

## Ellsworth Bros. General Store

According to an article from the Historical Society archives, dated July 1, 1943, "...a huge fire completely destroyed the Ellsworth Bros. store and gasoline service station in the community of Rittenhouse. A Maricopa County deputy sheriff stated that the driver of a Signal Oil truck was filling the service station's gas tank when a spark from a small pump being used to pump the gasoline into the tank ignited the fumes, severely burning the driver and causing the gas truck to explode. Flames completely devastated the building."

Back in 1920, when the town of Queen Creek was still called Rittenhouse, Charles Rittenhouse owned a thousand acres of cotton, grapes, and plums. Within a few years, however, Charles was faced with financial troubles – grapes and plums weren't very profitable. It was Mr. Rittenhouse's financial problems, therefore, that presented the opportunity for the Ellsworth brothers – Leo, Larence, and later, Donald. In 1927, Rittenhouse Farms became Ellsworth Bros. Ranch. The Ellsworth brothers expanded their cotton crop and added other farm produce – carrots, lettuce, broccoli, cauliflower, and potatoes.



The Ellsworth Store and Service Station, which burned in 1943, was built by Leo on the corner of Ocotillo and Ellsworth Roads in 1928. Larence cared for the store, and, Donald took care of the sheep and cattle part of the business. Leo managed the farm and produce operations. The farming operation employed several hundred workers during harvest times. Because there were no banks nearby and transportation was limited, it was nearly impossible to pay the laborers wages with checks. To solve the problem, the Ellsworth Brothers issued script money that could be used at their store. Coins were produced, and had the appearance of silver in 5, 10, 25, and 50 cent pieces. One side of the coin was stamped with the amount, and Ellsworth Bros. Stores was printed on the other side.