for the ranch headquarters, more than likely was determined by the road's location since at the time of construction the possibility of a railway, the Virginia & Truckee Railroad, had not been discussed. This property, like the Stone House Ranch, had the distinction of being the last place to water, feed, and rest before reaching the mines. During the early years, the Browns operated a waystation for travelers. The second floor in the house was divided into 14 small bedrooms for this purpose. The floor plan remained this way until 1955 when the second generation of Damontes to live in the house remodeled the second floor. Peleg Brown wrote to his parents on March 31, 1866 about his boarding business:

Wee now have four steady boarders and some transom susomers which has not amounted to much this last winter prospect of it beaing better this season than it ever has been orn this road as the railroad will be done this spring to Dutchflat most of the freight will cross the mountains this way⁴⁷

In 1866 Sarah E. Brown commented in a letter "You asked if the stage folks ate here they do and have lots of passengers most of the time."⁴⁸ In 1870 Peleg's mother wrote the following about a visit to see her son:

⁴⁴Letters, Letters written by Peleg Brown, March 1, 1864 and March 4, 1866.

⁴⁵Letters, Letter written by Peleg Brown, March 4, 1866.

⁴⁶Letters, Letter written by Peleg Brown, January 12, 1865.

⁴⁷Letters, Letter written by Peleg Brown dated March 31, 1866.

⁴⁸Letters, Letter written by Sarah E. Brown, November 24, 1866.

We found Peleg and family all well he seems to have a plenty to doe he has 7 borders by the week more or less Trancient ones some night he has from 60 to 80 horses to feed with the stage horses the blacksmith have moved there stock up hear from the foot of the grade. they bord hear I cannot say that I like the climet hear vary much it is vary dry hear yesterday Peleg took Father and myself over his big meadow as Joshua used to call it. some parts vary dry and others parts wet. he thinks the prospests of quite a good croop of hay it does not look much lik our croops at home to me I may like it better after a while the water is vary poor if I wash in the water it makes my face sore it is just about the same as sun burnt, they have a Chinaman Cook and a girl to wait on the Table... Pelegs house for this plaice is vey good well calculated for borders has 3 large barnes besides sheds and other buildings⁴⁹

The Virginia Road, at one time known as the Brown Toll Road, left the valley floor southeast of Brown's and ascended the Virginia Mountains along the route (now known as Toll Road) called Geiger Grade. Pardon Brown, Jr. describes the trip from Brown's to Virginia City in a letter to his mother dated October 13, 1861:

well in going from here thair for the first 4 miles the country is level and covered with sage brush then for a while we go into a canion with the mountains on both sides these are covered with ceaders and Pines here is whair the most of the wood that is used in the city is got from then for a while the rode is up the side of a mountain after we get to the top we have a level road some time and then we go down a steep pitch than thair is grade along the side of the mountain to the city along on this grade a person can loock down hundreds of feet into the valley below⁵⁰

In 1866, Peleg bought out Joshua's interest in the property and Joshua moved his family to Surprise Valley, California. Peleg purchased four separate pieces of property after 1857, the property being recorded from 1865 to 1877. Peleg preempted 160 acres in Section 16, T. 18 N., R. 20 E. which was recorded on December 4, 1865; this property became known as the Wood Ranch and was located in Cox Canyon. He purchased 160 acres in Section 21, T. 18 N., R. 20 E. for \$1,500 from Eliza Valvende who had preempted the property in 1864; Peleg had this land recorded in 1877. Eliza Valvende, referred to as the "old women" in the Pardon Family Letters, resided on the property. Peleg purchased the third parcel of land for \$800 from Julia Lafamboise through her lawyer, William S. Chapman. Julia's title to the land was from a half-breed Dakota or Sioux Certificate. The land was located in Section 21, T. 18 N., R. 20 E.; Peleg had it recorded on December 4, 1865. Peleg purchased the fourth property for \$800 from James Darland of California, 120 acres located in Sections 17 and 20, T. 18 N., R. 20 E. These four pieces formed his 620-acre ranch.

⁴⁹Letters, Letter written by Sarah Brown, May 30, 1870.

⁵⁰Letters, Letter written by Pardon Jr. Brown, October 13, 1861.

The Virginia & Truckee Railroad, a short line, connected the Comstock with Carson City and Reno carrying products from Reno and the Truckee Meadows to the Comstock and ore from the Comstock to the Carson River mills. The V & T passed behind the Brown Ranch headquarters. Surveying of the right-of-way was completed in 1868. Construction of the rail line on the ranch was completed in 1871, although the line ended at Steamboat Springs until 1872. A hay siding was constructed on the railroad within the boundaries of the Ranch and named "Brown Station." Brown Station allowed the ranchers in the immediate area to load produce and livestock to ship south to Carson City and Virginia City as well as north to the Central Pacific Railroad. Peleg Brown had wood camps on the west side of the valley and shipped wood from this station until 1881 when the Wood Ranch was closed.⁵¹ In 1866, Peleg Brown contracted for a road to be built six miles west towards the wood camps. He speculated that he could bring 6000 cords of wood to be shipped that year.⁵²

