
The Arizona Photographic Company and the Mine Promotion Game

By Robert L. Spude

The story is one too familiar. An old bank building on the plaza of a historic community was being renovated, and all the junk in the attic was being tossed down a chute to an awaiting dump trunk. A stack of small but heavy wooden crates caught the junk man's eye. Fortunately, instead of giving them the heave-ho, he pried open the top of one crate and found carefully placed yellow boxes of a photographic supply company, a treasure of historic eight-by-ten glass plate negatives. A few weeks later, I happened upon that junk dealer's stash at his yard in Humboldt, Arizona. I was able to negotiate a junkman's swap for them only after he found them a drug on the market. I loaded the boxes in my Volkswagen and drove them home.

Most of the nearly six hundred glass negatives were in pristine condition and contained images of a wide variety of early twentieth century scenes of Prescott and central Arizona. Prescott and Yavapai County were undergoing a mining boom at the time, and many of the images were of unidentified mining scenes. "Arizona Photographic Company" was stenciled on a number of the plates. I spent the next couple of years researching the company, printing the glass plates, and organizing them for permanent storage in the Arizona Historical Foundation collections at Arizona State University, Tempe. Another lot of five hundred plates, fortunately, ended up at the Sharlot Hall Museum at Prescott as well.¹

The Arizona Photographic Company was organized in Prescott by a group of young photographers eager to capitalize on the business boom. The group included: St. Louis photographer A. E. Suppiger; Percival Armit-

age, son of a mining engineer and specialist in mining scenes of the area; young Thomas Bates, a specialist in group photographs and portraits; and Wilfred R. Humphries, recently arrived from the *San Francisco Examiner* in California, who was a commercial photographer and the organizer and promoter of the group. Another member, Erwin Baer, an old-time Prescott photographer, was a less active participant, Bates probably assisting his mentor Baer in his work. Their negatives were of mills and hoists, pack trains, wagons, railroads, investors at the mines, and hardy miners, all formatted for easy use in mine prospectuses and mining company reports. Local newspapers such as the *Prescott Prospect*, in its special editions in 1902 and 1904, the *Arizona Journal-Miner*, especially in its 1905 mining edition, and the *Prescott Courier*, used the photographers' output to showcase the region's mines, industries, and settlements.²

