"Once upon a time there was a town" The ghosts of southeastern Arizona

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"ONCE UPON A TIME THERE WAS A TOWN"
THE GHOSTS OF SOUTHEASTERN ARIZONA

H. L. JAMES
New Mexico State Highway Department
Albuquerque, New Mexico

First there was the myth; it sustained those who could not be filled by what they saw or touched, who wished to clothe themselves with the sky. These were the dreamers. They built the towns which are now playthings of the wind—Michael Jenkinson*

INTRODUCTION

What makes a ghost town? A purist will argue that the place must have a population of zero; others say that a caretaker status is acceptable, but must not exceed ten inhabitants. A scholarly approach would be, a high percentage of deserted buildings of distinctive character—and so forth and so on. A reasonable definition might be a town that is a vestige of its former self:

The ghost towns of southeastern Arizona are plentiful—the state's richest harvest of Old West lore. Cochise, Santa Cruz and the eastern part of Pima County hold within their boundaries thirty-three former towns and settlements (fig. 1). Available data indicates that populations exceeded 50 residents. Most of the towns had schools and several businesses; a few had newspapers; and all but Mineral Hill and Russellville were on established mail routes.

*Excerpt from New Mexico Ghost Towns (1968). Courtesy: University of New Mexico Press.

1 The acceptance of this definition must include the towns of Bisbee and Tombstone. Although populated (and somewhat commercialized), these communities represent excellent examples of the early mining era.

Having long been dismissed as places of smashed dreams and boarded-up hopes, the ghost town is now experiencing a rebirth of curiosity. Once protected by washed-out roads, sandy arroyos and forbidding terrain, the towns were left to bask and age in desert solitude. Now man has returned—this time in four-wheel drives; intent to ply the plan kings, dig the cellars and sift the dumps for relics of an era past. As they criss-crossed the back-country, some so-called "antique hunters" destroyed what they couldn’t take. As a result many of the ghost towns of southeastern Arizona are much less than vestiges of their former selves. As categorized in Table 1, the state of preservation of towns can be divided into three groups: (PI) partly inhabited; (C.D.) completely deserted, but containing structures, foundations, walls, etc.; and (S.R.) site remains (usually rubble mounds and faint cemetery plots).

EARLY FOUNDINGS

With the exception of the farming community of Tres Alamos and the railroad town of Fairbank, all of the early Anglo-American listings of southeastern Arizona were sired by mining. After the Gadsden Purchase of 1854, Charles D. Poston and Samuel P. Heintzelman took up quarters in the deserted presidio of Tubac. They established the Sonora Ex-

Figure 1. Ghost town map of southeastern Arizona.
ploring and Mining Company and began reactivation of the old Spanish silver mine at Cerro Colorado (fig. 2). In 1858, the subsidiary Salero Mining Company was formed and operations began in the Santa Rita Mountains east of Tubac.

The Apaches held the upper hand and discouraged further operations for another decade. The only new investment was by Rhode Islander Sylvester Mowry. An 1852 graduate of West Point, Mowry resigned his commission at Fort Crittenden and purchased the old Patagonia mine. In 1858 he changed the name to Mowry (fig. 3) and during the course of the next four years shipped out 1,500,000 dollars in silver ore (Granger, 1960). At the outbreak of the Civil War, Mowry was arrested as a Southern sympathizer; his holdings were confiscated and he was sent to prison. The mine gradually fell into disuse. Twenty years later, the property was reacquired and the old diggings once again proved profitable, only to play-out permanently around the turn of the century.

Table 1. Alphabetical listing and information on southeastern Arizona ghost towns [after Barnes, 1960; Sherman, 1969].

