

CHARLES D. POSTON: The FATHER OF ARIZONA

by Tom Kollenborn (c) 2002

Many old timers, and even new comers, have heard about Charles D. Poston. Some are familiar with Poston Butte west of Florence and north of the Gila River along the old Hunt Highway. Many believe this was Poston's only involvement in Arizona's history.

Historians recorded Charles D. Poston as the "Father of Arizona." He indeed was the first delegate to the United States Congress from Arizona Territory in 1863.

In 1853, the Mexican government agreed to the conditions of the Gadsden Purchase and the accord was ratified in 1854 adding some 45,535 square miles of land between the Gila River and the present southern boundaries of Arizona and New Mexico to the United States. This territory included the town of Tubac.

Tubac was the oldest European settlement in Arizona, and was first garrisoned by the Spanish in 1752. The Spanish Presidio of Tubac is located thirty-eight miles south of Tucson along the Santa Cruz River.

Charles Debrille Poston arrived in San Francisco in 1850 at age 25. He was employed as a clerk in a customhouse for a couple of years until he read about the Gadsden Purchase. Poston traveled to and explored the Santa Cruz valley area prior to the official recognition of the Gadsden Purchase Treaty. Young Poston, not quite thirty years old, left Arizona Territory for the East with hopes of raising capital to invest in new mines, workable Spanish mines and prospecting for more mineral resources. He visited New York, Philadelphia and Washington D.C., but wasn't successful in fund raising. He finally succeeded in Cincinnati, Ohio.

He organized and formed Sonora Mining and Exploring Company on March 24, 1856. He was the agent for the company which had capital of two million dollars. The Texas and Pacific Railroad Company contributed a grant for \$100,000.

Colonel Charles D. Poston organized an expedition of around 350 men, primarily made up of miners. These men had mining equipment, arms and supplies to settle the frontier. The expedition left Texas in May of 1856 and arrived in Tucson in August of 1856. Poston eventually made his headquarters at Tubac.

His mining expedition attracted men from Sonora and soon almost a thousand people were living in the Tubac area. Poston recorded in his diary; "We had no law but love, and no occupation but labor, no government, no taxes, no public debt, and no politics."

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Charles Poston was the *alcalde* at Tubac. He was the law under the rules and regulations that governed the Territory of New Mexico at the time. He served as mayor, judge, town treasurer, and the justice of peace. He was legally authorized to execute criminals or declare war, but spent most of his time keeping official records, performing marriages, granting divorces, and etc. He also had the power to print and issue paper currency that was a substitute for bulky and heavy silver bullion.

Poston and Tubac prospered until the beginning of the American Civil War. Poston escaped to California when the Army withdrew and the Apaches went on the rampage. He eventually made his way to Washington, D.C., where he led the fight to gain separate territorial status for Arizona. This was accomplished in 1863 and Poston was rightfully given the title of "Father of Arizona."

Poston returned to Arizona Territory as the first Superintendent of Indian Affairs. He served as the first delegate to Congress from the Territory of Arizona. He also served as the Registrar of the Federal Land Office in Florence, Arizona. While in Florence he built a road to the top of Primrose Hill (Poston Butte) and received a deed to the land in 1883 from James Addison Reavis, the "Baron of Arizona". He believed Reavis to be the legal holder of the so-called Peralta Grant. Poston practiced law in Washington, D.C., and wrote books and worked as a newspaper correspondent. He also traveled extensively and had few peers as a lecturer.

He became involved in mining once again in 1893. The *Arizona Republican*, dated April 25, 1893, stated Colonel Poston was about to leave on a trip to his mining claims in the Superstition Mountains. Poston spent a couple of years working around the Superstition Mountain and Goldfield area.

At age 68, Poston was still promoting a mining operation and trying to raise capital. It is interesting to know that Charles Poston, the "Father of Arizona" was here in our community some one hundred and nine years ago.

He gave one of his last lectures in Phoenix in 1899 at the age of seventy-four. It was titled "How I Spent Christmas." He recounted his personal celebrations of Christmas with people like Mark Twain, Joaquin Miller, Garibaldi and other European royalty. However, he said his best Christmas was in Tubac in 1856.

Charles Debrille Poston was born in Kentucky in 1825, and died in Phoenix alone and in abject poverty amid scenes of squalor on June 2, 1902. Around 1899 the Territory of Arizona presented him with a late "recognition of his services" with a small pension. He never completed his "Temple to the Sun" on Primrose Hill near Florence, but he was later entombed there for all eternity. Poston's remains were removed from Phoenix and moved to Poston Butte in 1925, the 100th anniversary of his birth. James McClintock, Governor George P. Hunt, and other prominent Arizona pioneers were supportive of Poston's burial on Primrose Hill.



Charles D. Poston, 1825-1902, known as the “Father of Arizona”.
Photo- Az Pioneers Hist Soc.



Poston's Butte, the final resting place of
located near Florence, Az. Photo by Linda Barnett.