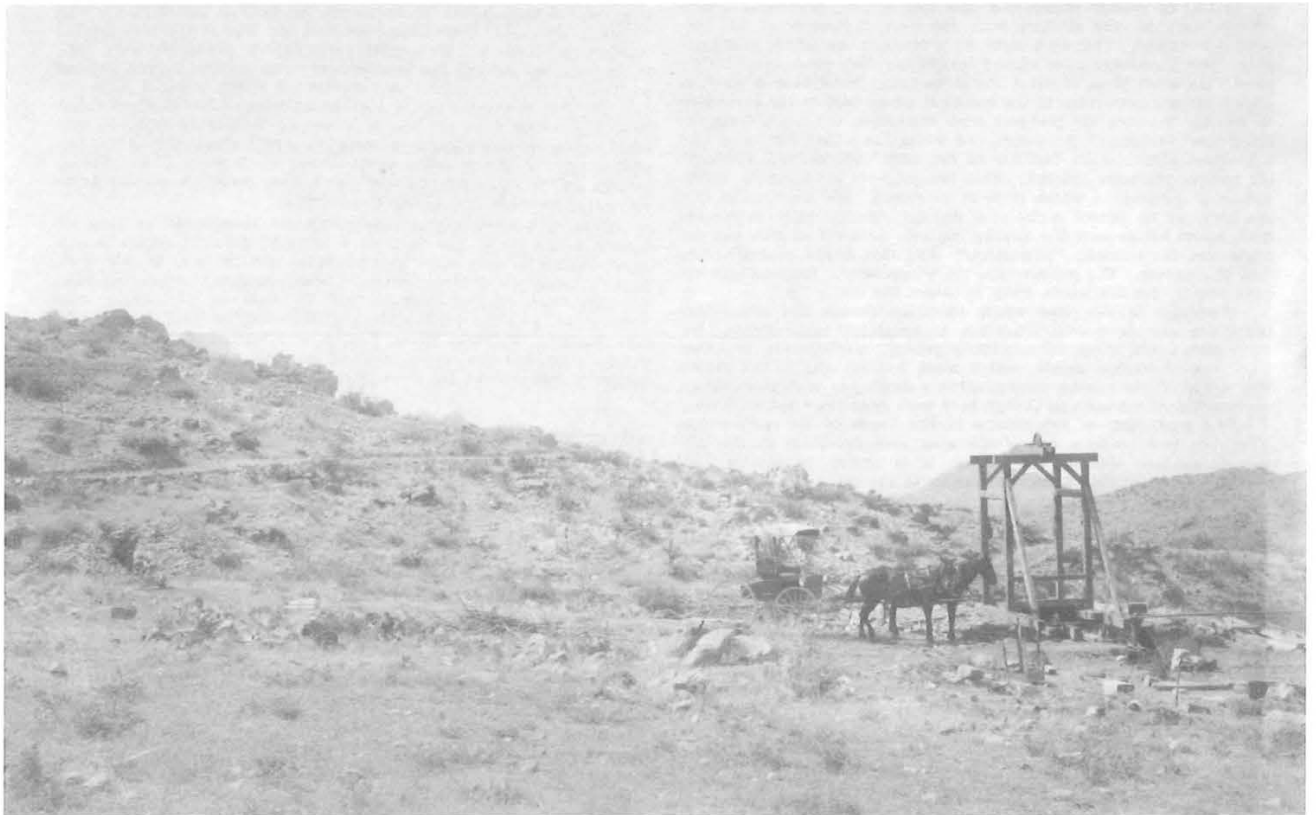
In 1902, W. R. Humphries was hired by the Development Corporation of America to take scenes of its mines throughout the state in order to help promote their operations and to photograph nearby bonanza operations, which the DCA wished to emulate. The leading figure of the DCA, Frank Murphy, was president of the Prescott bank where the glass plates were later found. During his tour of the territory, Humphries also took early moving pictures of Clifton-Morenci, Bisbee, and Tombstone, besides Prescott and Yavapai County. These images have not been found.³

Humphries established a reputation for the use of photography in mine promotion. He published several articles on the topic,

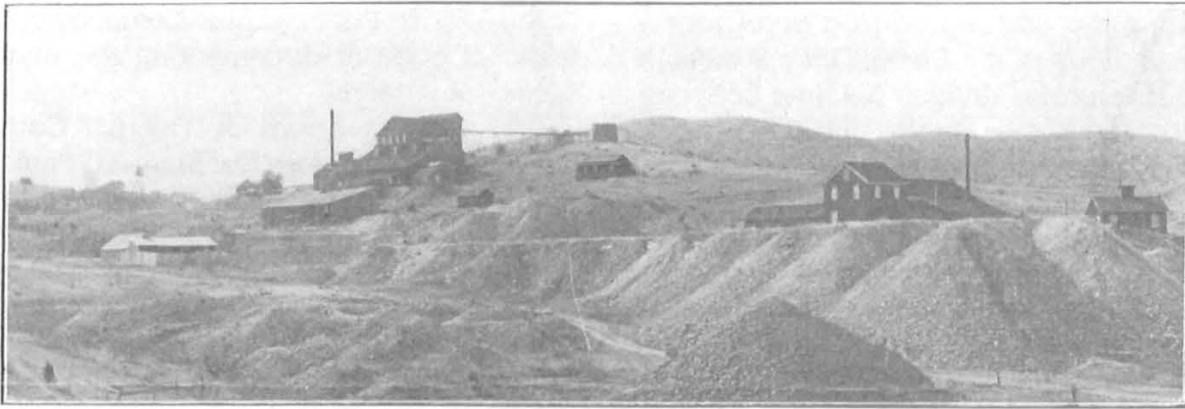
including the one reproduced here from a special edition of the *Bisbee Daily Review* in 1904. Humphries divided his time between Prescott and Bisbee studios until 1905, when he left Arizona for El Paso, Texas. His articles highlighted the increasing use of photographs. "Through mining photography," he wrote, "the topography of the country is shown, in an absolutely correct manner, the interior workings of the mine are laid bare to the eye, the system of timbering, drifting, tunneling, raising and stoping are all presented—if they are there—for the camera will tell the truth."⁴ We know that truth is relative, and the camera, more often than not, could be used to fool the eye rather than to confirm some suggested prosperous condition. However, Humphries and the rest

of the Arizona Photographic Company group were all good at documenting the mining scenes of Arizona.

