

Historic Ranger Cabin and its Furnishings, Walnut Canyon National Monument, Arizona

By

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Walnut Canyon National Monument (Walnut Canyon) is a National Park Service unit in northern Arizona, 10 miles southeast of downtown Flagstaff. President Woodrow Wilson proclaimed Walnut Canyon November 30, 1915, under the Antiquities Act, to preserve hundreds of ancient cliff dwellings. The monument boundaries have since been expanded in 1938 and 1996. With them, the focus of National Park Service interpretation now includes the exceptional natural environment of the canyon itself, which compresses multiple life zones into a picturesque, narrow chasm.

The prehistoric cliff dwellings were heavily vandalized and looted by both Flagstaff residents and tourists, beginning in the late nineteenth century. The proximity of a railroad station at Cliffs (a lumber camp now part of Flagstaff) and the town of Flagstaff itself provided ample access. Walnut Canyon also contains buildings and other structures from historic period activities, including early efforts by the U.S. Bureau of Forestry (now the U.S. Forest Service) to stop destruction of the cliff dwellings. The oldest and most important of these is Ranger Cabin (Figure 1). The Bureau of Forestry stationed a Forest Ranger at Walnut Canyon in 1904 and provided a one-room log cabin and tents (Figure 2). The cabin was later expanded to four rooms and served as the ranger residence and visitor contact station. Over the years this building has accumulated many names: Cliffs Ranger Station, Foresters Cabin, Old Ranger Station, Old Headquarters, and the preferred current designation, Ranger Cabin. It continued with the same function after the proclamation of Walnut Canyon National Monument in 1915, and its transfer to the National Park Service in 1934. In recognition of its importance, Ranger Cabin was listed individually to the National Register of Historic Places in 1975, with an amended listing updated with new information accepted on August 28, 2019.



Figure 1. Ranger Cabin in 2017 with the 1915 Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) monument in the right foreground. From 2018 National Register of Historic Places Nomination Update and Addendum, p. 14. (Photo credit: James W. Stealy 2018).

Ranger Cabin is one of the best-preserved early twentieth-century log cabins in Arizona and one of the two oldest cabins constructed by the Bureau of Forestry that remain standing; the other is a log cabin in Wyoming that was also built in 1904. Between 2011 and 2015, Ranger Cabin was thoroughly restored, completing intermittent attempts at preservation that began in 1966. Ranger Neil Erickson noted in 1927 that “The cabin is made of logs and is now quite unique, and to many tourists almost as interesting as the Cliff Dwellings themselves.” Following on this observation, the National Park Service intends to expand on an existing program of interpretation at Ranger Cabin through the installation of historic furnishings. The Museum of Northern Arizona assisted in this process by conducting research in Flagstaff and at repositories across the country, to identify the furniture and accessories once housed in Ranger Cabin.

