

## RUBY

The ghost town of Ruby is located in the Montana Mining Group of the Oro Blanco Mining District. The early Spanish explorers were aware of mineral deposits in the area but there was not much activity until after the area became part of the United States with the signing of the Gadsden Treaty. Extensive prospecting in the Oro Blanco District after the Civil War led to the discovery of the Montana Mine in the 1870's. The mine was named after Montana Peak, which is located just south of the mine. A jumble of cabins, shacks and tents grew into Montana Camp. For about forty years, the camp retained its original name. In 1903, George Cheyney established a general store at the camp. The store went through a series of owners and was being run by Julius Andrews when mining activity began to rapidly accelerate in 1909. Julius made an application for a post office, which was established as Ruby on 11 April 1912 in honor of Lillie B. Ruby, Andrew's wife. In 1913, Philip M. Clark purchased Andrew's store and post office and relocated the business to a new adobe-frame building about 400 yards north of the old building. The Ruby Post Office continued operations there until 31 May 1941.



Ruby Town site – View from Montana Peak  
Photo by T. Johnson

According to Mexican superstition, the new General Store/Post Office was cursed because it had been built over a padre's grave. Whatever the reason, the building was the scene of two murderous incidents. The first occurred in February 1920 when the store was being tended by Alex and John Frazier, two brothers hired by Clarke. A Mexican ranch hand had stopped at the store and upon finding it locked had looked in the window and saw the two brothers lying on the floor. They had been shot by two Mexican bandits. When the authorities arrived, Alex was dead but John lived long enough to identify the murderers, one of who was eventually tracked and killed by sheriff's deputies. The second incident occurred 26 August 1921 when Frank Phearson and his wife Myrtle were running the store. Frank's four-year-old daughter, his sister Irene and his sister-in-law Elizabeth were also in the store when several vaqueros entered. They shot Frank and then murdered his wife after forcing her to open the safe. Elizabeth, grazed by a bullet, fainted. In the confusion, Irene managed to escape with the four-year-old. As Myrtle lay dying, one of the robbers noticed her five gold front teeth and knocked them out with his gun. This led to his eventual arrest the following April when he sold them to a bartender in Sasabe, Sonora. Manuel Martinez was sentenced to death by hanging and his companion Placido Silvas received life imprisonment.

The Montana mining claims were rich in minerals and by the turn of the century, Montana Camp had become the largest in the area. However during these early years, processing of the rich ore body was hampered by poor methods and a lack of water. A dam was built and several small operations worked the place but full-scale mining didn't begin until Eagle Picher Lead Company bought the patent rights in 1926. They constructed a processing mill and erected two more dams but that still did not provide enough water. To solve the water problem, a four-inch pipe was laid from the Santa Cruze Valley through Peck Canyon to Ruby. It took two years, was completed in 1930 and cost \$100,000. Remnants of the pipeline can still be seen in Peck Canyon. During the glory years off 1926 to 1940 the mining operation was significantly expanded. By 1935, the population of Ruby increased to approximately 2000 people with around 350 miners working around-the-clock shifts. The town boasted its own clinic, bachelor's quarters, boarding house, mercantile, schoolhouse, Sunday school, Boy Scout Troop, barbershop, ice cream parlor, pool hall and jail. There were no bars in Ruby. The company wouldn't allow drinking and other kinds of "indecent" activity within its confines so the seven bars that serviced Ruby were erected just outside the town's boundaries.



Ruby Pipeline Remnant in Peck Canyon  
Photo by T. Johnson in 2014

The mine reached its peak during the 1935 to 1939 period when Ruby became the largest producer off lead and zinc in Arizona. During its existence, the mine processed about 870,000 tons of ore which yielded 126,500 ounces of gold, 4,600,000 ounces off silver, 31,000 tons of lead, 26,000 tons of zinc, and 2,600 tons of copper. By 1940, the ore had pretty well given out and water was starting to seep into the tunnels so Eagle Picher ceased operations and the mill was moved to Sahaurita. There were still some sporadic mining operations until 1958, mostly involving processing of the tailings.

With the mine closed, Ruby rapidly turned into a ghost town. The tents went first and then the houses gradually became vacant. The post office closed in May 1941. By 1946, the school was down to eight students and one teacher. In May 1948, the last two students graduated and the teacher packed her things and left. In 1961, Dick Frailey and four other investors bought the town. The original owners are now gone and the town is owned by their survivors. Pat and Howard Frederick (Pat is Dick Frailey's daughter) and five other families now own Ruby. The town was named to the National Historic Register in 1975. For a long time, the town was completely closed to visitors. The town now has a caretaker in residence and is open to visitors from Thursday through Sunday for an admission fee of \$12 per person.

Although efforts have been made to slow down the deterioration of the buildings, the passage of time is taking its toll. The following pictures, Figures 1 through 7, were



taken in November 2014 by Ken & Jan Sink. They show Ruby is still an interesting place to visit for people with an interest in Arizona history. Figure 2, the Pfrimmer house was the childhood home of Tallia Pfrimmer Cahoon who periodically conducted tours of Ruby for the Pima Community College.



Figure 1. Allen-Sullivan House



Figure 2. Pfrimmer House



Figure 3. Cargill House



Figure 4. Eddy house



Figure 5. School House



Figure 6. Town Jail



Figure 7. Remains of Ruby Mercantile

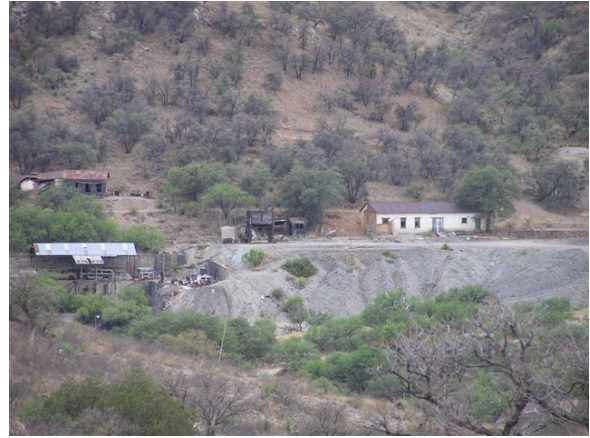


Figure 8. Industrial Area Overview  
Photo by T. Johnson

Summary prepared by T. Johnson from the following documents:

1. US Forest Service "Heritage Resources Management Report No. 15".
2. The Green Valley News and Sun dated 10 February 1993.
3. The Arizona Daily Star dated 11 April 1993.
4. The Arizona Daily Star dated 1 February 2002.
5. Ruby Statistics prepared by Jim Moore.
6. "Ruby", from a document summarizing the major mining camps of Arizona.

**Additional Material:** GVHC Library File 49