

COURTLAND ARIZONA

Law and Order



Glenn Snow
June 2009

Copyright 2009 Glenn Snow
GSnow@GleesonArizona.com

Cover photograph: Jail window, Courtland Arizona.

Drunks and petty thieves were the primary concern of Deputy John Bright, constable of Courtland, during most of his tenure in the town. Modern police will describe their job as 5 hours of boredom followed by 30 seconds of abject terror, followed by 5 hours of paperwork. So also the daily fare of law enforcement in this turn-of-the-century mining town was mostly routine. There were moments, however...

The law, and its implementation, are usually divided into three components: the police, the courts, and the jails. In Courtland, both the police and the jail wore a single badge, and it was on the chest of John Henry Bright, who was both Deputy Sheriff (police) and Constable (jailor). Deputy Bright came from Texas, where his family had considerable oil interests. Bright was married to Pearl Allen Bright, whose sister Minnie Allen Cates was married to the Deputy Sheriff in nearby Gleeson. The Allen sisters had followed their family to Arizona, and brought their husbands with them. When Courtland became a town in 1908, John Bright was appointed as the first lawman in town. In fact, he was the only one to ever hold the title of Deputy Sheriff of Courtland.

When Courtland sprang into being, there was no jail in town. Since it was a full day's ride to the county seat in Tombstone, it was necessary to find a way to lock up miscreants locally. The first "jail" in Courtland was an abandoned mining tunnel which had a heavy oak door fastened into place over the opening, and which was padlocked shut.

Early on the morning of June 2 1909, Constable Bright walked to the jail tunnel from home in order to bring breakfast to the Mexican man who was incarcerated there. Upon his approach he found that the prisoner had his own plans for freedom. Smoke poured from the tunnel, through the ventilation window in the heavy wooden door. It appears that sometime in the previous hours, the prisoner had piled his mattress up against the inside of the door and lit it on fire, intending to burn the door down and escape. The door, however, proved more formidable than he had expected and was relatively unharmed. The smoke, however, had filled the small tunnel and began to suffocate the lone detainee.

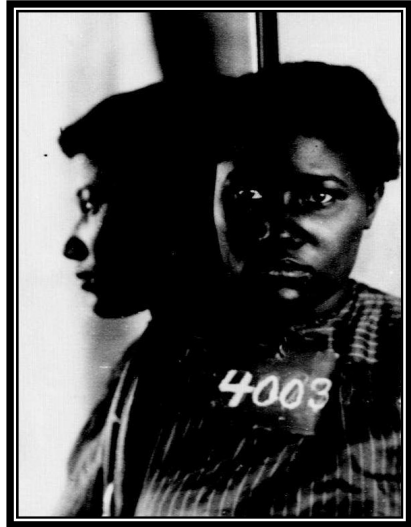
Although unconscious, he revived when Bright dragged him out into the fresh air.

The only remaining building standing today in Courtland, the jail was completed in June of 1909 at a cost of \$1000. It was built of reinforced concrete and comprised two cells 14' by 14', with an additional inner cage 6' by 8' which was imported from the Bisbee jail. In the corner of each cell was a bathroom which consisted of a wash basin and a toilet. The accommodations were so far improved from the mining tunnel that the local citizens nicknamed the jail "The Hotel Bright."

The jail was so accommodating that it caused a bit of a problem. Since much of the housing in the mining camp consisted of canvas stretched over a wooden frame and dirt floors, it seems several of the local citizens found the jail a more pleasant place to spend the night than their own homes. Overcrowding began to become a problem. Furthermore, it had been the local judge's practice to offer a one-to-one reduction in sentence for every day worked. Thus, a prisoner sentenced to two weeks in jail could work every day on the roads (supervised by Bright), and would then be released after serving only one week. The lodging was so pleasant that a number of the prisoners declined the judge's offer, resulting in a smaller work force and a larger jail population. County records consistently show a considerable amount of money being disbursed in the purchase of food for the prisoners at the Courtland branch of the county jail. From these records, it appears that there were 4-8 inmates of the Courtland jail most of the time.

The only complaint registered about the jail came from an incident involving a loyal mutt. In September of 1909 a woman named Felipe Martinez was sentenced to 20 days in jail for a fight in which she severely beat and tore the hair from a 70 year old woman. When Deputy Bright locked her up, her dog was left outside the jail. After two days of the dog barking, yelping, and generally making a fuss, the other prisoners were unable to sleep and requested that it either be shot or allowed to live in the jail with its owner during her incarceration. Bright opted to allow the dog inside.

Though a number of killings happened in the general area of Courtland, including several along the road from Gleeson to Courtland, only one murder happened within the town limits. On January 26 1913, Dan Danielson was shot in the back by his 18 year old girlfriend Jennie Canady Parker, whose occupations were listed in official records as cook and actress. Mr. Danielson, a miner and saloon keeper, had been paying too close attention to a female Mexican acquaintance, much to the displeasure of Miss Parker. Her protest took the form of a confrontation with Danielson behind his saloon on the north side of Courtland. The argument got more heated and Danielson took a six-shooter and shot the corner off the liquor cabinet next to where Jennie was standing, then put the gun in a bar drawer inside the saloon. After a few more minutes of argument, Miss Parker ran behind the bar, got the gun, and shot Danielson in the back. He died a few minutes later, and Jennie Parker (A.K.A. Janie Parker, Jennie Canady, Genevieve Kanaday, Genevieve Kennedy) was arrested and sent to Tombstone for trial. She was found guilty of manslaughter, and sent to the state prison in Florence on April 28, 1913. Her attorney told her mother that he would get her paroled within three months. He was only a little over-optimistic, in that she was paroled in May of 1914, just a little over one year after her incarceration. Furthermore, Governor George Hunt granted her a full pardon on November



28, 1916, and her rights as a citizen were restored. Interestingly, this pardon came in the midst of a ballot counting crisis from the November 7th election, which saw Governor Hunt claiming victory, then being certified as losing, then bringing a lawsuit to the Arizona Supreme Court, which changed its decision twice, and finally confirmed him as the election winner more than a year later.