In 1872, a local newspaper described Peleg Brown as an early settler who has an "extensive area of natural meadow, which is watered mainly by Brown Creek".⁵³ The newspaper went on to say "Mr. Brown is an excellent farmer, and has carefully seeded his meadow to timothy and other tame grasses, with great success." Besides raising crops, Peleg raised dairy cows and produced butter and some cheese as well as renting his milk cows out by the month. In 1876, Peleg's ranch was described as a "well cultivated ranch within a mile of Steamboat Springs, ... much attention to blooded stock, but has lately disposed of most of it as the cost of feeding during the long winter consumed much of the profits. ... meadow of 200 acres reclaimed 15 years ago ..." ⁵⁴

In addition to being a rancher, Peleg Brown served as a stockholder and one of the organizers of the Steamboat Canal Company which owned the Truckee and Steamboat Springs Irrigation Canal. B. B. Norton, James Burke, Peter Dalton, A. M. Lamb, Peleg Brown, and J. L. Downs constructed the canal.⁵⁵ This project consisted of a 34-mile canal which takes water from the Truckee River near Verdi to Steamboat Valley for irrigation purposes. Thompson & West's *History of Nevada* describes the principal irrigating canals in Washoe County. The following is the description of the "Steamboat Irrigating Canal" given in 1881:

The Steamboat Irrigating Canal is by far the largest work of its kind, being thirty-four miles in length, and costing over \$50,000. It was commenced in 1878, and was completed in the spring of 1880. The ditch takes its water from the Truckee River, four miles above Verdi, runs parallel to the course of the stream several miles, then turns to the south and crosses the creek at Steamboat Springs; it then turns to the north, and discharges into the creek, five miles below. It was built and is owned by an incorporated company of farmers. Mr. A. M. Lamb,

⁵¹ "The Last Run," *Reno Weekly Gazette*, March 17, 1881, 6:6.

⁵² Letters, Letter written by Peleg Brown, March 31, 1866.

⁵³ "Washoe County," *Nevada State Journal*, August 31, 1872, 3:2.

⁵⁴ "Truckee Meadows," *Daily Nevada State Journal*, August 13, 1876, 2:2-3.

⁵⁵ Washoe County Liens & Misc. Documents, Book B, 312-314. Certification of location recorded 1/14/1878.

who came to Galena Canon, at the town of Galena in 1863, and is now a resident of Huffaker, is President of the Company.⁵⁶

By this time, Peleg Brown was a prominent citizen in the Truckee Meadows. In 1867 and 1872 he served as a member of the Washoe County Grand Jury⁵⁷ and in 1868 as a delegate from Huffaker's to the Union Party State Convention.⁵⁸ In 1870 and 1874 Brown was Inspector of Elections for Brown's Precinct.⁵⁹ In 1872, Brown won a seat on the County Commission as a Republican candidate, beating George Alt.⁶⁰ In 1874 Peleg Brown became a charter member of the Agricultural, Mining, and Mechanical Society in Reno.⁶¹ In 1875 he served as a juror for the United States Circuit Court⁶² and in 1876 as a member of the United States Grand Jury in Carson City.⁶³ In 1876 he served as a Washoe County delegate to the State Republican Convention.⁶⁴ In 1877, Peleg donated one acre of land to the county for construction of a school. The original Brown School, a wood-frame structure, was built in 1878 and served the area until a modern brick structure replaced during this century.⁶⁵

Peleg Brown continued ranching until his premature death on September 9, 1878. His wife, Elizabeth, kept the ranch until her death in 1918. Peleg had four surviving children at his death — Albert, Laura, Charles, and Nellie. Albert G. (1864-1934) grew up and worked the ranch until he retired and moved to Reno in 1910. Albert married Emma, daughter of Orrin C. Ross, in 1897. Albert and Emma had a large family. Laura (1866-1939) lived on the ranch, married George E. Wilcox, and became executor of her mother's estate in 1922. Under Laura's control the ranch became known as the Wilcox Ranch. The Brown/Wilcox Ranch was placed on the market after Laura's death in 1939. Charles P. (1871-1900), the second son, graduated from the University of Nevada in 1893. By 1900 he was appointed Associate Professor of Mathematics and Mineralogy at the university. Charles died in 1900 from typhoid. Nellie, the youngest child, was born in the mid-1870s. She married Joseph Wheeler and moved to Santa Cruz, California. Louis Damonte purchased the Brown/Wilcox Ranch from Laura Wilcox's estate in 1940.

History of the Louis Damonte Family and Ranch

Louis Damonte (1895-1975) settled in the Truckee Meadows in 1913, coming from Genoa, Italy, in 1909, by way of the San Francisco Bay area. He joined his brother, Jack, who already lived in the Meadows.

⁵⁶Angel, 634.

⁵⁷*Eastern Slope*, November 2, 1867, 2:3. *Nevada State Journal*, June 1, 1872, 3:4.

⁵⁸*Eastern Slope*, April 4, 1868, 3:1.

⁵⁹*Reno Crescent*, May 7, 1870, 2:5 and October 22, 1870, 2:5. *Nevada State Journal*, August 9, 1874, 2:6.

⁶⁰*Nevada State Journal*, September 14, 1872, 3:1, September 21, 1872, 3:2, and November 16, 1872, 3:3. *Reno Crescent*, November 16, 1872, 3:1.

⁶¹*Nevada State Journal*, June 7, 1874, 3:1.

⁶²*Nevada State Journal*, October 10, 1875, 3:3.

⁶³*Nevada State Journal*, April 26, 1876, 3:2.

⁶⁴*Nevada State Journal*, August 6, 1876, 3:2.

⁶⁵Reed, Dorris B. *Talk about the Brown Family*, 1962.

