

An Old Timer's Experiences in Arizona

A Story of the Pioneer Days of Isaac Goldberg, San Bernardino,
California

(Written for the Society of Arizona Pioneers, June, 1894.)

To my respected brethren of the Society of Arizona Pioneers:

This writing shows how the first pioneers of Arizona suffered from Apache Indians and desperadoes and from want of water and food, also, how we opened new trails and roads. Whenever I look back upon those eventful days, my eyes fill with tears to think of the danger we encountered, and the hardships we experienced then, not knowing when we might lose our property, our scalps, and our lives. There was no protection for either life or property at that period, for Territorial organization had not yet been effected. When we had a law-suit, or the like, on our hands, we were compelled to travel to New Mexico, a thousand miles distant. An Apache would not attack you face to face, and could see you coming without your knowing of his proximity.

The Apache could imitate the cries and movements of animals such as coyotes and other denizens of the desert and, whenever you heard or beheld anything of the kind, you trembled as you thought of the direful consequences, if Apaches. Those treacherous savages travelled in bands numbering from 50 to 200, and waylaid you while progressing slowly through formidable thickets and rocks. The foremost of them would allow you to pass by unharmed, then the other would yell and shoot. At this, you would likely retreat, but only to be relentlessly slain by the closing-in-advance-guard of your demoniacal enemies. They scalped you, took off your clothes, and let the mutilated corpse lie in the road, or elsewhere. If they caught you alive, they removed your shoes, cut flesh from the soles of your feet, and tied you to the tail of a squaw-ridden horse. Then they took you to the nearest rancheria, made a war-dance around you, scalped you, pulled off your clothes, and threw your flesh away.

Thus we suffered from those fiends in human form. I will now proceed to tell you what induced me to go to Arizona.

One day, in 1863, a Mexican—Don Juan Quarez by name—brought from La Paz, Arizona, on the Colorado River, a chunk of gold valued at \$1,000. It looked exactly like the hand of a human being. He brought besides this "rich and rare" specimen, 50 ounces of smaller nuggets, all of them pure gold. Then came a period of memorable excitement. Everybody wanted to go to the promising "diggings." From San Bernardino to La Paz, the freight charge was 15 cents per pound, and when I arrived there, flour cost from \$30 to \$40 a hundred. People had little to eat besides mesquite beans and river fish. I sold empty dry goods boxes to get back my freight expenses of 15c per pound.

Those boxes were used for coffins, furniture, and other purposes. Every evening the miners and gamblers would spread their blankets upon the streets, and play card games for the nuggets which were daily found in abundance by those who searched the adjacent "placers." Water for drinking and culinary purposes was sold at \$1 the ten-gallon kegful. It so happened, shortly after my arrival, that a thief, who had been stealing from stores and other places, was at last caught. There was, of course, no law officer to confine and try the culprit, so the miners and citizens held a meeting, and sentenced him to receive 25 lashes. These were promptly and lustily given, and after the affair was over, they handed him \$5 in cash, telling him that if he dared to again visit the settlement, he would receive a double dose of the same back-medicine. You may be sure that the rascal did not return, and that the community was no more troubled by thieves. We could leave all our property unguarded, and yet miss not a single cent's worth of anything.

Another "diggings" was discovered in '64, known as "Weaver's diggings". Accompanied by a friend named Burnett, I went there shortly after hearing the news. On the journey, our water had given out—except one cupful; we had forty miles of desert before us—what were we to do? Should we drink it "straight" or "make coffee?" My partner said, "Coffee by all means," but, as he went to bring the package to the fire, he stumbled, causing the water to be spilt on the ground.

Getting excited at our precarious situation, and thinking that we could reach the nearest settlement—Weaver's—by riding fast, we urged our famished horses to their utmost speed, but did not accomplish more than twenty miles of the distance.

Our animals succumbed to hunger, thirst, and fatigue, and were abandoned to their fate. We threw away our shoes, clothes,

and hats, although 'twas the month of July, the hottest period of the year, for we were rapidly becoming crazy with the thoughts of our awful jeopardy.

But we kept on, after having had sense enough to repose for some time in the shade of a tree, until we reached Wickenburg. The people there carefully attended to our wants, and, after considerable trouble, restored us to health and vigor.

Only those who have similarly suffered can adequately realize the dangers and discomforts of the inhospitable and trackless desert.

