



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

H. L. James

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

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*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.¹

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.

Having long been dismissed as places of smashed dreams and boarded-up hopes, the ghost town is now experiencing a re-birth 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 kins, dig the cellars and sift the dumps for relics of an era past. As they crisscrossed 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-

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

¹The 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.

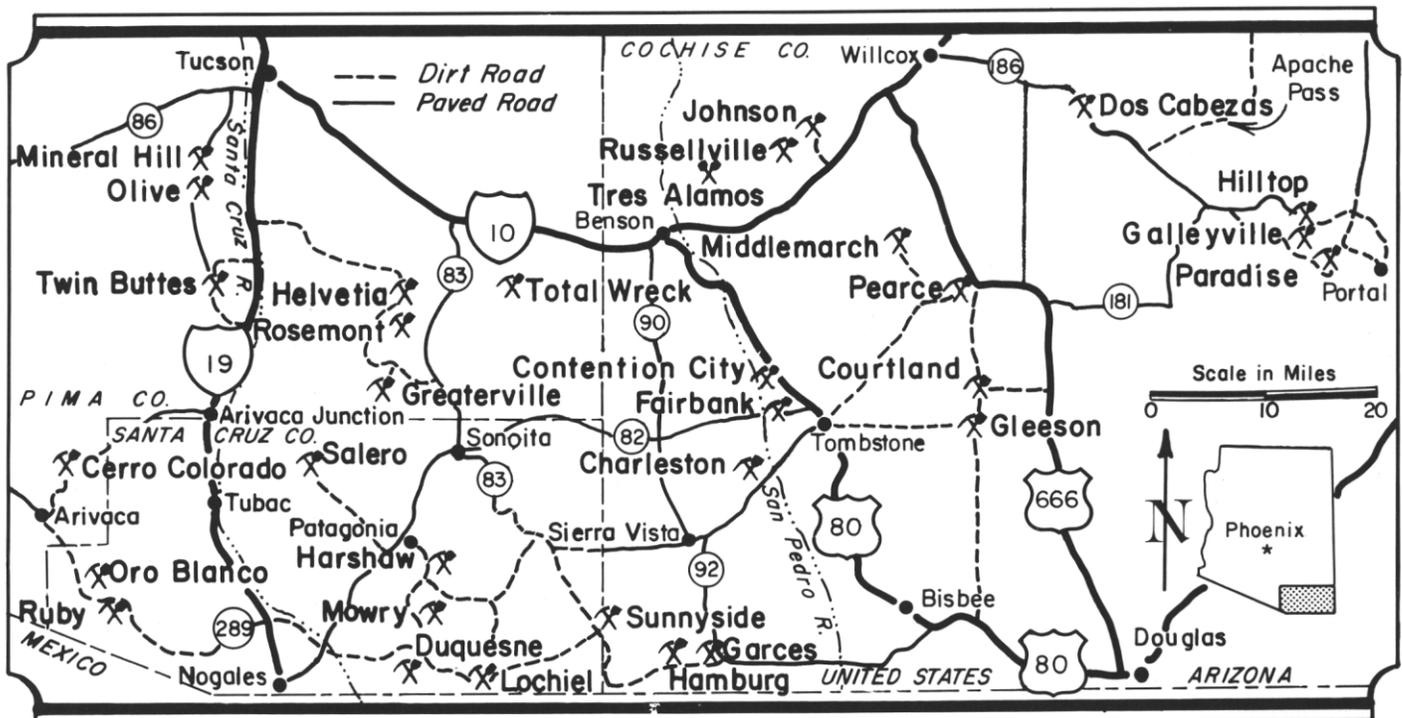


Figure 1. Ghost town map of southeastern Arizona.

