

# From Charcoal to Banking

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## The I. E. Solomons of Arizona

*by*

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wood scraps and tin. The narrow main street was flanked by an array of adobe structures that housed a generous number of saloons heavily patronized by cowboys and prospectors. Emil Levy, another Freudenthal relative, was in business there, and Isadore sought him out to inquire about a ride to Clifton. No freight team was moving through the area at the moment, so Isadore asked a stable operator about hiring a horse. Quoted a price of \$75, he protested, "I do not want to buy the horse. I only want to hire him for a ride to Clifton!" After a day's wait, Levy told Isadore he might be able to go to Clifton with a certain Mr. Grant, who had come to Silver City to see a doctor. "I went to see the man . . . and asked him whether he could take me to Clifton. Mr. Grant told me he could take me if I could ride a mule, but he had no extra saddles; so I went to a store which was kept by a man named Crawford and bought a saddle, bridle and blanket for \$25.00 and started for Clifton with Mr. Grant."

The two men traveled cautiously, following along the banks of the Gila River. The river provided water for the animals, and the cottonwood and mesquite trees growing alongside provided some cover — an important consideration, because this was the land of the Chiricahua Apaches, who were spreading terror among travelers. Three days later, fortunately without incident, they arrived in Clifton.

This humble entrance into Clifton on a borrowed mule, heralded only by a pack of barking dogs, marked a turning point in the life of Isadore Solomon. In Clifton he would find the opportunity he sought, although it would take him to yet another location before he found the place he would call home.

The opportunity was associated with the Lesinsky mine. In Clifton Isadore found a rough mining camp not unlike the one in Silver City, except that here the quarry was copper. The crude shelters and canvas covered shanties huddled on a flood plain expressed a boom or bust psychology. Precipitous rock walls rose five thousand feet from a narrow canyon cut by Chase Creek and the San Francisco River. Small mule-drawn cars traveled on a twenty-inch track from a mine high on the mountainside to the Longfellow Incline before reaching the smelter at the level of the

river.<sup>14</sup> This was the Longfellow mine, "Henry's big mine" of which the Fruedenthals had spoken.

Isadore quickly learned that practically everything in Clifton was owned and operated by the Lesinskys. On the west side of the river, the Longfellow Mining Company maintained a general store, successively managed by a series of Fruedenthal relatives: Sam Fruedenthal, Leonce Fraissenet, and Louis Smadbeck.<sup>15</sup> Miners were obliged to buy goods at the company store and paid the bills with *boletas*, or vouchers, a common medium of exchange on the frontier. Actual currency was scarce; banks were distant, and the transfer of cash by stage or mail carrier was a risky business.

In addition to the store, the Lesinskys provided a mess hall, located on the east side of the river, and a rooming house, on the west side. Rafts were used for crossing until a swinging bridge attached by wire cables was built. Miners who had visited one of the several saloons before crossing the bridge sometimes failed to reach the other side and had to be fished out of the river.

Jake Abraham, an experienced mining-camp innkeeper, operated the Clifton Hotel and a saloon next door. The hotel was unique even on the frontier. It was constructed of one-inch lumber, except for the roof, which was canvas. Such privacy as there was between "rooms" was provided by cheesecloth sheets hung from scantlings. A whisper at one end of the hall could easily be heard at the other, which gave rise to the hotel's nickname of "Telegraph Row." Some customers suspected that Jake watered the whisky he served in his saloon. Challenged on this point, he is supposed to have responded, "How else would Lesinsky have a work crew tomorrow morning?"<sup>16</sup>

Isadore found that justice in Clifton depended upon the decisions of the justice of the peace, an appointee of Henry Lesinsky. This powerful office was held by Colonel J. F. Bennett, brother of Cornelius, Henry's former partner on the Santa Fe-El Paso Express line. In his sober moments Bennett also served as the company bookkeeper. Justice in Clifton was dispensed on a double standard: found guilty of misdemeanors, Mexican and Chinese workers, by far the majority of the labor force,<sup>17</sup>

worked their sentences out in the mine without pay, whereas Anglos merely paid a small fine in *boletas*. When the accumulated fines filled Bennett's cash box, he gave a grand party for his friends.

What kind of man was Henry Lesinsky, the "big boss" who wielded so much power over this little mining empire? Ambitious and adventurous, Lesinsky was also serious and unsmiling. He described himself as a man "with a native restlessness which was the true cause of my success. I left nothing untried or undone."<sup>18</sup> This restlessness had carried Lesinsky to distant places: to Australia at age fourteen and then to California, both times in search of gold, and both times without success. His big strike came when he grubstaked Jim and Bob Metcalf, two prospectors who had located copper deposits in the mountains above the San Francisco River, near Clifton. The price of copper (25 cents per pound) and the high quality of the ore made the risks of shipment worthwhile. Despite the 1200-mile haul by mule team to Kansas and the frequent attacks by neighboring Chiricahuas or the Mescaleros in New Mexico, the Longfellow Mine went into operation in 1872.<sup>19</sup>

Four years later, when Isadore arrived in Clifton, the mine employed nearly four hundred men. After spending several days acquainting himself with the area, Isadore approached Lesinsky and asked for a job.

