
ARIZONA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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PC 204**Risdon, Oliver Ambrose, ca. 1880-1940
Photograph Collection, ca. 1910-ca. 1950****DESCRIPTION**

Photographs of people, landscapes, and activities in eastern Arizona, ca. 1910-ca. 1950. Some studio portraits are included although the majority of the collection documents the towns of Clifton and Metcalf where Oliver A. Risdon operated photography studios. The collection consists of approximately 88 glass plates (predominantly 6 x 8 inches) and a large number of nitrate negatives, many of which have been printed for viewing. Many of the nitrate negatives have been duplicated. Frank Gabusi, who bought the studio from Risdon in 1940, made some of the images in this collection. Considering the dates of the subject matter, it seems safe to suggest that the images printed from 8x10 negatives were all made by Gabusi.

5 boxes, 2.5 linear ft.

ACQUISITION

Dr. James T. O'Neil donated the glass plates in 1972; Mary A. Beager, president of the Clifton Chamber of Commerce, donated the remainder of the collection in October 2000.

RELATED MATERIALS

"Clifton: Photography and Folk History in a Mining Town" by Heather Hatch, Karen Dahood, and Al V. Fernandez, *Journal of Arizona History*, Autumn 1982

Scenes from the Clifton-Morenci Mining District, Greenlee County, Arizona, photos by Risdon Studio, Clifton, Arizona, published by The Albertype Company, Brooklyn, New York, n.d.

ACCESS

There are no restrictions on access to this collection.

COPYRIGHT

Requests for permission to publish material from this collection should be addressed to the Arizona Historical Society-Tucson, Archives Department.

PROCESSING

Dena McDuffie processed the collection in September 2001.

ARRANGEMENT

The collection is arranged topically.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Oliver Ambrose Risdon was born near Fort Scott, Kansas around 1875. He married Etta Dilliner in Glasco, Kansas on January 18, 1897. Risdon had been teaching school in Kansas for \$25 per month when he moved his family West. They first went to Santa Rita, New Mexico (near Silver

City), where Risdon worked for the railroad and the family lived in two boxcars. In Silver City, Risdon learned photography and began his career as a photographer. Oliver and Etta had 10 children; six girls survived to adulthood: Mildred, Emma (born 1900, m. Dichtenmiller), Rita (born in 1899 and named after Santa Rita, New Mexico where the Risdons lived when she was born, m. Hubbard), Dolores, Roxanna (aka Roxie, m. Killingsworth), and Dorothy. Risdon is said to have written poetry and stories.

The family moved to Clifton, Arizona Territory around 1900 and Risdon opened his first photography studio in a tent opposite Sam Abraham's Clifton Hotel on North Clifton Street. When the San Francisco River flooded in 1902, this first location was washed away and Risdon built a studio on the east side of town. By 1907, Risdon was operating two studios—one in Clifton and one in Metcalf (another mining town which, by 1918, had all but disappeared). At that time, his brother-in-law Ira Dilliner was a partner in the studio, but the partnership didn't last and Dilliner became a deputy sheriff under Greenlee County Sheriff Johnnie Parks. Around 1915, Risdon built his last studio on Chase Creek Street (Chase Creek was the business section of the city with pool halls, saloons, amusements, movie theatres, stores, etc.); that building is now the Clifton Chamber of Commerce. For a time, he also had a studio in Safford.

During Prohibition, the American Express office received a box of books addressed to Clifton's most popular attorney, Mr. Kearney. The local American Express agent, Mr. Seidel, asked people to look for Kearney and tell him "to come down as soon as possible because the cases [of books] are leaking." Risdon was a strong Prohibitionist and served as president of a local committee to enforce the 18th Amendment when Arizona went dry in 1914. He helped enforce Prohibition, sometimes serving as a deputy sheriff. One of his most memorable photographs portrays men destroying boxes of whiskey confiscated from Hipolito Cascarelli's saloon in Metcalf.

In the early years of the 20th century, union representatives began organizing mine workers in Arizona. When strikes for miners' rights began in Clifton in 1915, Risdon documented their marches and meetings.

