

Building Tours

The Sheep Shearing Barn

Sheep have been an important part in the history of Antelope Island since the settlement of Garr Ranch. In the 1850s, more than 100 sheep were worked at the ranch. The sheep were sheared once a year by ranch hands.

This building was built in the 1920s by John Dooley, the owner of the Island Improvement Company. It was the first mechanized (meaning the ranch hands no longer had to shear the sheep by hand) shearing barn west of Mississippi River. This cut the time of shearing from half an hour to just about 10 minutes.

A large engine tuned a belt that was attached to the shaft you see above the platform, which in turn powered the ten shearing stations.

Because of the improved efficiency of the shearing machinery, during the 1930s the number of sheep on the island numbered more than 10,000. Antelope Island was one of three ranches owned by John Dooley. The sheep were brought here during the spring, where they would lamb. After lambing, the sheep were gathered and brought to the ranch. They were brought onto the shearing platform and into the holding pens. The person shearing them would set them on the rear ends, shear off their wool and then send the shorn sheep through the trap door, down the slides and out into the counting pens behind the barn.

The fleece or wool from off the sheep would then be placed on a conveyer belt and transported to the end of the barn where it was bagged and stored, to be later purchased by wool buyers.

By the 1950s the wool market had deteriorated and the ranch shifted its focus primarily to cattle.

Activity

After talking to the students about the shearing barn and its history, encourage them to explore the shearing stations and imagine what life would have been like if they were a sheep rancher on the island. Have the students go around to the counting pens and gather the gunnysacks at the bottom of the slides. Allow the students to place the bags on the slides and to pull the rope to see how the sheep would leave the barn. Please **Do Not Allow The Students To Go Down The Slides!**

The Ranch House

Because it was continuously lived in and operated from 1848 – 1981, the overall theme or message of the Garr Ranch is “Change Through Time”. Much of the change can be seen here in the Ranch House.

Living Room (south end of the house)

Built in 1848, the living room is the first and oldest section of the house. The Garr family used this room to fill their social needs. The whole family would spend time here. It is set up much as it would have been like in the 1860s.

South Living Room Bedroom

The furniture in this room is representative of the 1860s. Because of Utah’s isolation from the rest of the country, furniture like this was produced locally. Take a look at the bed. During the time the Garr family lived here, bed mattresses were made of straw (straw tick) and sat on rope springs fastened tightly to the frame. The ropes would have to be tightened on a regular basis, or the straw tick would sag, and the bed bugs would bite. (“Sleep tight, don’t let the bed bugs bite”)

North Living Room Bedroom

In the 1890s, Utah was no longer an area of isolation. The railroad was now here, and with it came the availability of having many items, including mass – produced furniture, shipped by train. This iron bed, for example, would have been too heavy to come to Utah before the use of the railroad. Take a look at the bed, and compare it with the pioneer bed in the first room.

Dining Room

During the 1940s, the dining room was the center of social activity. During the busy months, more than a dozen ranch hands sat at a table like this one. The ranch foreman’s wife was responsible for feeding the ranch hands three meals a day. Following dinner, ranch hands and family alike would gather here to play games and listen to the battery powered radio bringing news from around the world.

Dining Room Bedroom

This room served as a bedroom for several young boys throughout the years. During the 1940s, the ranch foreman’s son Max, lived here. Unlike children living in the city, Max worked long days with the other ranch hands, earning a dollar a day. Take a look at this bed and compare it to the first two beds.

Kitchen

The kitchen is furnished as it might have appeared in the 1970s. The kitchen has all the amenities you would find in your home; hot running water, gas, electricity

and a few appliances (Electricity and water were introduced in the 1950s). During the 1970s, when the Anschutz Land and Cattle Company owned the ranch, ranching operations had decreased. Instead of many ranch hands eating and playing games at the table, it was often just the ranch foreman and his family.

Activity

Throughout this tour, have the students notice the differences between the rooms and how they are furnished (representing several different time periods). Have them imagine living here during those times without the modern conveniences they have now.

Lean-to Exhibit/Museum

This building, which is now used as the Museum or Orientation Center, is a reconstruction of the old machine shop that was once here. That building was destroyed by heavy snow in 1983.

Moving through the museum you will pass through areas representing various time periods, showing the people and the materials they had available to them during those times. Each of the different time periods uses materials made from the building products of that era.

Native Americans:

Building material: Stone

Prior to the ranch history, Native Americans used the island as a place to hunt and gather food. A few artifacts have been found on this and surrounding islands dating back several thousand years.

Pioneer Era: 1848-1875

Building material: Adobe Brick

In 1848, Brigham Young sent Fielding Garr to the island to establish a ranch for the LDS Church. He built the Ranch House and several of the other buildings.

Corporate Era: 1875-1911

Building material: Wood

In 1875 the LDS Church relinquished their claim on the island and it was opened up to settlement as part of the Homestead Act. Each island settler was allowed 160 acres of the island. John Dooley and Fredrick Myers slowly acquired all of the different sections of the island until his company, the Island Improvement Company, owned the entire island.

Sheep Era: 1911-1951

Building material: Corrugated Tin

Operation of the Island Improvement Company shifted from cattle to sheep. During this time several additions were made to the Ranch: the corrals, silo and the sheep shearing barn were added.

Modern Era: 1941-1981

Building material: Cinder Block

Automobiles became more common during this time and machines slowly took over the strenuous work previously done with horses. The sheep industry slowly waned and eventually converted back to cattle. Different companies owned the ranch until the State of Utah purchased it in 1981.

Activity

As you walk through the museum, invite the students to touch and pick things up. Please encourage them to be gentle with the items, and put them back where they found them. Have the students look for evidence of the Ranch Theme: "Change Through Time".

Please remember there are other visitors touring the site. Quiet voices are appreciated.