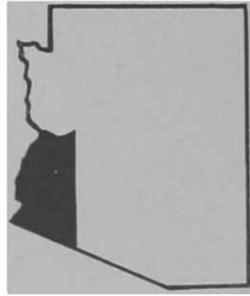


"Big Red" Makes Yuma County

James R. Hazlitt

From barren sand to productive land — accomplishments of "Big Red." That is the biography of Yuma County. "Big Red," being the Colorado River, is responsible for the founding of the city of Yuma and for most of the \$77 million crop income produced in the county.



History reports that Hernando de Alarcón fought his way up the river and was the first white man to see the present site of the city of Yuma. This was in 1540, and he was trying to find the Seven Cities of Cibola. What he saw was a vast expanse of blazing white sand, heat, dirt and straggling vegetation.

Alarcón fought his way up the river as far as the mouth of the Gila. Convinced that the Yuma Indians didn't cater to strangers, he left. It was 162 years before another white man saw this area of desert and a peaceful or raging river.

Then Came Padre Kino

In 1699 Father Kino made his expedition to the area on a trip to prove that Baja California was a peninsula and not an island. Later, in 1779, a mission was founded on the California side of the river. This was the first settlement. However, it remained for the Mexican war and the 1849 gold

rush to California to really put the location of the Yuma crossing on the map.

The Yuma Indians, peaceful until then, became restless. The result was Fort Yuma, established on Mission Hill opposite the place where the Gila flows into the Colorado. Yuma then was still part of Mexico, and was until the Gadsden Purchase of 1854. But Mexican authority seldom extended that far north and the people of Yuma needed protection. Fort Yuma was the answer.

With the military came the problem of supplies and the use of the river for steamers. In this era of steamboats, Yuma was overshadowed by such places as La Paz, north of present Ehrenberg. At one time La Paz was the largest town in the territory and the county seat of Yuma County. But in 1909 the Laguna Dam was built on the Colorado. Out went the steamboats. In came agriculture.

Rich Irrigated Agriculture

Present day agriculture of Yuma County consists of approximately 200,000 acres in the following major locations: Yuma Valley, Yuma Mesa, Gila Valley, Wellton-Mohawk, Parker Valley, and isolated pump areas.

The Yuma Valley is the oldest irrigated area in Yuma County. It is located in the extreme southwest corner of the county, bordered on the

west and north by the Colorado River, on the east by the Yuma Mesa and on the south by Mexico. It contains approximately 52,000 acres with about 46,000 acres in irrigated rotation. Yuma Valley is the most productive area in the county, with an average value of crops produced of \$735 per acre.

What grows in Yuma Valley? You name it, it's there. The major crops are alfalfa, wheat, barley, sorghum, cotton, lettuce, cantaloups and flax. In addition are such delicacies as pecans, tomatoes, onions, cabbage, carrots, sweet corn and watermelons. Also citrus. About 500 acres of oranges and lemons have been planted in the last two years, with more to come.

Citrus on the Mesa

The Yuma Mesa adjoins the Yuma Valley to the east. It is a plateau-type area which is approximately 100 feet higher than the valley. Of its 20,000 acres, 18,000 are in citrus — lemons, limes, oranges, tangerines, tangelos and grapefruit. The balance of the acreage is in cotton, alfalfa and peanuts.

It wasn't too long ago that this land was considered worthless. It was, until the Colorado River water made it bloom. Now mature citrus groves sell from \$3,500 to \$5,500 per acre. Land not in citrus has brought up to \$1,650 per acre. That's not peanuts. And talking of peanuts, the world's record of 5,500 pounds of peanuts per acre was produced on the Yuma Mesa. That is peanuts!

East of Yuma is the Gila Valley. It is commonly divided into two areas — the North Gila and the South Gila. They are distinguished by their location in relation to the Gila River. Previously, the North Gila obtained its water from the Colorado River, while the South Gila obtained its water from wells. Now the South

Yuma County's Extension Agent James R. Hazlitt is an Iowan by birth and training. He was born at Marshalltown, Ia., attended Ellsworth Junior College in 1942-43, later went on to Iowa State University at Ames, where in 1948 he was graduated with a bachelor of science degree, specializing in vocational agriculture.

