

**DOROTHY
WATSON**

THE PINOS
ALTOS STORY

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The Pinos Altos Story

The Pinos Altos Story

Pinos Altos, the oldest Anglo settlement in Grant County, is a small town in southwestern New Mexico. It lies across the Continental Divide at an altitude of just over 7000 feet, between the Diablo Range to the north and east and the Pinos Altos Mountains to the south and west. Bear Creek begins in the Pinos Altos Mountains and flowing north divides the town, joining the Gila River near the town of Gila, twenty miles away as the crow flies. Whiskey Creek has its source in the Diablos, skirts the town on the east and by devious means finds its way to the Rio Grande. It is in a transitional zone where Ponderosa pine and junipers, pinon and scrub oak meet. There was a time when the site was covered with tall pines, when springs bubbled to the surface, and the arroyos ran with water. Ruins of pit houses and the number of shards and artifacts found in the vicinity indicate that a prehistoric people lived here before the coming of the white man.

In the archives of the Mexican Government in Chihuahua, it is said, there are records of the discovery of gold in the Pinos Altos Mountains by General Pedro Almandaris, a commandant at Santa Rita, and of shipments of gold received there from San Domingo Creek in 1837. The laborers at Santa Rita were convicts for the most part and a small garrison of soldiers was stationed there to guard the convicts and also to protect them from the Indians. No doubt in the performance of their duties they scouted this far afield.

There is a legend that Mexicans finding gold here built a small but strong encampment of logs, rocks, and adobe which they called “Pinos Altos”. The wall was built in the form of a horseshoe with the only opening at the narrow end. Inside were shelters for men and animals and a living spring at the foot of a large cottonwood tree. Men and animals lived inside the enclosure but went outside every day and while the men placered the animals grazed. At day’s end the workings were carefully concealed and all returned to camp and barricaded the opening for the night. Day by day more gold was added to the rawhide panniers. At last the time came when the gold must be taken to Mexico. There is something about the precious metal that incites greed and envy. The men disagreed as to whom would take the gold to far away Chihuahua, and who would stay to protect the camp and continue working. Each man distrusted the other. The story does not tell what happened—whether all went and were ambushed and destroyed by the unfriendly Indians, or whether while they quarreled the Indians found them with their guards down. Perhaps like “the gingham dog and the calico cat”, they “ate each other up”. The story simply ends by saying that they disappeared and that nothing was left but the horseshoe-shaped ruins around the spring at the foot of the cottonwood tree. Such is the legend of Pinos Altos Primero.

Early History

Early one spring a party of twelve scouts left Tucson for the Rio Grande. When they reached Mesilla they decided to prospect in the mountains to the northwest. They stopped in Santa Rita to replenish supplies and then moved westward. On May 18, 1860, three prospectors, from that party, named Birch, Snively and Hicks, camped on what is now known as Bear Creek. Birch went to the stream for water and found chispas—small nuggets of gold, in the bed of the stream. Scooping up a handful he returned to his companions. Then began a frantic exploration of Bear Creek and every nearby gulch. Their findings were sufficient to justify the establishment of a more permanent camp but additional tools and supplies were needed. They went to Santa Rita where they confided their discovery to the Marston brothers and Langston whom they found working there. Returning, they christened their camp “Birchville” in honor of the discoverer and erected structures more adequate for comfort and protection. They were joined by the three Americans who knew of their discovery, and by many others, both American and Mexican, for the secret was out. By September there were 700 men in the field and a few families of the Mexican miners. While Santa Rita could supply staples, it was necessary to go to Mesilla for hardware, clothing, groceries in quantity, which they paid for with 1 · 2 or 3 fingers of gold. The first year was spent placer mining and prospecting to find the “mother lode”. The Apaches were very troublesome, confining their activities to waylaying small parties, the driving off of stock, and to gathering on the hills above the workers, taunting the “Goddammies” as they called the Americans, from the words heard frequently from the men. The second year a few lodes were located but only the surface was scratched. Quartz bearing ore was crushed in arrastras, century-old mills such as the Egyptians and Phoenicians had used to crush olives for oil and grapes for wine, and which had come down through the ages to the Mexicans. A circular pit was dug, sides and bottom lined with flat stones, a stout pole was placed in the center to which an arm was attached and a burro, mule or horse could be hitched. Heavy rounded boulders were placed in the pit and attached to the other end of the arm. The quartz was thrown into the pit and broken up as the beast walked around and around. The rubble was thrown out and the bottom scraped of the fine material which was then washed in the ordinary rocker. (Only one arrastra in good condition is intact today). As more and more miners came in the settlement moved up the creek to a more central location for all placer grounds. The Mesilla Times in 1861 carried items and advertisements from the gold camp. It stated that “Thomas J. Marston was pushing ahead his work of grinding quartz and doing well although constantly annoyed by Indians,” that, “The Pinos Altos Hotel served bread and meals,” that “Samuel G. and Roy Bean (Law West of the Pecos) were dealers in merchandise and liquors and had a fine billiard table”, and that “Thos. Marston wanted 200 quartz miners at \$1.00 and \$2.00 a day.”

