

HOW WE BUILT THE ENTERPRISE CANAL

By Judge W. B. Fonda

Going back thirty-seven years in writing a history of past events is a very difficult task when you have but few records and must write from memory. If I should overlook a few minor points, or omit names of persons to whom credit should be given for past services, it will be unintentional on the part of the writer of this history of the Enterprise Canal. Many of my old-time pioneer friends have passed to the other side who worked with me in trying to perfect a plan for developing the Gila valley; and few are left to read of their past doing, and vouch for the truthfulness of this article.

I claim no especial credit for any of the work I have done, for all the thanks should be given to that grand old home-builder who spent his time, money and energy, and who never ceased his untiring support to a proposition that met with all kinds of opposition. That grand old pioneer has now passed away. But the name of N. P. Beebe will ever be remembered as the man who was never thoroughly understood.

A company of Mormons under the leadership of N. P. Beebe (a returned missionary) arrived on the Little Colorado River, November 12, 1877, from the southern states. These emigrants, most of whom were in destitute circumstances, were obliged to divide their meager stores with them.

This company consisted of about 100 souls, and came through from Arkansas by teams. Some of them stopped at Savoia, while others went on to the Little Colorado River. They were the first Mormon emigrants from the southern states in many years, and they were the fruits of the labor of Henry G. Boyle and others.

In 1880 Charles Shumway and Nelson P. Beebe commenced the erection of a grist mill on Silver Creek, on the present site of Shumway, having bought out the claims of the Wansiees. Beebe and Boyle both came to Cochise county in 1884, settling on the San Pedro near Benson. He then settled on the Gila river, buying the ranch of Rosel Stevens and began the work of building the Enterprise Canal. Many of the company followed the old pioneer and the descendants of these families are now among the most prominent citizens of the Gila valley. In the party were the families of Wanslee, Quinn, Talley and Morris. One member, Daddy J. J. Quinn, lived to see his one hundredth birthday.

Well do I remember, a few days before he passed away of being called to the bedside of Mr. Beebe to take his last acknowledgment, when he said:

"Now you have assisted me in my last work. Let me take your hand, Will. I know this is you, but I cannot see you. We worked hard together to build the Enterprise, and I shall not live to see this one great object of my life accomplished, but you will be here when the Enterprise is completed."

"Then you go to the head of the canal and on the face of the rock where we sat so many times and discussed our work, you cut the name of N. P. Beebe, President; and you tell my boys to cut your name, W. B. Fonda, under mine, as Secretary, after you pass away."

Away back in 1879 I was engaged in the cattle industry, but see that the range was becoming overstocked, I turned my attention to securing a piece of land in the valley where I could some day build me a permanent home and find myself a helpmeet. I wrote to friends in Colorado, my native state, and succeeded in interesting a few members of my family, which resulted in their sending a competent German engineer to look over the situation of the Enterprise Canal and make a report.

I met him in Bowie with a mule team and a buckboard, and that evening landed him at my ranch on the Munson Cienega, about nine miles south of the now prosperous town of Safford, the county seat of Graham county. We spent several days looking over the country and decided to begin a preliminary survey with the terminus at the Cottonwood Wash, west of Smithville, which was afterward called Pima, and a post office was established there. In August 1885, we began running the levels and found the fall sufficient to give the canal a grade of three feet to the mile; the engineer thought this grade necessary in order to keep the canal free of sediment. We made several surveys, and finally settled our location about three quarters of a mile up the river from the head of the Enterprise Canal. Our object in doing this was to take the water from the bed rock and utilize the underflow, thereby saving about 150 inches of water lost in less than one-half mile.

After this preliminary survey, C. K. Betz, the engineer of Heid-

elburg, Germany, went back to Colorado to make his report, which I knew would be favorable and that he would again return early in the fall. About August 1, 1885, Engineer Betz returned, and I bought the first bill of provisions for the camp from I. E. Solomon, the father of early Solomonville. This old statement shows a balance due the company when we ceased operations, is still in my possession and a matter of record.

Well do I remember the night of August 5, 1885. We had run our lines west as far as the upper part of the Kleinstaubner ranch, now known as the Rancho Paloma. Betz was expecting important letters from Colorado, and we broke camp and started for my ranch on the Munson Cienega. Passing just enough south of Solomonville I left the team with Betz to take on to the ranch, while I saddled up the horse we were leading behind the buckboard, and road into Solomonville for the mail.

The stage being late, I put my horse, a valuable thoroughbred stallion, in the Solomon corral and, like any cowpuncher, went into the saloon run by George Stevens, better known as "Little Steve," the renegade son of one of New England's proudest families. Steve, Ben Crawford and I. E. Solomon were engaged in a friendly little game of poker and of course I bought two stacks of chips and entered the game. Fortune favored me and I began, for a wonder, to win. We had a hot game and after playing nearly all night, I found myself about \$500.00 to the good.

Not being able to walk a crack in the floor straight, I had the corral boy order my horse, and after being assisted to mount, I set out for the ranch. When nearing the foothills south of Solomonville, I saw what I supposed to be a bunch of Globe freighters driving their horses out to feed in the chapparal.

"Hello!" I called. The answer came back: "Hello!" Knowing the country so well I hollered, "Go up the next draw and you will find some good feed."

I started to ride out to show them, when I noticed my horse become very nervous and, like all American horses he began to snort at the smell of an Indian. I drove the spur into his flanks and he made the run of his life. Little did I know that he had carried me through a bunch of hostile Apaches, led by that old time murdering fiend, Geronimo.

When I arrived at the ranch I turned the old horse loose and went to the camp where I found Hank Dowdle, Charlie McCreary, Charley Proctor, Marion Gillis and other cowpunchers, all in bed and scattered around on the ground. Hank Dowdle, my old time pal, rose up in bed and hallowed: "Hello, Bill! Got anything on your hip?" "Of course I have! Do you think I would get in a poker game and win \$500.00 and not buy a bottle for the boys?"