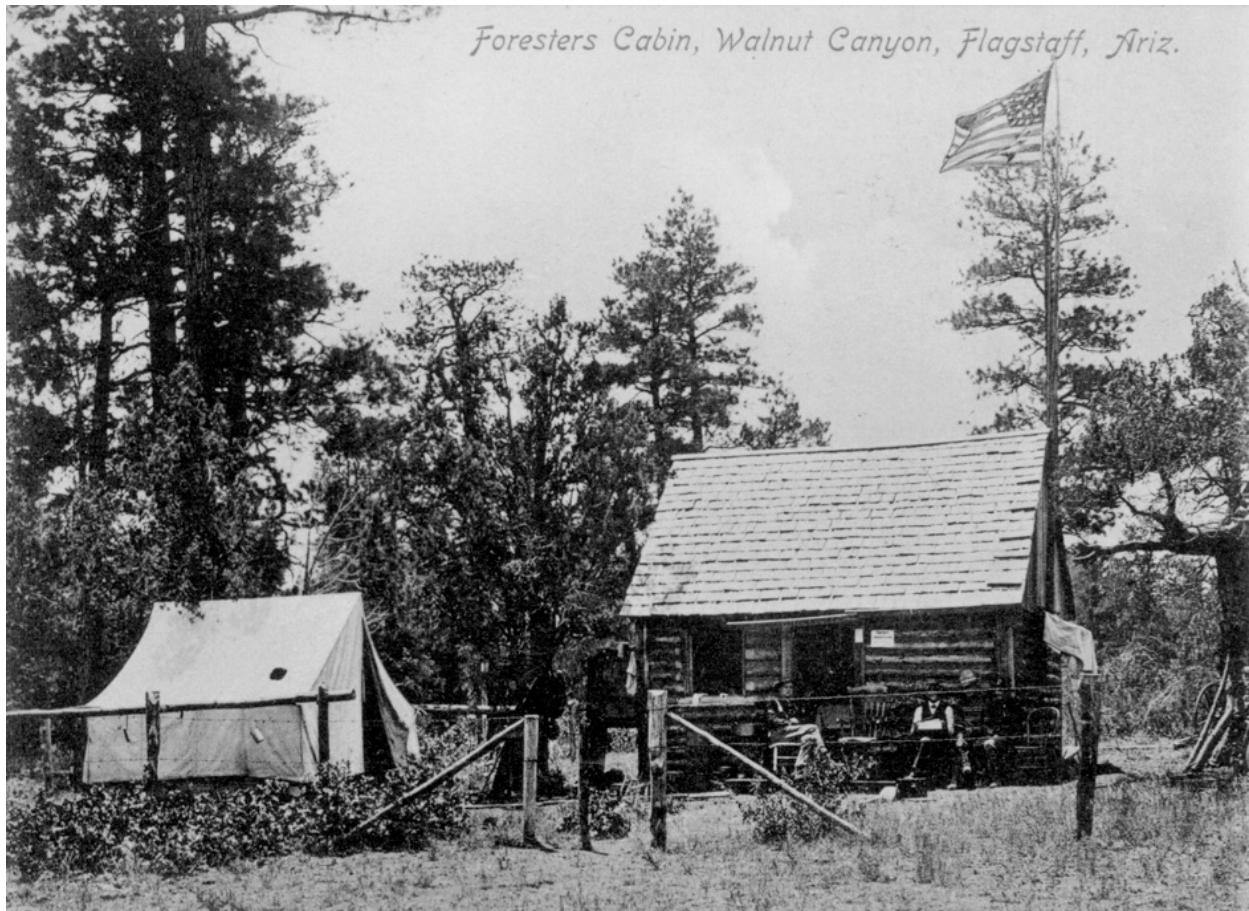


Figure 2. Circa 1904 postcard view of Ranger Cabin with the tent to the southeast. NAU.PH.99.64.

The resulting Historic Furnishings Report will guide the National Park Service in how they exhibit Ranger Cabin, which will be interpreted as the residence, office, and contact station of Walnut Canyon’s early rangers and custodians. It covers the period 1904-1941, with an emphasis on the experiences of the early Forest Rangers and their families during the summer months they were stationed there. This includes not only Ranger Cabin itself, but the surrounding landscape of an outhouse, flowerbed and garden, apple tree, cistern, birdbath, and a 1915 Daughters of the American Revolution monument (Figure 3). Nearby is Ranger Ledge Trail, probably a prehistoric Sinagua trail

re-used as the original visitor route into Walnut Canyon in the late nineteenth century. Because the focus of visitor activities at Walnut Canyon shifted from Ranger Cabin to Observation Point (where the current Visitor Center is located) southeast of the cabin in 1934-1941, the environment of Ranger Cabin remains virtually unchanged from its period of historic use, preserving a time and place separate from the rest of the monument.

