

Old Pioneers' Home

Retired to state home,
oldsters spit, cuss
and fight with canes

by CLAUDE STANUSH

PERCHED on a granite hill overlooking Goose Flat near Prescott, Ariz. is a three-story, red brick building, the Arizona Pioneers' Home. Except for a somewhat similar institution in Alaska, which provides a home for the salty survivors of the Gold Rush days, the Arizona home is the only one of its kind in America. State-supported, it was founded both as memorial and haven for the men and women who lived through the blood-and-thunder days of early Arizona. Here live—or have lived—such characters of the old West as Dynamite Joe, Whispering Joe Stephens, Sourdough George Wright, Foot-and-a-Half Jones and Stoneboat Annie. They have not been immortalized in legend or myth like Buffalo Bill Cody nor do they represent the pure, heroic Westerner portrayed on the screen by Roy Rogers. But, disillusioning as they might be to moviegoers and other Western romanticists, they provide the best composite portrait of the most fabled era in American history.

In the stock movie or novel the early Westerner is presented as a gregarious, chivalrous character ever hunting for opportunities to risk his life for the preservation of society, law and order. In reality he was probably the most rugged individualist the world has ever known. The Arizona Pioneers are a crusty, cantankerous lot whose only common denominator is that they do not like society generally and each other



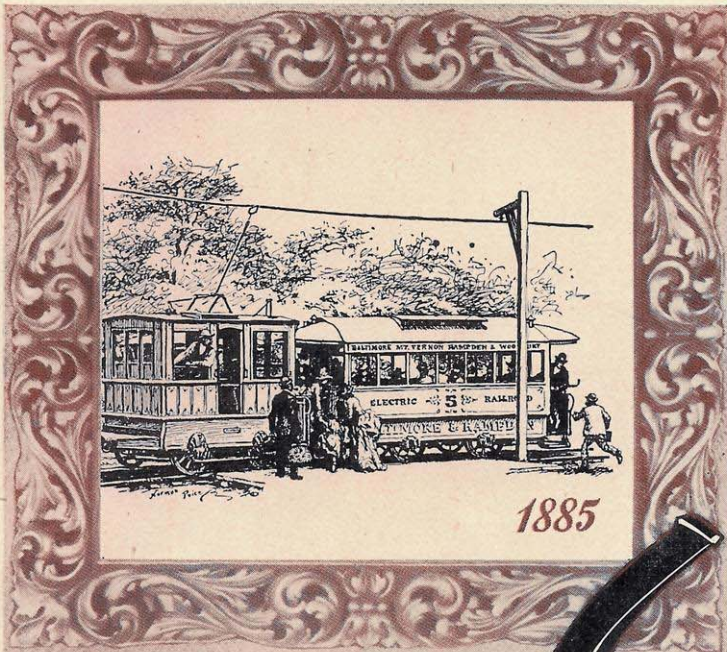
EVERY AFTERNOON ARIZONA'S PIONEERS LINE UP ON THE PORCH TO SPIT OVER RAILING

specifically. Some of them have lived at the home for 15 years or more, but even these are about as institutionalized as a cageful of wildcats in the Bronx Zoo. A classic example of Western temperament are the two foot trails which lead up to the home from Goose Flat. There used to be only one trail until one day a ruddy-faced, volatile miner, Michael Clancy, told another guest he "wouldn't be seen walking on the same ground that 'ee did"; Clancy worked for weeks clearing away boulders and chopping out brush until he had blazed his own private trail, known today as Clancy's New Deal Cutoff.

With 160 such intense individualists under one roof, the home is about as peaceful as an old frontier saloon. Every week there are at least two or three old-fashioned brawls, fought sometimes with bare knuckles but more often with walking canes. Practically all the guests carry canes and, as Superintendent Jack Sills says, "they can swing a cane faster than old Billy the Kid could draw a six-shooter." Quarrels may start over the latest copy of *Western Story*, the next turn in the barber chair or, as it usually turns out, over nothing at all. When Can Can John Henniger, owner of the famed Can Can bar in Tombstone, remarked one day that he saw Wyatt Earp shoot down the Clanton boys "in cold blood," another old-timer screeched, "That's a damn lie, it niver

happened that-a-way a-tall." and within 60 seconds both men were being wheeled into the hospital ward with cracked skulls. Dynamite Joe, a small, grizzled hard-rock miner, was recently discharged from the home for the sixth time after punching an orderly in the mouth and displaying a two-bladed stiletto, made by honing both ends of a file to razor sharpness.

