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## Orson B. Adams Farmstead Existing Conditions Survey

Mandie Zollinger  
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**ORSON B. ADAMS FARMSTEAD  
EXISTING CONDITIONS SURVEY**

by

**Mandie Zollinger**

**Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree**

of

**DEPARTMENT HONORS**

in

**Landscape Architecture and Environmental Planning**

**Approved:**

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**Thesis/Project Advisor**

**Michael Timmons**

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**Director of Honors Program**

**Dr. David Lancy**

**UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY  
Logan, UT**

**2005**

**ORSON B. ADAMS FARMSTEAD  
EXISTING CONDITIONS SURVEY**



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Landscape Architecture and Environmental Planning  
Thesis Advisor: Professor Michael Timmons

May 3, 2005

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## PROJECT OVERVIEW

The project study area is on the site of the former Harrisburg Settlement, in Central Washington County, Utah between the towns of Leeds and St. George, Utah, and west of Interstate 15. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has recently (2001) acquired a 200 acre parcel of the project site. The landscape contains thousands of years of history in a small area, including features from the prehistoric cultures of the Virgin Anasazi and Southern Paiute, settlement of the Mormon pioneers, mining industry, and remnants of a 1950's Hollywood movie set. All of this lies at the southeastern tip of the Pine Valley Mountains near several popular recreation areas. A road through the site leads to the Red Cliffs Campground, great spots for picnicking, hiking trailheads, biking and equestrian trails, and natural pools for swimming along Quail Creek. The site is also adjacent to the Red Cliffs Desert Reserve, which is part of a Habitat Conservation Plan that protects habitat for the threatened Mojave Desert tortoise.

In order to preserve the history and culture of the site, the BLM is overseeing the completion of a Historic American Landscape Survey (HALS). This thesis project inventoried the existing conditions of the site that will be included as part of the HALS. In addition to the written documentation, two complete site maps of the layout and existing conditions were prepared utilizing GPS technology (see Appendices b and c).

HALS can be submitted at three different levels, Level I Exhaustive, Level II Thorough, and Level III Limited. The project area has been divided into five areas (see Figure 1.1) with two levels of recordation. Area one, which includes the Orson Adams home, will be a level II while the other areas are level III. This document divides the existing conditions information according to these two levels.



**Figure 1.1 - Project Area Divisions**

## I. EXISTING CONDITIONS – ORSON ADAMS SITE (AREA 1)

### A. Existing Conditions Narrative

To assist in describing the area, it has been divided into four areas of key landscape features: the lower north field, the lower south field, terraces, and the upper field (See Appendix B, Site Layout map). The site has been uninhabited since 1947, giving room for native and invasive species to move into each of the four areas. The lower north field and the lower south field are at a lower elevation than the Orson Adam's house and currently show the greatest amount of disturbance by invasive plant species. There exists a serene landscape character causing a viewer to reflect on the history that exists in this landscape.

Because the site has been unoccupied for over 50 years, the only outside influences that have impacted its current condition are the weather and vandalism. Remains of glass bottles, tin cans, fence posts, and barbed wire can be found throughout the site, giving testament to former occupation.

### B. Landscape Features

#### 1. Spatial Organization

The Orson Adam's property occupies a bench and adjacent bottom-lands of Quail Creek. The home itself is on the bluff, where it overlooks the rest of the farmstead and the former town-site of Harrisburg beyond. Silver Reef lies to the northeast, with the Red Cliffs running east-west to the north of the site, and a low ridge defines the west edge of the property.

The home is located near the northern end of the bench, which enlarges as it extends to the south to form the upper field. This relatively flat field slopes gently from west to east. There is a small rise on the west edge of the field where the irrigation ditch that once watered the field runs. The east side of the field is supported by a rock retaining wall running along the top of the bluff. The west side is defined by a freestanding rock wall, the road beyond it, and a steeply rising ridge on the west side of the road. The north and south sides are unbounded.

Below the upper field, and separated from it by the retaining wall and bench, is the lower south field. It is further defined by Cottonwood trees along Quail Creek on the east side. This gives the field an enclosed sense of space visually detached from the rest of the Adams property.