With the establishment of the Confederacy this part of the West was claimed by the South. On August 1, 1861, Col. John R. Baylor as Governor at Mesilla, proclaimed the establishment of the Territory of Arizona. This included the part of New Mexico below the 34th parallel. Miners had been asking the United States Government for military protection but little action had been taken. However, Governor Baylor recognized the importance of controlling the Indians and of protecting the scattered inhabitants. Captain Snively’s Arizona Guards were assigned to watch the Apaches under Cochise and Mangas Colorado, and Thomas Marston was named Captain in the Arizona Scouts with nine men under his control to protect Birchville. At the same time he appointed Justices of the Peace for Dona Ana County, which then included Dona Ana, Luna, Hidalgo and Grant. Among them was M. M. Steinhil of Birchville, who became the first Justice of Peace in what is now Grant County. The Apaches were determined to drive all Americans from their land. Cochise brought his warriors from the Chiricahuas and joined Mangas Colorado and his Mimbrenos for a concerted attack on the miners. Cochise was in command. Early on the morning of September 22, 1861, 400 Apaches made a bold, but unsuccessful attempt to destroy the camp and drive the miners out. The conflict raged along

the Continental Divide until one o'clock, when with fifteen Apaches killed, one by a dog belonging to a Mexican named Carlos Norero, the Indians withdrew. Three Americans lost their lives, including Thomas Marston who had been fatally wounded and died a few days later. He was buried beneath the large juniper tree in the Pinos Altos cemetery. Many of the remaining Americans decided that their scalps were more valuable than gold and left to join either the Union or Confederate Forces. The Beans were among them. On October 10th Governor Baylor responded to a desperate call for help from the weakened settlement by sending a detachment of 100 men under Major E. Waller to relieve the miners and to protect their rich workings.

Not all the trouble during the year 1861 was with the Indians. A man named Taylor held a grudge against William Dike, who was in the employ of the Overland Express Company. At a baile on Christmas Eve, Taylor gathered some friends about him and fired at Dike, who was dancing. Several shots were exchanged, Dike was killed and Taylor wounded. However, he was able to escape into Mexico. This was the first murder in the camp.

Jack Swilling, who had been among the first people to come to the camp, enlisted with the Confederate Army, was commissioned a lieutenant and assigned to protect the settlement. He was very popular with Americans and Mexicans alike. He had been friendly with Mangas Colorado and once was accredited with saving the chief's life. One night, in a drunken brawl, he shot and killed his best friend—a man named Printer. This friend was buried in the cemetery near Captain Marston but his grave was not marked. People of the camp, thinking that Swilling's shock and grief were sufficient punishment, did nothing about the affair. Later Swilling went to Arizona where he started the development of the Salt River Valley. However, when in 1867, Dan Diamond, over a trivial matter and in cold blood, killed Schwartz, a butcher, the men took action. The nearest court was at Mesilla so they decided to give Diamond a fair trial. He was permitted to select his own jury and a man to defend him. He was found guilty as charged and sentenced to hang. Sunrise next day saw him hanging from a large juniper tree on the "Mill Site."

Mangas Colorado was a wise and worried chief of the Warm Spring Apaches, and he was getting old. He had watched the hard rock miners at Santa Rita and the slow-moving pipe-smoking "Los Goddamies" in the arroyos in the Pinos Altos mountains and noted that they came in ever increasing numbers, that every day parties of hunters were killing deer, antelope and turkey and driving game farther back into the mountains. He wondered what would become of his people. He went to parley with the miners and learned that they were interested only in obtaining the bright metal. In an effort to get them to leave the country he offered to lead them to a rich gold field south of the border which Victorio had found. On one occasion he was bound and whipped, which he said he "could never forgive". As he was let go one husky miner, who had been tormenting him, called, "Send over Apache girls, no whip their backs". He went to a secret place where he rested and recuperated from his injuries, sick with humiliation and bitter about the loss of his son and of his friends through the treachery of the Americans. A plan formed in his mind. Returning to Warm Springs, he began his preparations. He sent for Cochise "Not for war but for counsel". Cochise told of long wagon trains coming into the country with more and more men. If ever the miners were to be driven out now was the time. Cochise returned to his mountains. Mangas Colorado had the herds brought in and driven to secret places, braves and women were given instructions, and suddenly Warm Springs was deserted. One day, on the long slope above the miners' camp, a bevy of Apache girls and young squaws appeared. They paid no attention to the settlement nor to the miners who were working nearby, but combed and braided their long hair. Once in a while the girls left the group to run and play among the rocks and then went back to combing their hair. The miners called to them but they did not answer. Evening came when all the miners returned to camp. The sight of the women so excited the men that they forgot their camp chores and charged up the hill. At the same time the mules were stampeded, hunting parties that had been out for game for the camp were ambushed, and a volley of shots came from across the canyon. Forty of the miners were killed or wounded. One hunter who

