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## TRES ALAMOS: A PLACE FORGOTTEN



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**COVER PHOTO**

*Tres Alamos Rock: "Tres  
Alamos A.T. carved before AZ  
became a state in 1912.*

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# Tres Alamos:

## A Place Forgotten

By Harry E. O'Neil

Located eight miles north of Benson on the San Pedro River, Tres Alamos (Three Cottonwoods) might have become a large bustling town if the Apache Indians hadn't ravaged the many Spanish, Mexican and Anglo settlers who tried to live there over the course of nearly one hundred years. And it could have succeeded in 1880 if the Southern Pacific Railroad had opted to cross the river at Tres Alamos, instead of upstream at what is now the town of Benson.

Yet, despite its eventual demise, the amazing fact is that in 1875 Tres Alamos was the largest settlement in all of what became Cochise County. At that time such places as Bisbee, Douglas, Willcox, Tombstone, Sierra Vista and all towns in between had not been born. Tres Alamos, however, could



proudly claim a population of over 200 men, women and children.

The story of this historically neglected and nearly forgotten part of Arizona, which went through several interesting phases of development, deserves to be told as one continuous narrative, including its prehistoric beginnings.

## The Ancient Ones

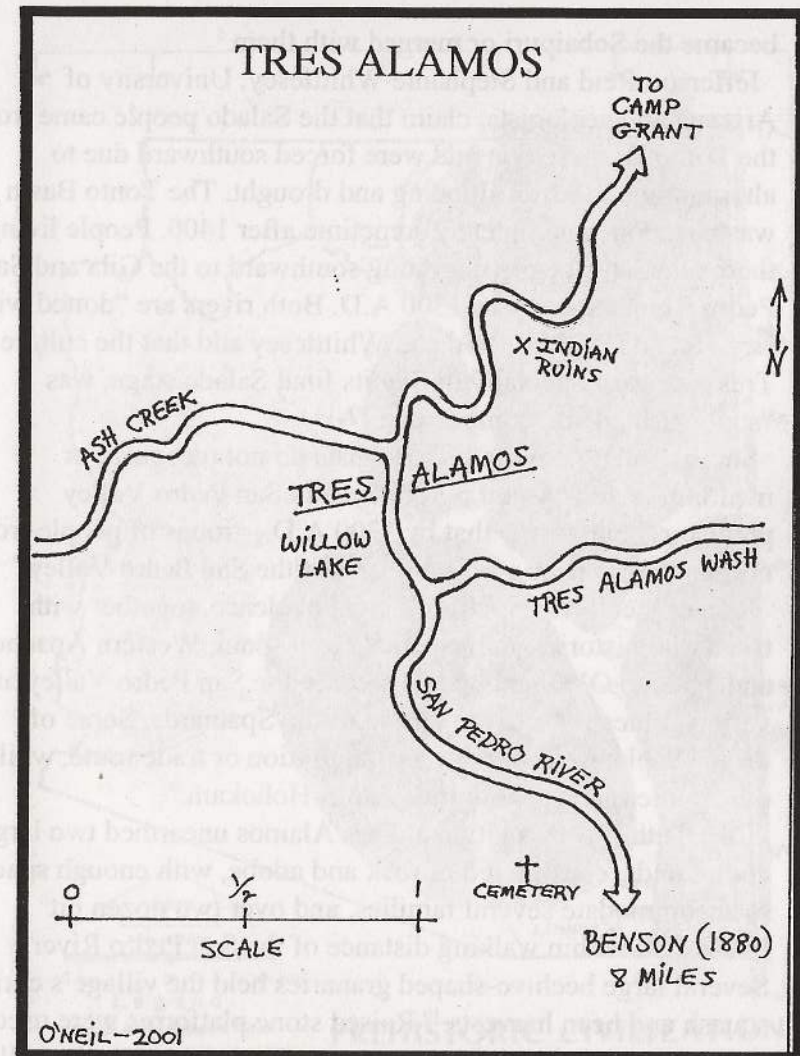
The famous archaeologist, Adolph Bandelier, was the first scientist to mention Tres Alamos as a prehistoric Indian site, which he found in 1884, one mile north of the home of Thomas Dunbar, an early settler.<sup>1</sup> Then, in 1940, Carr Tuthill excavated the site as one of the early projects of the Amerind Foundation.

Mr. Tuthill wrote that the first people to occupy Tres Alamos were part of a large prehistoric cultural group known as Hohokam, whose villages spread in all directions along the Gila, Salt, Verde, Santa Cruz and San Pedro rivers. Archaeologists don't know the Indian name for Tres Alamos; therefore it's still referred to by its Spanish name. Tres Alamos was one of fourteen villages that dominated the lower San Pedro Valley

from approximately 700 A.D. to 1450 A.D.<sup>2</sup>

The culture at Tres Alamos, according to Tuthill, developed slowly over many centuries. Outside influences, identifiable by artifact comparison, indicate that while the village site was essentially Hohokam, other cultural technologies and practices were borrowed from the Mogollon people to the east, from Mexican groups to the south and from the Salado culture that entered the San Pedro Valley from the north.<sup>3</sup> There are, however, several conflicting opinions regarding San Pedro Valley immigration, cultural diffusion and assimilation.

Colorado archaeologist Norman Oppelt believes that in the 1300s the Salado people had increasing contact with the Riverine Hohokam. By 1450 they had abandoned their homeland in the area of the Tonto Basin and probably



integrated peacefully with the Hohokam.<sup>4</sup> However, Gordon Bronitsky and James Merritt, Arizona Bureau of Land Management archaeologists, state that the Hohokam, for unknown reasons, abandoned the lower San Pedro River around 1200 A.D. It was only then that the Salado people began to occupy the San Pedro villages and stayed until 1450 A.D. And, they claim, it is possible that these Salado people



became the Sobaipuri or merged with them.<sup>5</sup>

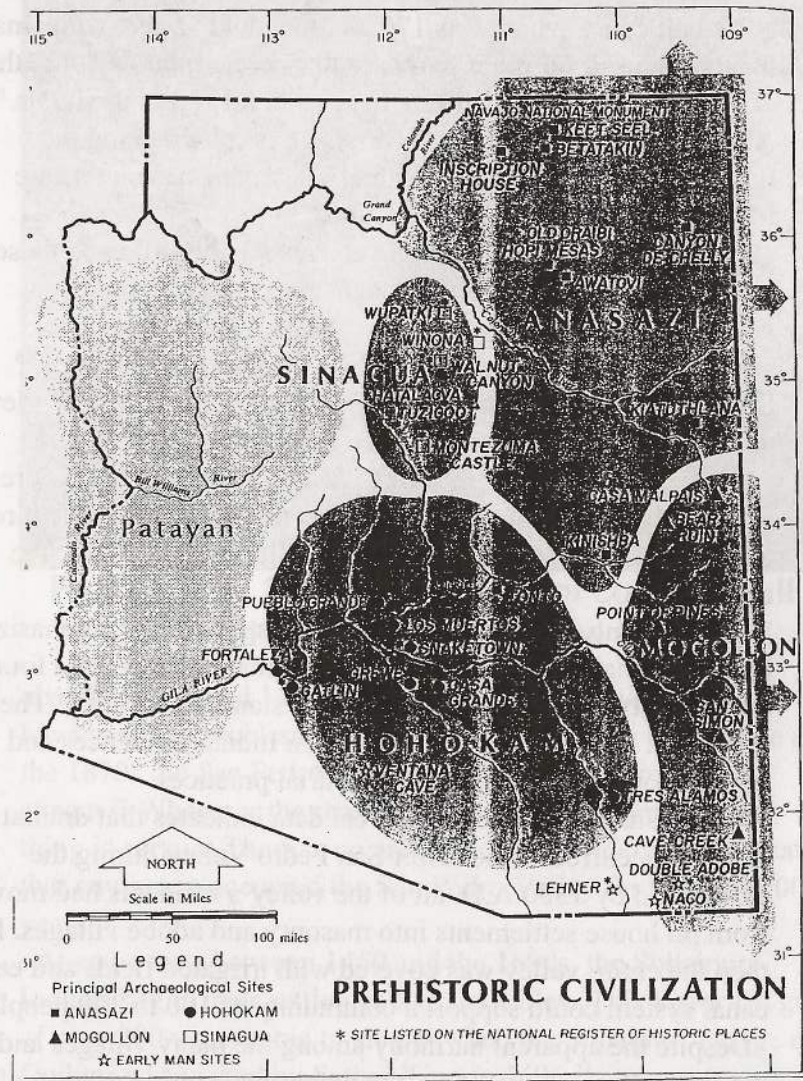
Jefferson Reid and Stephanie Whittlesey, University of Arizona archaeologists, claim that the Salado people came from the Tonto Basin region and were forced southward due to alternating periods of flooding and drought. The Tonto Basin was abandoned completely sometime after 1400. People living there may have begun migrating southward to the Gila and San Pedro Rivers as early as 1300 A.D. Both rivers are "dotted with large Salado ruins."<sup>6</sup> Reid and Whittlesey add that the culture at Tres Alamos, especially during its final Salado stage, was "sophisticated and complicated."<sup>7</sup>

