

**THE RUBY MERCANTILE MURDERS:
SEPARATING FACT FROM MYTH**

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PREFACE

Background

The Montana mine and its mining camp, first called Montana Camp, later renamed Ruby, are of special interest to the authors. On April 12, 2002, at the New Mexico – Arizona Joint History Convention in Las Cruces, New Mexico, the authors presented three papers on the subject:

1. Bob Ring, “Montana Camp: Gold and Silver Mining at the Montana Mine in the Arizona Territory Borderland,” covers the history of the Montana mine from the mid 1800’s to 1912, when Montana Camp was renamed Ruby.
2. Al Ring, “Ruby: The Montana Mine Becomes the Largest Producer of Lead and Zinc in the State of Arizona,” covers the period from 1912 to the present.
3. Tallia Pfrimmer Cahoon, “Ruby: From Its Heyday in the 1930’s to Ghost Town,” covers the author’s recollections of her life in Ruby in the 1930’s and a description of today’s ghost town.

The authors are currently working on a book, to expand this material, with working title, *The Complete Story of the Montana Mine, Montana Camp, and Ruby*. This paper on the Ruby mercantile murders will be a highlight chapter of the book.

The Authors

Sparked by family genealogy research, brothers Bob and Al Ring are long-time investigators of the history of mining in Arizona’s borderland area. In addition to Ruby, they have researched and written about the Oro Blanco Mining District, the Old Glory gold mine, and Warren, Arizona, a suburb of Bisbee.

Since her years in Ruby, Ms. Cahoon has done a great deal of historical research on Ruby and maintained personal relationships from her years living there. Since October 1994, Ms. Cahoon has hosted Pima Community College’s public tours of Ruby.

THE RUBY MERCANTILE MURDERS: SEPARATING FACT FROM MYTH

Introduction

The tiny mining camp of Ruby, Arizona gained immediate and everlasting notoriety in 1920 and again in 1921, when its mercantile proprietors were robbed and brutally murdered by Mexican bandits. Located in south-central Arizona, only five miles from the international border, Ruby was in constant danger from bandits, who could strike quickly and then escape over the border.

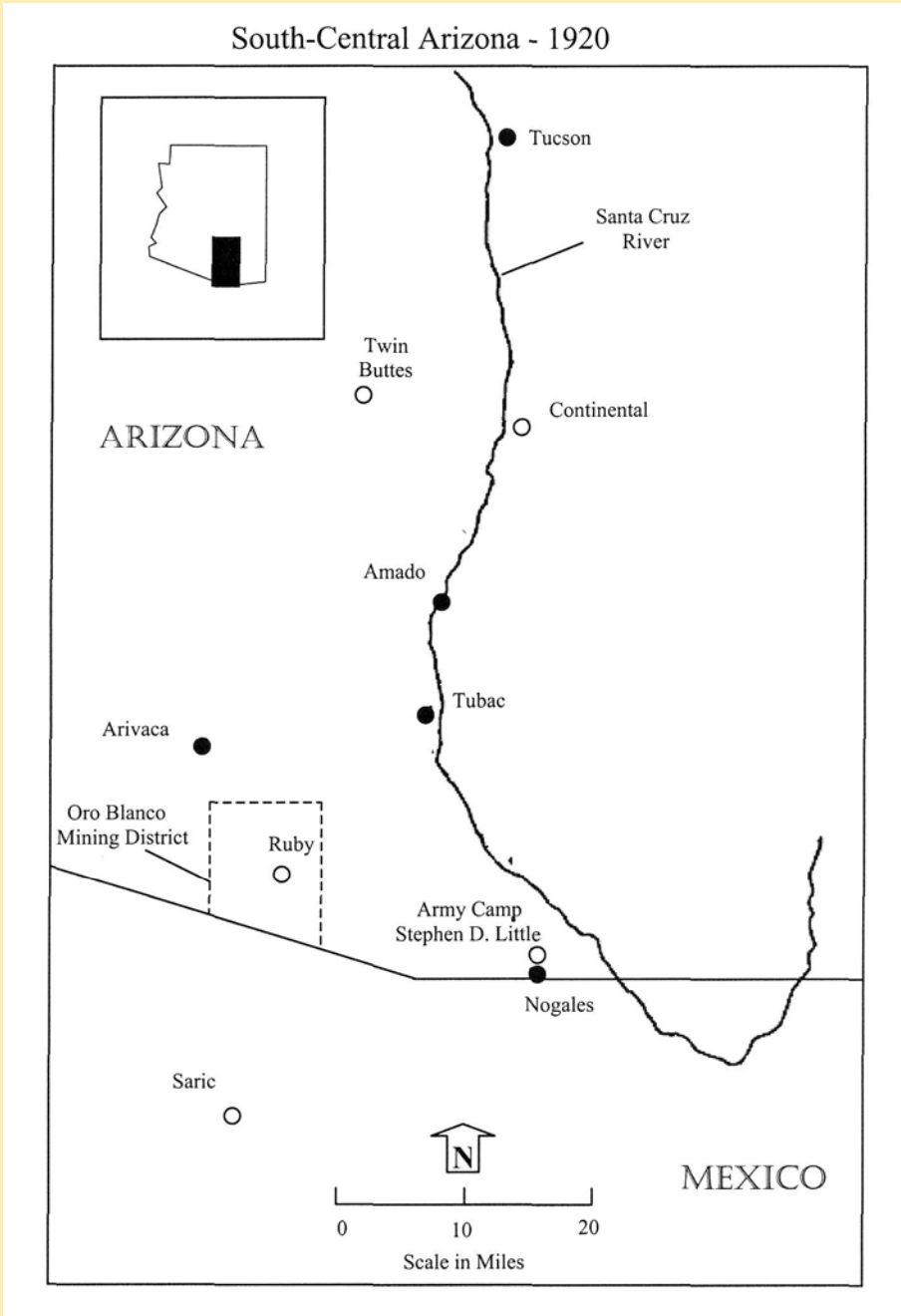
The Ruby mercantile murders were sensationalized in every newspaper within a hundred miles plus countless magazines and periodicals. But, the story of the Ruby mercantile murders currently exists only in bits and pieces. This paper will document the whole story, separating fact from myth.

First we will introduce the Montana mine and its mining camp, called Montana Camp, later renamed Ruby. Next, we will trace the early history of the Ruby mercantile. Then we will look at the early 1920's border environment of the Ruby mining camp, including those geographic and economic factors that made Ruby ripe for such crimes. For the first crime, the robbery and murder of brothers John and Alexander Fraser on February 27, 1920, we will cover some background on the Fraser family, how the Fraser brothers acquired the store, the crime itself, and the events that followed. We will follow the same general outline for the second crime, the robbery and murder of Mr. and Mrs. Frank Pearson on August 26, 1921.

Our sources for this paper include all the newspaper records mentioned above, trial records, juror interviews, Department of Corrections records, several magazine articles that were published a little later, and a few thoughtful reminiscences from later years. Of special importance are Fraser family letters from this period and an oral history from Margaret Pearson Anderson, Mr. and Mrs. Pearson's daughter, who as a child, was present at, and survived, the murder of her parents.

Ruby, Montana Camp, and the Montana Mine

Ruby, Arizona, now a mining ghost town, is about seventy miles southwest of Tucson, near the Mexican border. Settled at 4,200 feet altitude, amongst beautiful rolling hills and rugged canyons in the Oro Blanco Mountains, Ruby lies at the foot of 5,370-foot Montana Peak, the most distinctive landmark in the Oro Blanco region. Today, Ruby is 300-plus acres of wonderful memories of gold, silver, lead, and zinc mining at the Montana mine. But Ruby wasn't always named Ruby, not until 1912. Before that it was known as Montana Camp, with one of the most colorful histories of the early Arizona Territory mining camps.¹



The Ruby mining camp was only five miles north of the international border, 70 miles southwest of Tucson, and 30 miles northwest of Nogales. (Map by Bob Ring, 2003)

The Montana mine was first worked for gold and silver by Spanish prospectors, probably starting in the mid 1740's. (Note: It was the Spanish who named the area Oro Blanco because of the region's characteristically white-colored gold (oro blanco), resulting from significant silver content in the gold.) The Oro Blanco region came under United States control with the Gadsden Purchase in 1853. Following the passage of the U.S. Congressional Mining Law of 1872, the first American gold mines were located (mineral rights claimed) in the Oro Blanco area in 1873. The Montana mine was officially located by an American in 1877, about the same time that the Oro Blanco Mining District was organized.

From 1878 to 1912, the Montana mine produced mostly silver and gold. By the mid 1880's, the mine was attracting miners and a small (up to 50 people) mining camp, named Montana Camp, was born, just north of the mine. But silver and gold mining were not very profitable due to the generally low-grade ore, the scarcity of water to process the ore, and inefficient recovery of silver and gold.

So, in 1912, when Arizona Territory became a state, the Montana mine started a transition to lead and zinc mining. Lead was used in bullets and paint, and zinc was used in rust-resistant galvanized iron and calcimine coatings. U. S. preparations for World War I, with increased use of these products, and higher prices, made large-scale mining of these minerals more cost effective. (Note: The Montana mine later became the district's first and only large-scale mining operation. In fact, between 1935-1939, the Montana mine produced more lead and zinc than any other mine in Arizona and the mining camp's population approached 1,200 people. ²)