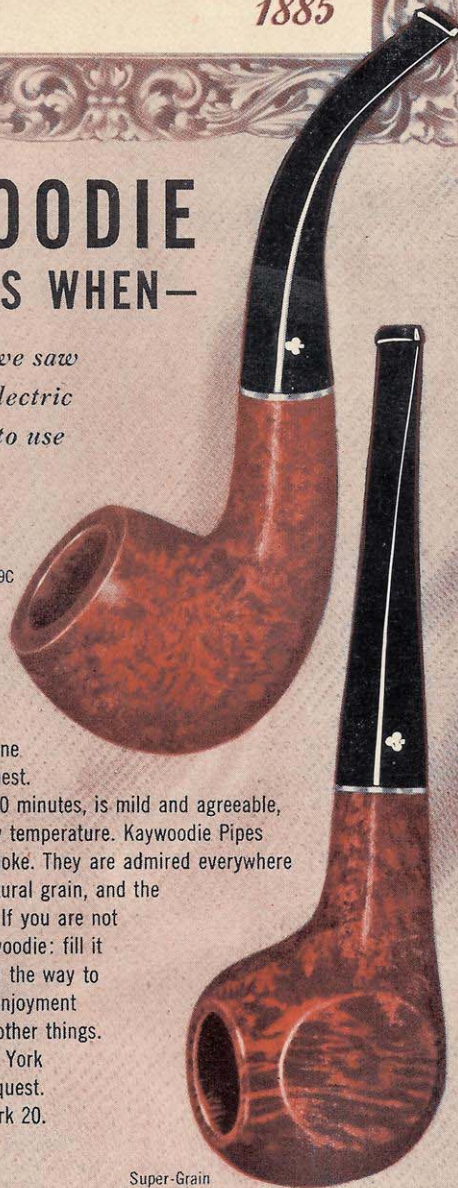
While such behavior is hardly characteristic of an old folks' home, it must be understood that the men and women who live in the Prescott institution are not retired bankers or dowagers but the hardy survivors of a primitive civilization in which a man had to be able to use both his fists and a six-shooter to survive. Within their own society they do not consider a man a social outcast for killing another man. For several years Six-Shooter Smith, a tall, slim, blustery cowboy, carried a cane with 10 notches for the men he claimed to have killed. At least a fourth of the guests have served time in jail or the penitentiary for varying indiscretions. Their past sins are seldom mentioned, but if one asks what they got in trouble over, Dogie Ed Lemmons, a banty-sized cowpuncher with close-cropped mustache, drawls, "Over cows or wimmin; that's all there wuz to get in trouble over those days." Superintendent Sills explains with pride that the Prescott home was established "for all of Arizona's pioneers," regard-



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THE HOME has two wings, one for women (extreme right) and one for men (extreme left), separated by middle section containing lobby and hospital wards.

PIONEERS' HOME CONTINUED

less of their background, disposition or state of their pocketbooks. The only requirements for admittance are that the applicant be at least 60 years old and have lived at least 35 years in Arizona. Some of the guests have bank accounts of their own and could well afford to live in a private institution if not with relatives or friends. But they end up at the home because they like its easy discipline and other attractions. It is ideally nestled in the Bradshaw Mountains of north-central Arizona, in one of the state's finest mountain-resort areas. Guests are given individual rooms wherever possible or, at worst, are bunked in pairs. Rooms, while bleakly furnished with single beds, dresser and spittoons, usually have radios and are adequately heated against the sharp mountain air. Meals are nourishing and adapted to aging stomachs. There is a bin in the superintendent's office always filled with smoking and chewing tobacco. Each guest, rich or poor, gets \$7.50 a month spending money.

Whisky Row

IN such circumstances the early Westerners live comfortable if not exactly serene lives. When they are not listening to the radio in their own rooms, they are usually in the home's big lobby, where newspapers and magazines are available, or on the veranda, where they get a beautiful panoramic view of juniper- and pine-covered hills. The veranda, equipped with a long line of rocking chairs, is known as Tobacco Row because the favorite pastime is spewing tobacco juice and quids over the railing. Guests are not confined to the grounds, and those able may hobble down to Prescott's famed Whisky Row, which is just "a whoop and a holler," or about three quarters of a mile, from the home. They spend most of their allowance in saloons along the row. While \$7.50 does not buy many drinks of hard liquor over a 30-day period, Police Officer W. R. Fitzgerald of Prescott explains ruefully that "It don't take more'n one or two drinks to git 'em higher 'n hoot owls." Sometimes the local constabulary puts them in jail to sober up but more often escorts them to the foot of the granite hill and shoos them up one of the foot trails. The trails wind around big granite boulders, but even in an intoxicated state the oldtimers negotiate them very well. The only recorded mishap occurred one night when Scrap Iron Kelley, a prospector, forgot to zig at one of the turns and ran head-first into a granite boulder, fracturing his skull.