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

Name	County	Category*	Elevation	Post Office		Population
				From:	To:	
Cerro Colorado	Pima	S.R.	4240'	Apr. 17, 1879	Apr. 15, 1911	58
Charleston	Cochise	S.R.	4300'	Apr. 17, 1879	Oct. 24, 1888	400
Contention City	Cochise	S.R.	3792'	Apr. 5, 1880	Nov. 26, 1888	200
Courtland	Cochise	C.D.	4604'	Mar. 13, 1909	Sept. 30, 1942	2,000
Dos Cabezas	Cochise	P.I.	3900'	Apr. 8, 1879	Jan. 31, 1960	300
Duquesne	Santa Cruz	P.I.	5500'	May 13, 1880	Feb. 14, 1920	1,000
Fairbank	Cochise	P.I.	3800'	May 15, 1883	†	100
Galeyville	Cochise	S.R.	5700'	Jan. 6, 1881	May 31, 1882	400
Garces	Cochise	C.D.	4000'	Jan. 7, 1901	May 24, 1926	200
Gleeson	Cochise	P.I.	5000'	Oct. 22, 1890	Mar. 31, 1939	500
Greaterville	Pima	P.I.	5280'	Jan. 3, 1879	Jun. 30, 1946	?
Hamburg	Cochise	S.R.	7000'	Oct. 5, 1906	?	150
Harshaw	Santa Cruz	P.I.	5000'	Apr. 29, 1880	Feb. 28, 1903	100
Helveita	Pima	C.D.	4400'	Dec. 12, 1899	Dec. 31, 1921	300
Hilltop	Cochise	C.D.	7000'	Jan. 26, 1920	Jun. 30, 1945	100
Johnson	Cochise	C.D.	5000'	Apr. 5, 1900	Nov. 29, 1929	1,000
Lochiel	Santa Cruz	P.I.	5000'	Aug. 23, 1880	Sept. 30, 1911	400
Middlemarch	Cochise	C.D.	4000'	May 10, 1898	Dec. 31, 1919	100
Mineral Hill	Pima	S.R.	3650'	††	††	125
Mowry	Santa Cruz	C.D.	5500'	May 7, 1866	Jul. 31, 1913	500
Old Glory	Santa Cruz	S.R.	4370'	Jan. 15, 1893	Aug. 14, 1915	50
Olive	Pima	S.R.	4000'	Mar. 4, 1887	May 23, 1892	?
Oro Blanco	Santa Cruz	S.R.	4002'	Oct. 2, 1879	Apr. 30, 1915	225
Paradise	Cochise	P.I.	5398'	Oct. 23, 1901	Sept. 30, 1943	?
Pearce	Cochise	P.I.	4255'	Mar. 6, 1896	†	1,500
Rosemont	Pima	S.R.	4200'	Sept. 27, 1894	May 31, 1910	150
Ruby	Santa Cruz	C.D.	4219'	Apr. 11, 1912	May 31, 1931	300
Russellville	Cochise	S.R.	4707'	††	††	100
Salero	Santa Cruz	S.R.	5500'	Aug. 31, 1884	Apr. 17, 1890	?
Sunnyside	Cochise	C.D.	6500'	Jul. 16, 1914	Mar. 15, 1934	?
Tres Alamos	Cochise	S.R.	2500'	Mar. 2, 1894	Sept. 15, 1886	?
Total Wreck	Pima	C.D.	4600'	Aug. 12, 1881	Nov. 1, 1890	200
Twin Buttes	Pima	S.R.	4000'	Dec. 29, 1906	Aug. 15, 1930	300

*(P.I.) Partly inhabited; (C.D.) completely deserted; (S.R.) site remains.

†Postal service continuing.

††No postal service records.

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.

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 at 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-canvassed 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 bannered by the "lucky cuss" who first hit pay dirt, i.e., Galeyville, Gleason, Hamburg and Pearce. Some expressed patriotism like Old Glory, while

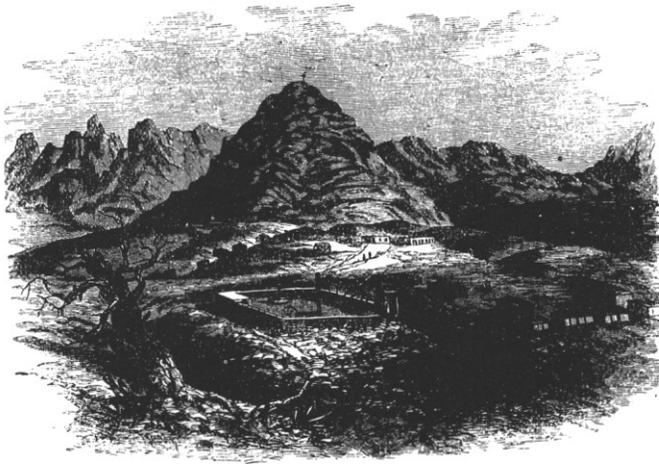


Figure 2. Arizona's first Anglo-American mining community at Cerro Colorado, Spanish for "Red Hill." Sketched by Browne, 1869 (from Wallace, 1971).

