

COURTLAND ARIZONA

Type and Hype:
Newspapers

COURTLAND ARIZONAN

"KEEP FAITH WITH THE PEOPLE AND THE PEOPLE WILL KEEP FAITH WITH YOU"

VOL. 1

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There is an old saying which goes: “*There are two kinds of lies: bald-faced lies and statistics.*” Along with those two, a footnote could be added: Newspapers... at least in the latter part of the 19th and early 20th centuries. In a world where telephones were rare, telegrams were short, and televisions were non-existent, the newspaper was a vehicle of awesome power and influence.

For a short time, the small town of Courtland Arizona had two rival newspapers: the Courtland Arizonan and the Courtland Times. The Times was a company newspaper, owned by the Great Western Copper Company, printed in Douglas. In large part because of its association with the Great Western company, the Times’ circulation was never very high, and the paper didn’t last very long. The Courtland Arizonan, on the other hand, put out a weekly edition from February 13, 1909 until the paper closed at the end of 1920, a twelve year run.

The Arizonan was an independent newspaper in an independent town. One of the proudest comments of Courtland citizens was that unlike many other mining towns like Bisbee, Morenci, and Jerome, Courtland was not a “company town.” There was no question the citizens were grateful to the big mining companies, like the Calumet & Arizona or the Great Western Copper Company, but they did not want their town to be dependent on the whim or the business concerns of the company.

That is not to say, however, that the town newspaper was unbiased. In fact, it would be a difficult thing to find *any* newspaper in the country that was completely unbiased. Most didn’t even pretend to be. The more modern reader might expect that a newspaper would never choose sides, promote a cause, or mingle “hard news” with paid advertisements. Such a reader would be aghast at the ease and frequency with which those lines were crossed in newspapers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

The Arizonan in effect really was a company paper... but the “company” was the whole town of Courtland. Anything which would bring fame or credit to the town was reported, promoted, and sometimes exaggerated without apology.

The very first issue of the Arizonan is bursting with enthusiasm and language which seems more appropriate to a carnival barker than a journalist. Anyone who

had a critical comment about the town was called a “knocker” and was roundly attacked in the paper. “Boosters” were welcomed and patted on the back. “Knockers” were reviled and encouraged to go elsewhere.

**NO OTHER CAMP IN ARIZONA EVER MADE
SUCH A SHOWING IN SO SHORT A TIME**
Astonishing Statement by a High Official of One of the
Big Copper Companies Leaves No Doubt of the
Permanency of the Coming Metropolis

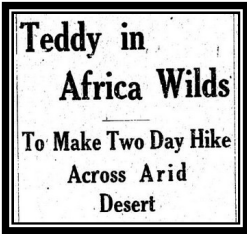
Courtland with a big C.
Two thousand at work in six months.
A population of ten thousand inside of a year.
A mining town which is sure to make the others take notice.
Courtland merchants are to have the benefit of railroad competition.
Courtland has no reason for knocking, no use for knockers.
Courtland has only one saloon, and it has been dubbed the Stingaree.
The man who buys lots in Courtland now is going to wear "that smile" six months from now.
There are a number of townsites, but room for all in the end, and the man who invests in Courtland realty is bound to hit it big.
With a hustler like J. N. McFate, the McFate Courtland townsite is rapidly going to the front.

Editorials are normally the place where the political leanings of a newspaper are more clearly revealed... at least this is so in modern newspapers. While the selection of stories and the inclusion or exclusion of certain news events is a normal part of any news publication, in most turn-of-the-century newspapers it was done for political reasons, and done openly and loudly. The Courtland Arizonan was certainly no exception. The Arizonan was staunchly Republican in its selection of articles, its editorials, and even its advertising. Republican politicians were praised, not just in the editorials, but in the actual

reporting of stories. Sometimes it was done by quoting a Republican supporter, and sometimes it was simply inserted without any pretense of neutrality