Superintendent Sills, a slim, mild-mannered man, tries to be as lenient as possible with his charges without permitting open anarchy. His job calls at the same time for understanding, patience and firmness. In the case of Carl Wilcox, 100-year-old Indian fighter, and Joe Young, a cowpoke, who were paired off in one room but did not get along together, he had to employ the wisdom of Solomon. After one serious quarrel which ended in a fist fight, a chalk line was drawn down the center of their room, like Pope Alexander VI's famous Line of Demarcation, and when this still did not promote peace, the line was continued up the walls and across the ceiling of the room, after which everybody was happy. Sills also solved a difficult problem concerning the serving of meals. For years food was dished out family-style, with the result that there was continuous

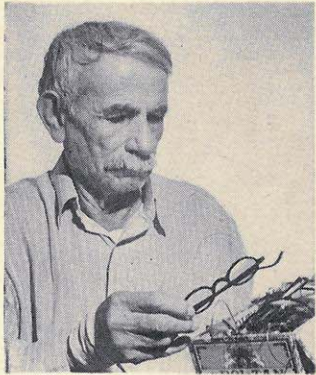
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GENA FRAZIER once played the piano in Prescott's famed Palace bar.



ED LEMMONS, who used to wear a gun, inspects one belonging to home.



JOE CONTRERAS, like most guests, is always asking for new eyeglasses.



TEXAS BOB HAYDEN, 72 years old, is still the home's hottest fiddler.

PIONEERS' HOME CONTINUED

squabbling over who got the best steak or the last helping of pie. In one celebrated incident—which resulted in his being discharged from the home for the fifth time—Dynamite Joe turned a bowl of gravy over the head of Six-Shooter Smith in a quarrel over a chicken drumstick. Thereafter meals were served in individual portions.

While there are no cows at the home these days to instigate trouble, there are women. The "females" live in the right wing of the building and during certain hours can "visit" with the men. The old boys, despite their age, have not lost any of their yen for romancing. Almost any afternoon one can see an old prospector or cowboy sparking one of Arizona's grand old ladies in the lobby or on the veranda. Because there are more men than women, the competition is keen, and some of the home's best fights have started as a result of female claim-jumping. But the real trouble started several years ago when one couple startled the superintendent by announcing that they wanted to get married. "There's no place for married couples here," said the bewildered superintendent and, not knowing what else to do, turned the matter over to the state legislature. That august body, after serious debate, turned the request down. The couple was not to be frustrated, however. They eloped and after a two-week honeymoon were back at the home. This time the superintendent relented by giving them a room together. Since then several other romances have ripened into marriage and Sills is afraid a precedent has been set.

In some respects, however, the presence of women has had a mellowing influence. The oldtimers do not fight or "cuss" when a woman is around, a throwback to the code of the Old West which demanded that a man be always respectful in the presence of a lady. When love-smitten they think nothing of spending their whole month's allowance (money that would otherwise go for liquor) on a big box of candy or other gift for their lady friend. A clerk in one of the Prescott drugstores explains, "They always want a verse on their gift cards, and 'cause most of 'em can't read, I have to read the verses to 'em. The mushier the verses are, the better they like 'em." Texas Bob Hayden, a fast fiddler who gives a concert in his room every night, also sadly notes the feminine influence. "Most of us ole cowboys like fast numbers, like *The Drunkard's Hiccough* or *Snow Bird in the Ash Bank*," he says. "But these calf-eyed 'uns—they're always wanting sentemental tunes like *The Lost Goose Waltz*. Ah don't understan' it. In the old

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OLDTIME DANCES are held at the home nearly every Saturday night. Here Mrs. Tot Young and Shorty Brinkley do a step called "put-your-little-foot."