Damonte's daughter, Emily Bianco, described his early days in the Truckee Meadows:

He loved the Truckee Meadows immediately. His first job was with Columba Lavagnino on Wedekind Road in Sparks, Nevada. He learned to ride horses and took care of the Lavagnino livestock. Columba was his mother away from home. She paid him fifty cents a day and would caution him to save his money. Louis was a tireless worker and was soon working for others in the area. Among these were Joe Bisagno who later sold his ranch to George Curti, Sr. In 1912, he went to work for Marco Raffetto and family in Carson City, south of the Nevada State Prison. From 1913 to 1915 his brother, Jack, and his brother-in-law, Jerry Anslemo, sharecropped on the Bridleman Ranch, south of Reno. They all lived in a two-room cabin behind the large home built by A. A. Longley who was the first owner of the beautiful ranch. They had large crops of wheat and potatoes and did very well financially.⁶⁶

Louis married Louise Anselmo Damonte (1896-1955), his brother's widow, in 1916, after his brother's death in 1915. Louis, Louise, and Louise's daughter, Cecile (1914-) resided on the Bridleman Ranch. Louis and Louise had three more children: Emily (1917-), Bennie (1918-), and Gladys (1922-).

The Damontes planned to purchase the Bridleman Ranch in 1918 with savings and a large crop, but Louis fell ill with Spanish influenza and was not expected to live. Mr. Bridleman sold the ranch to the Capurro family. Louis and Louise Damonte leased land in the southern Truckee Meadows wherever they could to grow grain and potatoes. In 1925, they began buying land, beginning with the small Frank Compston Ranch on East Holcomb Lane. They continued leasing additional land and growing potatoes. Emily Bianco describes the process:

They shipped potatoes all winter from the Huffaker or Brown Siding of the V & T [Virginia & Truckee] Railroad. They would sack out of the potato pits, load the horse-drawn wagons and drive to the railroad siding in record time, unload the potatoes into the cars, and go back to the ranch to reload. Each railroad car held over 400 sacks of potatoes.⁶⁷

The Damontes sold the East Holcomb Ranch in 1927 and purchased the larger Boynton Ranch on Boynton Road with a partner, Andrew Lituania. Emily Damonte Bianco describes her parents' life as ranchers:

They (Louis and Andrew) divided the ranch work with Andrew doing all the irrigating and planting of a large garden while Louis hired all the men for haying and did all the plowing and harvesting. They planted potatoes, onions, and hay with beautiful teams of horses. The two partners had sharecrop partners who planted acres of potatoes and onions, sharing fifty-fifty on expenses and profits. On this ranch, Louis

⁶⁶Gardella, Louie A. *LaZappa*, 1990, 45.

⁶⁷Gardella, 46.

and Louise started a long term relationship and working partnership with Gino and Oliva Martini, and with Tony Balardini. They continued to have sharecrop partners throughout the years.

Louis and Andrew leased the Elmer Jones Ranch, east of Boynton Lane, and cut many hundreds of tons of grass hay each year. Louis stacked with buck rakes and large nets or with a derrick. Late in the fall, the Ede family of Sierra Valley, California and Edith Evans of the Dry Lake area north of Reno drive their cattle to the Boynton Ranch and would stay all winter, feeding hay out of the huge stacks. During this time, Louise did all the cooking, canning of hundreds of quarts of fruits and vegetables, and made bread every other day for twenty-two men plus the family during the spring, summer and fall, and then for twelve men who stayed on for room and board plus a small salary during the winter months. The men graded potatoes or onions for shipping to the railroad sidings at Anderson or the Southern Pacific siding at Sparks. They traveled to Galena or the Mount Rose area with large wagons, stayed overnight, and cut wood for the ranch.

Louis learned to write his name in 1928 when he had to sign checks for his hired men. With his wife's help, he learned to read and write Italian and together, they learned English when they received their American citizenship papers. Prior to the time Louis did business with the banks, he had Nick Sorge, the Cordano family, Caesar Ramelli, and Albert Nichols as his personal lenders. He could make long term or short term loans, on a note only, and was able to keep his association and friendship with these families throughout their lives. Louise kept all records, paid all bills, and kept accounts with the sharecrop partners. Everyone met once a year to settle accounts. All bills to the grocer, the blacksmith, and for machinery parts were paid once a year, usually just before the holidays. There was no electricity on the ranch, so a huge icebox was used to keep food from spoiling. Ice was delivered every other day. On Fridays, Louise also bought large trout, weighing over five pounds, from the Pyramid Lake Indian fishermen.⁶⁸

In 1930, Louis Damonte and Andrew Lituania sold part of the ranch to Boeing Aircraft of Seattle for the beginning of the Reno airport. During this time, Gentry Way was extended through the ranch and some land was sold for a private duck hunting club, a gun club, and a restaurant called the Nevada Game Farm. In 1937 Louis and Louise sold their half of the Boynton Ranch and took their children to Italy. Upon their return to Nevada, they purchased the Holcomb, Wright, Burke, and Stevenson Ranches all in the southeast Truckee Meadows. With these ranches came water rights from Washoe Lake Reservoir, Galena and Brown Creeks, White Creek, and the Truckee River from the Steamboat Canal and Irrigation Company, and from the Last Chance Ditch Company.

