

JAMESE BARK

By Tom Kollenborn © 2003

James E. Bark was a very popular figure in the Salt River Valley around the turn of the 20th century. Bark dabbled in cattle, mining, politics, and story-telling. He was a hard working and well-respected businessman on the Arizona frontier.

James Bark was born in New York about 1860. He worked as an apprentice printer in Philadelphia, but traveled westward to seek his fortune. According to his good friend, Sims Ely, author of the *Lost Dutchman Mine*, he arrived in Arizona Territory in 1879. Other accounts claim he arrived in 1885.

When Ely met him in 1891, Bark was president of the Arizona Cattle Growers Association and well established in the territory. Ely described James Bark as a six-footer, weighting about one hundred and seventy-five pounds, rather prominent gray eyes, brown hair, and built like an athlete. He was articulate, flamboyant, determined and diplomatic in most cases. Ely considered Bark a very persuasive and tactful individual when it came to business or politics. He also considered Bark a superb storyteller and legend builder.

Sims Ely's description of James E. Bark is one of the best available. Ely for the most part eulogized Bark and his life, but there is much more about Bark's life than Sims Ely's writings. Periodicals of the period support Ely's description of Bark's personality in most cases. But, according to Ely, Bark spent most of his life searching for the Lost Dutchman Mine. This could be true, but documents and periodicals do not support this.

James Bark was buying, selling and shipping cattle as early as 1885. He probably purchased his first ranch out near Liberty, west of Phoenix, sometime around 1888. Sam F. Webb sold Bark 175 head of cattle on December 25, 1889. Bark had a working partner at the time by the name of Frank Criswell. Bark was articulate and tactful so it wasn't difficult for him to make good business deals with different people.

Bark made a trip to Camp Creek as a tourist in July of 1890. Most of his trips always had some kind of business attached to them. On April 27, 1892, James Bark and Frank Criswell purchased another ranch and moved more cattle from the valley. Bark attended the World's Fair in 1892. He wanted to learn more about railroad refrigeration. Refrigeration was changing the way the beef industry handled cattle, and Bark could see the handwriting on the wall. If he and Criswell didn't change their methods they would loose a lot of money. One method for him and Criswell to compete was to open their own butcher shops in populated areas of the territory and bring the herds to the people.

Politics always had an interest for Bark. He knew people liked him and he was careful not to alienate friends or foes alike. He decided in October of 1892 to take his first shot at politics. He ran for Maricopa County Supervisor on the Republican ticket and was defeated the Democratic candidate.

Between October 1892 and October 1893, local periodicals reported Bark coming from and going to his various cattle ranges. The most often reported was his Superstition range. Bark always reported on the condition of cattle and the range, and around April 1894, the newspapers picked up on one of Bark's mining interests located in the area of Four Peaks.

Bark had journeyed up the Salt River with a mining partner named Ward. He inspected the property Ward was talking about and decided it was worth an investment. This turned out to be the mining claims in Alder Creek across the Salt River in what was later to become known as the Volcanic Mining District. In August of the same year Bark was reported as being the most popular young Republican in the valley. It was said he was intelligent, articulate and wealthy.

Throughout the year of 1894 Bark spent time at both his mine and on his cattle ranges. He was a friend to several valley pioneers. He made a trip to Florence with W.A. Kimball on October 10, 1894. A man by the name of Metcalf accompanied Bark on a mining expedition on October 13, 1894. He could have gone to his Salt River claims or the Superstitions.

Bark went into the Superstitions on an extensive prospecting expedition around the end of November and did not return until December 7, 1894. There is no mention as to whether or not he searched for the Lost Dutchman Mine. It was at this time he was quite friendly with W.A. Kimball, who was informed about the story of the Lost Dutchman Mine.

