

# Gemmills recall days when lizards roamed lots

By LAURIE HURD-MOORE  
Sun Cities Independent

When they first learn of the existence of Lizard Acres, some Sun City West residents react with a grin and possibly, a chuckle.

They mentally categorize the name with other "quaint ol' Arizona designations," such as Slaughter House Gulch, Polygamy Creek and the Lucky Cuss Mine.

Yet, long before the Del E. Webb Corp., purchased the property in 1971 and developed it into part of Sun City West, the Circle 1 Livestock Company Inc. — unofficially known as Lizard Acres — was a thriving business.

Circle 1 at one point in 1970, employed 45 people to manage and maintain nearly 40,000 head of cattle, according to Mark and Gloria Gemmill of Sun City.

The Gemmills called the place home for 30 years, raising two sons in a house once located on the site.

The feedlot included three main houses and more than a dozen trailer homes.

Cattle feed was produced on 1,000 acres of the 1,800-acre ranch. There was enough surplus feed, says the retired foreman, to supply other area feedlots.

Cattle pens comprised approximately 80 acres of the property.

The Circle 1 Livestock Company Inc., was designed to be, according owner, J.C. "Charlie" Wetzler, to be a "hotel for cattle."

Mr. Gemmill says, "It started out to be a privately- owned feedlot.

"We kept building on and took on other people's cattle to feed. It just kept getting bigger and

seems like every year, we would have to build more pens."

Cattle from as far away as Florida, went to build the Circle 1 Livestock Company Inc.

Circle 1 evolved from a smaller feedlot which was started in 1947, "The Spurlock and Wetzler Feedlot."

Lance Spurlock and Charlie Wetzler had both run cattle together on a ranch in Holbrook.

When the men decided to move their operation to the Valley they leased a feedlot and first employed Mr. Gemmill in 1947.

Mr. Gemmill was raised in Crown King.

Soon, the partners decided they wanted a feedlot of their own, so they bought this "desert" in the West Valley.

They were to call their new business, "Lizard Acres/Spurlock and Wetzler Feed Lot."

The business was located one mile from the intersections of Dysart Road and Grand Avenue.

"I don't think it was called Circle 1 until about '50," recalls the former company foreman.

The partnership between Spurlock and Wetzler was to dissolve in 1954. Wetzler would become the sole owner of the company.

Mr. Gemmill was to be trained in all aspects of the feedlot operation.

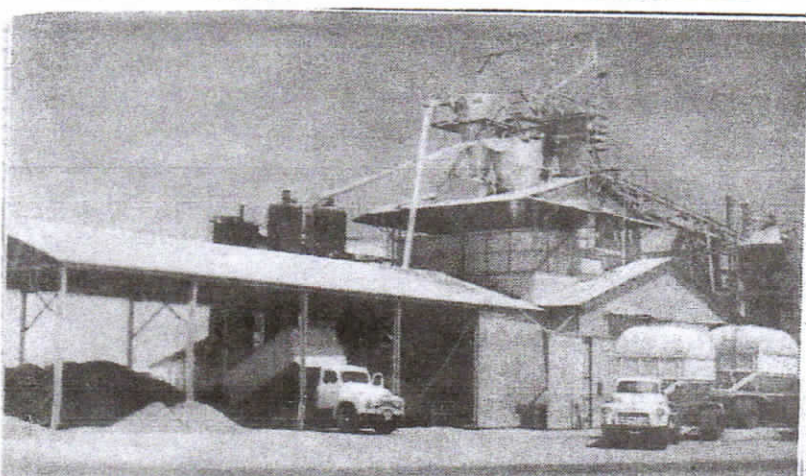
"It was kind of split up. There were several of us who were capable of working any part of it.

"I took care of all of the hiring and firing, the farming and operation of the feed mill and the construction of company structures," he explains.

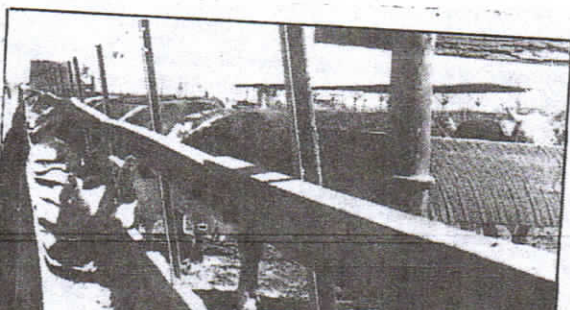
Construction at Lizard Acres; adds Mr. Gemmill, continued until shortly before the Del E. Webb Corp., leveled the business.



This sign points to what would become Sun City West.



CIRCLE 1 LIVESTOCK CO. was also in the business of raising cattle feed. Lizard Acres produced enough feed not only to feed its cattle, but to sell to neighboring ranches. The business of raising cattle was an ever expanding one, according to Mark Gemmill of Sun City. Mr. Gemmill was once the foreman of the Circle 1 Livestock Company Inc. The feedlot grew to accommodate nearly 40,000 head of cattle



Left are early visitors from as far as Florida. Be a sign on Grand provides shade for a retiree in hopes of selling his car.

# Welcome To Lizard Acres

The Webb Development Co. purchased the feedlot as a part of a 11,000-acre package in 1971.

Ultimately, due to employee death and retirement, Mr. Gemmill was to be the sole manager of Wetzler's Lizard Acres.

"I had to quit playing golf when this happened.

"But there wasn't anything definite that any of us did. We could all be involved in any part of it, at any time," he says.

Mr. Wetzler, explains Mr. Gemmill, would "keep his finger on the whole thing," visiting daily from his home or office in Phoenix.

The business of fattening up cattle for slaughter elsewhere, was not a simple one, he says.

Cattle, in addition to a steady diet, need shade from the Arizona sun.

The Lizard Acres Feedlot was divided up into pens. Each pen was fitted with a metal shade, which would accommodate all the cattle.

The cattle were initially branded with a 1 within a circle, represent Circle 1. Later, the cattle were identified by their colored ear tags.

"The business changed and it became ridiculous to have the hides all branded up because it hurt the value of the cowhide."

The feedlot pens on the 80-acre site, were constructed by Mr. Gemmill.

Water sprayers, which were used to keep down the dust, were fitted to each cattle pen.

The pens, after a disaster involving lightning, were also grounded.

A metal fence not grounded, was hit by lightning during a storm. The resulting electricity, passed through the fence and through some of the cows and killed approximately 26 head of cattle.

"In any storm, a bunch of cattle turn their backs, their tails to the storm. Some were touching the fence, some were touching each other," he explains.

He says the employees immediately grounded all the fences. "All we could do was put an iron stake or fence post and tie all the wires to it."

It was the odor produced by manure in these pens that became the focus of some attention by residents of Sun City in the mid-1960s.

Odors from the Spur Feedlot ultimately became the focus of a lawsuit by citizens of Sun City.

The Webb Corp. offered to buy Spur Feedlot, but was turned down. DEVCO filed for an injunction to close the operation.

Eventually the case went to the Arizona Supreme Court. They delayed a final decision on the matter until 1971. Meanwhile, because of the long court delays and costs, Spur Feedlot agreed to move if Webb would pay its costs.

Around the summer of 1978, Mr. Gemmill says, Circle 1 Livestock Co., was relocated to a site near Scottsdale. The couple moved with the company.

When the lease in Scottsdale was lost, they moved with the livestock company again, to a place near Williams Air Force Base.

The Gemmills remained with the company another five years.

Upon the death of the owner's wife, Katharine, followed shortly by Mr. Wetzler's death, the feedlot closed.

The Gemmills were to become Sun Citizens in 1984.

Mr. Gemmill says Circle 1 was initially blamed for cattle odors which were reaching the community. It was also about this time that the Del Webb Corp., purchased Lizard Acres.

"They began to get all over us, well, where the prevailing wind was, there wasn't any way," says the Sun Citizen.

Tests measuring the direction of the prevailing wind were conducted by Maricopa County officials. They determined that the odor was not coming from Lizard Acres, but from the Spur Feedlot located at Olive and 111th Avenue.

Some of the odor, adds Mr. Gemmill, came from raw sewage which was leaking in Sun City.

"There were actually two feedlots down there, but the other one folded up," he says.

# Growing up on Lizard Acres

By LAURIE HURD-MOORE  
Sun Cities Independent

Her great-grandfather, I.E. Solomon, established Valley National Bank in Arizona.

Her grandfather was a well-known citizen in Holbrook.

And her father, J. Charles "Charlie" Wetzler, founded one of the largest cattle feedlots in Arizona — the Circle 1 Livestock Company Inc.

Evelyn "Pit" Lucking was the only child born to Charlie and Katharine Wetzler.

Today, Mrs. Lucking is married to John Lucking, the chief economist for Valley National Bank.

The resident of North Central Phoenix is a housewife and mother of two children.

Though both her parents are deceased, Mrs. Lucking has no trouble remembering what family life once was like, particularly the trips to Lizard Acres.

Though the Wetzlers' home was in Phoenix, Mrs. Lucking says she visited her father's feedlot frequently and played with the employees' children.

"It was very much a family place. My father always said the people didn't work for him, they worked with him. And, their kids were wonderful."

She says for the dusty, hot

place that it was, the children living on the feedlot were well-mannered and industrious. Many of these playmates would grow up to become highly educated adults.

"As kids, we would play with animals, the equipment, ride

horses," she says.

There were also plenty of picnics and parties to attend at Lizard Acres.

"I loved going out there."

She says one of her favorite activities was delivering Christmas stocks with her father to the employees' children.

Her father, says Mrs. Lucking, became very involved in the Dysart School System. He worked to improve education for the families living in and around the feedlot.

Mr. Wetzler was also president of the Central Arizona Project Association, a member of the Valley National Bank board of directors, the Boswell Hospital board and worked for the Cattle Feeders Association.

"My father was a tall, lanky man. He was also a quiet man, who was well-read and knowledgeable," says Mrs. Lucking.

The Wetzler's daughter says her father was pleased with the offer made by the Del E. Webb Corp., for his land, though she did not know what the purchasing price was. "We never discussed money in my family."