The Damontes moved to the Holcomb Ranch in 1938 and started a herd of cattle and a dairy herd. Louis Damonte read about Peleg Brown and Ervin Crane's success

⁶⁸Gardella, 46.

with alfalfa and began to reclaim land on the Burke and Stevenson Ranches and refurbish the irrigation systems. Gino Martini and Eugenio Damonte sharecropped the land and planted alfalfa, onions, and potatoes. Louis had a limited water supply but continued reclaiming the land and cut many tons of alfalfa. In 1940, the Damontes purchased the Brown Ranch from the Laura Wilcox estate. They sold the Holcomb Ranch to Wilbur May who called it the Double Diamond Ranch. Between 1940 and 1945, the Damontes purchased the Pizzolo or Olive Calhoun Ranch and part of the Ervin Crane Ranch (James Lyons Ranch). At the height of their holdings, the Damontes owned over 7,000 acres in the Truckee Meadows.

Louis Damonte improved the irrigation system and purchased a large amount of water rights. His work is described below:

In 1945, Louis took over the management of the Steamboat Canal and Irrigation Company and the Last Chance Ditch Company. As Reno started developing, the various ranches were not using the full irrigation water so Louis purchased over 4,000 acre feet in water rights as they became available. He transferred these rights to his large southeast Reno ranches and then purchased land rights-of-way from the Pine Tree and Lazy A Orr Ranches from La Vere Redfield and from Dr. Edna Carver.

With his extensive knowledge of water and with the help of his son-in-law, Bud Bianco, he extended the Steamboat Canal under the Mount Rose Highway, across the lava beds of Steamboat Springs, finally crossing under Highway 395 to Rhodes Road into the Steamboat Creek. The water was divided into the Chandler and the Crane Ditches that serve the ranches below.

During the many years he managed the ditch company and the reservoirs, he made many improvements. He replaced miles of wooden flumes with cement and shored up a tunnel, used his own D8 caterpillar for many things, as the ditch company did not have equipment.

As the service improved, the directors of the ditch company decided to assess the users so that the bills could be paid. Louis bought a skip loader to clean the ditches every year and a jeep for the ditch rider, Nick Gardella, who looked for the trouble spots along 34 miles of ditch. Louis also improved the Galena and Brown Creeks which dump into Little Washoe Lake. These water rights belong to the land through the Orr Ditch Decree but there has been much controversy over the water line in the lake. This is because the tree that had a nail in it for the water line rotted away and none of the users before 1938 could agree where the level of the lake should be. There have been many lawsuits against the water users and against the Orr Ditch Decree, but for the lack of money to carry on litigation, no real decision has ever been reached. Owning the water rights is very necessary for the owners of the ranches. Louis settled many disputes and always tried to be fair.

His big hope was to receive his share of head water at the end of the ditch which was, and still is, very difficult because the ditch traverses through many private properties as it winds its way from the Truckee River at (the) Stateline, Nevada (near Verdi) to Steamboat Springs. C. V. Taylor, an engineer and land surveyor, gave Louis a great compliment when he called him "a self-educated engineer who could look at a piece of land and tell how many acres it contained, how much leveling it needed, and how much water to run without any instruments."⁶⁹

Louis continued to manage the Steamboat Canal and Irrigation Company until 1965 when his son, Bennie, took control.

After Louise Damonte's death in 1955, her son Bennie and his family moved into the Brown house. Louis died in 1975 and left his holdings to his four children. Cecile, the oldest child, married Ben Caramella in 1934; they have three generations of offspring. They own the Reno Disposal Company, Incline Sanitation, and the Carson Sanitation Company. Emily married Bud Bianco in 1938; they have three generations of offspring. The Biancos raised alfalfa, potatoes, and garlic and ran a dairy on part of the ranch. Bennie married Eva Curti (1922-1982) in 1942. Their sons Ben Jr. and Louis and grandsons still raise beef cattle and grow alfalfa hay. Louis lives on the Stevenson Ranch with his family and Ben lives at the Brown headquarters with his family. Gladys, the youngest child of Louis and Louise, married George Curti, Jr. in 1940. They have two sons and grandchildren. They operate the Curti Ranch, cutting hay and corn for their dairy herd. Since 1980, Gene Curti, grandson of Louis Damonte has managed the Steamboat Canal and Irrigation Company.

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⁶⁹Gardella, 48.

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Project Information:

The Nevada Department of Transportation (NDOT) project consists of building a freeway section of US 395 from near Longley Lane in Reno, Nevada south to South Virginia Street near the Brown School north of the Mount Rose Highway. The new roadway will be elevated and run to the east of present-day US 395. Presently there is a six lane surface highway (US 395/South Virginia Street) at the western boundary of the property. An off ramp would bring traffic down to ground level from the proposed section of US 395 and tie into South Virginia Street south of the Brown/Damonte property.

The proposed project will have an adverse effect on the National Register eligible Brown/Damonte Ranch complex as it will "introduce visual and audible elements that are out of character with the property or alter its setting." The primary view of the Brown Ranch House is to the east and the elevated highway will alter the view from the house. Within the view from the Brown Ranch House, the highway will slope from slightly above current ground level to a maximum of 23 feet above existing ground level at South Virginia Street.