On hearing this they all came alive, and for the next few hours, times were lively.

We had just got quietly asleep when we heard the pattering of a horse's feet coming from the direction of Safford. We knew something was up, and all arose at once when Mac Freeman came riding up to camp and reported that Mexicans had cut horses loose from the wagons in John Lee's and the Wright Brothers' yards.

Mac was not much excited as he thought they were a bunch of Mexican rustlers who had stolen his horses. This explained to me the actions of the horse I had so cruelly spurred for not going where I had steered him.

"Mexicans, h—l," I yelled to him. "They were Indians and old Dandy carried me right thru the bunch. Come alive and get your horses. Those tenderfoot Mormons who are following the Mexicans will every one be massacred before we can get to them."

The boys had turned their horses loose when they came into camp and the only horse to be had was the one I had ridden the night before. I saddled up and started out to round up the saddle horses, but it was nearly nine o'clock before we got our mounts and started for Solomonville, a distance of about ten miles.

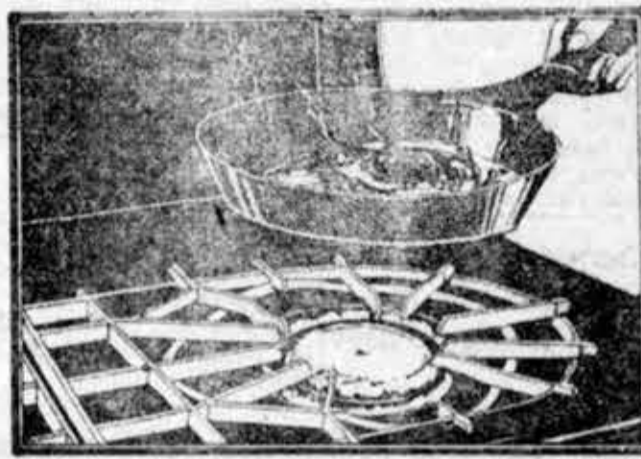
As we rode into town from the south, the parties that had been following the supposed Mexicans came up on the run from the east. They had begun to suspect what sort of "Mexicans" they were chasing and all supposed the Indians were now following them; but not so with us, as we knew too well the cowardly disposition of Geronimo and his band of cut-throats.

We got a few together and started back to the place where the Indians had laid in ambush. There we found the Wright brothers, both dead. From the empty shells found on the ground, we knew they had died. The

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remains of the dead ranchmen were brought back to Solomonville and turned over to the relatives.

We knew our small bunch of cowpunchers could do no good to follow the Indians and as we could not get others to go, we returned to the ranch.

P. J. Bolan, our brave district attorney, sent a runner to Fort Thomas for the soldiers, and in three days the cavalry came. They made this forced march of twenty-one miles and then went into camp at Solomonville, where the officers could sleep on spring beds and have plenty to eat and drink. By this time old Geronimo was across the Mexican line and headed for the Sierra Madres where he knew the American troops could not follow. I went with the troops to the place the boys were killed and with the help of others, built monuments of boulders, which stand today silent witnesses to the sacred spot where two of our hardy, young pioneers so cruelly met their death.

After the funeral services next day, Engineer Betz told me that he was going back to Colorado, and when he thought the proper time had come, he would return and complete the work. I asked him "About what time do you think that will be?" He glared at me straight in the eye and said: "In about fifty years or ven zhe ferdanned soldiers get orders from Washington to shoot instead of holding councils of war a joker table over."

Betz left the next morning and as the time has not yet arrived, I have never seen him since. My own folks wrote me to come home while I was altogether and had a full head of hair, but I am still in Arizona, hale and hearty and expect to live long enough to see our great work completed.

As time drifted on, the Enterprise lay dormant. N. P. Beebe and myself did every thing within our power to enlist capital in it.

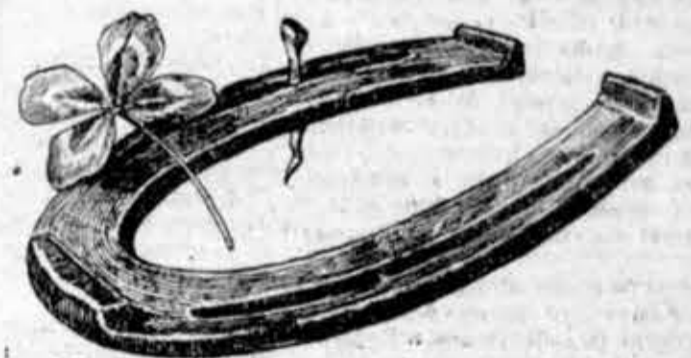
Our next move was a trip to

Phoenix to get the territory to take an interest in it and supply convict labor. At that time we had a law authorizing the governor to furnish such labor and the territory to take stock in the corporation. I met Governor McCord and he thought the proposition feasible and immediately called the Board of Control to meet with Senator Ives, who at that time was working convict labor on a canal at Yuma. Senator Ives, one of the biggest-hearted men in Arizona, proposed that Graham county be given one-half of the convict labor and offered to take stock in the corporation, saying to the board: "If we ever expect to

redeem Arizona, we must work together in the great work of irrigation." To Senator Ives belongs the credit of first advocating the building of storage reservoirs.

I returned to Safford and reported what had been accomplished, and no sooner had the proposition been received than selfish interests did everything in their power to defeat the building of the Enterprise. A delegation was sent to Phoenix and every obstacle placed in the way. Solomonville succeeded for a time in killing the Enterprise, as a controlling interest in the Montezuma and San Jose canals.

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