Some contemporary archaeologists do not recognize or mention Salado culture in reference to San Pedro Valley prehistory, but do say that by 1300 A.D., groups of people from northern Arizona moved into parts of the San Pedro Valley.<sup>8</sup>

Recently collected archaeological evidence, together with tribal oral histories, indicate that Hopi, Zuni, Western Apache and Tohono O'odham people were in the San Pedro Valley at various times prior to the arrival of the Spaniards. Some of these people used the river as a migration or trade route, while others intermarried with indigenous Hohokam.<sup>9</sup>

Carr Tuthill's excavation at Tres Alamos unearthed two large compounds, constructed of rock and adobe, with enough space to accommodate several families, and over two dozen pit houses, all within walking distance of the San Pedro River. Several large beehive-shaped granaries held the village's corn, squash and bean harvests.<sup>10</sup> Raised stone platforms were used for ceremonial or religious purposes. They constructed a ball court and played a game similar to that played by the Indians in Mexico. Over 75 broken stone and wood paddles were found at the site.<sup>11</sup>

Researchers at the Center for Desert Archaeology in Tucson state that around 800 A.D. ball courts were constructed at six villages between the mouth of the San Pedro River and Tres Alamos. The game played was most likely an import from western Mexico. At the same time, a new variety of corn was



From Walker & Bufkin Historical Atlas of Arizona

introduced, as were cremation burial practices and a new type of pottery. These changes were probably associated with developments in religious practices, which, in turn, promoted village interaction and cooperation throughout the lower San



Pedro Valley.<sup>12</sup>

The ball court, which was 170 feet long and 75 feet wide, may have been used for other purposes like ceremonial dancing, the exchange of gifts with other villages and for religious rituals.<sup>13</sup> According to C.W. Ceran, "There is no point wracking our brains about the rules of the game. The Spanish accounts are too meager to permit any deductions."<sup>14</sup>

An extensive irrigation system at Tres Alamos allowed these people to grow cotton as well as the previously mentioned subsistence crops.<sup>15</sup> Bronitsky and Merritt state that cotton clothing was worn by all villagers in the San Pedro Valley.<sup>16</sup> Some researchers say there is no evidence supporting this view, at least until the Sobaipuri arrived after 1500 A.D.<sup>17</sup>

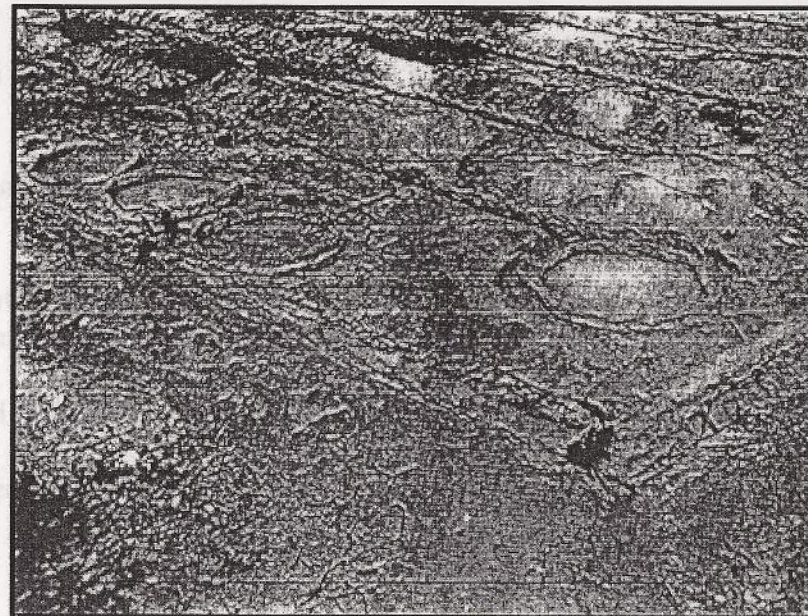
Many pit ovens were uncovered at Tres Alamos which were used for baking yucca roots, agave plants and small game birds and animals. Other wild foods were collected throughout the region.<sup>18</sup>

The blending of several cultures at Tres Alamos is emphasized by their burial practices. Thirty-five cremation sites were found as well as twenty-five inhumations, or standard burials.<sup>19</sup> The cremation sites tend to verify Mexican Indian influences and the inhumations are typical of desert burial practices.

Recent analysis of archaeological data indicates that dramatic changes occurred in the lower San Pedro Valley during the 1200s, and by 1300 A.D. all of the valley's residents had moved from pit house settlements into masonry and adobe villages. By then the entire valley was covered with irrigated fields and each canal system could support a community of 100 to 300 people.<sup>20</sup>

Despite the apparent harmony among the many villages and the intervillage cooperation, the defensive location of several walled villages along the San Pedro River suggests to some active field archaeologists that there may have been "open conflicts" after 1300 A.D.<sup>21</sup> These researchers, however, seem uncertain as to whether such conflicts were internecine or were with outsiders.

For reasons that remain a mystery, Tres Alamos was



From Tuthill: Southeast corner of compound II  
and granaries 1, 2, 3 and 4.

abandoned around 1450 A.D. It's doubtful that water could have been the problem as historical records show that as late as the 1870s the San Pedro River was a perennially reliable stream.<sup>22</sup> Whatever the reasons were for abandonment, one thing is certain: There is no archaeological evidence to indicate that any group occupied the San Pedro Valley for the next 200 years.<sup>23</sup>

At some time between 1450 and the 1690s, the Sobaipuri Indians began their settlements in the valley. This historical gap of over 200 years came to an end when the Sobaipuri village of Quiburi was visited by Father Kino in 1696.<sup>24</sup>

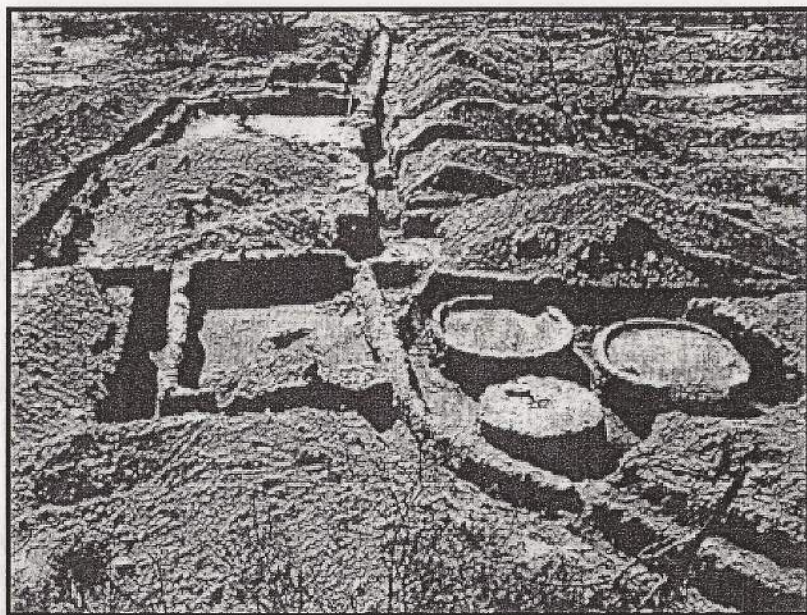
It is not clear who the Sobaipuri were or where they came from, but some scholars believe that they entered the San Pedro Valley around 1500 A.D. They spoke a Piman dialect related to that spoken by the Tohono O'odham, and present-day O'odham oral tradition connects their ancestors to the San Pedro Valley.<sup>25</sup>

