

French Henry Camp Profile

Name of Camp: French Henry

Time Period: Summer, 1922

Camp Theme: Mining, milling and mystery at Aztec Gold Mines Company.

Significance in American History:

Rich mineral deposits were largely reasonable for the US government policies to claim and control the West. The gold rushes and mining industry helped populate the American West with Americans from the eastern states and immigrants from Europe and Latin America. Fortunes were made and lost by individual prospectors, owners and speculators, but, where hard rock or placer mining companies were established, the actual work was done by hired laborers. It was a job of skill, strength, hardship and often danger. In the Baldy Mountain area of New Mexico there were a series of booms and busts, periods of activity and longer ones of inactivity that, at the Aztec Mine, extended intermittently from 1868 until 1941.

Characters.

Jake Schlegal. From a German family that immigrated to the US and ended up in Elizabethtown where Jake was born in 1903. His father had come to work for the sledge operation known as the Eleanor. This didn't last for long, but he got a job with a placer operation run by Joe Lowrey, whose wife is the woman for whom Elizabethtown had been named when she was only a baby. In this way Jake's father managed to support his family and stay in the area even when mining work was sparse. Jake learned placer mining and worked for the Lowreys, too, but he heard there was going to be better pay at the newly formed Aztec Gold Mines Company on the eastern slope. Prior to this time, it would have been difficult to get work at the Aztec because the pro-British Maxwell Land Grant Company was running the operation there. They were very anti-German because of the "Great War", but now they were leasing the operations to a new company formed by local Colfax County investors including Mr. Robert G. Mullen. Jake knows all the stories, rumors and mysteries of the area and shares them freely.

Sheila O'Shea. Came to the US from Ireland with her aunt Agnes after her parents were killed in the Easter Uprising of 1916. Aunt Aggie married in Philadelphia and they all came to this area to work for the McIntyre brothers who have been drilling a deep tunnel mine (since 1900) that would go from one side of Baldy Mountain to the other in search of the mother lode. Sheila can do most anything and does -- from cooking, to laundry, blacksmithing, and managing the books. She has made herself indispensable, and she is not bashful about taking the lead in whatever she does.

Juan Villasenor. Came from Mexico across the Rio Grande border to the US with his family as a child to escape the continued backlash of the revolution which had made the life of a *campesino* very difficult. His father is working in the mines near Gallup, New Mexico now, but Juanito didn't like it there where the Mexicans were given all the most dangerous jobs. He heard that mining companies were more tolerant in the northern part of the state where there were more Spanish speaking people; so he came to Cimarron looking for work. He found out that the Aztec Gold Mines Company was hiring and hired on. Juan likes it here. It reminds him a little of the Sierras of his early childhood on the Chihuahua-Durango border near San Francisco de Oro.

Maribelle "Belle" Crandell. From a Yuma County family farm on the Eastern Colorado plains, Belle is tired of the hard life of a farm woman and the last thing she wants to do is marry a farmer. She is much more interested in gold and mystery -- she's a big fan of the mystery dramas on the radio. The Aztec suits her fine since she's not afraid of hard work, believes in equal rights for women (who just got the vote in 1920), and has taken a particular interest in the beheading that

occurred at the Mystic mine which adjoins the Aztec. Belle has been playing detective and trying to figure out "who done it". She is quick to tell about her theories to anyone who will listen.

"Smithy" White. Learned blacksmithing from his father who had a small shop of his own in Springer, New Mexico. Smithy served in the infantry during the Great War in France and doesn't like to talk about it much, but he loves music and sometimes breaks out with a tune that was popular from the war. More likely he'll sing a line or two from those jazzy popular songs that they play on the radio. "Five foot two, eyes of blue" (has anybody seen my gal); Yes sir, that's my baby" (no sir, don't mean maybe); Does the spearmint lose its flavor on the bedpost overnight" are among his favorites.

Charlie or Charlotte Lee. Came north from Silver City, New Mexico, to the Baldy district when s/he heard that there was activity again at the Aztec. Could be Asian American who was born to Chinese parents who worked on the building of the railroads in the West, but stayed in Silver City. Whatever ethnicity is appropriate, his/her parents started a little grocery store there. There is copper mining in the Silver City area but s/he wanted to go where there was gold.

"Willy" Wilson. Came West from West Virginia where he'd been around mining all his life. The work here is just as hard but he likes the clear air and sunshine of the Baldy area. Or, an African American, who came west from Texas. Either one could be working his way to California where he hears there is sunshine and a land of plenty for everybody. He is a little leery of being around the Aztec alone and has had nightmares about a headless prospector.

Historical Background of Camp.