The purpose of this furnishings plan is to refine the interpretive focus of Ranger Cabin by intimately portraying the experiences of the early rangers and their families through the display of original and period-correct furnishings. Using each of the four rooms as an exhibition space for a defined time period or topic, Ranger Cabin will interpret the intervals of Bureau of Forestry and Forest Service administration of Walnut Canyon in Room 2 (1904-1920) and Room 1 (1921-1927), the early period of National Park Service management in Room 3 (1934-1941), and the stabilization, restoration, and preservation of Ranger Cabin in Room 4 (1966-2015) (Figure 3). Interpreting Ranger Cabin in this manner will provide visitors interested in historic preservation and rural life in the Late Territorial/Early Statehood period with a rich, immersive experience.

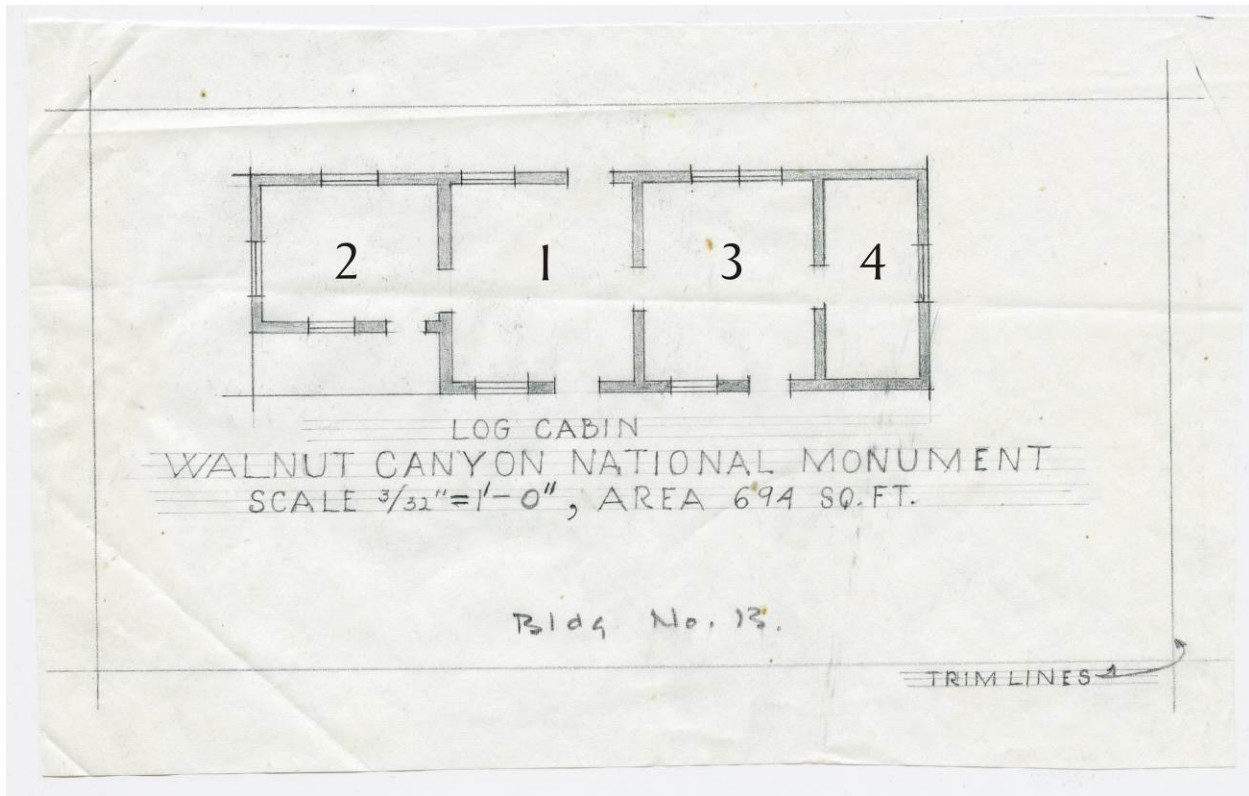


Figure 3. Schematic illustration of the Ranger Cabin Floor plan, circa 1950. The rooms are numbered in their order of construction. WACA 2372.