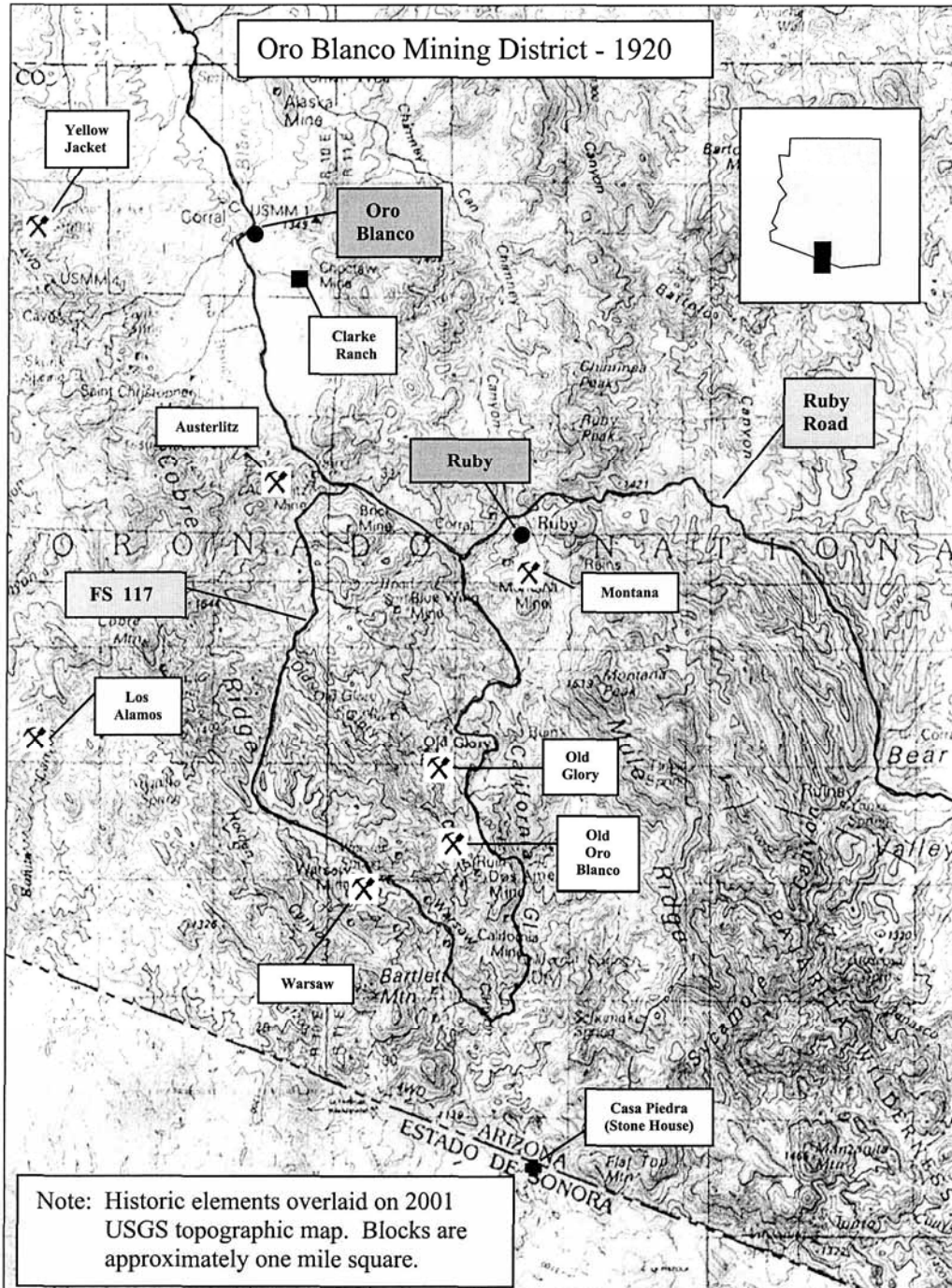
Also in 1912, with the application for a new Post Office, Montana Camp was renamed Ruby, after the new postmaster's wife, whose family name was Ruby. That postmaster, Julius Andrews, just happened to be the proprietor of the camp's general store.

Julius Andrews had purchased the store in 1897 from Louis Zeckendorf, owner of the Montana mine. The Montana Camp store became as profitable as the early mine. Customers included homesteaders and miners from outside the community as well as the local people. Andrews owned and operated the Montana store until 1913, selling it before the tragic events that were to make the mining camp famous in the 1920's.

Phil Clarke and the Ruby Mercantile

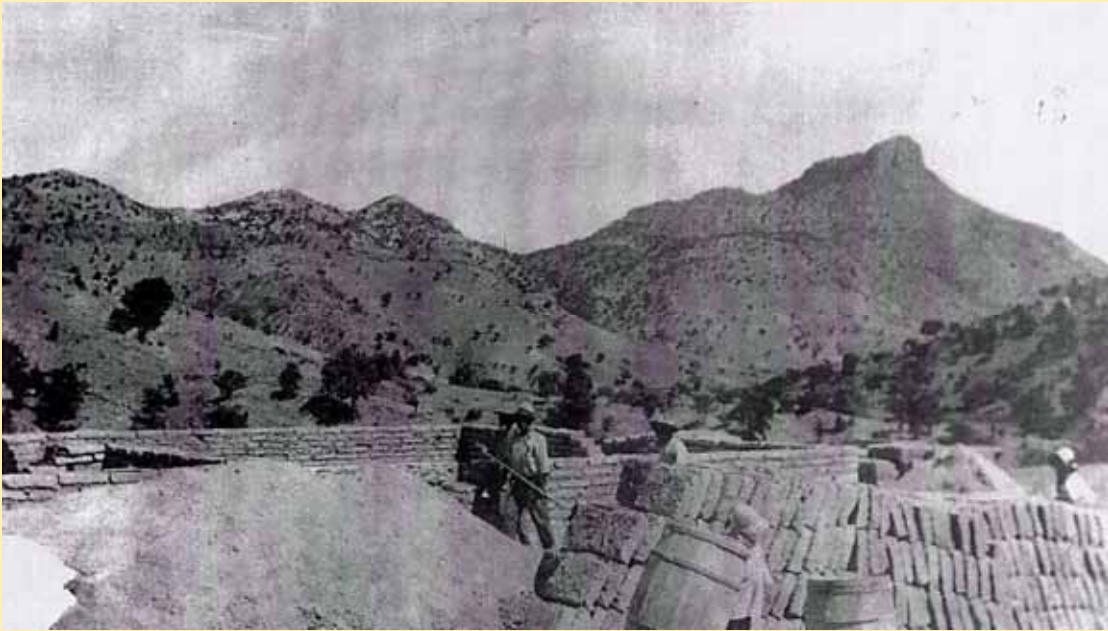
Andrews' Ruby store was bought by Irish immigrant Phil M. Clarke on May 6, 1913. Clarke's American dream had started in the slums of New York. He was born in Ireland in 1888, but his parents emigrated to New York city in 1892. Arriving in Arivaca in 1906 at age 18, Clarke worked at odd jobs, including helping out at nearby farms and cattle ranches and working at stores in Arivaca. By 1910, he had managed a store, served terms as Arivaca Postmaster, notary public, and Justice of the Peace, and was a school trustee. In order to raise the money to buy the Andrews' store in Ruby, Clarke and his school-teacher wife, Gypsy, "had to sell our chickens to add the money to what we had saved to make the purchase." ³

To
Arivaca
(4 ½ miles)



*Ruby was situated at the foot of Montana Peak in the Oro Blanco Mining District.
(Map by Bob Ring, 2003)*

Clarke's business was very good from the beginning. But, the wood frame store building that Clarke had bought from Andrews was in pretty dilapidated condition, so Clarke decided to build a new, larger store of adobe.⁴



*The infamous Ruby mercantile was built by Phil Clarke in 1915.
(Photo from Tallia Pfrimmer Cahoon private collection)*

The new store opened for business on September 8, 1915. In addition to the store, the building included living quarters for Clarke's growing family. Soon he added rooms for the Ruby Post Office and an ice house. (This Ruby mercantile was the building where, first the Fraser brothers, and then Mr. and Mrs. Frank Pearson, would be robbed and murdered a few years later.)

Visiting Ruby the day of the store's opening, the editor of the Nogales *Oasis* newspaper reported:

“The new structure, which occupies a commanding position on a slight eminence overlooking the reservoir, and some distance away, is a large commodious building, 62x32 feet in dimensions, with the store in one end and the family quarters in the other, with a wide screened porch around two sides. The living quarters are fitted, conveniently and handily, with running water in every room, and acetylene gas in all parts of the building. The water is piped from a large tank on the hill, in to which it is pumped from a large spring in the gulch close at hand.”⁵



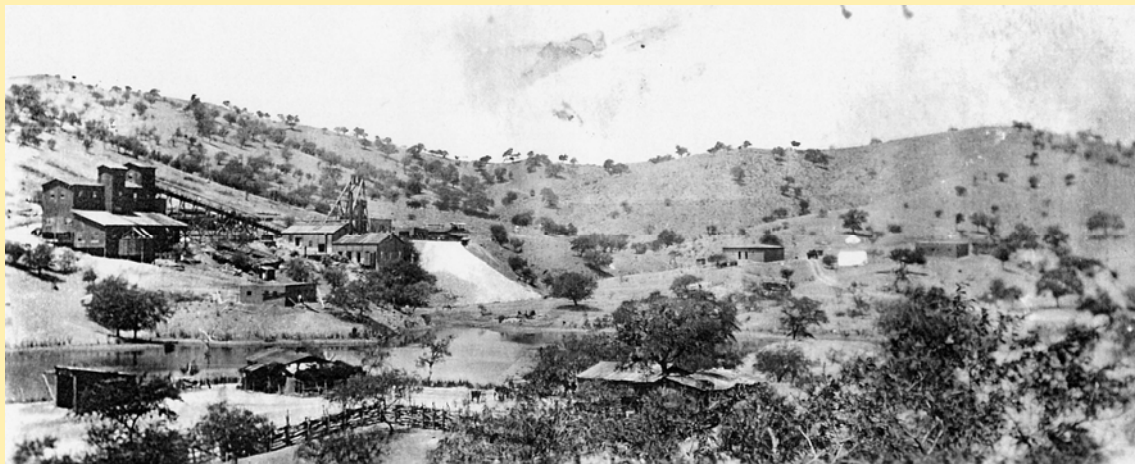
*Phil Clarke opened his new Ruby store on September 8, 1915.
The sign over the door reads: P. M. Clarke, General Merchandise.
(Photo from Nancy Clarke Rice private collection)*

The store continued to do good business, serving both Ruby and the surrounding community. In a strange turn of events, the Ruby mining camp was soon to grow up around Clarke's store. In 1917/1918 the Goldfield Consolidated Mining Company operated the Montana mine. This was the first significant mining of lead and zinc at the Montana. A new mill to process the ore and a new dam to store rainwater for powering the electric motors were built.⁶

During this active time, there was usually work for everyone. Ruby's population began to grow, reaching 50 people by 1919.⁷ Most of the adobe buildings that stand today in ruins, including the schoolhouse, were built then. A boarding house helped accommodate mining families and visitors

Clarke made "good money" during this period. Even when the Goldfield Consolidated Mining Company shut down operations in 1918, Clarke continued to do well by drawing customers from the entire Oro Blanco area.

Along the way, Clarke "collected a large herd of cattle" as payment for some of the goods he sold. Increasingly, he had to split his time between operating the store and his growing cattle business. But Clarke yearned to become a full time cattle rancher. So in 1919, he started looking around seriously for someone to buy the Ruby store. By early 1920, he had sold the store to brothers Alexander and John Fraser, and moved his family to Oro Blanco, just five miles northwest of Ruby. Clarke's ranch was located just southeast of that small village.