Archaeologist Charles DiPeso wrote, "...there was

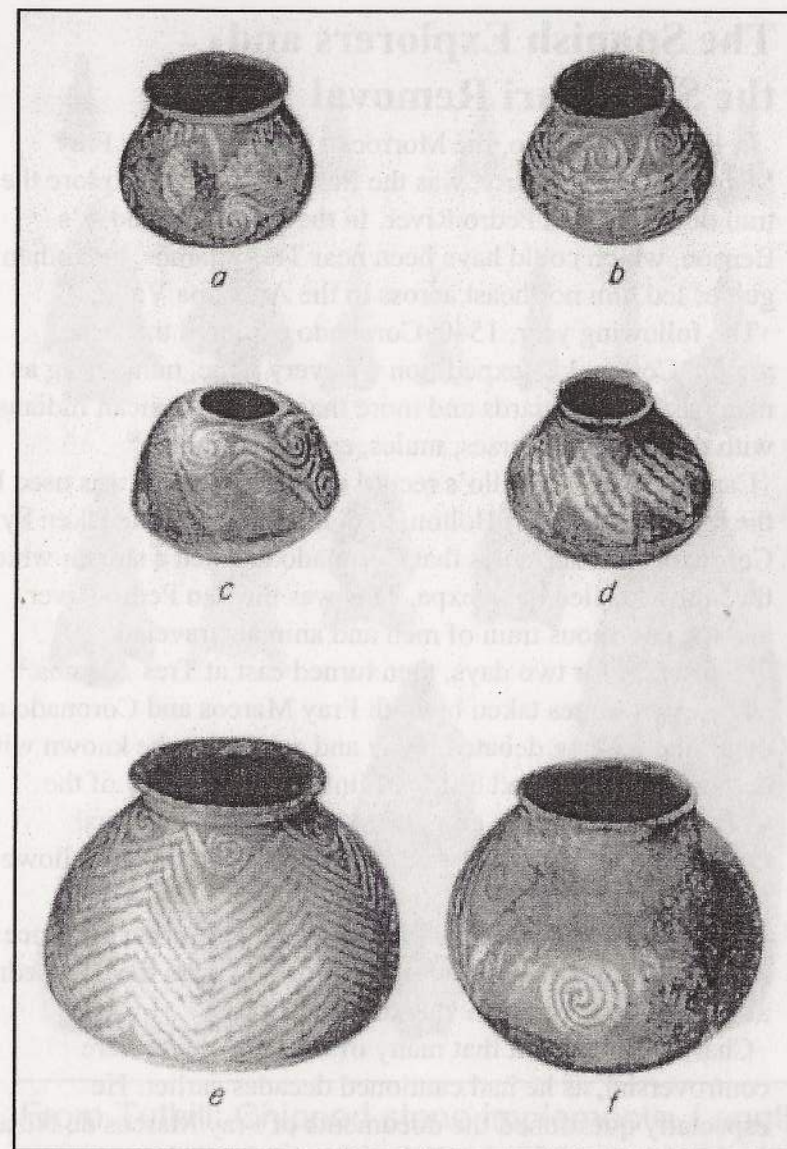


apparently some amalgamation of the indigenes with the Western Pueblo and that this intermixture may have resulted in the historic Sobaipuri culture of the San Pedro Valley."<sup>26</sup> Dipeso then adds, "The Sobaipuri were recognized as being different from the other Pima Ootam (sic) ...when the Spanish arrived in the 1700s."<sup>27</sup>

It's difficult to discover solid answers to many questions regarding the various peoples who occupied Tres Alamos. The best that can be said is that archaeological analysis of the data collected from the fourteen major pre-historic villages, stretching from Benson north to the Gila River, continues to be an on-going effort, especially by the Center for Desert Archaeology, which has taken a long-range interest in the San Pedro Valley.<sup>28</sup>



From Tuthill: East wall of compound II and granaries 5, 6 and 7. Rooms 2, 1 and 3.



From Tuthill: Red-on-brown ollas. a and e are Rincon red-on-brown. b, d and f are Tres Alamos red-on-brown. c is Dragoon red-on-brown. Diameter of e. 113/8 inches.



## The Spanish Explorers and the Sobaipuri Removal

In 1539, Estavanico, the Morrocan pathfinder with Fray Marcos de Niza's party, was the first European to explore the trail down the San Pedro River. In the vicinity of today's Benson, which could have been near Tres Alamos, his Indian guides led him northeast across to the Aravaipa Valley.<sup>29</sup>

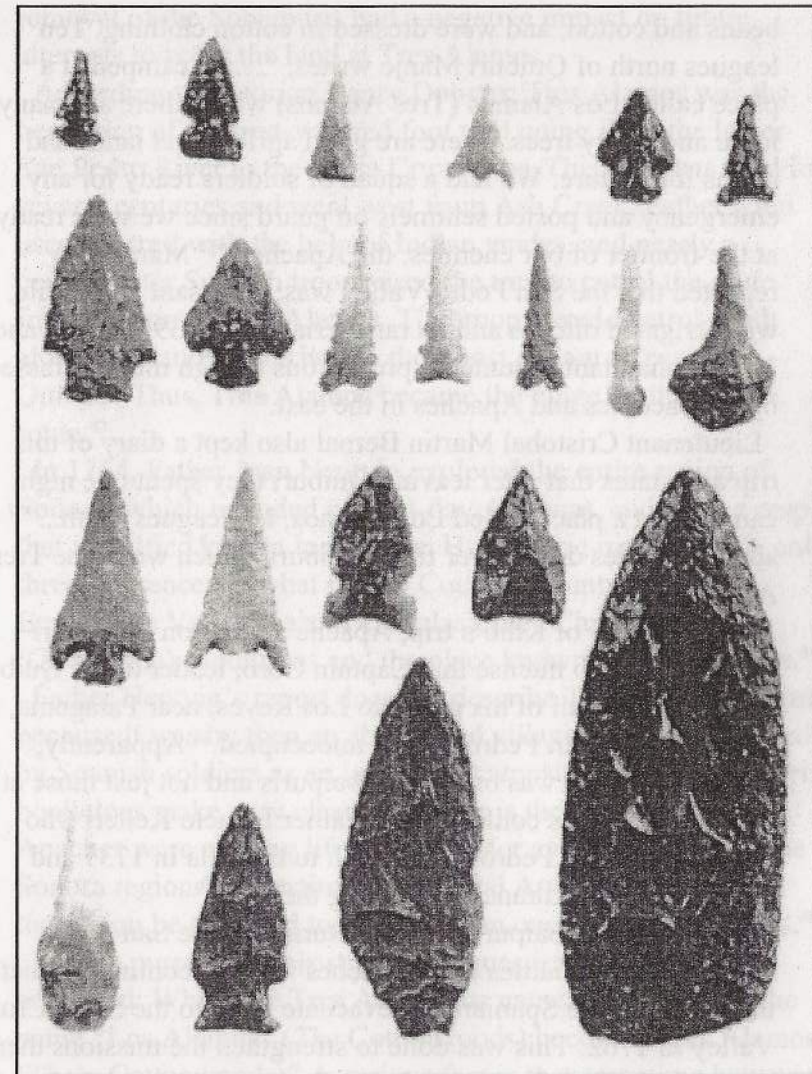
The following year, 1540, Coronado explored the same region. Coronado's expedition was very large, numbering as many as 350 Spaniards and more than 1,000 Mexican Indians, with thousands of horses, mules, cattle and sheep.<sup>30</sup>

Captain Juan Jaramillo's record of the expedition was used by the historian, Herbert Bolton, to determine the route taken by Coronado. Bolton states that Coronado reached a stream which the natives called the Nexpa. This was the San Pedro River, and the enormous train of men and animals traveled downstream for two days, then turned east at Tres Alamos.<sup>31</sup>

The exact routes taken by both Fray Marcos and Coronado are continually being debated today and may never be known with certainty. Richard and Shirley Flint, in their history of the Coronado Expedition, emphasize the fact that "Internal evidence...indicates that Fray Marcos and Coronado followed the San Pedro to its mouth, not just to Tres Alamos or Arivaipa..." They then add that there is little or no evidence to indicate that the two expeditions went east from the San Pedro at Tres Alamos or north via Aravaipa Creek.<sup>32</sup>

Charles DiPeso felt that many of the documents were controversial, as he had cautioned decades earlier. He especially questioned the documents of Fray Marcos de Niza, as did the Flints.<sup>33</sup>

Father Kino, Captain Juan Mateo Manje, twenty-two soldiers and ten Indian servants traveled north down the San Pedro River in November of 1697. Kino's purpose was twofold: to reaffirm his control of the Sobaipuri Indians living in several villages including Tres Alamos, and to ascertain the strength of



From Tuthill: Chipped stone implements. Length of the large blade is 4 1/2 inches.

the Apaches.<sup>34</sup>

On November 9, they reached Quiburi (three miles north of present-day Fairbank) and met 500 Sobaipuris living in 100 homes. According to Manje's diary, these people grew corn,



beans and cotton, and were dressed in cotton clothing. Ten leagues north of Quiburi Manje writes, "...we camped at a place called Los Alamos (Tres Alamos) where there are many large and shady trees. There are good agricultural lands and plains for pasture. We had a squad of soldiers ready for any emergency and posted sentinels on guard since we were ready at the frontier of our enemies, the Apaches."<sup>35</sup> Manje also reported that the San Pedro Valley was: "pleasant and fertile, with irrigated ditches and its rancherias – with 390 houses and 1, 850 inhabitants counted – prosperous though much harassed by the Jacomes and Apaches in the east."<sup>36</sup>

Lieutenant Cristobal Martin Bernal also kept a diary of this trip and states that after leaving Quiburi they spent one night camped "at a place called Los Alamos, ten leagues north..."<sup>37</sup> or about 25 miles down river from Quiburi, which would be Tres Alamos.

