

# "THE PLACE OF THE MORNING GLOW"

Something About Casa Grande, the Garden of Eden of the Southwest Indians

I don't know what reason there is for it, neither do the Indians of the southwest, but Casa Grande—the "Great House," or the "Place of the Morning Glow"—is to them the Garden of Eden of their race traditions, the scene of their mythical golden age, when there were no Apaches raiding the crops nor white men stealing land away; when life was a perpetual Happy Hunting Ground, only the hunters didn't kill, and all the animals could talk, and the desert was an antelope plain knee-deep in pasture and flowers, and the springs were all full of running water.

Casa Grande is undoubtedly the oldest of all the ruins in the United States. It lies some eighteen or twenty-five miles, according to the road you follow, north of the station called by that name in Arizona on the Southern Pacific railroad. The drive can be made with ease in an afternoon, but better give yourself two days and stay out for a night at the tents of Mr. Pinkley, the government custodian of the ruin.

The ruin has been set aside as a perpetual monument. You drive out over a low mesa of rolling mesquite and greasewood and cactus, where the giant sycamore stands like a columned ghost of centuries of bygone ages.

"How old are they?" I asked my driver as we passed a huge cactus, high as a house and twisted in contortions as if in pain. From tip to root the great trunk was literally pitted with the holes pecked through by little desert birds for water.

"Oh, centuries and centuries old," he said, "and the queer part is that, in this section of the mesa, water is sixty feet below the surface. Their roots don't go down sixty feet. Where do they get the water? I guess the bark acts as cement or rubber, preventing evaporation. The spines keep the desert animals off, and during the rainy season the cactus drinks up all the water he's going to need for the year and stores it up in that big tank reservoir of his; but his time is up round these parts. Settlers have homesteaded all round here for twenty-five miles, and next time you come back we'll have orange groves and pecan orchards."

Far as you would look were the little shacks and white tents of the pioneers, stretching barbed wire lines round 160-acre patches of sagebrush, with a faith to put Moses to shame when he struck the rock for a spring. These settlers have had to bore down from thirty to sixty feet to water level with very inadequate tools; and you see little burros chasing homemade windlasses round and round, to pump up water. It looks like "the faith that lays it down and dies"—slow, hard sledding, this kind of farm; but it is this kind of dauntless faith that made Phoenix and made

Yuma and made Imperial valley. Twenty years ago you could squat on Imperial valley land.

Today it costs \$1000 an acre and yields high percentage on that investment. Today you can buy Casa Grande lands for from \$5 to \$25 an acre. Wait till the water is turned on the ditch and it will not seem such hard sledding.

If you want to know just how hard and lonely it is, drive past the homesteads at nightfall, as I did. The white tent stands in the middle of a barbed wire strung along juniper poles and cedar shakes—no house, no stable, no buildings of any sort. The horses are staked out. A woman is cooking a meal above the chip fire. A lantern hangs on a bush in front of the tent-flap. Miles ahead you see another lantern gleam and swing, and dimly discern the outlines of another tent—the homesteader's nearest neighbor. Just now a Grande town boasts 400 people, housed chiefly in one-story adobe dwellings. Come in five years, and Casa Grande will be boasting her ten or 20,000 people. Like mushroom rooms of one night, the little towns spring up in irrigation lands.

You catch the first glimpse of the ruin about eighteen miles out—a red roof put on by the government, then a huge square four-story mass of ruins surrounded by broken walls, with remnants of big elevated courtyards, and four or five other compounds the size of this central house, like the bastions at the four corners of a large old-fashioned walled fort. The walls are adobe of tremendous thickness; six feet in the house or temple part, from one to three in the stockade, a thickness that in an age of only stone weapons must have been impenetrable. The doors are so very low as to compel a person of ordinary height to bend almost double to enter, and the supposition is this was to prevent the entrance of an enemy and give the doorkeeper a chance to eject unwelcome visitors. Once inside, the ceilings are high, timbered with vigas of cedar strengthened by heavier logs that must have been carried in a horseless age a hundred miles from the mountains. The house is laid out on rectangular lines, and the halls straight enough but so narrow as to compel passage sideways.

In every room is a feature that has puzzled scientists both here and in the cave dwellings. Doors were, of course, open squares of the halls, or other rooms; but in addition to these openings you will find, close to the floor of each room, little round "cat holes," one or two or three of them, big enough for a beam but without a beam. In the cave dwellings these little round holes through walls four and five feet thick are frequently on the side of the room opposite the

fireplace; and Fewkes and others think they may have been ventilator shafts to keep the smoke from blowing back into the room; but in Casa Grande they are in rooms where there is no fireplace. What were they for? Others think they were whistling tubes, for use in time of war or religious ceremony, but in a house of open doors would it not have been as simple to call through the opening? Yet another explanation is that they were for drainage purposes, the cave man's first rude attempt at modern plumbing; but that explanation falls down, too, for these openings don't drain in any regular direction. Such a structure as Casa Grande must have housed a whole tribe in time of religious festival or war; so you come back to the explanation of ventilator shafts.