Overview History of Ranger Cabin

The Bureau of Forestry built a one-room log cabin using the expedient hog-trough method of construction in 1904. Rather than the time-consuming method of cutting notches and interlocking the logs at the wall corners, hog-trough construction tied the ends of the walls with a piece of upright milled lumber. The cabin was initially used by William Henry and Mattie Pierce in conjunction with a canvas wall tent or tents during their seasonal occupation at Walnut Canyon, where William acted as a Forest Ranger (Figure 4). In about 1906 the newly re-named Forest Service added a small saddle-notched log kitchen to the southeast side of the cabin (Room 2), and in 1907 two additional saddle-notched log rooms were appended to the northwest side for use as a museum/visitor reception room and office (Rooms 3 and 4). A tent may have continued to be used as supplemental space through at least 1906 based on historic photographs that depict a tent erected adjacent to Ranger Cabin with the kitchen addition. A boardwalk along the northeast side of the house, begun in 1906, was extended to the full length of the structure with the final additions of 1907. Walnut Canyon was proclaimed a National Monument (although still under the administration of what had become the U.S. Forest Service) in 1915, and Ranger Cabin became the de facto headquarters.



Figure 4. Mattie and William Pierce and dog. Note the two different bentwood chairs. WACA 2373.

The Pierces resided seasonally at Ranger Cabin until William's retirement in 1921, with the remainder of the year spent at a house in Flagstaff. Ranger Cabin was used as a seasonal residence by Neil and Emma Erickson from 1921-1927 (Figure 5), by Walter Hackleman in the summer of 1928, by Frank J. Cox and his wife Annie from 1929 to 1934, by Acting Custodian Jimmie Brewer and his wife Sallie in 1934, and the first National Park Service Custodian of Walnut Canyon, Paul Beaubien in 1934-1941. After the Civilian Conservation Corps constructed new residences and a visitor center at Observation Point between 1938 and 1941, Ranger Cabin was used only intermittently, before being

designated for storage and later falling into disrepair. Although the 1958 Master Plan for Walnut Canyon called for Ranger Cabin's demolition, the structure was later stabilized, listed to the National Register, and eventually stabilized again in 1991 and completely restored in 2011-2015.



Figure 5. Emma and Neil Erickson. Note the poured concrete walk in front of Ranger Cabin, for which Neil had unsuccessfully requested reimbursement for the cost of materials in 1922. WACA 2373.

Now recognized as an important part of the history of Walnut Canyon, the National Park Service constructed new wayside exhibits in 2017 along an existing service road along the canyon rim from the visitor center to Ranger Cabin, and is continuing to interpret the site for visitors interested in the history of Walnut Canyon. The cabin currently retains built-in features (a kitchen cupboard and pie-cooling shelf in Room 2 and shelves in Room 3), the original museum woodstove, and a period-correct telephone for Room 3. No other original furnishings were retained from or within Ranger Cabin, necessitating the archival research undertaken by the Museum of Northern Arizona.

The story of Ranger Cabin has three major phases: 1904-1934 as the residence of Forest Rangers and Walnut Canyon contact station (Cliffs Ranger Station); 1934-1968 as the residence of first NPS Custodians, seasonal employee residence, and storage (Old Headquarters); and 1968-2015, with alternating periods of neglect and efforts to maintain the structure, administrative debate whether to demolish or allow to collapse, or to stabilize, restore and interpret Ranger Cabin. The debate of the third period was resolved in favor of complete restoration, finished in 2015. Ranger Cabin now begins its fourth period of existence as an interpretive exhibit on the early Forest Service and National Park Service administration of Walnut Canyon and the lives of the Forest Rangers and Custodians and their spouses who cared for the monument:

