



Arizona Archaeological Society Historic Sites -- SWANSEA

CONTRIBUTOR: (Aline Laforge BLM Archaeologist)

Aline provided the stabilization information. The public visitation and site description was taken from the Swansea Townsite brochure prepared by the BLM Lake Havasu Field Office. Volunteer work at Swansea was provided by members of BLM, AAS, Site Stewards, and NPS.

LOCATION:

Swansea Townsite, located about 30 miles northeast of Parker, Arizona. From Phoenix you take I-10 west to the Vicksburg Jct. turnoff. Go right (north) to Vicksburg which is on State Rt 72. Go left (north-west) to Bouse. In Bouse, turn right (north) on Main Street across from the general store and take Ryder Rd to Swansea Road, a dirt road. At Midway go left (north-west) for about 5.7 miles to a 4-way stop. Go right (north-east) about 7 miles to Swansea.

PUBLIC VISITATION:

Always open to the public. Visitor brochures include a Townsite map for a self-guided tour. Obey the warning signs. These public lands contain many mine shafts and adits (a more or less horizontal entrance to a mine). Do not enter or explore these features. Honor all fences, barricades and warning signs. Barriers are in place to ensure visitor safety.

SITE DESCRIPTION AND BACKGROUND:

Swansea Townsite, once a flourishing copper mining development, now sits in memory of a bygone era. Prospectors began working the area in the year 1862. Results were slow until 1886, when three miners struck a silver-lead ore deposit. Soon the silver ran out, leaving only a "worthless" copper deposit. John W. Johnson eventually sold his mining claims in 1904 to the Signal Group. The new owners found the key to fully developing the copper mine lay with the Arizona & California Railroad's new line from Wickenburg to Parker.

T. J. Carrigan, one of the new owners, began looking for investors. He convinced George Mitchell to take a 21-mile buckboard ride through the desert to visit the claim in 1907. Mitchell, a Swansea born Welshman, incorporated the Clara Consolidated the following year. He built a blast furnace smelter, power plant, water system and dug more mine shafts. By 1909 with a population of about 500 people, the town blossomed to include saloons, a general store, post office, and even a moving picture house.

The first train arrived at the adobe depot on the new Swansea Railroad in 1910. By May of that same year, the furnaces began producing the first copper at a rate of 50 tons a day. Unfortunately, Mitchell, who invested heavily above ground and not enough in the mines, was forced to declare bankruptcy in 1911. After bankruptcy was declared, the mine had several false starts until 1915, when Ernest C. Lane became the manager and successfully ran the mine for a number of different owners. New adobe houses were built near the store.

The mine fell victim to the Great Depression and a declining copper market, and never boomed again. The last milling was reported in 1944.

The Swansea Stabilization Project received the 1999 Arizona Heritage Preservation Award for the category of Outstanding Educational Project.

PRESERVATION ISSUES AT SWANSEA:

Natural threats are always a factor in earthen architecture; meteorological erosion events and weathering caused by high winds, rain and major flooding; geomorphological events such as rock slides or earthquakes; biological intrusions by plants and animals. Human damage has accelerated anything nature could dish up at Swansea. Located in an extremely arid environment, and built in areas not prone to ponding or flooding, these buildings would still be in great shape if not for people. When the mining companies finally abandoned the site local entrepreneurs took advantage of the free milled lumber. I have actually talked with one old timer who helped someone load up bundles of wood from the worker cottages and haul them to Wickenburg. In later years, campers pulled apart wooden roofs and porches for firewood and bonfires. Without a roof an adobe building is at the mercy of even the most infrequent rainfall.

Later the site was used as an unauthorized movie set for "Day of the Wolves". We had always wondered about the scorching on the lintels, no longer a mystery after watching the pyrotechnics, explosions and gun play in this less than "B" rated film. Since then, bullets and graffiti have scored the protective lime plaster. All of this adds up to a weakened structure. On top of it all, the builders did not seem to really know adobe building techniques, the walls are narrow, single brick, and many corners and door and window openings are not keyed. Long running joints of bricks are the weakest point and that is where the walls will start to lean and eventually fall.

STABILIZATION HISTORY AT SWANSEA:

Nothing was done to stabilize the buildings until 1996 when the BLM Lake Havasu Field Office invited David Yubeta and Jim Rancier from the NPS to provide guidance to begin the process of evaluating, documenting, and planning emergency stabilization and building maintenance. In Dec. 1997, the first adobe/plaster workshop was held under the guidance of David Yubeta and Jim Garrison, AZ SHPO. Work started on the railroad depot with participants from NPS, INAH (National Institute of Archaeology and History, Sonora, MX), BLM (Sierra Vista Project Office, AZ State Office & Lake Havasu FO) and the Havasu Chapter AAS. The first, or scratch coat, of plaster was applied and over 200 adobe bricks were made.

The second workshop held Dec. 1998 was funded by BLM and AAS members provided the labor and experience gained in the first workshop or other stabilization projects they had attended in the state. The second coat of plaster was thrown, bricks made the previous year were used to stabilize a section of the company store wall, and a protective cap and some base filling was done at the company residences.

The following photos represent stabilization of the train depot which included the application of lime plaster.



The third workshop in March 2000 was funded by BLM and the Friends of Swansea. Perhaps scheduling in March was not such a good idea because there was only two BLM volunteers who participated in the plastering. BLM masons provided the additional assistance needed to almost complete the railroad depot's final coat of plaster, applied a scratch coat of plaster to a section that had not been plastered, and finished the final plaster coat with a native soil stain.