Below the northwest end of the main terrace landform, immediately behind the house, the slope has been terraced with six parallel stone retaining walls, forming an edge stepping down to the lower north field. These five man-made terraces generally run northwest-southeast along the slope.

The lower north field at the bottom of the terraces is relatively flat, sloping gently toward Quail Creek along its eastern side. The east side of the field adjacent to the bank of Quail Creek is partially built-up by a short rock retaining wall and is fully lined by Cottonwood trees. These landscape features provide a sense of enclosure while open to the sky. This field has access to a trail that goes up to the area behind the Adams house along with access along the creek to the lower south field.

## 2. Land Use

The property was originally used as a farm with a variety of crops, fruit trees, and animals. Information has been combined from various sources to best describe the practices of the time that both Orson Adams and William Emett occupied the land. Both owners farmed the land, growing a variety of crops. Vaunda Emett, William's daughter-in-law, remembers that Williams had grown melons, cantaloupe, and grapes, and sold them at a fruit stand next to the highway.

The lower north field is believed to have been an agricultural field, though it is possible that it may have been used as a pasture for animals. According to Vernon Parent, the Utah State University (USU) Agriculture Extension Agent for Washington County, this field was probably the forage crop for animals because of its orientation with Quail Creek, a higher water table, the gradual slope toward the creek, and access to the lower south field. Agriculture also causes a high degree of disturbance to a landscape, supported by the existence of invasive plant species in this field.

The lower south field is where Parent believes the cattle, horses, or other animals were kept. The animals may have been moved to and from the upper bench by the track cut on the slope east of the house. There is not as much evidence of disturbance with invasive plant species as there is in the lower north field, so it may have been in use more recently as there has not been time for species to invade.

According to Idonna Emett, daughter of William Emett, grapes were grown both in the terraces and in the area south of the house. The terraces are now filled with soil and are devoid of vegetation, other than invasive forbs and grasses.

The upper field was an agricultural field that may have grown different crops during the different ownership periods. Idonna mentioned that William Emett practiced crop rotation in this area. This field is presently covered with invasive grasses and forbs.

## 3. Topography

The lower north field and lower south fields are generally flat lending themselves to agricultural purposes. Both slope gently toward Quail Creek. The lower north



field has a 5 % slope from the bank of the creek to the base of the terrace walls. The top of the terrace walls is sixteen feet above the bottom. The slope increases to about 30% from the top of the terraces to the irrigation ditch, then a 9% slope to the fence. The topography of the site is partially the result of human manipulation for creating irrigable farmland, as evidenced by the retaining walls used to build-up the lower side of fields in order to further level them.

The topography of the southern half of the property is comparable to that of the northern; though it is lower in elevation. There is a steep hill instead of terraces at the edge of the field and the gently sloping upper field that lies at the top of the hill. The slope from the bank of the creek to the base of the hill is approximately 10%. The slope of the upper field from the top of the hill to the edge of the irrigation ditch is 6%.

#### 4. Vegetation

The only overstory trees growing on the site are the riparian species (primarily Cottonwood) along Quail Creek. Several lower Mesquite and Cottonwood trees are growing throughout the site, along with a few exotic species. Otherwise, the farmstead is almost devoid of live trees excepting a few on the west edge of the lower north field, two Locust trees near the house, and a few Pepper trees. The southeast slope along the base of the upper field is covered with several large dead fallen trees.

The lower north field is now completely full of Rubber Rabbitbrush with Cottonwood trees and other riparian vegetation along Quail Creek. The abundance and success of Rabbitbrush in this area are indicators of a high water table that the plants have tapped into (see Figure 2.1). North of the field, near the flume bridge that passes over the wash, a nut tree is growing in the wash, most likely Pistachio according to Rick Heflebower, the USU Horticulture Extension Agent. Heflebower also identified a Pear tree on the west edge of the field near a cluster of Cottonwood and Mesquite trees.



Figure 2.1 – Lower North Field

The lower south field contains a few patches of Arrow Weed and Saltbrush, but is mostly barren, possibly indicative of a lower water table or more recent grazing activity. The field is bordered by Quail Creek and its riparian plant community on the east edge. This riparian plant community is quite old and is in great need of rehabilitation. Many of the trees have been wrapped with wire mesh for protection, possibly from beavers or other animals, and are growing into the wire.