The ceilings of Casa Grande are extraordinarily high and bodies found buried in sealed-up chambers behind the ruins of the other compounds are five to six feet long, showing this was no dwarf race. ("For there were giants in those days.") The rooms do not run off rectangular halls, as our rooms do. You tumble down stone steps, through passage so narrow as to catch your shoulders, into a room deep and narrow as a grave. Then you crack your head going up other steps off this room to another compartment. Bodies found at Casa Grande lay flat-headed to the east. Bodies found in the caves were trussed up, knees to chin, as at birth; but, as usual, the bodies found at Casa Grande have been shipped away east to be stored in cellars, instead of being left, carefully glassed over, where they were found.

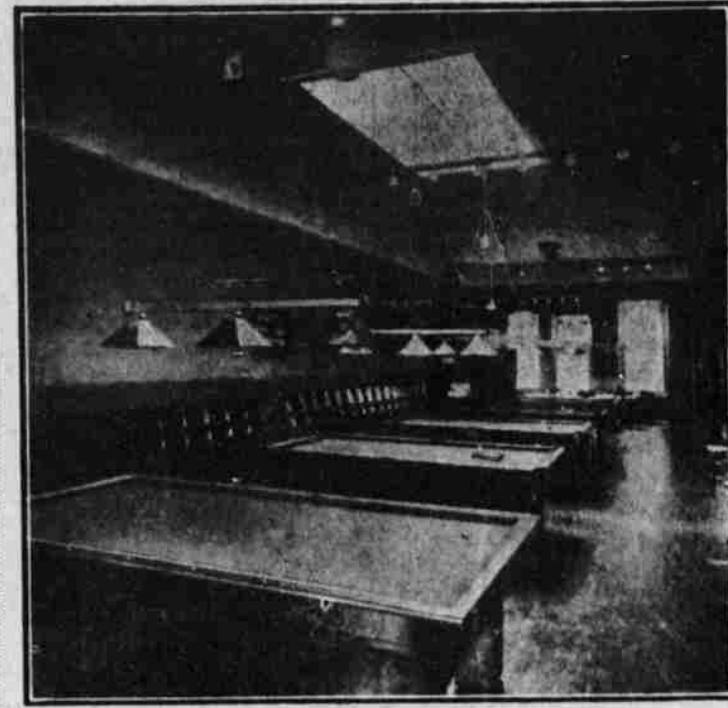
Lower altitude, or the great age, or the quality of the clays may account for the peculiarly rich shades of the pottery found at Casa Grande. The purples and reds and browns are tinged an almost iridescent green. Running back from the Great House is a heavy wall as of a former courtyard, the only walled Indian ruin that I know in the southwest. Backing and flanking the walls, appear to have been other houses, smaller but built in the same fashion as Casa Grande. Stand on these ruined walls or in the doorway of the Great House, and you can see that five such big houses have once existed in this compound. Two or three curious features mark Casa Grande. Inside what must have been the main court of the compound are elevated earthen stages or platforms three to six feet high, solid mounds. Were these the foundations of other Great Houses, or platforms for the religious theatricals and ceremonials which enter so largely into the lives of the southwestern Indians? At one place is the dry bed of a very ancient reservoir, but how was water conveyed to this big community well? The river is

two miles away and no spring is visible here. Though you can see the path of sandaled feet worn in the very rocks of eternity, an irrigation ditch has not yet been located. This, however, proves nothing, for the sand-storms of a single year would bury the springs four feet deep. A truer indication of the great age of the reservoir is the old tree growing out of the center; and that brings up the question, how we know the age of these ancient ruins—that is, the age within a hundred years or so. Ask settlers round how old Casa Grande is and they will tell you five or six hundred years. Yet on the very face of things Casa Grande must be thousands of years older than the other ruins of the southwest.

Why? First as to historic records: did Coronado see Casa Grande in 1504 when he marched north across the country? He records seeing an ancient Great House, where Indians dwelt. Bandler, Fewkes and a dozen others who have identified his itinerary say this was not Casa Grande. Even by 1540 Casa Grande was an abandoned ruin. Kino, the great Jesuit, was the first white man known to have visited the Great House, and he gathered the Pimas and Papagos about and said masa there about 1694. What a weird scene it must have been, the purple Sacaton mountains glimmering in the clear morning lilac light, the many

(Continued on Page Seven)

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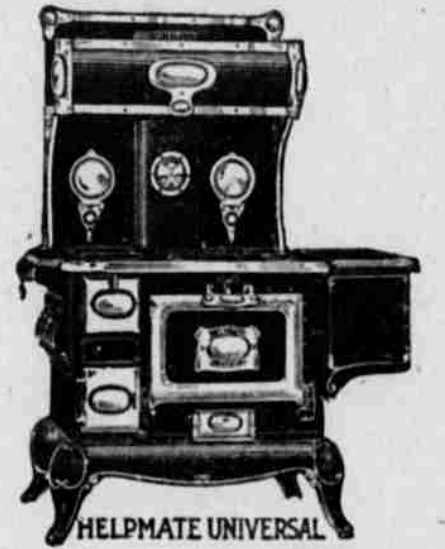
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