

JOHN HENRY PEARCE

by Tom Kollenborn © 1984

John Henry Pearce was truly an interesting pioneer of the Superstition Mountain and Goldfield area. His charismatic character endeared him to those who called him friend.

Pearce was born in Taylor, Arizona, on January 22, 1883. His father founded and operated Pearce's Ferry across the Colorado River near the western end of the Grand Canyon. Pearce's father had accompanied John Wesley Powell through the Grand Canyon in 1869.

John Pearce began his search for Jacob Waltz's gold in 1929, shortly after arriving in the area. When John first arrived, he built a cabin on the Apache Trail about seven miles north-east of Apache Junction. Before moving to his Apache Trail site, John mined three gold mines and hauled his ore to the Hayden mill on the Gila River. He sold his gold to the United States government for \$35.00 an ounce. During the depression his claims around the Goldfield area kept food on the table for his family.

All the years John Pearce lived on the Apache Trail he also maintained a permanent camp deep in the Superstition Wilderness near Weaver's Needle in Needle Canyon. He operated this camp from 1929 to the time of his death in 1959.

John traveled the eleven miles to his camp by driving his truck to County Line Divide, then he would hike or ride horseback to his Needle Canyon Camp. Actually, Pearce had two mines in the Superstition Wilderness— one near his Needle Canyon Camp and the other located near Black Mesa Ridge. The mine John worked for many years on Black Mesa Ridge contained no gold, but did produce silica. He wanted to build a road to the mine on Black Mesa, but could never obtain permission from the government.

My father and I spent several days with John Pearce looking over his property in the late 1940's. Father felt John had a good deposit of silica, but believed it wasn't prudent to build a road to this site because there were so many other equally good sites outside of the wilderness for claiming.

John Pearce told my father a story about a man who had once worked for his father. The man, John claimed, was an actual survivor of the infamous Peralta Massacre of 1847. According to John, the survivor's name was Leonardo Torres. Torres told John's father there were only 48 people, including eight women, at the site of the ill-fated massacre. He said all of the Mexicans had been to the mine and had worked it. John always claimed the Peralta Massacre, not the Peralto Massacre as some called it, occurred on the northwest slopes of Superstition Mountain. Torres told John's father the massacre was not over gold, but over women and the killing of game.

Torres' story goes something like this. "I was up before dawn rounding up stock when the Apache devils struck. I made my get-away on a horse before the Apache knew I was even gone. They were so thrilled with the success of their attack they didn't even look for me. There was nothing I could do for the others.

Torres eventually made his way back to the villages along the Santa Cruz River and told the story of the massacre. Torres tried for several years to organize a group of men to return to the Apacheria, but he found no takers.

Before Torres died he drew a map with the general directions to the rich mine he said he worked as a youth in the Superstition Mountains.

John Henry Pearce believed his father's story and continued to search for that mine until his death. He died from injuries suffered in a head-on collision west of Bush Highway (Power Road) on Friday, January 12, 1959. John spent almost thirty years searching for the old Dutchman and he certainly believed it was out there.

by Tom Kollenborn (c) 1988

The Dutchman's Lost Mine story centers around a German prospector named Jacob Waltz, a rich gold mine and the Superstition Mountains. Men and women have tried to locate this "grand daddy of all lost mines" for more than a century.

Several men have searched for this mine and then emerged as key figures in its story. Names such as Bark, Safford, Ely, Corbin, and Walker have all become part of the Waltz legacy. One of these men played a key role in the story, but probably never searched for the Dutchman's mine itself. This man was John D. Walker, and Arizona history treats Walker differently than it treats the other lost mine buffs, pulp writers and storytellers of the legendary Dutchman's Lost Mine.

Walker was born in Illinois in 1840 and traveled to California as a young man, but too late for the California "gold rush".

Being strongly antislavery, Walker joined the California Volunteers under the command of General James H. Carleton at the start of the Civil War in 1861. He was made an officer and put in charge of a wagon train that accompanied General Carleton's Army to New Mexico Territory in early 1862.

Captain Walker hauled supplies overland to several military camps and forts being established at the time. When he arrived at the Gila River he found a Confederate troop under the command of Captain Sherod Hunter. Hunter had taken possession of the wheat and corn that Walker had planned on buying for General Carleton. Hunter also destroyed Ammi White's flour mill before retreating to Tucson and finally out of Arizona Territory.

Captain John D. Walker continued to haul supplies to the camps and forts that dotted the Arizona frontier. President Abraham Lincoln signed the Enabling Act that made Arizona a territory of the United States on February 14, 1863. Walker mustered out of Carleton's Army in April of 1865 and settled in to farm with the friendly Pimas along the Gila River. He eventually married a Pima named Churga and had a daughter named Juana.

As Walker's friendship with the Pimas developed, he soon learned of their dreaded enemy, the Apache. The Apache-Yavapai raided the Pima fields and carried off young Pima women, and Walker soon realized there would be no peace until the Apaches were neutralized.