"My father was getting old. I was his only child and I didn't know anything about the business. Daddy was really happy about the agreement made for his land. He could have another 10

years to operate."

Mrs. Lucking says he was also relieved he sold the feedlot because of the complaints Sun Citians had lodged against the Spur Feedlot regarding an odor problem.

"The problem between Sun City, the Spur Feedlot and the lawsuit, really bothered daddy. He had no complaints from Sun City, but he was concerned."

She says some people told him he could have gotten more money from the Webb Corp., for his land, but he liked the agreement.

Once Webb bulldozed over Lizard Acres, Wetzler's daughter says her father was ready. He moved on and continued to work on smaller feedlots.

He died shortly after the death

of his wife Katharine, in 1983, at the age of 74.

"After visiting a very old friend of my father's, I had the opportunity to drive through Sun City West," explains Mrs. Lucking.

"The friend was saying that it was sad to see the desert and the feedlot gone, but I saw the most beautiful community when I drove through there.

"About 500 ducks crossed my path and I thought how proud both my parents would be to see Sun City West."



# Just Where Was "Lizard Acres?"

Back in the 1940s, R. S. Spurlock and J. C. Wetzler of Holbrook, AZ, were looking over a proposed 1,800-acre site for a new ranch one mile east of the intersection of Grand

Avenue and Bell Road. Supposedly Spurlock said, "Jumpin' Jehosophat, this country isn't fit for raising anything but lizards." Hence the Circle One Livestock Company operations here became known as "Lizard Acres."

But today's Sun City West covers slightly more than 7,000 acres. So, where was the 1,800 acres that gave the community its nickname?

A starting point is the "Lizard Acres" sign on the east side of Grand Ave., just opposite the entrance to Surprise Towne Center. This sign marked the location of the cattle loading and unloading pens along the east side of the railroad.

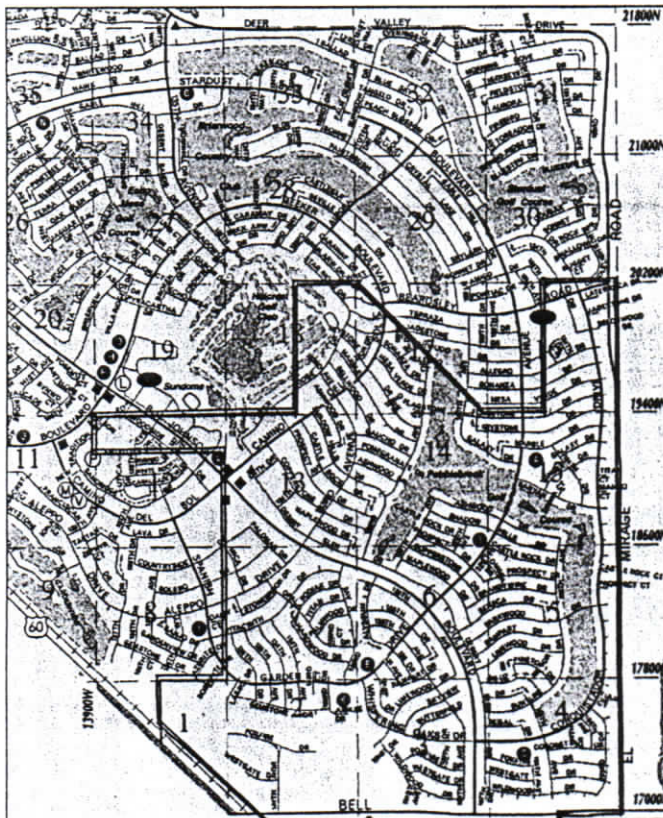
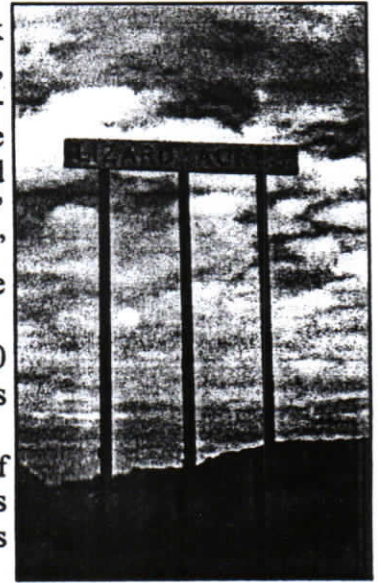
The southern border was actually south of Bell, occupying land where the former Surprise town center was located, along with RISE, Windmill Inn, Crossroads Shopping Center – all the way to Dysart Rd. It also included the triangle of land between Dysart, Grand, and Bell Road. The ranch was bordered on the east by today's El Mirage Road, and ran as far north as Beardsley Rd. The north and west boundaries were irregular as shown on the map.

At its height, "Lizard Acres" was home to 40,000 cattle. These were kept in rows of pens topped with shade awnings – a first for the cattle industry. Water sprayers were fitted to each pen to help keep the dust down. The pens occupied an 80-acre site in the southern part of the ranch.

R. H. Johnson Blvd. wound through the cattle pens, making early buyers wonder if

this is where they really wanted to locate. One of the most challenging jobs of demolition involved the underground grain storage bins. They were huge, almost like bunkers used in wartime. The bins were V-shaped, solid concrete and had a system of elevators. Workers finally resorted to dynamite and blasted them to pieces.

At the height of construction in 1978, 30 scrapers were moving some 45,000 cubic yards of dirt a day. An older style of life was demolished to make way for a new community. So long, Lizard Acres, Hello Sun City West.



"Lizard Acres" occupied the southeast portion of today's SCW as shown by the area within the double line.

# **MEMORIES**

**OF THE**

# **SUN CITIES**



## **SUN CITY WEST WAS ONCE HOME TO LIZARD ACRES**

One of a series on the history of  
Sun City and Sun City West, Arizona

Sun Cities Area Historical Society  
10801 Oakmont Dr., Sun City, Arizona  
(623) 974-2568

## SUN CITY WEST WAS ONCE HOME TO "LIZARD ACRES"

In the early 1940s, two gentlemen from Holbrook, E.S. Spurlock and J.C. Wetzler, were looking for a site to establish a cattle feeding operation in the area along Dysart Road about a mile south of the intersection of Grand Avenue and Bell Road.

According to one report, Spurlock declared, "Jumpin' Jehosophat, this country is not fit for raising anything but lizards."

From that date on the name of "Lizard Acres" became the popular name for the ranch, more formally known as Circle One Livestock Co. In spite of the dismal prospects, the two men converted the 1,800-acre site into one of the leading cattle operations in the Southwest.

Mark Gemmill, foreman, with his wife and baby started out living in a trailer, but soon moved into a house where they would live for 30 years before it was bulldozed down to make way for Sun City West.

Cattle feeding pens were located on an 80-acre site. More than 1000 acres were in cultivation and produced corn, alfalfa, wheat, parsley, turnips, onions, artichokes, watermelons and other crops. Grain sorghum was chopped and stored in large underground pits to form silage, a succulent roughage to go along with grain for fattening. Grain was stored in concrete storage bins with elevators.

Three irrigation wells and two domestic wells provided the water. These wells are now providing water for Sun City West. One large tank was adorned with a red lizard that was used as a weather vane. Several ponds to catch and store runoff water attracted migratory birds.

At its peak, in 1970, the Circle One Livestock Company had 40,000 head of cattle in its feedlots. At one time it shipped carloads of finished steers to a major supermarket chain for processing as its best beef specialities.

Forty-five employees living in three main houses and a dozen trailer homes made Lizard Acres their home. Lizard acres had no postoffice but did have a fire engine.

At Christmas time Mr. Wetzler gave bonuses and gifts to all employees and Christmas stockings to 125 children. The men had their own baseball team and competed with others around the Valley. Over the years the workers experienced floods, dust storms, tornadoes, haystack fires, lightning strikes, along with lizards, scorpions, snakes and one gila monster.

In 1971 the Del Webb Development Co. purchased an 11,000 acre tract for future development. Lizard Acres was a part of that acreage.

SCW

Daily News - Sun  
10/18/97

# Sun City was once home to 'Lizard Acres'

In the early 1940s, two gentlemen from Holbrook, E.S. Spurlock and J.C. Wetzler, were looking for a site to establish a cattle-feeding operation in the area along Dysart Road about a mile south of the intersection of Grand Avenue and Bell Road.

DOWN  
MEMORY  
LANE

According to one report, Spurlock declared, "Jumpin' Jehosophat, this country is not fit for raising anything but lizards."

From that date on the name of "Lizard Acres" became the popular name for the ranch, more normally known as Circle One Livestock Co. In spite of the dismal prospects, the two men converted the 1,800-acre site into one of the leading cattle operations in the Southwest.

Mark Gemmill, foreman, with his wife and baby started out living in a trailer, but soon moved into a house where they would live for 30 years before it was bulldozed down to make way for Sun City West.

Cattle feeding pens were located on an 80-acre site. More than 1000 acres were in cultivation and produced corn, alfalfa, wheat, parsley, turnips, onions, artichokes, watermelons and other crops. Grain sorghum was chopped and stored in large underground pits to form silage, a succulent roughage to go along with grain for fattening. Grain was

stored in concrete storage bins with elevators.

Three irrigation wells and two domestic wells provided the water. These wells are now providing water for Sun City West. One large tank was adorned with a red lizard that was used as a weather vane. Several ponds to catch and store runoff water attracted migratory birds.

At its peak, in 1970, the Circle One Livestock Company had 40,000 head of cattle in its feedlots. At one time it shipped carloads of finished steers to a major supermarket chain for processing as its best beef specialties.

Forty-five employees living in three main houses and a dozen trailer homes made Lizard Acres their home. Lizard acres had no postoffice but did have a fire engine.

At Christmas time Mr. Wetzler gave bonuses and gifts to all employees and Christmas stockings to 125 children. The men had their own baseball team and competed with others around the Valley. Over the years the workers experienced floods, dust storms, tornadoes, haystack fires, lightning strikes, along with lizards, scorpions, snakes and one gila monster.

In 1971 the Del Webb Development Co. purchased an 11,000 acre tract for future developemnt. Lizard Acres was a part of that acreage.

