



By  
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# Yuma Crossing History

## Townspeople

Several months ago I wrote about the "Country Club of the Colorado, the infamous Yuma Territorial Prison, and how two of our early townspeople were able to have it constructed here.

This week, I will write about a man, who was an early riverman, rancher, one of Yuma's original teamsters and was responsible for the construction of the Yuma Territorial Prison. A man who contributed to the growth and development of the area.

His name was David William Neahr, born in Pennsylvania, in the early 1830's. He was educated as a Civil Engineer and worked briefly in his native state at a local locomotive works in Morristown. David later moved to New York and was employed as a boatbuilder in a local shipyard, where he met and became a friend of Issac Polhamus.

Both men were very ambitious, and they were moved by the stories of great fortunes that could be made in the gold fields of California. Neahr and Polhamus decided to join a wagon train moving West, where they arrived at Yuma Crossing around 1853 or '54.

They stopped at the Crossing for a few days rest in order for the teams to get a breather before continuing the long trek to California across the desert. David Neahr was looking over the area and was soon overcome with its possibilities and potential for navigating the Colorado River. Obtaining government contracts for transporting freight upriver, he decided to give it a try.

Soon a shipyard was built just East of

North Main Street, and Neahr and Polhamus contracted with the local Indians to cut the wood for their boats, they were now in business. After several months, Neahr found his new endeavor rewarding and pleasant and he made his decision to stay permanently.

Back in the early days of Yuma, women were very scarce, Neahr discovered while working along the river, and eventually courted a young and beautiful Indian maiden, by the name of Maria Hupchauss, who was a full blooded Cocopah. She was destined to become his wife and bear him ten children.

While operating in the steamboat business, David Neahr observed that there was a need for supplying the immigrants who were making the trip to California through Yuma Crossing, so he opened one of Yuma's first stores. While involved with this venture, he took it upon himself to re-supply small communities by hauling freight by wagon, sometimes as far as the area around Fort Huachuca.

David Neahr was one of Yuma's true pioneers who would not sit around, even though he was involved in his freighting business. He was also the first owner of the Aqua Caliente Hot Springs, East of Yuma, where he established a large cattle ranch. Each year, David Neahr would have a gathering at his ranch with the local Indians and his cowhands prior to the annual deer hunt. There he would supply the local Indians with beef, flour, beans and coffee to use while they were on the hunt. David Neahr maintained a good relationship with the local Indian tribes throughout the years while gaining their respect and friendship.

When Yuma was selected for the site of the new Territorial Prison, construction posed sort of a problem. Knowledge of con-

struction was scarce and skilled workers even more so. Because of his background as a developer, being a Civil Engineer and his knowledge of construction, David Neahr was appointed superintendent of construction for the new prison.

Having obtained permission to use the future prisoners themselves in the construction, Mr. Neahr set up his work shop on site. The prison foundation was made of stone and adobe bricks for its walls. The steel bars and doors were fashioned and riveted together on site, all the work was entirely done by hand.

Upon completion of the construction, many prisoners who worked with David Neahr expressed their gratitude for learning a new trade as Carpenters, Masons, Plasterers, Blacksmiths', ect. When released from prison they would have a trade to go into.

After his work on the prison was completed, mining industry in the Yuma area was developing rapidly, David Neahr took interest in this growing business, and in fact, it was while working his Picancho Mine that he was badly hurt when one of his wagons, loaded with ore, rolled down a hill and ran him over. This accident would later contribute to his death.

As the years passed David Neahr became involved in land speculation in the Yuma and Phoenix area. When the decision was made to move the Territorial Capital from Prescott to Phoenix, he donated five acres of land for the site of the new Capital Building.

David Neahr, could be written about in length, due to all the activities that he was involved in. His life was one of amazing accomplishments, and he himself was a remarkable person.