During World War I, the U.S. government rented Risdon's photographic lenses for military use; all were returned to him, in good condition, after the war ended.

In 1921, the family moved to Los Angeles to seek better work. There, Risdon went into cement contracting and did carpentry work, but he found Los Angeles too hectic and the family returned to Clifton in 1925. In 1932, Clifton's mines were shut down and the next eight years were a time of hardship in the area.

In the 1920s and until around 1940, postcard views were popular items at the Risdon Studio. Many of the images in the collection were taken as postcard views with captions written in reverse on the negatives.

In 1940 Phelps Dodge bought up all the mines in the area and reopened them. The same year, Risdon sold his studio to Frank Gabusi (son of Tucson photographer Juan Gabusi who had a studio at 111 E. Congress St.), then died shortly afterwards. Gabusi is described as a "jovial fellow" whose favorite greeting was "Glad to be alive, saw the sun shine once again." Mrs. Risdon died in 1963. When Gabusi died around 1970, Frank Martinez of Clifton bought the studio.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The Oliver A. Risdon collection of photographs is a significant grouping of images portraying eastern Arizona during in the first half of the twentieth century. The large volume of images taken by one photographer over forty years documenting eastern Arizona—and especially its mining industry—makes this collection particularly valuable. The collection contains prints of original glass plates and of nitrate negatives taken by Oliver Risdon. Some of the images in the collection were made by Frank Gabusi who bought Risdon's studio in 1940, shortly before Risdon's death.

Many of Risdon's images were in postcard format, a popular specialty of his studio and of the times. The title of each view was inscribed in reverse on each negative so that the white lettering appeared on the prints. This is, of course, very helpful in terms of identifying images.

Many of the negatives in this collection are not printed, but have been preserved. In the course of organizing the collection, the archivist chose the most significant negatives to print. However, if a researcher is interested in seeing every negative on a particular subject, any unprinted negatives can be retrieved and made available to researchers. Researchers are asked to provide the research library with advance notice so that these negatives can be pulled from cold storage and made available.

Notations on backs of photographs, identified with the initials "A.F.," are comments by Clifton historian Al V. Fernandez.

SERIES NOTES

Series 1: Prints from Glass Negatives. These prints were made from the approximately 88 glass plates donated by Dr. James T. O'Neil in 1972. Copy negatives have been made of all these images. These photographs have been kept separate from the rest of the nitrate-based collection in order to retain their provenience. These pictures stand alone, providing an excellent overview of the collection, including images of miners, funerals, landscapes, and families.

Series 2: People. Although Risdon advertised himself as a portrait photographer, there are few studio portraits in the collection. Most of his images of people are posed outdoors, with Clifton, Metcalf, and Morenci often serving as background. In addition are the requisite photos of official groups . . . city officials, civic organizations, etc.

Series 3: Places. Among the places chronicled by Risdon are Clifton and the towns surrounding it; mining sites; the White Mountains and Hannagan's Meadow; Chase Creek Street where most of Clifton's business took place; the Coronado Trail; Coolidge Dam; San Xavier; and the Petrified Forest.

Series 4: Subjects. Images include: airplanes, businesses; mining; military; organizations; farming and ranching; hunting, fishing and camping; floods; funerals; railroads; schools; and transportation.

BOX & FOLDER LIST

Box 1, F. 1-5

Series 1: Glass Negative Prints

F. 1-5 Prints made from glass plates made by Oliver Risdon

Box 2, F. 6-18

Series 2: People

F. 6 Portraits-Risdon Family.

F. 7 Portraits-Miscellaneous. Identified photographs include Greenlee County Sheriff Johnnie Parks; an old prospector; Dr. Laugharn; Claude Mitchell; Supt. Metcalf or McLean (a mining superintendent); and Mrs. Emma Wilkerson (PC 204/F. 7/D) whose second marriage was to Albert Wilkerson who had been a captain in the Confederate Army and also a captain in the Texas Rangers. They moved to Arizona in 1897 and settled on two acres of land, at the confluence of the Blue and San Francisco rivers, where they grew corn. One day, Mrs. Wilkerson was home alone when a band of Indians walked into the barn and stole two sacks of corn. When he came home, her husband told her she should have scared them off with a