The Pimas had a very weak defense against the Apaches and had no way to launch an offensive action against them. The Pimas told Walker about the many Rancherias (villages) the Apache had behind the "crooked-top mountain".

Walker carefully studied the situation and then organized the 1st Arizona Volunteers, a local militia, to control the predatory raids of the Apaches and Yavapais. Until then the Apache-Yavapai would raid the Gila settlements from the Superstition and Pinal Mountains with little or no fear of retaliation. Walker helped change all this.

Lt. Col. Clarence E. Bennett, Commander at Fort McDowell in 1866, gave Walker a field commission of Brevet Lieutenant and Walker commanded about 200 Pima Scouts and another 60 Mexican and Anglo farmers who lived along the Gila River. The mission of Walker's loose-knit volunteers was to search out and destroy the Apache-Yavapai villages in the Superstition and Pinal Mountains.

Lt. Walker also led elements of the 1st Arizona Volunteers, the 14th, 24th, and 32nd Army Infantry (stationed at Fort McDowell) on campaigns in the Superstition Mountains. Walker's Pima Scouts had reported numerous Apache-Yavapai camps in and around Superstition Mountain in May of 1866.

Walker's first attack was against a village located at Frog Tanks, known today as First Water. This engagement was followed by attacks against camps at Garden Valley, Weaver's Needle, Tortilla Creek's Dismal Valley and Quail Camp along Lewis and Pranty Creek.

In less than two years, Walker, along with other military campaigners, eliminated the Apache-Yavapai threat in the region. It was during these campaigns that Walker became so familiar with the Superstition Mountain terrain.

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When Pinal County was organized, John D. Walker became the County Engineer. He also served as County Probate Judge for several terms and was a highly respected citizen in Pinal County and Florence.

Walker formed a prospecting and mining partnership with P.R. Beady and Juan Jose Gradello in 1879. He and his two friends filed on the Vekol silver claims on February 5, 1880 and the Vekol Mine made Walker a rich man. A Papago Indian led Walker and his partners to this rich outcrop.

John D. Walker heard many stories about lost gold and silver mines in the mountains surrounding Florence. The rich Vekol Mine had been a mine lost and then rediscovered. Prior to Walker's acquisition of the mine it had been known as the Lost Pima Mine.

The following is a reported scenario as to how Walker became involved with the famed Dutchman's Lost Mine in the Superstition Mountains. Storytellers claim that, while Walker was campaigning against the Apache in the Superstition Mountains with his Pima Volunteers and elements of the U.S. Army infantry, he observed two old prospectors with pack burros in an area that is today called La Barge Canyon.

Walker later learned these two old prospectors were Jacob Waltz and Jacob Wisner (Wieser). It was apparent these two old men were taking a great risk to prospect in the heart of Apache country. The Army had reported finding many skeletal remains of prospectors and cattlemen who ventured into these rugged mountains during their recent campaigns against the Apaches. Nothing would deter prospectors from searching these mountains for gold except a fatal arrow or bullet.

Many years later Walker recalled these two old prospectors and, according to one source, told the following story:

Late one evening, a fatally wounded old man appeared at his ranch on the Gila River. He had two arrow wounds and three bullet wounds. The old man told Walker his name was Jacob Wisner and that he had just survived an Indian attack in the Superstition Mountains two days prior. The old man, with his wounds, had walked more than twenty miles to Walker's ranch.

Wisner explained to Walker that he and his partner, Jacob Waltz, had been working a rich Mexican gold mine in the Superstition Mountains. After four days, Waltz returned to Mill City for supplies. Wisner further told Walker that he and Waltz had saved a wealthy Mexican land owner's life in Mexico, and in return for their deed of bravery, the Mexican's family had given them a map to a rich gold mine. The Mexican man claimed their family had worked the mine for over three decades prior to the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo.

Wisner said they had no problems finding the mine, but when they arrived near the site in the Superstition Mountains they found two Mexicans working the mine. They killed the Mexican workers and took possession of the mine. Wisner claimed the two Mexicans looked like Indians so they shot them.

Walker was convinced Wisner could not live long and asked him to draw a detailed map as to the location of the mine. Wisner agreed to draw the map in return for a decent burial. He sketched the map that Walker had requested, hence the 'Walker-Wisner Map'.

Walker never found the Dutchman's Lost Mine and really didn't spend much, if any time looking for it. He had found and developed a rich silver mine called the Vekol. He did grubstake a couple of prospectors who took a look for the mine after the Wisner episode.

Walker later became ill and lost his mind. He was moved to a sanatorium near Napa, California, in 1890. Captain (Brevet Lt.) John D. Walker died there on September 2, 1891.



Very Respectfully
Your Obedt. Servt.
J. D. Walker
1st Lt. 1st Regt. A Vol
Comdg Servts

Beault