*This Down Memory Lane is drawn from the files of the Sun Cities Area Historical Society.*

**Mark D. Gemmill**

SUN CITY — Mark D. Gemmill, 74, died Dec. 10, 1990, in Walter O. Boswell Memorial Hospital.

Mr. Gemmill was born in Englewood, Calif., and moved to Arizona 70 years ago from Colorado. He was a rancher for Circle One Livestock Co. at "Lizard Acres," which is now Sun City West. He was a member of the Arizona Cattle Feeders and Arizona Cattle Growers Association.

Mr. Gemmill is survived by his wife, Gloria; two sons, Mark of Virginia and John of Phoenix; a brother, Dick of Arizona; and four grandchildren.

Service will be 10:30 a.m. Friday in Sunland Lakeside Chapel, 15826 Del Webb Blvd.

Memorials may be sent to West Side Food Bank, P.O. Box 1310, Sun City, 85372.

Daily News-Sun

**Gloria R. Gemmill**

SUN CITY — Gloria R. Gemmill, 68, died Jan. 28, 1991 in her home.

Mrs. Gemmill, who was born in Port Allegheny, Pa., was an artist. She moved to Arizona from New York in 1928. She was a member of the Arizona Artist Guild; Arizona Water Color Society; Bell Art Club; Van Guards and the 22 by 30 Club.

Mrs. Gemmill is survived by two sons, Mark of Virginia and John of Phoenix; her brother, Wayne Rollins of Colorado; and four grandchildren.

Services will be at 10:30 a.m. Friday in Sunland Lakeside Chapel, 15826 N. Del Webb Blvd. Burial will be in Sunland Memorial Park.

Memorials may be sent to Westside Food Bank, P.O. Box 1310, Sun City 85372.

Daily News-Sun



# Northwest Valley feedlot transformed into world-class retirement community

Laurie Hurd Moore  
Sun Cities Independent

Dick Mastin had the unique opportunity of being present when the rustic feedlot known as Lizard Acres, was transformed into the internationally-known retirement community of Sun City West.

Dick Mastin -- now Del Webb's vice president in charge of land development -- was in his early 20s, when he began working for the corporation.

Mr. Mastin was transferred out to Sun City in June, 1972 from Webb's corporate office.

"Then, we were still over in Sun City. We were just getting ready to cross Bell Road and begin work in the Willowcreek area.

"I was 23 years old then. I was full of vim and vigor and ready to go and tackle the world."

He says one of the very first days he began working in Sun City, the community of Sun City West was already being discussed. "This was something for me to really get excited about."

Mr. Mastin says in 1973, Webb started to construct the "Bell housing components yard," on the northwest corner of Bell and Dysart Roads. The components yard would become operational in late 1974. The main building on the site no longer exists, but the concrete pad is still visible.

Building trusses, wall panels and bathroom components were manufactured at the yard near the Sun City West site. Initially, all the components were shipped by railroad back for use in Sun City.

The first time Mr. Mastin says he began working on the Sun City West project, he met with owner J.C. "Charlie" Wetzler and foreman Mark Gemmill, (now a Sun City resident), of Lizard Acres.

Mr. Gemmill, along with his wife, Gloria and their two sons lived in a house on Lizard Acres for 30 years.

Lizard Acres, officially, the Circle 1 Livestock Co., was purchased by the Webb Corp. in 1971. Circle 1 was located in the southeast corner of Sun City West. The cattle feedlot was part of a 11,000-acre package purchased by the corporation.

The men met over a large table in a feedlot scale house, recalls Mr. Mastin.

"We were working out ways to get the ditches rearranged so that they (Lizard Acres) could get their water and we could take care of the golf course. Those were exciting days that I remember," says Mr. Mastin.

The vice president of land development says, he can still recall J. C. Wetzler pulling up in a new Thunderbird and getting out of the car wearing cowboy boots, spurs and jeans. "You'd look in the car and see cow manure about this high on the floor of the car," he says, gesturing with his hands.

Mr. Mastin says one of the best experiences he had in those early days of Sun City West, was meeting Mr. Wetzler and Mr. Gemmill.

Webb began preparing the property for construction of Sun City West early, he says.

These first construction workers out at the desert site, met with dozens of rattlesnakes. "It seems like every time we went to tear out some old irrigation structures, there would be two or three rattlesnakes. No one was ever bitten, but we sure had some spooky surveyors."

The work crews plotted the land, checked section corners and tested the wells out at the Sun City West site.

Mr. Mastin says the Arab Oil Embargo, which hit the United States in 1973 (The ban on oil exports to the U.S. was lifted March 18, 1974) and the subsequent decline in the economy, forced Webb to "suck their horns back in and put Sun City West on the back burner for awhile."

The corporation, he says, returned to Sun City and just tried to "keep things going," there until the economy improved.

The U.S. economy was back on the upswing by 1976 and the Webb Corp., returned to fully developing Sun City West.

"We completed our planning and put our master plan together. We submitted it to Maricopa County and it went through the approval process. Sun City West was approved and it was beginning to be reality in late 1977," he says.

Webb began moving dirt at the site the third week in January 1978. The actual ground breaking for the project was February 15, 1978.

"In the beginning core area, we had 2.5 million cubic yards of dirt for the Hillcrest Golf Course, the Sundome Center for the Performing Arts, the Crestview (and the Vacation Special Headquarters) our models and the recreation center. This whole area was around 400 acres or so."

The rec center, the restaurant and the model homes were the first buildings constructed by Webb, says Mr. Mastin.

"These buildings were almost all being done at the same time in June, though I think the rec center was started a little earlier than the model homes."

Hillcrest Golf Course was opened in the fall of 1978, he explains. The rec center was opened in July, 1979.

Construction of the Sundome would not be done until 1979-80. "This construction was not done with the first facilities," he says.

The first model homes would be located west of the present model homes, along Crown Ridge Drive.

Webb would begin selling the Sun City West lifestyle in the spring of 1978. The first Sun City West residents would move into the community in October 1978.

"The first move-ins over here were Sun City houses. We did not have the first Sun City West models done, so we could not begin to push those models," he says.

OVER

"At the height of our construction," says Mr. Mastin, "we had 30 some scrapers moving some 45,000 cubic yards of dirt a day, which is a few shovelfuls."

Some of this dirt and rubble was generated from the demolition of Lizard Acres.

"That was all done in 1978. It was phased in. As we were expanding, we'd go back in there (Lizard Acres). But I think we worked on tearing it down for four or five months," he explains.

As the first residential unit was built south of main core area he says, it cut into a portion of Lizard Acres.

"Really, when we got serious on this, is when we brought in R.H. Johnson Boulevard, because it went right up through the pens of the feedlot and some silage pits," says Mr. Mastin.

Half of R.H. Johnson Boulevard was opened in the fall of 1978.

The only road into Sun City West, before R.H. Johnson Boulevard was constructed, was an old road connected to Dysart Road, that wound around the feedlot. He says visitors often drove up the road through the cattle pens and got lost or in the dirt. "It was a really mess the first few months before we had R.H. Johnson."

He adds, that at the same time that construction workers took down the cattle pens, the Gemmill home was demolished.

Mr. Mastin says this demolition was personally uncomfortable for him, because he comes from a farming background. "I've been around my parents and all my relatives in farming. I know how much work went into building a facility like that."

Shortly after this, the mill was torn down.

"They also had a big, tremendous ... it was almost like a bunker they would use in wartime, but they had this big v-shaped underground grain-storage bin. It was all concrete and had a system of elevators. Really, it was a very involved design and well-built.

"We had a heck of a time tearing it out. I think we used dynamite. We drilled down and set some charges and blew this thing out, he explains.

The Lizard Acres water tank, which was located in the center of the feedlot, was left standing for awhile, he says, because the water was used by several nearby homes.

Webb construction crews also had to be on the outlook for septic tanks which were buried throughout the property.

"Even after we did our grading, and tried to locate all the septic tanks, we couldn't. Several times when we'd be building a house, someone would call and say we found another hole in the ground and we'd have to go out and fill another cesspool."

Despite these occasional discoveries, Sun City West homes were being built at a record pace, says Mr. Mastin.

"In 1978, we were building 10 to 15 homes a day. We even got up to 20 homes in 1979, which is incredible."

The first commercial activity in Sun City West was in 1979, and involved several banks and the Sundome Plaza Shopping Center, at the southwest corner of Camino del Sol and R.H. Johnson Boulevard, he adds.

Asked if he could recall any projects that were initially planned for the community but did not come into being he says, a facility between Crestview Restaurant and the Sundome was discussed, but never finalized.

"We had several ideas. We thought about constructing some kind of social-type thing and this never did come to pass. I don't know if we really ever did focus in on what we were looking for ... some kind of fancy restaurant or social or cultural-type facility. It does have a tremendous view of the golf course," says the vice president.

Pointing to a series of maps, he says, "By 1979, Sun City West was pretty well a thriving community. If you look across at the progression there, you can see that there are a lot of homes.

"There were a lot of changes if you looked at it from 1978. When we started, Lizard Acres was still intact.

"It's been an exciting place to work. There was just so much going on. I've enjoyed every minute of it," says Mr. Mastin.

THE SUN CITIES INDEPENDENT/SCW, May 23-29, 1990

# Growing up on Lizard Acres

By LAURIE HURD-MOORE  
Sun Cities Independent

Her great-grandfather, I.E. Solomon, established Valley National Bank in Arizona.

Her grandfather was a well-known citizen in Holbrook.

And her father, J. Charles "Charlie" Wetzler, founded one of the largest cattle feedlots in Arizona — the Circle 1 Livestock Company Inc.

Evelyn "Pit" Lucking was the only child born to Charlie and Katharine Wetzler.

Today, Mrs. Lucking is married to John Lucking, the chief economist for Valley National Bank.

The resident of North Central Phoenix is a housewife and mother of two children.

Though both her parents are deceased, Mrs. Lucking has no trouble remembering what family life once was like, particularly the trips to Lizard Acres.

Though the Wetzlers' home was in Phoenix, Mrs. Lucking says she visited her father's feedlot frequently and played with the employees' children.

"It was very much a family place. My father always said the people didn't work for him, they worked with him. And, their kids were wonderful."

