

Loose in the Foothills

by Bob Ring

I Found Two Treasures in my Closet

The first treasure was photographs that my grandfather, Ambrose Ring, took more than a hundred years ago on his first mining engineering job – south of Arivaca, near the Mexican border. The year was 1905, seven years before Arizona became a state.

Newly married Ambrose and Grace Ring had just moved from the country's biggest metropolis, New York City, to the Arizona desert to live in isolated, barren, dirty mining camps. To record this grand adventure, Ambrose took 33 pictures of the mines, stores, and old shacks around the Ruby mining camp.

Only five months after arriving, my grandparents suddenly left southern Arizona, and didn't return for 27 years, spending all that time on other mining jobs around the West. The only clue to why they left Arizona was my grandfather's cryptic diary note, "We stayed until conditions became intolerable (personally)."

This family mystery prompted my brother Al and me to try to uncover the story behind our grandfather's photos. Starting in the late 1990s, we made many 4-wheel-drive jeep trips over crumbling, rocky, dirt roads to the old mining territory.

Of course by that time, all the buildings that appeared in the photos were long gone. But, wonderfully, we were able to figure out where all the pictures were taken by comparing the profile of hills in the background of the photos to what we were seeing while tramping around the borderland.

Al found an announcement in the files of the *Arizona Daily Star*, dated March 29, 1906, of the arrival at Tucson's San Augustine Hotel of A. E. Ring and wife. Our grandparents were on their way to Butte, Montana, via San Francisco. Family tradition says they left San Francisco on April 17, 1906, one day before the devastating earthquake and fire that destroyed the city.

We spent years researching the mining and people history of the area around Ruby. We shared our discoveries in history papers at several Arizona History Conventions. We talked about our research in presentations all across southern Arizona.

In 2005 we published a book that captures all that we found out, *Ruby, Arizona – Mining, Mayhem, and Murder*, but we never figured out why our grandparents left southern Arizona so abruptly.

The second treasure was a detailed, handwritten memoir by Eugene Ring (Ambrose Ring's father and my great grandfather) of his unplanned trip to the California gold rush.

On a long sailing trip (New York City to Chile) for his health in late 1848, twenty-one-year-old Eugene was in the middle of South America's Strait of Magellan, when he first heard of the fantastic gold strike from a passing ship.

Eugene's exciting story described how he worked his way to California, his adventures there in gold-rush-bustling San Francisco, flood-swept Sacramento, and the back-breaking gold fields.

Amazingly, Eugene ran into his father – who had come all the way across the continent from New York by river transport and wagon train while Eugene had been at sea and working in Panama to earn passage to San Francisco.

Eugene's return home was even more unbelievable – hiking, horse backing, and canoeing across southern Mexico's Isthmus of Tehuantepec, after being abandoned by his ship while he and nine others were ashore foraging for food and water. Five of Eugene's fellow travelers died of cholera, before the survivors reached Veracruz and were able to catch a ship to New Orleans.

Al and I, together with my youngest son Steven, edited the original handwritten record, and integrated that with several of Eugene's subsequent revisions, to provide the most complete and readable story possible.

In 2009 we published *Detour to the California Gold Rush: Eugene Ring's Travels to South America, California, and Mexico, 1848-1850*.

You might check your closet for family treasures; there may be a book or two in your future.



In this favorite Ring family photo, Grace Ring is “Looking into Mexico.”