The mining boom in Yavapai County took a downturn with the financial Panic of 1907. Suppiger and Armitage left the territory, but Bates continued in Prescott as the town photographer. Many of his half century of photographs are in the collections of the Sharlot Hall Museum, Prescott, including images from the Arizona Photographic Company. Except as noted, the photographs reproduced here are from the negatives at the Arizona Historical Foundation, Tempe.



THE LONELY PROSPECT. The photographer placed his team and wagon near this small operation in order to show some life in this scene of an unidentified Yavapai County mine.



SCENE AT TOMBSTONE MINES.

The last of the quintette of the "Bonanza Circle" is the Junction Development Company, and is considered to be the very best located properties of them all. It is situated north of the Calumet and Pittsburg, and very close to the Lowell shaft of the Copper Queen, and is looked upon with most favorable consideration by local as well as foreign people interested in the Warren district.

MINING PHOTOGRAPHY.

ITS USES FOR THE SELLER AND BUYER—ITS ADVANTAGES IN LITIGATION.

Mining photography has come to be recognized as one of the established arts—in fact, one of the essentials—in the great Western mining fields, and there is scarcely a property of any consequence whatever where the stocks of the company or the property are offered for sale to individual buyers, or to the public generally, which is not accompanied by the art of the photographer.

It will be readily understood that mining photography is a field entirely separate and distinct from the work ordinarily of the man with the camera. The work must be a familiar one to the photographer. His knowledge must extend beyond the dark room and development. He must have, if not a really technical knowledge of mining, a good general knowledge of the technical terms used in the profession of mining, to know the prospect from the claim, the claim from the mine, the "workings," the stopes, the whim, the winze, the raise, and a hundred other details familiar to the man underground, and have his picture illustrate precisely what the property is to convey to the person or persons to whom it is to be shown. He must make it a specialty, or he cannot make it a success. He virtually enters the field, where before only the mining engineer held sway, with rod and chain and the common "blue print." And this is the natural evolution of progress. The picture tells the whole story. Explanations are unnecessary, for the whole truth is before the eye.

Especially is this true where litigation ensues and where rich properties are developed, litigation is absolutely unavoidable. Encroachments are made on adjoining ground, intentionally or otherwise, and contention enters, which must find its way to the courts. The work of the mining photographer enters here and gives to the court and jury the facts as though they were upon the disputed ground.

The production of the camera in the hands of the mining photographer now becomes one of the most essential parts of the mining prospectus. Without the picture it is totally incomplete. One photograph, accurately taken, says more to the person in whose hand has been placed the statements of the company, than pages of details concerning it. Through the mining photographer, the topography of the country is shown, in an absolutely correct manner, the interior workings of the mine are laid bare to the eye, the system of timbering, drifting, tunneling, raising and stoping are all presented—if they are there—for the camera will tell the truth.

It is an indisputable fact that the dividends on mining of various kinds in the United States have exceeded in revenue to the investor that of any other business. Naturally this fact is drawing and wooing the hidden and stored gains of masses of people, who have shrunk from investment in industrials and other sources of increasing wealth. The advantage accruing from the work of the mining photographer is here indispensable, for the investor sees with his or her own eyes precisely what has been and is being done by the management of the properties which hold out to them what would appear to be a good risk for safe investing. Before the advent of the mining photographer this advantage was entirely missing. Today the experience of the mining photographer is practically a part of the system of mining. This is especially true in underground work, where in the darkness the flashlight must be used. The ordinary "picture taker" of the photograph gallery would be as much out of his sphere in the tunnel and stope as the engineer of a railway train would be on the bridge of a ship.

W. R. HUMPHRIES.

EXEMPLIFICATION OF THE FOREGOING.