BROWN RANCH HOUSE LOOKING EAST

(from front porch perpendicular to house)

Distance to edge of right-of-way	520 feet
Distance to center line	780 feet
Elevation of Roadbed at that point	7 feet above existing ground level

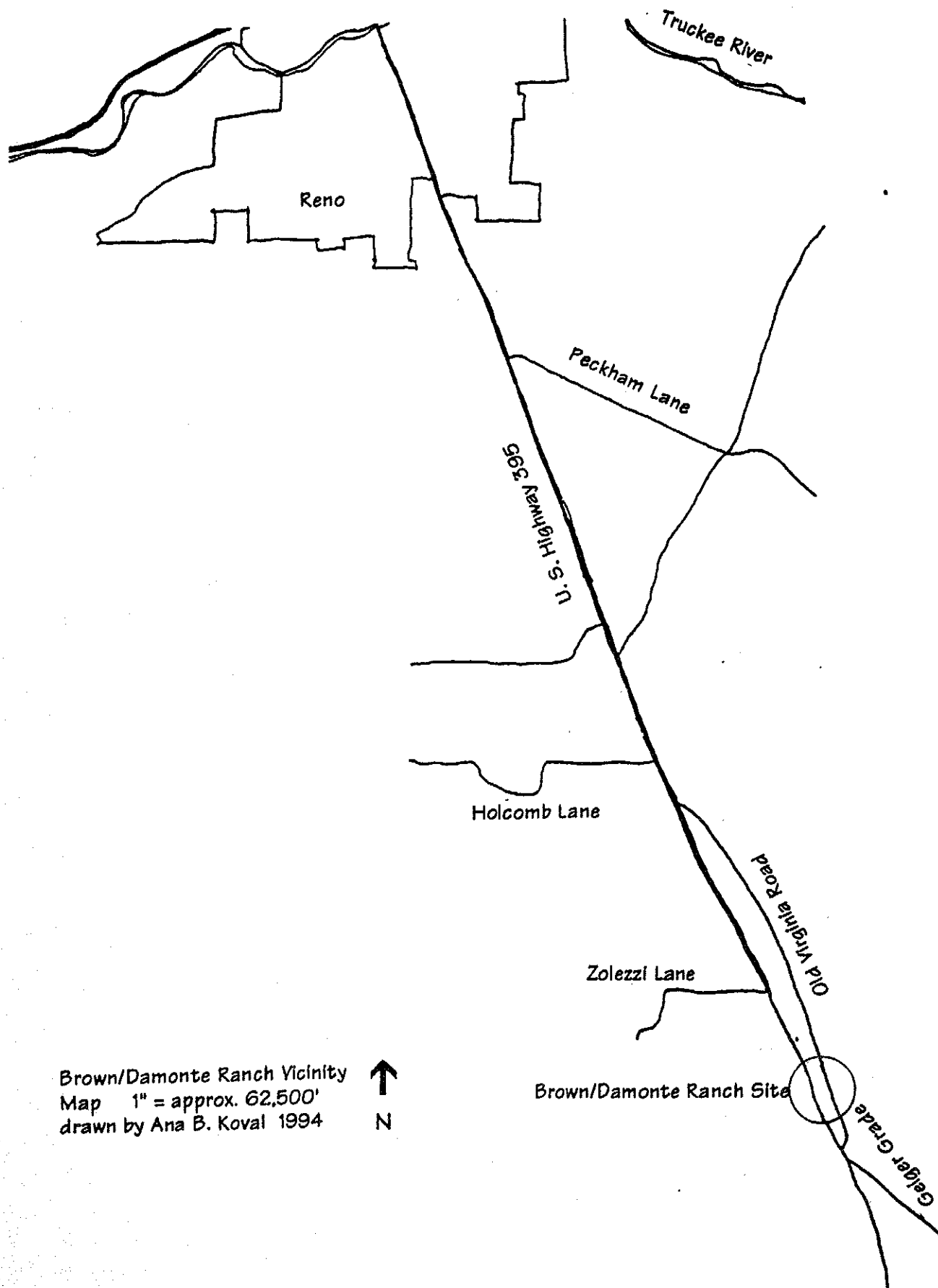
CLOSEST POINT TO BROWN RANCH HOUSE

(looking southeast from front porch)

Distance to edge of right-of-way	400 feet
Distance to center line of elevated highway	650 feet
Elevation of Roadbed at that point	22 feet above existing ground level
Distance to off ramp center line	495 feet
Elevation of Off ramp at that point	27 feet above existing ground level

This document was prepared by: Ana B. Koval, Architectural Historian, and
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June 1994.