Back in Courtland, Deputy Sheriff John Bright had a few moments of excitement now and again. He was wounded only once in the line of duty. This happened on August 12 1916, when two Mexican men broke into “Colonel” F.A. Davis’ home and stole two pistols, several boxes of ammunition and some other items. When Bright was notified, he started a search for the robbers, but was unable to find them. After several tours around town on foot and in a borrowed car, he saddled up his horse and went up to a hilltop, where he spotted the two walking north towards Pearce. Going around the hill, he managed to come out on the road ahead of them. Leaving his horse, he stepped out in front, identified himself, and asked if they were armed. One of them pulled his gun out and replied, “Yes, you gringo S__ of a B____, I have a gun!” A gunfight ensued between the two desperados and the sheriff, with Bright being shot in the leg. Bright emptied his five-shot revolver at them, and then hid himself behind a mound and crawled, limped, and tumbled his way to Leadville Canyon and help. When a posse was rounded up and came upon the scene of the shoot-out, it was discovered that all five of Bright’s bullets had struck their targets, and both his assailants were dead: five shots, five hits between the waist and shoulders. Not a man to be messed with.

When the county eliminated the position of Courtland Deputy in 1916, the jail became largely unused. It still stood solidly in 1937 and can be seen in photographs of that year with all hardware intact, but in April 1938 the steel doors and barred gates were appropriated by the county for the construction of a new jail at Benson. Some windows remain, but weather and vandals have done considerable damage to the structure which had once been a second home to the troublemakers of Courtland.



As for the courts, there were two men who served as judges in the Courtland district: Judge Cabell and Judge Bolton. The Honorable Judge James M. Cabell served as the local justice of the peace from Courtland's foundation until his semi-retirement in 1914. Cabell was counsel to the county Board of Supervisors in Tombstone until he was replaced by a political appointee. He moved to Courtland in February of 1909, and lived there until he died in 1921. Born in Missouri in 1858, he had moved to Arizona in 1901, and practiced law in Cochise County.

Judge Cabell was known for his even-handedness in dealing with rowdy miners and those who were just blowing off steam. When it came to more serious offenders, he was considerably more strict. The judge was especially known for his rulings against those who treated animals with negligence or cruelty. One of his first rulings was a case regarding the closing of the only saloon in Courtland. Arizona law said it was illegal to operate a saloon or sell liquor within 6 miles of a mining camp. James Herron had opened and operated a saloon in north Courtland, well within the six-mile limit. He contended however that he had in good faith paid for and received his license from the state before the opening of those particular mines, and therefore should be allowed to continue operation. Judge Cabell agreed and threw the case out, allowing Herron to continue running his saloon.

One event in the life of Judge Cabell continued to cause him embarrassment for many years thereafter. In mid-July of 1910, the Judge was roused from his sleep by shots fired at a neighbor's house, followed by much shouting. In his eagerness to come to his neighbor's aid, he ran out of the house carrying a gun, plenty of ammunition...and nothing else. It had been a hot night, and Judge Cabell was entirely unclad. The cause of the ruckus was a wildcat which was terrorizing his neighbor's hen house. Both the neighbor and Judge Cabell fired away at the bobcat until they killed it. It was then that they noticed they were both equally underdressed for the occasion. Both men retreated to their respective homes, much to the amusement of their families and other neighbors.

Born in Vermont, Judge Carlos Bolton was a civil war veteran, having served throughout the war in the Pennsylvania Volunteers.

He was a true pioneer, having come to Arizona in the 1870's after his service in the Union Army. He first worked in Gleeson and Courtland as a carpenter and construction manager. In 1911, he was commissioned as a Notary Public, and thus began his career in public service. On New Years Day, 1914, he began his appointment as United States Commissioner in the district, a position which made him administrator of federal law in the area. The office of United States Commissioner performed judicial functions for the federal government, including such tasks as the apportionment of land and settling of claims filed under the Homestead Act.

In September of 1914, Carlos E. Bolton was elected Justice of the Peace for the town of Courtland. He had run unopposed, as Judge Cabell entered retirement. Judge Bolton lived the remainder of his life in Courtland, and passed away in the summer of 1920 at the age of 73. He was buried in Douglas and his funeral was one of the biggest that Douglas had seen in many years.

In contrast with the legends of the Old West, towns of the New West were much more peaceful and civilized. It was because of people such as John Bright, James Cabell, and Carlos Bolton that law supplanted force as the ruling principle in the new state of Arizona. Because of their respect for and enforcement of the law, both business and population boomed throughout the wider territory of the southwest, even if they happened to decline and fade in particular locations such as Courtland.



1894 Hiatt "Darby" handcuffs, the type used in Cochise County in 1910