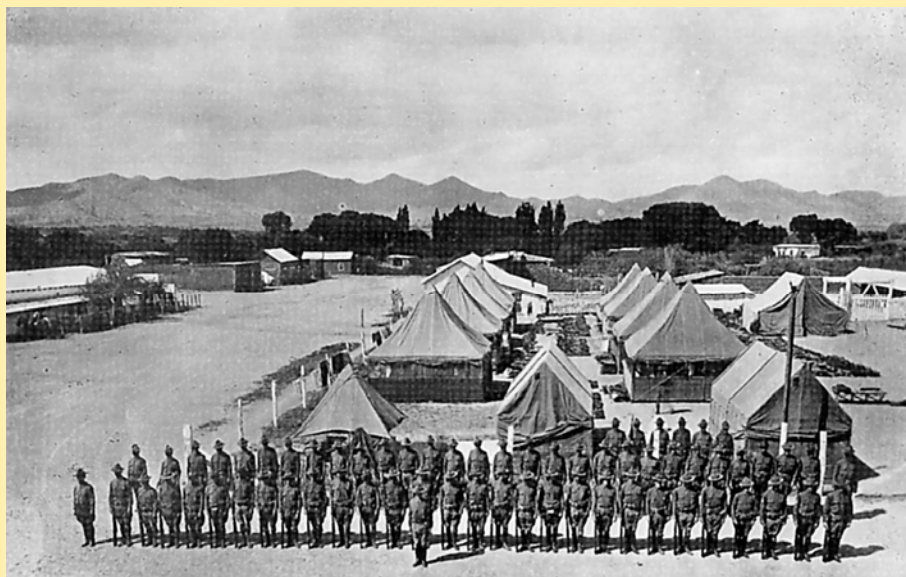
*In 1917, mining of lead and zinc at the Montana mine
caused the Ruby mining camp to grow.*
(Photo from Fraser family private collection)

Dangerous Border Country

The country along the border between the United States and Mexico had been a dangerous place for years.⁸

From 1910 to 1916, Mexico was embroiled in a violent revolution. Mexican militants caused havoc along the border from Texas to California. There were many incidents of murder, robbery, kidnapping for ransom, property destruction, and even an invasion of U.S. Territory by “Pancho” Villa, who raided Columbus, New Mexico in March 1916.

The U.S. responded to Pancho Villa’s raid on Columbus, New Mexico in 1916 by mobilizing the National Guard. Troops were soon patrolling the entire southwest border with Mexico. New U.S. military camps were established in remote areas, including one at Arivaca, just north of Ruby.⁹ (Note: Mexican soldiers, with uncertain loyalties because of the turmoil of the Mexican revolution, also patrolled their side of the border.)



*U. S. Cavalry troops were first deployed to Arivaca
in August 1916 to protect the Arizona border country.*

(Photo courtesy of *The Origin and Fortunes of Troop B*, by Col H. B. Wahrfield, 1964)

Mexican bandits were also a continuing problem along the border between Arizona and Mexico. Referring to the area south of Arivaca, the editor of the *Nogales Oasis* wrote in 1915:

“ . . conditions with the cattlemen out in that part of the country are very unsatisfactory. Petty depredations from the Mexican side of the line are frequent and almost continuous and the loss of cattle is heavy. . . estimates that within a few months, between Sasabe and Nogales at least 1,000 head of cattle have been run across the line and slaughtered.”¹⁰

On January 26, 1917, a border incident occurred at a place called Casa Piedra (Stone House), just five miles south of Ruby and 16 miles south of the new military camp at Arivaca. According to the next day’s Tucson’s *Arizona Daily Star*:

“The trouble started yesterday morning when six American cowboys rode to the line to drive back some American cattle which are reported to have been close to the line, but on the American side. When they started to drive the cattle away they were fired on by a force of twenty Mexican cavalry.”¹¹

The cowboys reportedly withdrew northward until they were reinforced by U.S. cavalymen from Arivaca. Later that day, additional troopers from the Arivaca camp were sent to reinforce the Americans. A few of the men were left at Ruby to guard the Montana mine. The Americans and Mexicans exchanged fire for the rest of the day, with no American casualties. By the next morning, the Mexicans had departed and the so-called “Battle of Ruby” was over.

The “Battle of Ruby” did not cause a major international incident, but in the Oro Blanco Mining District, according to Carol Clarke Meyer, Phil Clarke’s daughter-in-law, “hard feelings between Americans and

Mexicans were intensified by this episode.”¹²

A patrol of troopers from Arivaca remained at Casa Piedra to protect the border crossing. Another patrol was stationed a few miles north, east of Ruby, in Bear Valley to help protect the border region.

As Carol Clarke Meyer points out, it wasn't just Mexicans doing the bad deeds. Speaking of the hard lives of U.S. residents of the border area at that time, she says:

“Now and then a man would rustle a beef for his meat-hungry family, but it was a risky business. It would not do to kill a calf since the mother cow would stand and bawl for days. If the animal were too large, the meat couldn't be consumed fast enough. And always the hide and entrails had to be hidden. An old mine shaft was perfect for this. . . There were lots of mines that didn't have any ore, but they could have been mined for rawhide. It was dangerous to kill and butcher on the spot, for a cowboy could easily trail the thief to his house. The only solution was to go across the line and take a Mexican beef. This seemed to work both ways, for the Mexicans did the same.”¹³

Border problems affected everyday life in Ruby too. Just after Phil Clarke had bought the Ruby store in 1913, another storekeeper, Jasper S. Scrivener, owner of the store at Oro Blanco Camp just three miles away, was shot and killed by an unknown party or parties. As the *Tucson Daily Citizen* reported about Scrivener's murder: “As the scene of the crime is only two miles from the Mexican border, it is quite probable that the murderer has crossed. Scrivener was in his store at the time and the shooting was done through the window. He is said to have had \$1,400 in gold dust on the premises.”¹⁴ This crime was a harbinger of things to come in Ruby.

Everyone along the border was afraid and nervous during this period. Ever wary of bandits from nearby Mexico, Clarke kept loaded guns in every nook and cranny of the store.

In later years Clarke told this humorous story about a Mexican customer, illustrating the lengths that Clarke would go to protect his family and store:

“As he was leaving he spotted a rain gauge that I had recently put up. It was an old fashioned large style apparatus that stood on a big pipe. He wanted to know what on earth it was. I told him it was a new weapon that held poison gas. All I had to do was press a button in my bedroom and it would release a big spray of gas, enough to kill a whole regiment of soldiers! He was very impressed and carefully rode way around it as he left.”¹⁵

Whether or not this fanciful story had anything to do with it, as Clarke said later:

“I never did have trouble to speak of with the Mexicans because they were friends of mine. The bad element amongst them knew that I was a good shot. I was once Golden Gloves bantam weight champion of the U.S. and they had seen my fists on occasion and respected my ability.”¹⁶

The Fraser Brother Murders

Fraser Brothers' Background

Alexander J. Fraser and his younger brother John A. Fraser were born in Nova Scotia, Canada - Alexander in 1860, and John in 1863. Emigrating to the United States (Boston area) as children, they came west in the 1880's and began a long mining career together in Colorado, including Cripple Creek, Boulder, Creed, Breckenridge, and the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. The brothers' search for gold in Colorado continued through the 1880's, the 1890's, and into the first few years of the 20th century. For John Fraser, the only interruption was a several-month solo exploration of the Alaskan Klondike in 1898.

The Fraser brothers came to the Oro Blanco Mining District (OBMD) in 1903. Their activities, as they attempted to earn a decent living by mining in the OBMD, are a study in perseverance. In 1904, Alexander Fraser located eight contiguous mines, listed in the records as Alamo Nos. 1-8, but referred to by the Frasers as Los Alamos. Los Alamos was about four miles southwest of the Montana mine, on the western edge of the Oro Blanco Mountains and the OBMD. Los Alamos was to be the center of the Fraser brothers mining life in the OBMD for the next 16 years. But, with Los Alamos largely unproductive over that period, the brothers had to seek other mining jobs in the OBMD in order to earn enough money to support themselves.

John Fraser married Ines Chinn, 17 years his junior, in 1904 and it is from John's letters to Ines that we can follow the mining history of the Fraser brothers in the OBMD.¹⁷ In 1904/05, the brothers were officers in a new company attempting to operate the Old Glory gold mine, about two miles south of Ruby. Frustrated with lack of success at both Los Alamos and the Old Glory, the Fraser brothers made short exploration trips outside Arizona's OBMD in 1909-1911 to the Nevada gold fields of Pioneer, Rhyolyte, Ventura, and Nevada Camp. Unsuccessful in Nevada too, the brothers returned to Arizona and the OBMD and began looking at mining properties across the border in northern Mexico. In 1914-1919, while still hopeful of the eventual success of Los Alamos, the Fraser brothers at various times did mining work in the OBMD for the (old) Oro Blanco, the Tres Amigos, the El Oro, and the Austerlitz mines. In 1916 and 1917, mining engineer Alexander Fraser helped develop and check out the new milling operation of the Goldfield Consolidated Mining Company, which was about to begin serious mining of lead and zinc at the Montana mine. By this time naturalized citizens of the United States, the brothers' efforts to develop a productive mine in Mexico were curtailed in 1917 by the shooting incident at Casa Piedra and subsequent restrictions of cross-border traffic by the U. S. military.



*Alexander Fraser, in white shirt and tie, poses with miners at one of the Fraser brothers mines. Circa 1917.
(Photo from Fraser family private collection)*

John Fraser's wife Ines, alternated periods of difficult life in the mining camps with her husband with frequent stays in San Diego, California, with their growing family. Years later, Ines would write about the Alamos camp in a letter to her children, "I was the only resident white female, in all the years I spent there, and had no overnight visitors for years! . . . picture the isolation, the quiet, the often waterless camp . . . We walked five miles for the mail, often waiting till nearly sundown to avoid the heat, and coming home by moonlight . . ." ¹⁸

While Ines was in San Diego, John's loving letters to her were full of optimistic projections of mining success and hopes for the future. Unfortunately these hopes and dreams were never realized. Fraser's letters also show how lonely he was, without his wife for months at a time, how frustrating his various attempts to make a success were, and how difficult conditions were in his crude mining camp accommodations.

By mid 1919, the Fraser brothers, now both in their fifties, were ready to give up, declare themselves cured of gold fever, and move out of the area. But a new opportunity was about to present itself, one that would change their lives, in fact end their lives. Phil Clarke, owner of the Ruby general store, was looking to sell the store so he could devote full time to raising cattle.

Fraser's Acquisition of the Store

For the last six months of 1919, Alexander and John Fraser thought about buying Ruby's general store from Phil Clarke. The brothers had spent 16 years in the district trying to earn a living by mining, but had never achieved any real success. They were looking for something more profitable and much more dependable. They thought that running the successful Ruby general store might be the answer.



John and Ines Fraser, with daughter Daphne, visiting the Andrews at Ruby in 1911.
(Photo from Fraser family private collection)

John Fraser's letters to his wife Ines, in San Diego awaiting the birth of their fourth child, reveal the difficulties in coming to terms with Clarke. In September 1919, frustrated with not getting the truth from Clarke about the

business, Fraser wrote that “I have given up the store idea . . .” But a few days later, he wrote of Clarke, “A good deal could be made with him if one had the money to back an offer. . . . Clarke gave every indication of being both eager and willing to accept any reasonable offer.”

In a September 15th letter, Fraser noted that the Casa Piedra trooper patrol, stationed just south of Ruby on the border with Mexico, had been shifted to another location. He viewed this positively, since it eased his border crossings to visit his mining interests in Mexico. At the time he did not fully appreciate the protection value that the troopers provided for Ruby.

In December 1919, after unsuccessfully trying to interest Ines’ brother in coming in on the deal, John and Alexander agreed to go ahead on their own. From San Diego, where John Fraser had gone to attend the birth of his child, he wrote his sister Annie, “We are about to take over the Montana store at Ruby, which has a pretty good business . . .”

Returning to the Oro Blanco Mining District in January, 1920, after the birth of his daughter Constance in San Diego on November 19, 1919, John Fraser moved quickly to close the deal with Clarke. Though the final papers had not yet been signed, by mid January, the Clarkes had moved out of the store and John and Alexander had moved in, and had begun to operate the place.