Lesinsky told me he was sorry that he could not give me anything to do, as he didn't need anyone in his office or store. I waited one day, and I went to the place where the men made the copper. I asked Mr. Lesinsky what he was paying a man doing this work. He told me he was paying \$4 a day for ten hours. I told him that if he would give me the chance, I would try and do the work the men were doing. Mr. Lesinsky told me, "All right, you can go to work any time you wish." I went the next day into the store and bought a pair of overalls and a work shirt, and went to work mining copper.

For three weeks Solomon swung a doublejack and pushed a grub stake while he surveyed the situation for a better opportunity.

Lesinsky knew that mining success could be achieved only by smelting copper ore near its source. He had sustained great losses in time, men, and equipment attempting to transport the ore 1200 miles by wagon or muleback to the nearest railroad. To recoup his losses, he began experimenting with primitive furnaces that could stand the intense heat needed to smelt copper. The first smelter, made of adobe brick, was hand-operated by means of bellows and fired by charcoal. In a short time the heat caused the furnace walls to collapse. Next, Lesinsky built a larger furnace of native stone, but the heat caused the stone to expand and cracked the walls. In desperation Lesinsky sent to Pope, Cole Company in Baltimore for a metallurgist, who claimed he would "astound the natives." This "expert" built an impressive furnace at great expense; within a day of operation, it was a heap of clay. Finally, Lesinsky's cousin Louis Smadbeck, who had no technical training, discovered that copper itself was the best material for a smelter, provided that the walls were cooled by incorporating a water jacket around the copper sheets. His solution worked so well that this type of smelter was used until the advent of the great smelters in the twentieth century.<sup>20</sup>

During all this experimenting, the Mexican woodcutters had stripped the surrounding mountains of timber with which to feed the furnaces. Lesinsky was compelled to bring in Chinese laborers from San Francisco to haul mesquite in bags on their backs from deep gorges in the Burro Mountains — work none of the hired hands would do. With that supply of mesquite exhausted, he was looking for a fuel supplier and was willing to pay \$30 per ton for charcoal delivered to the cave pit. Learning of this, Isadore recalled the dense growth of mesquite he had seen along the Gila River on his way to Clifton. He convinced Lesinsky that he could furnish the needed charcoal and was given the contract.

Isadore quit his job, bought a mule, and started down the rocky trail to the valley of the Gila River in search of a location to start his charcoal operation. In later years, he often talked about that solitary trip and recalled his feelings as he passed through the mountains where the Chiricahuas conducted their forays.

## Chapter Two

### *Pueblo Viejo*

**S**OLOMON headed down the Coronado Trail — the same path traversed by the Spanish explorer in his search for gold — toward the river valley he had noted on his trip from Silver City to Clifton. The mountain terrain changed gradually to high desert as he crossed the Gila range that dominated the horizon. Soon the ground was covered with greasewood and covillea, interspersed with an occasional Spanish dagger or yucca. The desert landscape was still new to Isadore. It was the spring of the year, and in the distance the mesas were blanketed with the yellow blossoms of the greasewood. Despite the view of the land, Isadore was preoccupied, watching for signs of the danger that might be lurking around the next bend in the trail. A lone traveler was an easy target for the Indians or outlaws.

Isadore's luck held, however, and further descent brought him uneventfully into full view of the valley of the Gila, "Southern Arizona's great life-giver."<sup>1</sup> The river, swollen from the melted snows on the higher elevations, wound its course between growths of cottonwood, willow, and mesquite. The dense groves of mesquite trees suggested that this might be the location he sought for his charcoal operation.

The trail brought Isadore past the tiny settlement of San Jose, where a handful of Spanish-speaking farmers were working

plots of land irrigated by a ditch about a half-mile long that brought water from the river. Several miles down the river, he came to another town, this time finding a few English-speaking people in addition to a number of Mexican farmers. This town was called Pueblo Viejo.

The history of the region around Pueblo Viejo would be of great importance to Isadore Solomon, as to all the Anglo and Mexican pioneers who settled there. The settlers were both the beneficiaries and the victims of the Indian people who had preceded them. For example, the canal systems being used by the farmers in San Jose and Pueblo Viejo were Indian in origin and were indeed quite ancient.

