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Adlai Feather

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ORIGIN OF THE NAME ARIZONA

*By ADLAI FEATHER**

ALL three of the states carved from the territory taken from Mexico by the treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo and later by the Gadsden Treaty received their romantic names from the legends which induced explorers to visit them and colonists to inhabit them. Less than a dozen years after the conquest of the City of Mexico, stories began to circulate concerning another city as rich or richer which lay far to the north.¹ It was never found but the name of New Mexico (Another Mexico) persisted. The first ships which skirted the western shore of Mexico were manned by sailors who hoped to find the legendary island of California, immensely rich and happy and inhabited by Amazons. The putative island which they discovered proved to be barren and a peninsula but the name, which they had given it in their pristine enthusiasm, survived. The tale of the fantastically rich mine called Arizona lured prospectors and adventurers into the state which now bears that name. They found that the mine had long since been exhausted. No other of similar

* Mesilla Park, New Mexico.

1. This city existed under a multitude of names but the rumors which spread among the common people simply mentioned it as "Another Mexico" and on that basis volunteers were recruited to form the looting or colonizing expeditions.

richness was found. With the passing of time, the bitter disappointments connected with all three names have been forgotten.

Dissatisfied with the names which had appeared on maps or had been suggested by collaborators, Lucas finally hit upon Arizona but only after a suggestion of events in which the prime movers were José Francisco Velasco and Charles D. Poston. The former was a public official and author in Sonora; the latter an adventurer and speculator in the Southwest.²

Velasco was responsible for bringing the name out of obscurity into fame, largely through a mistake in quoting a previous writer. In 1850 a book, of which he was the author, was published in the City of Mexico. Its appearance created a furore among prospectors, miners, promoters and the general public. Since it was intended to draw attention to the conditions and resources of Sonora, including a great part of the Gadsden Purchase, he devoted one chapter to the minerals of the state in which was included accounts of several notable discoveries of rich placer deposits; fields where a man with only his hands as tools or, at most, a shovel and pan might become wealthy in a few days. Especially attractive was a site where silver nuggets of enormous size were found in loose soil. This location lay deep in Apache territory, there were no mining officials on the ground and the men who flocked to the place simply excavated without order or system, found what they could and abandoned the place when the Apaches began to gather. It, therefore, received no formal name but was known as the "Minas de Bolas," "Mina de Planchas" and "Bolas de Plata." In the neighboring state of Chihuahua it was known as the "Mina del Padre" since it was a Jesuit Priest who

2. For biography of Charles D. Poston see *Charles D. Poston, Sunland Seer*, by A. W. Gressinger, 1961. Material concerning his activities in New Mexico are scant and incomplete.

first made a written account of the affair. Velasco used none of these names but called it the Arizona mine since it was situated on an arroyo of that name.³ His account of the discovery reads as follows:⁴

In the work entitled *Los Apostólicos Afanes de la Compañía de Jesus*, written by one of its sons, there is found on pages 232-237 of the second volume, chapter 2: "In the year 1769 there was discovered a mine with deposits of native silver on the frontier of the barbarous Apaches, at a place called Arisona to the north of the fortress of Altar, now the town of Guadalupe, at a distance of forty leagues near the Agua Caliente. This discovery was made by a Yaqui Indian who revealed its existence to a merchant who made the news public. In effect, the treasure was found near a mountain and extended for half a league along the base. Those who rushed to the place found in the ground, at the depth of a few yards, masses of virgin silver, in the form of round balls weighing from one to two arrobas. Afterwards, there were found some weighing up to twenty arrobas and one of a hundred and forty which was discovered by a native of Guadalupe, which was reduced to smaller pieces in order to be weighed. In view of the astounding richness of the district, many people rushed to the place and excavated the whole ground where they found smaller masses, others collected mere grains of silver and others found nothing at all."

From this description it is evident that this astounding discovery of a placer of virgin silver had its origin from some

3. H. G. Ward, Esq. in his book *Mexico in 1827*, London, 1828, mentions having crossed this arroyo, and seen the mountain from a distance and ventures the opinion that the existence of the "Bolas de Plata" mine was no fiction. Pp. 136-139, Vol. 2.

4. Jose Francisco Velasco, *Noticias Estadísticas del Estado de Sonora, etc.*, Mexico, 1850, pp. 190-192. Parts were translated into English by Wm. F. Nye, 1861, and into French, 1864.