Within a year of Kino's trip, Apache attacks on Sobaipuris villages were so intense that Captain Coro, leader of the Quiburi people, moved all of his group to Los Reyes, near Patagonia, which left the San Pedro Valley unoccupied.<sup>38</sup> Apparently, Coro's influence was over all Sobaipuris and not just those at Quiburi. This was confirmed by Father Ignacio Keller, who followed the San Pedro River north to the Gila in 1737 and noted the deserted rancherias along the way.<sup>39</sup>

Many of the Sobaipuris slowly returned to the San Pedro River. Yet their battles with Apaches were so continuous that they allowed the Spaniards to evacuate them to the Santa Cruz Valley in 1762. This was done to strengthen the missions there, but the move left the San Pedro Valley once again in the hands of the Apaches.<sup>40</sup>

The Sobaipuris were the most warlike of all the Piman Indians and as long as they lived along the San Pedro River, they formed a defensive line against the Apaches.<sup>41</sup> One Jesuit official, Manuel Aguirre, believed it would have been better to have placed a garrison of soldiers somewhere on the San Pedro River in order to reinforce the Sobaipuris.<sup>42</sup> In any event, the

removal of the Sobaipuris had a negative impact on future attempts to settle the land at Tres Alamos.

According to historian Henry Dobyns, Tres Alamos was the beginning of the best-watered foot trail going from the lower San Pedro River to the Santa Cruz River. This trail was used for several centuries and went west from Ash Creek. Father Kino used the trail with the help of Indian guides, and nearly a century later Spanish troops used the trail to patrol the route from Tucson to Tres Alamos. The troops would patrol south along the San Pedro River to their post at Santa Cruz near Quiburi. Thus, Tres Alamos became the hinge on this patrol route.<sup>43</sup>

In 1764, Father Juan Nentvig explored the entire region of Sonora (which included present-day Arizona), and drew a map that identified known landmarks. His historic map contains only three references in what is now Cochise County: The San Bernardino Valley (east of Douglas), the "Chiguiragui" (Chiricahua) Mountains and the place known as Tres Alamos.<sup>44</sup>

Father Nentvig's report does not describe Tres Alamos, mainly because it was by then an abandoned village, but was still used by Spanish soldiers as an important campsite. What the Nentvig book does make very clear, however, is the fact that the Apaches were making life miserable for everyone living in the Sonora region.<sup>45</sup> He estimated the total Apache population in the region he explored to be more than one thousand families.<sup>46</sup>

For the purpose of this study, two questions cannot be answered: Who gave Tres Alamos its name, and when did the name "Los Alamos" (*The Cottonwoods*) become "Tres Alamos" (*Three Cottonwoods*)? A curious fact is that sometime between 1698 and 1784 the Spanish name for the Rincon Mountains was the "Sierra de Tres Alamos," according to the Herbert Bolton map, which was based on Kino's travels as well as on a map made by a Spaniard named Roche in 1784.<sup>47</sup>



## Spanish and Mexican Attempts to Settle at Tres Alamos

During the early 1800s, when Spain still controlled Mexico, Tucson's Hispanic citizens grew crops at Tres Alamos, but due to the constant Apache threat, had to be escorted to and from their fields by presidio soldiers.<sup>48</sup> Consequently, the old trail from Tucson to Tres Alamos became a well-developed wagon road. Apparently, many Tucsonans were willing to settle on the lush farmlands along the San Pedro River, but the Apaches always made people think twice about such a venture. As an illustration of the magnitude of this problem, the Apaches actually attacked the Tucson presidio in 1782 and nearly defeated the Spanish troops.<sup>49</sup>

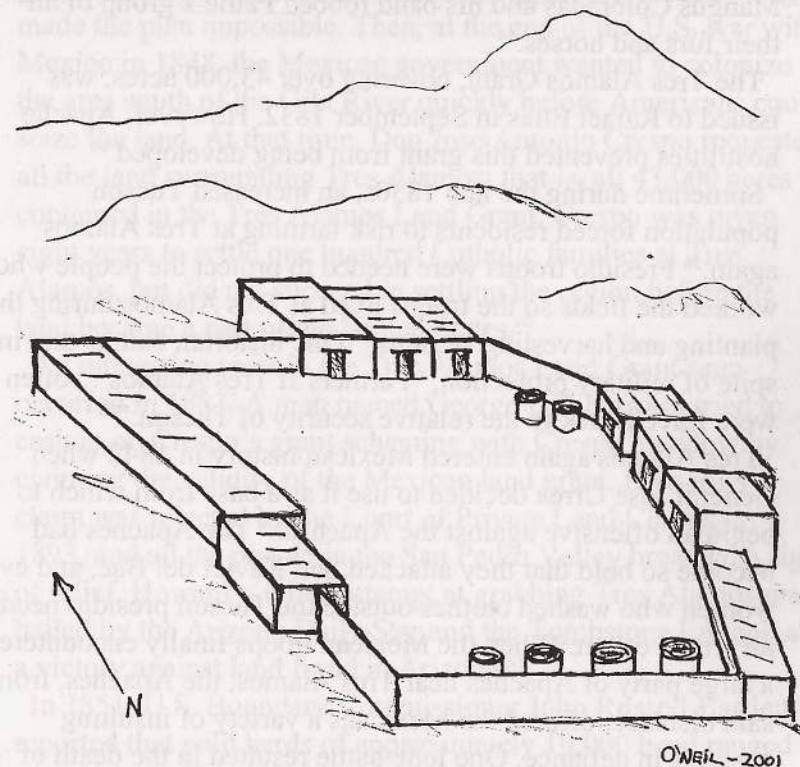
When the war of Mexican independence began in 1810, the presidio at Tucson was commanded by Captain Antonio Narbona. It was he who understood that Tucson's food supply could be augmented by crops grown at Tres Alamos. He encouraged several peaceful Apaches living near the presidio to farm the Tres Alamos lands under the protection of fifteen or more fully armed soldiers.<sup>50</sup>

Protecting the Tres Alamos farmers was made even more difficult because during the struggle for independence (1810-1821), the Sonora-Arizona frontier was lightly garrisoned. Most of the Mexican soldiers were fighting deep in Mexico, so the Apaches took advantage of the situation by laying waste to the entire region.<sup>51</sup>

When Mexico finally gained her freedom in 1821, the new Tucson presidio commander, Manuel Escalante, realized that soldiers and workers were no longer cultivating the Tres Alamos fields, which had made Tucson self-sufficient in both grains and vegetables. He also discovered the reason: The previous commander was getting kickbacks from the merchants of Arizpe, Sonora, for buying the food and presidio supplies from them.<sup>52</sup>

Along with Mexico's independence came an increase in the

## PREHISTORIC TRES ALAMOS



AN ADOBE AND STONE COMPOUND

number of land grants issued to wealthy Hispanic ranchers and settlers. The majority of the Arizona grants were along the San Pedro and Santa Cruz rivers, and were acquired between 1820 and 1833. However, as the historian Leon Metz states, "Apaches swept the region so clean of inhabitants that many owners either abandoned their property or were buried on it."<sup>53</sup>

In the spring of 1825, Sylvester Pattie and his party of beaver



trappers got a taste of Apache dominance. While working their way down the San Pedro River, the famous Apache Chief Mangus Coloradas and his band robbed Pattie's group of all their furs and horses.<sup>54</sup>

The Tres Alamos Grant, covering over 43,000 acres, was issued to Rafael Elias in September 1832. However, Apache hostilities prevented this grant from being developed.<sup>55</sup>

Sometime during the late 1830s, an increased Tucson population forced residents to risk farming at Tres Alamos again.<sup>56</sup> Presidio troops were needed to protect the people who worked the fields so the troops lived at Tres Alamos during the planting and harvesting seasons.<sup>57</sup> One historian claims that in spite of military protection, "Farmers at Tres Alamos ... often were forced back to the relative security of Tucson."<sup>58</sup>

Tres Alamos again entered Mexican history in 1842 when General Jose Urrea decided to use it as a base from which to begin an offensive against the Apaches.<sup>59</sup> The Apaches had become so bold that they attacked San Xavier del Bac, and even women who washed clothes outside the Tucson presidio needed an armed escort. When the Mexican troops finally encountered a large party of Apaches near Tres Alamos, the Apaches, from a safe distance, offered the Mexicans a variety of insulting gestures in defiance. One lone battle resulted in the death of fifteen trapped Apaches, including two women and one child. After that token victory, the soldiers returned to Tucson with two wounded men.<sup>60</sup>

As a footnote to Tres Alamos history, it should be noted that the Mormon Battalion, enroute to California, passed through the San Pedro Valley in December 1846. On the 12<sup>th</sup> of that month, they camped one mile southwest of today's St. David. Their camp on December 13<sup>th</sup> was about three-fourths of a mile northwest of present-day Benson. The next day they struck a trail leading to Tucson. Apparently the battalion didn't get as far as Tres Alamos, but the trail they found going west probably was the same one used by the Spaniards and Mexicans going from Tres Alamos to Tucson.<sup>61</sup>