One of the most convincing evidences of the correctness of the foregoing article from the pen of Mr. Humphries, are the half-tones

in great number throughout this work, produced from the photographic work of Mr. Humphries. Coming to Bisbee, the center of the mining activity of the southwest, this gentleman, although having had much experience in other mining fields, discerned at once the very broad field which Arizona and Sonora offered for intelligent work in mining and general topographic photography. With an intelligent conception of just what the field broadened as it was here presented, the panoramic views of the "Bisbee district," which covers a length of over eight miles, and the bird's-eye view of the young smelter city of Douglas, were attempts in photographic accomplishment not dreamed of or previously attempted. This may well be imagined when the energy required in climbing rugged and barren hills and mountains to permit the camera to absorb the scope indicated is considered. Sectionizing a mineral photograph, as engineers would topographical sectional maps, was a revelation to the art of the photographer. The success attendant was instantaneous. The camera had invaded and proven its utility in the field of the engineer with his blue print. The result has been that Mr. Humphries, through his most praiseworthy and intelligent work, has developed his field, until he is now the official photographer of many of the largest mining companies of the Southwest, and carries the appointment of a similar position with a number of the leading railways of the Southwest and Mexico. Among these are the El Paso and Southwestern R. R., and from his camera are going forth from the traffic department of the line throughout the United States large views, which must attract the attention of the observant traveler more than could all the literature for which railways are known to be prolific.

From modest individual proportions Mr. Humphries, by close attention to his work, has built up a splendid clientele, which in volume requires a large force of assistants, and, in fact, as this work goes to press, he is incorporating a stock company, which has been oversubscribed. Large additions will be made to his already complete plant, and the headquarters of the company will probably be established at El Paso, Texas, simply as a matter of convenience in reaching quickly the wider fields of Arizona, New Mexico and the Southern Republic of Mexico.—[THE PUBLISHERS.]



W. R. HUMPHRIES.



THE MYTH AND THE MELODRAMA. Gold was discovered in the tributaries of the Has-sayampa River in the 1860s, and the tale grew that whoever drank of its waters would never leave Arizona nor tell the truth again. The above gentlemen are tempting the fates. Note the shadow of the photographer and his bulky camera. The melodrama in the Elks Theater, Prescott, has our heroine in distress at the bottom of a mine shaft. Mining themes were much better known and more popular in the press and on the stage a century ago.



*Previous page:
From the Bisbee
Daily Review,
World's Fair Special
Edition, 1904.*



THE DUMP AND WHAT MATTERS. A staple photograph was of the ore car at the mine dump. The small one in the upper image from the Big Bug District indicates limited work in the tunnel at right. Below, though a mundane photograph, piles of ore were what the savvy investor wanted to see, so mining reports contained many such images (if the owners had the ore).

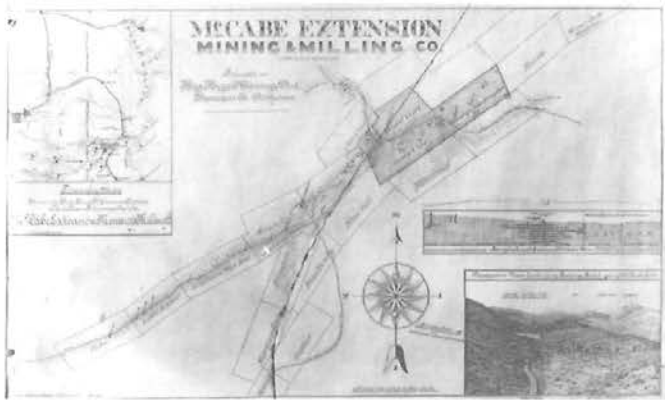


THE PROMOTER. Joe Mayer, long-time resident of the Big Bug District, at center, shows moneyed men (maybe the satchel is filled with greenbacks) one of the prospects he sold early in the twentieth century.



DEVELOPMENT. In the desert country of southern Yavapai County a series of unidentified mine scenes show the hoist and tools of a prospect. The physical plant and the size of the dump indicate serious exploratory work, which may be coming to an end without a new infusion of capital.