*John and Ines Fraser’s older children, Richard and Daphne,
pose with troopers of the 10th Cavalry in 1919.
(Photo from Fraser family private collection)*

In a January 23rd letter to Ines, still in San Diego, Fraser wrote: “The Mexicans say the border is open to them now. . . . The patrol is being taken away from Bear Valley today.”

So the two closest patrols of protective troops had been removed from the Ruby area just as the Fraser brothers completed their deal to take over the Ruby mercantile.

The brothers closed the deal with Clarke on February 16. A first payment of \$765 was due on April 1st, a payment John Fraser hoped to make from the store's profits. Recognizing that money would be tight for a while, he wrote his wife concerning her financial needs in San Diego, "I guess dear heart, you will have to draw on your savings deposits for a while."

So the Fraser brothers were launched on their new career. By February 23, the Frasers' own letterhead appeared on the Ruby mercantile stationary. They had purchased Clarke's goods and had ordered their own first shipment of new goods. Cash received from sales, and money to make change, were kept in a safe in the store.¹⁹

According to his letters to Ines, John Fraser was planting vegetables and flowers around the store and residence, and was happily planning for the day in the near future when his family would join him in Ruby.



By the time the Frasers took over in early 1920, the Ruby mercantile included a Post Office and an ice house.

(Photo from Tallia Pfrimmer Cahoon private collection)

The Robbery and Murders

But on February 27, 1920, only 11 days after completing the deal on the store, Alexander and John Fraser were robbed and brutally murdered by Mexican bandits.

Note: What happened at the Ruby store on February 27 was reported by every newspaper within a hundred miles, and even further by AP wire. The story was sensationalized beyond reason and conflicting accounts were the rule. The authors have chosen to present Phil Clarke's account, written years after the incident. Clarke's telling of the story will be supplemented by the account of Oliver Parmer, the Arizona Ranger in the Oro Blanco Mining District at the time, who helped investigate the murders. These accounts of the murders are consistent with the facts as the authors understand them.

As Phil Clarke related the events of that tragic day:

“On the morning [Friday] of February 27 . . . Alex opened the store as usual. While he busied himself arranging the shelves, two Mexicans entered with pistols in their hand. John, who was in the back room washing the breakfast dishes heard the door of the store open and close, then a shot that was almost immediately followed by the ring of the cash register. Although I had cautioned them repeatedly and thoroughly about keeping guns in every room (they had taken my advice and placed a shot-gun or rifle in several corners), John rushed into the store without a gun. He saw a man he knew as Lara standing over the body of his brother with a pistol still smoking in his hand. Lara seized John and forced him to open the safe. After he and his accomplice, Garcia, also known to the Frasers, cleaned out the safe, Lara shot John in the eye. John fell unconscious to the floor. The Mexicans took what else they could carry and started off for the border.

Later, Jose Cuesta of Ruby entered the store and found that Alex was dead but that John still lived. He rushed for the Justice of Peace, [John] Maloney. I was also notified. John regained consciousness and identified the murderers [Mexicans Ezequiel Lara and Manuel Garcia]. John was taken to Nogales where he died [Monday morning].

I went with the soldiers after the Mexicans but when we got to the border the officer in charge refused to cross. Next morning we formed a posse with blood hounds that Frank Bailey, the Chief of Police in Tucson had brought. The bandits were so certain that they were safe the first night that they found their camp only a quarter of a mile from the line. The posse followed them so closely that they found their second camp fire still warm. Unfortunately, the Mexicans gave them the slip in the rough country.”²⁰

Arizona Ranger Parmer, at the scene of the murders soon after the crime, provided additional details on Alexander and John Fraser’s wounds:

“Although we were prepared for the sight of death, we were appalled at the grisly scene within the post office. Alexander was dead. A bullet had entered his back, coursing to the front, and a second had penetrated his head. This unquestionably had cause instant death. John had been shot through the left eye and the bullet had passed through his skull. He was alive, but . . .”²¹

Parmer went on to say about the crime:

“Gunplay was not uncommon in Arizona where, due perhaps to the lingering spirit of the Old West, men often faced each other and shot it out. But this was different. Alexander Fraser had been shot in the back in cold blood . . .”²²

Phil Clarke’s wife, Gypsy, added her perspective to the crime aftermath:

“ . . . Almost at once, the stage arrived and it was sent back to Arivaca, 12 miles away, with the alarm. . . . Before five o’clock, the . . . doctor arrived from Arivaca and shortly thereafter a troop of the 10th Cavalry came. John Fraser explained everything to the smallest detail. . . ”²³

The posse that was formed the day after the murders to search the border country included Chief Bailey and his hounds from Tucson and Nogales Sheriff Raymond Earhart. Chief Bailey reported that “approximately \$200 in cash and \$300 in merchandise was taken” by the bandits.²⁴

Early on Saturday morning (February 28th), from Nogales, where John Fraser had been taken to the hospital, Sheriff Raymond Earhart sent this telegram to Ines Fraser in San Diego:

1920 FEB 28 AM 9 01

ALEXANDER SHOT AND KILLED YOUR HUSBAND
SHOT BUT BELIEVE HE WILL RECOVER AS HE IS RESTING
EASY

Later that day, two more telegrams²⁵ were sent from the hospital to Ines:

1920 FEB 28 AM 10 28

YOUR HUSBAND HERE IN HOSPITAL HE REQUESTS YOU
COME AT ONCE RUBY STORE ROBBED HE WAS WOUNDED

1920 FEB 28 PM 2 12

CONDITION SERIOUS LEAVE SATURDAY TAKE STAGE
TUCSON FOR NOGALES

Ines Fraser arrived at the hospital in Nogales on Monday afternoon (March 1st) to find that her husband had died earlier that morning.

Alexander and John Fraser were buried in Nogales on March 6, the bodies having been held awaiting the arrival of the brothers’ sister Annie from Boston.

On March 12, Ines and Annie “went over to Ruby to look out for the property interests” of the Fraser brothers.²⁶ The mines brought no money, they just weren’t worth anything at that time.²⁷ Ines turned the problem of what to do about the store over to Phil Clarke and on March 19, she departed for her home in San Diego.²⁸

Ranger Parmer later summed up the tragedy:

“As to the characters of the Fraser brothers, I learned much from Justice Maloney and others whom I questioned later. They had lived in Ruby for number of years, were unobtrusive, well liked, and had no known enemies. They were especially kind to the Mexicans . . . often extending them credit for food. Seldom, indeed, had a crime seemed more cold blooded.”²⁹

The Fate of the Murderers

Arizona Ranger Parmer reported the initial results of the search for the murderers of the Fraser brothers: “In the months that followed, the investigation went on with [Nogales] Sheriff Earhart flooding the country with circulars describing the post office killings. Many suspects were rounded up by able officers, but no charges were made.”³⁰

On March 28, Mexican authorities stated that both Garcia and Lara were wanted in Mexico for crimes committed in Mexico.³¹

In October, there was a break in the manhunt. Garcia was spotted and put under surveillance for several days after officers learned that he had re-crossed the international border from Mexico. Garcia was tracked to the ranch of a Mexican, named Bojorques, two miles west of Twin Buttes (about 20 miles southwest of Tucson).

On October 12, 1920, Deputy Sheriffs George McLure and George Holloway were assigned to make the arrest. The *Tucson Citizen* reported what happened:

“They arrived at the ranch about eight o’clock and found the man they wanted in the corral.

Garcia submitted quietly but asked permission to go into the small adobe shack and change his trousers.

He went in ahead of McLure who was more or less blinded by the darkness of the house and did not see that Garcia darted for the bed and drew from the pillow a heavy revolver until Garcia whirled and fired point blank at McLure, who was close by his side. After he fired he struck McLure down with the butt of the gun.

George Holloway was in the house at the sound of the shot with his hand on his revolver ready to draw. As he ran in the Mexican met him with the butt of his revolver. He struck Holloway on the shoulder as Holloway instinctively ducked. As he struck the revolver bounced out of the Mexican’s hand and he grasped Holloway by both arms to prevent him from drawing. Together they wrestled over the body of McLure, who recovering raised on his elbow. Holloway shouted to him to shoot and then, believing he was getting the better of it told him not to shoot. Finally Holloway got hold of the Mexican by the topknot and putting all his strength, yanked him forward. The Mexican released Holloway’s gun arm and backed away his head down. He jerked loose and staggered back. As he did so, both McLure and Holloway fired. One bullet hit him on each side the chest and he fell dead.”

McLure . . . was wounded seriously, the bullet going in his right side, through his intestines and almost exiting in the region of the spine . . .”³²

For a few days it was feared that Deputy McLure would not survive the shootout. But, McLure did indeed recover. Two weeks after the incident he answered a letter of concern from Ines Fraser:

“I received your appreciated letter this morning and will say that I am very

near recover only a little weak. . . I am very glad that Garcia has run his race and will bother no one else. To say that he was cruel puts it mildly.³³

You may rest assured that if Lara is heard of in this country that the sheriff's office here will do all in its power to capture or kill him. . .”³⁴

Ezequiel Lara never did come back to the United States, at least not long enough to be caught. On September 2, 1921, the Tucson's *Arizona Star* printed a September 1st report from Nogales:

“Ezequiel Lara, alleged to have been one of the two bandits who crossed the border from Mexico and murdered the two Fraser brothers at Ruby on February 27, 1920, is in prison at Hermosillo, Sonora [about 170 miles south of the border] according to word brought here today by Thomas Cummings, a rancher of Sonora. Cummings, who was a candidate for sheriff of Santa Cruz county last year, said that Lara was convicted and sentenced to prison for killing a Chinaman at Ures, Sonora. He said he saw Lara being taken to prison four days ago by Mexican soldiers.”³⁵

So Ezequiel Lara was being imprisoned in Mexico at just about the same time that the new proprietors of the Ruby store, Mr. and Mrs. Frank Pearson, were being murdered by Mexican bandits - on August 26, 1921. Though he was not put away for the murders of the Fraser brothers, Lara's imprisonment in Mexico effectively ended the Fraser brothers crime saga. But another, even more brutal crime was taking place at the same Ruby mercantile.

The Pearson Murders

Pearsons' Background

Frank and Myrtle Pearson came to Ruby in 1920. In an oral interview conducted in 1994, their daughter Margaret recalled why they came to Ruby, “. . . [when] my father heard about an opening in the post office and store there together in Ruby. The Fraser brothers had been murdered there, so the place was up for new owners and a brand new postmaster.”³⁶

Joseph Frank Pearson and Myrtle Vela Pearson (maiden name Purcell) were Texans, from small towns near San Antonio. Their families were farmers, with cotton the main product most of the time. According to their daughter Margaret, Frank developed tuberculosis as a young man and moved to a ranch in New Mexico “to be healed,” working there as a cowboy. Myrtle “had gone to college. She was a very studious, very elegant, fastidious lady,” who became a teacher. After a long courtship, Frank convinced Myrtle to marry him and join him “on a ranch out of Carrizosa, New Mexico.” Their daughter Margaret was born on June 9, 1917.

