**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR**

**NATIONAL PARK SERVICE**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**

**INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR FEDERAL PROPERTIES

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS

TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

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### 1 NAME

**HISTORIC**

Keys' Ranch, Desert Queen Ranch, (Bill) McHaney Ranch

**AND/OR COMMON**

Bill Keys' Ranch, Keys' Ranch

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### 2 LOCATION

**STREET & NUMBER**

Not applicable

**CITY, TOWN**

Joshua Tree National Monument

**STATE**

California

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### 3 CLASSIFICATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>OWNERSHIP</th>
<th>STATUS</th>
<th>PRESENT USE</th>
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<td>AGRICULTURE</td>
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<td>UNOCCUPIED</td>
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<td>BOTH</td>
<td>WORK IN PROGRESS</td>
<td>COMMERCIAL</td>
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<td>BEING CONSIDERED</td>
<td>YES: UNRESTRICTED</td>
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### 4 AGENCY

**REGIONAL HEADQUARTERS: (If applicable)**

National Park Service - Western Region Office

**STREET & NUMBER**

450 Golden Gate Avenue - Box 36063

**CITY, TOWN**

San Francisco

**STATE**

California (94102)

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### 5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

**COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.**

San Bernardino County Recorder's Office

**STREET & NUMBER**

172 West Third Street

**CITY, TOWN**

San Bernardino

**STATE**

California (92415)

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### 6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

**TITLE**

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**DATE**

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**DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS**

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**CITY, TOWN**

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**STATE**

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<td>ORIGINAL SITE</td>
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**DESCRIPTION**

Keys' Ranch is a complex of buildings, sheds, dams, structures, parts of automobiles, trucks, water tanks, a stamp mill, an arrastra, and pieces and parts of machinery and equipment associated with ranching and mining.

Buildings and structures include: A. Ranch House, a two storey frame shack; B. Museum/Storehouse, a recent stone and frame shed; C. Corrugated sheet-metal shed on wooden frame, badly deteriorated; D. Frame outhouse, corrugated metal roof; E. Outhouse, of recent plywood construction; F. Chicken Coop, wood frame with corrugated metal roof, deteriorated; G. Tool House Shed, recent plywood construction; H. Tack House (Tack Room), made of two wooden cyanide tanks, one placed upside down on top of other, with door cut in; I. Guest House, wood frame on rock foundation, in poor condition; J. School House, wood frame board and batten structure with no foundation, poor condition; K. Outhouse, badly collapsed; L. Arrastra - good condition if kept free of dirt and sand; M. West House (McHarney House), a badly decayed, partially collapsed wood frame board-and-batten shack with corrugated sheet metal roof; N. Adobe Barn with wood frame gable roof covered with corrugated sheet metal, with only one central portion standing, the remainder having collapsed long ago; O. Machine Shed, wood frame building with corrugated sheet metal roof, fair condition except lean-to on south end which is near collapse; P. Ore Loading Hopper, main frame beams broken by overloading, adjacent conveyor belt collapsed and in fragments; Q. Water Tank, metal tank on wooden frame, in good condition; R. Windmill, metal windmill on metal tower, with some blades of wheel missing, others bent; S. Adobe ruin, partial walls of one of two adobe buildings known to have stood east of dry stream which runs through ranch, the second adobe being represented only by almost completely "melted" adobe walls; T. South House, a wood frame structure with gable roof and exterior exposed frame, in fair condition on a good stone foundation; U. Ranch Cemetery, containing four marked graves of Wm. F. Keys, Jr., David Lynn Keys, Elsworth George Keys, and Francis (sic) May Lawton Keys, the fifth and unmarked grave presumably being that of William F. Keys Sr., the marked ones having handmade stone tombstones with turquoise inlay; V. Dam, crudely formed of concrete, with decayed wooden catwalk, the dam itself being in good condition; W. North House, a wood frame board-and-batten residence for a schoolteacher, in decayed condition; X. Dam, a secondary dam upstream from the first one designed to prevent water from escaping the reservoir through a "side door", built of concrete; Y. Outhouse, two room frame structure built of wood, in good condition; Z. Outhouse, a wood frame construction covered with corrugated sheet metal, in badly decayed condition; AA. Concrete dam, a curved miniature of Boulder Dam in good condition.