PIONEERS' HOME CONTINUED

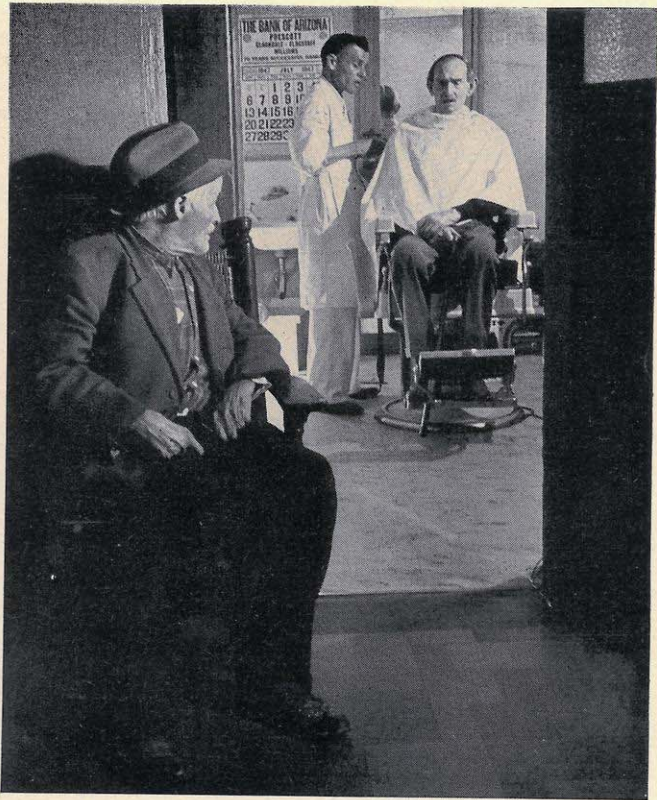
days cowmen had their wimmin folks, but they nivver got mushy 'bout 'em."

While each guest at the home is an individual problem, prospectors generally are the biggest headache, principally because of their scorn of personal hygiene. One day an old prospector was brought to the home from Superstition Mountain, where he had lived for six months on sour-dough biscuits, wild game and wild honey. His long beard (all prospectors have long beards) was matted and caked almost as hard as a board from honey dripping down on it. Ordered to take a bath, he suddenly disappeared and a few minutes later was found trotting down the roadway to Prescott. "I heered what yuh were saying," he shouted. "I ain't had a bath in six years, an' I'm not gonna take one now. I'll go back to Skull Valley an' eat skunk meat 'fore I'll do that." Having lived as lone wolves so long, prospectors particularly find it hard to adjust themselves to communal living, and their intolerance extends even to other members of their own profession. Sourdough George Wright, commenting on other prospectors living at the home, said he considered them "so dumb they wouldn't know gold from a mule biscuit." "Best friends in my life have bin burros," Sourdough said. "Shucks, a burro'd be better'n a wife if'n only they could cook."

Three-Finger Jack and Bravo Juan

CONTRARY to the movie version of the breezy, yarn-spinning Westerner, Arizona's pioneers are a tight-lipped, reserved lot, particularly to strangers. This reticence is an old Western characteristic. It stems from the fact that newcomers to the West were always suspect until they proved they were not interlopers or trouble-hunters. Tom Flannigan, a silver-haired, profane Irishman who served as district attorney of Tombstone in the days of Three-Finger Jack and Bravo Juan, has some of the most dramatic stories to tell, but his invariable retort when asked about them is, "It's none of your damn business." Flannigan has gentler moods, particularly after he has had a few drinks down on Whisky Row, and then he may talk about some of his famous clients, such as Burt Alvard, an Arizona marshal who turned train robber and killer. "When I took Burt's case," Flannigan says, "I told him I'd get him off with a light sentence if he could pay my fee. He didn't have any money, so he broke out of jail, crossed the border into Mexico and robbed the bank at Nogales." After getting his fee, Flannigan convinced the U.S. attorney to let Alvard off with a two-year sentence. He rationalizes this by saying, "It was a lot better than leaving the outlaw run wild." But if you press the attorney for more details than he wants to tell you, he'll reply, "There ain't any more. Anyway, it's none of your damn business."

Flannigan, incidentally, is one of the few guests at the home who



WAITING IMPATIENTLY, 84-year-old miner fidgets outside barbershop. Although they have little else to do, Pioneers hate waiting in line for haircuts.