LOCATION, LOCATION. The McCabe Extension Mining & Milling Company published an attractive prospectus in 1902, showing its works near the McCabe bonanza ore body, Big Bug District. Jules Bauman prepared a map showing the mine's proximity to the McCabe, noting the "ore" underneath its claims.



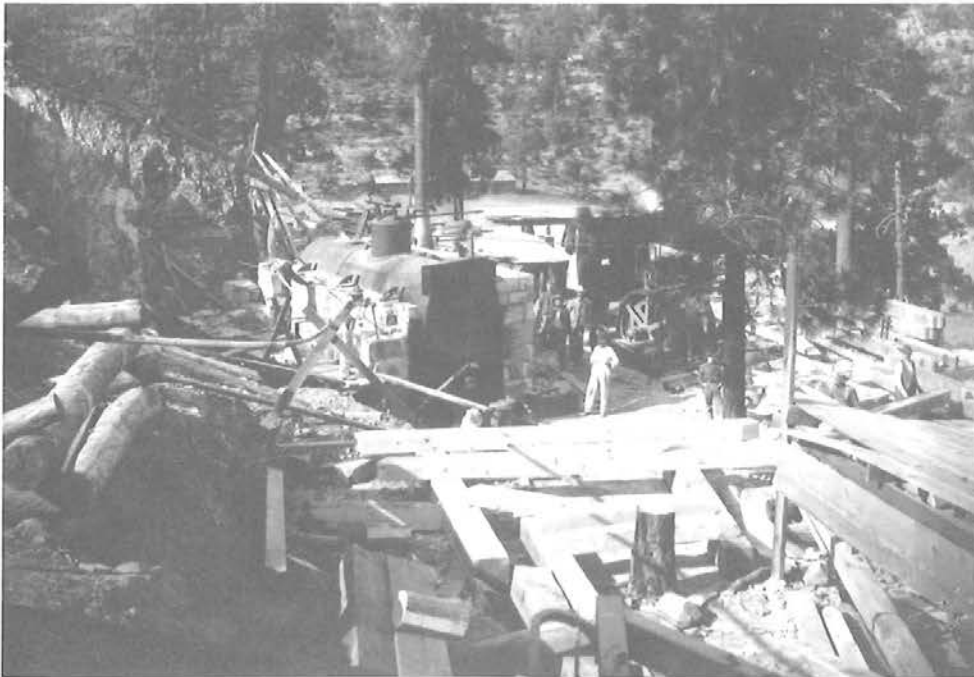
The hoisting plant frames the McCabe mill, while a difficult-to-capture underground scene shows the ore bucket ready to be hoisted. The camp sprawled along Chaparral Gulch.





LOCATION, LOCATION 2. The United Gold Mines works were in the Congress District, near the territory's most productive gold mine, the Congress. The photographer showed the United's headframe and mill with the Congress works behind, a sure sign of profitable possibilities. The photographer also showed the labor-saving operation of mine-to-mill conveyor feed system. The mill hand stands with shovel ready to feed the primary crusher at the ore bin.





SHOW THE WORK. An image of the "Mud Hole" Mine, in the Lynx Creek or Walker District, shows the construction of a new hoisting works, above. The Cash Mill, at the headwaters of the Hassayampa River, has a full supply of cord wood ready for when the mill would start again. Investors needed confirmation, especially photographically, of progress at a mine site. Mill returns were what counted (but hard to show photographically), though scenes of new mills and hoists were appealing.



