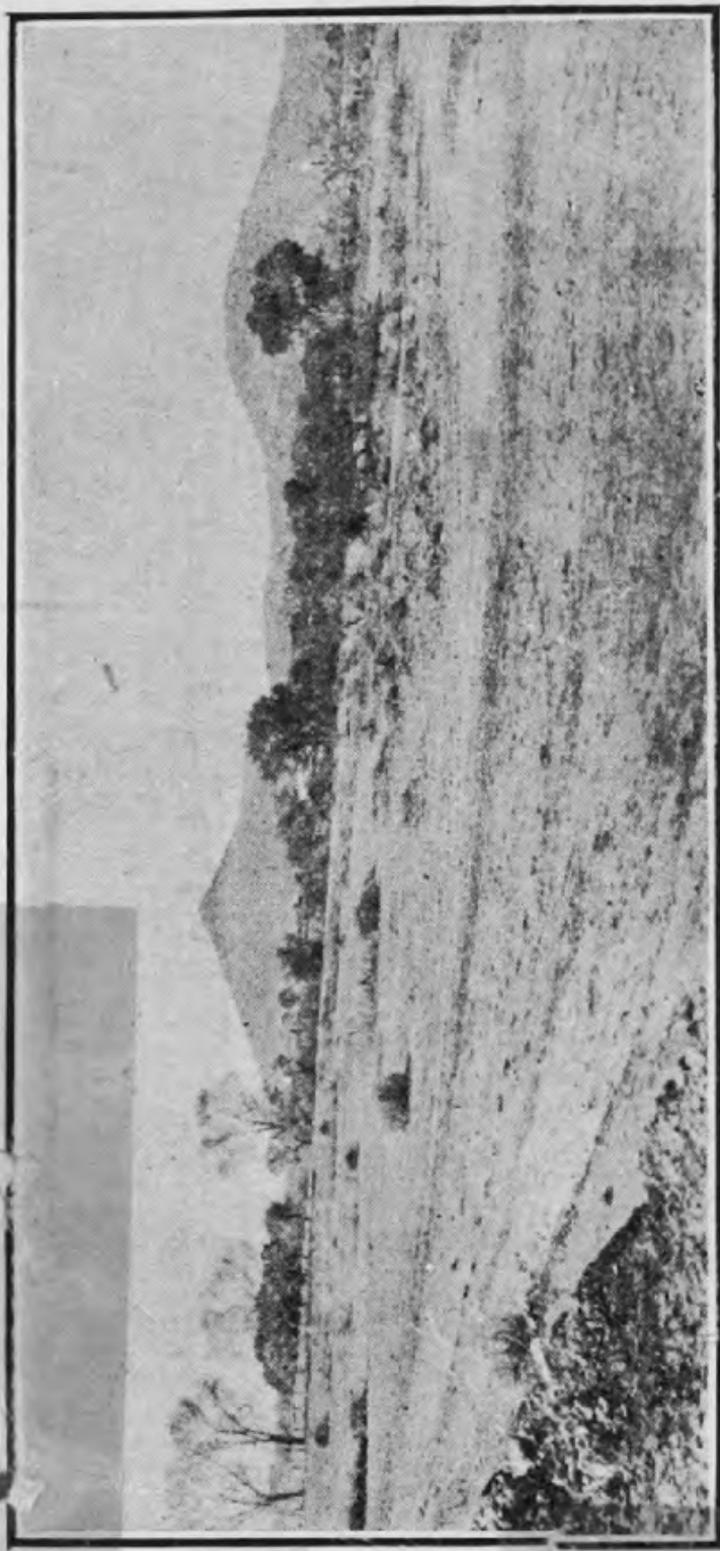


The City
of Tucson
Its Foundation
and Origin of
Its Name

By
M. P. Freeman, LL.D.

Tucson, Arizona
April 14, 1912



SENTINEL PEAK

Many years ago the little Indian village of Styook-zone lying at the foot of this peak, gave its name to the present metropolis of the Southwest.

The City of Tucson Its Foundation and Origin of Its Name

In a recent number of the West Coast Magazine, Charles F. Lummis inveighs against the "preposterous ignorance of our own local history, and of the Southwest in particular". I am myself reminded of numerous exhibitions of this "preposterous ignorance," and when he refers to "the Cheerful Chump that still tells us that Tucson is the oldest city in the United States," he strikes a sympathetic chord in my own heart.

However much I may regret it, it is nevertheless a fact that there is no justification whatever for this claim for our good old town, and still better, new and up-to-date, modern metropolis. It's iconoclastic, of course, but let's admit the truth of this proposition; not necessarily because it is the truth, but because of the indisputable evidence that establishes it. Although Tucson is about two hundred years shy on age as compared with St. Au-

gustine, Florida, and 170 behind Santa Fe, New Mexico, the Old Pueblo is still sufficiently mature to justify our respect for its years.