escaped the ambush reported that an overwhelming number of Apaches were in the wooded hills. Apache like, they did not follow up their advantage but withdrew. This episode and the War between the States caused more of the Americans to leave. “They will come again,” said Mangas Colorado.

Word was sent by General Carleton at Fort Bowie to General Joseph West to arrange for the capture of “the bloodiest of Apache chiefs”, to “take him dead or alive, by force or strategy”. Captain Shirland, with the aid of Jack Swilling, located Mangas Colorado in the Pinos Altos Mountains. When told that General West wanted to have a peace talk with him, the chief went willingly and without his warriors. On January 17, 1863, he was taken as a prisoner, to Captain Shirland of the 1st California Cavalry at Fort McLane. The official records say that “he was killed the following day by a guard while attempting to escape.” The records in Washington also stated that “the wife of Mangas Colorado was killed, along with ten other Indians by Captain William McCleave, of the 1st California Cavalry at the Pinos Altos Mines on January 19, 1863”.

The next year an enterprising young man, Pete Nest, left camp to go to El Paso where he bought a barrel of whiskey. All went well on his way back until he reached the creek east of camp where he had a breakdown. He managed to get word in and the boys went down the trail with their tin cups. Nest said that he netted about \$800.00 in cash and gold. There are many stories of how the creek got its name but this one is most reliable. Many years later the good people ranching down the valley petitioned the legislature to have the name changed. The bill was introduced by the senator from this district. Some was suggested “Cedarbrook”, that being the senator’s favorite brand. The name was changed to Arenas Valley but the people at this end prefer “Whiskey” to “Arenas” (sand).

There was a strong feeling of enmity between the Southerners—most of whom had come from Texas—and the Mexicans. In February of the following year a dispute about the locating of mining claims arose. The Americans insisted that the Mexicans should not be allowed to locate claims along the main gulches. The Mexicans, believing themselves to be the stronger group, made plans to take the camp. Don Manuel Leguinazabal prevailed upon them to desist so what might have been a bloody conflict was averted. The Indians continued to attack small parties and to steal stock so the two groups forgot their differences and united against the common enemy. For many months there were no major calamities for the Mexicans had made a treaty with the Indians who frequently came to the camp to beg for tobacco or to trade. Some bright mind conceived the idea late in the summer of ’64 to have a fiesta to celebrate the treaty of peace and to invite the Indians. A fine dinner of beans and other dishes was served to sixty Apaches in a house, since destroyed, but which stood near the present home of Miss Recene Ashton. While the beans were being enjoyed the dastardly hosts opened fire, killing several of the guests, others escaped with all trust in the settlers destroyed. Woe to anyone who wandered from camp from that time on. Virgil Marston took a chance and was killed on Whiskey Creek. He was buried beside his brother. But the danger did not keep other men from coming. After the war many of the men who had gone to fight came back.

When the California Column had been disbanded at Mesilla many of its members came to the settlement as “Indian fighters” and to make their fortunes in the gold camp. In 1866 the name “Birchville” was changed to the original name of “Pinos Altos”. To many the climate and the beauty of the country made a strong appeal and they considered making permanent homes. There were no American women in the settlement so many men took Mexican and Indian girls as their common law wives, built log or adobe homes and founded families that have been prominent in the history of the Southwest. Perhaps a touch of homesickness made them yearn for familiar things. They sent to former homes for seeds and trees and planted orchards, vineyards and gardens on their claims where they had built homes. Some did not stake out claims but built on open ground, holding it by “Squatters’ Rights”. Messrs. Houston and Thomas located several claims down Bear Creek and made of the home place a garden spot. Their apple orchard was the first in Grant County. Moore, Stanley, Barton, Adair and Handy also planted orchards and vineyards. There were fields of alfalfa, corn and beans, and smaller plots of garden truck and flowers. Besides his terraced grape vines and