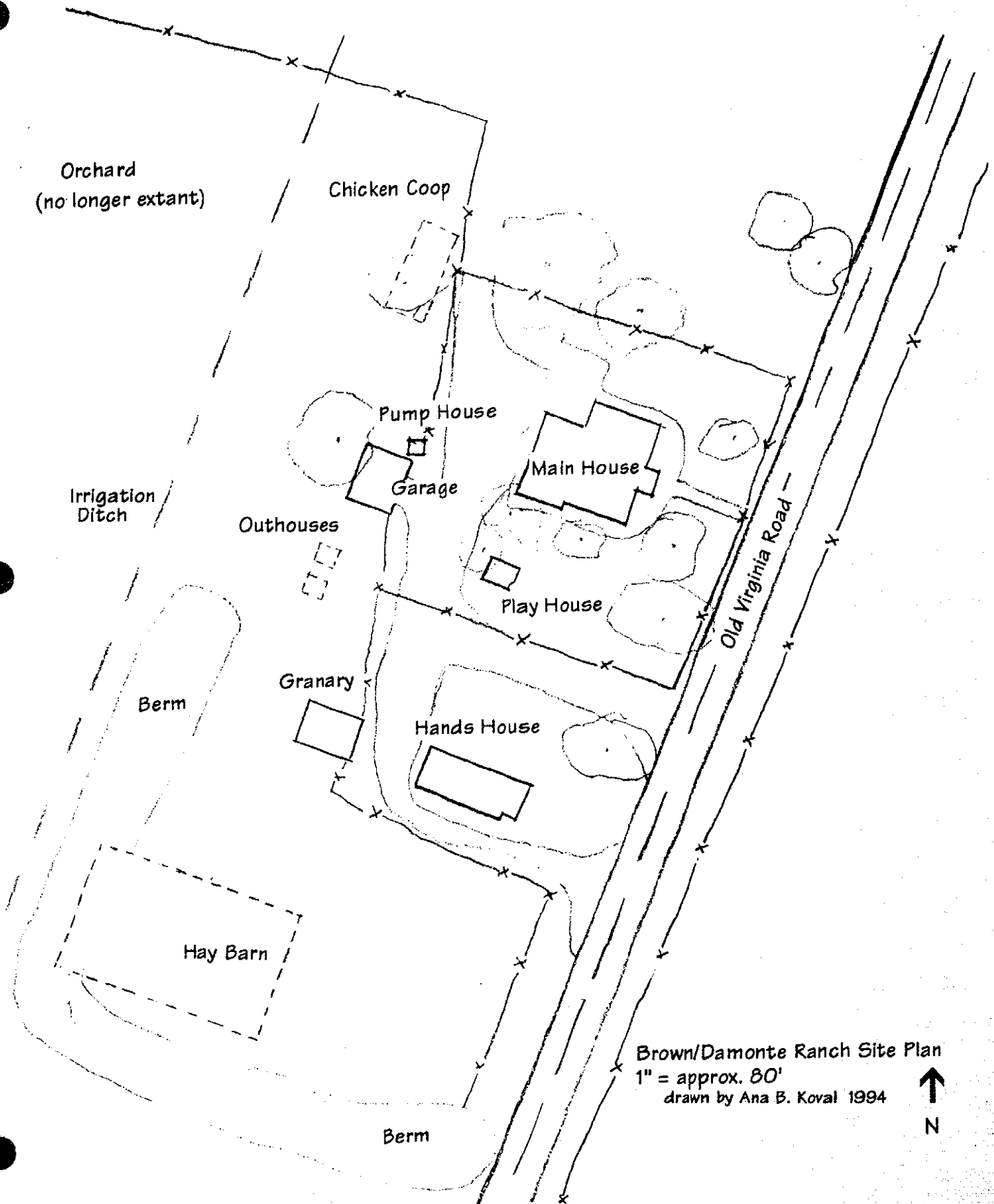
PELEG BROWN RANCH (Louis Damonte Ranch)
HABS No. NV-25 (Page # 27)