In centuries past the great valley of the Gila had supported an impressive culture, that of the Hohokam (a Pima word meaning "the ancient ones" or "those who have gone"). The Hohokam culture, based on agriculture and boasting sizable towns, is believed to have survived for more than a thousand years. Around the turn of the fourteenth century the culture disappeared as an identifiable unit. The exact cause of its disappearance is unknown; it is possible that the Hohokams' farming gradually saturated the soil with salts.<sup>2</sup> A great drought, quarrels among themselves, and invasion by the Sinagua have all been suggested as causes of the Hohokam disintegration.

Anthropologists believe that remnants of the Hohokam became the ancestors of the modern Papagos and Pimas. The Pimas lived in mud-plastered, woven stick houses along the Gila, Santa Cruz, and San Pedro rivers; the Papagos lived farther to the Southwest, in the desert. Some of the same skills are evident in both latter-day cultures, the most important of which is the diversion of water from the river into a complex network of canals. The mud-walled dwellings of the valley people were described by Spanish explorers, the first Europeans to enter the valley. The entrada of Coronado and his conquistadores in 1540 encountered the remains of ancient canals and a structure described as "a tumble-down house without any roof, made of red earth." This ruin was named Chichiltecalli, or Red House. Its exact location is uncertain, but some researchers, noting many

artifacts found on ranches south of the river, believe it might have been within a few miles of Pueblo Viejo. Indeed the village may have owed its name — which means “Old Town” — to this ruin.<sup>3</sup>

For three hundred years almost the only non-Indians who knew what is now Arizona were missionaries and soldiers in the service of Spain, Mexico, or the Catholic Church. The Spaniards' search for gold was coupled with the missionaries' hope of converting “heathens” to Christianity. Jesuits established a vast missionary field northwest of the Sierra Madre, while Franciscans worked the territory to the northeast. But the progress of sword and cross was sporadic, and for the most part the land that would become Arizona remained the province of Indians — Papagos, Pimas, Hopis, Yumas, Apaches, and others. Within these broad groupings, clans, languages, and customs abounded. Native economies varied as well: some of the Indians engaged in intensive agriculture in a fixed location, some moved their settlements with the changing seasons, and some, like the Apaches, supplemented nomadic farming with hunting.

In more recent times the region where Isadore Solomon now found himself had been occupied by the many bands of the Apaches. Although the Apaches practiced some agriculture, they survived largely by hunting, gathering, and raiding. There were two principal groups: the eastern Apaches, consisting of the Jicarilla and the Mescalero bands of New Mexico, and the western Apaches, including the Coyoteros, Pinalenos, Tontos, Aravaipa, and Chiricahuas. To those who penetrated their homelands — missionaries, trappers, miners, ranchers, and military men — the Apaches were notorious raiders and killers, intent on plunder and on protecting their ancestral lands.

Present-day Arizona, together with most of the Southwest, was first claimed by Spain and then was a part of Mexico until the end of the Mexican War. By the treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, signed on February 2, 1848, Mexico ceded all of what is now Arizona north of the Gila to the United States as part of an enormous transfer of land. The Gadsden Purchase of 1853 added another 29,670 square miles, including the desert area south of



the Gila. Kit Carson described this region as so God-forsaken that a wolf could not survive on it.<sup>4</sup>

To organize part of this great acquisition, the United States established the Territory of New Mexico in 1850, with the capital at Santa Fe. Following the Gadsden Purchase, the territory included all of present-day Arizona. At first only sparsely populated by whites, the region soon began to attract trappers, miners, and ranchers. Repeated Indian attacks on settlers and travelers brought about a demand for protection of people and property. The federal government responded by establishing military outposts, most of them in Arizona. Among them were Fort Yuma, built to protect the ferry crossing on the Colorado River (1849); Fort Defiance, to keep the Navajos in check in northeastern Arizona (1851); and Fort Buchanan, on Sonoita Creek, near the old settlement of Tubac (1856). In recognition of the threat to life and property in the Gila Valley — the raiding route for Apaches on their way to Sonora — the army garrisoned troops at three forts in the vicinity. Fort Grant was established in 1860; Fort Bowie was activated in 1862 to protect the springs at Apache Pass, the route of the Overland Stage Line; and Fort Thomas, thirty miles from Pueblo Viejo, was activated on August 12, 1876, three months after Solomon arrived in the valley.

The presence of military troops and growing numbers of white invaders only increased the hostility of some Indian groups. When federal troops were withdrawn for duty on other fronts during the Civil War, white settlers found themselves highly vulnerable. The Apaches were on the warpath, and the settlements in southern Arizona — ranches, mining camps, and overland stage stations — were easy targets for their forays. The federal government complicated the situation by abandoning the military forts in the Arizona-New Mexico Territory in order to keep supplies from falling into Confederate hands. Thinking that the soldiers' exodus meant that they were succeeding in driving out the Anglos, the Indians stepped up their activities, raiding mails, plundering wagon trains, and attacking settlers.