Bark brought 500 head of cattle into town the middle of May 1895. He and Criswell were still doing well with their cattle raising partnership. Bark once again returned to his rich mine up the Salt River on February 15, 1896. On March 4, 1896, Bark and Ed Metcalf were down from the claims on the Salt River. John Montgomery was reported interested in the property. On March 3, 1896, Bark returned to his claims on the Salt River. Throughout the spring months and into the summer months Bark continued to make trips to his Salt River claims.

On August 19, 1896, James E. Bark announced he was running for Sheriff of Maricopa County on the Republican ticket. After his announcement he returned to his mines on the Salt River. He continued the development of these claims and eventually found a Chicago capitalist by the name of F.W. Thompson who invested \$10,000 in his venture on the Salt River. Bark spent a lot of time at his claims in the Volcanic Mining District. The ford near the Crabtree Ranch provided a safe crossing of the Salt River when it was not flooding. John Spangler, Bark's nephew, once said Bark made a considerable amount of money off his claims in the Volcanic Mining District. Bark arrived home on Christmas day in 1896 after spending a couple of weeks at the claims.

The newspaper of the day called Bark "the cattle king of the upper Salt River and a rich miner." This was not necessarily true, but periodicals of the period had a tendency to exaggerate. Bark, returning from his claims on July 7, 1897, brought news to town about the struggle to save a miner trapped beneath the ground at the Mammoth Mine. James Stevens, the lucky miner, was rescued after thirteen days underground on July 17, 1897. In late August of 1897 Bark traveled to California looking for more investments.

James Bark bought the Triangle F Ranch near Superstition Mountain on December 31, 1897. From the first months of January 1898 to September of 1898 periodicals only occasionally mentioned Bark and his cattle enterprise. Then on September 9, 1898, he put his hat in the political ring again and said he would run for Sheriff of Maricopa County on the Republican ticket. At the time Bark was a very popular young man in the "Valley." On October 3, 1898, James E. Bark officially announced his candidacy for Sheriff of Maricopa County.

On November 11, 1898, James E. Bark was once again defeated in his political endeavor, losing to Sheriff D.L. Murray. Bark filed suit over the election on December 17, 1898, but Murray was declared the winner on December 30, 1898. Bark was discouraged by yet another lost to the Democrats, but the Democratic Party in Maricopa County out numbered Republicans by five to one.

With the election behind him, Bark began his spring roundup on his Superstition range May 5, 1899. He continued to prospect the Superstition Mountains with his friend Sims Ely, and was searching a rugged portion of Superstition Mountain when he found an olla filled with several hundred arrow heads. Throughout most of 1899 Jim Bark worked his cattle range in the Superstitions and little was heard about the mining claims up the Salt River. When Bark first arrived at the Alder Creek placer site with Ward there was a little gold. Bark, with the help of Ed Metcalf, was able to get Chicago capitalist F. W. Thompson to invest money in his claims. The claims never produced any large quantity of gold. Bark and Ward may have taken a few ounces of pay dirt out of the area.

By 1900 Bark's cattle empire was doing very well. He decided to go to Nome, Alaska, in April of 1900 and try his luck searching for gold. While in Alaska his partner Frank Criswell bought out the large Lamb Brother's Ranch near Superstition Mountain. Bark and Criswell now controlled more than 400 sections of desert lands in and around Superstition Mountain. Bark returned from Alaska on September 9, 1900, again without any prospective mining venture in hand. While in Alaska he did look into shipping cattle to the territory. Goldman, Bark and Criswell shipped a trainload of cattle to Alaska on February 1, 1901.

After this big cattle sale and the operation of his interest for nine months, Bark decided to make a trip back East. John Spangler said his Uncle Jim Bark was quite a traveler and business was usually his excuse, but he enjoyed his trips. Between June and August of 1901 Bark did a lot of hunting. He loved to hunt White-wing Doves.

Jim Bark could never give up his prospecting and mining blood. It was in September of 1902, Bark got involved in another mining deal with Ed Jones. They claimed to have found a rich deposit of manganese.