It is strongly recommended that additional work be carried out to protect and re-vegetate the area.

The terraces are now void of vegetation with the exception of invasive grasses and forbs, with no sign of the grape vines that once grew there. There is a dead tree still standing in the middle of the terraces which is difficult to identify. Rick Heflebower believes that it is an Apricot tree because of its thorn like branches, characteristic of non-cultivated Apricot trees. Idonna Emmett mentioned that there used to be a couple of Pear trees on the terraces and there were Apricot and Peach trees on the upper field.

There is only speculation as to what was grown on the upper field during Orson Adam's time. Parent believes it may have been a small grain crop such as wheat, oat, or barley because that was highly used and in demand at the time. Idonna Emmett remembers corn, melons, and cantaloupe grown in this area during William Emmett's time. Vaunda Emmett more specifically remembers the corn grown in the west part of the field just below the ditch. The upper fields around the house are now mostly covered in grasses and small forbs scattered with Creosote. There is a community of dead Saltbrush to the northeast, most likely victims of the recent drought. There are 1 dead standing and 3 live Pepper trees at the south end of the field (see Figure 2.2), and one large dead Cottonwood tree on the northeast side at the top of the retaining wall that has fallen down the hill(see Figure 2.3).



Figure 2.2 – Pepper Trees



Figure 2.3 – Dead Cottonwood Tree

## 5. Circulation

The asphalt road that currently exists is approximately 19' wide and follows the route of the original access road, though it has been widened since the Orson Adam's period. This road leads to the Red Cliffs Campground and Recreation Area and is currently the only access road to the property from Harrisburg.

There is also evidence of two unused dirt roads on the Adams Property. One leads from behind the Adams house to the banks of Quail Creek and, as mentioned earlier, may have been an access route for animals or a wagon. Another road at the southern end of the property runs diagonally northeast to southwest from the upper field to about halfway up the hill west of the site. Use

of this road is undetermined, but it was likely used to access livestock kept in the lower south pasture.

There is no readily available access from the Adams property to the adjacent land across the creek, though there have been boards set up for crossing the creek. When the creek is too high to cross, the best way to cross the river is by following the asphalt road and driving through the creek on a concrete ford.

## 6. Water

The irrigation ditch has not been used for many years, but can still be seen on the property (see Figure 2.4) and followed to its source further up Quail Creek. A dam and small reservoir provided water for the ditch and it wound through the riparian plant community until it entered a flume on the north edge of the farm. The flume currently in place is a metal culvert held up by metal tubes on concrete bases (see Figure 2.5). The original flume was made of wood and was replaced sometime after William Emmett's death in the 1944. The ditch follows the retaining wall and edge of the west slope until it nears the house at the terraces. It then flows around the house to the east, then gradually winds its way back to the west side of the upper field. It eventually fades away at the southern edge of the property.



Figure 2.4 - Irrigation Ditch



Figure 2.5 - Metal Flume

There was no evidence found of water takeouts along the ditch, but Idonna Emmett mentioned that water was diverted from the main ditch by sticking boards in and causing it to overflow. Smaller ditches or furrows then directed the water through the garden or agriculture field. During a site visit in March of 2005, linear stripes of greener and taller grasses could be seen at 5' intervals running perpendicular to the irrigation ditch (see Figure 2.6). These are likely "fossil" traces of smaller distribution furrows. There is evidence of four water takeouts at the east edge of the upper field, which is also the top of the retaining wall.