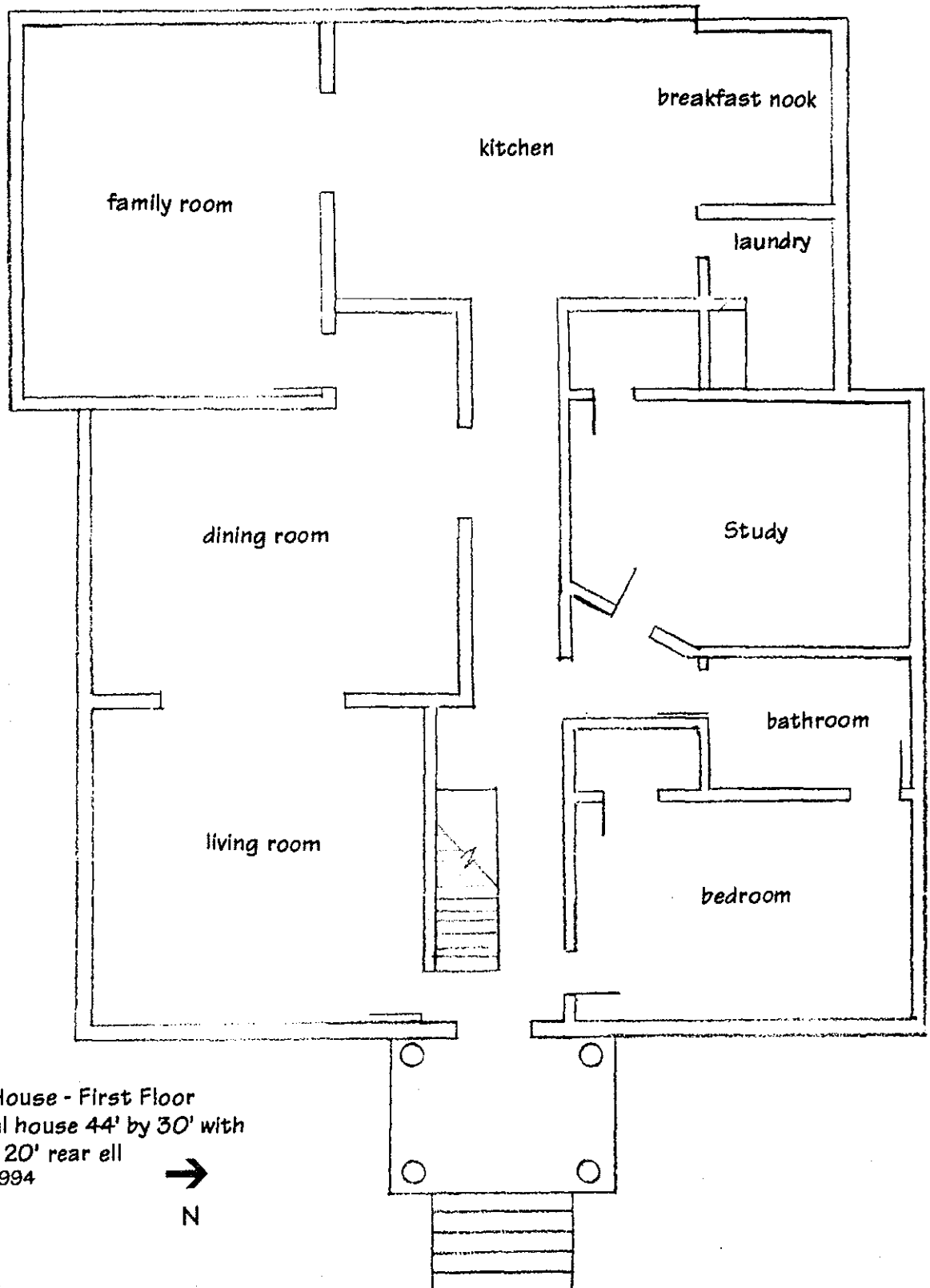


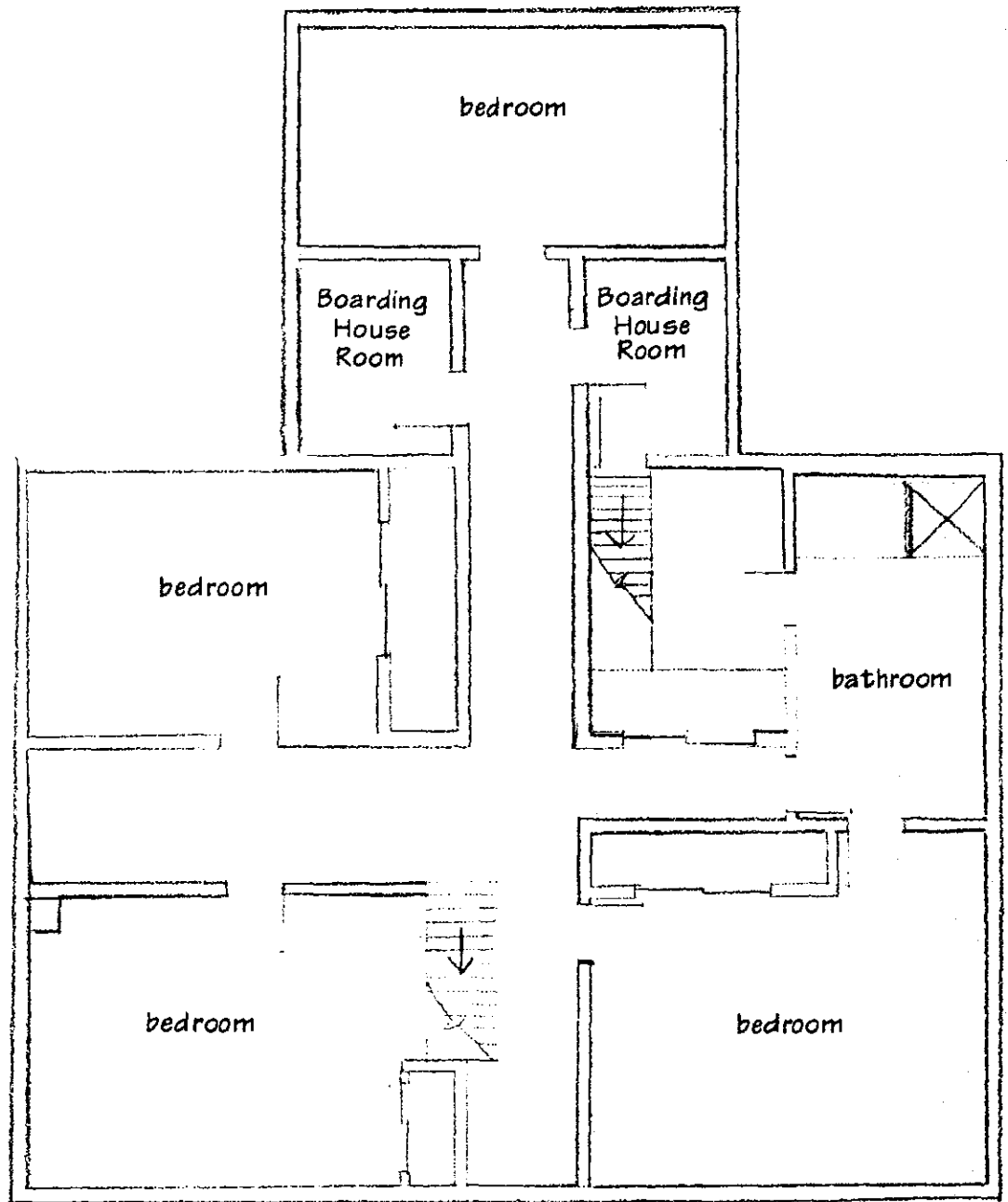
Brown/Damonte Ranch Vicinity
Map 1" = approx. 62,500'
drawn by Ana B. Koval 1994



