

## OUR FRIEND DON DONNELLY

by Tom Kollenborn

No individual in my lifetime has personified Marion Morrison as much as Don Donnelly. Yes, for those of you who didn't know Marion Morrison, he was John Wayne.

Don was a big man with an enormously big heart which he extended to his fellow man. He had a special place in his heart for children and reached out to help others. Don was loved for his caring disposition.

Harold Christ introduced me to Don when he first arrived in Apache Junction in 1980. Don looked me in the eye and said, "Tell me friend, what do these mountains mean to you?"

He accomplished two things that first day that I held dear to my heart. I hadn't known Don Donnelly more than five minutes when he addressed me as "friend". He followed that by inquiring about what the mountains meant to me, rather than how much I knew about it. He was a true cowboy diplomat with wonderful tact. I never forgot that first meeting.

Our trails crossed at Chamber of Commerce meetings, at the wilderness trailheads, in different camps and on the trails for the next twenty years. Often we visited about the Superstition Mountains, its legends and lure. Don was a lot like Will Rogers; he never met a man he didn't like if given half a chance, and he always had some wonderfully humorous or witty remark to make about cowboys, horses or life on the trail. It was always a pleasure to talk to Don. He always had time for a friend, visitor or even a stranger.

Don Donnelly was a nationally known cowboy and desert conservationist. The Sonoran Desert and Superstition Mountains were a part of his domain, a region he loved. Don brought to this area a special meaning to the word "cowboy". He told stories about cowboys, horses, cattle, wranglers, and dude strings. He always found some humor or mettle in cowboy stories.

I rode along with Don on one of his rides to Roger's Canyon in March of 1999. I believe it was his Crow Canyon Institute group. It was on this ride, I really got to know the Don Donnelly of Gold Canyon. He talked of his love for the desert, his love for horses and how much he loved working with his people. He certainly was a natural when it came to soothing the soul of his riders. He had the right thing to say and knew when to say it. Don rode along talking to this rider and that rider, assuring those who needed it and complementing those who were doing fine on the long trail into Roger's Canyon from the trailhead.

Don was a natural teacher with an enormous amount of patience. Don made it a point to let me know how important it was for young people to know about cowboys and the good they represented. As Don would say, "The cowboy is the good spirit of the West." I learned a lot about the man who loved his work on that two-day ride to Roger's Canyon Cliff Dwellings.

Sometime in the early 1980's, Don and I rode across Bluff Springs Mountain. He was overwhelmed by the beauty of the Superstitions. On this occasion we talked about the old characters of the area. Don absorbed the history of the area and carried it on to others. He became an exceptional storyteller of cowboy tales and stories about Superstition Mountain.

Don and Shelly Donnelly moved down from Estes Park, Colorado, to Gold Canyon in 1980. Harold Christ, General Manager of Dinomount Corporation, believed a stable would add a lot to the Gold Canyon area. Christ eventually recruited Donnelly to move here and open the Gold Canyon Stables that eventually became the Don Donnelly Stables at Gold Canyon. Don enjoyed horses, animals, the outdoors, and meeting people. His business certainly suited his life style.

His comments and demeanor will be remembered for a long time. His comments like, "Our mission is to be the best neighbor anybody has ever had," or "We want to be the best riding stable in the Southwest," attest to his method of conducting business. He and his business were wonderful assets to our community.

Our community lost a great friend when Don passed away on December 27, 1999, from a heart attack at the age of 54. Yes, Don Donnelly is part of the history, legend and lore of Superstition Mountain and will be remembered for his contribution to the area.

## FROM THE S.S. GERONIMO TO THE DOLLY

by Tom Kollenborn (c) 2000

Often we ask ourselves, what is there in a name? “Geronimo” was a common term used by airborne divisions as they jumped from aircraft during World War II. The term was accepted to mean a total defiance to danger and the origin of the name was the Apache Chief Geronimo.

He led his band of warriors against the United States Army from 1867-1886. Geronimo was outnumbered twenty to one and eventually surrendered to the Army at Skeleton Canyon in 1886, ending hostilities and creating a legacy.

The infamous Chirichuaha Apache war chief “Geronimo” has lent his name to many landmarks in Arizona. The name appears on landmarks in the Superstition Mountain area, including Geronimo Head and Geronimo Cave. Near the base of Superstition Mountain a street is named Geronimo.

The construction of the Mormon Flats Dam between 1923-1925 led to yet another interesting use of Geronimo’s name when the first tour boat used on Canyon Lake was named the S.S. Geronimo in 1925.