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>County</th>
<th>Category*</th>
<th>Elevation</th>
<th>From:</th>
<th>To:</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cerro Colorado</td>
<td>Pima</td>
<td>S.R.</td>
<td>4240’</td>
<td>Apr. 17, 1879</td>
<td>Apr. 15, 1911</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charleston</td>
<td>Cochise</td>
<td>S.R.</td>
<td>4300’</td>
<td>Apr. 17, 1879</td>
<td>Oct. 24, 1888</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contention City</td>
<td>Cochise</td>
<td>S.R.</td>
<td>3792’</td>
<td>Apr. 5, 1880</td>
<td>Nov. 26, 1888</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courtland</td>
<td>Cochise</td>
<td>C.D.</td>
<td>4604’</td>
<td>Mar. 13, 1909</td>
<td>Sept. 30, 1942</td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dos Cabezas</td>
<td>Cochise</td>
<td>P.I.</td>
<td>3900’</td>
<td>Apr. 8, 1879</td>
<td>Jan. 31, 1960</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duquesne</td>
<td>Santa Cruz</td>
<td>P.I.</td>
<td>5500’</td>
<td>May 13, 1880</td>
<td>Feb. 14, 1920</td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairbank</td>
<td>Cochise</td>
<td>P.I.</td>
<td>3800’</td>
<td>May 15, 1883</td>
<td></td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Galeeville</td>
<td>Cochise</td>
<td>S.R.</td>
<td>5700’</td>
<td>Jan. 6, 1881</td>
<td>May 31, 1882</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garces</td>
<td>Cochise</td>
<td>C.D.</td>
<td>4000’</td>
<td>Jan. 7, 1901</td>
<td>May 24, 1926</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gleeson</td>
<td>Cochise</td>
<td>P.I.</td>
<td>5000’</td>
<td>Oct. 22, 1890</td>
<td>Mar. 31, 1939</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hamburg</td>
<td>Cochise</td>
<td>S.R.</td>
<td>7000’</td>
<td>Oct. 5, 1906</td>
<td></td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harshaw</td>
<td>Santa Cruz</td>
<td>P.I.</td>
<td>5000’</td>
<td>Apr. 29, 1880</td>
<td>Feb. 28, 1903</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helvita</td>
<td>Pima</td>
<td>C.D.</td>
<td>4400’</td>
<td>Dec. 12, 1899</td>
<td>Dec. 31, 1921</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hilltop</td>
<td>Cochise</td>
<td>C.D.</td>
<td>7000’</td>
<td>Jan. 26, 1920</td>
<td>Jun. 30, 1945</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johnson</td>
<td>Cochise</td>
<td>C.D.</td>
<td>5000’</td>
<td>Apr. 5, 1900</td>
<td>Nov. 29, 1929</td>
<td>1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locheil</td>
<td>Santa Cruz</td>
<td>P.I.</td>
<td>5000’</td>
<td>Aug. 23, 1880</td>
<td>Sept. 30, 1911</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middlemarch</td>
<td>Cochise</td>
<td>C.D.</td>
<td>4000’</td>
<td>May 10, 1898</td>
<td>Dec. 31, 1919</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mineral Hill</td>
<td>Pima</td>
<td>S.R.</td>
<td>3650’</td>
<td></td>
<td>††</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mowry</td>
<td>Santa Cruz</td>
<td>C.D.</td>
<td>5300’</td>
<td>May 7, 1866</td>
<td>Jul. 31, 1913</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olie</td>
<td>Pima</td>
<td>S.R.</td>
<td>4000’</td>
<td>Mar. 4, 1887</td>
<td>May 23, 1892</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oro Blanco</td>
<td>Santa Cruz</td>
<td>S.R.</td>
<td>4002’</td>
<td>Oct. 2, 1879</td>
<td>Apr. 30, 1915</td>
<td>225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paradise</td>
<td>Cochise</td>
<td>P.I.</td>
<td>5398’</td>
<td>Oct. 23, 1901</td>
<td>Sept. 30, 1943</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearce</td>
<td>Cochise</td>
<td>P.I.</td>
<td>4255’</td>
<td>Mar. 6, 1896</td>
<td></td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosemont</td>
<td>Pima</td>
<td>S.R.</td>
<td>4200’</td>
<td>Sept. 27, 1894</td>
<td>May 31, 1910</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruby</td>
<td>Santa Cruz</td>
<td>C.D.</td>
<td>4219’</td>
<td>Apr. 11, 1912</td>
<td>May 31, 1931</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russelville</td>
<td>Cochise</td>
<td>S.R.</td>
<td>4707’</td>
<td></td>
<td>††</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salero</td>
<td>Santa Cruz</td>
<td>S.R.</td>
<td>5500’</td>
<td>Aug. 31, 1884</td>
<td>Apr. 17, 1890</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunnyside</td>
<td>Cochise</td>
<td>C.D.</td>
<td>6500’</td>
<td>Jul. 16, 1914</td>
<td>Mar. 15, 1934</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tres Alamos</td>
<td>Cochise</td>
<td>S.R.</td>
<td>2500’</td>
<td>Mar. 2, 1894</td>
<td>Sept. 15, 1886</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Wreck</td>
<td>Pima</td>
<td>C.D.</td>
<td>4600’</td>
<td>Aug. 12, 1881</td>
<td>Nov. 1, 1890</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twin Buttes</td>
<td>Pima</td>
<td>S.R.</td>
<td>4000’</td>
<td>Dec. 29, 1906</td>
<td>Aug. 15, 1930</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*P.I. Partly inhabited; C.D. completely deserted; S.R. site remains.
†Postal service continuing.
††No postal service records.