- gun. Four days later, the Indians returned and hung two hindquarters of beef on the empty hooks where the sacks of corn had been. This portrait was taken by Gabusi on her 75th birthday at her Soap Box Ranch near Clifton. Identified images among the unprinted negatives in this folder are: Elk Club members; oldest voters in Greenlee County on 9-11-62 (no doubt taken by Gabusi); and Copper era Judge Abers.
- F. 8-9 Portraits-Group. Identified photographs include a cabinet card depicting rangers from Tonto National Forest, including Frank Mitchell, James H. Sizer, Benton S. Rodgers, and Joe Bush, ca. 1933; a photo of Gladys Sidebotham; a group photo of McMillen, Danahauer, Brutnell, Parker, Baker, Thomason, Span, Barr, Barra, Ashford, Pollock, Laughren, Anderson and Villalante; the 5th contingent, Greenlee County, 1918; flood victims believed to be employees of Phelps Dodge Co. store; and an image called "Main Street Loafers, Clifton, Arizona."
- F. 10 Portraits-Ethnic Groups-Asians. Photographs include an interior view of the Ching Chang Wong store and formal portraits of an unidentified Asian man wearing a western suit.
- F. 11 Portraits-Ethnic Groups-Native Americans. Posed photographs of Apache Indians.

Series 3: Places

- F. 12 Places-Alpine, Arizona. [At the eastern end of Arizona's White Mountains, in the center of the state, lies Alpine, nestled in a high mountain valley just six miles from the New Mexico border.] Photograph of the Beaverhead Lodge in Alpine.
- F. 13 Places-Clifton, Arizona-Aerial Views. [At one time, Phelps-Dodge operated the country's largest open-pit copper mine in the Clifton area; Clifton had two smelters and a population of 5,000; today, the town has about 2,800 residents.] Risdon called these images "Birds-eye Views" and probably took them from atop mountains or buildings. Many of these pictures were used as postcard images and have titles inscribed on the negatives. Images include: Hills Addition; North, South and East Clifton; cattle herded down dry river bed; Stanton Stadium; post office; Peñasco looking north; and Frisco Ave. 1897- 1939
- F. 14 Places-Clifton, Arizona-Chase Creek Street (business district). [When mining began in the Clifton area, ore was shipped to Scotland for smelter. This was not satisfactory to the Lesinsky brothers who built an adobe smelter along Chase Creek in Clifton. Businesses cropped up around the smelter and the three-block strip of stores through Chase Creek Road had groceries and bars, a few pool halls, apartments and boarding houses, and was a popular draw for cowboys and ranchers in the area. Its narrow crooked street had board sidewalks and buildings jammed together on both sides.] Images include: Businesses La Feria Rafael Valdez, Blue Bird Laundry, Casino, Co-Operativa Mexicana, Lindsey's Ice Cream, Greenlee Restaurant, Manila Rooming House, Ferber's, Royal Theatre, El Paso Dry Goods, S.J. Forbes Groceries, Chase Creek Store, Charley's Laundry, Lola Saba & Sons Liquors, The White House Store, J.C. Penney, Smith's Radio Service, and Farmer's Market; and Chase Creek Canyon.
- F. 15 Places-Clifton, Arizona-Homes. [About 55 buildings in Clifton are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Nearly all are concentrated in the townsite historic district, a 37-acre area encompassing the confluence of the San Francisco River and its Chase Creek tributary. Architectural styles range from the Arizona and New Mexico Railway's restored 1913 Mission Revival passenger train depot—with its red tile roofs and wide eaves—to Henry Lesinsky's Sonoran-style adobe home from 1873, Greenlee County's oldest surviving building.]
- F. 16 Places-Clifton, Arizona-Street Scenes and Groups. Among the identified images are: R.R. Avenue looking North and South; The Cliffs; Court House; South Clifton Bridge; Clifton Cemetery; P.D. [Phelps Dodge] Hospital; S.P. [Southern Pacific] Depot; July 4 Parade;

