

HELVETIA MINING DISTRICT

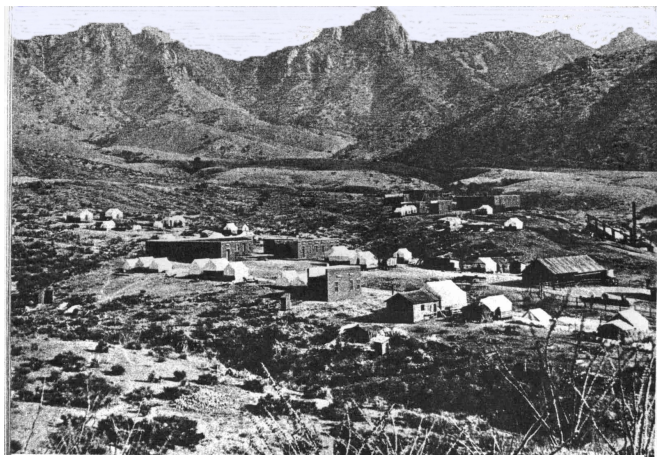
Helvetia was named by a miner, Ben Hefti, in honor of his native Switzerland. It is a word comparable to the English “liberty.”

Copper mining began in 1875. The first mine, Old Frijoli, was located in 1880 by Bill Hart and John Weigle. Other mines included Old Dick, Heavyweight and Tally-Ho discovered by L. M Grover. By 1883 twenty claims had been recorded in what became known as Helvetia Copper Group. Early major developers were Omega Copper Co. (owners included Tully and Ochoa, Fred Hughes and T.J. Jeffords) and Columbia Mining and Smelting Co. Tom Jeffords was a friend of Cochise and was the person who arranged the historic meeting between General Howard and Cochise which established a reservation for the Chiricahua Apaches.

The first smelter was completed in 1882. Material is ground, placed in a large furnace and heated to the point where the copper metal separates. Slag, the fused refuse, floats on top of the copper. The sludge, sediment resembling mud, goes to the bottom. All is molten. The crucible, a brick bowl, is heated with coke (coal that has been fired in the absence of oxygen). This produces a highly concentrated heat. A hole is drilled in the brick furnace to drain off the metal; another hole drains the slag.

Depression of copper prices and poor management caused the area to become virtually dormant until about 1890 when a second boom period began. The Helvetia Copper Co. of New Jersey developed the mines and promoted growth of the settlement. By May 1898, twenty-seven claims were owned by the company. Helvetia included several permanent company buildings and a line of tents to house workers. Two Tucson stage lines carried passengers to and from Helvetia. In 12 years the settlement became Pima County's largest and most important mining camp.

In 1890 and 1900 about 350 men were employed. About 550 to 650 people made up the Helvetia Camp described as a motley collection of tents and adobe and grass shanties. There were four saloons; a Chinese laundry; Schroutz barbershop; meat market



Helvetia in 1901

(Casky and Korb); J. R. Glenn, shoemaker; Dorsett's Helvetia House, restaurant/boarding house. Workers, organized by the Western federation of Miners, were paid \$1.25 to \$1.50 a day for surface work and \$3.00 a day to work underground. It was the merchants, however, who made money, grossing \$10,000 a month at the peak of mining activity.

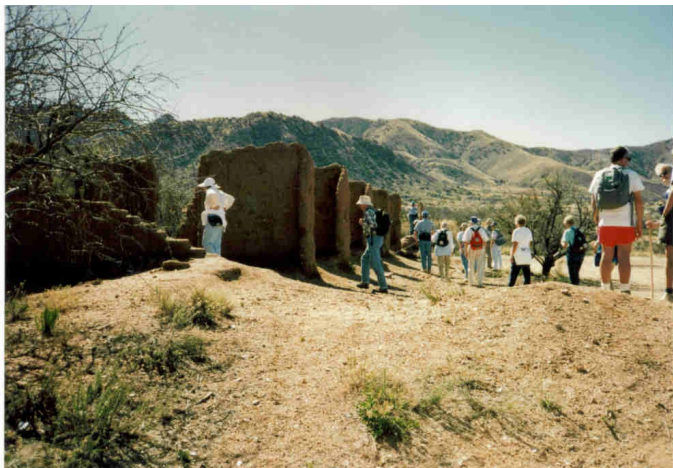
A post office that remained in service until 1921 and school were established in 1900. Helvetia became the third largest school district in Pima County. At one point 101 pupils were enrolled in the school. Between 1912 and 1914 the school had steady enrollment. In late 1923 the school was shut down for good. At that time there were 10 or 12 students, children of Mexicans working on the neighboring ranches.

In 1900 the smelter was running at full capacity. Sufficient water presented a big problem, but water was struck in one of the mines alleviating the problem somewhat. In December of 1900 a large mass of slag ran onto the wooden floor of the smelter igniting timbers and totally destroying the mill. A new 150 ton smelter was erected in 1903.

The US Industrial depression in 1902 affected Helvetia and the population dwindled to 100. In 1903 the Michigan and AZ Development Co. bought controlling interest in the Helvetia Copper Company. The name was changed to Helvetia Copper Company of Arizona. Work was concentrated on the most profitable claim.

Sporadic business continued until in 1911 when the low price of copper forced the mines to close and the machinery was sold. Mining activity started up again during World War 1. After 1920, the claims became virtually idle with only small, intermittent shipments of ore by lessees. Lessees continued small-scale, irregular production at the mines and output rose to another peak in the 1944 to 1947 period. It is estimated that up to 1950 the Helvetia district had produced about 17,000,000 pounds of copper worth \$4,000,000.

There has been very little activity since the 1950s. As late as 1959 some ore was



GVR Hiking Club visits Helvetia Hotel Ruins - 1991

being hauled out of the Helvetia district by trucks of the Lewisohn Copper Corp.

Back in the 1960's Helvetia was occupied by hippies. When the company that owned the property couldn't get them to leave, the old structures were bulldozed down. That is why we don't see more signs of the community.

Material was collected and edited by: Charlie DelBecq, Bill Fritz, Harry Frye, Chuck Rogers and Peggy Smith.

Sources in order of importance include:

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