The Apache wars took on still greater momentum after the famous Bascom Affair in 1861, which vaulted the Chiricahua

the Indian menace. He ordered his companies to "kill all Indian men and take all women and children prisoners."<sup>6</sup> With the help of a company known as the Arizona Volunteers in addition to many pioneers who became expert Indian fighters, this extermination policy was vigorously pursued.

The Massacre at Bloody Tanks, a notorious trick played on the Indians, was part of that campaign. When word reached the East of "the brutal attacks against helpless human beings,"<sup>7</sup> the reaction was swift and violent. Demands were made for Congress to abandon the extermination policy, which, it was said, had neither protected the citizens nor subdued the Indians. A policy of pacification was adopted.

Meanwhile, as the potential mineral wealth of Arizona became known, largely through the efforts of Charles D. Poston, Congress began to be more receptive to Arizona's claim for independent territorial status. The need for gold and silver to continue the war finally persuaded Congress to establish the Territory, and on February 24, 1863, President Lincoln signed the order. The military posts were restored with the hope that uniformed men could help pacify the Apaches. The opposite occurred, however, when the Indians found easy access to the white men's supplies. The frontier continued to be a battleground — not North against South, but whites against Indians.

John N. Goodwin was appointed governor of the new territory after the death of the first appointee, John A. Gurley, in August. Goodwin's first order of business was to bring the Apaches under control. After the failure of the extermination policy, Congress adopted a system of reservations, setting aside areas of land where Indians would be fed, protected, and otherwise provided for. The White Mountain-San Carlos Reservation was established on September 5, 1871 as one of the first reserves established in Arizona Territory.<sup>8</sup> The San Carlos Reservation was later created from the White Mountain reserve.

The location of the San Carlos reservation, thirty miles from Pueblo Viejo, brought little of the intended peace to the people of the Gila Valley. The close proximity of the reservation proved a

constant threat to life and security for the Solomons as for all the settlers in the area well into the 1880s.

Implementing a pacification policy originally meant persuading the Apaches to come peaceably to the reservation. Many of the Apache groups refused to accept reservation life. Warriors continued to break the peace, and up and down the Gila Valley raid after raid occurred. Stage service came under frequent attack; settlers and travelers were in constant peril; a party of Mexicans returning from Sonora was massacred after leaving Tucson.<sup>9</sup> Between 1864 and 1871 over three hundred whites were killed, fifty wounded, and many taken prisoner.

It was generally thought that the freedom to attack Anglos and Mexicans was an outgrowth of the attitude of the men appointed by President Grant to carry out his "peace policy" in 1871. The appointed chair of the Board of Indian Commissioners, Vincent Colyer, believed that kindness to Indians would bring them under control. The Anglo settlers of Arizona Territory were outraged and clamored for a military commander who would bring an end to the attacks. The answer came with the appointment of General George Crook, an aggressive Indian fighter. He drilled his soldiers until they became as tough as the Indians themselves. Crook understood the Indians' methods and hit them hard when they broke the peace. His battle against the Apaches at Skull Cave, above the Salt River Canyon, was a serious defeat for the Indians. They were concealed in the cave high on the canyon wall, confident of their safety, when Crook's soldiers fired at the ceiling. The deflected shots rained down upon the defiant but helpless Indians. In the battle of Turret Butte, Crook's men, led by scouts, soundlessly scaled the bare walls of the cliffs and slaughtered the surprised Indians. The resistance of the Tonto Apaches was broken, and they reluctantly entered the reservation.

With Crook in charge, pacification seemed possible until 1873, when the Bureau of Indian Affairs began moving hundreds of Chiricahuas along with other Apache bands to the San Carlos reservation. Crook was opposed to the plan, as were the Indians themselves. The Apaches had never been a united

people, and small bands of them hated each other almost as bitterly as they hated the whites. They were homesick for their ancestral lands and hideouts, and it became increasingly difficult to keep several thousand people contented on land intended for eight hundred.

In 1874 John P. Clum, an able young agent just out of college, was placed in charge of San Carlos. One of the first things he did was to request the withdrawal of the soldiers and the establishment of an Apache police force with an Indian court system in which Apaches could be judged by their peers. By 1878, Anglo observers considered the Apaches at San Carlos to be on the road to self-sufficiency. Relative peace prevailed, but Anglo encroachments on reservation lands, combined with corruption among reservation agents and disorganization in the Indian Bureau, encouraged dissatisfaction and factionalism among the Indians. Conflicts broke out, and General Crook was recalled to Arizona to conduct another pacification campaign, which ended in 1884.<sup>10</sup>

Despite the Indian wars, settlers continued to move into Arizona. The first permanent settlers in the area around Pueblo Viejo were farmers who came from Sonora and Chihuahua. They came for several reasons — political unrest and poverty in Mexico, scant protection from the government against Apache raids, and news of good farmland north of the border. They traveled north in their wooden-wheeled *carretas de bueyes* (ox carts) with their families on board and their livestock tied on behind. These were the Spanish-speaking people Solomon found working small plots of land when he arrived in Pueblo Viejo. They included the Mejias, the Montes, the Montoyas, and the Sanches families — all from Sonora.<sup>11</sup> Manuel Michelena came from Caborca, Mexico, and was farming twenty acres across the river from Pueblo Viejo. In order to provide a regular water supply for his land, he had dug a ditch from the river that extended some three miles.