- Frisco Avenue looking West; East Side; North Clifton; and Main Street looking South. Among the unprinted negatives are: East, South Clifton; Scenic Drive; Clifton from Highway 71; East Side Road; R.R. Avenue going South; and photos of road construction and scenic images labeled "City of Clifton."
- F. 17 Places-Coolidge Dam. [The Coolidge Dam, on the Gila River in southeastern Arizona, was completed in 1928. It irrigates approximately 100,000 acres, providing water for irrigation, power, and recreation. The San Carlos Reservoir, formed behind the dam, lies above old tribal burial grounds and the former camp of Geronimo.]
- F. 18 Places-Coronado Trail [The Coronado Trail is believed to be the oldest roadway in Arizona; legend and fact suggest it may be the route Francisco Vasquez de Coronado and his armored caravan traveled north from Mexico in search of the fabled Seven Cities of Cibola in 1540.] Identified images include: Chase Creek; Longfellow; K.P. Blue Mountains; Ranger Station, Eagle River; Needle's Eye, Mule Creek Hwy.; The Portal; Rino (Ring?) Lookout; Apache Forest; and Goat Rock. Among the unprinted negatives are: Chase Creek Canyon; August Headwaters, Black River, Ariz.; Aspen; and Needle's Eye, Mule Creek Road.

Box 3, F. 19-31

- F. 19-20 Places-Duncan, Arizona. [Duncan straddles the Gila River in southern Greenlee County, a few miles from Arizona's border with New Mexico. Originally called Purdy, the name was changed to Duncan in the early 1880s. In territorial days, Duncan was known as a tough town.] Images include: Lunt's Dairy; Patrol/Inspection Station; parade; schools; North, South and East views; onions; Arizona Service Station; Bonnie Heather Inn; Duncan Valley Service Station; Camp No. 1; SCS Camp 1-A; C.C. Camp; Main Street; Duncan Saloon; aerial views and street scenes.
- F. 21 Places-Franklin, Arizona.
- F. 22 Places-Mayer, Arizona. [Mayer is in northern Arizona, in Yavapai County. Prescott National Forest is just to the west of Mayer; the town is 70 miles north of Phoenix and 25 miles southeast of Prescott. Joseph Mayer came to the area in 1881. He built a store and a saloon. Later, he established a Wells Fargo stage station along the line between Phoenix and Prescott. After a period of time, the town was named after him. Today Mayer is a center for agricultural and mining industries in the surrounding area. Mayer's population is 1,500.]
- F. 23 Places-Metcalf, Arizona. [Metcalf's post office was established in 1899 and discontinued in 1936. Once a town of approximately 4,500 people, Metcalf lasted through the Depression. The copper mine, originally discovered in 1870, was the mainstay of the town. The townsfolk left as the mines played out; today, nothing is left.]
- F. 24-26 Places-Morenci, Arizona. [Morenci is located in Greenlee County northeast of Tucson along Highway 191, a few miles from the banks of the San Francisco River near the New Mexico state line.] Among the images of Morenci are: a posse; Longfellow Inn; mule train; railroad turnaround; mines, mills and railroads; Morenci shopping center; P.D. [Phelps Dodge] Hospital; Plaza Park; Phelps Dodge general offices, mercantile store, general manager's residence and hospital; Morenci Canyon; tennis court; and aerial views of the city.
- F. 27 Places-Mt. Graham. [Mt. Graham, the most prominent feature of the Gila Valley, towers above the valley floor at 10,713 feet. The mountains are a holy place for the Apache.] Images include: Mt. Graham from Highway 180; Webb Tower Lookout; Mt. Graham from Bowie Highway; Boy Scout Cabins; and aerial views.
- F. 28 Places-Petrified Forest. [The Petrified Forest is located in northeastern Arizona and features one of the largest and most colorful concentrations of petrified wood in the world. It was designated a National Monument in 1906.]