She says for the dusty, hot

place that it was, the children living on the feedlot were well-mannered and industrious. Many of these playmates would grow up to become highly educated adults.

"As kids, we would play with animals, the equipment, ride

horses," she says.

There were also plenty of picnics and parties to attend at Lizard Acres.

"I loved going out there."

She says one of her favorite activities was delivering Christmas stocks with her father to the employees' children.

Her father, says Mrs. Lucking, became very involved in the Dysart School System. He worked to improve education for the families living in and around the feedlot.

Mr. Wetzler was also president of the Central Arizona Project Association, a member of the Valley National Bank board of directors, the Boswell Hospital board and worked for the Cattle Feeders Association.

"My father was a tall, lanky man. He was also a quiet man, who was well-read and knowledgeable," says Mrs. Lucking.

The Wetzler's daughter says her father was pleased with the offer made by the Del E. Webb Corp., for his land, though she did not know what the purchasing price was. "We never discussed money in my family."

"My father was getting old. I was his only child and I didn't know anything about the business. Daddy was really happy about the agreement made for his land. He could have another 10

years to operate."

Mrs. Lucking says he was also relieved he sold the feedlot because of the complaints Sun Citians had lodged against the Spur Feedlot regarding an odor problem.

"The problem between Sun City, the Spur Feedlot and the lawsuit, really bothered daddy. He had no complaints from Sun City, but he was concerned."

She says some people told him he could have gotten more money from the Webb Corp., for his land, but he liked the agreement.

Once Webb bulldozed over Lizard Acres, Wetzler's daughter says her father was ready. He moved on and continued to work on smaller feedlots.

He died shortly after the death of his wife Katharine, in 1983 at the age of 74.

"After visiting a very old friend of my father's, I had the opportunity to drive through Sun City West", explains Mrs. Lucking.

"The friend was saying that it was sad to see the desert and the feedlot gone, but I saw the most beautiful community when I drove through there.

"About 500 ducks crossed my path and I thought how proud both my parents would be to see Sun City West.

May 16-22, 1990

## Leapin' lizards Home where reptiles once roamed now tips scales as retirement site

**By Laurie Hurd-Moore**  
**Sun Cities Independent**

Sun City West – it once was a great place to grow lizards.

The unofficial name of the site, “Lizard Acres,” developed from a comment made by the wife of Circle One Livestock Company Inc., owner, J. Charles Wetzler.

Asked by her husband what she thought of his new West Valley property, Katharine replied, “It looks like a good place to raise lizards.”

Today, what was once fertile territory for lizards is now home to the 19,000 residents of Sun City West.

Churches now stand where vegetables and cattle feed were farmed.

Adult-living homes with lush landscapes now stand where cattle once were penned.

The mill, grain storage buildings, silage pits and shops are also gone.

Even the tons of leftover cow manure were put to good use fertilizing green belts and golf courses in the burgeoning Sun City West.

Nothing except some photos, artifacts and memories remain of the once-thriving business. Many of these items and r remembrances belong to Mr. and Mrs. Mark Gemmill of Sun City.

The Gemmills and their two sons spent approximately 30 years with the Circle 1 Livestock Company at Lizard Acres.

Mark Gemmill was the foreman of the feedlot. The Sun City couple were also good friends of the Wetzlers.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Wetzler are dead now, but the Gemmills remain in touch with their daughter, Mrs. Pit Lucking of Phoenix.

Mrs. Gemmill, today an artist in her own right, recently shared memories of her life at Lizard Acres with members of the Sun Cities Area Historical Society.

Also present at the meeting were several present and former Del E. Webb Corp., employees and more than a dozen Sun City West Pioneers.

The meeting was the first of its kind held in Sun City West.

The Sun Cities Area Historical Society was founded in 1985 as a non-profit organization, dedicated to preserving the history of both Sun City and Sun City West.

“Hello, Sun City West – So Long Lizard Acres,” was presented April 26 in the Community Services Building.

The meeting was held two weeks before National Historic Preservation Week, May 13 to 19.

Mrs. Gemmill, along with Webb Vice President of Land Development Dick Mastin and the former Vice President and Special Assistant to the President Ann Loos Raymond, recalled their role in the changeover from Lizard Acres to Sun City West.

SCM

Mrs. Gemmill says upon first moving to the ranch, she learned that Lizard Acres was good for growing a lot more than lizards. Rattlesnakes, scorpions, and black widow spiders also favored the location. One such creature, a bull snake, became a sort of a pet to Mrs. Gemmill.

The resident says she used to get the snake and enjoyed watching it wind its way up palm trees, until her husband decided it had to go and killed it.

The mother of two says she quickly learned to place the legs of her baby's crib in mason jars, to ward against climbing scorpions.

Aside from the resident creepers, it was the cattle that soon dominated Lizard Acres.

The property was first known as Lizard Acres Spurlock and Wetzler Feedlot.

Wetzler and Spurlock also operated a cattle business in the Mesa/Chandler Area.

Mr. Wetzler bought out his partner, Rance Spurlock, in 1954 and the Lizard Acres became known as the Circle 1 Livestock Company Inc.

At its peak, in 1970, the Circle 1 Feedlot consisted of 1,800 acres and approximately 40,000 head of cattle.

There were also approximately 45 Circle 1 employees during this period.

It was to become kind of a little town, though not all of the people lived on the feedlot. Some people lived in Surprise and El Mirage. But there were a lot who lived there and felt that Lizard Acres was their home.

There was no post office or civic center at Lizard Acres, but the small community did boast of having its own fire engine, it

reportedly was the first engine in that portion of the West Valley.

When the men were not working, they participated in a baseball team made of up Circle 1 employees.

Though life among these reptiles and the livestock might appear to be rough to some, says Mrs. Gemmill, it turned out to be a good place to live and bring up two sons.

Long before Mrs. Gemmill became a part of the history of Sun City West, she resided in Prescott.

"It all started in early January 1947, when Lance Spurlock and Charlie Wetzler, who had run cattle together for many years up in Holbrook, decided to have a feedlot of their own down here."

The feedlot began with approximately 1,000 head of cattle. Mark Gemmill was selected to be the foreman of the new operation. "I decided around the first of December that I would bring my baby and come down. I couldn't stand to be away from him that long."

She spent her first Christmas at Lizard Acres in a trailer.

"We had a circle of trailers and tents and one outhouse. It was a little bit primitive."

Mrs. Gemmill says by February, her family was able to move into their home.

Eventually a lawn, shade trees and air conditioning units were added, making the house more comfortable, she adds.

The house, which was enlarged several times, would be come home for the family for approximately 30 years.

] Before being bulldozed down by the Webb Corp., to make way for Sun City West Phase

In 1978, the Gemmill house contained a living room, kitchen, service room, three bedrooms, one bath and a carport.

Not far from the Gemmill house, there were rows of cattle pens topped off with shade awnings.

These shade awnings, which were developed by Mr. Wetzler and built by Mr. Gemmill, set a precedent for the cattle industry.

The cattle were fed hay, some of which was grown at Lizard Acres.

They were also fed alfalfa, oats, barley, maize, cottonseed meal, cottonseed hulls, beet pulp, citrus pulp and potatoes.

"Anything that was good food, they would feed," she explains.

There were about five large haystacks spread throughout the feedlot.

Mrs. Gemmill says when one of these haystacks caught on fire, it was a spectacular sight. "There was basically no way to put the fire out."

One of the main types of feed used by Circle 1, was called ensilage. Ensilage is a tall-growing sorghum plant. "The ensilage was stored in large pits in the ground. It was bulldozed in and packed down in layers with water. This accumulation was covered with plastic, which was weighted down with used tires. "People would come around, through the feedlot and wonder what we were doing, growing tires?"

The farming operations kept approximately 1,000 acres under cultivation with corn and wheat.

Several ponds on the property, says Mrs. Gemmill, were a water conservation

measure to save the water runoff from the fields. These ponds became the stopping point for a large variety of water fowl on their annual migration.

"We used to have avocets, water turkeys, snow geese, and we even had at one time, six egrets. I hate to tell you, but someone went down and shot them." Mrs. Gemmill said the ponds gave her an education in birds not usually found in the desert.

These ponds also came in handy, she adds, when her sons began studying biology in school.

Today, Mrs. Gemmill paints and teaches art at several local recreation centers. Her husband Mark is retired. One of the Gemmill sons is a Phoenix lawyer; the other is a captain in the United States Navy.

The Sun City couple has managed to retain some of the mementos of their lives together at Lizard Acres. Photos and news clippings from those former days fill several small boxes. They also have an aerial map of Lizard Acres and site maps of the infant Sun City West community.

With the help of one of the site maps, she drove out to Sun City West one day and determined that her former home once stood in the middle of Maplewood Drive.

Her Sun City home still bears some clues from Lizard Acres and the Circle 1 Livestock Co.

She has managed to find and hold onto several branding irons from the feedlot and a few cattle identification tags. Mrs. Gemmill also has the lizard weather vane, which now adorns her house. "It's black now. It used to be bright red. I painted it black and hung it up. I thought if people can have fans and dancing girls and things, I could have a lizard."

# Leapin' lizards

## Home where reptiles once roamed now tips scales as retirement site

By LAURIE HURD-MOORE  
Sun Cities Independent

Sun City West — it once was a great place to grow lizards.

The unofficial name of the site, "Lizard Acres," developed from a comment made by the wife of Circle One Livestock Company Inc., owner, J. Charles Wetzler.

Asked by her husband what she thought of his new West Valley property, Katharine replied, "It looks like a good place to raise lizards."

Today, what was once fertile territory for lizards, is now home to the 19,000 residents of Sun City West.

Churches now stand where vegetables and cattle feed were farmed.

Adult-living homes with lush landscapes, now stand where cattle once were penned.

The mill, grain storage buildings, silage pits and shops are also gone.

Even the tons of leftover cow manure was put to good use fertilizing green belts and golf courses in the burgeoning Sun City West.

Nothing except some photos, artifacts and memories remain of the once-thriving business. Many of these items and remembrances belong to Mr. and Mrs. Mark Gemmill, of Sun City.