fruit trees Mr. Stanley had a rose garden. The Mexicans planted almond and peach trees around their homes and invariably had oleanders in wooden tubs. During the summer they blossomed beside the doorways and somehow room was found for them inside the small dwellings when frost came. They took fledgling mocking birds from nests and carefully tended and trained them. They were kept in large cages hanging outside on the wall or from a tree where they called and exchanged confidences with the neighboring birds or complemented the guitar music. Each home had a small corral for the burro. Chickens and cows roamed at will and here and there goats would clamber over walls and roofs. Every day the yard was swept as clean as the mud packed floors of their dwellings. Peter Wagner and John Simon brought wild roses from the canyons and planted hedges of them around their homes. Although the buildings were crude the general impression was pleasing. While this was begun in the late 60's it stretched over many years.

A band of Navajos succeeded in driving off 31 yoke of oxen belonging to Hartford and Groves on the night of June 16, 1867. A company of 50 men under the command of Richard Hudson, (a member of the California Column and an uncle, by marriage, of Mrs. Robert K. Bell) took the trail and followed it for eight days before they came upon the band. In the running fight thirteen Navajos were killed and seven taken as prisoners. Hudson reported that one of his men had a cheek grazed by a bullet. This is the only record of the camp being raided by any Indians other than Apaches.

After the war the policy of the government regarding the West changed. The point that affected the Southwest most was the establishing of forts to protect travel and trade—even to protect the miners at Pinos Altos. In the general field orders for the establishing of forts it was stated “that one was to be in the vicinity of Pinos Altos, to consist of one company of infantry and two of cavalry to protect the miners of southwest New Mexico from the Warm Springs Apaches.” The Military Reservation of Fort Bayard was established in 1869.

All during the '60's supplies had to be brought in by pack trains over rough trails. The 10 mile trail to Santa Rita was the most direct line crossing above present Fort Bayard and across the mountains to Whiskey Creek. The pack trains from Mesilla left the main road to Santa Rita at Fort McLane (Apache Tejo) and came straight to camp. Game was plentiful but hunters had to be sent out daily to keep the people supplied with meat. It was never safe for one man to hunt alone so small parties took turns with the understanding that the venison, bear and other game would be shared by all. The Hill Brothers left the camp to ranch on the Gila at what was known for years as the Hill and later the Gila Hot Springs (now Doc Campbell's). There they raised vegetables and made jerky of venison which were brought to camp. James McKenna, author of *Black Range Tales*, engaged in such trade. The miners made periodic trips to the springs to bathe and sweat out the grime, smoke and the effects of bad whiskey. In 1868 Ancheta had a trading post in the original part of the old store building which burned in 1957. The handmade wrought iron box found in the ruins may have been his strong box. That same year he operated an arrastra, the remains of which can still be seen on the “Mill Site” now belonging to L. E. Nichols.

Mr. Robert K. Bell, as a boy, lived at the Ancheta Ranch, (the Ward Lodge in Little Cherry) and he told the story of the original stone house. Sr. Ancheta had taken up land near the Twin Sisters and had a goat ranch. This land is said to be the first land patented in Grant County. Ancheta went to Mexico for a visit and was a guest at an hacienda where he fell in love with the wife of his host. He persuaded her to run away with him and come to Pinos Altos. The house was built for her. The port holes were designed to keep off the pursuing husband and relatives as well as the Indians.

There was no formal organization, nor survey made of the camp until 1867. Anson Mills, later a prominent figure in the history of El Paso, was sent by a member of the famous Maverick family to make a mineral survey and report of this district. Evidently Mills' report was not satisfactory to Mr. Maverick for he took no further interest in this section but Mills stayed. The residents felt that to make their rights to improvements secure they should take legal action so a Pinos Altos Town Company was organized. It had hired Mills to survey and plot the town conforming to government

survey lines. According to the file in the county courthouse, transferred to Grant from Dona Ana, “streets had been laid off and graded, four bridges built over Bear Creek, and some wells sunk”. The file also states that “The first settlement had been made in 1860. In 1868 it had 600 to 700 inhabitants, 120 houses, two stamp mills, a number of arrastras, three furnaces for smelting silver, two hotels, and several mercantile establishments.” Incidentally, there were seven saloons, but instead of being listed separately they may have been classed as “mercantile” establishments. “The town embraced 320 acres, twenty miles from the Gila River and 110 from the Rio Grande by the nearest traveled road.” The town company was incorporated and the deed signed by “Samuel J. Jones, vice president, acting for persons” and dated July 3, 1868. Grant County was formed from Dona Ana that same year and Pinos Altos was made the county seat, 1869-1871. The county’s first court house is now owned by Mrs. Mabel Eckerd of Lordsburg. Only one term of court was held, presided over by Judge H. B. Johnson. It has been described as “the gayest and loudest ever held in the Rocky Mountain region.” A band furnished music, refreshments were handy, and two condemned men were taken out and hanged from the same tree where Dan Diamond met his fate.