PIONEERS' HOME CONTINUED

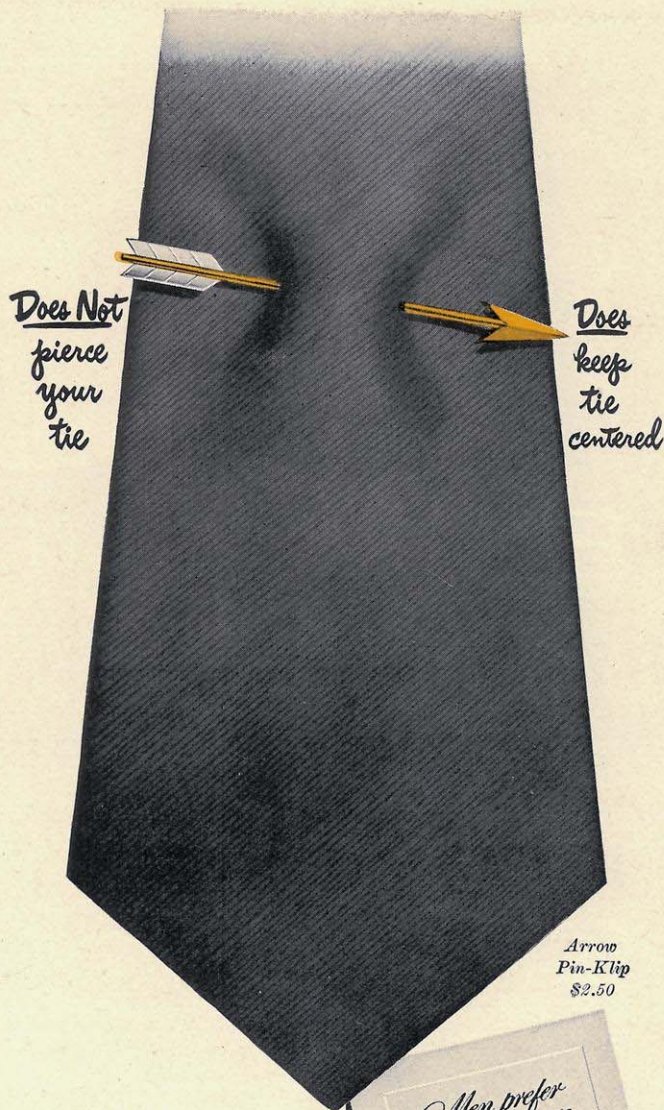
do not have a moniker. In the old days, when nobody came West "cept for health, wealth or a ruined reputation," newcomers frequently went by assumed names. While granting them this right, the West also reserved the right to attach a nickname onto a man whose real name it did not know. Usually these nicknames derived from some physical characteristic of the person or perhaps from one of his Western experiences. Thus, at the Pioneers' Home, Foot-and-a-Half Jones received his moniker because he blew off half of one foot with a charge of dynamite; Big Nose Kate, an old dance-hall queen, for obvious reasons, and Stoneboat Annie, another dance-hall girl, because of an episode in which she drove a stoneboat (a flat piece of iron, hitched to mules and used for hauling rocks) at breakneck speed around the Prescott town square. Whispering Joe Stephens, who received his nickname because he claimed the loudest voice in Yavapai County, knows his roommate only as Limpy Henry. The rooming arrangement is unusual because Henry, who admits he came to Arizona just ahead of a Texas posse, once worked on Stephens' ranch in Williamson Valley and made off one day with his boss's prize quarter horse. When asked if he has forgiven his roommate for the theft, Joe replies, "Yeah, I've forgiven 'im for stealing the hoss, and he's forgiven me for not killin' 'im." He adds, "O' course, I trailed 'im, and if he would'na been riding a better hoss than I wuz, I woulda killed 'im."

Stephens' eyes have been steadily failing him and today he is almost blind. But like all the other oldtimers suffering from disease, injury or other infirmity, he never complains. The West always associated complaints with quitters, and it had no room for quitters. Western cheerfulness and humor in the face of adversity developed as a result of this attitude. If they mention their physical disabilities at all, Whispering Joe and his cohorts poke fun at them. Along these lines, Stephens keeps his rather sparse funds in a sock, which he knots at the top to keep the money from falling out. "I'm gettin' awfully blind and absent-minded these days," he explains. "I can't see this wallet of mine when I misplace it, but I sure can smell it."

Many of the most colorful pioneers have died in recent years, and only a few remain of the original group who helped dedicate the home back in 1910. Prescott was selected as the site, partly to appease the local citizenry for removal of the state capital from Prescott to Phoenix in 1889, partly because of the town's colorful

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You can't believe your eyes!