The Gemmills and their two sons spent approximately 30 years with the Circle 1 Livestock

Company at Lizard Acres.

Mark Gemmill was the foreman of the feedlot. The Sun City couple were also good friends of the Wetzlers.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Wetzler are dead now, but the Gemmills remain in touch with their daughter, Mrs. Pit Lucking of Phoenix.

Mrs. Gemmill, today an artist in her own right, recently shared memories of her life at Lizard Acres with members of the Sun Cities Area Historical Society.

Also present at the meeting were several present and former Del E. Webb Corp., employees and more than a dozen Sun City West Pioneers.

The meeting was the first of its kind held in Sun City West.

The Sun Cities Area Historical Society was founded in 1985 as a non-profit organization, dedicated to preserving the history of both Sun City and Sun City West.

"Hello, Sun City West — So Long Lizard Acres," was presented April 26 in the Community Services Building.

The meeting was held two weeks before National Historic Preservation Week, May 13 to 19.

Mrs. Gemmill, along with Webb Vice President of Land Development Dick Mastin and the former Vice President and Special Assistant to the President Ann Loos Raymond, recalled



**ALMOST GONE FOREVER.** Very little remains of the Circle 1 Livestock Co., better known to some as Lizard Acres. This photo belongs to the Del E. Webb Corp. and was taken April 2, 1978.

Photo courtesy of the Sun Cities Area Historical Society

See *LIZARD*, page 6

## • LIZARD *From page one*

their role in the changeover from Lizard Acres to Sun City West.

Mrs. Gemmill says upon first moving to the ranch, she learned that Lizard Acres was good for growing a lot more than lizards.

Rattlesnakes, scorpions, and black widow spiders also favored the location. One such creature, a bull snake, became sort of a pet to Mrs. Gemmill.

The resident says she used to pet the snake and enjoyed watching it wind its way up palm trees, until her husband decided it had to go and killed it.

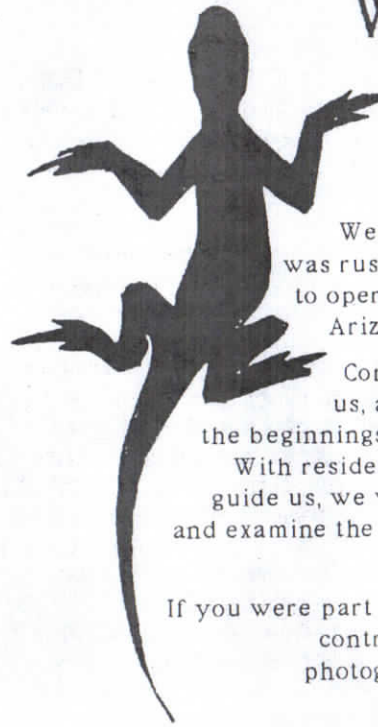
The mother of two says she quickly learned to place the legs of her baby's crib in mason jars, to ward against climbing scorpions.

Aside from the resident creepers, it was the cattle that soon ruled Lizard Acres.

The property was first known as Lizard Acres Spurlock and Wetzler Feedlot.

Wetzler and Spurlock also operated a cattle business in the Mesa/Chandler area.

Mr. Wetzler bought out his partner, Rance Spurlock in 1954 and the Lizard Acres became known as the Circle 1 Livestock Company Inc.



---

---

## Welcome To Lizard Acres

Welcome to a place where the living was rustic and the business at hand was to operate one of the largest feedlots in Arizona, the Circle One Livestock Co.

Come and kick up some history with us, as the Independent looks back to the beginnings of Del E. Webb's Sun City West.

With resident's scrapbooks and memories to guide us, we will feature a summertime series and examine the people and events that made Sun City West what it is today.

If you were part of this history, and would like to contribute your recollections and old photographs, telephone the *Sun Cities Independent* at 972-6101.

---

---



At its peak, in 1970, the Circle 1 Feedlot consisted of 1,800 acres and approximately 40,000 head of cattle.

There were also approximately 45 Circle 1 employees during this period.

"It was to become kind of a little town, though not all of the people lived on the feedlot. Some people lived in Surprise and El Mirage. But there were a lot who lived there and felt that Lizard Acres was their home."

There was no post office or civic center at Lizard Acres, but the small community did boast of having its own fire engine. It reportedly was the first engine in that portion of the West Valley.

When the men were not working, they participated in a baseball team made up of Circle 1 employees.

Though life among these reptiles and the livestock might appear rough to some, says Mrs. Gemmill, it turned out to be a good place to live and bring up two sons.

Long before Mrs. Gemmill became a part of the history of Sun City West, she resided in Prescott.

"It all started in early January, 1947, when Lance Spurlock and Charlie Wetzler, who had run cattle together for many years up in Holbrook, decided to have a feedlot of their own down here."

The feedlot began with approximately 1,000 head of cattle.

Mark Gemmill was selected to be the foreman of the new operation.

"I decided around the first of December that I would bring my baby and come down. I couldn't stand to be away from him that long."

She spent her first Christmas at Lizard Acres in a trailer.

"We had a circle of trailers and tents and one outhouse. It was a little bit primitive."

Mrs. Gemmill says by February, her family was able to move into their home.

Eventually a lawn, shade trees and air conditioning units were added, making the house more comfortable, she adds.

The house, which was enlarged several times, would become home for the family for approximately 30 years.

Before being bulldozed down by the Webb Corp., to make way for Sun City West Phase I homes in 1978, the Gemmill house contained a living room, kitchen, service room, three bedrooms, one bath and a carport.

Not far from the Gemmill house, there were rows of cattle pens topped off with shade awnings.

These shade awnings, which were developed by Mr. Wetzler and built by Mr. Gemmill, set a precedent for the cattle industry.

The cattle were fed hay, some of which was grown at Lizard Acres.

They were also fed alfalfa, oats, barley, maize, cottonseed meal, cottonseed hulls, beet pulp, citrus pulp and potatoes.

"Anything that was good food, they would feed," she explains.

There were about five large haystacks spread throughout the feedlot.

Mrs. Gemmill says when one of these haystacks caught on fire, it was a spectacular sight.

"There was basically no way to put the fire out."

One of the main types of feed used by Circle 1, was called ensilage. Ensilage is a tall-growing sorghum plant.

The ensilage was stored in large pits in the ground. It was bulldozed in and packed down in layers with water. This accumulation was covered with plastic, which was weighted down with used tires.

"People would come around through the feedlot and wonder what we were doing, growing tires?"

The farming operations kept approximately 1,000 acres under cultivation with corn, wheat, turnips, parsley, potatoes, green onions, rappini, artichokes and watermelon.

Most of the vegetables and fruits, she says, were grown in conjunction with vegetable growers throughout the Valley.

The former resident of Lizard Acres says it was wonderful to run out to the fields on a hot day, crack open a watermelon and find the center cool.

She says Lizard Acres also had two small citrus orchards.

"There were three irrigation wells and two domestic wells.

"All of you here are probably getting your water from those wells."

There was also a water tank on the feedlot. The tank was adorned with a red metal lizard, which was used as weather vane.

Several ponds on the property, says Mrs. Gemmill, were a water conservation measure to save the water runoff from the fields.

These ponds became the stopping point for a large variety of water fowl on their annual migration.

"We used to have avocets, water turkeys, snow geese and we even had at one time, six egrets. I hate to tell you, but someone went down and shot them."

Mrs. Gemmill says the ponds gave her an education in birds not usually found in the desert.

These ponds also came in handy, she adds, when her sons began studying biology in school.

Today, Mrs. Gemmill paints and teaches art at several local recreation centers. Her husband Mark, is retired. One of the Gemmill sons is a Phoenix lawyer; the other is a captain in the United States Navy.

The Sun City couple have managed to retain some of the mementos of their lives together at Lizard Acres.

Photos and news clippings from those former days fill several small boxes.

They also have an aerial map of Lizard Acres and site maps of the infant Sun City West community.

With the help of one of the site maps, she drove out to Sun City West one day and determined that her former home once stood in the middle of Maplewood Drive.

Her Sun City home still bears some clues from Lizard Acres and the Circle 1 Livestock Co.

She has managed to find and hold onto several branding iron from the feedlot and a few cattle-identification tags.

Mrs. Gemmill also has the lizard weather vane, which now adorns her house.

"It's black now. It used to be bright red. I painted it black and hung it up. I thought if people can have fans and dancing girls and things, I could have a lizard."

*This series on the history of Sun City West will continue throughout the summer. Next week, interviews with Mark Gemmill and Pit Lucking, the daughter of J. Charles Wetzler.*

# Historical group preserves Sun City West memories

By TIFFANY MEANS  
Daily News-Sun staff

SUN CITY WEST — Scrapbook in hand, Clarice Uhl reminisced recently during a local historians' meeting featuring speakers who helped establish Del Webb Community Inc.'s second Arizona retirement community.

The Sun Cities Area Historical Society along with Webb designed Thursday's program, "Hello, Sun City West — So Long Lizard Acres," to attract Sun City West pioneers like Uhl and her husband, Ed.

The Uhls were the second family to move into the new community. Luman Wick, the first official resident, also attended the meeting.

For awhile, the two lived close to each other. Now residing in different areas, the Uhls and Wick remain friends, Wick said.

"There was a lot of friendship in the early group. Del Webb took us on lots of trips and parties that everybody went on," Wick said.

Historical Society members said those are the memories that they want founding citizens to help them record.

The club wants donations of fliers, brochures, and other memorabilia that can be used to record such events.

About 15 in the 85-member audience could boast a move-in date during late 1978 — which was the official opening year for Sun City West — and early 1979.

The event marked the club's first public attempt to begin documenting the community's growth, said Al Driscoll, Historical Society chairman of the committee for the preservation of Sun City West.

As an introduction, Gloria Gemmel turned back the clock



Daily News-Sun photo by Stephen

**MEMORY LANE** — Early Sun City West residents Clarice Uhl, left, her husband, Ed, Luman Wick look at photographs from the community's beginning, after a meeting of Sun City Area Historical Society Thursday at the Sun City West Community Building.

to pre-Webb development as she described the area when it supported a working community of 45 people.