A Mexican lost his horse, while working at "Weaver's diggings," and went to the summit of Antelope Peak—the highest of the neighboring mountains. As he neared the apex, he stumbled over what he fancied a piece of rock, but it was a lump of pure gold. With his butcher knife he proceeded to dig up the soil, and, in an hour or so, took out over \$3,000 worth of the yellow treasure.

On the return of the Mexican with his remarkably lucky "find," great excitement ensued, and everybody wondered to think that the precious metal lay so abundantly near by, and in so strange a locality. Had the Mexican kept the matter secret, he could easily have secured a fortune in a few days, but like the generality of his countrymen, he could not "stand" prosperity, and actually imagined himself "rich."

With what he had found, and \$3,000 more given him by the miners for his claim as discoverer, he went to Tucson and gambled off the "whole pile" in a few days.

From Weaver's I went to Prescott, and on the road I met Col. Woolsey with 50 volunteers—all brave citizens—returning from the slaughter of a band of Apaches. The savages were first seen standing upon a hill-top, and waving the white flag of peace." At the return of the signal by the soldiers, the Indians descended, and were invited to participate in the mid-day repast. They would not, however, seat themselves at the victuals, unless blankets were provided for their **fundamental** ease and comfort.

This was done and they freely partook of the only edible presented to their savage attention—the delicious and wholesome pinole. While thus engaged, Col. Woolsey scratched his nose—a digitory movement which had been agreed upon as the signal for the wholesale slaughter of their dusky guests—and

each man accordingly "took his Indian," and made him everlastingly "good."

But one white man got "bitten" in this unexpected "taking-off"—an over-hasty volunteer who, thinking that he could especially distinguish himself by slaying two savages, fired at a couple in quick succession. The unfortunate failed in "downing" the nearest Apache who immediately thrust his lance with fatal effect.

This terrible affair is known as "Col. Woolsey's pinole treaty," and resulted—as above described—in the slaughter of the whole of the Indians present, with the loss of but one settler's life.

A great deal of valuable property—consisting chiefly of buckskins, guns, lances, and mescal was secured by the victors, some of whom yet live to remember and relate the dark deeds of the eventful days of old.

Shortly after this memorable meeting, I reached my destination—Prescott—and was delighted to ascertain that Territorial organization had just been effected. The name of the first governor was Goodwin, and Secretary, McCormick. The official abode of the first Legislature was a large log-house, and Prescott itself was hardly distinguishable from the surrounding wilderness, by reason of the many pine trees, and other "aboriginal" growths which everywhere abounded.

My bar room paraphernalia consisted simply of two bottles and a cup on the rude counter which concealed sundry barrels of whiskey. My bar-keeper—a brave man indeed—was a deserted soldier with an abbreviated or chawed-off nose. I paid him \$100 a month—in addition to board—and could really well-afford to do so, for I had neither rent nor license hanging over me, and got 50c for each dram retailed. One dollar greenbacks was then worth only 45c, but I had no reason to complain of that fact, or the scarcity of their appearance.

One morning as I entered the bar-room, my "fancy" dispenser of "exhilarating fluid" asked me if I desired a nice "cocktail" compounded, and I had hardly assented, when a rough customer, whom I did not previously observe, told me, with a frightful oath, that I must, instead, take a drink at his expense, accompanying his request with a terrific display of murderous weapons. Filling the tincup to the brim with fiery liquid, he ordered its instant disappearance on pain of death, and I seemingly complied with the rudely accentuated demand.

But, when I had consumed a portion of the unrelished draught, I abruptly dashed the remainder into the blood-shot eyes of the demented ruffian. This unexpected attack so confused him—making him temporarily blind—that the bar-keeper and I had but little difficulty in overpowering, disarming, and binding him, prior to confining him in an adjacent log-pen. Although he soon escaped from our “chamber of penance,” owing to the frailty of its construction, he could not find me to wreak his vengeance upon my innocent head, and shortly afterwards, becoming apologized for his abominable “meanness.”

Thus we Pioneers of Arizona were afflicted by desperadoes—foes frequently as dreadful as the dreadful, detested and dangerous aborigines.

In those days of bold adventure, we usually traveled with as many associates as possible, and I will—although almost unwillingly—remember that when I prepared for my lengthy trip back from Prescott to Weaver, I expected to be accompanied by six others. But owing to the business which delayed me, I was obliged to proceed alone, with the expectation of “catching-up” with them. By my diligence as a pursuing horseman, I did overtake my friends, at a few miles from our destination—only, they were dismounted and dead.