The approximate dates of the birth of each may be fixed at 1565 for St. Augustine, 1605-10 for Santa Fe and 1776 for Tucson. It is more than probable that antedating the discovery of the American Continent by several hundred years, an Indian rancheria could have been found here in the valley. After the lapse of many, many years along came those zealous old Padres, those makers of our early history, history, a good deal of which is obscure and a little uncertain but enough of which is definitely known to clearly establish it, history of intense interest to the student, the more so by reason of the romance surrounding it. In time this Indian rancheria here in the valley becomes a "rancheria de visita;" that is, there is no priest stationed there, but it is visited at intervals and its spiritual needs cared for by one of the good padres from some established mission. And then we come to the year 1776; memorable not only in the history of our country, but as the date of the founding of our good old town, and back of that date for its origin, the "Cheerful Chump" may go, but the student of history does not follow him.

In the year 1752 a presidio was established at Tubac by the Mexican government. In the year 1776 the few soldiers there at the time, about fifty, were brought down the valley and stationed at the then established Presidio of Tucson, and their arrival fixes the

date of the beginning of the Old Pueblo. It is possible that prior to that there may have been a few people other than the Indians taking advantage of the rich valley lands along the Santa Cruz and raising a little corn, a few frijoles and chiles to sustain life, but there was no settlement here prior to the establishment of the Presidio of Tucson in the year mentioned.

The word Tucson, pronounced "Too-sun" by us and "Took-son" by the Mexicans, is not Spanish, but Indian, and in coming down to us through its many years it has cheerfully responded to more than a dozen different spellings. In each case it is safe to assume that the author was attempting to follow and record the sounds as they came to him, and these, very naturally, varied, depending on their understanding by the author recording them. A popular origin of this word has been claimed to be found in the "Piman styuk-son, meaning dark or brown spring," and some show of plausibility has been given to this by identifying this "dark or brown spring" with the considerable spring at the foot of the large cotton wood tree just across the road from Elysian Grove. This claim, however, is not justified, and the source from which this word sprang must be sought elsewhere. In my investigations I have been materially assisted by "Norris," for confirmatory as well as new direct evidence. Norris is an intelligent Papago, who speaks English fluently and reads and writes it. He is court interpreter in Tucson when the Papago language is

involved. He tells me that the knowledge he has of the very early history of his country he has gleaned from the very old men of his tribe. From Norris I learn, as we also know from other sources, that in years gone by there was a Papago village, or rancheria, at the foot of the hill known to us as Sentinel Peak, just across the valley from Tucson. This village, rancheria, or pueblito, the Indians called "Styook-zone." I have had Norris repeat this word to me a dozen or more times, and I am confident that in my spelling of it I have given the nearest possible approach to the pronunciation as he gives it to me. The last syllable is not "son," nor is it "sone," but "zone." Numerous "cheerpas" (Papago), probably of these same villagers, may still be seen at the foot of the hill. Cheerpas were mortar-like holes fashioned out of the solid rock, in which, with a stone pestle, they ground their food seed and mesquite beans.

This hill is still known to the Papagoes as "Styook," meaning black, and derives its name from the weather stained volcanic rock with which it is covered. The word "zone" means foot or base, that is, the foot or base of a hill, and "Styook-zone," the name of the rancheria, simply meant the village at the foot of the black hill. "Styook" does not necessarily mean any or every black hill, but "Styook," black, was the name by which this particular black hill, our Sentinel Peak, was then and is still known to the Papagoes.

"Styuk" and "Styook" are the same,

meaning black, but governed by different conceptions of the phonetic equivalents, and writers have been led astray by the last syllable. "Zone" does not mean spring, but foot or base—of a hill—so "Styook-zone" could not mean black spring. Papago for spring is "zonac," an altogether different word, and the mistake has been in confusing the two words "zone" and "zonac." Through the Mexican, "Styook-zone" easily became Tucson, which, as I have said, they pronounce "Took-sone." Our "z" sound has no equivalent in Spanish, nor have the Mexicans adopted any for it. The Mexicans pronounce "z" just as they do "s," although in Spanish it is pronounced "th," as in the word "thin," so the Mexicans could not say "Took-zone," which is such a near approach to "Styook-zone," but made it "Took-sone."

This Papago rancheria, prior to 1700, became a "rancheria de visita," and by the good old Fathers was called "San Cosme del Tucson." As late as 1775 Father Garces, then in charge at San Xavier, speaks of it as "una visita de mi administracion." Probably the first mention of "Tucson" to be found in any writings extant is by Father Kino, the first white man to visit Casa Grande, if we eliminate the uncertain possibility of Coronado's passing there in 1540; Kino saying mass in the old ruin on November 24, 1694. In September, 1698, Kino writes that he went down the river from San Xavier del Bac to San Agustin del Oyaut (or Oiaur), passing through San Cosme del Tucson. San Agustin del Oyaut

was another Papago visita, a few miles down the river from Tucson. Kino gives it as five leagues from San Xavier. Again, in November, 1699, he tells us that he went from San Xavier del Bac to San Agustin del Oyaut, "leaving the rancheria of San Cosme del Tucson on his left." And again, in April, 1700, he "went down the river from San Xavier del Bac to San Cosme," there "baptising six infants and one sick woman."