In the preface to the English translation, there is the following biographical information:

The author, Don Francisco Velasco, was a native of Sonora, and held various official positions of responsibility—among others, that of Secretary of State and member of the Federal Congress. Although he modestly remarks in his preface that his principal motive in giving his book to the public was that it might induce some person better informed than himself to furnish more full and accurate statistics, his work is universally recognized in Sonora as the best and, in fact, the only reliable one that has yet been published upon the subject.

The Library of Congress has no further biographical reference to José Francisco Velasco.

very rich vein which might exist in the mountains or hills nearby, since all of them are full of mineral. The news of this discovery is authenticated, not only in the history to which I refer but also in the *Ocios Españoles* and the old records which must exist in the ancient archives of the old missions of the Pimeria Alta. Afterwards, in the year 1817, Don Dionisio Robles, resident of the town of Rayou near Nacameri, organized an expedition of two hundred men to go to the so-called Arizona to discover the richness of this district and, in fact, got the expedition under way. As soon as they arrived, they made a search of that region, excavating in likely places since the old workings had been entirely obliterated with the passing of time. Actually, although they found the stringers of caliche in which the virgin silver had been obtained, they were not fortunate enough to find any nuggets and discovered only a few slivers or grains such as those which escape from the forges where metal is melted into bars. Only one man found a sheet of virgin silver which weighed five marks⁵ and which passed into the hands of Robles and from him to Don Lorenzo Martínez who gave it to the author of these notes. He was keeping it to present to the Museum of Mexico but before he had that pleasure his friend Don Ignacio Zuñiga, about to return to the capital, saw it and at his request I gave it to him since he assured me that he wanted it for the same purpose as I and he did not fail in his promise for in 1835, when I was in the capital, I saw the sheet on the first visit which I made to the museum.

From these reports, it is evident that there can be no doubt that these enormous masses of silver did exist in the Arisona and, if the expedition to which I refer did not find them, it does not prove to the contrary, if one considers that they were in the Arisona only a week since they observed parties of Apaches in the vicinity who were about to attack them and for this reason were forced to abandon the country.

History and tradition agree in the statements of the discovery of masses of silver at Arisona and its abandonment. They say that in the year 1769, that of the discovery, the Military Commander of Altar seized the silver from the masses or sheets as treasure of the king and made a report of his action. The owners made their claims but received no

5. Mark—eight ounces.

satisfaction. They carried their petitions to the authorities at Guadalajara who reported the matter to the court at Madrid. After seven years, the king declared that the silver pertained to his royal patrimony and that the discovery should be worked on his account, etc. As a result of the confiscation of the silver, added to the threatening attitude of the barbarous Indians who began to attack the people who had assembled in that place (Altar) and killed many of them, the town was abandoned and remains so until this day.

I have spoken with many of the people who accompanied the expedition of Robles concerning the place of which we have spoken and all assure me that the country is mineralized: that there is a mountain to the east of the site of the discovery of the masses of silver in which were noticed many mineralized outcrops containing gold and silver which crisscrossed in every direction. Don Teodoro Salazar, a truthful man fully experienced in mining in Sonora, has said the same, adding that the whole region invites the hand of man with the great riches which it contains. Speaking of this matter, he refers to a mine which he himself saw, a little more distant from the Arizona, while traveling through that country, worked on the surface of the ground by means of an open cut, as is customary; that he observed the quality of the ore with fear and alarm since the Apaches had seen him and for that reason they made a hurried departure. Nevertheless, that mine, which they gave the name of Ojito de San Ramon, is very rich according to the assay which he made of a few small pieces which he brought out.

Sr. Don Manuel Escalante Arvisu, a man not only of impeccable veracity but one who occupies a high position in society because of his civic activities and the offices which he has held at all times, among them that of the State of Occidente, saw the Arisona also, although very fleetingly, and states that he saw the ruins of the old town but dared not investigate further because of danger from the enemies. But he states that from the appearance of the place it is highly mineralized and that his opinion is that if it were worked for some time with security from molestation by the Apaches, interesting discoveries would be made.