1904-1921: William Henry (1841-1928) and Mattie (1869-1952) Pierce
1921-1927: Neil (1859-1937) and Emma (1854-1950) Erickson
1928: Walter Hackleman (life dates unknown)
1929-1934: Frank J. “James” Cox and Annie Cox (life dates unknown)
1934-1941: Paul Beaubien (1903-1962)

Three of the four rooms of Ranger Cabin will interpret a different period of occupation and different ranger family. Although the cabin was constructed for and during the residence of William Henry Pierce and his wife Mattie, many of the stories about their time at Ranger Cabin focus on the kitchen, Room 2, where Mattie baked pies that cooled on a pie tray in one window and allowed cold visitors to warm themselves and make coffee at the cook stove.

- Room 2 will be furnished with 1904-1920 period-correct wood cook stove, flatware, china table settings, and framed photographs.
- Room 1, the original cabin, will be furnished with period 1905-1920 living room set, chairs, Navajo rugs, and framed photographs to commemorate the residence of the Ericksons.
- Room 3 (the museum) is the only room for which contemporary interior photographs have been identified, taken in 1935 and 1938 by new National Park Service Custodian Paul Beaubien (Figures 6a and 7a). This room will include the only original furnishing, the ornate wood stove, which will be displayed with a replica decorative top (the original is in the Walnut Canyon collections at MNA). Period-correct Western Electric telephone, Hopi baskets, and museum display with Sinagua artifacts, fossils, and natural history items will complete the scene.
- Room 4 will provide an exhibit of photographs documenting the decay and restoration of Ranger Cabin. Before-and-after photographs and awards, including the 2019 Governor’s Heritage Preservation Award, will be presented.

Visitors will begin their ranger-guided tour in the kitchen, located at the southeastern end of the cabin, moving through each successive period of occupation, during which stories of the challenges, hardships, and accomplishments of the early rangers will complement the visual experience of Ranger Cabin (Figure 8).

Historic Furnishings Research

Previous research on Ranger Cabin located a number of exterior photographs depicting various rangers, their families as well as friends, and visitors to Walnut Canyon. Only the two interior images by Paul Beaubien were known to exist before the current project was undertaken. Although it is possible that the Pierces did not own a camera, the Ericksons did, and numerous interior photographs of their other residence (Faraway Ranch) in Chiricahua National Monument have been retained from this time period, as have exterior shots of Ranger Cabin. Flagstaff pioneer F.F. “Ted” Compton stated that his mother had taken a number of photographs of the cabin, but he was not sure where they were (in 1974). The very small size of Ranger Cabin may have been a limiting factor for interior photographs, depending on the focal length of camera lenses and how many pieces of furniture were inside.