In 1918, the Pearson family moved to Bisbee, where Frank worked for a while in the mines and Myrtle kept a rooming house for miners.

According to the *Nogales Herald*, just before “going to Ruby, the Pearson family resided at Arivaca, where Mrs. Pearson taught school.”³⁷

Pearsons' Acquisition of Store

Within a month of the murder of the Fraser brothers, Frank Pearson approached Phil Clarke about buying the store. Clarke would recall later, “I was not anxious to turn the store over to anyone after what had happened. I tried to dissuade him, but he was determined to buy. His arguments made sense too. As he pointed out, my wife and I, and the Andrews before us, had lived through the worst period of that part of the country, it certainly wasn’t likely that lightning would strike twice.”³⁸ As the Pearson’s daughter Margaret recalled, “. . . my father was a very religious man and I just assume that he thought nothing bad could happen to us.”³⁹

The same March 20, 1920 newspaper article that reported that Ines Fraser had returned to San Diego after settling her husband’s affairs in Ruby, also reported that the store had been purchased from the Frasers’ estate by Frank Pearson, the purchase having been arranged by Phil Clarke.⁴⁰ So the Pearsons quickly took over and moved in. The store had been completely cleaned, painted, and restocked.⁴¹

In addition to helping her husband in the store, Myrtle Pearson taught in the little one-room school, which was just down the hill from the store. When the Pearsons bought the Ruby store, Margaret Pearson was a few months short of three years old.

As did the Clarkes and Fraser brothers, the Pearsons lived in the back rooms of the store building. Margaret recalled, “. . . it’s sort of on a hillside . . . The store and post office were on the lower level, and then you went up steps all under one roof, and then our living quarters were on the upper level. As I remember, there were a couple of bedrooms and we had running water, which is unusual in those years – in the twenties. And we had a phone . . .”

The Robbery and Murders

On August 26, 1921, barely 18 months since the murder of Alexander and John Fraser, lightning did strike again. Seven Mexican bandits robbed the Ruby store and killed Frank Pearson and Myrtle Pearson.

Note: As with the Fraser murders, newspaper accounts of the Pearson murders were numerous and conflicting with respect to facts. But in this instance, we have an account of an eye-witness, then four year old Margaret Pearson, daughter of Frank and Myrtle Pearson. This account was not available to the public until 73 years after the crime. Other primary sources to flesh out the overall record include Frank Pearson’s sister’s account and the account of Arizona Ranger Oliver Parmer, who helped investigate this crime, as he did the murder of the Fraser brothers. As for the reporting on the Fraser murders, these accounts of the Pearson murders are consistent with the facts as the authors understand them from all available sources.

The murder of Mr. and Mrs. Frank Pearson triggered a series of almost unbelievable events.

Date	Event
Aug. 26, 1921	Seven Mexican bandits kill Mr. and Mrs. Frank Pearson, wound Miss Elizabeth Purcell. Leaders of bandits are Manual Martinez and Placido Silvas .
Sept. 9, 1921	Silvas taken into custody
Dec. 15-24, 1921	Silvas first trial; mistrial declared.
Dec. 24, 1921	Martinez (caught in Mexico); deported to United States. Martinez confesses and names all seven Pearson bandits, including himself and Silvas .
May 15-18, 1922	Martinez trial; convicted of murder, sentenced to hang Aug. 18, 1922.
May 19 - July 12, 1922	Silvas second trial (Mr. Pearson) and third trial (Mrs. Pearson); convicted w/ life sentence for Mr. Pearson; mistrial on Mrs. Pearson.
July 13, 1922	Sheriff George White and Deputy Leonard A. Smith killed in car crash outside Tucson while transporting Silvas and Martinez from Nogales to Florence prison. Both prisoners escape.
July 18, 1922	Silvas and Martinez recaptured by Sheriff Harry Saxon about 2 ½ miles southwest of Amado.
Aug. 10, 1923	Martinez hanged at Florence prison after several delays.
Dec. 3, 1928	Silvas escapes – never caught. Other five bandits never apprehended.

As Margaret Pearson recalled:

“ . . . There were two aunts visiting there, my mother’s sister Elizabeth [Purcell], whom they call Lizzie or Gigie, and she was 24 [22], and my father’s sister, Irene Pearson, who was 16 [17] . They had come up from Texas to visit.

[At just after 11:00 am] Well we were all up in the house part, and . . . my dad was down in the post office. My mother and I were in the kitchen, and I was up on a kitchen chair getting a drink of water, and we heard shots down in the store. She just left me and ran. ‘Frank, Frank!’, and ran down the stairs. I jumped down off the chair, and I ran and I looked, and I still don’t know what I saw. It’s a black curtain.

Everything else I remember with detail but my mind has never let me accept what I saw. I have heard later . . . that they knocked out my mother’s gold teeth with a rifle butt. . . I turned and ran and one of the men came up out of the store and started chasing me. We had a screen porch along the side of the house and I was running down that porch which was an outside entrance , and I fell spread eagled. I can remember his spurs, his chaps, his boots, as he was chasing me. For some reason when I fell, he turned around and went back, I don’t know where. The younger aunt, Irene, had been in a bedroom, and she saw me and she came and got me very quickly, and we went out to a bunkhouse. . . We hid in the bunkhouse.

While we were doing that, . . . one of the men went into the bedroom where she (Gigie) was, and he pulled out his gun and shot at her, and she . . . I remember hearing her tell this . . . hand on her forehead . . . in fear – and this is a real miracle, he aimed at her head, and the bullet slanted up and wounded her hand. Blood gushed – she fainted, I guess, from fear – and he thought he had killed her, so he left her. She came to very shortly, I think, and then she ran out to the bunkhouse. We left the bunkhouse and went up in the hills . . . I still remember Gigie had a blue and white check dress, and it was stained with blood.

So, I don’t know how much time had passed, but we went back down, and there was a crowd there by then. . . [It was] my understanding that he [father] was in the post office, and then my mother ran down, and that my dad had died shooting. And as he was dying, of course he wasn’t aiming, and there was a circle of where the bullets had gone, because he was trying to save my mother.”⁴²

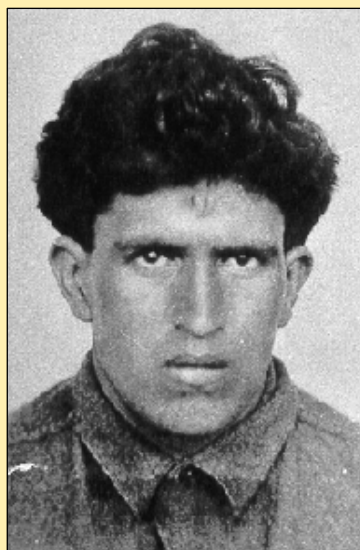
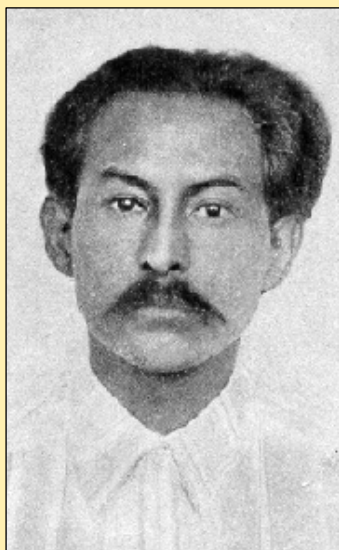
Arizona Ranger Oliver Parmer arrived at the scene of the crime that evening with Santa Cruz County Sheriff George White. Later, he described the scene:

“Chairs were overturned in the store, drawers were pulled out, papers scattered, the safe rifled, blood spattered on the floor, and boxes, bottles and canned goods strewn about. Pearson lay behind the counter in a pool of blood with two bullets in his back – stiff in death. His wife’s lifeless body lay sprawled on the floor. Her skull was fractured, a bullet had entered her left temple and come out at the back of the head. Her jaw was broken her lips horribly mashed and lacerated. Many of her teeth had

been knocked out, but they were not on the premises. . .”⁴³

According to Irene Pearson’s account, the bandits cut “the safe open with an old double edge hatchet, taking all the money [unknown amount] it contained, and carrying away Pearson’s two rifles, and his revolver. . .” The robbers also reportedly took 24 pairs of shoes, calico undershirts, tobacco, other clothing, groceries, and unknown mail from the post office. Irene Pearson went on to say that “three bandits did the shooting, while four remained on the outside. Prior to the shooting the bandits had cut the telephone wires . . . so help could not be summoned.”⁴⁴

Phil Clarke recalled that, as the bandits left the store and headed for the border, a local woman named Doña Paz identified Placido Silvas and Manuel Martinez as two of the seven bandit murderers.⁴⁵ Placido Silvas was well known in the area; indeed he had been born in the U.S. and was included in the 1900 U.S. census as a two-month old resident of the village of Oro Blanco, just five miles from the Ruby.⁴⁶ Silvas lived in Arivaca at the time of the crime. Manuel Martinez was not an American citizen, having been born in Saric, Sonora, Mexico in 1894. It turned out that both Martinez and Silvas had worked in southern Arizona for years before the murders of the Pearsons.



Manuel Martinez and Placido Silvas were immediately identified as two of the seven Pearson murderers.
(Photos courtesy *Startling Detective Adventures*, March, 1936)

Later, official court records would relate how the brutal murders unfolded;

“Manuel Martinez, and four of his comrades left Saric, Sonora, Mexico about August 24, 1921, arrived a few miles below Ruby, Arizona on the 25th and Manuel Martinez proceeded to scout the country and by personal visits to the Ruby store and post office ascertained that few, if any, men were in the neighborhood at that time. The party was increased to seven and they advanced on the post office about 11:00 A.M. [Friday] August 26, 1921, taking the trail up the cañon. From a point about 200 yards from the store, three bandits proceeded to the store. . .”⁴⁷

After the murders, Irene Pearson, Elizabeth Purcell, and the young child Margaret Pearson were taken to Nogales. Late in that sad day of Friday, August 26th, Irene Pearson wired the bad news to her father J. W. Pearson at Liberty Hill Texas. Myrtle Pearson's brother, W. M. Purcell, of San Marcos, Texas, was also notified. He responded, "advising to have the bodies embalmed, and that he was leaving immediately for Nogales."⁴⁸

The bodies of the dead couple were also taken to Nogales, arriving late Saturday night, after being delayed several hours by almost impassable roads made tortuous by recent heavy rains. After the family from Texas had gathered in Nogales, on September 3rd, the bodies of Frank and Myrtle Pearson started on their final journey to Liberty Hill, Texas for burial.⁴⁹ Irene, Elizabeth, and Margaret accompanied the bodies.⁵⁰

Meanwhile, a massive manhunt for the murdering bandits was underway. Santa Cruz County Sheriff White formed a posse and pursued the bandits toward the border. Mexican military forces were alerted and looking for the robbers. The U.S. State Department officially asked the Mexican government for help in the search and to issue warrants for the fugitives. Because there was potential theft of U.S. mail, a Federal Inspector from the Post Office was dispatched to Ruby to investigate the crime. The U.S. War Department ordered permanent protection for Ruby and vicinity by a detachment of soldiers from Camp Stephen D. Little at Nogales.⁵¹