**Figure 2.6 – Irrigation Furrows**



**Figure 2.7 - Quail Creek**

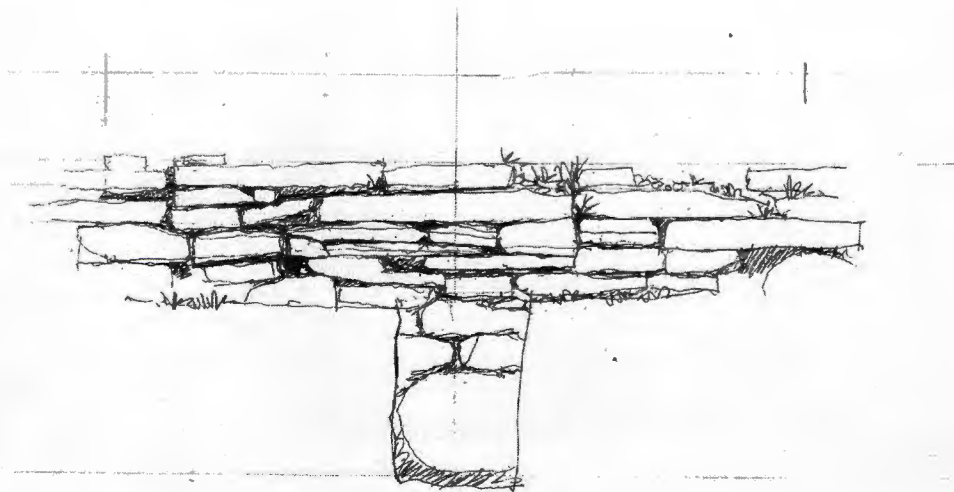
Quail Creek may be the most important feature of the site, as it is the reason that it stayed occupied for so long (see Figure 2.7). Heavy rainfall has recently caused the creek to change its course in a few places and rising water levels have also impacted the plant community. There is evidence of two dry creek beds and undercut banks showing how the creek has evolved over the years. This season (2005) brought a 100-year flood to Washington County, so the recent changes in the creek may be some of the most dramatic since Orson Adams time.

## 7. Buildings and Structures

The Orson Adams home is the only standing structure on the site and is currently undergoing restoration. The home was built at the top of a bluff overlooking Quail Creek, the town of Harrisburg, the Red Cliffs, and Silver Reef. Vandalism of the home is apparent by graffiti covering the inside walls. Pieces of wood shingles and tin can lids formerly used as roof flashing and patching are scattered throughout the site. A detailed account of the home can be found in the *Historic Structure Condition Assessment*, by S. Kardas and E. Larrabee.

Footing remains have been found for a small building in front of the house along with evidence of an outhouse behind the house.

The terrace walls are between two and three feet tall, one foot thick, are spaced about six feet apart, and run a length of about 260'. Figures 2.8 and 2.9 show detailed sketches of the terrace walls.

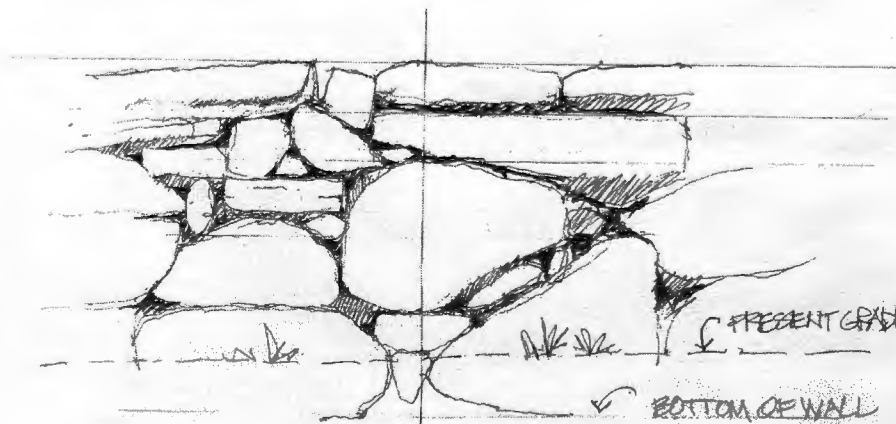


WALL #4

ELEVATION 12' EAST OF TRANSECT

1'-0" 1'-0"