There were also several Anglos in the little village, including Harlow and Hamon, two merchants who operated a small store where a few staples could be purchased — flour, coffee, lard,

salt, and a generous supply of whisky. Another Anglo, William Munson, a colorful and prominent figure in the area, arrived in 1873 from Bowie.<sup>12</sup> He claimed Maine as his birthplace and had worked in Texas, New Mexico Territory, and Arizona Territory as a stage driver, many times escaping capture by Comanches and Apaches. He knew more about Indian forays and Southwest history than any six men and talked freely to whomever would listen. An Overland Stage agent at old Fort Bowie before coming to Pueblo Viejo, he settled in an area he called Munson's Cienega and took up a forty-acre ranch. There he built an adobe house for his Mexican wife, Raphaela. When the need for irrigation became apparent, he collaborated with Thomas McWilliams and Tom McQuinn to construct the Montezuma Canal. Completed in 1874, the Montezuma was the first modern canal in the Gila Valley. It followed the eroded and indistinct excavations of the canals used by the ancient people who had inhabited the area along the river.

In Pueblo Viejo, Isadore deliberated carefully on the selection of a location for his charcoal operation. The Gila Valley, and more precisely the Pueblo Viejo site, seemed to meet the requirements: in addition to the supply of mesquite, native grasses, both gramma and bunch, were abundant — nutritious feed for cattle if livestock raising should become an option. The settlers already established in Pueblo Viejo proved that farming also was a reliable support.

Mesquite is a scrubby tree that rarely reaches more than fourteen to sixteen feet in height, with a girth of no more than two feet. The wood of this tree is hard and heavy grained. It was thought that mesquite charcoal, burning slowly at a high temperature, would have excellent value for metallurgical and smelter purposes.<sup>13</sup> Thus this stunted tree, lacking distinction and dignity, might provide the Solomons with a foothold in the valley and perhaps even a productive life.

Assisted by a few Mexican woodcutters, Isadore began cutting down trees and digging out roots from dawn to dusk. The wood was piled in mounds with air space between layers and then covered with grass and dirt.<sup>14</sup> The fires smoldered continuously

