Sixty years ago, Arthur Pack offered his 26,000 acre dude ranch (since reduced to 21,000 by Abiquiu Lake) to the United Presbyterian Church (USA). Some from the National Staff (then in NYC) came to New Mexico to meet with Mr. Pack. They were highly skeptical that all that land in a rather remote part of the country, in a state with relatively few Presbyterians, could be an asset to the denomination. Afterall, New Mexico had been a state for only 43 years and lots of people across the US still don’t know it is one of our “50.” Wisely, they invited into their consultations several pastors serving in New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado and a few educators serving in the many schools Presbyterians had established in 40 northern New Mexico villages.

Those with experience in the Southwest and cowboy camp meetings could envision the ranch as an ideal location for educational opportunities, something like a camp and conference center for adults. Out of those conversations and shared ideas, it was agreed to receive Arthur and Phoebe Pack’s generous gift. It became the National Adult Study Center of The United Presbyterian Church. Since reunion with the Presbyterian Church (US), it has been owned by the Presbyterian Church (USA), continuing the traditions and purposes for which it was originally imagined.

When the church accepted ownership, everything on the property was included in the gift: the buildings and furnishings, equipment, animals, vehicles and staff that chose to assist in the transition. Buildings on the ranch still in use include Ghost House (the oldest, predating it’s dude ranch years), several residences, the adobe cottages, Corral Block, the barns, equipment and animal areas, and the Robert Wood Johnson house that became the library named Cottonwood.

The house that Arthur Pack built for his family that later became O’Keeffe’s home, was a seven-acre parcel (now 12-acres owned by the O’Keeffe Museum), a small island of private land surrounded by Ghost Ranch. A home on 200 acres built by Edward H. Bennett, a Chicago architect, was purchased to be a home for the director of the new study center.

In the original Headquarters building were the dude ranch kitchen and dining room. One of the first buildings added was a larger dining room attached to the Headquarters to serve a larger number of people. When attendance grew more, the present dining room at the end of the alfalfa field was erected and the attached room became Convocation Hall, still in use. The original Headquarters burned in 1983 and was replaced in the same area by the present Welcome Center, connected to Convocation Hall as was its predecessor.

The Board of Christian Education was assigned responsibility for administering and developing program for the ranch asking
Paul Calvin Payne, upon his retirement as Secretary of the Board, to live at the ranch from May through October to get things started. He was interested in developing dwellings to reflect the history of the life of Native American communities. Teepee Village, authentically constructed except for canvas rather than hide exteriors, was built and used for many years, particularly enjoyed by kids. A group of Navajos built several authentic hogans that housed people for a number of years. (The construction of the teepees and hogans is described in the Fall, 1989 issue of The Ghost Ranch Journal.

The early church administrators and developers envisioned something like a summer camp for adults, education for church staff, pastors, educators and volunteers. With summer program in mind and memories of their own camp experiences when young, the first housing and meeting rooms erected were simple, unheated rooms with communal baths. Those still on the Mesa were not originally intended for year-round use. They had wooden slats for windows that when closed against rain or cold left the rooms in total darkness. Over the years, windows, heat, sinks in rooms, and showers in buildings that lacked them were added. Now, despite the upgrades, those choosing that lodging feel its age.

More permanent housing--Aspen and Poplar with shared baths, Staff House with communal ones, the present Dining Hall and the swimming pools--were constructed in 1958. In subsequent years, all these have been renovated, added to, patched, repaired and remodeled.

Easterners who remembered their early “camping” experiences, not familiar with Southwestern high mesa wind, dust and tumbleweeds, arranged for the construction of Lower and Upper Pavilions as shaded meeting places for classes and activities. The original structures were flat roofed, screen-sided buildings. Imagine the wind and dust blowing through, the tumbleweeds caught against the screens, the early morning and late afternoon sun streaming in. The Winter, 1988 Ghost Ranch Journal has Jim Hall’s article about making those buildings more useful as program months and attendance were rapidly increasing in the 60’s. Upper Pavilion was later improved when walls with windows replaced the screens. Lower Pavilion was completely rebuilt and since remodeled and repaired numerous times.

The Board of Christian Education financed the conversion of Ghost Ranch from its “dude” years into a National Adult Study Center. By 1970, these subsidies were becoming less available. Friends of the ranch began donating to cover the cost of the numerous programs the ranch helped develop in neighboring communities, such as La Clinica del Norte. In time, the national church could no longer continue its financial support and donations to the ranch itself from its friends became necessary if costs were to be kept in a range families could afford. Out of this need, the Chimney Rock Foundation was formed in 1972, which became the National Ghost Ranch Foundation in 1975.

People coming to Ghost Ranch today often prefer private rooms and baths. Two newer buildings fitting that description are now available on the Mesa. The rest of ranch housing is old and designed for a different era. When the original housing was
constructed most visitors were not long years removed from outhouses and very few from, if an indoor bathroom just one for the whole family no matter its size or number of generations it served. The interstates did not yet traverse the continent; motels along the way were yet to come. The housing we still use at Ghost Ranch did not seem “primitive” then. Not only is it now outdated, but much of it has also reached its extension for reasonable repair. To serve present and future Ghost Ranchers, it is time for a sizable campaign to be able to replace aging structures with those that can better serve the needs of people and programming for the future. We need lodging that is up to the standards of the 21st century to serve the needs and expectations of this and coming generations. In keeping with the value system of the ranch, we can have accommodations that are still “simple” but offer comfort and privacy.