Two attempts by Mexico to colonize Tres Alamos met with defeat. In 1831, Leonardo Escalante was authorized by the governor of Sonora to occupy the region, but Apache uprisings made the plan impossible. Then, at the end of the U.S. war with Mexico in 1848, the Mexican government wanted to colonize the area south of the Gila River quickly before Americans could seize the land. At that time, Don Jose Antonio Crespo requested all the land surrounding Tres Alamos; that is, all 43,000 acres contained in the Tres Alamos Land Grant. Crespo was given eight years to settle one hundred Catholic families at Tres Alamos, but did not succeed in settling the region before the land became a part of the United States.<sup>62</sup>

An interesting twist in the Tres Alamos Land Grant saga occurred in 1883. A man named George Hill Howard tried to cash in on Crespo's grant scheming with Crespo's widow by claiming the validity of the Mexican land grant. Howard's claim was rejected by the Court of Private Land Claims in 1893, and all the people in the San Pedro Valley breathed a sigh of relief. Howard's failed attempt at grabbing Tres Alamos was hailed by the Arizona Daily Star and the Tombstone Epitaph as a victory against land fraud in Arizona.<sup>63</sup>

In 1851, U.S. Boundary Commissioner John Russell Bartlett reported that wild herds of approximately 10,000 head ranged up and down the San Pedro River. He wrote, "To the north lay Tres Alamos, the Chiricahua Mountains and the Chiricahua Apaches... within this remote, isolated region, the wild longhorns grazed undisturbed, except for the Apaches and a few brave Mexicans, until the arrival of the Americans."<sup>64</sup>

Vast herds of wild cattle were left behind when the Apaches drove out the Mexican ranchers in the 1830s.<sup>65</sup> By 1854, however, the wild cattle were nearly extinct. The Apaches preferred the fatter and more tender cows, and killed nearly all of them, preventing normal reproduction of the species. Disease and predators took their toll, and Mexican and Anglo hunters finished off the remainder.<sup>66</sup> By the time of the Gadsden Purchase, implemented in 1854, there were very few people



living in southeastern Arizona outside of Tucson. All the great ranches were ruined and deserted. In addition to the forced evacuations by the Apaches, many Mexicans had been drawn away from Arizona by the discovery of gold in California.<sup>67</sup>

Nearly all of the events taking place in Arizona up to the Gadsden Purchase involved Spanish and Mexican people. Anglo Americans didn't have a real impact in Arizona until after the Civil War. Even then, all Mexicans living in Arizona in 1854 were given citizenship, if they so desired, as part of the U.S. treaty with Mexico.<sup>68</sup> Any discussion of events in what is now Cochise County prior to 1854 is really Spanish or Mexican history. At that time, the land south of the Gila River to the Mexican border became part of the United States.

The fact that southeastern Arizona had become part of the United States meant nothing to the Apaches. In June 1858, while traveling across southern Arizona via the "Jackass Mail," Phocion R. Way wrote in his diary that due to the menacing Apaches, traveling "...is like running the gauntlet." He then wrote, "We are now camping on the San Pedro river to get our suppers. It is a small, short and muddy river....I have just been bathing in its murky waters and feel much refreshed....We follow this stream 6 or 7 miles (to Tres Alamos?) and then strike out west and leave it. If no accident happens, we will be in Tucson tomorrow night."<sup>69</sup> Fortunately, Mr. Way and the "Jackass Mail" wagon reached Tucson without incident.

## Post Civil War Settlement

During the Civil War years, the Apaches made life difficult for everyone they found in southeastern Arizona. The Bascom affair at Fort Bowie in 1861 made Cochise the enemy of almost all whites. A veritable mutual extermination policy existed between the Apaches, the U.S. Army, and the occasional roaming Confederate forces during the war years.<sup>70</sup>

But the Homestead Act of 1862, with its allure of 160 acres of free land, made a few brave souls accept unusual risks.<sup>71</sup> In December 1865, several Anglo and Mexican families filed claims on Tres Alamos land. They knew the risk, but they also knew that farming at Tres Alamos could be a rewarding venture.

The first settlers were John Montgomery, Mark Aldrich, John Archibald, Frederick Berthold, Jarvis Jackson, Hampton Brown, Eugenio Ruiz and Juan Lopez. These men brought their families, built homes and began construction of an irrigation ditch that would supply water to the homesteads. Such progress could not have been made had it not been for the detachment of soldiers stationed at Tres Alamos during 1866. In due time the population increased as more settlers arrived. The first crop of wheat, barley and beans amounted to nearly 350,000 pounds. The colony's greatest blessing, thanks to the troops, was that there were no Apache attacks during its first year. As John Montgomery said in his report to The Arizona Citizen, "All was peace and prosperity."<sup>72</sup>

What these settlers were doing took real courage, as they were truly separated from the rest of humanity. According to the official U.S. Army map of 1864, no other habitations existed in what is now Cochise County except for Fort Bowie some fifty miles to the east.<sup>73</sup> Camp Wallen began in 1866 and Fort Huachuca was built in 1877. Several wagon roads crisscrossed the region, linking springs and isolated stage stations, but there were no towns, villages or ranches at that time. In fact, all of Pima County had fewer than 1,600 residents, most of whom lived in Tucson.<sup>74</sup>





John Montgomery, Tres Alamos settler (1865)  
and Arizona Territory Legislator (1873-1875).

Photo courtesy Edward Ellsworth

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The homesteaders at Tres Alamos disproved a prediction made less than a decade earlier. Writing for The New York Herald newspaper in 1858 and traveling on the first Butterfield Overland Mail stagecoach, Waterman L. Ormsby wrote that although the San Pedro Valley was very fertile "...as long as it is left, as it is now, a prey to merciless Indians, no man can settle there in safety."<sup>75</sup>

The one man who did not seem to fit into the above mix of settlers was Mark Aldrich. Mr. Aldrich arrived in Tucson in 1855 and opened the first store owned by an Anglo American. By 1864 he was one of the richest men in Arizona Territory, worth around \$52,000, which was a fortune at that time. In 1864, he was elected to the Council of the First Territorial Legislature and was elected president of the Third Council in 1866.<sup>76</sup> Why he became a settler at Tres Alamos is a mystery. One explanation might be that he was a silent partner with Fred Berthold and allowed Fred to manage their holdings.<sup>77</sup>

John Montgomery, on the other hand, played a leading role in the early history of Tres Alamos. He married Maria Ruiz, the oldest daughter of fellow homesteader Eugenio Ruiz when the two families were living in Tucson in 1863. John and Maria had nine children, seven of whom were born at Tres Alamos. Several of their descendants currently live in Cochise County. Much of what is known about Tres Alamos is due to the diligent research conducted over the past twenty years by Edward Ellsworth of Benson, whose ancestry dates back to Maria Ruiz.<sup>78</sup>

Tres Alamos grew rapidly during its first year of settlement. A special U.S. Census, completed in 1866, enumerated 59 people living in the vicinity of Tres Alamos. Thirty-five were Mexican, twenty-one were Anglo American and three were African American.<sup>79</sup> This census was not completely accurate as it somehow omitted several of the original settlers.

News of the success at Tres Alamos must have spread quickly. John Montgomery reported that "each day brought arrivals of settlers to the valley until the population reached one hundred



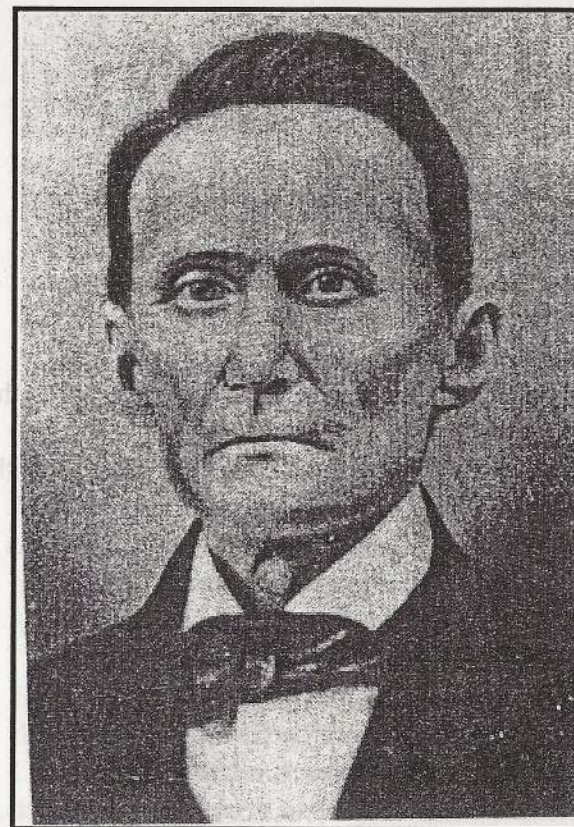
men, women and children. During the year (1866) there was not a single death from any cause, nor was there one Indian depredation."<sup>80</sup>

The first year was peaceful and successful, and for the next several years Tres Alamos continued to grow. Records at the Pima County Recorder's Office indicate that Tres Alamos lands were continually being bought and sold, settlers came and went, water rights were sold, and partnerships were formed and dissolved, making it difficult to keep track of everyone living there or how long each person stayed.<sup>81</sup>

Tres Alamos grew steadily even though the peace mentioned by John Montgomery came to an abrupt end in 1867. In a letter to *The Arizona Citizen*, Mr. Montgomery offered a highly poignant summary of events from 1867 to 1870. The soldiers were removed in September 1866, after the first harvest, and problems began soon thereafter.