"Once upon a time, there was a place called Lizard Acres," Gemmel said. The name was the unofficial title given to Circle One Livestock Co., one of the largest feedlots in the nation.

Gimmel and her husband moved to the feedlot shortly after its opening in the late-1940s. Nearly 40 years later, their

home was one of the buildings razed to make way for Webb.

Clarice Uhl and Wick said they enjoyed hearing Gimmel's description of the feedlot.

Dick Mastin, Webb vice president in charge of land development, worked on Sun City West from the project's beginning in 1972.

Mastin, then 23 years old, said he remembers the sense of excitement that pervaded the people planning and construct-

ing the community, a process which took about six years.

After the Webb executives shared their memories, Driscoll asked residents to recollect their own stories and write them down for the Historical Society.

Clarice Uhl said she is "tired of the dirt and the coyotes."

"It was kind of surprising that no one mentioned much they like it here. I do," Uhl said.

SCW



NEWS-SUN Thursday, September 28, 1978

## **Remains**

Decaying remains of cattle loading docks near Surprise serve as reminder of agricultural area that once was in the northwest area. The dock was used by Lizard Acres for its cattle operations, which are closing down as Sun City West construction proceeds in that area.

(News-Sun Photo by Rick Smith)

AVONDALE ARIZ.  
WESTSIDER  
W. 2,410

MAR 29 1972

## Webb Buys Lizard Acres

The Webb Development Co. has purchased approximately 11,000 acres of new land, including the Lizard Acres area, northwest of Sun City, according to Robert H. Johnson, president of the Webb Corp. The land, which is presently in agricultural use, is located west of the Agua Fria River bed.

"The acquisition is part of our long range planning," Johnson said. "Webb has no immediate plans for development of the newly acquired acreage since portions of the original land acquired for Sun City are yet to be developed.

"At this time our primary concern is the steady, orderly growth of Sun City," the Webb President said.

Part of the property involved was owned by the Circle One Livestock Co., a cattle feeding operation, also known as Lizard Acres.

Circle One was part of a combination of 15 parcels under separate ownership. However, the major portion of over 10,000 acres was held by Circle One and the J.G. Boswell Co.

"Sale of our property will in no way affect our cattle feeding business at this location," J.C. Wexler, head of Circle One declared.

July 1971

Sun City, Ariz., Sun Citizen

## Lizard Acres Livestock Land

### In 11,000-acre Webb Acquisition

Land owned by Circle One Livestock Co. north of Sun City was part of the 11,000 acres of land recently acquired by the Del E. Webb Development Co., The Sun City Sun Citizen has learned.

At the time purchase of the 11,000 acres was announced last week, the Webb Company did not pinpoint the land other than to report it was west of the Agua Fria River.

J. C. Wetzler, president of the livestock firm, confirmed that Circle One, also known as Lizard Acres, was part of the land.

It also was learned that the newly acquired Webb land ranges north of Sun City and west on both sides of Grand Avenue.

The property was a combination of 15 parcels under separate ownership, although the major portion — 10,000 — was acquired from Circle and the J. G. Boswell Co.

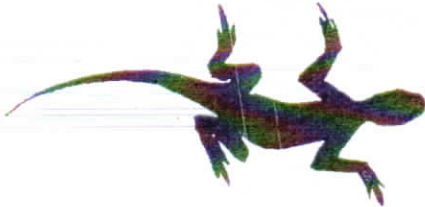
"Sale of our property will in no way affect our cattle feed business at this location," said Wetzler. "The Webb Company said it has no plans for development in this area within the foreseeable future, and we expect to continue our business here for many years to come."

William V. Dewey, president of the Sun City Homeowners Association, said there have been some complaints of odors from the

Lizard Acres operation. He added, however, there is the difficulty of separating odors from there and those from the Spur Feed Co. on Olive Avenue, which is now moving out.

Dewey said he was "delighted" to learn of Webb's acquisition of the Lizard Acres property.

Robert H. Johnson, Webb president, had described the 11,000-acre acquisition as "part of our long-range planning." He said the company has no immediate plans for development of the land "since portions of the original land acquired for Sun City are yet to be developed."



## Just Where Was “Lizard Acres?”

Back in the 1940s, R. S. Spurlock and J. C. Wetzler of Holbrook, AZ, were looking over a proposed 1,800-acre site for a new ranch one mile east of the intersection of Grand Avenue and Bell Road.

Supposedly Spurlock said, “Jumpin’ Jehosophat, this country isn’t fit for raising anything but lizards.” Hence the Circle One Livestock Company operations here became known as “Lizard Acres.”

But today’s Sun City West covers slightly more than 7,000 acres. So, where was the 1,800 acres that gave the community its nickname?

A starting point is the “Lizard Acres” sign on the east side of Grand Ave., just opposite the entrance to Surprise Towne Center. This sign marked the location of the cattle loading and unloading pens along the east side of the railroad.

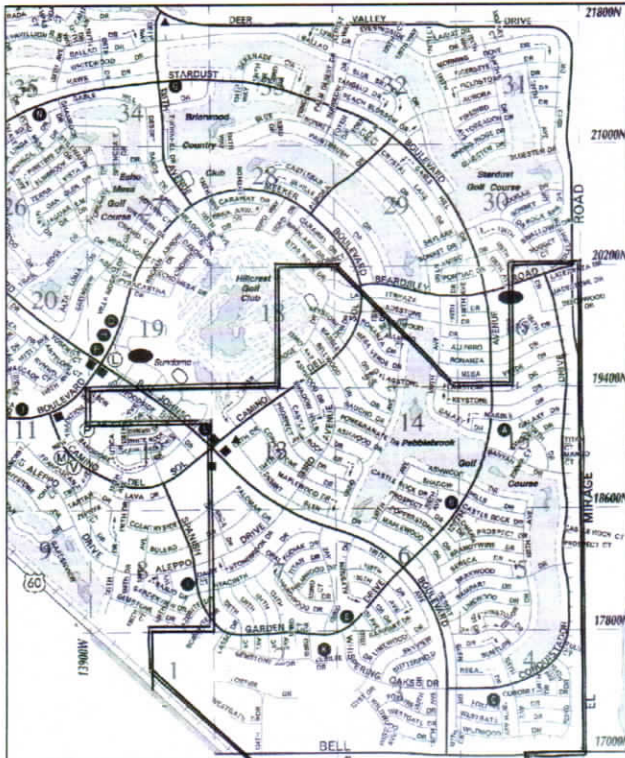
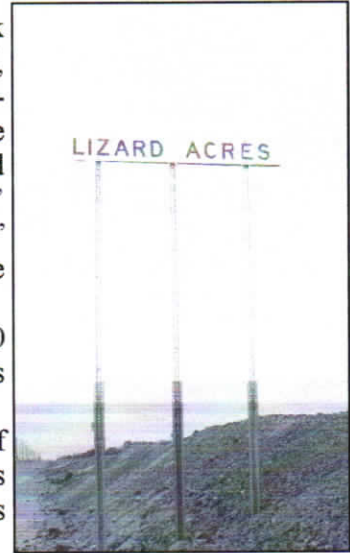
The southern border was actually south of Bell, occupying land where the former Surprise town center was located, along with RISE, Windmill Inn, Crossroads Shopping Center – all the way to Dysart Rd. It also included the triangle of land between Dysart, Grand, and Bell Road. The ranch was bordered on the east by today’s El Mirage Road, and ran as far north as Beardsley Rd. The north and west boundaries were irregular as shown on the map.

At its height, “Lizard Acres” was home to 40,000 cattle. These were kept in rows of pens topped with shade awnings – a first for the cattle industry. Water sprayers were fitted to each pen to help keep the dust down. The pens occupied an 80-acre site in the southern part of the ranch.

R. H. Johnson Blvd. wound through the cattle pens, making early buyers wonder if

this is where they really wanted to locate. One of the most challenging jobs of demolition involved the underground grain storage bins. They were huge, almost like bunkers used in wartime. The bins were V-shaped, solid concrete and had a system of elevators. Workers finally resorted to dynamite and blasted them to pieces.

At the height of construction in 1978, 30 scrapers were moving some 45,000 cubic yards of dirt a day. An older style of life was demolished to make way for a new community. So long, Lizard Acres, Hello Sun City West.



“Lizard Acres” occupied the southeast portion of today’s SCW as shown by the area within the double line.

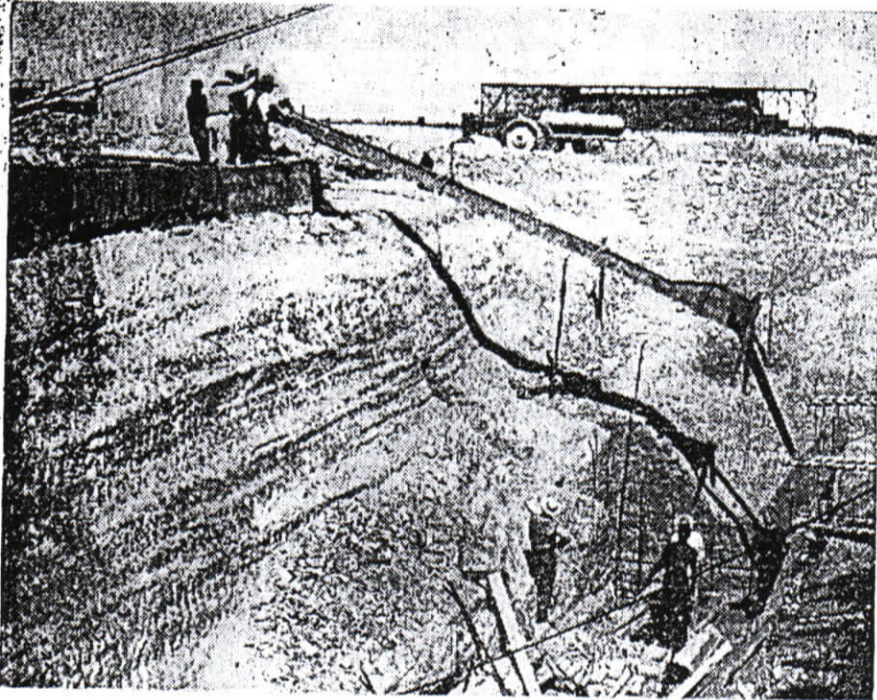
SCW



# ARTIZONA Ranchman

## Fat Cattle—and Lizards

Spurlock and Wetzler Building Outstanding Feeder Unit  
Near Peoria



View of the deep grain pit being built by Spurlock and Wetzler. It will have a capacity of 1,800 to 3,000 tons.