PELEG BROWN RANCH (Louis Damonte Ranch)
HABS No. NV-25 (Page # 28)



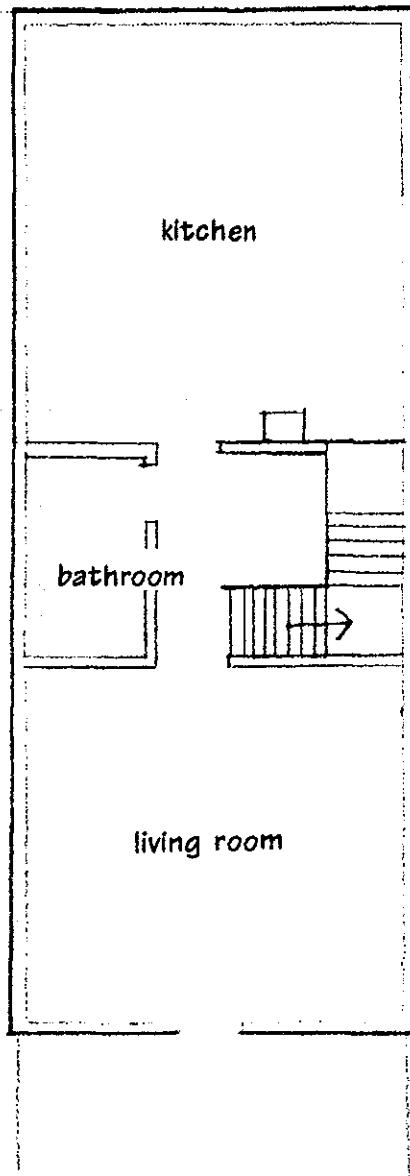




Main House - Second Floor
44' by 30' with 20' by 20' ell

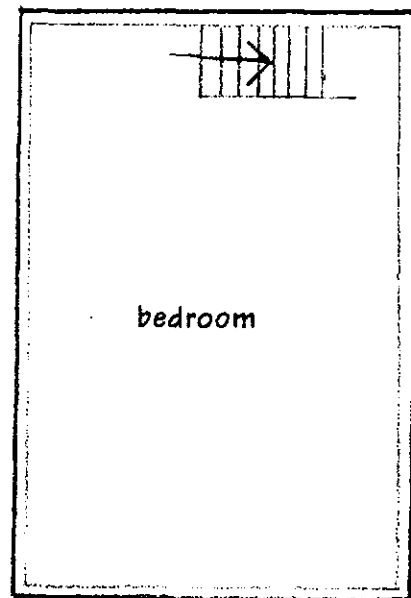
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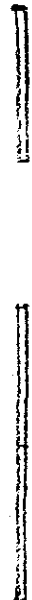
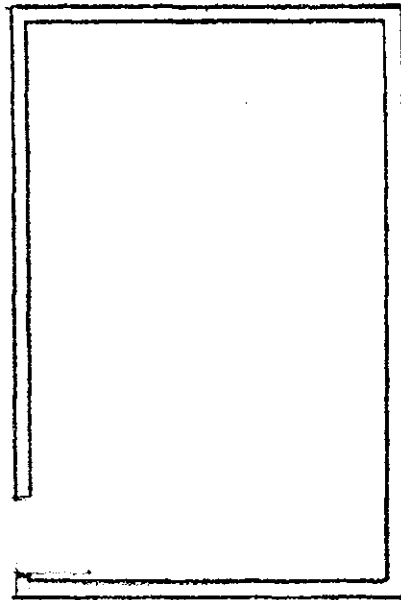
Foreman's House - First Floor
16'6" by 42'8"

drawn by Ana B. Koval 1994



Foreman's House - Second Floor
approximately 16'6" by 28'

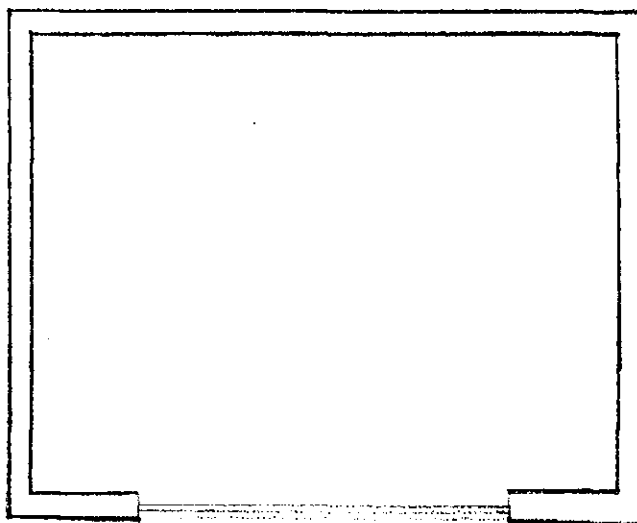
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Granary
26' by 25'



drawn by Ana B. Koval 1994

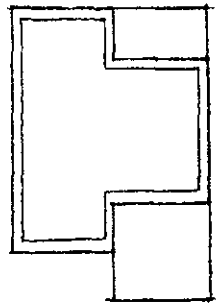


Cold Storage (now Garage)
21' by 26'6"

drawn by Ana B. Koval 1994



N



Play House
8'1" by 10'2"

drawn by Ana B. Koval 1994