TOP 15" THIN BEDDED RED SANDSTONE

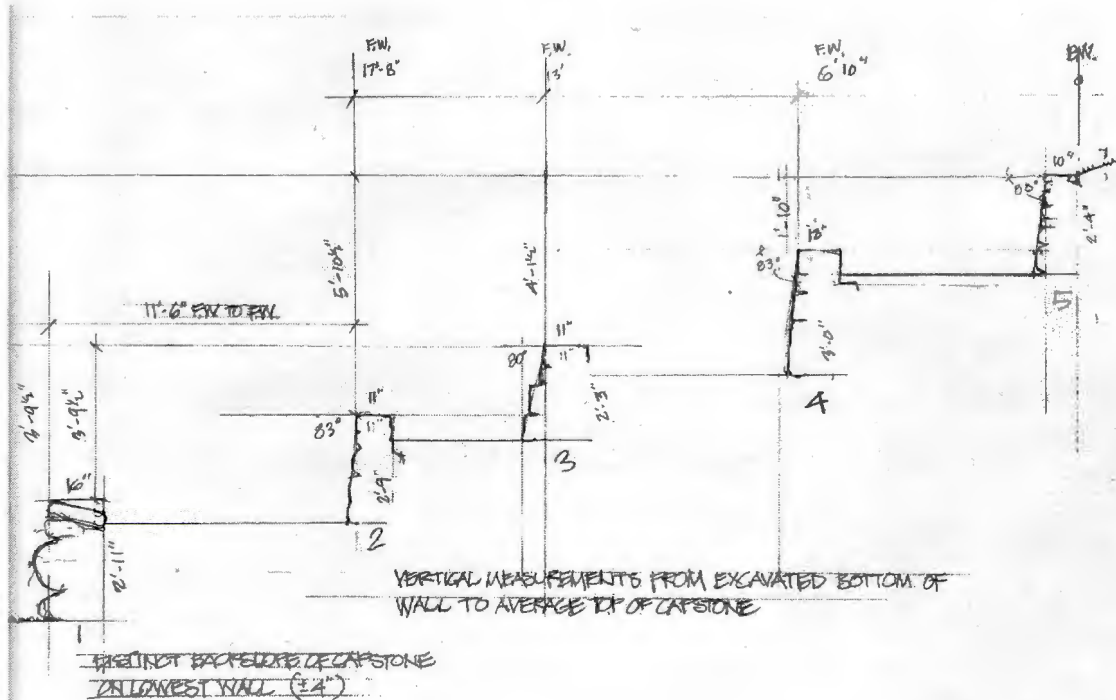


WALL #1 3-16-05

AT TRANSECT

Figure 2.8 - Sketch of Terrace Walls





### FIELD NOTES: TERRACE TRANSECT

3-15-05

WALL 1: MIX OF SANDSTONE, BOTH RED + WHITE; ROUNDED + FLAT; SOME WHITE STONE W/ BLACK FLECKS; CORRELICHERA BOULDERS AS LARGE AS 18" x 32"

3/6 = 1-0"

WALLS 2-5: TYPICALLY LARGER BOULDERS FORM BOTTOM COURSE UPPER COURSES ARE FLATTER SANDSTONE

SOIL BETWEEN WALLS IS RED SANDY LOAM; W/ VERY FEW ROCKS TO DEPTH EXCAVATED

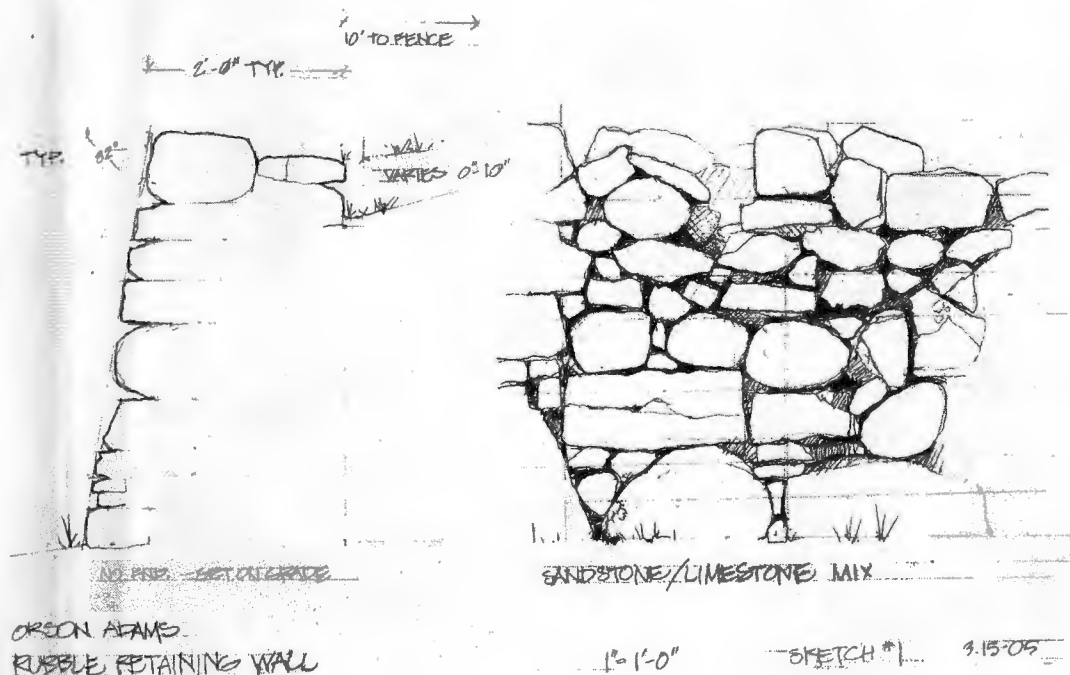
EXCAVATION ABOVE WALL #5 YIELDED NUMEROUS ROCKS, FROM 1" TO 6" DIMENSION, SANDSTONE, APPEAR TO BE NATIVE, IN-SITU, INDICATING NON-CULTIVATED LAND.