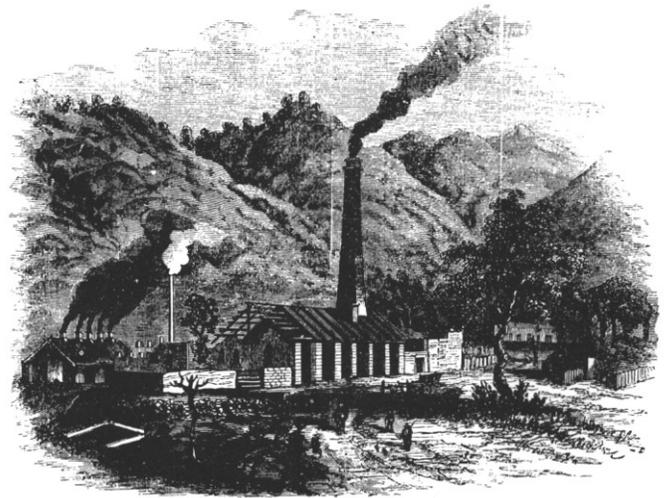


Figure 3. Smelter works at Mowry. Sketched by Brown, 1869 (from Wallace, 1971).

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, skimmers, 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 "die-hards" 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? 11 certainly was for George Walker who took a bride to his diggings high in the Chiricahuas 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!