Trolius Stephens brought his wife overland by mule train from Nebraska in 1873. She was the first, and for several years, the only American woman in town, excepting Miss Parker who had been here eleven years before. They were the grandparents of Cecil Stephens of Arenas Valley. Both Mr. and Mrs. Stephens were interested in welfare of the people, they visited the sick, cared for the injured, and saw to it that no family was cold or hungry. He contended that a man was worth but \$1.25 a day from the neck down but that there was no limit to his worth from the neck up. He paid accordingly. He could not or would not tolerate stealing. On one occasion when he noticed that wood was disappearing from the town’s large wood yard, and the man in charge of it said that he did not know how, when, or by whom, Mr. Stephens said he would “fix the guy.” He bored holes in several sticks of wood and put in dynamite. Before sunrise the next morning a mighty blast shook the town. Mr. Stephens rushed out and saw a roof rising into the brightening sky and above were several black disks, the lids from the kitchen stove—in the home of his cousin.

Fuel for homes and mills was juniper and oak wood cut in the hills into cord lengths and packed into town by burros. Ore from the mines was taken to the mills in the same manner. Often there were as many as twenty burros to a train. The trails they used still stand out on the mountain sides, as do the old roads from the saw mills, where the logs were hauled out by oxen. Among the names of men who operated early sawmills are Ripley, Scott, McMillan, Brownell and Franey, who came in ’81 or ’82. He was joined in 1902 by his nephew, Thomas Foy, a rosy cheeked boy fresh from old Ireland. Later there were Davidson, Slack, Leonard, Mason and others.

From the earliest days when both Mexicans and Americans traveled through the country they would camp at the springs the Mexicans had called Cienega de San Vicente. Miners from Pinos Altos tried raising corn and beans there, but being loathe to leave their diggings to care for the crops, Indians or animals destroyed them. Captain A. J. Hulburt, more daring and persistent than other miners, built a cabin and took his Mexican wife there to live during the growing season. He would ride to and from his mine, the “Texas” on the western slope of the mountain, a distance of seven miles. One day he left his rifle at the cabin with his wife and son and went out to plow his field. Looking up he saw Apaches between himself and the house. Knowing he could not rescue his family he ran to the mines, hoping his wife would be able to stand off the marauders until he could get help. Almost exhausted he gasped out his story. The men grabbed their guns, mounted their animals and hurried to the cabin, only to find it smouldering, the wife and son dead, and the Indians gone.

When this place was selected as a town site in 1872 and was named “Silver City”, Dick Hudson remarked, “That’s a hell of a name to give a town on a mud flat.” Later he wrote, “The only rival the Tall Pine City is ever destined to have sprang into existence as if by magic”. He was wrong in his use of the word “only”. A quarter of a century later a writer in *The Enterprise* referred to Pinos Altos as “an abandoned camp in Silver City’s back yard”. He, too, used one wrong word—“abandoned”. The

opening of mines to the south and west drew many miners away and more adventurers were attracted to this district. Many of these men wanted to get rich quick and engaged in illicit mining deals. The result was that many claims were not being worked. The newcomers were more inclined to gamble than to use a pick and shovel. It was helpful to have a nearer source of supplies but the cost was just as great and business declined. In those days ox teams would leave Pinos Altos in midmorning and camp at the Half-Way Rock for the night. Early the next morning they would proceed to Silver City where the wagons were loaded, then they came back to the Half-Way camp and on to Pinos Altos the third day. Once a band of Apaches attacked but were unsuccessful. Another time they swooped down on the stage between the old Brent Ranch and Pinon Hill, wounding the driver and killing one mule. “Chinamen” were among the passengers and they put up such a good fight that the Indians rode off. Old “One-Armed-Juan” Esquejeda told of having goats taken from his place almost in the center of town and about the same time Willie Fletcher and some of his pals went swimming in a pool formed by a dam in Arroya Rico. Their scattered clothing was left on a bank. A group of young braves came down the gulch and stood watching the splashing boys. They gathered up the clothing and departed. The boys waited until dark before slipping home. Some time during the '70's Silvario Gutierrez returned to his family after having been a captive of the Apaches for seven years. His family had given him up for dead and although he had been very small when captured he, fortunately, remembered his “pet” name. He was the grandfather of Manuel Gutierrez of Santa Rita and of Virginia Terrazas and Nora Garcia.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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