Figure 2.9 - Sketch of Terrace Transect

There is a rock retaining wall that runs along the west edge of the property (see Figure 2.10), stopping before it reaches the Adam's house, and continuing again on the other side of the house. It is approximately two feet wide and is made of a mix of sandstone rocks. See Figure 2.11 for a detailed sketch of this wall.



Figure 2.10 - Rock Retaining Wall



**Figure 2.11 – Sketch of Rock Retaining Wall**

There is another rock retaining wall on the southeast edge of the lower north field. This wall is hidden by vegetation and is very discreet. It is only about 12-18” tall and is not in good condition.

A third retaining wall is along the southwest edge of the upper field. There are a few places where the wall has fallen out and these appear to be water takeouts for the adjacent irrigated field at one time. This wall varies from two to four feet tall and is in fair condition. The wall has been destroyed in the area where the Cottonwood tree has fallen.

## 8. Small-scale Elements

There are broken wooden fence posts and barbed wire fence remains scattered throughout the entire site. The style of barbed wire varies because of the different time periods, though more recent versions are most common. Most of the fence post and barbed wire remains have been included as barbed wire fences on the existing conditions map, though they are not all still standing.

A pile of crudely made metal screws and bolts (see Figure 2.12) was found on the site at the southern end of the upper field. There is only speculation as to their creation and placement.

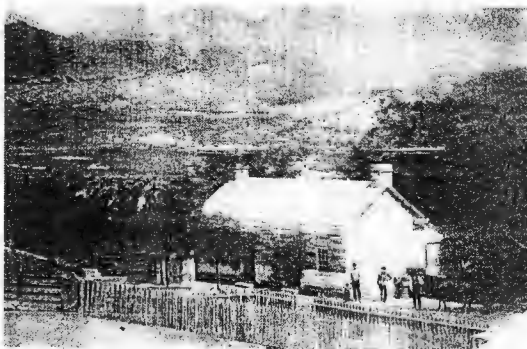


**Figure 2.12 - Metal Screws**

## 9. Views and Vistas

There are beautiful views both to and from the Adams property. The view of Silver Reef and the Red Cliffs is virtually unchanged since the days of Orson Adams. The placement of the home may have been to take advantage of this view, but there is no record of their intentions. There would also have been a good view of the rest of the Harrisburg town from the Adams property. Views from atop the ridge west of the home provide a more broad range of vision and offer spectacular panoramic views. Views to the south toward old Harrisburg are now disrupted by Interstate 15 and the Harrisburg trailer park.

There are no existing vistas on the site, though it is possible that trees were cleared or planted at an earlier time to frame or create a range of vision. There is one historic photo of the home with Orson Adams standing in front of it (see Figure 2.13), which has been recreated as part of the archive photo collection. A digital photo was also taken for inclusion in this report (see Figure 2.14). Comparing the two photos shows how the site has changed over time. Vegetation and land use have been significantly altered over time, while the Red Cliffs in the background remain virtually unchanged.