**J**UMPIN' Jehoshaphat!" yelled R. S. Spurlock when he first saw the proposed site of the new ranch he and J. C. Wetzler were planning. "This country isn't fit for raising anything but lizards!"

And that's how Lizard Acres Ranch, located on the greasewood flats some miles northwest of Peoria, got its name. For in spite of Spurlock's first impression, the two men went ahead to turn Lizard Acres into what may soon be one of the most up-to-date feeder outfits in the State.

True, the spread is still in its infancy. Workmen are living there in tents and shacks, and there is much yet to be done. But the ranch is in operation. At this very minute, there are well over 1,000 whiteface feeders being fattened up in its fine, new corrals.

Those corrals are the first feature that meets your eye when you drive northward on Lizard Acres. The many trim pens, some of them have a capacity of 100 head—are divided into two sections by a wide driving alley. Another feature is the way the concrete feed troughs are built into the alley fences—an arrangement similar to the one at Tovrea's.

About that time, you will meet Charley Cochran, the congenial fore-

man of the outfit, and he'll explain that they built those troughs themselves—even to the metal forms. With pardonable pride, he will tell you about the blacksmith and welding shops on the ranch, and of the many unique metal jobs they can accomplish right there at Lizard Acres.

"The forms we made for the troughs are similar to those Tovrea uses," he says. "We worked the whole job out efficiently, too. Installation costs us around \$1.50 to \$1.75 a running foot."

Why did the ranch select this type of feed troughs?

"Simply because we've found it's easier and better to distribute feed by truck," Cochran explains. "The truck we use on the ranch has a built-in chute that automatically pours feed into the troughs as it is driven along the driving alley. It takes the chore-work out of feeding. Actually, one truck can do the work of four wagons, four horses, and eight men."

Then he'll take you over to the newly-built feed-mill and show you how feed is fed directly from the bin into the truck. All feed is ground right there on the ranch. "Percenters" mix the correct amount of grain

(Continued On Next Page)



## Fat Cattle and Lizards (Continued From Page 15)

with the ground hay, which mixture is sent into a cyclone, and finally into the bin.

### Eight-Man Job

"Eight men can easily feed as many as 1,800 cattle with our present setup—and at an average daily cost of 75 to 80 cents per head unit," Cochran says. "The men are equipped to turn out five tons of feed an hour if need be. In the future, sometime, we hope to build a new feed mill that will process feed sufficient for 2,500 to 4,000 cattle."

You can easily believe that big things are in store for Lizard Acres when you get a glimpse of the remarkable grain pit that is being built not far from the feed-mill. It will be lined on all sides with concrete, and have a capacity of 1,800 to 3,000 tons.

The water supply at Lizard Acres is provided by a 350-foot well, with a 210-foot lift, which is located at ranch headquarters. The ranch slopes away from headquarters, averaging about an eight-foot fall, which is sufficient drop to carry water to almost every section where it is needed. A main pipeline runs down the driving alley to a "T", which, in turn, dispenses water to the pens in the corrals. A second pipeline carries water to the more distant wire corrals.

It's when you talk about crops,

however, Cochran gets really enthusiastic. The entire crop program centers around a 340-acre farm, where silage and pasture will be grown. Spurlock and Wetzler believe strongly in silage as cattle feed and intend to produce most of it on the farm. "We have two plantings of barley and alfalfa in right now—90 and 60 acres each," Cochran explains. "And of course, we plan to follow the barley crop with a planting of hegari."

This feeder ranch has been built as a part of the Spurlock & Wetzler northern ranch, which spreads out over a few townships in the Holbrook area. Fall calves and yearlings are bought and shipped up to the northern ranch, where they have the opportunity to grow out. When they are ready for finishing, they are shipped down to Lizard Acres.

True, the Lizard Acres ranch is still far from completed. There is much yet to be done. But in spite of this, the ranch is already well on its way toward becoming one of the most outstanding feeder outfits in the State.

## Hello, Sun City West; So Long, Lizard Acres

Cattle are giving way to people at the new Sun City West, where residential construction is in its early stages.

One of the nation's big commercial feed lots, Lizard Acres, is part of an 11,000-acre tract which the Del E. Webb Development Corp. bought in 1972 for its second huge unit of retirement homes and recreation facilities.

Lizard Acres is moving out after more than 30 years of feeding as many as 25,000 cattle at a time, and its striking name soon will be erased by smooth streets, neat homes and nicely manicured yards.

**BUT CATTLEMEN** of the Southwest — and elsewhere — will remember it as Lizard Acres.

J. C. "Charlie" Wetzler says he and his wife, Katharine collaborated in picking the name after his Circle One Livestock Co. began its feeding operations there in 1945.

Not because they thought the name was pretty, but because it was different. Cattle were coming to Circle One from as far away as Florida — "and if there are two places in the United States with the same name, you can

bet the railroads or the truckers will go to the wrong place," Wetzler said.

**WETZLER**, SCION of pioneer Arizona families, has been working with cattle since the 1920s. His father was a sheep man. His grandfather on his mother's side was I. E. Solomon who founded the Gila Valley Bank at Solomonville in 1899. It was a major forerunner of the present Valley National Bank.

Says Wetzler of his Circle One operations at Lizard Acres, "We've been running a hotel for cattle. We don't own them, we house and feed them for other people."

In short, Circle One takes raw steers and fattens them for market in a management operation which at one time shipped carloads of evenly developed steers to a major supermarket chain for processing as its best beef specialties.

**WETZLER HAD** a partner, R. C. "Rance" Spurlock, when Circle One started, and its headquarters were in Holbrook. The partners dissolved the arrangement amicably in 1954 for family and financial reasons and divided their holdings.

For a time, the Wetzler-Spurlock operations were at Tremaine, in the Mesa-Chandler area. Then Circle One acquired a 640-acre section of what was to be called Lizard Acres, which later tripled in size.

Now the 1,800 acres are being

Turn to • SO LONG, Page D-3



WETZLER

## • SO LONG, LIZARD ACRES

(Concluded from Page D-1)

cleared, the feed mill dismantled and some of the equipment sold. Wetzler says he still has 4,000 or 5,000 cattle on feed with friends at other locations in the Valley and hasn't quite managed to move off the Sun City West site: "We're still one percent there."

**HE'S A BIT** doubtful about the commercial feeding business now because of an oversupply of feed lots and because the beef price picture doesn't encourage cattlemen to expand their holdings.

"What can a man do when he buys feeder cattle at 60 cents a pound and sells them fat at 52 cents?" Wetzler wonders.

But Wetzler thinks Circle One probably will acquire another feed lot somewhere as a replacement for Lizard Acres, because the company's reputation is valuable. "We're known all over the country," he says.

**WETZLER IS** 72 and vigorous — in the manner of his father, Julius, who came to the United States from Germany in 1885 when he was 16 years old.

In the Southwest, Julius learned English, Spanish, Hopi and Navajo. He made a fortune in sheep and land, then lost it in the Depression.

Charlie Wetzler has since been depression-conscious. He says the Wetzler-Spurlock partnership dropped

half a million dollars in 1951, but made most of it back the next year. His prime asset, he believes, has been good credit — which many good cattlemen always have claimed, they lack in sufficient quantity.

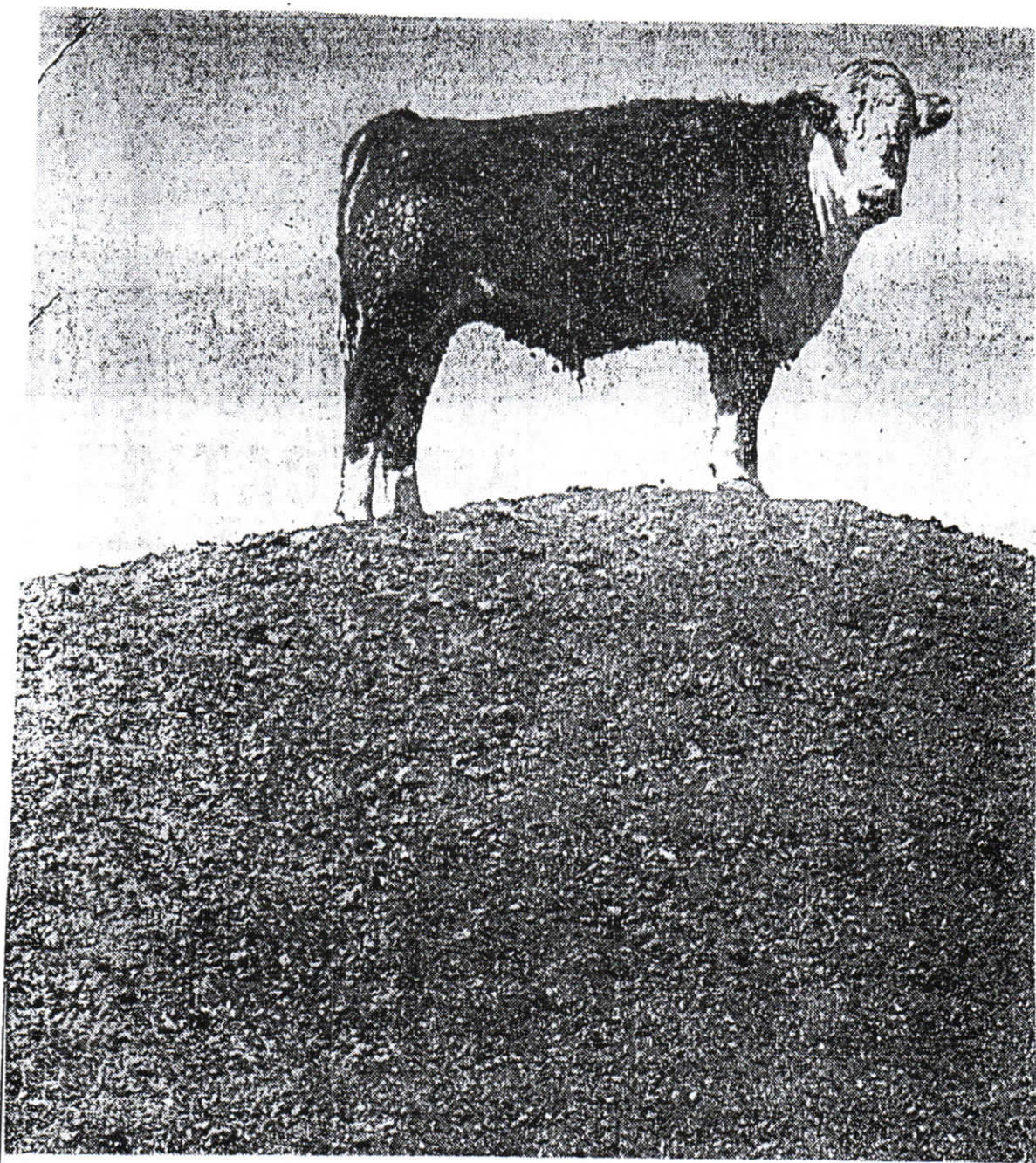
**IN HIS EARLY** days here, Wetzler lived on 11th Avenue and drove daily to Lizard Acres. There was only one traffic light between his home and his place of business, he recalls.