- F. 29 Places, Pima, Arizona. [Pima is in Graham County, close to Mt. Graham, in eastern Arizona. Fur trappers searched for pelts in the area during the 1820s and 1830s, traveling along the nearby Gila River. It wasn't until 1879, when a group of Mormon settlers arrived in the area, that a community was created. They named the town Smithville in honor of Mormon leader Jesse Smith. When the town established a post office in 1880, its name was changed to Pima, after the local Indian tribe. Throughout the town's history, agriculture has been its most important economic source. Today, the population of Pima is 1,725.]
- F. 30-31 Places-Safford, Arizona. [Safford is located in Graham County (of which it is the county seat) northeast of Tucson along US Highway 70 on the banks of the San Simon River near the Coronado National Forest.] Images include: Red Knolls (area containing a series of 40- to 60-foot-deep pits in the raised bed of an ancient lake, with a four-foot-thick rock cap); high school; public school building; Roosevelt Park; public highway; Highway 180; Central Avenue; Main Street; municipal pool; I.O.O.F. home; Montezuma Canal; Buena Vista hotel; and aerial views of the city and surrounding area.

Box 4, F. 32-48

- F. 32 Places-San Xavier Mission. Three images taken April 1, 1936.
- F. 33 Places-Solomonville, Arizona. [Solomonville was founded by Jewish pioneer Isadore Solomon who also founded Valley National Bank. During its boom years, between 1880 and 1910, Solomonville had some 1,000 residents; the population today is around 250.] Images include: public school building; miscellaneous views.
- F. 34 Places-Thatcher, Arizona. [Thatcher was originally settled by Mormons in 1881, along the Gila River's south bank. Agriculture has always been the town's mainstay; fields of cotton, alfalfa and grains surround the town and the Gila River provides irrigation.] Images include: Latter Day Saints Church; Graham County Gila Junior College; Mt. Graham; and public school.
- F. 35 Places-White Mountains/Hannagan's Meadow. [An 80-acre expanse, surrounded by pine and aspen, Hannagan's Meadow was named for Robert Hannagan, a Nevada miner who engaged in cattle ranching in the 1870s and who used to run cattle in this area during the 1890s. Legend has it that Hannagan racked up \$1,200 in debt to some neighbors; because of his debts, the neighbors chained him to a tree until his son arrived from Deming, New Mexico and paid his father's debts to get him released.] Images include: beaver dams, Black River; irises; Hannagan's Meadow Lodge; and Hannagan's Ranger Station, Coronado Trail.

Series 4: Subjects

- F. 36 Subjects-Airplanes. Images include: Arizona and Standard Airways planes; and autogyro.
- F. 37 Subjects-Bears. Pictures of people playing with and feeding a baby bear.
- F. 38 Subjects-Business-Entertainment. Images include: Morenci Concert Band; cowboy band; and the Martin Theatre in Clifton (exterior and interior).
- F. 39 Subjects-Business-Gas Stations and Auto Dealers. Images include: Standard Oil Products; Cowboy Trading Post; Lee's Service; Fritz's Service Station; Maud's; and Cansler's Service Station.
- F. 40 Subjects-Business-Hotels and Churches. Images include: Presbyterian Church; Coronado Inn; and Clifton Hotel.
- F. 41 Subjects-Business-Municipal Buildings and Structures. Images include: Clifton Bridge; Arizona Copper Company Hospital; and Town Hall, Clifton.
- F. 42 Subjects-Business-Restaurants and Bars. Among the images are a large number of photos identified as "Le Mock Bar (Oasis Bar now)," probably taken by Gabusi; and Maud's Cafe.

- F. 43 Subjects-Business-Retail Merchandise. Images include: Zorrilla's Market; Phelps Dodge Mercantile Company; Whelan's Jewelry; Rietz's Home Furnishings; grocery store; Lindsey Creamery truck; and Roscoe's Food Palace.
- F. 44 Subjects-Business-Services. Images include: doctor's office; Spoon Bros Stage Line; Model Cleaners and Tailors; and a laundromat.
- F. 45 Subjects-Cactus. One of the unprinted negatives, an image of an ocotillo in bloom, has the words "Candles of the Lord" written on its border.
- F. 46 Subjects-Celebrations. Images recording crownings of various queens; dance recitals; parades; gatherings; children's birthday party; and weddings.
- F. 47 Subjects-Farming and Ranching.
- F. 48 Subjects-Floods. [The community's towering cliffs made it subject to dangerous floods. The greatest flood occurred in 1906 when it rained continuously for 30 hours; although most people took refuge on higher ground, 18 were killed.] Dramatic images of floodwaters rushing through the streets of Clifton and the aftermath of those floods (cars buried under mud and rubble, furniture on the high banks of the San Francisco River, toppled buildings, linens hung out to dry). Many of these images are dated January 19, 1916.