**Figure 2.13 - Historic Photo of Adams Home**



**Figure 2.14 – Orson Adams Home**



C. Dates of Site Visits

February 25-26, 2005

March 13-19, 2005

D. Is National Register or National Historic Landmark documentation completed? Y or N; if yes, describe the criterion the landscape meets

No.

## II. EXISTING CONDITIONS – ADJACENT BLM PROPERTY (AREAS 2-5)

### A. Existing Conditions Narrative

The remaining property within the study area has long been abandoned, but traces of old Harrisburg can still be found throughout the site, including Harrisburg ditch, other irrigation ditches, house foundations, rock wall remnants, mounds, and piles of rocks. The best preserved feature is the ruin of the McMullin home. Part of the south wall is still standing and the remains of a smokehouse and the perimeter walls are semi-intact (see Figure 3.1).



Figure 3.1 - McMullin Home

The remains of an old movie set, *They Came to Cordura*, starring Gary Cooper and Rita Hayworth, can also be found on this site. Much of the landscape character can be seen in the movie, filmed in 1958, and there is one scene in which the Orson Adams home can be seen.

Evidence of the Silver Reef mining industry can also be found on the site, including rock cairns, mining entrances, and remnants of a dwelling. There is ample evidence that Indians once inhabited the area and some of their ruins can be found north of Silver Reef, but none have been found on the BLM property.

### B. Landscape Features

#### 1. Spatial Organization

Silver Reef is part of a geologic phenomenon as it is the only place in the world that silver has been found in common sandstone and in an area that is essentially devoid of any mineral deposits. It rises above less resisting red shale running in an east-west direction, bordering the north edge of the study area, with a large hill to the southeast, Interstate 15 at the south edge, and Quail Creek and the Orson B. Adams property to the west. The terrain is fairly level with a creek running northeast to southwest connecting with Quail Creek. The creek and other small washes throughout the area create depressions in the landscape. A rock wall that varies in height, average three feet, can be followed along the ridge of Silver Reef and around the northern half of the property.

The McMullin house is at the southern end of the area. The site is fairly flat and a rock wall delineates the boundary of the property. The BLM does not currently own this part of old Harrisburg, but they are in the process of acquiring it. From this site there is a great view of Silver Reef and the Red Cliffs to the north.

Various rock alignments exist throughout the site, delineating possible property boundaries.

The remains of the old movie set are in the middle of this area, with the entrance of the "city" oriented to the southwest. A significant amount of rubble from the set can be found on the other side of the rock wall behind the set, running southeast to northwest.

The rock cairns, mining entrances, and the fort are all found along the top ridge of Silver Reef. Views from these points overlook all of old Harrisburg to the south.

## 2. Land Use

The land is currently unused, though many people can be found walking around the area and there is evidence of ATV use and horse riding. Most of the land was used as agricultural fields and is now covered with native and invasive plant species.

## 3. Topography

Silver Reef is the highest feature in the area to the point where it meets Quail Creek and ends. The creek in the middle runs through a culvert which gets larger as it nears Quail Creek.

## 4. Vegetation

There is a minimal amount of vegetation in the area, with most of it around the creek, near the springs at the base of Silver Reef, and in the southern area where there was greater agricultural disturbance.

The riparian corridor along Quail Creek borders the west side of Areas 4 and 5. See Feature 4 of the previous section for more information on this riparian corridor. There is also a significant amount of riparian vegetation around the springs and seepage at the base of Silver Reef. The plants appear to be fairly young, but more research is needed on the species of vegetation currently inhabiting this area and the rest of the site.

## 5. Circulation

Circulation through the landscape is by pedestrians; no vehicles are currently allowed on the property. The main path is a two track dirt road that runs north-south through the center of the property. This follows the path of an original road according to the Harrisburg plat (Washington County Records Office). This road now goes past the movie set ruins and turns northeast before disappearing. Two roads break off from this one, one to northeast and one southwest. Neither of them ends at a specific location. There are also a few footpaths or trails, most

likely created within the last 50 years. None of these routes form networks or systems. See Appendix C for an Existing Conditions map including these routes.

## 6. Water

Quail Creek is the most significant source of water on the site. The water table varies according to the season, carrying the most water during spring runoff and during times of high precipitation.

