

Vulture City making comeback

By Jeanie Williams, Publisher/Photographer Oct 4, 2017



The 1863 gold mine which gave life to Wickenburg is all but forgotten by modern residents of the town, but that may change in the near future. Restoration is being breathed into the ghost town which surrounded the mine, and owners hope to make it a tourist destination.

Vulture Mine was founded 14 miles southwest of Wickenburg when, according to local lore, Henry Wickenburg picked up a rock to throw at a pack mule and found gold. The rest is history, as they say. Vulture City quickly sprouted up as the rich gold vein lured fortune seekers and workers to the area. The underground mining operation in the hard rock of the Arizona desert required hundreds of men and mules. The ground around Vulture City still holds enough promise that it is a working gold mine, bustling daily with modern equipment and techniques.

The ruins of Vulture City are nearby, and until recently had been left in decline. With the mining operation recently divided from the town and fenced off per federal regulations, Vulture City's current owner is moving forward with restorations of the ghost town and plans to host tours and public events.

Several local builders are on site, carefully rebuilding the old town literally from the ground up. Henry Wickenburg's first house, made of rock and adobe, is still standing and is being repaired. Next to it is the infamous hanging tree, an ironwood from which at least 18 men met their fate – most for stealing from their employer.

Nearby, the assay office still stands, along with the quarters where the armed guards stayed and kept watch. Not far from that is the brothel, also still standing, with some amenities inside. An adobe building which appears to have housed workers has slowly melted away and lowered its wooden roof to ground level. "We will repair that one. It doesn't take much to lift that roof back up. If we have the roof, we can rebuild the building," Echeverria said.

The dance hall and saloon are still there, and so is the wood-fired cook stove on which untold amounts of food were undoubtedly prepared. New floor and some updates have been added to the dance hall in preparation for parties, receptions and weddings of the future, Echeverria said.

The blacksmith shop and mine head have been moved and reconstructed due to the present day location of the working mine operation. Lots of relics of the past dot the desert areas between the buildings. Everything from handmade nails to a huge diesel-powered air compressor, to old car bodies, to a man lift with chain still attached, antique wooden sluicing machines, and other equipment from different time frames throughout the mine's history, can be found.