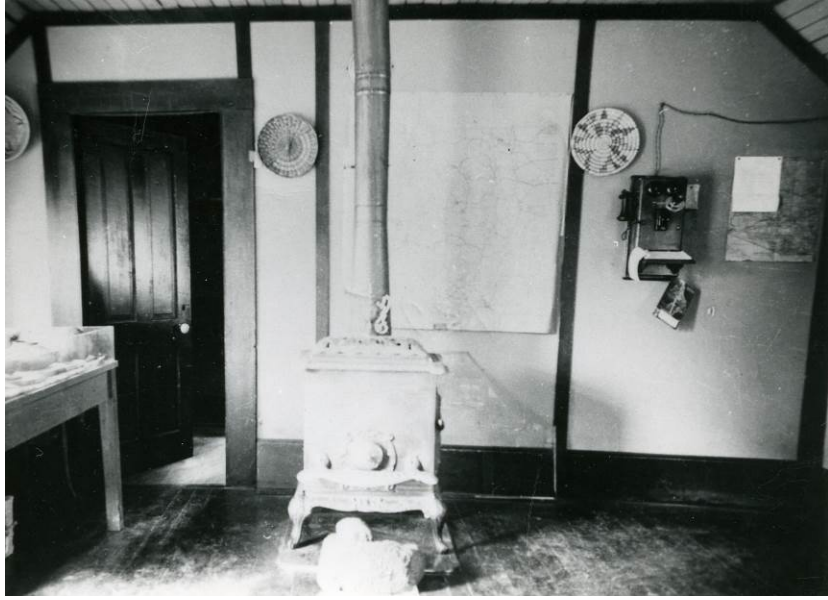


Figure 6. (a) Top, view of Room 3 interior by Paul Beaubien, August 1938, looking northwest. WACA 5530. (b) Bottom, Room 3 as it appeared in 2017, same view. (Photo credit: David E. Purcell).



Figure 7. (a) Top, view of Room 3 interior by Paul Beaubien, August 1935, looking north. WACA 4330. (b) Bottom, the northeastern corner of Room 3, 2017, with the built-in shelves visible in the image above. (Photo credit: David E. Purcell).