Few, except pioneers, have witnessed a sight like that which almost unmanned me, and caused the cold chills of death itself to invade my trembling frame. There they lay, all six of them, not only lifeless, but naked and shockingly mutilated from head to foot. Barbarity had accomplished its worst upon the bodies of my lately breathing friends, as though implacably angry because their souls were beyond the reach of the relentless scalping knife.

With a heavy heart, I hurried into Weaver and gave the alarm. The citizens hastened to the disastrous scene, and gave the victims a common burial.

From Weaver I went to Tucson, a some-time deserted city, with the buildings mostly in ruins; but nevertheless, I opened a business there, for there was a good indication of an early return of prosperity.

Quite a while after my arrival at this ancient “presidio,” an escaped captive—i.e., a person who had been, in infancy, carried off by the marauding Apaches, but had tired of his unnatural associations—came from the Santa Catalina mountains, and reported that upon the very summit of the Canada del Oro

was gold in abundance. I hastily organized a company of explorers and prospectors consisting of P. W. Dooner, (now of Los Angeles), General Sigel, Jack Shubling, and eight Mexicans—all good citizens. We took one burro, laden with a few days' provisions, expecting to shortly return with pocketfuls of nuggets. But, on reaching our destination, we found, instead of gold pieces, large "chunks" of ising-glass.

Much disappointed, we stood and gazed at the vast area of country which lay far below, and resolved on immediate return to Tucson. I asked the guide how many days would probably be consumed in journeying, and he answered "two," but no less than eight days had expired ere we reached our goal.

Almost incredible hardships attended and encumbered our progress homewards—narrow, steep trails, between dreadful abysses, exhausting tracts of rocky sterility, and patches of "brush" so thick and thorny that our wearied bodies lost their coverings, and our blistered feet their leather protectors. We were nearly naked, barefoot, and on the very brink of starvation—for we had not food except a small quantity of pinole and some wild grapes.

The Tucsonians, wondering at our delay and anxious for our safety, successfully solicited Governmental aid, and, had we not returned ere hope was utterly extinguished in their human hearts, a large company of citizens and soldiers would have hunted—but, I am afraid, **in vain**—to discover our whereabouts.

During this dangerous expedition, I found a mine, the rock from which assayed richly, but the contents yet remain undisturbed, owing to its uncommon inaccessibility. We had, however, attained the distinction of being the first explorers of the terribly precipitous heights known as the Santa Catalina mountains.

The complete narration of my innumerable experiences as an Arizona Pioneer would fill many more pages than those already occupied, and I therefore, for the sake of brevity, and to render my reminiscences permanently interesting—especially to "old Pioneers"—add but the following incident to finish the burden of my story. Captains Chequita and Eskiminzin—two big Apache chiefs—came down to Old Camp Grant and "made peace" with the Government, but nevertheless continued their hostile practices. Mass meetings were held at the court house, and resolutions passed to the effect that the whole of the people of the nation should be made acquainted with the actual conditions of affairs in Arizona.

This was promptly done, but nothing of consequence resulted, chiefly owing to the apathy of the General Government, which, instead of protecting its much-harassed citizens, extended almost every possible description of assistance to their implacable enemies—the sanguinary Apaches. Another mass meeting was held at the same place—five or six of the bravest citizens calling and conducting it—and, as the result, a very large body of loyal Papago Indians, accompanied by about fifty Mexicans, were led by their white commanders to Arequipa Canyon, where nearly five hundred Apaches were found encamped, and mercilessly slain.

Then, and not until then, did “Uncle Sam” realize that it was his bounden duty to prefer the claims of his suffering children to those of their savage tormentors, and hasten to make amends for his reprehensible neglect in the much-troubled past.

Thus the sturdy Arizona Pioneer unflinchingly faced the dangers of the unsubdued wilderness, and, fighting, fell!

It may, indeed, be truly said, in concluding this humble and incomplete sketch of the never-to-be-forgotten “days of gold,” and “Auld Lang Syne”, that Arizona is the chief graveyard of those heroic American and foreign-born Pioneers who boldly surrendered their valuable lives for the good and glory of the “great republic,” and the irrepressible advances of conquering civilization.

That the grand example they unfailingly set, as the earnest disciples of liberty, integrity and all-pervading courage, may be inflexibly followed by their favored descendants, is the cherished desire of your loving Brother,

(Signed) ISAAC GOLDBERG,
San Bernardino, California, June, 1894.