It didn't take the reader very long to discover, for instance, that Teddy Roosevelt held the highest place in the pantheon of the Arizonan's gods. Even though Roosevelt was nearly out of office by the time the Arizonan first went to press, his every move was followed, his every utterance reported with filial devotion. When Roosevelt went on an African safari after leaving office, almost every word, every meal, every destination, and every shot was re-

ported in the Arizonan... and not just on a back page surrounded by other “gee-whiz” trivia. It was reported on the front page, with eye-catching headlines and prominent placement. Several issues have multiple front-page stories about the ex-president, his travels, and his speeches. Roosevelt’s successor, fellow Republican Howard Taft, was often held up in comparison to Teddy and found sorely lacking. But then again, how could anyone stand in comparison to the great T.R.?



In Arizona politics, the biggest concern for the Courtland Arizonan and its readers was the question of statehood for Arizona. The territory had been trying to become a state for decades, and as far as most citizens were concerned, it couldn’t happen fast enough. From its first edition in 1909 until statehood became a reality on Valentine’s Day 1912, the acceptance of Arizona into the Union was a drum that was beaten loudly in every issue. In the beginning, Arizona’s application for statehood was tied together with that of



New Mexico. But difficulties with corruption in the New Mexico territorial government caused the dual application to be put on hold, and there was much moaning and whining about the dual application. Arizona was urged by many to go it alone, and try to achieve statehood separately from New Mexico.

Later, problems with the wording of Arizona’s state constitution as passed by the territorial legislature caused it to be put on the back burner, while New Mexico became a state before Arizona. Many Arizonans saw this as a stab in the back by the perfidious neighbor state of New Mexico.

In local politics, any chance for the newspaper to promote a Republican cause and downplay a Democratic one was taken up with speed and force. The election results were published with great fanfare on the front page... when the Republicans won, and any Democratic gains were portrayed as a bout of temporary insanity

on the part of a confused populace. The Democratic and progressive first state governor, George Hunt, was often publicly reviled in the pages of the Courtland Arizonan, and his election was seen as a hiatus from sanity which would soon be remedied... if somehow the state managed to survive it.

The wonders of Courtland, at least according to the paper, included the fortunes of each and every business in the town. Readers of the paper who had never set foot in Courtland could only envision a booming metropolis with every conceivable luxury, service, and opportunity. Wherever the reader looks, at least in the first few years of publication, yet another business is thriving, yet another entrepreneur is succeeding, and yet another building is going up. Within a month of the establishment of the town, an editorial proposed the “inevitable” conclusion that Courtland surely *must* soon become the new county seat, as every conceivable advantage was there in the town, or would soon be arriving.

The sheer optimism displayed in its pages made the newspaper a physical manifestation of the frenetic boom-town mining spirit which gave birth to the town in the first place. This optimism, coupled with the quite extensive distribution of the paper, resulted in an influx of expectant, energetic, and often naive newcomers to the municipality. From all over the country individuals, and even entire families, took the Sunset Limited to Cochise and then streamed south into Courtland. The newspaper was sent from Courtland via second-class mail to libraries in towns and cities all the way to both coasts, and from the Mexican to the Canadian border.

With all that influence and clout, it is surprising to note that the entire staff of the Courtland Arizonan comprised 4 people. Four. The founder, owner, editor, promoter, and reporter of the newspaper was John Van Eaton. His wife Clyde helped in the office, tak-

**OVER 1000 MEN
ON COURTLAND
PAYROLLS
TODAY**

EMBRYO METROPOLIS OF THE
SOUTHWEST GOING FORWARD
RAPIDLY TO FUTURE
GREAT DESTINY

**MUSIC OF HAMMER, SAW AND
PICKS IN THE ATMOSPHERE**

Scores of Inquiries Arriving Daily
About the City, the Mines and the
Wonderful Agricultural Region
On Every Side.

ing in reports from passers-by and other interested citizens, and reading other newspapers for articles which could be reprinted and included in the Arizonan. A typesetter/pressman and his assistant rounded out the staff.