By 1866 Lucien Maxwell controlled the land in all directions from Cimarron and it was then that gold was found near the western slope of Baldy Mountain. Consequently, this area became populated with miners and prospectors from all parts of the United States and many new immigrants, especially from Italy, Ireland, Scotland, Spain, Germany and Mexico. Many of the immigrants came with skills and experience in mining from their native countries. Elizabethtown quickly became the largest settlement in the area and had a very diverse population. Mr. Maxwell made a handsome profit from leases that he made to prospectors, placer miners, and mining speculators on the western slope, but it was from mining operations on the eastern slope of Baldy where the Aztec mine was located that he realized the most wealth. Nonetheless, by 1870 the richest ore bodies and those easiest to extract were gone. Maxwell sold the huge Maxwell Land Grant and his mining interests that year to foreign investors who formed the Maxwell Land Grant Company. By 1875 both Baldy Town and E'town had few residents in comparison to the late '60's boom time and mining activity was spotty.

There were several resurgences of mining activity in the Baldy region on the eastern slope. (For the complete history see the references listed below in the reference section.) The most significant for the Aztec was in 1909 when the Maxwell Land Grant Company took over management of the mine and hired an expert mining engineer Ernest V. Deshayes to be in charge of operations. The mine prospered until Deshayes' resignation in 1917. Although several other mining experts were hired, "the Great War" created major difficulties -- necessary materials and tools were not available, labor was scarce, and prices were sky high. Again, activity slacked off to none.

From 1900 on there was another significant venture in progress in the Baldy region. Two brothers Alexander and William McIntyre were drilling a deep tunnel mine that was to go through the mountain connecting in the center where they were convinced the "mother lode" rested awaiting their discovery. There were many ups and downs to this operation; however they somehow managed to keep selling stock and raising enough money to keep drilling.

Also of note to the history of the area is the inspiration to dredge the Moreno riverbed of its gold deposits. H. J. Reiling of Chicago formed the Oro Dredging Company in 1900 designing a massive contraption with huge boiler and hundreds of wheels that was called "the Eleanor". From

August of 1901 until spring of 1905, her 21,000 pound boilers powered buckets that dug 15 feet into the riverbed and deposited the contents into long sluice boxes producing an average of \$1000 per day in gold. She was mortgaged to finance another "better" machine that turned out to be a complete failure. The Oro Dredging Company and its entire project collapsed by 1906.

Most recently, in the winter of 1920-1921, word spread that The Maxwell Land Grant Company was negotiating with a group of Colfax County investors headed by Robert G. Mullen for the reopening of the Aztec. It was also rumored that these investors wanted to purchase the Mystic mine which adjoins the Aztec. Gossip was that one of the three owner/operators of the Mystic mine, "Shorty" Wilkerson, was not willing to sell. Accusations of "high grading" (stealing ore) from the Aztec were made with strong implications that it was "Shorty" Wilkerson, Clarence Probert and Jack Ferguson -- the Mystic owners who were doing it. In turn the Aztec was accused of trespassing by the Mystic. Bad feelings were said to be in the air when Wilkerson disappeared. "The story told by his partners, Ferguson and Probert, was that they had found his body in the Mystic Mine, killed by a gun shot and headless. They said they buried the body, through they could not find the head. They told that Wilkerson had that day met with the owners of the Aztec, and they voiced dire suspicions. Suspicious or not, they stopped for a meal at the Aztec Mine. On their way home both men became violently sick; both were in bed for weeks. The owners of the Aztec said they had not seen Wilkerson; they did not believe that Ferguson and Probert had found a body or buried it, though they thought a skeleton found years later might have been Wilkerson's. None of this ever came to court." *Murders and Mysteries in New Mexico* by Erna Fergusson. "In the days when the Aztec and Mystic mines were going full blast, old residents of the area recall at least three other decapitation slayings. All three of the victims were miners, and it is rumored that all three had been connected, in ways that were not clear, with either the Mystic or the Aztec mines." Headless Body #5 ... *The Denver Post*, Magazine Section, November 10, 1929.

In the spring of 1921 the Aztec Gold Mines Company is incorporated by Mullen with operations beginning that fall -- less than a year after the Wilkerson story became common knowledge in the area.

A wealthy Oklahoma oilman, Waite Phillips and his wife Genevieve, purchased the 42,000 acre Hawkeye Ranch from George Webster on April 25, 1922. Gene Hayward has just arrived in Cimarron from another Phillips ranch in Colorado to manage this new ranch for the Phillips family. Mr. Phillips gave Mr. Webster a check for \$150,000 -- the total purchase price. This transaction and the new owners are relevant pieces of current events and gossip for the area.

Present Time at French Henry.

Summer of 1922 is bustling with activity, hopes of big profits and steady jobs with good pay. This is the tenor of the United States as a whole during this era of prosperity and high spirits. However, French Henry is also thick with the undercurrent of the mystery behind the alleged beheading. Whether they want to or not, employees find themselves talking about it -- wondering if there was a murder at all, if it was really Wilkerson, who did it (Mullen or someone in his employment, Wilkerson's partners, a serial murderer who beheads unsuspecting, suspicious prospectors, anyone connected with the Aztec or the Mystic?), and why.