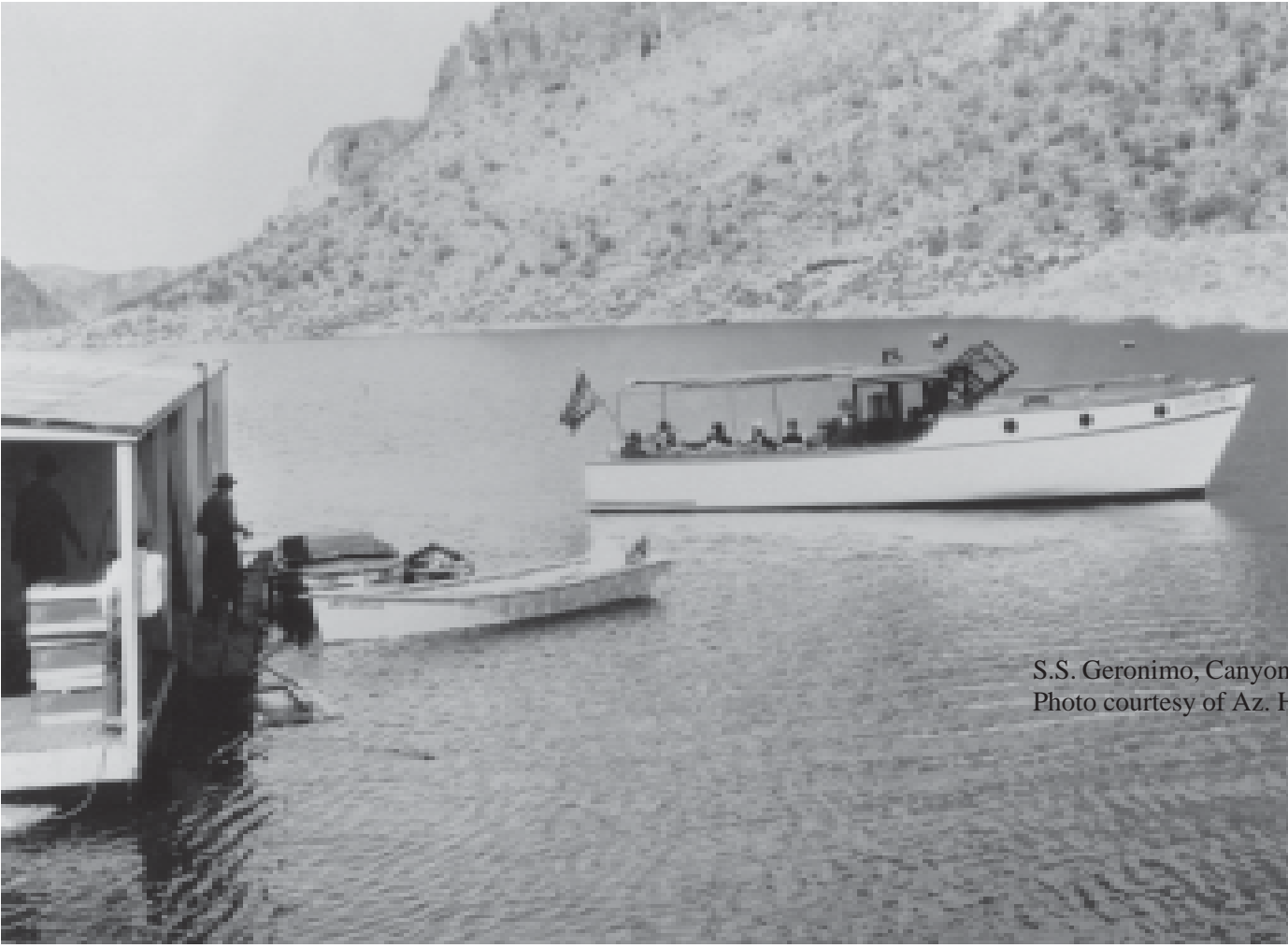
One of the most beautiful lakes in Arizona was formed with the completion of Mormon Flats Dam on January 12, 1925. The dam stood 225 feet above bedrock and was 25 feet thick at the base and 12 feet thick at the crest. The dam was 320 feet long and 160 feet about the streambed. Mormon Flats Dam required 44,000 cubic yards of concrete to complete and the dam was capable of impounding some 98,000 acre- feet of water. The lake filled rapidly during the late winter and summer of 1925.

Local businessman George Moody soon recognized the business potential as the beautiful lake rapidly filled just east of the Salt River Valley. Moody, with the help of Ben and Jess Cramer, built a launch capable of transporting fifty passengers and a crew of five.

The S.S. Geronimo was thirty-five feet long and had a ten-foot beam. It was powered with a thirty-five horsepower engine and could cruise at about fifteen miles per hour. The S.S. Geronimo was launched on October 3, 1925. The launching of the Geronimo required the building of a short rail system to get the launch from the road to the lake. This was the introduction of tour boats to Mormon Flats Lake, known today as Canyon Lake, and Moody was the man most responsible for changing the name.

The tradition of tour boats on Canyon Lake continues today with the Dolly Steamboat. Drive up the Apache Trail and enjoy the beauty of Canyon Lake, have lunch or dinner at the Lakeside Cantina, ride the Dolly Steamboat or rent a boat from the Canyon Lake Marina.

Whatever you do— enjoy the beauty of this desert lake created by man some seventy-five years ago. C.C. Cragin once said of Mormon Flats Lake, “What a beautiful paradise of stone and water.”



S.S. Geronimo, Canyon Lake, November, 1925  
Photo courtesy of Az. Historical Society



cave



g-head