In addition the ranch contains much machinery, equipment and spare parts from both agricultural and mining industry. There are remains of a small fruit orchard. Keys utilized natural caves in surrounding hills for storage and other purposes, including one which served as his assay office. There is adobe-making machinery, a small ore crushing mill, an antique truck, an antique wagon, and myriad other historic artifacts, trash, junk, and scrap metal.

In later years Keys collected what he construed to be historic material such as old bottles, aboriginal artifacts such as manos and metates, rock and mineral specimens, and whole or fragmentary mining and agricultural machinery and parts for same, it being nearly impossible today to separate material he used legitimately in his ranching and mining interests from that which he collected simply to preserve.

Keys built most of the buildings on his ranch with material scavenged from abandoned mines and shacks elsewhere in the region, almost all were very insubstantially built, most had no foundations and rested on native soil, promoting decay, and practically none were ever painted, exposing the wood to the deteriorating effects of the desert sun and occasional rain, the ever-present desert wind, and wind-blown sand.
Bill Keys' Desert Queen Ranch is of local historical significance as reflecting his career in the categories of agriculture and industry (mining). From the time he settled in the area (1910) and on this specific site (1916), William F. Keys was perhaps the most persistent rancher, farmer, and miner in the region. Others were temporarily more prominent, but none made their home in this high desert country and scratched out a living as did Bill Keys. He ran cattle, raised horses, mules, burros, and goats, cultivated a fruit orchard, built myriad dams at his ranch and elsewhere in the area to collect water from scarce and infrequent rainfall, prospected, mined, and established a lifestyle more unique than typical of other prospectors, miners, ranchers and farmers in the region.

The above statement of significance is based upon the following historical data:

William F. Keys was born on September 27, 1879 at Palisade, Nebraska. As a youth he worked in Colorado as a miner and elsewhere as a ranch hand. In Arizona he worked for the C.W. Wimmel cattle ranch and in the copper mine and smelter at Jerome. About 1900 he worked for the George Briggs cattle ranch near Needles, California, as a cowhand, and later the Conrad-Knight Cattle Company near Kingman, Arizona. He served as a deputy sheriff for Mojave County. Subsequently he turned to prospecting and mining from the Colorado River on the south to Death Valley on the north, developing several profitable claims. He became a friend of Walter "Death Valley Scotty" Scott and participated with Scott in the abortive swindle which culminated in the notorious "Battle of Wingate Pass", luckily escaping imprisonment for that episode. After 1910, Keys settled in the Twenty-nine Palms region, became a friend of the aging Bill McHaney, took care of McHaney in his declining years, and ultimately took over McHaney's Ranch, which McHaney had commenced about 1894 by constructing three adobe buildings. Beginning in 1914 or 1916, Keys commenced constructing the flimsy, wood-frame shacks which would subsequently make up Keys' Desert Queen Ranch, the only surviving original building being a fragment of McHaney's 1894 adobe barn. Keys had also taken over the Desert Queen Mine, from which he derived the name of his ranch. On October 8, 1918, Keys married Francis (sic) M. Lawton, and the couple later had seven children, three of whom died on the ranch and are buried there. Keys meanwhile expanded his original homestead from 80 to 240 acres. To educated his children he built a school and schoolteacher's house on his ranch and with county aid obtained a couple of retired Burma missionaries to teach on the ranch. Keys also became involved in a feud with some unscrupulous individuals in the county which culminated in him killing one Worth Bagley in self defense, although he was found guilty of manslaughter and sent to San Quentin Prison in 1943. San Quentin's library served as his college, giving him late in life much of what education he had. On February 28, 1950, he was paroled, and on July 26, 1956, through the efforts of Earl Stanley Gardner (author of the "Perry Mason" novels), Keys was pardoned. His wife died on January 9, 1963, and Keys died on June 29, 1969 two months short of his 90th birthday.
9 **MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

Gordon Chappell, Robert Cox, Roger Kelly, "Keys' Desert Queen Ranch, Joshua Tree National Monument, Preservation Study," Ms. report prepared by the Historic Preservation Team, National Park Service, Western Region, 1974

10 **GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

**ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY** 160

**UTM REFERENCES**

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**VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION**

The boundary is roughly a square, its corners delineated by the above UTM references.