THE FIRST HOORAH

The human influx into southeast Arizona came with military control of the Chiricahua Apache in the mid 1870s. The first prospectors were placemen, who trudged the high country with an eye for "colors"; others worked the hillsides looking for float. Lode mining followed, with sunken shafts to get to the veins.

The first bonanza was Tombstone, struck by Ed Schieffelin in February, 1878. His ore assayed at $15,000 a ton—the madness had commenced. The desert became literally sprinkled with white-canvased tents. Every new strike quickly attracted a crowd. If the deposit was rich the temporary camp slowly materialized into the semblance of a town with crudely constructed wooden shacks and false-fronted emporiums. The next step would be a name, usually banned by the "lucky cuss" who first hit pay dirt, i.e., Galeeville, Gleason, Hamburg and Pearce. Some expressed patriotism like Old Glory, while
others used Spanish descriptions like Dos Cabezas ("two heads"). Hilltop was well named, as was Sunnyside.

Towns that began to attain permanence usually could boast of an ore-reduction mill, smelter, churches, schools, a newspaper and the usual assortment of stores, saloons and cafes. If the economy was healthy, one can imagine the chaotic, boisterous and sometimes lawless activity that filled the streets. Everyone from bullwhackers, skinners, miners and prospectors to saloon keepers, prostitutes, drifters and confidence men—all waiting their turn with a keen eye trained for the discerning stranger. The whole premise of existence was hellbent on instant wealth and then moving on to the next strike.

Strangely enough, early towns also attracted people of culture; those who possessed education and who added a touch of charm to a rather crude environment. Teachers, lawyers, preachers, bankers and businessmen were all poured into the frontier melting pot and lived respected lives side by side with those of lesser social standing.

THE LAST HOORAH

Silver declined nationally in the mid 1880s and mining activities slowly subsided in southeastern Arizona. Between 1884 and 1891 silver was not coined by the federal government, causing its value to drop steadily. By the early 1900s many towns slowly began their demise. The streets became less crowded; the noise of the stamp mills no longer clanged; and the incessant music from saloons was finally stilled.

Whatever the nature of a town, its reason for existence is now gone. In most cases it was the economy. In some it may have been pinched-out veins, or lack of water (or too much water); or it could have been the realization that nature’s extremes were just too harsh. In any event, the local citizenry just up and called it quits—no excuses necessary. A few “diehards” usually hung on for awhile and scrounged the tailings left by others. But soon they too moved on. The “last hoorah” of a town was probably quick and silent ... saddle a horse, pack a mule, or load a wagon—the place was empty.