Montgomery wrote: "The commencement of the first Apache depredations was in 1867. The Indians attacked some Mexicans while plowing and killed one of their number. A few weeks later, they attacked a herd of oxen and killed the herder, and drove off one horse and four yoke of oxen. Some of the settlers in the lower part of the valley were becoming alarmed and talked about leaving their places. About this time Captain Hinds, of the firm of Hinds & Hooker, happened in the settlement and wrote a petition which was signed by a number of citizens and forwarded to General Crittenden, asking for a guard to be stationed at this place. The General immediately sent ten men. They remained there until the next year. In September three more horses were stolen, the property of Ruiz, Berthold, and Lopez, making for the year, two men killed and twelve head of stock stolen. About 250,000 pounds of corn was raised in the valley."<sup>82</sup>

According to Mr. Montgomery's letter, 1868 was nearly the



Mark Aldrich, Tres Alamos settler. This photo, dated Nov. 11, 1857, courtesy of the Arizona Historical Society.

same, except "no person was killed and the crops about the same as the previous year."

The Apaches increased their raiding at Tres Alamos during 1869, and from April of that year until January of 1870, they killed "six settlers and stole fourteen head of valuable horses."<sup>83</sup> Three more settlers were killed in 1870. John Montgomery concluded his letter by saying, "There never has been but one death by natural causes in the valley."<sup>84</sup>

William Ohnesorgen, who operated the stage station at the Middle Crossing of the San Pedro River (near today's Benson), recalled nearly fifty years later that "The first people to settle at Tres Alamos was a colony of 25 Americans....They were all killed, in time."<sup>85</sup> Although his memory was somewhat faulty,



Mr. Ohnesorgen's tragic assessment of life at Tres Alamos accurately reflected the harsh conditions the settlers endured.

William S. Oury, an instigator of the infamous Camp Grant massacre, claimed that the slaying of two men, one named Simms and the other Sam Brown, near Tres Alamos was one more example of Apache atrocities and contributed to his decision to take action against the Apaches.<sup>86</sup>

## The Apache Menace

The story of Tres Alamos in many ways is a microcosm within the larger history of southeastern Arizona's "clash of cultures."<sup>87</sup> The Spaniards, Mexicans and Americans all had the unshakable belief that this land was their own. The Apaches were equally certain that they were the only rightful residents of their traditional homeland. This irreconcilable difference of opinion was at the heart of most of the tragic events at Tres Alamos.

It may appear redundant to discuss Apache raiding as a separate issue when the prior decades at Tres Alamos were replete with such happenings. However, a few isolated incidents, which took place over a span of about fifteen years, are worth relating.

A brief item in the Weekly Arizonan, dated April 16, 1870, said only this: "Killed – J.A. Jackson, formerly of California and lately of the San Pedro settlement, was killed by Indians on Wednesday. He left his ranch in the morning and went down the river about four miles to a deserted ranch formerly owned by Samuel Brown. Upon his return he was attacked by a party of Indians lying in ambush near the road and received a musket ball through the heart. His body was discovered on the evening of the same day, and was buried by the settlers, whose respect and confidence he had won during his short stay among them."<sup>88</sup> Jarvis Jackson was a member of the original group of 1865 settlers.

On March 13, 1871, an article in The Arizona Citizen stated:

"The Indians attacked the lower part of the settlement today (Tres Alamos), and killed Mr. Alexander McKinsey, took off a yoke of oxen, one horse and did considerable other damage about the place." Two days later another item in that newspaper read: "From San Pedro Valley. The slaughter continued – four more men killed, and quite surely by Indians fed and protected at Camp Grant."<sup>89</sup>

Eskiminzin, chief of the Camp Grant Apaches, admitted he was the one who killed Alexander McKinsey at Tres Alamos. According to his statement, the two men had become friends. On that fateful day Eskiminzin and several warriors rode up to the McKinsey ranch. McKinsey butchered a steer for the occasion and the group feasted. Later, pretending to leave, Eskiminzin hid in some bushes, and when McKinsey passed by, "ran a lance through his heart." When asked later for an explanation, Eskiminzin offered only "...it takes a great and brave man to kill his best friend."<sup>90</sup>

Eskiminzin's braves from Camp Grant also killed Harry Long, Sam Brown and a man named Chapin near Tres Alamos, and a day or so later killed all the members of a haying party near Camp Grant.<sup>91</sup> A brief item in the Weekly Arizonan, dated April 15, 1871, reported: "A party of Indians descended upon the valley of the San Pedro on Thursday and killed Mr. Long, Mr. McKinsey, Mr. Chapin and another whose name we have not learned. This news has been received as we go to press."<sup>92</sup>

The continual murders throughout southeastern Arizona that year outraged many Tucsonans. William Oury stated: "Apache murders and depredations were so numerous as to threaten the abandonment of nearly all settlements outside of Tucson, especially on the San Pedro." In March of 1871, William Oury and about one hundred men determined to protect themselves and pledged "to eat up, blood raw, every Apache in the land, immediately upon the occurrence of a new outrage."<sup>93</sup> The Camp Grant Massacre took place the following month.

The settlers at Tres Alamos were doggedly determined to stay regardless of the cost in life and property. During the following



Mary  
Bernard  
Aguirre, first  
teacher at  
Tres  
Alamos.  
Photo cour-  
tesy Arizona  
Historical  
Society.



## The Peak Years: 1873-1880

Apaches, insects and malaria did not prevent the Tres Alamos farmers from growing crops, and nothing kept additional settlers from taking up new land or buying land from the original homesteaders. The community continued to flourish. Beans, potatoes, cabbages, tomatoes, flowers, tobacco, sugar cane, buckwheat, oats, barley and corn were crops the homesteaders grew with varying degrees of success.<sup>101</sup>

In August 1873, Fred Berthold placed an ad in *The Arizona Citizen* letting everyone know he had a store at Tres Alamos and was a dealer in general merchandise: "having on hand a well-selected stock of dry goods, groceries, provisions, liquors, tobacco and cigars...which I offer for sale at the lowest

possible prices...."<sup>102</sup> Shortly thereafter, another newspaper item mentioned the death of Mark Aldrich, an original Tres Alamos settler, who died "of old age" in Tucson on September 21, 1873.<sup>103</sup>

Henry Clay Hooker claimed 320 acres on the east side of the San Pedro River in November 1874. He drove 75 dairy cows onto the land, built a ranch house and soon was producing high quality milk and butter for customers in Tucson.<sup>104</sup>

Hooker then built Tres Alamos House on the west side of the river and advertised it as a way station for travelers. It was "First class in every respect." In addition to rooms and meals, Tres Alamos also maintained a general store providing "groceries, liquors and cigars, which are needful to sustain life whilst the Apaches are out." This new business also housed the military telegraph office, operated by Levi Pitts.<sup>105</sup>

Cassius M. Hooker, Henry's nephew, was employed to run Tres Alamos House where he and his wife, Emma, "clerked and slung hash for a few years." Cassius moved to Dragoon when the railroad was built, bought some land and became Dragoon's first postmaster in 1881.<sup>106</sup>

Tres Alamos House had to compete with another entrepreneur, Thomas Dunbar. Dunbar arrived some time before 1875 and began a long and prominent career as a rancher, stage station operator, politician and postmaster. He and his wife, Agnes, managed the stage station and post office and provided travelers "with good food and clean beds." Mr. Dunbar served two terms in the Territorial Legislature, where he pushed hard to establish a new county separate from Tucson influences and became known as the "Father of Cochise County."<sup>107</sup>

David Pitts and his sister followed their brother, Levi Pitts, to Tres Alamos in 1876. Help was very scarce at that time so David was hired as a cook at Dunbar's Station for \$120 a month, a huge salary, plus room and board. David's sister, Prudie, stayed at Tres Alamos for a few years and then married the owner of a cattle ranch at Point of Mountain. During David



