

THE BARON OF ARIZONA

By Tom Kollenborn (c) 1999

One of Arizona's most infamous characters was a man named James Addison Reavis, a man of dubious character and background and one of the great land fraud schemers of the 19th Century. His claim on 18,500 square miles of Arizona and New Mexico territory as part of an ancient Spanish land grant led to him being dubbed the "Baron of Arizona."

James Addison Reavis was born on May 10, 1843, in Henry County not far from Clinton, Missouri. He served as a soldier in the Confederate Army, enlisting in Hunter's Eighth Division of the Missouri State Guard. While in the army he perfected his genius as a forger.

Reavis became disillusioned with the Confederate Army and soon recognized the fact they were losing the war. Near the end of the Civil War he enlisted in an U.S. Army regiment. He tried using his forgery skills and was caught. Reavis fled to Brazil and South America in late 1865.

Reavis' mother Maria was part Spanish and probably taught him the language. It was his knowledge of Spanish, reading and writing, which allowed him the opportunity to forge Spanish documents in both Spain and Mexico that would later lead to the bogus Peralta Land Grant.

Reavis arrived in Arizona Territory in 1880, making claims he owned a large part of Arizona and New Mexico territory that included Phoenix, Tucson and Mesilla. He collected rent and tribute from railroads, ranches, farms, and mines for about eleven years. Many of the Arizona pioneers preferred to pay his extortion rather than fight him in court, and he amassed a fortune from the rentals.

Finally, the United States District Court challenged Reavis' claims. The case had been on the docket since February 1, 1893, in the U.S. Land Claims Court, but still had not gone to court even by February 1, 1895. Reavis had collected money from the Southern Pacific for right-of-way and from various mines in the Arizona Territory. Reavis lost the case in the U.S. District Land

Claims Court and was soon indicted in a criminal court.

His criminal trial began on June 27, 1896. He was convicted and sentenced to two years in prison for trying to defraud the United States Government. He served his time in the Santa Fe Penitentiary and was released early for exemplary conduct on April 19, 1898.

Reavis died from bronchitis at the age of seventy-one in Denver, Colorado on November 20, 1914.

James Addison Reavis was related to two other well known Arizona pioneers. One was Federal District Judge Isham Reavis and the other was Elisha Marcus Reavis, better known as the "Hermit of Superstition Mountain."

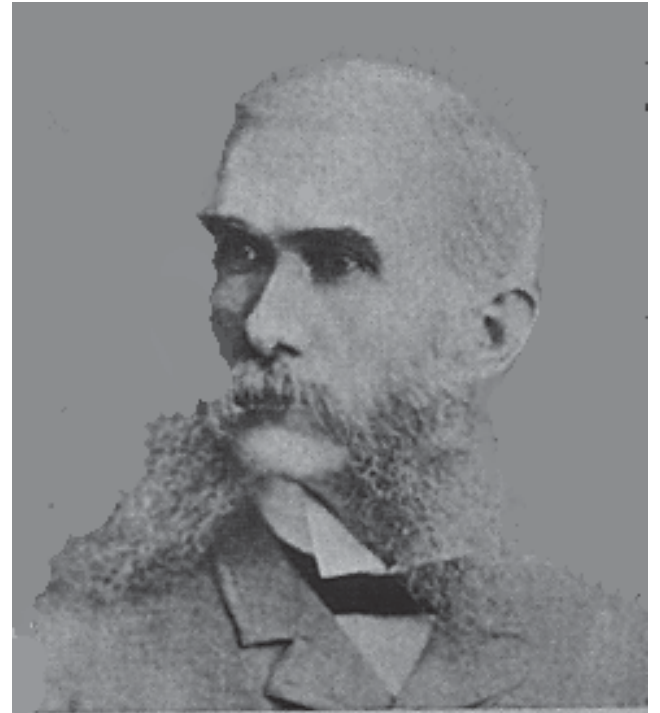
What we call the Superstition Wilderness Area today was part of the Peralta Land Grant (1880-1895), and James Addison Reavis claimed all mineral wealth within his land grant territory this included the Superstition Mountain area.

Reavis was known for creating stone markers to verify his claim on lands within the boundary of the Peralta Land Grant. There are some who believe the infamous Peralta Stone maps were one of Reavis' initial set of marker stones that were never placed properly by his henchmen. The reason behind this belief is that Reavis needed to provide proof his land was surveyed by the Spanish court. Could the stone maps placed near Black Point have belonged to the Reavis, the infamous "Baron of Arizona"? If so, why didn't Reavis use them to prove the authenticity of his claim?

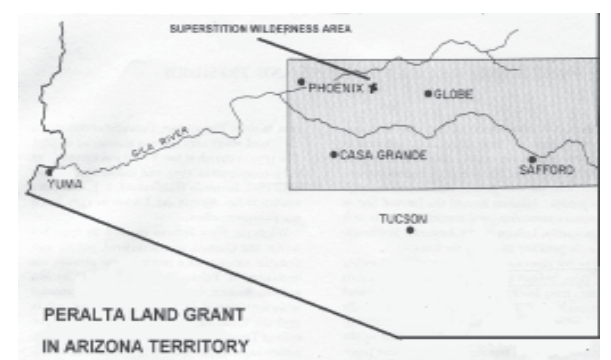
The Peralta Stone maps are the work of a true artist in stone. The inscriptions are clear and crisp for the most part. Everything about the stone maps points to careful planning and preparation.

Like the "Baron of Arizona", the Peralta stone maps are another enigma of Arizona pioneer culture.

If you are interested in this topic read *The Baron of Arizona* by E.H. Cookridge, John Day Company, N.Y., N.Y., 1967.



James Addison Reavis 1843-1914



Could this have been one of Reavis' marker?

QC July 30, 2001

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