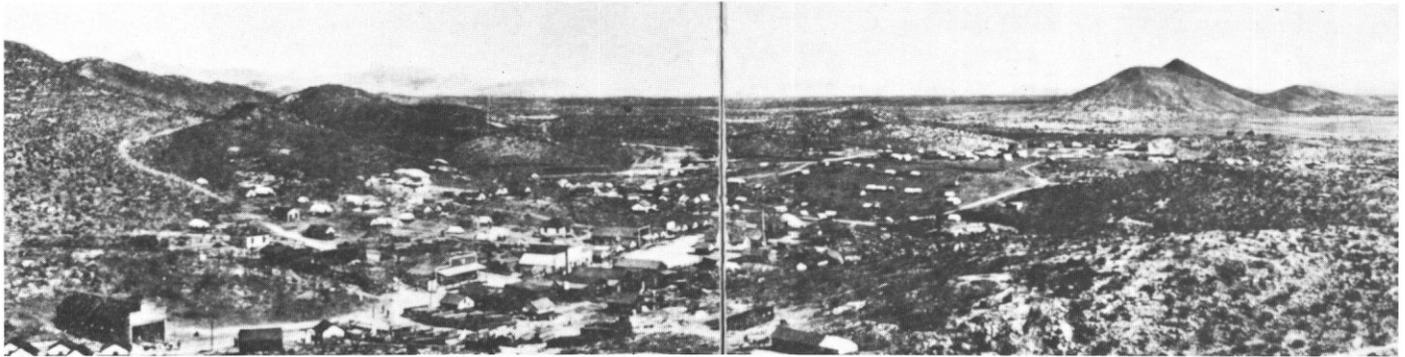
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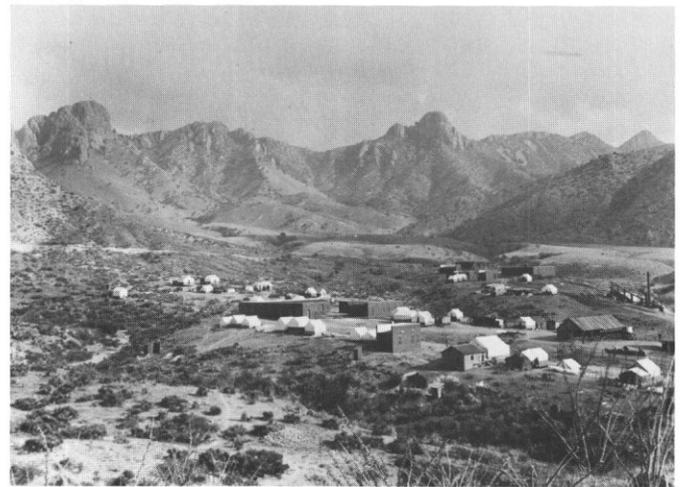
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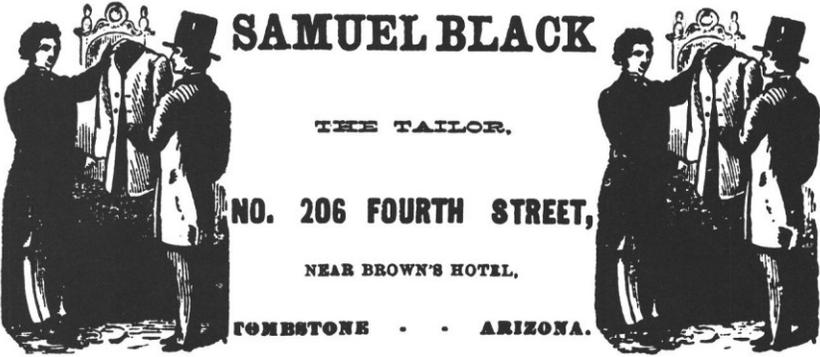
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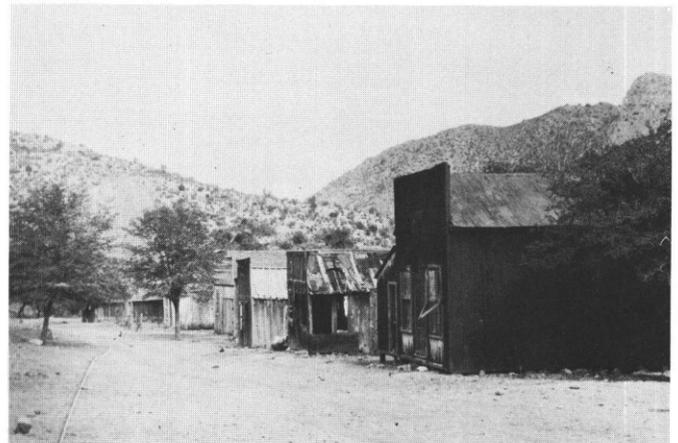
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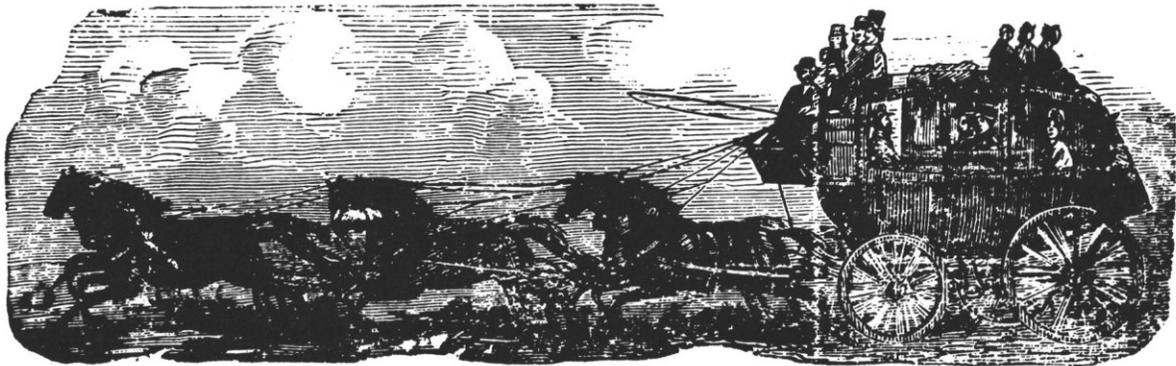
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