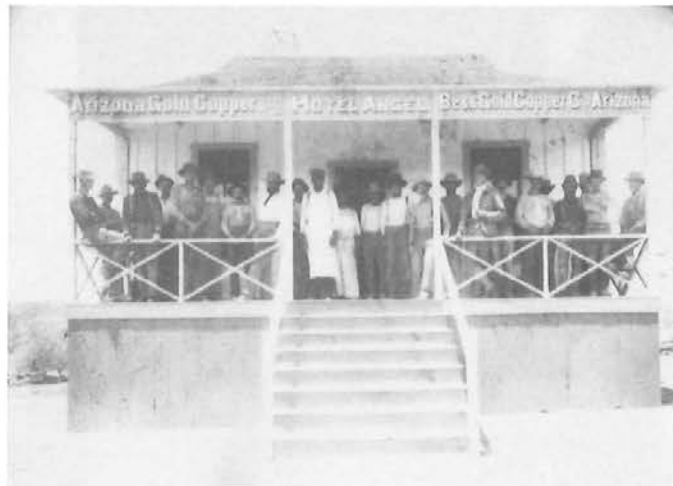


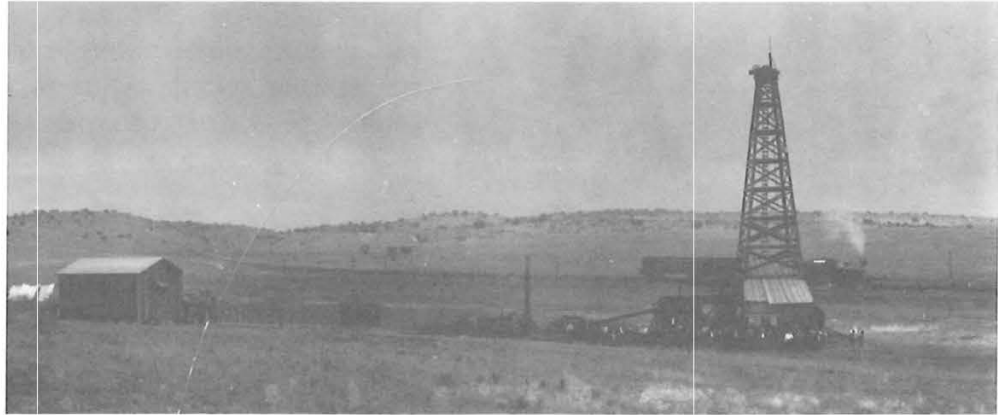
THE INVESTIGATION. After an optimistic construction of its mill and camp in the 1890s, the Yarnell Mine joined the ranks of idle properties. An investigation of the mine included inspections of the twenty-stamp mill and the sampling of the vein. The lace-booted gentleman in the tunnel probably determined the future of the camp and its promoters.





A POSITIVE REPORT. A promising prospect near Wickenburg typified so many of the gold boom camps. A new office, cook house, and hoist went up, were photographed, and then survived as long as investors' funds or faith lasted. The group photograph is a classic sampling of mining camp characters. The photographer captured the first days of this short-lived operation for a company prospectus.





RAILROAD ACCESS. High transportation costs could kill an operation. With a photograph, the stockholders of the Chino Valley Oil Company could show how accessible their wildcat oil rig was to the Santa Fe Railroad branch through the valley. The Poland branch of the Bradshaw Mountain Railroad tapped the mines along Big Bug Creek. The photo of the tunnel showed potential investors the quality of its construction.