SUMMARY

Geographical logic had nothing to do with the founding of early towns in southeastern Arizona—on the side of a mountain, in a desert valley, or crammed in the walls of a canyon.

The driving force was simple survival and the fantasy of wealth from glory strikes that unhinged the minds of men.

Were the “good old days” of shantytown life really good? It certainly was for George Walker who took a bride to his diggings high in the Chiricahua and called it Paradise. But perhaps a truer picture of the period might be found in the legacy that John Dillon left when he named his mining hamlet in the Empire Mountains—Total Wreck!

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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REFERENCES

Cortland, 1910

Helvetia, 1901
The Best Dressed Man

IN TOWN
Wears a Suit of Clothes Made

BY

SAMUEL BLACK
THE TAILOR.

NO. 206 FOURTH STREET,
NEAR BROWN'S HOTEL.
TOMBSTONE - ARIZONA.

Where you will find the best selected Stock of imported wollen casimere, diagonals, novelty cloths, scotch and english cretonnes, fancy suitings and trimmings, and the latest fashions at bed-rock prices. A perfect fit and first-class workmanship guaranteed. Securing and trimming by the latest process, and binding and repairing at reduced rates. Call and examine the goods and prices before going elsewhere.

206 Fourth Street, near Brown's Hotel.

---

Total Wreck, 1885

Paradise, 1907
Weak Women

Owe to themselves a duty to take Hood’s Sarsaparilla, in view of the great relief it has given to those who suffer from ailments peculiar to their sex. By purifying the blood, regulating important organs, strengthening the nerves, and toning the whole system, it restores the debilitated health.

After 15 Years.

"For 15 years my mother has been troubled with milk leg. She went to different parts of California, as persons said the climate might help her, but it was of no avail, and I, being a druggist, thought I would get her to try Hood’s Sarsaparilla. Before she had taken half a bottle she said she was improving, so she continued till she took half a dozen bottles, and now she is perfectly well. For nearly fifteen years she was unable to walk around, but now she can walk as well as ever." T. F. Blake, San Francisco, 1890.

G. J. Richards & Co., Wholesale Druggists.

Like a New Creature.

"I have been for years trying to get relief from that terrible general debility and weakness common to women. Within a year I have taken ten or twelve bottles of Hood’s Sarsaparilla, and I am now feeling like a new creature." Mrs. B. Ross, Marlin, Texas.

Hood’s Sarsaparilla


100 Doses One Dollar!

---

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CARRIES U.S. MAIL AND WELLS, FARGO & CO’S EXPRESS

Fare to or from Fairbank, $1.50.

Leaves Tombstone at 7:15 a.m. to connect with Trains for Nogales, Bisbee and all points South. Arrives in Tombstone 11:00 a.m.

Leaves Tombstone at 1:45 p.m. for Fairbank to connect with trains at Benson for all points East and West.

Baggage of Passengers delivered to and from Stage office in the city Free of Charge.
Pioneer Establishment.
(Ritter Building)
ALLEN STREET, OPPOSITE O. K. CORRAL.
FRARY & Co., Managers.
The largest and finest stock of Undertaking Goods in Arizona. We are prepared to do all
work in our line in a first class manner. ALL
OUR WORK GUARANTEED.

Bodies Embalmed
Or temporarily preserved at a trilling
expense for shipment.
Satisfaction Given in All Respects.

Orders left at the O. K. Stable
will receive prompt attention.

ALLEN WALKER, FUNERAL DIRECTOR.

Charleston, 1889

To the Unfortunate.
Dr. Gibbon's
Branch Dispensary.
GRAND HOTEL, TOO
lished in 1864, for the
benefit of the needy and
sick. This hospital, 300
beds in all, is the largest
such establishment in the
United States. The Doctor
has been in continual service
throughout the years, and is
known for his charitable deeds.

GIBBON will make his charge
moderate, and all persons writing
for a cure may expect his care.

A. T. GIBBON, Grand Hotel, Tucson.

Greaterville, 1898