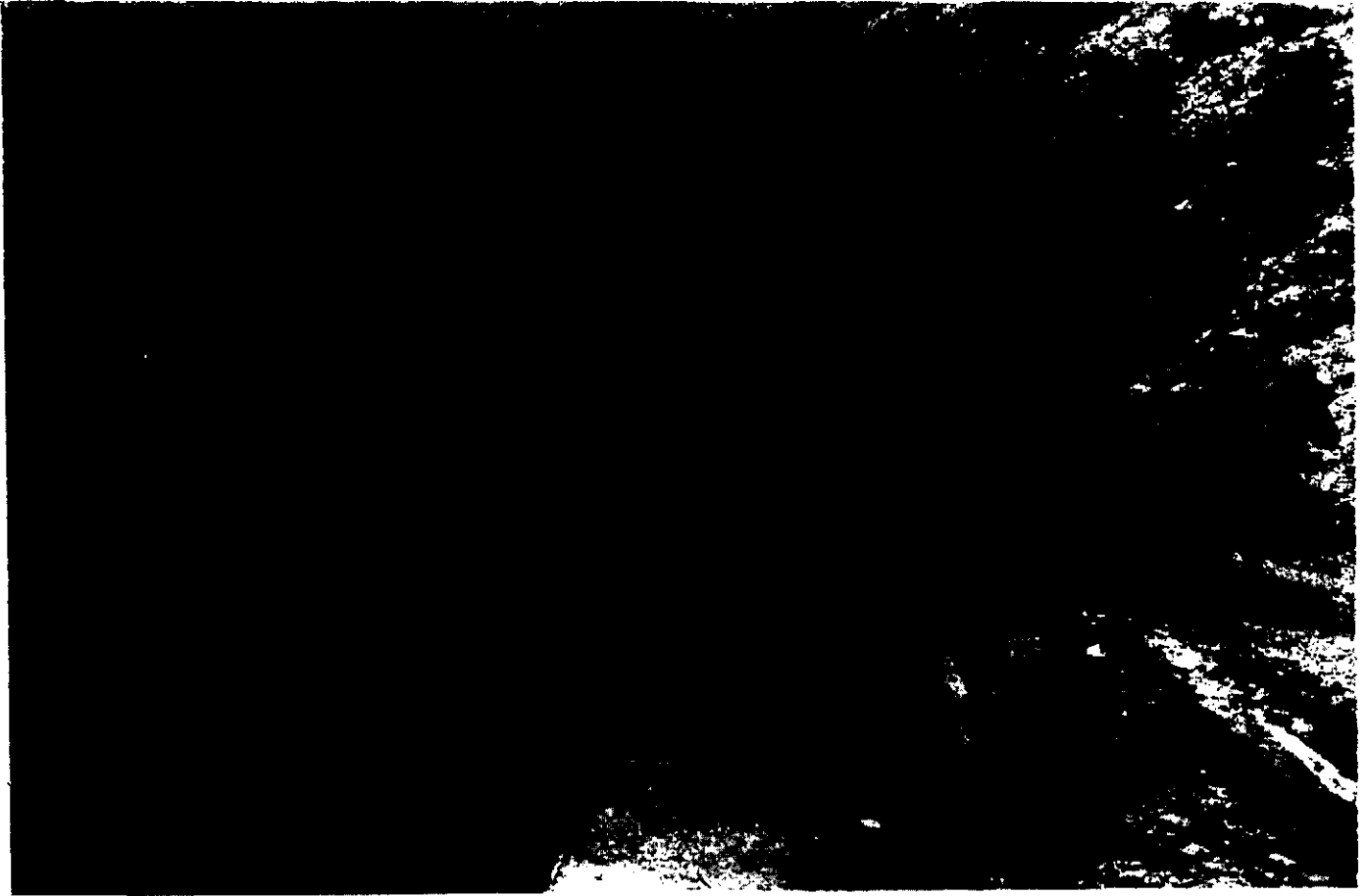
until only the charcoal remained. Guards were posted to ward off attacks by Apaches who might have been attracted by the fires. Within a short time a shipment was ready, and Isadore bought a few wagons and mule teams. Solomon wagons broke the first road between the Gila Valley and Clifton. Shortly thereafter the Longfellow Mining Company improved the road in order to expedite deliveries.<sup>15</sup>

The shortage of merchandise on the frontier presented problems for Solomon. He bought shovels, axes, spades, and other equipment from the local store, but his needs went beyond the supplies. Without too much difficulty, he was able to convince Harlow and Hamon to sell him their store. The asking price was \$75. Isadore needed all his cash for wagons and teams, and the sum was more than he could spare. However, the merchants agreed to rent him the store for \$20 a month, stock included, until he could set aside enough funds for the purchase. As soon as Isadore received the first payment on the Lesinsky contract, he bought the store and what stock remained.

With copper production at the Longfellow increasing markedly because of Henry Lesinsky's success in finding the right material for his smelter, the demand for charcoal increased. Isadore soon hired more woodcutters, bought more wagons, and before long was running twenty-five teams back and forth to Clifton continuously.<sup>16</sup>

Within three months of his arrival in Pueblo Viejo, Isadore knew that he could make a living there and made plans to bring his family from Las Cruces to their new home. Before making the trip, he rented the small adobe house from William Munson, who again was overcome by wanderlust and wanted to move on.

Isadore hitched a two-horse team to a buckboard for fast travel and set out for New Mexico Territory. Traveling alone through Apache lands with only a shotgun for protection required courage and a lot of luck. Isadore had both. After four days of travel over roads that had been washed out by spring rains and then parched under the blazing summer sun, he reached Las Cruces. There he traded the buckboard for a wagon and made preparations to return. The wagon was loaded with provisions for the



*Freight train between Clifton and Solomonville. —Arizona State University.*

next forty-three years now began to take shape. They had a home, a store, a charcoal business, and a location that seemed to have the potential for growth. And indeed the tiny, sun-baked settlement of Pueblo Viejo would soon be transformed into a bustling frontier town.

The years 1877 to 1881 were a time of adaptation and enterprise for the Solomons, as they adjusted to the exigencies of life in the Southwest and the isolation from other parts of the country. Isadore kept an eagle eye out for any activity that would develop the area as well as produce a profit. Meanwhile he continued to tend his fires and drive the wagons while Anna ran the store and the household. After three months the arrival of the household goods and furniture from Las Cruces brought a feeling of luxury to their home. In Anna's words, "I never knew what comfort a real bed provided or what convenience a wood burning stove supplied until I had neither."<sup>3</sup>

Although the Solomons worked hard, they desperately needed responsible help. In 1878 a bit of fortune came their way. David Wickersham, a young Quaker from Pennsylvania, arrived in the nearby town of Safford, bringing with him "only good health and some education."<sup>4</sup> He soon found a position teaching school. He must have been an inspired teacher, working in a school that had no windows or benches, no slates or blackboards. The students provided their own books and brought boxes to sit on.