Pitts' stay at Tres Alamos, he said, "There was a man named A.A. Wilts and he kept a store there."<sup>108</sup>

During its first year of operation in 1874, the post office was managed by John Montgomery. In August 1875, Thomas Dunbar became postmaster and continued in that role until the office was discontinued in September 1886. The Mormons at St. David, sixteen miles south, got their mail at Tres Alamos until their own post office was built in July 1882. After 1886, people living at Tres Alamos received their mail in Benson. William Ohnesorgen ran a post office at his stage station on the San Pedro River sporadically from 1872 to 1880.<sup>109</sup> Postmaster compensation figures indicate that Tres Alamos' peak years were 1879 to 1881, but even at its height, the most Thomas Dunbar received in one year was \$154.69. The postmaster at the new town of Willcox received over \$255 that same year, 1881.<sup>110</sup>

In 1875, Dr. Glendy King, an ailing 45-year-old physician and widower from New York, settled at Tres Alamos and became well known throughout the region. It wasn't long before Dr. King moved to San Pedro Springs (Hooker Hot Springs), where he improved his health and attempted to establish a ranch. Dr. King was shot and killed in 1884. Although some references claim he was murdered by Apaches, the fact is he was killed during an altercation with 18-year-old Melvin Jones, whose father was planning to ranch near Dr. King's springs. Melvin Jones was acquitted of murder charges.<sup>111</sup>

In June of 1875, Henry Clay Hooker and a Colonel Hodge rode down from the Sierra Bonita Ranch to count the residents at Tres Alamos. They discovered the population had grown to 100 men, 47 women and 56 children.<sup>112</sup> This total of 203 people made Tres Alamos an important community in Pima County and the only community in what later became Cochise County.

In addition to being a successful farmer, John Montgomery was elected to the House of Representatives during the Seventh



Tres Alamos cancellation stamp. Courtesy of the Postal History Foundation, Tucson, AZ.

Territorial Legislature for the years 1873-1874. He represented the people of Tres Alamos who voted as part of Pima County in the territorial elections. Mr. Montgomery also served on the jury that exonerated most of the perpetrators of the Camp Grant massacre in 1871.<sup>113</sup>

1875 and 1876 seem to have been the peak years at Tres Alamos. In addition to its large population, it could boast about having a post office, stage station, hotel, several merchants, a military telegraph, two doctors and a school. The location of this community allowed it to become an important transportation hub as well, with good wagon roads heading north to Camp Grant, east to Fort Bowie, south to Sonora and west to Tucson. It was also during this time that the landowners formed the San Pedro Farmer's Association.<sup>114</sup>

The school at Tres Alamos had a brief and unusual history. According to the historian Rufus Wyllys, public schools were unknown in Arizona Territory until after the Civil War, and most of the children "simply had to go uneducated" or be taught at home or by private tutors. The first public school opened in Tucson in 1871, and by 1873 the number of schools had risen to eleven.<sup>115</sup> Therefore, it's not surprising that the first school at Tres Alamos didn't open until 1875.



The first teacher was Mary Bernard Aguirre, hired for the 1875 school year. Mary was the widow of Epifanio Aguirre, a successful Tucson freighter who was killed by Indians near Sasabe, Sonora, in 1870. Mary and her son boarded with the Thomas Dunbar family for the school year. The school was one room in an adobe house, but it served the needs of Mrs. Aguirre and her 23 students. Due to Indian problems, one year was enough for Mrs. Aguirre and she moved back to Tucson at the end of the school year. Mary would have been a great teacher to keep. She was fluent in Spanish and later became Chair of Spanish Language and English History at the Territorial College, which became the University of Arizona.<sup>116</sup>

Mr. Fred Pratz, a teacher from Sitka, Alaska, by way of San Francisco, arrived in Tres Alamos for the 1877 school year. John Montgomery and other members of the newly-formed school board converted a room in the home of Fred Berthold, which was to be used as the school. Mr. Berthold had died of natural causes on a trip to Sonora the previous year. His home was the only building available at the time. Although new furniture was made and some old equipment refurbished, the school wasn't opened on time. An infestation of flies and mosquitoes that year kept the school from opening until October.<sup>117</sup>

There is no further mention of schools at Tres Alamos in either the Tucson papers or other sources. Due to the mining discoveries at Tombstone, Patagonia and the Dragoon Mountains, people were pulled away from Tres Alamos in 1877. It is certain that some people left for the mines, including John Montgomery, but it isn't known how many abandoned Tres Alamos.

When the news of Tombstone's rich silver strikes reached Tucson in 1878, hundreds of hopeful miners rushed toward the new mining district. Some traveled the route from Tucson to Tres Alamos, known also as the Lower Crossing, or by way of Ohnesorgen's station at the Middle Crossing of the San Pedro River. From there they went south to Tombstone. During the

first hectic summer of 1878, a young man named James Branson made a good deal of money by opening an express line between Tres Alamos and Tombstone.<sup>118</sup>

Richard Hinton's *Arizona Business Directory* of 1877, which was based on data obtained a year or two earlier, lists ten people of note at Tres Alamos: Leonardo Apodaca, rancher; A. Blair, rancher; Jesus Diaz, general merchant; Thomas Dunbar, postmaster and station keeper; G. Gibson, rancher; C.M. Hooker, merchant and hotel keeper; G. King, physician; Frank Long, rancher; Levi Pitts, U.S. military telegraph operator and A.A. Wilt, merchant.<sup>119</sup> Hinton's list of notables includes only those people who responded to his inquiry, but it does add some new names who would otherwise have been forgotten.

In 1877, Charlie Shibell became sheriff of Pima County, which covered 12 million acres and stretched from the New Mexico border all the way to Yuma. Livestock theft, mining camp lawlessness, stagecoach robberies, drunken brawls and murders made the protection of rural residents a very difficult task. In order to help ease his burden, Mr. Shibell appointed deputies at Camp Thomas, Greaterville, Safford, Tombstone and Tres Alamos. Wyatt Earp was the deputy sheriff at Tombstone and George Woolfolk was located at Tres Alamos, effective August 28, 1878.<sup>120</sup>

In addition to these problems, Sheriff Shibell had a different type of crime to deal with – voter fraud. During the election of 1880, ballot box stuffing was reported at San Simon, and witnesses “swore to voting irregularities at Tombstone and Tres Alamos, involving vote tampering and incompetence.”<sup>121</sup> This should have been no surprise to Sheriff Shibell, because when he was running for office “It was claimed that Mexicans were furnished free transportation from across the border to swell the voting.”<sup>122</sup>

For some unknown reason, Henry Clay Hooker put his Tres Alamos holdings up for sale or rent in February 1879. His property included the Tres Alamos House, his dairy, stable, corrals and blacksmith shop. In a newspaper ad Mr. Hooker



said: "The telegraph office is in the house and the daily mail passes Tres Alamos House." These holdings must have been sold or closed, because Cassius Hooker, his nephew and manager, moved to Dragoon shortly thereafter.<sup>123</sup>

John Montgomery died of natural causes in January 1879. Two years later, his widow, Maria Ruiz Montgomery, married Severiano Bonillas, a Tres Alamos farmer and one-time employee of Hooker's Tres Alamos House. Maria and Severiano had three children; Rita, Cristobal and Aurora Bonillas.<sup>124</sup>

## Mexican-American Settlers at Tres Alamos

In the introduction to the book *Frontier Tucson*, the editors begin by stating: "For many decades the study of southern Arizona history has concentrated largely on the male Anglo experience...while Hispanics have received scant attention...." This Arizona Historical Society anthology "seeks to right part of that wrong by exploring some of the contributions of the Hispanic community." As one example the editors cite the fact that until 1878, Mexican Americans made up sixty-seven percent of Tucson's population.<sup>125</sup>

John Rockfellow made some interesting observations about Tucson in 1879 that are applicable not only to Tucson, but to all of southeastern Arizona. "Tucson," he said, "because of the great influx of people passing through to the Tombstone District, was just then awakening to the new order of things." That is, the new railroad and new mining discoveries were altering the economics of southeastern Arizona. One day Rockfellow noticed "perhaps a hundred vehicles, mostly two-wheeled carts from Mexico," were bringing all sorts of products to Tucson. "The Mexican trade meant much to Tucson, and the current coin was the Mexican dollar, or 'dobe dollar' as it was called...(and)...prices were in Mexican coin, discounted if one paid American money."<sup>126</sup>

Mexican money and Mexican culture were important during those days. Also, Mexicans who adopted agricultural skills during the territorial period enjoyed a near monopoly of farm labor. Several families who settled in areas where irrigation was possible enjoyed success as farming entrepreneurs during the 1870s and 1880s.<sup>127</sup>

The ethnic and racial mixture of settlers at Tres Alamos and other locations along the San Pedro River illustrates how impartial Arizona was at that time to race, color and religion.<sup>128</sup> In fact, ethnic mixing at Tres Alamos was so pervasive that it's difficult to separate one from the other.