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11 **FORM PREPARED BY**

**NAME / TITLE**
Gordon Chappell, Regional Historian (Replaces form by F. Ross Holland, 1971)

**ORGANIZATION**
National Park Service - Western Region Office

**STREET & NUMBER**
450 Golden Gate Avenue - Box 36063

**CITY OR TOWN**
San Francisco

**STATE**
California (910.02)

**DATE**
Western Region Office

**CERTIFICATION OF NOMINATION**

**STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER RECOMMENDATION**

YES X NO

**STATE-HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE**

In compliance with Executive Order 11593, I hereby nominate this property to the National Register, certifying that the State Historic Preservation Officer has been allowed 90 days in which to present the nomination to the State Review Board and to evaluate its significance. The evaluated level of significance is National X State Local.

**FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE**

Title
Deputy Assistant Secretary

**FOR NPS USE ONLY**
I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

**DATING**

**DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION**

**ATTTEST:**

**KEEPS OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER**
Keys' Desert Queen Ranch
Joshua Tree National Monument
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
PROPERTY PHOTOGRAPH FORM

FOR NPS USE ONLY
RECEIVED SEP 9 1975
DATE ENTERED OCT 30 1975

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS
TYPE ALL ENTRIES ENCLOSE WITH PHOTOGRAPH

1 NAME
HISTORIC
Keys' Ranch, Desert Queen Ranch, (Bill) McHaney Ranch

AND/OR COMMON
Bill Keys' Ranch, Keys' Ranch

2 LOCATION
CITY. TOWN
Joshua Tree National Monument
VICINITY OF Twentynine Palms
COUNTY San Bernardino
STATE California

3 PHOTO REFERENCE
PHOTO CREDIT National Park Service photo
DATE OF PHOTO December 1971
NEGATIVE FILED AT Joshua Tree National Monument
Twentynine Palms, California

4 IDENTIFICATION
DESCRIBE VIEW, DIRECTION, ETC. IF DISTRICT, GIVE BUILDING NAME & STREET

Building A (right) - Main Ranch House
Building B (left) - "Museum" and storehouse

PHOTO NO 1 of 4
Structure V - one of three dams at ranch headquarters, this one being the largest
1 NAME
HISTORIC  Keys' Ranch, Desert Queen Ranch, (Bill) McHaney Ranch
AND/OR COMMON  Bill Keys' Ranch, Keys' Ranch

2 LOCATION
CITY, TOWN  Joshua Tree National Monument
VICINITY OF  Twentynine Palms
COUNTY  San Bernardino
STATE  California

3 PHOTO REFERENCE
PHOTO CREDIT  National Park Service photo
DATE OF PHOTO  December 1971
NEGATIVE FILED AT  Joshua Tree National Monument
Twentynine Palms, California

4 IDENTIFICATION
DESCRIBE VIEW, DIRECTION, ETC. IF DISTRICT, GIVE BUILDING NAME & STREET

Building N - remains of partially collapsed 1894 adobe barn erected by Wm. McHaney
NAME

HISTORIC
Keys' Ranch, Desert Queen Ranch, (Bill) McHaney Ranch

AND/OR COMMON
Bill Keys' Ranch, Keys' Ranch

LOCATION

CITY, TOWN
Joshua Tree National Monument

VICINITY OF
Twentynine Palms

COUNTY
San Bernardino

STATE
California

PHOTO REFERENCE

PHOTO CREDIT
National Park Service photo

DATE OF PHOTO
December 1971

NEGATIVE FILED AT
Joshua Tree National Monument
Twentynine Palms, California

IDENTIFICATION

DESCRIBE VIEW, DIRECTION, ETC. IF DISTRICT, GIVE BUILDING NAME & STREET

Building I, "Guest House", with old wagons and miscellaneous material in foreground