Though Velasco correctly identifies book, chapter and pages, his account differs considerably in content and espe-

cially in dates.⁶ The original from which he supposedly quotes reads as follows:⁷

(In Pimeria) there are silver lodes and some that show signs of gold but those who follow the business complain that they are very superficial since, at a shallow depth, the veins disappear and with them the hopes of the miners. It is true that many of these lodes, unless they are very rich and can be worked at little expense and of high grade ore, cannot be worked profitably because of the expenses to which their owners are put in obtaining machinery, chemicals, supplies and other necessities because, if they are obtained from Mexico, the freighting for a distance of six hundred leagues is difficult and, if they are bought elsewhere, the prices are excessive and yield more profit to the merchants than to the miners. In spite of this great disadvantage, the camp at Arizona has flourished and yielded a profit to its owners; if the costs were not so excessive, I have no doubt that other mines would be opened in the Pimeria.

And in order that this should be shown more clearly, I shall mention a discovery which, at a short distance from the Arizona, was revealed some fifteen years ago and which caused wonder and astonishment not only throughout Mexico but through all of the nations of Europe, seeming so incredible that it was taken, like so many others, for a wild tale from the Indies. A Yaqui Indian, who was working in that region, found the silver and revealed its location and nature to a merchant who told of its existence to others and, in a short time, the sensational discovery became public. This treasure was found near a mountain; on its slope and ridge it extends for almost half a league and ends in a gully which winds through the neighboring hills and carries the arroyo floods when rain falls in the neighboring mountains, though

6. The date of the discovery was either 1734 or 1736 and the royal decree claiming the silver for the king reached Mexico in 1741. Velasco's repeated use of the date 1769 probably results from historical confusion. In that year the Jesuits, who had been prominent in the exploration of Sonora, were expelled from Spain and the Dominions.

7. The full title of this work is *Apostólicos afanes de la Compania de Jesús escritos por un padre de la misma Sagrada Religión de su provincia de Mexico*. It was first published in Barcelona in 1754. A second edition was published in Mexico in 1887 and a third in the same city in 1944.

Various opinions have been advanced concerning the identity of the author, none conclusive. Probably several aided in the compilation. The chapter from which this extract is taken was based upon a trip made by Father Fernando Consag.

for the rest of the year it is dry and the country is destitute of water. People rushed to this place with the greatest hopes and found sufficient wealth to satisfy their desires because both on the hill and in the gully they found larger and smaller nuggets, some in the form of masses of pure silver and others largely silver with an admixture of other metals. The weight of these nuggets, according to their size, averaged from one to two arrobas (25-50 pounds). The news of this famous and startling discovery brought in people from every direction and at the slight expense of removing a little soil, some in one place, some in another, they found masses and sheets of prodigious size.

A poor man, either a negro or a mulatto, who had come more than two hundred leagues from the city of Guadalajara, had the good fortune to discover a mass of silver which weighed 21 arrobas (425 pounds), so solid that when an attempt was made to break it up it resisted both iron and steel: a weight so heavy that it could not be placed on the strongest mule by mere human strength and artifice had to be used. The mass was tied with ropes and raised to the branches of a tree whence it was let down with extreme caution to the pack saddle of the animal. Nevertheless, the misfortune of the poor discoverer was so great that he did not get anything at all from his find; an opponent whom I shall not name laid claim to the treasure and the ministers of justice, who came into the case quickly, took it away from him and his final attempt to surrender his interest to the king was of no avail; his petitions were not granted or even heard. Others were more fortunate in their discoveries, finding sheets of even greater size and weight. But the most marvelous discovery of all was one which was found a yard below the surface and weighed, according to the lowest accounts, a hundred and forty arrobas (3500 pounds) of pure silver and resisted every effort to break it, and, since its weight was so great, the finders were forced to melt it by fire in a forge; and when the smelting was completed the scoria yielded nine arrobas of silver and considerably more was obtained when smelted for the third time.

Interested people who were in the neighborhood state that four hundred arrobas of silver were obtained in that region with little expense in a short time. The strangest circumstance noted was that some pieces, when taken from the ground, were flexible and resembled a mass of soft wax and

could be drawn out, lengthened and pressed together; but on the following day, they were hard and inflexible as if hardened by exposure to the air.⁸ Not only the Spaniards but some missionaries who are still alive today and held pieces in their hands can testify to the fact as eye-witnesses of this phenomenon. Upon hearing the news of this extraordinary fact, quite properly, the captain of the nearby fortress of Fronteras, who temporarily filled the office of local judge, wondered whether so much silver would be classed as ore or as a treasure recently discovered; if it were ore, it belonged to the finders after paying the royalties due the king; but if it was treasure, the greater part belonged to the king and very little to the individuals. Until competent authority could decide the point, he seized all of the silver which had been found, leaving the decision to the Viceroy of New Spain to whom he sent a messenger with the information.