John V. Van Eaton was born in Placerville, California in 1865. Placerville was one of the wildest mining towns in the California Gold Rush days (its original name was “Hangtown” because of the many hangings which took place there in the latter 1800’s). John knew mining, and he understood miners. Because of the location of Placerville in California’s fertile Sacramento valley, he also felt right at home with farmers and ranchers. But rather than join either the miners or the farmers, he felt compelled to tell their story instead. That is what lead him into the newspaper business.

John Van Eaton started the paper on a little capital he’d brought with him to Courtland, and augmented it with a large dose of advertising money. The promise of advertising was Van Eaton’s stock in trade. And what a salesman he was. The first issue was an 8-page edition, and except for the front page, every other page was roughly 50% advertising. Furthermore, blurring the line between news and paid advertising was the norm at the time, and the Arizonan was no exception. Short blurbs promoting a Courtland business were inserted between local news stories. Sometimes the stories themselves were only barely disguised advertisements.

Van Eaton became the secretary and treasurer of the Sulphur Springs Valley Land and Development Company, a firm whose aim was to offer information about the choicest places in the valley to build a farm or ranch. The announcement of the formation of this real estate company was presented on the front page as news, but was little more than an extended series of promotional statements made by the officers of the company.

<p>Death of Favorite Neice. Friday word was received by Mrs. W. A. Sherwood of the death of her favorite neice, Mrs. Hipple, of Watonga, Okla. On March 4th Mrs. Hipple buried her two month's old babe, and the nervous excitement at this time probably hastened her demise. The lady leaves a husband and young daughter to mourn the loss of loving wife and mother.</p> <p>Merchant's Cafe. Everybody dines at the new cafe. Everything to eat in fine array.</p> <p>Name of Agent. J. L. Strong is the agent at Blacks, the present station for Courtland on the Arizona & Colorado railroad.</p>
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"The land will be there, fertile fields and beautiful orchards, populated by a hundred thousand people when the mines of Courtland and every other adjacent camp are exhausted. People will say I am looking a great ways into the future, but the years fly rapidly in these times of rapid transit. It shall be the purpose of the Sulphur Springs Valley Land and Development company to present to families all over the United States a strictly accurate picture of conditions as they exist. The company will be prepared to locate settlers, with accurate information as to water and crop possibilities. We will advertise the valley throughout the east and middle west, but only in a strictly legitimate manner. We shall hue closely to the truth. That is sufficient to attract thousands to this section."

In the end, the real estate company folded and Van Eaton sold his newspaper to William A. Sherwood, and moved on. It is said of some politicians that their gift is the ability to win an election, but that winning and governing are two different matters. The same might be said for John Van Eaton in regard to the newspaper business. His gift was to start up a newspaper and to get it moving. But then he would get bored and move on to some other interesting place and do the same again. By 1915, he had moved back to California, where he had grown up, and was editor of the Delano Record, a weekly newspaper in an agricultural region. By 1921, he had moved yet again, and was the founder, publisher, and editor of the Inglewood Californian. The Courtland Arizonan continued on after his departure, but it never again quite reached the plateau of enthusiasm or influence it had under the direction of John Van Eaton.

There was no single cause which accounted for the "boom town" status of Courtland in 1909-1912, it was really a combination of three factors: copper, railroads, and publicity. Each of these had one man as their driving force in the town of Courtland. In copper, it was W. L. Young, owner of the Great Western Copper Company. In railroads, it was E. H. Harriman, chairman of the Union Pacific Railroad. But in publicity, that driving force was John V. Van Eaton. His enthusiasm for the town of Courtland, for its residents and neighbors, and especially for miners and farmers like the ones he grew up with, brought people from near and far into the town and helped to create the phenomenon that was Courtland in its heyday.