The commercial feed lot survived the first Sun City, some of whose early residents complained they couldn't open their windows because of stench from Lizard Acres' operations. Complaints stopped after scientific measurements determined that Sun Citians weren't really scenting any odor from the cattle.

Wetzler is a community leader as well as a cattleman. His work in that field won him designation as 1959's Man of the Year in Arizona Agriculture.

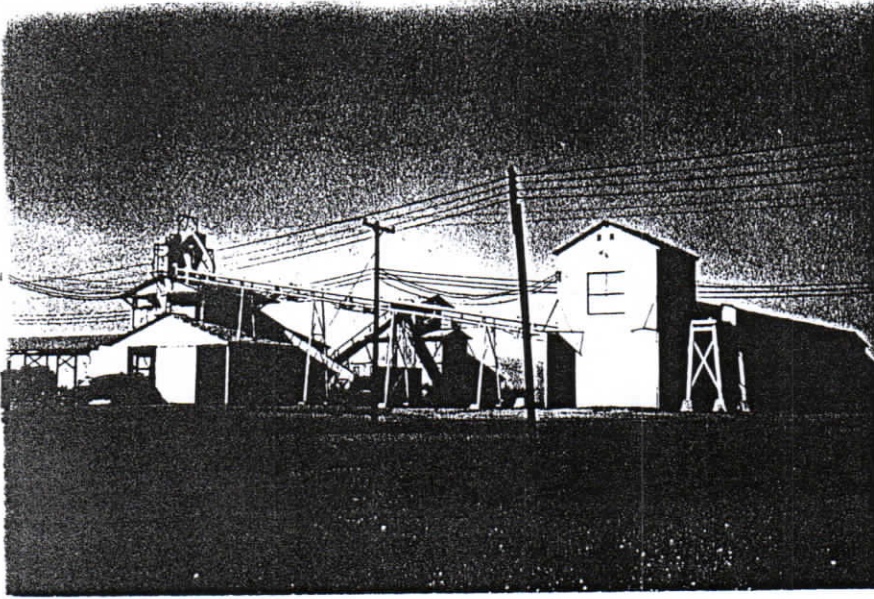
He is on the Arizona Water Commission and is a leading booster for the Central Arizona Project. He is a director-emeritus of Valley National Bank, having been active on the board from 1966 until recently. And he is still on the board of Boswell Memorial Hospital in Sun City.

He remains a director of the ASU Foundation which he helped form and holds an honorary doctor of laws degree from Arizona State.



**Healthy Animal** At the Circle One feed lot near Marinette, a fine steer stands on top of pile of fertilizer. He has been fed for 120 days, consuming 3,000 pounds of mixed feed at the rate of 25 pounds per day. He has gained 240 pounds at a cost of 60 cents per day. A healthy animal will drink seven gallons of water a day and eats the amount of feed equal to its own weight every 30 days.—(Republic Photos by E. D. Newcomer).





OYSART and GRAND AVE.



*Lizard Acres*

**SPURLOCK & WETZLER  
FEED LOT**

**← 1 MILE →**

Date unknown

## Gemmills recall days when lizards roamed lots

By Laurie Hurd-Moore  
Sun Cities Independent

When they first learn of the existence of Lizard Acres, some Sun City West residents react with a grin and possibly, a chuckle. They mentally categorize the name with other "quaint ol' Arizona designations," such as Slaughter House Gulch, Polygamy Creek and Lucky Cuss Mine.

Yet, long before the Del E. Webb Corp., purchased the property in 1971 and developed it into part of Sun City West, the Circle 1 Livestock Company Inc. – unofficially known as Lizard Acres – was a thriving business.

Circle 1 in one point in 1970, employed 45 people to manage and maintain nearly 40,000 head of cattle, according to Mark and Gloria Gemmill of Sun City.

The Gemmills called the place home for 30 years, raising two sons in a house once located on the site. The feedlot included three main houses and more than a dozen trailer homes.

Cattle feed was produced on 1,000 acres of the 1,800-acre ranch. There was enough surplus feed, says the retired foreman to supply other area feed lots. Cattle pens comprised approximately 80 acres of the property.

The Circle 1 Livestock Company Inc., was designed to be, according to owner, J.C. "Charlie" Wetzler, to be a "hotel for cattle."

Mr. Gemmill says, "It started out to be a privately-owned feedlot. "We kept building on and took on other people's cattle to feed. It just kept getting bigger and seems like every year we would have to build more pens." Cattle from as far away as Florida went to build the Circle 1 Livestock Company Inc.

Circle 1 evolved from a smaller feedlot which was started in 1947, "The Spurlock and Wetzler Feedlot." Lance Spurlock and Charlie Wetzler had both run cattle together on a ranch in Holbrook. When the men decided to move their operation to the Valley they leased a feedlot and first employed Mr. Gemmill in 1947. Mr. Gemmill was raised in Crown King.

Soon the partners decided they wanted a feedlot of their own, so they bought this "desert" in the West Valley. They were to call their new business, "Lizard Acres/Spurlock and Wetzler Feed Lot." The business was located one mile from the intersections of Dysart Road and Grand Avenue. "I don't think it was called Circle 1 until about '50," recalls the former company foreman.

The partnership between Spurlock and Wetzler was to dissolve in 1954. Wetzler would become the sole owner of the company. Mr. Gemmill was to be trained in all aspects of the feedlot operation. "It was kind of split up. There were several of us who were capable of working any part of it. I took care of all the hiring and firing, the farming and operation of the feed mill and the construction of company structures," he explains.

Construction at Lizard Acres, adds Mr. Gemmill continued until shortly before the Del E. Webb Corp., leveled the business. The Webb Development Co. purchased the feedlot as a part of an 11,000-acre package in 1971.

Ultimately, due to employee death and retirement, Mr. Gemmill was to be the sole manager of Wetzler's Lizard Acres.

"I had to quit playing golf when this happened. But there wasn't anything definite that any of us did. We could all be involved in any part of it, at any time," he says. "Mr. Wetzler," explains Mr. Gemmill would "keep his finger on the whole thing," visiting daily from his home or office in Phoenix. The business of fattening up cattle for slaughter elsewhere was not a simple one, he says. Cattle, in addition to a steady diet, need shade from the Arizona Sun.

The Lizard Acres Feedlot was divided up into pens. Each pen was fitted with a metal shade, which would accommodate all the cattle.

The cattle were initially branded with a 1 within a circle, representing Circle 1. Later, the cattle were identified by their colored ear tags. "The business changed and it became ridiculous to have the hides all branded up because it hurt the value of the cowhide."

The feedlot pens on the 80-acre site were constructed by Mr. Gemmill. Water sprayers, which were used to keep down the dust, were fitted to each cattle pen. The pens, after a disaster involving lightning, were also grounded. A metal fence not grounded, was hit by lightning during a storm. The resulting electricity, passed through the fence and through some of the cows and killed approximately 26 head of cattle. "In any storm, a bunch of cattle turn their backs, their tails to the storm. Some were touching the fence, some were touching each other," he explains. He says the employees immediately grounded all the fences. "All we could do was put an iron stake or fence post and tie all the wires to it."

It was the odor produced by manure in these pens that became the focus of some attention by residents of Sun City in the mid-1960s.

Mr. Gemmill says Circle 1 was initially blamed for cattle odors which were reaching the community. It was also about this time that the Del Webb Corp. purchased Lizard Acres. "They began to get all over us, well, where the prevailing wind was, there wasn't any way," says the Sun Citian. Tests measuring the direction of the prevailing wind were conducted by Maricopa County Officials. They determined that the odor was not coming from Lizard Acres, but from the Spur Feedlot located at Olive and 111<sup>th</sup> Avenue. Some of the odor, adds Mr. Gemmill, came from raw sewage which was leaking in Sun City. "There were actually two feedlots down there, but the other one folded up," he says. Odors from the Spur Feedlot ultimately became the focus of a lawsuit by citizens of Sun City. The Webb Corp. offered to buy Spur Feedlot, but was turned down. DEVCO filed for an injunction to close the operation. Eventually the case went to the Arizona Supreme Court. They delayed a final decision on the matter until 1971. Meanwhile because of the long court delays and costs, Spur Feedlot agreed to move if Webb would pay its costs.

Around the summer of 1978, Mr. Gemmill says, Circle 1 Livestock Co. was relocated to a site near Scottsdale. The couple moved with the company. When the lease in Scottsdale was lost, they moved with the livestock company again, to a place near Williams Air Force Base. The Gemmills remained with the company another five years.

Upon the death of the owner's wife, Katharine, followed shortly by Mr. Wetzler's death, the feedlot closed. The Gemmills were to become Sun Citians in 1984.