From the first day of settlement in 1865, Mexican and Anglo men and women, side by side, were hard at work. Soon after the main irrigation ditch was constructed, thirty-six people were paying for the use of water, and thirteen of these were Mexican settlers.<sup>129</sup>

It was mentioned earlier that the population of Tres Alamos in 1866 consisted of 35 Mexicans, 21 Anglos and three African Americans. Some of the Anglo settlers had Mexican wives and at least 14 Mexicans were property owners with recorded deeds. The list of Tres Alamos merchants in 1877 included two Mexicans. In 1881, the year Cochise County became a political entity, nearly half of all the landowners around Tres Alamos were Mexican Americans. In addition to landowners and day laborers, three Mexicans worked at Tres Alamos House up to 1879.<sup>130</sup>

In August 1870, Charles A. Shibell, future Pima County Sheriff, who was working for the U.S. Census Bureau, listed 80 people along the San Pedro River near Tres Alamos: sixty-one were male and 19 were female, residing in 32 homes along the river. Out of this total number, fifty-five were Mexican landowners, laborers, wives or children.<sup>131</sup>

Frank Lockwood, in his book *Pioneer Portraits*, states that those who remembered life in Tucson back in the 1870s said "Mexicans and Americans were on the most neighborly terms. Neither race scorned the other." Whenever there was a dance



or “baile,” the food and music were Mexican. Surely the same was true at Tres Alamos. This ethnic quality is exemplified by Estevan Ochoa, of the firm Tully and Ochoa, who was elected mayor of Tucson in 1875. He served as president of the school board and was elected to the Fifth and Sixth Territorial Legislatures of 1868 and 1871.<sup>132</sup> Records show that Juan Bojorquez was elected to serve as Justice of the Peace in 1880, for Precinct 13, the San Pedro River region, including Tres Alamos.<sup>133</sup>

Mexican American family oral histories of those who lived at Tres Alamos prior to 1900 is considerable, but due to space limitations only a few can be mentioned.

The Tautimez family has one fascinating anecdote. It came from a grandmother who had lived at Tres Alamos during the 1870s. According to her, children were hidden in a cave by some nuns during an attack by Apaches. When they came out of hiding, they found several adults had been scalped and had parts of their feet cut off. Some of them managed to escape and their descendants now live in Florence and Benson.<sup>134</sup>

After John Montgomery died in 1879, family oral history states that Maria Montgomery struggled to keep their farm operating. Along with her four brothers, the family cultivated 140 acres by hand. Thomas Dunbar, it is said, interfered with Maria’s water rights and this led to a serious feud among the settlers. Court records indicate that this dispute wasn’t resolved until 1889, when Antonio Grajalva took Dunbar to court. A good deal of what is known about Mexican Americans at Tres Alamos is contained in the lengthy court documents and sworn testimonies given by Mexican witnesses at that trial.<sup>135</sup>

Although much Tres Alamos Mexican history has been lost, it’s fortunate that at least one family’s oral history, that of the Bonillas family, has been saved thanks to the recollections of Aurora Bonillas Mendoza.

Aurora was born at Tres Alamos in 1890 to Severiano and Maria Montgomery Bonillas. She married at age 14 and had ten children. Aurora passed away in December of 1990, seven



**The Bonillas Family of Tres Alamos (1890).** The infant is Aurora. Left to right is: Maria De Los Angeles Bonillas Ronquillo, Fernando Leon Bonillas, (in arms) Cristobal Bonillas, (sitting) Maria Ruiz Montgomery Bonillas, (Baby Georgia) Aurora Bonillas, (little girl) Rita Bonillas. Photo courtesy Edward Ellsworth.



upper valley lost entire herds. The situation was so bad that President Chester A. Arthur threatened to send the militia to southeastern Arizona.<sup>142</sup>

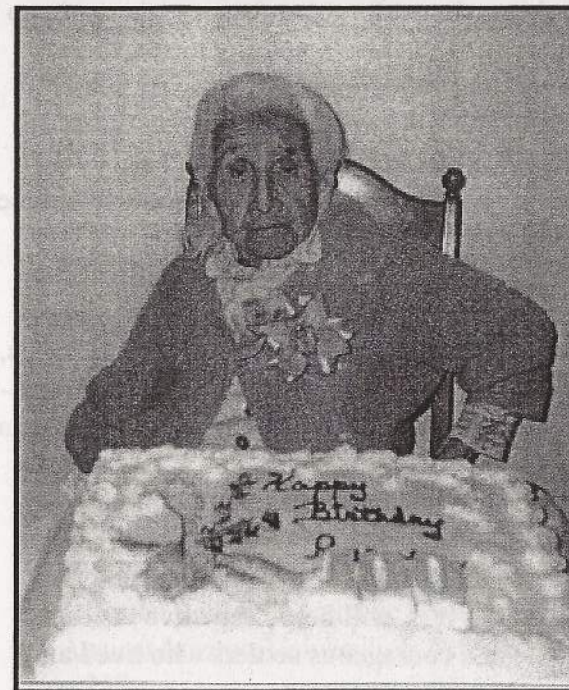
One expert on the subject said that "Cochise County with its numerous canyons, arroyos and hill pockets became a rustler's paradise...." Cattle thieves were so numerous that in February 1881, Governor John C. Fremont sent a special message to the Territorial Council requesting measures to destroy the organized bands of rustlers. This lawlessness continued into the 1900s.<sup>143</sup>

Cattle dealer T.W. Ayles wrote in 1881 that "Aside from the 50 head of good beef cattle I have been robbed of, Judge Blair has lost his entire herd. P. McMinnimen has lost all of his fine steers. Dunbar at Tres Alamos has lost a number of head...In fact, all engaged in the cattle business have lost heavily from cattle thieves...."<sup>144</sup>

Rustling did not stop ranchers from moving to Tres Alamos. In 1883, Thomas White, brother of Theodore, sold his interest in the famous Chiricahua Cattle Company and began a cattle operation at Tres Alamos, where it was said, "the San Pedro River flowed freely all year round."<sup>145</sup>

The first official Cochise County map was printed in 1884 by county surveyor H.G. Howe. This map shows several ranches developed by newcomers to the Tres Alamos area. Men such as Henry and George Etz, who owned the Three Bark Cattle Company in 1883; Jacob and Matthew Everhardy established the Everhardy Land and Cattle Company; and 33-year-old William H. Weeks, who claimed to be the youngest cattle rancher at Tres Alamos.<sup>146</sup> These new ranchers merged with the old Anglo and Mexican farmers and ranchers who had struggled through the hard times.

As if rustlers and other criminals weren't enough, Indians continued to be an occasional problem. In 1886, the U.S. Army handed out 20 rifles and ammunition to Thomas Dunbar and a Mr. Calkins at Tres Alamos. The rifles were to be used as protection against the few Apaches who were still raiding the



Aurora B.  
Mendoza,  
May 6, 1990:  
100 Years  
Young!  
Photo cour-  
tesy of  
Edward  
Ellsworth.

region. Oddly, when General Miles heard that Mexican ranchers and farmers were receiving these rifles, he ordered that they all be returned immediately.<sup>147</sup>

The history of Tres Alamos after the mid-1880s is one of continued agricultural and stock-raising pursuits carried on by a few Anglo, Mexican and Chinese farmers and ranchers. That phase, the Twentieth Century, of Tres Alamos' past is beyond the scope of this monograph.

Today, Tres Alamos is dominated by ranches, small farms and homes dotted along the valley. The few remaining adobe ruins are spread over several acres on the east side of the river. Like many Arizona ghost towns, there are numerous pieces of purple glass, old tin cans with soldered lids, crushed tea kettles, lard buckets, syrup tins and other odds and ends. The adobe buildings have been reduced to little more than mounds of earth. There are two major grave sites, both on private land and off limits.



Tres Alamos has been almost forgotten because there are no outstanding physical ruins. If there's nothing to see, there's nothing to remember. Yet, descendants of the early settlers living today in Cochise County and elsewhere possess a vast oral tradition and a never-ending supply of anecdotal knowledge about life at Tres Alamos. Today's residents in the area have collected scores of relics found on farms and residential property. It would be nice if all such stories and artifacts could be collected; however, it is not the purpose of this narrative to include every known fact about Tres Alamos, but rather to present the essential history of the area from pre-historic times until the 1880s when Tres Alamos lost its role as the cultural center of the lower San Pedro River Valley.

Tres Alamos deserves to be remembered as an important place in Cochise County history, but became so lost that it is not noted on most of today's maps. Hopefully, the above historical sketch, brief as it is, will help keep alive the dim memory of the noble and courageous settlers who lived and died there.



One of the last two graves of the original Tres Alamos homesteaders. Photo courtesy Edward Ellsworth.

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Courtesy of Arizona Historical Society.

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