



THE MUSEUM OF WESTERN FILM HISTORY

Bonanza Filmed in Lone Pine **Bonanza Series – NBC 1959-1973**



Original cast: Dan Blocker, Michael Landon, Lorne Greene and Pernell Roberts (1959)

Bonanza is an NBC television western series that ran from September 12, 1959, to January 16, 1973. Lasting 14 seasons and 431 episodes, it ranks as the second-longest-running western series (behind **Gunsmoke**), and within the top ten longest-running, live-action American series. The show

continues to air in syndication.

The show is set around the 1860s and it centers on the wealthy Cartwright family, who live in the area of Virginia City, Nevada, bordering Lake Tahoe. The series original cast starred Lorne Greene, Dan Blocker, Michael Landon, and Pernell Roberts (who left after six seasons); then David Canary and Mitch Vogel.



The title "Bonanza" is a term used by miners in regard to a large vein or deposit of ore, and commonly refers to the Comstock Lode.

In 2002, **Bonanza** was ranked No. 43 on TV Guide's 50 Greatest TV Shows of All Time, and in 2013 TV Guide included it in its list of The 60 Greatest Dramas of All Time. The time period for the television series is roughly between 1861 (Season 1) to 1867 (Season 13) during and shortly after the American Civil War.

During the summer of 1972, NBC aired reruns of episodes from the 1967–1970 period in prime time on Tuesday evening under the title *Ponderosa*.

The show chronicles the weekly adventures of the Cartwright family, headed by the thrice-widowed patriarch Ben Cartwright (Lorne Greene). He had three sons, each by a different wife: the eldest was the urbane architect Adam Cartwright (Pernell Roberts) who built the ranch house; the second was the warm and lovable giant Eric "Hoss" Cartwright (Dan Blocker); and the youngest was the hotheaded and impetuous Joseph or "Little Joe" (Michael Landon). The family's cook was the Chinese immigrant Hop Sing (Victor Sen Yung). Greene, Roberts, Blocker, and Landon were billed equally. The opening credits would alternate the order among the four stars.

The family lived on a 600,000+ acre (937+ square-mile) ranch called the Ponderosa on the eastern shore of Lake Tahoe in Nevada. The vast size of the Cartwrights' land was quietly revised to "half a million acres" on Lorne Greene's 1964 song, *Saga of the Ponderosa*. The ranch name refers to the Ponderosa Pine, common in the West. The nearest town to the Ponderosa was Virginia City, where the Cartwrights would go to converse with Sheriff Roy Coffee (played by veteran actor Ray Teal), or his deputy Clem Foster (Bing Russell).

Bonanza was considered an atypical western for its time, as the core of the storylines dealt less about the range but more with Ben and his three dissimilar sons, how they cared for one another, their neighbors, and just causes. "You always saw stories about family on comedies or on an anthology, but **Bonanza** was the first series that was week-to-week about a family and the troubles it went through. **Bonanza** was a period drama that attempted to confront contemporary social issues. That was very difficult to do on television. Most shows that tried to do it failed because the sponsors didn't like it, and the networks were nervous about getting letters", explains Stephen Battaglio, a senior editor for TV Guide magazine (Paulette Cohn, "Bonanza: TV Trailblazer", American Profile Magazine, p. 12, June 5, 2009).

Lone Pine Episodes

The Pursued: Part 1 October 2, 1966 Director: [William Witney](#) 60 minutes

The Pursued: Part 2 October 9, 1966 Director: William Witney 60 minutes

Season eight's "**The Pursued**" was a two-part epic with feature quality that dealt with a Mormon rancher and his two wives. The local townsfolk don't understand it and the new Christian preacher turns into a fanatic over the issue of polygamy. The rancher and his wives are forced out of their ranch by the preacher, who has the townsmen following his order to punish them for what he considers is sinning. In this case, the two-parter was censored.

Shot at Anchor Ranch, Lone Pine

Anchor Ranch is located adjacent to the Alabama Hills in Lone Pine. Its film history dates back to 1943. Motion pictures and serials were filmed at the ranch in this era. The property consisted of town exteriors with a main street and ranch grounds with a Spanish hacienda. The only "**Bonanza**" episode filmed there was "**The Pursued**" in July of 1966. Limited filmed cuts of the hacienda exterior and adjacent grounds were shot over the 6 days of outdoor filming. The town set was demolished years ago. The hacienda's foundation are the only visible remains on the property.