But there were no positive results right away. Ranger Parmer described the search for the murdering bandits:

"During the following weeks all the hectic madness and frantic energy of the Old Frontier were present. Days in the saddle and nights beneath the stars were the order of the day. Cars were of practically no value in the search. The country was too difficult and there were few roads. Poses rode over the parched desert and into the cool reaches of the mountain passes searching, searching. An airplane was chartered from the army post at Nogales to fly over the district in an attempt to get sight of the bandits. It was the first airplane ever used in Arizona for a manhunt. A reward of \$5,000 dead or alive was posted for each of the murderous outlaws."⁵²

Silvas and Martinez Capture and Trials

On September 6, 1921, the *Bisbee Daily Review* reported that Mexican soldiers had located the Pearson crime bandits in Mexico and had driven them back across the international border into Arizona. Sheriff George White and a posse of local men left Nogales immediately for the border country near Ruby. It is not clear that his arrest resulted from this action, but it was later reported that Placido Silvas was taken into custody, three days after the posse had left Nogales, on September 9th.⁵³

Placido Silvas went on trial in Superior Court, Nogales, for the murders of Mr. and Mrs. Pearson, on December 15, 1921. In the next few days, three local women from Ruby identified Silvas as one of the participants of the robbery and murder. Irene Pearson "declared that Silvas was the second of three men to enter her brother's store . . . and Silvas fired at her brother." The case went to the jury late on the morning of December 24th.⁵⁴

Later that Christmas Eve, with the Silvas jury still deliberating, dramatic word came that Manuel "Martinez was arrested at Saric, Sonora, four days ago and deported on orders of [Mexican] President [Alvaro] Obregon, on the grounds that he was an undesirable citizen. . . [After having been arrested at the border by Sheriff White] Martinez made a complete confession in County Attorney A. H. DeRiemer's office at 4 o'clock this afternoon . . . He named as members to the gang of bandits who raided the Pearson store and post office – Placido Silvas, . . . and himself. . . He said that the bandits were in the store about one hour and a half or two hours, after the

Pearsons were killed, and that they got about \$130 in the robbery . . . ”⁵⁵

Somehow the Silvas trial jury got word of these events while deliberating Silvas’ fate. Believing that this new information (just rumors at the time) might contaminate the Silvas jury deliberations, the judge ordered a mistrial. The next day the *Tucson Citizen* reported how the Silvas trial ended:

“On receiving word of the confession [Martinez’], Judge W. A. O’Connor discharged the jurors and ordered Silvas held for a later trial. The jury informed the court that a deadlock had been reached and that 10 men voted on conviction while two held out for acquittal.”⁵⁶

Four and a half months later, on May 16, 1922, Manuel Martinez, alleged to have been the leader of the gang, went on trial for the murders of the Pearsons. The same damaging eye-witness accounts that had been presented to the Silvas jury the previous December were presented to the Martinez jury. The trial took only three days.

On May 18, 1922, the *Tucson Citizen* reported on the result of the trial of Manuel Martinez:

“After being out but a few minutes this afternoon, the jury in the case of Manuel Martinez, charged with murder in connection with the killings of Postmaster and Mrs. J. Frank Pearson at Ruby last August, returned a verdict of guilty in the first degree and fixed the penalty at death.”⁵⁷

Martinez’ execution was set for August 18, 1922 at the state prison in Florence, Arizona.

The very next day, on May 19, 1922, Placido Silvas’ second trial for the murder of the Pearsons got underway in the same Nogales Superior Court. Silvas was to be tried first for the murder of Frank Pearson, and then he would be tried for the murder of Myrtle Pearson. It has been speculated that this was a prosecution strategy to maximize the chances that Silvas would receive the death penalty. Though the authors do not yet have the detailed records to prove it, we believe that the first trial ended with a verdict of guilty and a sentence of life imprisonment. The second trial apparently did not go so well for the prosecution. On July 12th, after 30 ½ hours of deliberation, the jury reported themselves hopelessly deadlocked at 11 for conviction, 1 for acquittal. Regretfully, the judge discharged the jury from further consideration of the case.

Afterwards, juror Hugo Miller expressed the frustration of the jurors voting for conviction (and added some weight to the authors’ Silvas-multiple-trial theory):

“ . . . one jury had already convicted Silvas of the murder of Postmaster Pearson at Ruby on the same evidence presented in this case, recommending a sentence of life imprisonment, which had been imposed, while another jury, upon the same evidence, had convicted Martinez of murdering Mr. Pearson, fixing a death penalty, which had been pronounced. Now, that in another trial of Silvas for murder of Postmaster Pearson’s wife, if one juror could nullify the verdicts of 35 other jurors and upon the same evidence. Juror Miller suggested it high time to change the law regulating procedure in murder trials, impanel juries of 14 and have courts accept verdicts agreed to by 12 jurors.”⁵⁸

Silvas/Martinez Escape and Recapture

At 5:00 pm the next day, July 13, 1922, Nogales County Sheriff George White and Deputy L. A. Smith left Nogales by automobile with passengers Placido Silvas and Manuel Martinez. They were taking Silvas and Martinez to the State Prison in Florence so that their sentences could be carried out. They had tire trouble in Tubac and had to call Nogales for another car to be sent to them. In the substitute car, with Sheriff White driving, they resumed the trip at high speed, apparently to make up the time they had lost in Tubac. As Deputy Smith told it later, about 18 miles south of Tucson, near the town of Continental, “the car traveling at a high rate of speed, struck a sand wash. Swerving from side to side of the road . . . the car finally completely left control of the sheriff and was overturned in a deep ditch bordering the highway.”⁵⁹

Sheriff White was killed instantly in the wreck and Deputy Smith, in the front seat with White, sustained serious injuries. Silvas and Martinez, who had been riding in the rear seat handcuffed together, survived the crash with no serious injuries and escaped into the Arizona desert.

Southern Arizona’s law enforcement community responded immediately. By the next day, July 14, several posses had been formed, with elements from Tucson and Cochise County. Arizona’s Governor ordered the Superintendent of the State Penitentiary in Florence to join the search. Soldiers from Camp Stephen D. Little in Nogales were sent to Arivaca to broaden the law enforcement net and search an area where both escapees had once lived.

Footprints were found near the crash site and generally tracked towards the south. The footprints indicated that Silvas and Martinez were probably still handcuffed together, the prints being only a few feet apart. Bloodhounds were added to the posses. As time went on, and the murderers remained at large, more and more men were stationed at strategic border crossings to the south, hoping to intercept Silvas and Martinez.



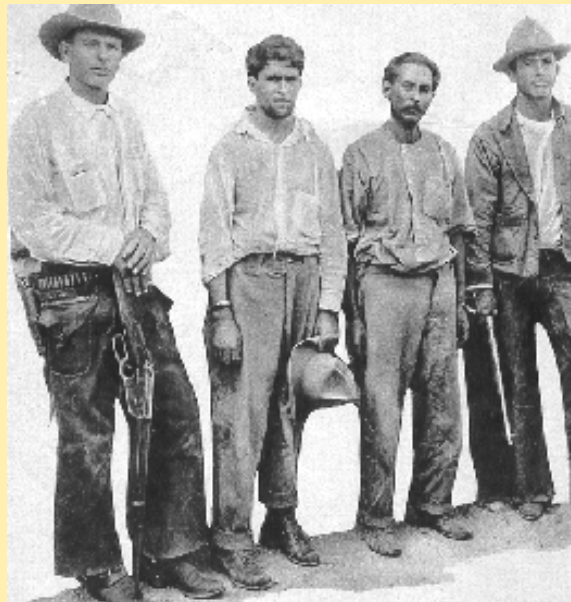
*Over 200 men pursued the escaped murderers, Silvas and Martinez, after they escaped during transport to the prison in Florence.
(Photo courtesy Arizona Police, April, 1950)*

On July 16, newly appointed Santa Cruz County Sheriff, Harry Saxon, formed a posse from Nogales. By now the posses numbered over 200 men, one of the largest manhunts in Arizona history. A vast encircling human net was tightening on Silvas and Martinez.

On July 17th, Deputy Smith died from the injuries he suffered in the car accident.

Finally, on July 18th, shortly before noon, the convicted murderers were recaptured by the posse headed by Sheriff Saxon. Silvas and Martinez were found, weak and exhausted, hiding among the rocks, about two and half miles southwest of Amado. Neither had eaten for four days. They traveled by night, and hid during the daylight hours. They had managed to travel only about 12 miles from the crash site in a southwesterly direction, with the safe haven of the international border still 20 plus miles distant.⁶⁰

The prisoners were returned to Nogales, but only for a couple of days. On July 20, 1922, Nogales County Sheriff Saxon delivered Silvas and Martinez to the prison in Florence without incident.⁶¹



Placido Silvas and Manuel Martinez after their recapture.
Left to right: Deputy Sheriff R. Q. Leatherman, Silvas, Martinez, Sheriff Saxon.
(Photo courtesy *Startling Detective Adventures*, March, 1936)

Martinez Hanging

Manuel Martinez was originally scheduled to be executed by hanging on August 18, 1922. But he was granted a stay of execution by the attorney general for a possible state supreme court review of the case. The supreme court dismissed the appeal and the Santa Cruz County court reset the date of hanging for May 25, 1923.

But the fight to save Manuel Martinez from the gallows was not over. The *Arizona Republican* reported that [the fight] “was one of the most bitter and determined ever waged in Arizona and assumed an international aspect as a result of formal intervention of the Mexican government.”⁶²

Mexican President Obregon made a plea for a commutation of Martinez’s sentence to life imprisonment. However, the State Board of Pardons and Paroles refused to recommend executive clemency.

The final step in the effort to save Martinez was reported by the *Arizona Republican*:

“Twelve hours before the time set for execution [on May 25th], attorneys representing the Mexican consul appeared before Judge Stephen H. Abbey in Pinal County Superior Court, who granted a writ of habeas corpus on legal technicalities on the allegation that Martinez was to be executed without due process of law. Before the hour when the writ was made returnable, the Supreme Court intervened, quashed the writ, and declared that Pinal County was in error. Meanwhile the date set for the execution had passed and the Santa Cruz court, again taking jurisdiction, set the date for the hanging a third time for August 10.”⁶³

So, on August 10, 1923, Manuel Martinez was hanged at the Florence Penitentiary for the murders of Frank and Myrtle Pearson.

The *Arizona Republican* described the scene and Martinez’ final minutes:

“Shortly after 5 o’clock, Warden Sims led those who were to be spectators to the death house, where 16 men previous to Martinez have been executed. The small room was crowded by the circle of men which formed about the trap door . . . The hangman’s rope, with the noose already tied swung in its wrapping paper from the low ceiling.”

Martinez was then brought to the death house:

“Those in the crowded room made way for the prisoner, who glanced around the room . . . spied the rope which was suspended from the ceiling, and took his position immediately beneath it. Then he glanced downward to his feet, noticed that they were not in the exact center of the trap door, and then shifted his position.”