Bark ran for Sheriff of Maricopa County again in 1902, but again lost his bid for elected office. At the time Bark was Committee Chairman of the Republican Party and accused Theodore Olea, Democratic Voting Registrar for Maricopa County, of registering voters who where not legal residents. The man who had been contested in this action turned out to be Diego Castanedo. But, as it turned out, the Republican Voting Registrar, R.M. Rice, had registered Diego Castanedo. Bark had no case, and he was too embarrassed to report to Judge Gray's courtroom.

Judge Gray deemed Bark's charges as purely political. Carl Hayden and Seth Beyers made bond for Theodore Olea until the hearing.

About a month later, Bark married Lena Frances Sears. He was forty-two years old. On December 19, 1902, the Phoenix Elks Club held a big party for Bark congratulating him on his marriage. Bark spent the summer in Long Beach, California, with his new wife and away from the heat of the Salt River Valley. Bark lived between California and Arizona for the next year or so.

James Bark was elected vice-president of the Arizona Cattle Growers Association on January 9, 1904. The spring rains were so poor, Bark and Gibson were burning cactus throughout their ranges around the Superstition Mountains so their cattle could survive.

Bark returned to territorial politics in October of 1904. He placed his name on the Republican ticket for Territorial Councilmen on October 8, 1904. Bark was elected to his first political position in November of 1904 when he became the Maricopa County Territorial Councilmen in the 23rd Arizona Territorial Legislature.

Bark traveled to Denver, Colorado, as the President of the Arizona Cattle Grower's Association on February 1, 1906. He and Criswell sold their Superstition Mountain ranching interest to William A. Barkley and Stewart in 1907. By the end of February 1908, Bark was in Arizona Territory buying butcher shops in Mayer and Humbolt with Perry Sears. Bark also opened a real estate business with Judge J.M. Burnett in 1908. There was no question at this point in his life he was diversifying his business interest. He was forty-eight years old and thinking about the future. By 1915, Bark had sold most of his Arizona business interest to his partner Frank Criswell and was residing most of the time in Long Beach with his wife Leona. The couple moved to Pasadena, California in 1928.

James E. Bark returned to Arizona on several occasions with his nephew, John Spangler, and they searched the Superstition Mountains for the Lost Dutchman Mine that he believed existed. On December 9, 1936, at the University of Arizona, James Bark gave a talk on the Lost Dutchman Mine for the Arizona Historical Society in Tucson. He was seventy-six years old.

Bark returned to Arizona on December 14, 1937, and visited with his friends William A. and Gertrude Barkley. John Spangler, his nephew, had planned on making a trip into the mountains to search for the Lost Dutchman Mine. Barkley didn't think old "Uncle Jim" was able to make such a trip and it never became reality. However, the *Arizona Republican* reported an old timer was returning to the Superstitions to once more search for the Lost Dutchman Mine.

This was James E. Bark last visit to the old Quarter Circle W and Bark Ranch in Pinal County. This Arizona pioneer, cattlemen, businessmen, politician and storyteller passed away in Pasadena, California on November 8, 1938.

The public life of James E. Bark is quite well documented. He was known to dabble in mining and prospecting. He also was known to search for the Lost Dutchman Mine. He was certainly a contemporary of Jacob Waltz. He apparently ran cattle in the Superstitions during the time Jacob Waltz was alive and living with Julia Thomas. Did he know Jacob Waltz? John Spangler said, "Why yes, Jim Bark knew Jacob Waltz quite well. He often stopped at his ranch in Pinal County south of Superstition Mountain." Some called it the old "Board Ranch."

The next logical question would be, did Jim Bark ever see Waltz with any high-grade gold ore? Spangler never really answered this question.

Historians favor the thesis that Bark was just a great storyteller and people loved to listen to him. He certainly embellished on the story of the Lost Dutchman Mine and his audience loved the way he told the story.



The 3R Ranch near Apache Junction



Superstition Range cowboys, circa 1930



Trailing cattler on the open range.



James A. Bark



Looking east from the Quarter Circle U Ranch, circa 1950