

HIGHLIGHT OF EARLY HOLBROOK

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When the Atlantic and Pacific railroad started to build westward from Isleta, New Mexico, 12 miles south of Albuquerque, Henry Randolph Holbrook was chief engineer of that division of the railroad. This was in 1880 and by 1881 the rails had reached Fort Wingate, New Mexico, not far from the Arizona State line. Working fast and looking ahead to the year's activity, advance workmen set up a section camp on February 4 a mile from the Mormon settlement of St. Joseph (Joseph City), with wagoning gangs and supplies positioned for the westward drive.

Later a temporary station was set up two miles east of present-day Holbrook at Horsehead Crossing. This station was named Holbrook by grading contractor John W. Young in honor of the A and P's chief engineer, but the town was abandoned for the present site. However, the name remained, and the rails reached Holbrook on September 24, 1881, and the town was founded.

Horsehead Crossing had been an important point for several years. Some authorities claimed that it was first established by Juan Padilla and that he placed Berrado Freyde in charge of the store and saloon he built there. Berrado (the name is spelled in various ways by various chroniclers) was of Mexican descent and was said to have been at the crossing from 1872 on. The crossing was the forerunner of Holbrook, but its usefulness ceased with the arrival of the railroad.

A bright future was forecast for the new town. With cattle and sheep ranging on the thousands of acres to north and south of it, its role as a shipping point was assured. It became a typical booming cow-towns when the Aztec Land and Cattle Company, created in 1884 for the purpose of utilizing the right-of-way land along the newly established railroad, brought 40,000 head of cattle from Texas, unloading them at Hardy Station, 11 miles of Winslow in the spring and summer of 1885.

The Aztec soon became known as the Hashknife Outfit because their brand resembled the knife used by rangeland "chuckwagon" cooks. The many cowboys hired by the company delighted in racing into town, yelling and brandishing their six-guns, and often shooting out any lights they saw. Because of their activities, Holbrook became known as the toughest and most lawless town in the west. Within the period of one year, twenty-six shooting victims succumbed. Rustling was rampant; hangings and shootings were a common occurrence on the unpatrolled cattle and sheep ranges, where cowboys and sheep men were wont to clash.

Into this lawless environment came Commodore Perry Owens, a young man with flowing blond hair and the reputation of being a dead shot. He was hired originally as foreman by the John Walker Ranch at Navajo Springs in 1881. He also held the job of range foreman for the Gus Zeiger outfit, as well as that of guard of the cavalry horses held at Navajo Springs where they were in danger of being stolen. It is said that he killed so many Navajo Indians that he earned the

name of “Iron Man”... The Indians decided that he lived a charmed life and could not be killed. He was as good a shot with his left hand as with his right, wore twin forty-fives at his hips, and carried two rifles in his saddle scabbards. He shot from the hip and often got the drop on his opponent.

Owens is remembered for his part in the Blevins House shootout during which he killed Andy Cooper and Sam H. Blevins, wounded M. B. Roberts, who died a few days later, and wounded John Blevins, who recovered. Owens was at that time sheriff of Apache County, the county seat being St. Johns.

During the years between 1881 and 1895, a lively rivalry had developed between the new towns of Holbrook and Winslow. When, in 1895, Apache County was divided and the western section received the name Navajo, each town vied for the honor of being the county seat. The honor fell to Holbrook, that community having a majority of 162 votes.

The first public school was erected in Holbrook in 1885. It was an adobe, 25 by 45 feet, and in the beginning twelve girls and fifteen boys were registered. A Mr. German was a teacher, a second teacher being Miss Estelle M. Hirstein. A total of 44 students enrolled for the 1893-1894 term. One of the pupils was Lloyd C. Henning, who later became a leading citizen of Holbrook. The teacher mentioned in old reports was Miss Clara F. M. Laughlin.

In the fall of 1896, the country voted a \$15,000 bond to erect a county courthouse and jail. This building venture was completed in 1893, on land deeded by F. A. and S. C. Zuck.

Commodore P. Owens became the first sheriff and assessor. When the first Navajo County election was held the following year, his deputy, Frank J. Watron was elected to replace him, winning over John T. Jones, Hashknife manager, by the narrow margin of seven votes. Watron will be remembered for issuing invitations to the hanging of George Smiley, December 8, 1899.

Burton C. Mossman, another colorful personage of early Holbrook, came to Arizona in 1893 as manager of the Graybeal, Murray and Hudson Ranch in Bloody Basin, on the Verde River. He arrived in Holbrook in 1898 to take over as manager of the Aztec Land and Cattle Company. Watron made him deputy sheriff and, according to reports, the new deputy kept the jail full of cattle thieves but never killed anyone. Until he took over, the Hashknife had not been able, for fourteen years, to obtain a conviction for horse or cattle stealing. Mossman changed this situation rapidly.