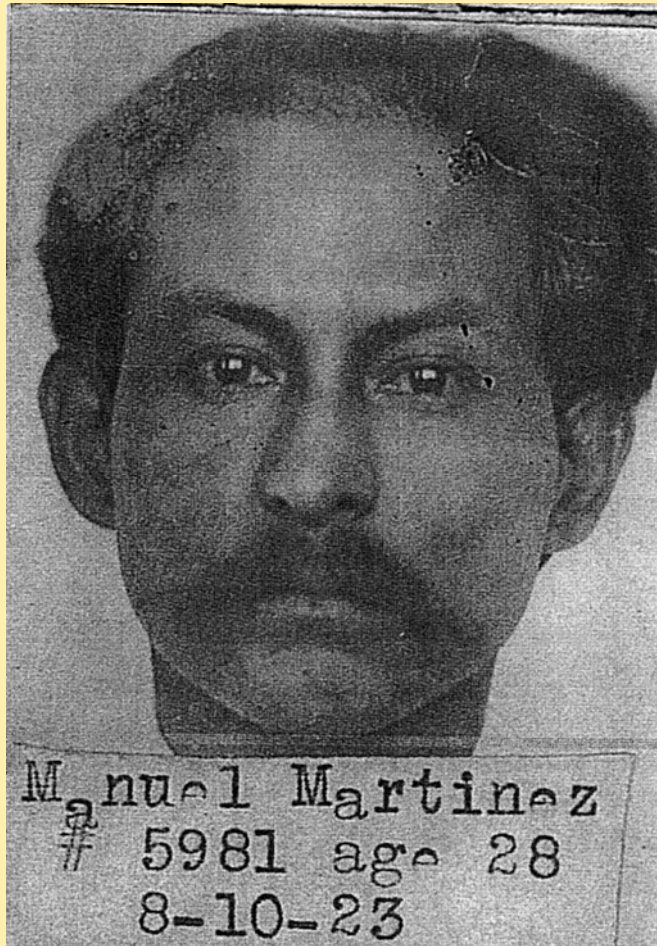
In his final remarks, just before a black cap was placed over his head, Martinez calmly, and clearly denied that he had participated in murdering or in the looting, declaring that he had accompanied the bandit gang on the raid because he was threatened with death if he refused.

“I am dying with a clear conscience. I am not afraid to go. But Placido Silvas has no right to be in this prison. I once said he was one of those who made the raid. He was not. He knew nothing about it.”

Then, with everything in readiness:

“Suddenly, at 5:24 a.m., the signal came. The trap door dropped with a loud clatter, and Martinez dangles, unconscious, with neck broken and without a struggle. Eleven minutes later he was cut cut down and his body carried to a pine board coffin which waited in a prison passageway not more than 15 feet from where he had died.”

Martinez’ body was not claimed by his family, a wife and three children, living in poverty in a small Mexican agricultural community below Nogales. So Martinez was buried in the prison cemetery.



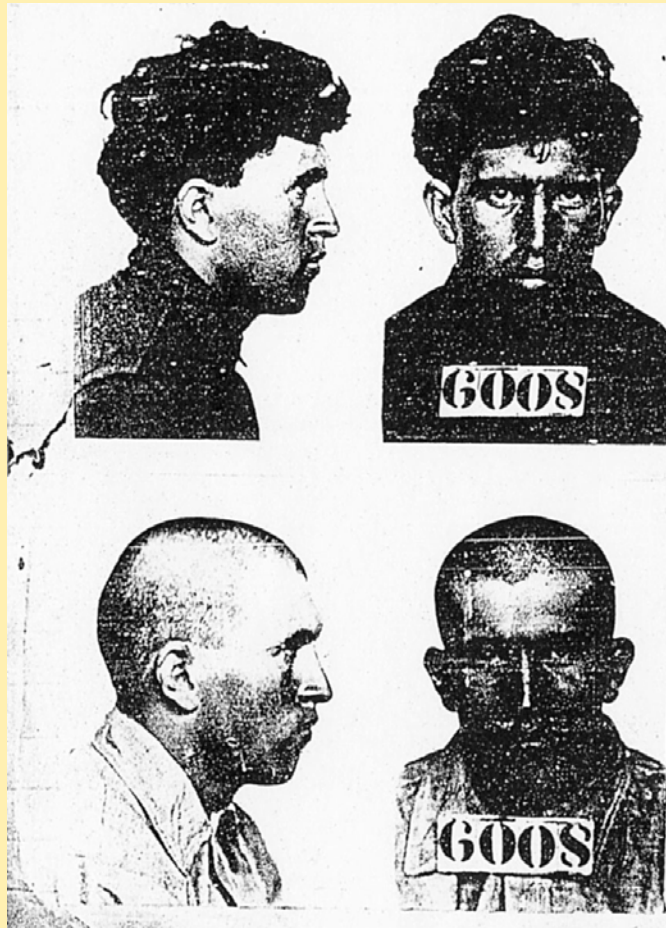
Manuel Martinez was hanged for the murders of Frank and Myrtle Pearson on August 10, 1923.
(Photo courtesy Arizona State Department of Corrections, 1922)

Silvas' Final Escape

Meanwhile Placido Silvas had started his life term in the Florence prison. According to prison records, by February 10, 1926, Silvas had earned a position of "trusty" at the prison. On December 13, 1927, as noted on his record, he was "Returned to yard, off Trusty List." But on January 3, 1928, it was noted that Silvas was an "Outside Trusty." And on April 27, 1928 a note on his record reads, "Trusty to New Ranch." The final note on Silvas' prison record reads: December 3, 1928 Escaped from Ranch."⁶⁴

Twenty one years later, in answer to a question about Silvas' fate from author Roscoe G. Wilson, then Florence Penitentiary warden Lon S. Walters, Jr., wrote:

"Though various attempts were subsequently made to find this escaped convict and leads were sent in now and then, he was never apprehended and is still on escape."⁶⁵



Placido Silvas escaped from a State Penitentiary work ranch
on December 3, 1928 and was never recaptured.
(Photo courtesy Arizona State Department of Corrections, 1922)

Placido Silvas remained at large and was never seen again. The other five members of the gang, that robbed the Ruby mercantile and killed Mr. and Mrs. Pearson, were never apprehended.

Epilog / Arizona Connections

The Fraser Family

Ines Fraser returned to San Diego after her husband's affairs were settled in the Oro Blanco Mining District. The Pearsons had bought the Ruby mercantile. The mining properties brought no money. Ines started teaching at the Montessori School, a primary school, and eventually got into teaching children with learning disabilities. She lived with her daughter Jean for a while, a long time with her daughter Constance, then moved to El Paso to be with her sister Mary. Ines Fraser died in August 1970.

Constance Fraser, born just 2 ½ months before her father's murder, grew up in San Diego with Ines, her sisters and brother. She married George Austin Kiely in 1942 and had three sons. Her husband was in the Air Force and moved around quite a bit. Constance came to Arizona in the late 1960's and resides today in central Arizona.

The Pearson Family

By prior agreement within the family, Elizabeth Purcell, Myrtle Pearson's sister was to care for Myrtle's daughter, Margaret, should anything happen to the Pearsons. When Elizabeth came back from Texas to Nogales to testify at the trials of Silvas and Martinez, she was offered a teaching job in Patagonia, Arizona by one of the trial jurors, who happened to be on the town's school board. So Elizabeth and Margaret went to Patagonia, where Elizabeth raised Margaret. Elizabeth married Woody Gatlin in Patagonia and had two sons.

Margaret attended Patagonia High School and later was a student at Tempe Teachers College (now Arizona State University). She began a long career as a teacher, finishing up in Nogales in 1976. Margaret married William H. Anderson in 1937, and had two sons and a daughter. Mrs. Anderson resides today in south central Arizona.

Following her testimony at the Silvas and Martinez trials in Nogales, Irene Pearson returned to Texas, with no known subsequent connection to Arizona.

The Ruby Mercantile

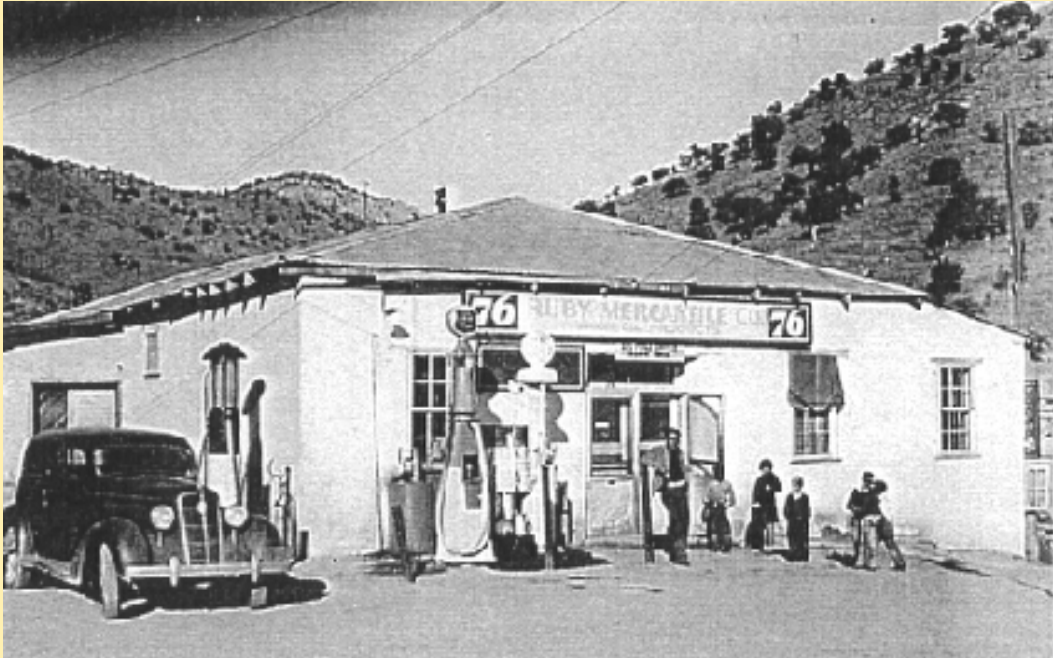
After the Pearson murders, in December 1921, a man named B. H. Worthington bought the Ruby mercantile. But he was not successful and by March of the following year he had left the area.

Little is known about the store from that time until 1926, when the Eagle-Picher Company of Joplin, Missouri bought the Montana mine and gradually started large-scale production of lead and zinc. Ruby became a "company town," with Eagle-Picher installing managers for the mercantile and other local businesses in the growing community.

A few things were added to the Ruby mercantile in the years following the Fraser and Pearson murders. Gasoline pumps were installed outside the store to fuel the growing number of automobiles in the area. Electricity, self generated in the mining camp, became more available, and made possible electric lights, refrigeration, and other electric appliances inside the store itself. The foundations, underneath the overhanging porch, were filled in, and access doors installed to provide additional storage room.

Ruby survived as a mining camp until 1940 when the ore gave out and the Montana mine was closed. Ruby's

most infamous building, the mercantile, survived right along with the camp, providing merchandise to the bustling camp of almost 1,200 people that Ruby became during the Montana mine's lead and zinc mining heyday in the mid to late 1930's.