In Mexico, though there were differences of opinion, the one which was most generous and in favor of the private citizens prevailed. The embargo was raised and each one was allowed to take away what he had found. But this decision formed in Mexico did not meet the approval of the Supreme Council of the Indies; therefore Don Felipe V, of glorious memory, after having examined all of the documents which were prepared concerning such a bitter dispute, issued a royal decree in which he declared that, since it was treasure, the place in which the silver was discovered belonged to his royal treasury and stated definitely that it is a place where

8. Horn silver (chloride of silver, cerargyrite) accumulates in large masses under peculiar conditions created when a slowly-rising stream of hot water containing some form of silver in solution meets salt water in an enclosed space at the bottom of a shallow sea. It can be cut with a knife or saw and melts in the flame of a candle. Being very tenacious, it retains its shape after the surrounding rock has been removed by erosion. It usually occurs on or near the surface. When melted by volcanic action subsequent to its formation, it usually hardens in the form of plates or slabs.

American prospectors discovered numerous sites where surface deposits of this mineral had been removed many years earlier, perhaps surreptitiously to avoid payment of royalties. A mass weighing 340 lbs. was found in loose soil on Carbonate Creek, two miles north of Kingston, New Mexico, in 1881. Several were found embedded at Leadville, Colorado—the largest more than 1700 lbs. Three large masses were found not far from the surface in the Bridal Chamber at Lake Valley. These were sawed into sections for removal and were not weighed though the largest was estimated at more than 4000 lbs.

Spanish miners were not acquainted with this phenomenon since any surface deposits of this nature in Europe had been found and removed many centuries ago. However, about 1440, a mass weighing more than two tons was found in a mine in Saxony. To celebrate the event, the king descended into the mine to eat a lunch which had been spread on the exposed mass.

that precious metal is formed; and, in fact, this seems to be confirmed, partly because of the flexibility of which we have spoken and partly because some had hardened as though seasoned and others remained imperfect as though not fully ripened. In anticipation of this unfavorable decree, the region had already been abandoned before its announcement. That the place was allowed to relapse into its former solitude was due largely to the covetousness of those who had assembled; as soon as they had found a reasonable amount of silver they hastened to their homes since the vicinity was sterile and provisions extremely expensive.

It is strange that so many people dared to flock to the place considering the danger to which they were exposed from the savage and infidel heathens whose barbaric fury creates havoc among any whom they chance to meet. His Majesty ordered, in addition to the other provisions of his decree, that the search be continued at the expense of the royal treasury. But the people who were experienced in this line of work, which would necessarily be conducted from Nuevo Viscaya, seeing no augmentation in their salaries, declined to enter into his service.

By combining the two accounts, one almost contemporary and the other written more than a century later, and inserting a few facts taken from the history of mining in Sonora it is possible to clarify some of the discrepancy in the use of the name.

The mining camp (Real) of Arizona was a concession probably covering several square leagues situated in a range of mountains which had the same name; which of the two acquired it from the other is uncertain. The operation was undoubtedly of considerable size; large enough to maintain itself against the Apaches with the aid of a small number of soldiers supplied by the government. It was not highly profitable because of the high cost of provisions, materials and transportation though the ores were of satisfactory quality.

As was customary throughout Mexico, the vicinity of the Real was inhabited by a crowd of footloose individuals called "gambucinos" who scoured the surrounding country in

search of rich float or small deposits which were reduced in small arrastras situated on the outskirts of the concessions. These independent miners were usually Indians, negros, mestizos or mulattos and were frowned upon by officials of the government who found great difficulty in collecting royalties and fees from these small operations. They were also accused of stealing the richer ores from the established mines and of ruining those closed down temporarily by mining the pillars of good ore left to support the hanging wall. Apparently, one of these, while prospecting the countryside, came upon the fabulous silver deposit.