However, early in 1900 Mossman was told to liquidate the last of the Hashknife's fluid holdings and to turn over management to Frank Wallace. In 1901 the end came for the hold Hashknife, although it continued for many years under that name, the remnant of it having been sold by Wallace to the firm of Babbitt and Stiles.

This also ended an era for Holbrook. It could settle down to being a quiet, fast-growing western town where one dared walk the streets without fear of marauders' gunfire threatening his life.

In addition to gunfights and brawling of the first years, Holbrook experienced severe floods and fires. The worst fire occurred in 1888, on June 26, when a warehouse filled with wool suddenly burst into flames. The surrounding business houses were not of a substantial nature and soon the flames were spreading from building to building. The fire fighting equipment was of a primitive nature and when the fire was finally subdued, nearly every business place in Holbrook was totally destroyed. However, nothing could destroy the faith of the residents in the new town. As soon as the ashes cooled they began building again, this time with less perishable brick and adobe. The railroad depot had been burned with all its contents so a depot was one of the first new buildings erected.

The second big fire did not occur until 1902 and by the time there was more equipment available and the immediate arrival of volunteer citizen fire fighters soon quelled the blaze. Very little damage resulted.

The floods were harder to curb. A damaging rush of water in 1904 aroused the residents, showing as it did the possibility that the river could undo all their efforts in an hour or so. Alarmed citizens banded together and petitioned the County Supervisors to appropriate money for the control of the river which, they said, “threatened to wash Holbrook Away”. The petition stated that “the unprecedented high waters of the past two days have caused the banks to cave in at an alarming rate at a point south and west of the James Scott house, not only endangering private property but also the Navajo County bridge and the Holbrook school building”.

This brought the desired action; the banks were reinforced. Nineteen years later the north bank began to crumble, on September 17 and 18, and soon a great stream of water was rushing through the homes of J. C. Manley and Judge J. E. Crosby. The bakery was inundated, two cottages were carried away, Apache Railway Company’s bridge piling was ripped out, but the county bridge withstood the pounding of the water-driven debris. This imminent danger to all they had build brought about a large public gathering and John R. Hulet was named chairman of a committee that was to seek federal, state, county, and railroad aid in controlling flood waters. The little town’s fight with the Little Colorado had already been going on for decades. Help was soon forthcoming, but it took several years for the town to fully recover from the 1923 onslaught of water.

Proof that the river was still a menace was continued in a report in 1937 that the riverbed was higher than Holbrook streets. That year a 2700-foot dike was constructed.

Meanwhile the City of Holbrook had been incorporated on March 6, 1917 with a mayor-council type of government and W. R. Scorse as mayor. At the first general election on May 28, 1917, George W. Hennesey was chosen as mayor.

Electric lights for the city were installed in 1921 and the old adobe school which had served the first students of the community was sold – and enlarged and modernized school having been erected in 1917. The number of students had increased as the town grew. In 1912 daily attendance was eighty-one. Mrs. L. C. Henning, who was to become one of the most influential women in Holbrook, was then one of the four teachers employed.

B7 1940 the census showed a population of 1,184. Things had slowed down and the rival town of Winslow was gaining in population. Navajo County was profiting from an increase in tourist traffic. Thousands of outsiders, having learned of the Petrified Forest and the Painted Desert, were driving in for a firsthand glimpse of the wonders; while better automobiles were making it easier and much safer to travel the highways.

The A. and B. Schuster Mercantile Company was one of the pioneer businesses of Holbrook. It was started in 1884 by Adolf Schuster and his twin brother Ben, who came from Bernalillo, New Mexico. A newspaper report states that there “were scarcely a dozen structures in the business district” when the Schusters arrived to open their miscellaneous store in a little frame building on Main Street. A room at the rear served as their home.

The Adamson and Burbage store, housed in a stone building by the railroad, was already in operation when the Schuster’s arrived. Holbrook then had a population of about 200, but there were three saloons, a jewelry store, a gunsmith’s shop, a blacksmith shop, a livery stable, a grocery and drug store, a meat market, and the two stores that sold general merchandise.

Francis M. Zuck was owner of the Holbrook House Hotel’ Mrs. A. M. Boyer ran the Apache House Hotel; J. D. Houck ran the White House billiard hall, and Charley Lindenberger was the baker. Sing Lee was proprietor of the Chinese Laundry and Sam Kee ran a restaurant, which was only seven feet wide.

One of the famous, or infamous, places in Old Holbrook was the Bucket of Blood Saloon. Here a fight took place that left two men dying in their own blood on the floor of the saloon. The saloon was then and there dubbed the Bucket of Blood — a name that seemed to be appropriate to the time and place.

However, those bloody days passed and Holbrook entered the World War II years with a commendable degree of maturity and business acuity.