Future Developments.

Although the Aztec Gold Mines Company reported \$20,000 worth of gold production per month during the last half of 1922, it was in perilous financial condition when the newly rebuilt mill was severely damaged by fire on May 24, 1923. The corporation dissolved and Mullen cancelled the lease with the Maxwell Land Grant Company. Ever hopeful, Mullen raised more financial backing and incorporated a new company in October of 1923. It rebuilt the mill and hired 150 workers in 1924; however quarreling among the owners, reported lack of sobriety by Mullen, and absence of easy pay dirt finally caused the Land Company to cancel its contract with Mullen in 1926.

The McIntyre brothers continued their deep tunnel. Although William died in 1930, four years later two tunnels met in mid-mountain. Unfortunately the rich veins that they had predicted did not intersect the passageway they had made through Baldy Mountain.

Sporadic attempts were made to revive interest in mining on Baldy until the beginning of WWII in 1941. Perhaps a few lone prospectors sluiced small amounts but the days of rich ore and hard rock mining were gone.

Characters' Clothing and Appearance.

The general look that we are after at French Henry is early 20th century expedition, "Indiana Jones" wear.

Women. Shirts or blouses with rounded, pointed or sailor collars in the variety of colors. Jodhpur pants in khaki, twill, or wool. Khaki or wool trousers. Split skirts. Gored and "A" line skirts that fall in between mid-calf and ankle. Leather belts, plain in design. Lace up work boots. Wool sleeveless vests or vest sweaters. V-neck or shawl collared sweaters; wool jackets, blazer style in subtle and dark colors. Cardigan sweaters and tailored men's blazer style jackets for warmth.

Accessories: Hats are a necessity to look right: broad brimmed or maybe one female who wears a Irish cap; leather work gloves, handkerchiefs, scarves (large squares in cotton or rayon). Black and white opaque stockings with skirts. No jewelry would be wore except watches.

Appearance: Neat, clean and orderly. Housekeeping is the same. Hairstyles of the period and class are long hair drawn back into a bun or up on top of the head or cut short in the bobbed fashion. No obviously dyed hair colors, ie. purple or green..

Men: Shirts with rounded or pointed collars in a variety of colors. Jodhpur pants in khaki, twill or wool. Khaki and wool "chino" style trousers. High top lace up boots. Wool vests. Leather belts, plain in design. Three quarter length Mackinaw Coats of canvas or khaki twill. Wool sport coat like jackets with 4 buttons in dark colors. Heavy padded wool parkas for very cold times. Sweater vests and cardigan sweaters.

Accessories include: Hats; Fedora, Open Road, Irish or golf style billed caps; work gloves. Handkerchiefs, white or solid colors, bandanas. Pocket watches; Socks;. Look for photos and drawings of working class men of this period.

Appearance: Neat, clean and orderly also as much as possible; dirty only as activities have made you. Buildings, tools, etc. in order. Hairstyles of the period were short -- to the ears and above nape of the neck -- without "buzzed" or shaved areas. No obviously dyed hair colors.

Language.

Most characters would speak a fairly standard American English. If the staff persons playing the characters of Willy, Sheila, or Juan want to go for a Southern, Irish or Mexican accents, that's icing on the cake. It would enhance the reality of the characters if done well, consistently and respectfully. No hokey hillbilly accents here.

Props.

- Pocket watches for men and women
- Fountain pens or pencils for check in; no contemporary looking pens
- Blacksmithing tools
- Gold panning equipment
- Lanterns for mine tour and possible mystery effects
- Wash tub, wringer and scrub board for laundry

Activities.

Aztec mine tours, blacksmithing, gold panning and mining/milling museum

Staff Roles and Responsibilities as Historical Interpreters.

Greeting --- In character, first person interp

Check-in – Out of character, third person interp

Gold Panning-- In character

Mine Tour-- In character

Blacksmithing—Blacksmith, in character first person

Museum tour -- In costume, out of character, third person interp

Campers' Roles.

New recruits for the labor force

Curiosity seekers who heard about the beheadings

Positive Values to the Depicted at French Henry.

- Willingness to work hard for a goal
- Diversity of class, nationality, and ethnicity in the mining camps working as a team
- Perseverance through ups and downs of fortune
- Knowledge and respect of the land, minerals and natural resources

References and Research.

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Out in God's Country: A History of Colfax Country, New Mexico. By Lawrence R. Murphy

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"The Changing Face of a Mining Town: The Dual Labor System in Elizabethtown, New Mexico." By Richard D. Loosbrock *New Mexico Historical Review* 74 (October, 1999) pp. 353-373.

"Managing a Gold Rush: Mining on New Mexico's Maxwell Land Grant." By Richard D. Loosbrock *Mining History Journal*, 1999.

Online searches for photos and mining information is encouraged.