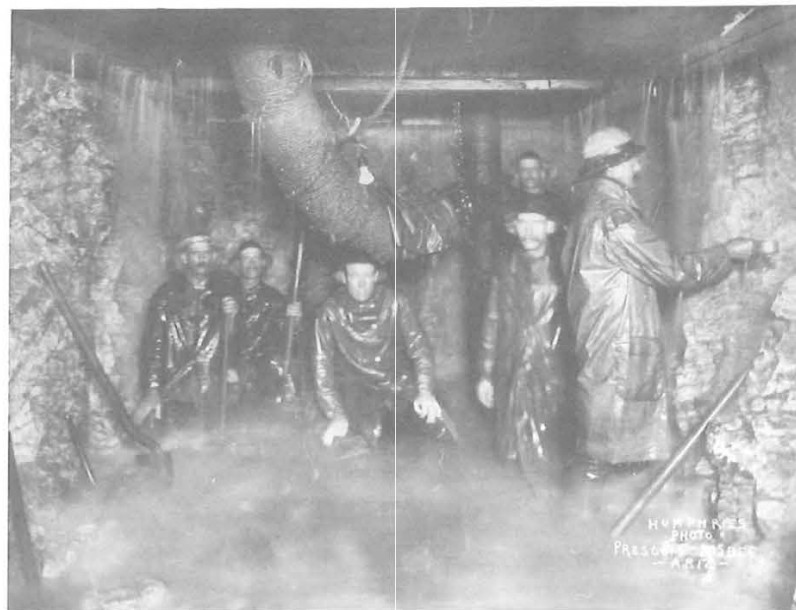
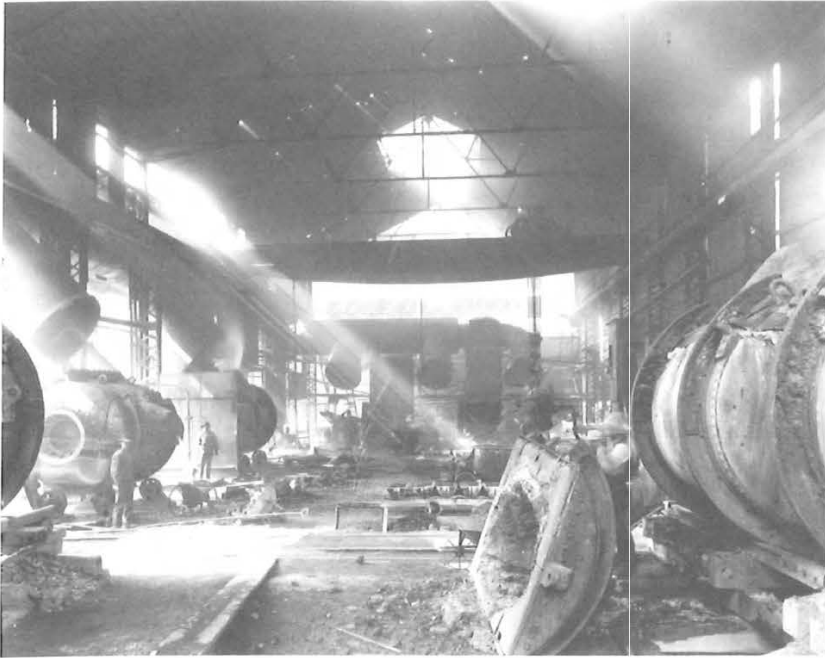




POST OFFICE. The mining camp post office at Wagoner was a quiet place after the initial boom. These essential community centers were often photographed for newspaper special editions, even if they looked less than prosperous and more ready for ghost town status.

MINING ADJUNCTS. Many a mining deal was made in the bar of the Yavapai Club, a businessmen's club in Prescott. A card game is posed for a promotional pamphlet about the club. The law office staff of Leroy Anderson, Prescott, posed, busily preparing for a case; another mine litigation?





SCATTERING GLASS PLATE NEGATIVES. The work of W. R. Humphries ended up in a number of repositories, from Bisbee to the Library of Congress. His glass plate negatives are also dispersed, with identified holdings at the Arizona Historical Foundation, at the Sharlot Hall Museum, Prescott—such as the interior photo above of the Copper Queen smelter, Douglas—and at the Arizona State Library and Archives—as in the interior view below of the water-drenched underground of the Tombstone Consolidated Mines Company, Ltd. 🏠

Notes:

¹ Robert L. Spude (comp.), "Glass Plates Collection of the Arizona Photographic Company," Arizona Historical Foundation, Tempe, ca. 1974.

² For biographical material on these photographers see: Spude, "Glass Plates Collection;" Thomas Vaughan, "A Guide to the Photographic Archives of the Bisbee Mining and Historical Museum," *Cochise Quarterly* 19, no. 2 (Sum. 1989), 27; and Jeremy Rowe, *Photographers in Arizona, 1850-1920: a History and Directory* (Nevada City, CA: Carl Mautz Publishing, 1997). An example publication is A. E. Suppiger, *Picturesque Gold,*

Silver, and Copper Mining in Yavapai County, Arizona (Prescott, AZ: A. E. Suppiger, 1903; copy at the Arizona State Department of Library and Archives, Phoenix).

³ A. E. Suppiger acquired Humphries' plates, *Arizona Journal Miner*, 8 Aug. 1902. *Copper Era*, Clifton, AZ, 26 Mar. 1903. *Arizona Republican* [Phoenix], 3 Feb. 1903.

⁴ *Bisbee Daily Review*, Special World Fair Edition, 1904; copy in Arizona Historical Foundation collections, Tempe.