He was a vocational agriculture teacher in Iowa for a year and a half, then a county supervisor for the Farmers Home Administration for six years in Iowa.

Jim Hazlitt came to Arizona as assistant county agent at Yuma in July of 1956, advancing to full agent status two years later. He was Yuma County program specialist under a community education program sponsored by the Fund For the Republic from October of 1959 to January 1962, a program undertaken as part of the Yuma County Extension activity.

In 1962 Jim reverted to county agent status, and in July of 1963, when his superior was transferred to Pima County, Mr. Hazlitt was named county agent in charge.

His job is a challenging one, for nowhere in the nation is there a more intensive, highly developed and diversified agriculture than in Yuma County.

BELOW. CITRUS acreage is expanding rapidly in Yuma County. This young orchard is down in the Yuma Valley.



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ONE OF THE WORLD'S outstanding Brangus herds is that maintained by the Yuvalle Cattle Company in Yuma County. ← Here is a group of heifers in the breeding pasture. The tree line in the background marks the Colorado River, while mountains in the background are in Mexico.

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Gila also obtains its water from the river.

World Bermuda Leader

In the North Gila, the crops grown are similar to those in the Yuma Valley. The major ones are cotton, alfalfa, small grains, cantaloups and lettuce. In the South Gila, bermuda-grass seed production is a big item. Approximately 95 percent of the world's bermuda seed production is grown in Yuma County. Most of this is in the South Gila Valley and the Wellton-Mohawk areas.

The Wellton-Mohawk district begins 15 miles east of Yuma and extends in an easterly direction for some 40 miles along the old Gila River bed. It is old, yet new. It has gone from productive land to barren sand and then back to productive land. Years of irrigating by pumps caused a salinity condition to the point where many acres of farmland were abandoned. After the completion of the Wellton-Mohawk irrigation system, which brought Colorado River water to the area, the valley again thrived. There are approximately 75,000 acres in the project. About 10,000 acres of this is still to be developed.

Crops grown here are similar to those grown in the Yuma area. Lettuce and cantaloup do well in the Dome area. Bermudagrass seed production centers around Wellton and Roll. Cotton, alfalfa and small grains are found throughout the area, and a citrus boom has hit the Wellton Mesa land. Since 1960, over 3,000 acres had been planted to citrus, with 1,700 acres more expected to be planted this year. Some of the county's largest feedlots are found in the Wellton-Mohawk Valley.

Parker's Boom Starting

One hundred twenty miles north of Yuma is Parker. Things are really booming there. The Parker Valley In-

dian Reservation covers over 100,000 acres from the town of Parker south to Ehrenberg. This valley is bordered on the west by the Colorado River and on the east by desert mountains. At present only about 31,000 acres is being farmed, but big tracts of land with 25 year development leases are going in. In a few years Parker Valley will be the county's largest agricultural area.

The crops and climate around Parker are similar to those of southern Yuma County. Cantaloup and lettuce have made their appearance in the last few years. Cotton thrives, as does alfalfa, small grains and sorghum. Another thriving crop is tourism. Californians and others by the thousands flock to the river on weekends and holidays. National championship boat races are held here. The Parker area is going places!

Six Bale Cotton!

In the eastern part of the county, mainly around Salome in the northeast and Horn in the southwest, are pump irrigation areas. Good quality water and a sandy loam soil provide for excellent agricultural production.

MUCH MANPOWER and modern machinery combine to speed cantaloup harvesting, since time is so important. Photo taken in 1964 on McLaren Produce Company acreage in the Yuma Valley.



AT LEFT, weedless peanuts; at right peanut crop grown up to grass and weeds. Jim Hazlitt points out the difference chemical weed control makes, in this Yuma County test plot.

Around Salome a land boom is also going on. A few years ago less than 5,000 acres was being farmed. Today, there is approximately 15,000. Some of the top cotton yields of the county are found there, with one field yielding nearly six bales to the acre. Salome farmers take a back seat to none of the farmers along the river when it comes to producing crops.

But, as elsewhere in Arizona, there is a limit due to water and pumping costs. Some land near Bouse has been taken out of production because of prohibitive pumping costs due to the lowering water table. All in all there wouldn't be much to Yuma County if it weren't for "Big Red."