Early maps become particularly valuable and interesting to the student where they confirm statements covering the same period. The earliest map of this country extant is Father Kino's of 1701. This map gives San Xavier, San Cosme, on the west side of the river, the location claimed for it, and San Agustin, but shows nothing at the present site of Tucson, for the very excellent reason that there was nothing here. I have in my files a French map of 1703, original. This map gives San Xavier only, but it shows Casa Grande. Venegas' map of 1757, "drawn by the Society of Jesuits," of which I have an original, shows San Xavier, San Cosme and San Agustin, but no Tucson. Padre Font's of 1777 gives Presidio Tuqulson, as it is there spelled. This was the year following the transfer of the presidio from Tubac to Tucson.

A few years ago an article appeared in a local paper stating that "Tucson enjoys the distinction of being the oldest city in the United States, and the proof of this was to be found in a stained and time-worn document of vellum, signed by their Catholic ma-

jesties Ferdinand and Isabella, and countersigned by the Viceroy of Mexico and General Coronado, who, in the early part of 1552, raised the flag of Spain over the little Indian village of Tucson, and laid the corner stone of the first mission with his own hands. This important paper was lost to the public until about twelve years ago, when it was discovered by a mere accident among the archives of the ancient church of San Xavier, nine miles south of Tucson. As a matter of precaution it was forwarded to the Librarian of Washington, D. C., where it now lies."

On reading this the thing that particularly appealed to me in the claims set up was their consistency, in that there was nothing whatever to justify a single one of them. Coronado, grieving over the utter failure of his brilliantly conceived expedition in search of the seven cities of Cibola, had some years prior to the date named, gone on a journey from which none are known to return. And it struck me as being exceedingly gracious of their Catholic majesties Ferdinand and Isabella, that they should attach their royal rubricas to this "stained and time-worn document of vellum" that the archives of the ancient church of San Xavier might be enriched by its presence, and peculiar emphasis was given to this generous action by reason of the fact that both of them had already been at rest for nearly half a century. Notwithstanding the eccentricities observed in these dates, I wrote to the Librarian of Congress at Washington for information in regard

to this "time-worn" document, asking for a certified copy of it, if by any possibility any such document were in their files, and in reply was informed that "no such document was in their files at the time, nor had there ever been." Neither had the Rt. Rev. Bishop of the Diocese ever heard of it.

But notwithstanding all this, so long as a single "Cheerful Chump" is permitted his freedom, it is possible that this perennial claim for our good little city will continue in evidence.

A communication recently appeared wherein the writer was "greatly interested in the fact that Tucson could lay claim to occupation by Europeans at a considerably earlier date than Santa Fe, to say nothing of St. Augustine." In justification of this, the writer refers to "Padre Tello's Cronica Miscelanea." Fray Antonio Tello's Miscellaneous Chronicle was written in 1653, more than a century after Coronado's return from his fruitless quest. It contains nothing that has any bearing on the date of the early occupation of Tucson. Whether or not Coronado may have left his footprints in the valley near the site of Tucson depends on the route he followed on his expedition, and this is a moot question on which writers are unable to agree, and as we already have all the information we shall ever be able to obtain it will continue to be so. For our information in regard to this journey we must rely on the very full separate accounts given of it by Juan Jaramillo, one of Coronado's captains, and Pedro Castaneda, both of whom were with the expedition.

In addition to these two narratives we have Coronado's own account, in his report to his Royal Master, the Viceroy of Mexico, written from Cibola, the translation of which is to be found in Hakluyt's Voyages, given in his quaint old English of three hundred years ago, where—in Hakluyt's English—Coronado writes that, "Here are many sorts of beasts, as Beares, Tigers, Lions, and certaine Sheep as bigge as an horse, with very great hornes and little tailles, I have seen their hornes so bigge that it is a wonder to behold their greatnesse" (our mountain sheep).

In the possession of Bishop Granjon of the Catholic Church in Tucson, there are two old registers of baptisms and marriages that by reason of their great age should possess a strong interest for the student of our early history, being the oldest written records of any kind to be found anywhere in the State. The Rt. Rev. Bishop, who guards these old treasures with a zealous care, has been good enough to permit of my examination of them.

The earliest entry is that of a marriage celebrated on August 16, 1739, the entry being authenticated by Father Alexandro Rapicani (or Rapuani), one of that early band of self sacrificing good Fathers. The appearance of these venerable old documents with their crude leather covers, hoary with age, worn and battered, may well justify their full 173 years, antedating, as they do by half a century, our old San Xavier Church in which we feel such a just pride.

I regret that history has overthrown and demolished what at one time was one of my own cherished idols, an idol never again to be set up on its old pedestal; but while we may not establish an unbroken line of descent from Paleozoic, Mesozoic or even Cenozoic ages; that some of us, at least, are willing to admit it should claim your respect.