Within a short time, Wickersham met the Solomons, and a friendship quickly developed. Isadore recognized the quality of this man and believed that he had found some much needed help. Wickersham agreed to come to the Solomon store on weekends to help Anna keep books and wait on trade. This association marked the beginning of a lifelong friendship and business partnership.

Subsequently, Isadore's brother, Adolph, arrived in Solomonville. Like his older brother, he came by way of Las Cruces and Clifton, where he worked for the Lesinskys briefly. Adolph initially worked in the Solomon store, but he soon became involved in other local activities. He was a gregarious man and a popular figure in town. He later joined Isadore and David Wickersham in several business ventures as well as taking an interest in local politics.

With the additional help, Isadore was able to seek other markets for his charcoal. When the quartermaster general called



for bids on provision contracts for the Army forts, he was able to post bond and enter bids that were most often the accepted low bids. On May 11, 1878, a contract was awarded to I. E. Solomon for one thousand bushels of charcoal to be delivered to Fort Thomas at 37½ cents a bushel.<sup>5</sup> So began more than twenty-nine years of successful business with the quartermaster general. At first the contracts were most often for charcoal delivery, but later they included all varieties of local produce.

As Isadore stripped and exposed the land along the river for a distance of twenty miles or more, it became apparent that the rich soil, nourished by centuries of flood waters from the surrounding mountains, could support agricultural development. Isadore saw that the Gila Valley had all the essentials for success in farming — mild climate, fertile soil, available labor, and a constant water supply from the Gila River and artesian wells at twenty feet.<sup>6</sup> Soon he began to acquire land.

The Homestead Act of 1862 and the Desert Land Act of 1877 opened up opportunities for the Solomons as they did for many pioneers. These laws had advantages for both the government and the settlers: they added vacant land to the tax rolls, and they gave settlers land at minimal cost provided it was developed within a limited time. Isadore took advantage of this opportunity, and during the following twenty-two years, four homesteads were granted the Solomon family.

According to Pima County records, on January 1, 1878, less than two years after his arrival in the valley, Isadore declared his intention to claim a homestead and obtained title to 160 acres.<sup>7</sup> A second opportunity came when William Munson offered to relinquish his forty-acre homestead, which included the house the Solomons were renting. Isadore was able to qualify for the preemption homestead grant, which involved legal proceedings requiring proof of preemption right supported by testimony of witnesses. He received patent to the land on January 9, 1880, and this forty-acre parcel later became the townsite of Solomonville.<sup>8</sup>

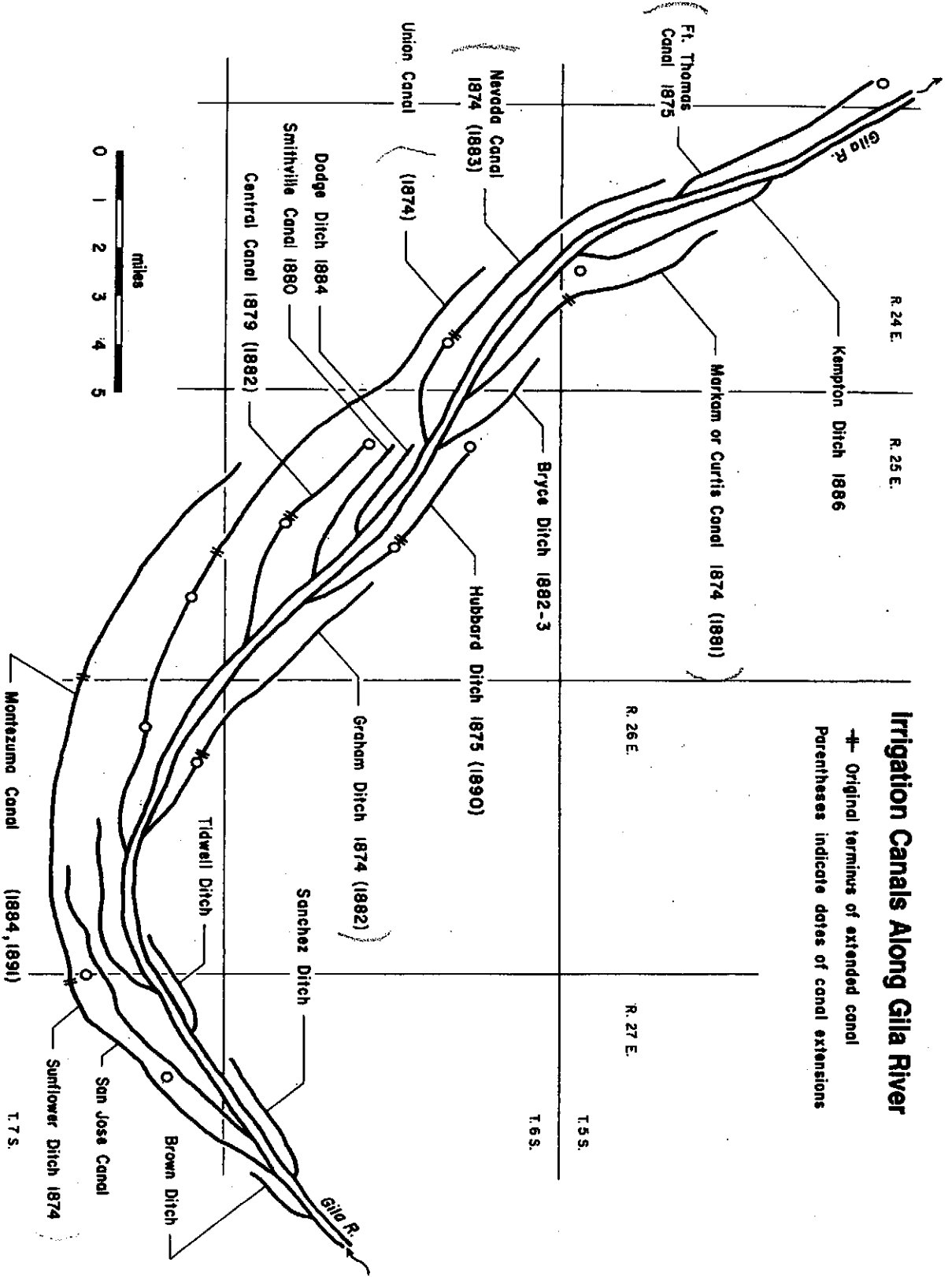
These acquisitions required little outlay of cash initially, but on December 29, 1880, Isadore purchased 120 acres from Roman