Both authors indicate that the site was inhabited for only a short time but it must have been occupied for at least several months since one gambucino came from Guadalajara, a distance of more than six hundred miles; nevertheless, the time was too short to allow the establishment of any kind of law or order. The gambucinos were a rough lot and it is easy to imagine the quarrels and conflicts which took place as disputes arose over the possession of the more likely spots. The strict Mexican laws governing the orderly exploitation of mineral resources were not applicable in this case, partly because of the location surrounded by hostiles and partly because of the speed with which the deposit was exhausted. For the same reasons, no concession was given later for continued operations.

Had the operation passed through the usual legal channels, the location would have been designated by name as is required in all nations possessing mineral resources. Since this never came about, it was known only by the descriptive names used locally. In more remote regions where it was known only from the book published by the Jesuits, it was called "La Mina del Padre (The Mine described by the Priest)".

The Arizona mine, which was worked in 1754, was soon after abandoned as the Apaches forced the abandonment of all Spanish establishments as far south as the town of Altar

itself. By 1850, the mine had been long since forgotten and the name existed only as applied to the mountain and an arroyo. Therefore, they applied the name of the region to the nameless mine.

It is worthy of remark that subsequent exploration never revealed the existence of a silver placer of equal value. Ten thousand pounds of silver is of minor importance as compared with the produce of other districts in America, but never was a like amount recovered with as little effort and expense.

The appearance of Velasco's book with its verification of a half-forgotten tale, its numerous accounts of rich discoveries made later and his assurance that great mineral wealth lay in the regions still infested with Apaches, aroused great interest wherever it was read. The first to profit was Hugh Stephenson of El Paso, a merchant and silver buyer, who financed an expedition into the Organ Mountains in search of the Padre Mine which was rumored to exist somewhere in that area.⁹ The fabled mine was not found but a lode was discovered which eventually yielded almost a million dollars, largely in silver. After the Gadsden treaty had been negotiated, prospectors flocked to the newly-acquired region. Among them was a party led by Charles D. Poston, an adventurer and promoter of mines and land grants. Having discovered that valuable ores still remained in the vicinity of Tubac, a region which had been worked by the Spaniards and Mexicans for decades, he set out for eastern cities in order to procure capital for the development of his discoveries. He obtained the promise of \$100,000, largely from capitalists of Cincinnati, a geographical circumstance

9. In 1856, Frank Flecher, first American to settle in Doña Ana, filed a claim to an old mine "known since time immemorial as the Padre Mine." Located in the San Andres Mountains three miles north of the San Agustín Pass, the only workings were a shallow cut and an exploratory shaft some ten feet in depth. Nearby was a stone cabin. The only evidence of a reduction works was a crude forge. Evidently, at some remote time, a surface deposit of horn silver had been removed, giving rise to the name.

In 1879, a Lincoln County merchant named LaRue did a little exploratory work at the site. Out of the jumble of indefinite information emerged the legend of "The lost mine of Father LaRue."

which was to be of great advantage in obtaining the support of members of Congress favoring the admission of Arizona as a Territory.

Naturally, Poston drew heavily upon Velasco's book in the promotion of his enterprise and probably quoted statements by the Sonoran on every possible occasion. Certainly the name was favorably known to every member of the party which set out in 1856 for Tubac via San Antonio. At Fort Fillmore, New Mexico, the party remained for several days while making travel arrangements; at least long enough to rebuild the crude smelter, which Hugh Stephenson had constructed on the Rio Grande, into a more efficient reduction works.

In Mesilla, only a few miles distant, he undoubtedly came in contact with James A. Lucas who undoubtedly brought up the matter of territorial status. Poston states that he first suggested the name of Arizona, which is probably true; and Lucas, still in search of a name, probably accepted it with enthusiasm, realizing the advantage of obtaining the aid of men who were certain to become prominent citizens south of the Gila. At any rate, it was adopted in 1856 and no other was suggested thereafter. On one occasion, in 1860, a bill was introduced into Congress in which the spelling "Ari-zuma" appeared. It was probably an error without significance which remained uncorrected since there was no delegate in Washington seeking admission to a seat in Congress.

In 1861, after the publication of certain chapters of Velasco's book translated into English by Wm. F. Nye, a new silver rush into the southwest occurred since now the information was available to all. As late as 1880 a type of prospectors, contemptuously called "Chloriders" by the hard rock men, scoured the mountains seeking surface deposits and often passing over the mineral which they sought without recognizing its nature.