

PIERPONT CONSTABLE BICKNELL

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By Tom Kollenborn © 2003

Arizona history records many interesting characters that have helped to build this frontier state. Pierpont Constable Bicknell, a mining man and newspaperman, was born in Syracuse, New York around 1836. "Bick" as he was known by friends arrived in Arizona Territory about 1870. He first associated himself with the Salt River Herald as a writer in the early 1870's. Bick preferred hunting for lost mines and prospecting to writing stories for the newspaper. He was well educated in Eastern schools and used his writing ability to make a living on the Arizona frontier. Bicknell was well established by 1880 as a writer and mining man in Arizona Territory.

Bicknell would write and sell a few stories then he was off on another major prospecting expedition into the mountains. Bicknell spent time searching for lost mines in the Mazatzals, Superstitions and other Arizona mountain ranges. His success was limited, however he wrote many interesting stories about his search for lost mines. These stories proved popular to the reading public at the time. Perhaps he is best known among historians of Arizona for his tall tales.

Bicknell spent many months riding and searching the Superstition Mountains east of Phoenix for the Doc Thorne Mine, the Lost Soldier's Mine and the Lost Frenchman Mine. After the death of Jacob Waltz, the alleged owner of the Dutchman's Lost Mine, in Phoenix, on October 25, 1891, Bicknell became very interested in his story. He researched the story the best he could. He began a systematic search for the mine when he was about fifty-five years old. He interviewed Julia Thomas and the Petrasch boys shortly after Waltz's death. He then wrote a long article about the Waltz mine that appeared in many newspapers in 1895. The San Francisco Chronicle ran the article on January 13, 1895. Bicknell wrote about Waltz being an old miser. It is interesting to note how he viewed this old prospector and the possibility of his hidden wealth. In this article Bicknell presents clues to Waltz's alleged mine. His contributions to the story have confused even more people about the story of the Dutchman's Lost Mine. Bicknell was known for his tall tales and jokes on the Arizona frontier.

Pierpont Constable Bicknell lived in the Phoenix until the late 1880's when he moved to Prescott. Bicknell soon became a close friend of "Bucky" O'Neill, Prescott's mayor. An interesting article appeared in the Arizona Daily Gazette, on August 22, 1899, page 8, col. 2, the article read as follows:

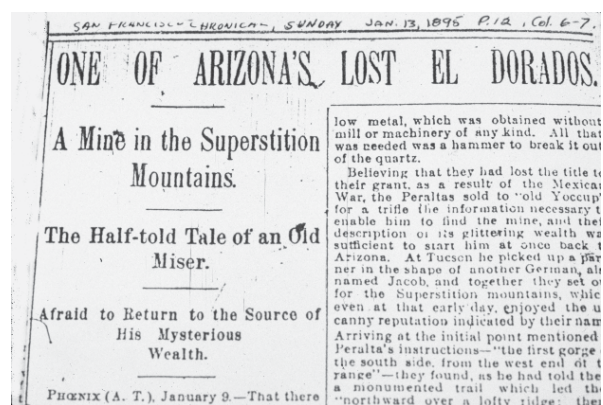
"P.C. Bicknell, for a long time of Phoenix, a well known magazine writer, for some years past a close companion of the late "Bucky" O'Neill, has come into a fortune of about \$2,000,000.00."

After moving to Prescott Bicknell began exploring the Colorado Plateau for mineral resources and even looked for a few lost mines. He spent a considerable amount of time exploring the Grand Canyon of the Colorado River for mineral resources. He had more knowledge of the Grand Canyon than any other professional writer of the period. Even after he acquired the small fortune in 1899, Bicknell remained very frugal. Bicknell was slowing down by 1900, and he was spending more time writing than exploring.

P.C. Bicknell passed away on March 31, 1904, in Prescott, Arizona. He was sixty-eight years old. Most records indicate Bicknell was both a mining man and newspaperman. Bicknell was a man of considerable wealth who lived a life of privation most of the time he was in Arizona Territory. He appeared to care little about money.

When his estate was settled in May of 1906 in Syracuse, New York, Eugene P. Bicknell of New York was granted papers of inheritance on May 14, 1906. Bicknell had owned 1,104 acres in the town of Redfield, Oswego County, New York and 2,445 acres in Lewis County, New York. He also left a considerable amount of money to his immediate heir.

Bicknell probably helped create the tale of the Dutchman's Lost Mine with his many stories that appeared in newspaper and magazines around the nation in the late 1890's. Pierpont Constable Bicknell was an enigmatic personality on the Arizona frontier because of his frugal ways when he was actually an extremely wealthy man.



This article by P.C. Bicknell in the San Francisco Chronicle, on January 13, 1895, started it all.