The second largest source of water is an ephemeral creek running through Areas 4 and 6 in a northeast to southwest direction, merging with Quail Creek at the southwest corner of the property. Condition of this creek varies according to the season.

There is a natural spring and seepage at the base of Silver Reef. It runs just over 200 feet before disappearing into the ground. Condition of this spring year-round is unknown.

Harrisburg ditch can be followed to its source on Leeds Creek, but it no longer carries water. There is also evidence of other smaller ditches that have been abandoned for many years. The soil in the northern half of the area is finer and, therefore, many temporary streams or depressions can be found here during periods of heavy rainfall.

## 7. Buildings and Structures

The McMullin house may be the most visited feature on the property. As mentioned earlier, part of the south wall is still standing along with the remains of a smokehouse and perimeter walls. The structure is not in good condition and it is recommended that efforts be made to preserve it.

The movie set consists mostly of rubble with one corner wall remaining (See Figure 3.2, upper right). The walls were made of stucco and chicken wire to create a set resembling a Spanish mission. Most of the rubble is featureless, except for a concrete curbing and walls of a Spanish style fountain in the center (See Figure 3.2, left center). Existence of the movie set on the site is said to have increased the property value as “improved land” and the owner, not wanting to pay the increased taxes, encouraged people to ruin the movie set so the property value would decrease.



Figure 3.2 - Movie Set Remains

The remains of an old dwelling or lookout can be found across the rock wall on northeast part of the property (See Figure 3.3). There is a fireplace in the fort that appears to be in fairly good condition (See Figure 3.4), but the walls appear fragile. It is speculated that this may have been the dwelling of a miner because there is an entrance to a mining shaft northeast of the fort, marked by a rock cairn.



Figure 3.3 – Dwelling Remnants



Figure 3.4 - Fireplace in Dwelling

## 8. Small-scale Elements

Rock cairns (See Figure 2.5) can be found all along the ridge of Silver Reef, signifying miner's claims. There are also several excavated holes and buried mining shafts on the ridge where silver may or may not have been found.

Various rock alignments exist on the southern half of the property in the area of old Harrisburg. These most likely represent house foundations or property lines. The wall around the McMullin house is still standing, along with another rock wall around the northern half of the property.

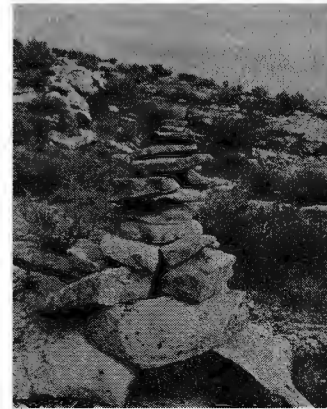


Figure 3.5 - Rock Cairn

## 9. Views and Vistas

The view from the southern end of the property contains a backdrop of Silver Reef and the Red Cliffs. In the spring, the contrast of the white snow on the distant mountains and the Red Cliffs in the foreground is particularly striking.

Views to the east are in the direction of Leeds and Harrisburg ditch with the Orson Adams property to the west. Interstate 15 runs through old Harrisburg to the south and the trailer park sits just south of that.

## 10. Other

Varying sizes of petrified wood can be easily found on the site, characteristic of the area's geology.

C. Dates of Site Visits

February 25-26, 2005

March 13-19, 2005

D. Is National Register or National Historic Landmark documentation completed? Y or N; if yes, describe the criterion the landscape meets

No.





### III. APPENDICES

#### a. References

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-  EXISTING BARB WIRE FENCE
-  EXISTING ROCK WALL
-  ABANDONED IRRIGATION DITCH OR DRAINAGE
-  SURVEY CONTROL (SET NAIL/REBAR)

NOTE: HORIZONTAL DATA BASIS OF BEARING IS AN ASSUMED GRID NORTH ALONG THE WESTERLY WALL OF THE ORSON ADAMS HOUSE.  
 VERTICAL DATUM BASIS AS PER ORTHOGRAPHIC PHOTO INTERPOLATION USING THE NW'LY CORNER OF THE HOUSE AS 3080'



SCALE 1" = 80'

IF REPRODUCED, PLEASE CREDIT THE HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, NAME OF PRESERVATION, DATE OF DRAWING