*Early view of I. E. Solomon's first store. This building evolved into the Solomonville Hotel. Photo possibly taken during the late 1870s. —Ridgway Collection.*

Griego for \$1,100.<sup>9</sup> The purchase included all rights, titles, and interest in the San Jose irrigation ditch. In September 1881 he bought 320 acres from Edward D. Tuttle, a Safford resident, for \$540.<sup>10</sup> This land carried four rights in the Montezuma Canal and two rights in an unfinished ditch.

From then on the Solomons made purchases whenever the store or charcoal shipments provided the cash. Ultimately they acquired a vast acreage, over 4,000 acres, and it came by many routes: sheriff's sales for delinquent taxes, probate settlements, and outright purchases at \$10 to \$15 an acre. A very large part, however, came as a result of Solomon's position as storekeeper on the frontier. In an area without banking facilities, local merchants provided many services. Customers were granted credit and loans, and their accounts were carried until their crops or



### Irrigation Canals Along Gila River

-#- Original terminus of extended canal  
 Parentheses indicate dates of canal extensions



Map by Thomas M. Wood

of maintenance varied according to the amount of water coming down from the mountains, but the cost to those owning rights did not exceed 75 cents per acre for any given year. Shares in irrigation companies were sold separately from the land and varied in price from \$50 to \$200 depending upon the acreage served and the particular canal involved. Shareholders paid an additional amount for water actually brought onto the land. Water rights could be retained even if the land was sold — a system that inevitably produced inequities, as prosperous farmers could buy water rights to someone else's land and reap a profit in water deals.<sup>12</sup>

With adequate irrigation systems in place, Isadore devoted more of his time to cultivating the land. Wheat, the product most in demand on the frontier, was planted first, followed by barley, corn, and alfalfa. The yields proved remarkable. Equally important as the production of crops was the location of markets. Isadore didn't have to look far: large quantities of local produce, meat, and charcoal were used by the quartermaster general for provisioning the army forts and the San Carlos Indian Reservation. As related by the *Arizona Citizen*,

Pueblo Viejo commands the best market in Arizona. The San Carlos Indian Reservation is only thirty miles away where hundreds of thousands of bushels of wheat, corn and barley are consumed annually. Camp Thomas is only twenty-five miles, Camp Grant sixty miles and Camp Bowie fifty miles. Each fort with two to four garrisons creates a ready market.<sup>13</sup>

Provision contracts were coveted prizes eagerly sought by suppliers; contract holders were assured of a reliable income at a fair profit. Payment was sometimes slow, but always certain. In addition, cash was brought into circulation, a great advantage to currency-short frontier towns.

Isadore and his partners, Adolph Solomon and David Wickersham, were awarded contracts by the government from 1878 until 1907. The registers of contracts among the quartermaster general's records at the National Archives list 57 contracts for the Solomon partners.<sup>14</sup> Deliveries of American seed corn,