Box 5, F. 49-61

- F. 49 Subjects-Funerals. Risdon often documented funerals and deaths. See the glass plate prints (Box 1, F. 1-5) for images of the deceased.
- F. 50 Subjects-Hunting, Fishing, and Camping. Canoers; man on donkey-back with deer head; people displaying strings of newly caught fish; hunter and his dog; campers and campsites; and a group of people standing in the snow and eating roasted marshmallows. Many of these images are "glory" shots: hunters with shotgun in hand, standing before an elk or deer or fishermen showing off their catch.
- F. 51 Subjects-Landscapes. Images include: Clifton-Morenci District; Clifton-Morenci Highway; people backed by majestic landscapes.
- F. 52 Subjects--Military. Images include: marching soldiers; tents; scenes at train station with caption "Seeing the boys off. Clifton, Ariz. 5-27-18"; "5th Contingent Greenlee County, Clifton, Ariz. 5-27-18"; aluminum collection stations with signs declaring "Aluminate Hitler"
- F. 53 Subjects-Mining-General. Miners and mining facilities; Clifton, Ariz. No. 4 Concentrator; panning for minerals; P.D. Mill from Stargo, 1-1-40; Ore Train-Metcalf, Ariz.; and assayers.
- F. 54 Subjects-Mining-Strikes and Unions. [In 1915-1916, after years of poor mining working conditions and wage discrimination, 5,000 miners (70 percent Hispanic), supported by the Western Federation of Miners (WFM), staged labor strikes in Clifton, Morenci, and Metcalf, Arizona. The 19-week shutdown caused hardships for laborers and their families and was finally settled with Arizona Gov. George Hunt mediating. The miners received increased wages and a sliding pay scale tied to copper prices, but one of the concessions miners had to make was abandoning the WFM.] Images include: rallies; picketers carrying signs reading "Capitalism/We Like It," "We Will Not Have More Czars," Mine Managers Are Too Proud To Confer But Not Too Proud To Lie," "After 30 Years Of Oppression We Demand Justice," "No Room For Outsiders/This Job Belongs To Us," and "We Work For Mine Managers/We Are Good Enough To Talk To Them!"; and Morenci Miners Union Local 616 workers.
- F. 55 Subjects-Miscellaneous and Unidentified.
- F. 56 Subjects-Organizations.
- F. 57 Subjects-Railroad. [Rail was the means of transportation for bringing ores from the mines to smelter. Arizona Copper Co. operated the Coronado Railroad between Clifton and Metcalf. The train hauled the ore from mines in Metcalf to the smelter in Clifton. Shannon Copper

Co. built in Chase Creek and hauled ore from their mines in Metcalf to their smelter in Clifton. The Morenci Southern Railroad had three loops and operated between Morenci and Guthrie.] Among the images in this folder are: railroad stations; railroad tunnels; Arizona and New Mexico Railroad; Morenci Southern Railroad; loading chutes; railroad workers; turntables; and the Longfellow Incline.

- F. 58 Subjects-Risdon Photo Studios. Images include: Risdon studios; advertising; photographer at work.
- F. 59 Subjects-Schools. Images include: Clifton High School; Clifton public school; students with teachers; students playing outside school; Metcalf schoolhouse; Gila Junior College; school-bus.
- F. 60 Subjects-Sports. Images include: Gila, Rangers and Dodgers baseball teams; swimmers at Clifton municipal pool.
- F. 61 Subjects-Transportation. Images include: box car residence; pack mules.