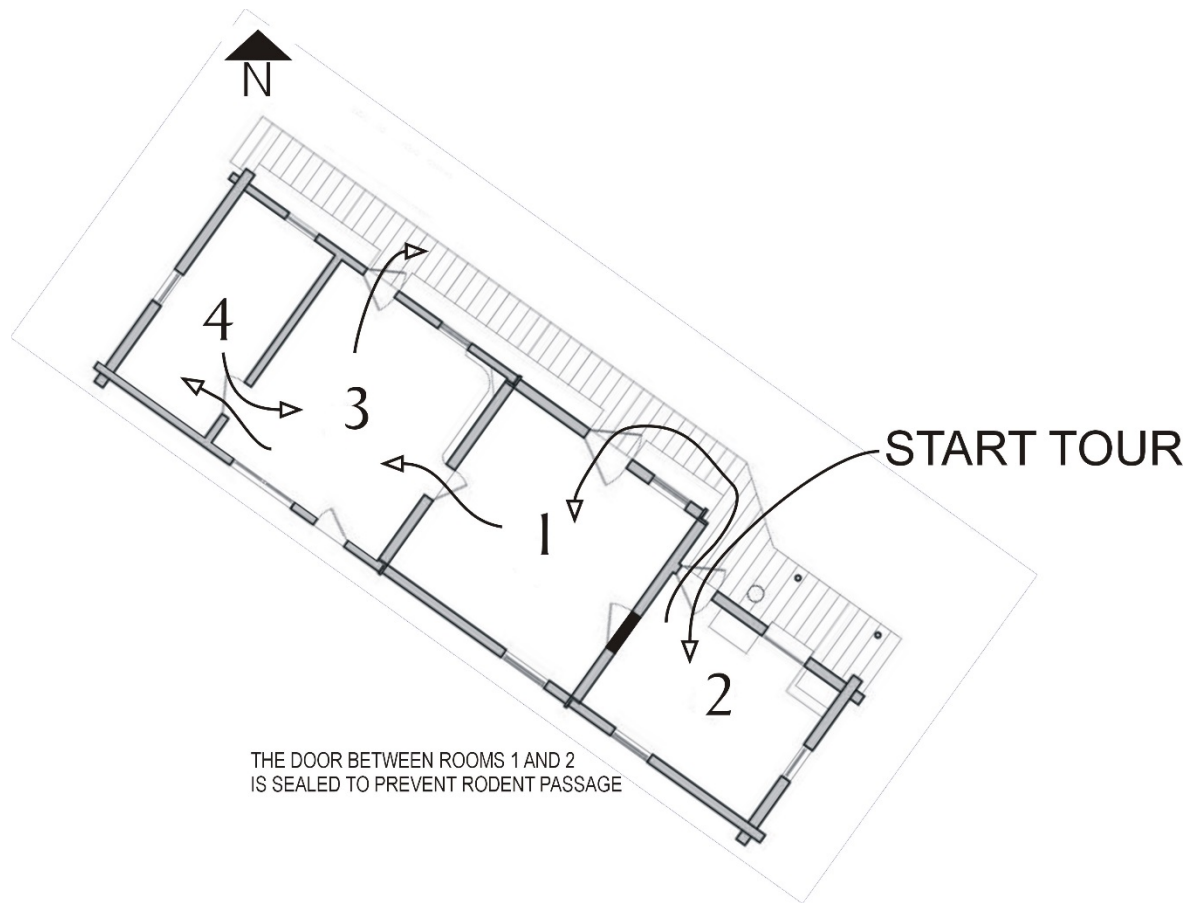


Figure 8. Circulation plan for Ranger Cabin interpretation. After Historic Structure Report (2007), Figure 43, with corrected orientation to north.

Museum of Northern Arizona personnel reviewed all of the previous management and research documents before consulting the repositories in Arizona, Colorado, California, and online, as described below, in 2018 and 2019:

- Flagstaff Area National Monuments Archives (National Park Service), Flagstaff, Arizona
- National Archives and Records Administration, Denver (Broomfield), Colorado
- National Archives and Records Administration, Riverside (Perris), California
- Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff, Arizona
- Western Archeological and Conservation Center, Tucson, Arizona
- Forest History Society, Durham, North Carolina (online)

No additional images of the interior of Ranger Cabin were discovered, nor were detailed descriptions of the furnishings, but the records on the historic furnishings of Faraway Ranch provide examples of contemporary furnishings owned by the same family. Neil and Emma Erickson homesteaded Faraway Ranch in what later became Chiricahua National Monument near Willcox, Arizona, in 1886. Neil was a Forest Ranger at Chiricahua from 1903 until 1921, when he accepted an appointment to Walnut Canyon. Faraway Ranch remained the Erickson's winter home during Neil's term at Walnut Canyon, where they resided during summer months until 1927.

Most of the furnishings in Ranger Cabin were the personal property of the Forest Rangers and their families, and were removed seasonally for use or storage elsewhere, from October to April or May. Office furnishings and tools were supplied by the Bureau of Forestry (1904-1905) and Forest Service (1905-1934), and were accounted for annually; it is not known if these were removed seasonally as well or were stored on site. On January 1, 1923, Neil Erickson signed an Annual Return Transfer of Property from the Cliffs Ranger Station to the Forest Service, which included both tools and some furnishings (Figure 9). Since Erickson remained stationed at Ranger Cabin until 1927, this appears to be an administrative verification of U.S. Forest Service equipment that was in Erickson's possession, rather than a physical tally of equipment being returned by Erickson. This inventory confirms the presence of the phone, a cook stove and heating stove, six bentwood chairs and an office desk and chairs. One of the bentwood chairs is visible in an image taken on the boardwalk along the front elevation of the house (Figure 10).

The list of government equipment is important, as it establishes that the original telephone was a Western Electric model 1317P. Western Electric Company introduced this model in 1907, making slight changes to the exterior appearance of the housing over the next three decades. The phone visible in Paul Beaubien's photograph of the museum (Figure 6a) is the Plain Front, Plain Top version introduced in 1911, which lacks the decorative "Picture Frame" routing on the housing front around the mouthpiece. This provides additional evidence that the telephone line to Ranger cabin was not completed until 1912. This telephone line allowed the rangers to communicate directly with the Forest Supervisor, an important innovation for quickly reporting forest fires and other emergencies.

The little that we do know now about how Ranger Cabin was furnished is courtesy of visitors to the cabin. In 1974, Fletcher Fairchild remembered Mattie Pierce as a good housekeeper: "But I know she had a lot of oh, kind of an antique parlor thing in there ... that I'd like to have some of that stuff today. Mrs. Pierce was a very immaculate housekeeper. The place was just dustproof and she was great for old time pictures on the walls which of course weren't old time in those days – were current. But that was the thing that all people did in those days." She also recalled many Navajo rugs on the cabin floor.