*The Mercantile provided goods for 1,200 people in Ruby's mining heyday in the 1930's.
(Photo courtesy Startling Detective Adventures, March, 1936)*

Today, more than 80 years since the Fraser and Pearson murders, Ruby is a ghost town. But the Ruby mercantile is one of about a dozen adobe buildings still standing.



*The Ruby mercantile survives today, 80 plus years after
the murders of the Frasers and the Pearsons.
(Photo by Bob Ring, 2000)*

Fact and Myth

The authors have tried to “lay out the facts” of the truly remarkable story of the two double murders in the Ruby mercantile. The first challenge was to determine what the facts were. For example, newspaper reports of the terrible crimes and their immediate aftermath turned out to be contradictory and often unreliable. Another challenge was to separate one source’s “facts” from another’s sensational exploitation or myths. That’s why, as much as possible, we selected (in our opinion) credible sources to build the major thread of the story and selectively supplemented these sources with other accounts to help draw the complete picture. We end with two conclusions: 1) We are confident that we have captured the basic facts of the story, and 2) We believe that there are additional facts to uncover, e.g., how Placido Silvas was captured and the court records of his three trials.

NOTES

1. For the early history of the Montana mine, events prior to 1912, see Bob Ring, "Montana Camp: Gold and Silver Mining at the Montana Mine in the Arizona Territory Borderland," Paper presented at the New Mexico – Arizona Joint History Convention, Las Cruces, New Mexico, April 12, 2002. A copy of the paper is available at the Arizona Historical Society, Tucson, Arizona.
2. For the history of the Montana mine, from 1912 to the present, see Al Ring, "Ruby: The Montana Mine Becomes the Largest Producer of Lead and Zinc in the State of Arizona," Paper presented at the New Mexico – Arizona Joint History Convention, Las Cruces, New Mexico, April 12, 2002. For a description of life in Ruby during its lead and zinc mining heyday, see Tallia Pfrimmer Cahoon, "Ruby: From its Heyday in the 1930's to Ghost Town," Paper presented at the New Mexico – Arizona Joint History Convention, Las Cruces, New Mexico, April 12, 2002. Copies of both papers are available at the Arizona Historical Society, Tucson, Arizona.
3. Phil Clarke was both a remarkable man, and a faithful chronicler of the important events of his life. His written personal recollections are a key resource for this paper. See, Phil Clarke, "Recollections of Life in Arivaca and Ruby, 1906-1926," MS990, Arizona Historical Society, Tucson, Arizona.
4. This may have been the third general store built in Ruby. In the late 1880's, George Cheyney, the early developer of the Montana mine, built the first store. This store was operated in turn by Cheyney, Louis Zeckendorf (and others for short times), and finally Julius Andrews, starting in 1893. Oral histories, from Ruby residents in the 1930's suggest that Andrews built a second store; the original store then became a residence. After Clarke built his "expanded" third store, the second store was abandoned and later burned down, with only the foundation remaining.
5. *The Oasis* (Nogales, September 18, 1915).
6. The authors have recently uncovered new information on the operation of the Montana mine during this period by George Wingfield's Goldfield Consolidated Mining Company. See the George Wingfield Collection, MS2403, State of Nevada Department of Cultural Affairs, Nevada Historical Society, Reno, Nevada.
7. *Arizona State Business Directory* (Denver, Colorado, The Gazetteer Publishing & Printing Company, 1917-1922).
8. For a summary of U.S.-Mexico border incidents, see US Army Center for Military History, http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/ops/mexican_expedition.htm.
9. For a good summary of National Guard operations in Arivaca, see Mary Noon Kasulaitis' three articles in *The Connection* (Arivaca, January, February, and March, 1998).
10. *The Oasis* (Nogales, September 18, 1915).
11. *Arizona Daily Star* (Tucson, January 27, 1917).
12. Carol Clarke Meyer, "The Rise and Fall of Ruby," *The Journal of Arizona History* (Tucson: The Arizona Historical Society, 1974), p. 17.
13. Meyer, "The Rise and Fall of Ruby," p. 13.

14. *Tucson Daily Citizen* (Tucson, March 7, 1914).
15. Phil Clarke's Recollections.
16. Phil Clarke's Recollections.
17. Fraser family records, including many letters from John A. Fraser to his wife Ines, are the source of much of the detail about the Fraser brothers in this paper. Author Al Ring retains a copy of these records, including all the letters. (Note: There is comparatively little background data available from Alexander Fraser's side of the family. We do know that Alexander was married as a young man and had a daughter, May, in 1886. But there are no references to Alexander's wife or daughter in the 16-years of correspondence between John and Ines Fraser, when the brothers were working together in southern Arizona.)
18. Fraser family records. Letter from Ines Fraser to her grandchildren Claudia and Bruce, November 25, 1969.
19. Several other general stores in the Oro Blanco Mining District used tokens for trade, instead of cash, trying to reduce the risk of robbery. This was the practice at such nearby camps as Oro Blanco, Franco American, and Tres Amigos. See Hal Burt, Jr., "Arizona Mining Camp Tokens," *History of Mining in Arizona, Vol. II*, J. Michael Canty, Michael N. Greeley, ed., (Tucson, Arizona: American Institute of Mining Engineering, 1991), pp. 141-162. The Ruby mercantile, as the Montana camp store before it, did not use tokens, although later in the 1930's, the mercantile would use paper scrip.
20. Phil Clarke's Recollections.
21. Oliver Parmer and Kathleen O'Donnell, "How We Trapped the Deadly Border Bandits," *Startling Detective Adventures, Vol. XVI, No. 92* (Louisville, Kentucky: Country Press, Inc., March 1936), p. 15.
22. Parmer, "How We Trapped the Deadly Border Bandits," p. 15.
23. Gypsy Clarke, Letter to her brother Bruce Harper in Texas, March 3, 1920. Reprinted in *Southern Arizona Trails* (Tubac, Arizona, April 10, 1990).
24. *Tucson Citizen* (Tucson, March 1, 1920).
25. Fraser family records. Copies of these telegrams and many others of condolence are retained by author Al Ring.
26. *The Oasis* (Nogales, March 13, 1920).
27. From a telephone conversation between author Al Ring and Fraser family members on October 15, 2002.
28. *The Oasis* (Nogales, March 20, 1920).
29. Parmer, "How We Trapped the Deadly Border Bandits," p. 15.
30. Parmer, "How We Trapped the Deadly Border Bandits," p. 17.
31. *Tombstone Epitaph* (Tombstone, Arizona, March 28, 1920).
32. *Tucson Citizen* (Tucson, October 11, 1920).

33. Garcia was also wanted for the murder of a bank patron during a bank robbery in Buckeye, Arizona on December 9, 1916. See *Arizona Republican* (Phoenix, Arizona, October 11, 1920).
34. Fraser family records. Letter from George McLure to Ines Fraser, October 24, 1920. Author Al Ring retains a copy.
35. *Arizona Star* (Tucson, September 2, 1921).
36. Margaret Pearson Anderson, Oral Interview by Betty Lane, August 25, 1994. Available at the Tubac Historical Society, Tubac, Arizona and the Arizona Historical Society, Tucson, Arizona. This fascinating interview covers Mrs. Anderson's entire life, with emphasis on the murder of her parents at the Ruby mercantile in 1921.
37. *Nogales Herald* (Nogales, August 26, 1921).
38. Phil Clarke's Recollections.
39. Margaret Pearson Anderson, Oral Interview.
40. *The Oasis* (Nogales, March 20, 1920).
41. Meyer, "The Rise and Fall of Ruby," p. 24.
42. Margaret Pearson Anderson, Oral Interview.
43. Parmer, "How We Trapped the Deadly Border Bandits," p. 18.
44. *Nogales Herald* (Nogales, August 27, 1921).
45. Phil Clarke's Recollections.
46. *Twelfth Census of the United States*, Department of Commerce, Bureau of Census. Available at Ancestry.com.
47. "Official Statement of County Attorney A. H. DeRiemer," June 10, 1922, State of Arizona; Department of Library, Archives, and Public Records; Department of Corrections, Pardons, and Paroles; Closed Files #56, 1922.
48. *Nogales Herald* (Nogales, August 27, 1921).
49. *The Bisbee Daily Review* (Bisbee, Arizona, September 2, 1921).
50. Margaret Pearson Anderson, Oral Interview.
51. For details of the manhunt to capture the Pearson murderers, see the *Tucson Citizen* (Tucson, August 29 – September 3, 1921).
52. Parmer, "How We Trapped the Deadly Border Bandits," p. 19.
53. *Arizona Star* (Tucson, June 2, 1922).

54. For more details about the Silvas trial, see the *Tucson Citizen* (Tucson, December 16-24, 1921).
55. *Nogales Herald* (Nogales, December 24, 1921).
56. *Tucson Citizen* (Tucson, December 25, 1921). In the days that followed Martinez' timely capture and deportation, there was some speculation that securing Martinez has resulted from an illegal deal between the U.S. and Mexico. The U.S. supposedly agreed to kidnap and trade prominent Mexican revolutionary, General Francisco Reyna, who had been living in the mountains north of the international border, for Martinez. Investigations into this matter were launched, but it is not clear if there is any truth to the speculation. A certain fact however, is that General Reyna was executed by a Mexican firing squad in Nogales, Sonora on December 27, 1921. See the *Tucson Citizen* (Tucson, December 27, 1921).
57. *Tucson Citizen* (Tucson, May 18, 1922).
58. *Tucson Citizen* (Tucson, July 13, 1922). Ironically, 20 years later, in the early 1940's, Hugo Miller would be the owner of the Montana mine and the Ruby mining camp. See note 2.
59. *Tucson Citizen* (Tucson, July 14, 1922).
60. For more information on the escape and recapture of Silvas and Martinez, see the *Tucson Citizen* (Tucson, July 14-19, 1922).
61. State of Arizona; Department of Library, Archives, and Public Records; Department of Corrections, Pardons, and Paroles; Prison Records, Placido Silvas (Prisoner no. 6008) and Manuel Martinez (Prisoner no. 5981).
62. *Arizona Republican* (Phoenix, Arizona, August 11, 1923).
63. *Arizona Republican* (Phoenix, Arizona, August 11, 1923). Manuel Martinez' execution was reported in virtually every southern Arizona newspaper. But, in the opinion of the authors, the *Arizona Republican* coverage was both the most detailed and eloquent of the available eyewitness reports of this event. Therefore, all quotes in this paper, related to the hanging of Manuel Martinez, are from the August 11, 1923 issue of the *Arizona Republican*.
64. State of Arizona; Department of Library, Archives, and Public Records; Department of Corrections, Pardons, and Paroles; Prison Records, Manuel Martinez (Prisoner no. 5981).
65. Letter from Lon S. Walters, Jr. to Roscoe G. Wilson, December 14, 1949. State of Arizona; Department of Library, Archives, and Public Records; Department of Corrections, Pardons, and Paroles; Prison Records, Placido Silvas (Prisoner no. 6008).