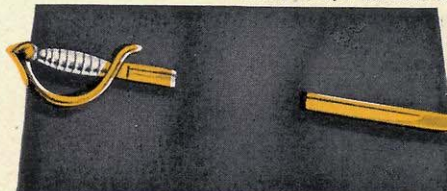


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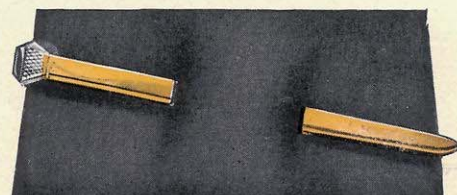
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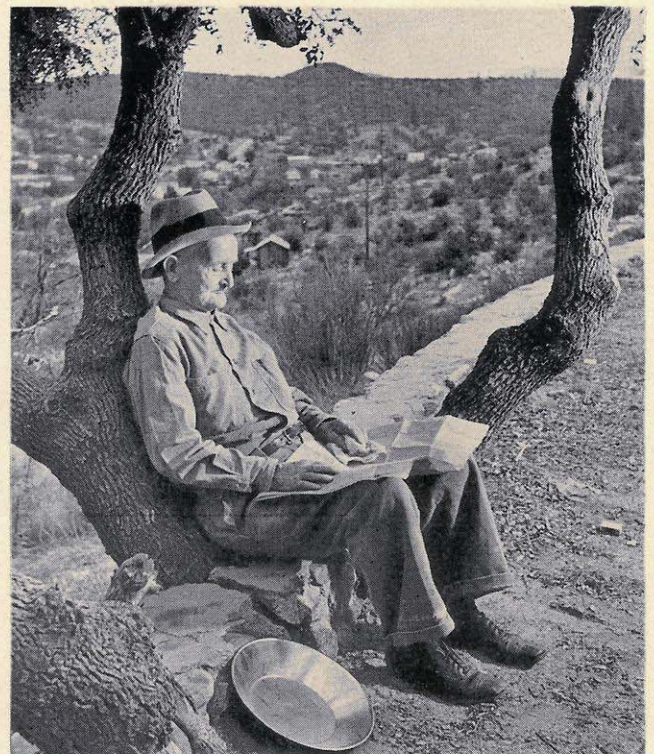
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and historical background. Founders of Prescott, lacking surveying instruments, laid out the town square by sighting along a frying pan. The early settlers were mainly cattlemen, who grazed their herds in the valleys, and mining men, who dug millions of dollars worth of gold, silver, zinc and copper out of the hills. Broncho George, an old freighter who died at the home recently, loved to show visitors where tracks of the mule- and oxen-drawn ore wagons followed the drainage lines up the hillsides and cut deep grooves in the solid granite rock. The early settlers gave colorful but obscene names to the canyons, hills and other geophysical features around Prescott, which posed a delicate problem for the U.S. Forestry Service when it made maps of the region. As the result of a compromise, today's maps have such enigmatic designations as S.H. Mountains, D.A. Canyon and S.A. Basin. The discreet tourist knows enough not to ask what they mean.

As the pioneers will tell you, in the early days in Prescott everybody lived in or out of the saloons, gambling and dance halls and other places of masculine diversion. Best-known of the saloons was the Palace Bar, which had a reputation as the hottest gambling spot between Mexico and the Canadian border. A famed dance hall was Lyda's Place, run by Lyda Winchell, a tall, frowzy blonde who died at the home about four years ago. "Old Lyda sold beer for a dollar a bottle," one oldtimer recalls. "In the back of her place was a fiddler and guitarist who played music for dancing. When the music started she made everybody git up and dance. When the couples got back to their tables they'd find their beer gone. Then Old Lyda would yell, 'Time for another beer,' and everybody'd buy another bottle of beer. When you'd wake up you'd find she had sold you the same bottle of beer six times." When Old Lyda died, there were no relatives to claim her body.

To die without friends or relatives seems to be the lot of most of the old pioneers. But that is not to say they do not die serene and happy. The touching death of Wild Bill Forbes, a Confederate veteran, is a case in point. In many ways Forbes is symbolic of the early Arizona pioneer, and if they had their way about it most of the oldtimers would probably like to die as he did. A nurse, finding the old warrior about to drift away, asked him if he had any last request. "Yep, Ah'd like some whisky," he said, in a whisper. The nurse, knowing nothing would hurt or save him any more, brought him a water glass full of whisky. She put a glass drinking tube in it, for Wild Bill was so far gone that he could hardly swallow. As he sucked up on the tube, however, a sparkle came into his eyes. He drank the whole glass of whisky. Smacking his lips, he whispered to the nurse, "Goddam, that's good." With that, the old man closed his eyes and died.



RETIRED PROSPECTOR Hard Rock Harry McPhaul refuses to quit entirely, studies a map at the home. Hard Rock boasts he has killed five men.



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