Mr. and Mrs. Fred Metz were also interviewed in 1974 about the Pierces: "They had a little office right in front where the guests were supposed to register, a little shelf outside. There was a kitchen, living room and bedroom, all heated by wood. There was a fireplace in the living room and the kitchen was heated by an iron stove. On the floor they had [many] Navajo rugs." F.F. "Ted" Compton also recalled a well-kept home: "She had pictures and photographs and stuff on the wall. For that time they had nice furniture. It wasn't all fancy, but they had a nice bedroom set and living room set, dining room set, and chairs. I don't remember any fireplace in it. I don't think there was. They had a heating stove."

Early Flagstaff resident Florence Fish recalled in an oral history interview in 1974 that the Ericksons had "really nice furniture" that they moved back and forth to Ranger Cabin each season. They used the rooms in Ranger Cabin as a kitchen, bedroom, dining room and an office. Pressurized kerosene lamps were used for lighting. Neil Erickson's diaries provide additional information regarding furnishings during 1921-1927. Being a carpenter, he documented the many repairs and modifications he made to the cabin and furnishings alike.

Voucher No. _____ Recorded _____

FOREST SERVICE

TRANSFER OF PROPERTY

From Neil Erickson, Clifton, A.S.
(Name.) (Place.)

To Annual Return - 1922.
(Name.) (Place.)

NO.	ARTICLE.
1	Axe, Single Bit
1	Badge, F.S.
3	Bags, Water, Canvas, 5-gal.
1	Bar, Crow
1	Bell, Extension 292U
2	Blankets, Wool, Single
6	Bromides, (framed)
3	Cans, Garbage
1	Case, Ranger's Metal
6	Chairs, Bentwood
1	Chair, Office, Revolving
1	Grinder, carborundum
1	Hammer, Jack
1	Hatchet, Marking, U.S.
1	Incinerator, Iron
1	Keys, F.S. (old)
3	Locks, Pad, F.S.
1	Lock, Rm, F.S.
1	Machine, Hotchkiss
1	Mattock

Received January 1, 1923.
(Date.)

By Neil Erickson
(Name.)

NE-2

- 1 Pan, Dish, Enamel
- 2 Picks, Ordinary
- 2 Rakes, Asphalt
- 2 Saws, Log, 1-Man
- 1 Saw, Meat
- 1 Shelterhalf, U.S. Army
- 5 Shovels, L.H.R.P.
- 1 Shovel, S.H.R.P.
- 1 Spoon, Miner's
- 1 Stove, Cook
- 1 Stove, Heating
- 1 Table, Office, 50"
- 1 Telephone, Wall, 1317N
- 1 Trowel, Mason's
- 1 Tub, G.I. (large)
- 1 Wheelbarrow

Neil Erickson
Forest Ranger

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Figure 9. List of Forest Service tools and equipment loaned to Neil Erickson for 1922. WACA 2374.4.

When the National Park Service and Museum of Northern Arizona began to collaborate on identifying the historic furnishings of Ranger Cabin, we all hoped to follow a trail of photos and documents to the very items owned by and used by the Forest Rangers and their families, perhaps hiding in plain sight at the Pioneer Historical Museum in Flagstaff. Alas, it was not to be. But, using the original wood stove and a donated telephone as the basis, Ranger Cabin will be furnished with furniture and objects correct to the period of time and general descriptions of visitors. Given the small size of the rooms in Ranger Cabin, only a few items need be present, enough to evoke the simple, comfortable life that Ranger Cabin could provide to those willing to dedicate more than half of a year to protecting the irreplaceable traces of past lives at Walnut Canyon.



Figure 10. Neil and Emma Erickson and unidentified person on boardwalk in front of Ranger Cabin. Note bentwood chair to right of open door. WACA 2372.

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