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The West Is Still Wild

COURTESY OLD TUCSON



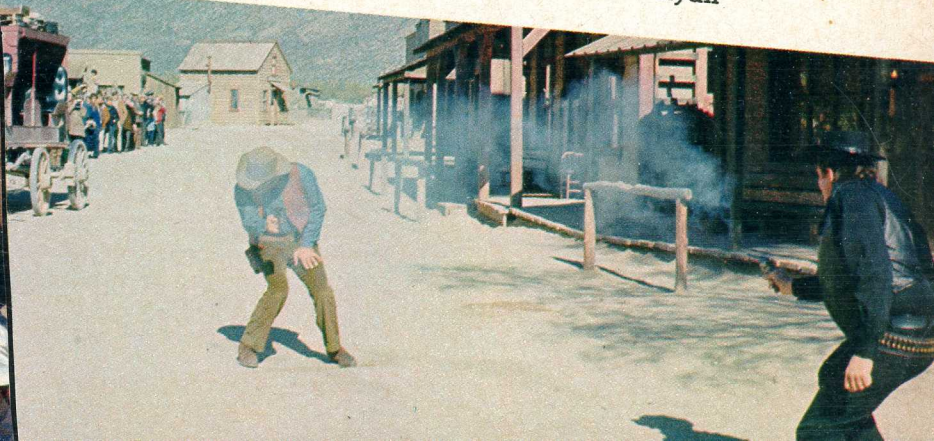


PHOTO BY JACK RYAN

at Old Tucson

PHOTO BY JACK RYAN

by Jack Ryan



WALT DISNEY demonstrated time and again on his television programs that watching the production of a movie was often as interesting as viewing the movie itself. Nothing, it seemed, was more fascinating to the viewer than watching a bare script converted into a finished movie. Now, Old Tucson Movie Location affords the visitor an opportunity to learn for himself just how that transformation is wrought.

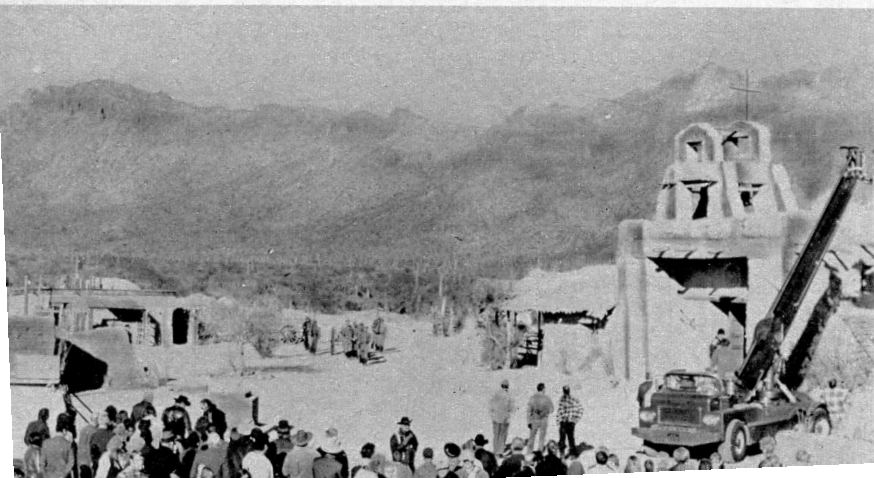
Old Tucson is located in Tucson Mountain Park, 12 miles west of Tucson, Arizona. Access is via the Ajo Way Exit on I-19 or by the Speedway Boulevard Exit on I-10. The ride west on Speedway Boulevard brings the visitor through the rugged Tucson Mountains and over Gates Pass. From Gates Pass a panoramic view of Old Tucson and the Avra Valley can be seen. The brilliant sun, blue sky, mountains and desert terrain demonstrate clearly

why the motion picture industry picked this spot as a setting for its western pictures.

Passing through the adobe gatehouse into the dusty streets of Old Tucson gives the visitor the impression that he has just stepped 100 years into the past. Some 500,000 visitors annually take this step.

Motion picture production is not a continuous occurrence, and in the absence of production equipment there is little to remind the visitor that he is not walking the streets of Tucson in the last century. This authenticity is no accident. When Old Tucson was constructed in 1939 by Columbia Studios for the motion picture "Arizona," old records and maps were carefully examined and the replica of Tucson was built from genuine adobe bricks. The more than 100 adobe and frame buildings which comprise the town of Old Tucson are carefully maintained to

Old Tucson's Spanish Mission was built for epic 1939 picture, "Arizona"



COURTESY OF OLD TUCSON

preserve this atmosphere.

Old Tucson was used only occasionally after the filming of "Arizona." However, the formation of Old Tucson Development Company in 1959 by Robert Shelton, with the help of local residents, has led to a dramatic increase in movie production. More than 70 motion picture and television programs have been produced at Old Tucson in the last 10 years.

Replica worth seeing

Even when no production is scheduled, a visit to Old Tucson is worth the modest price of admission, for there is much to see and do in the 320-acre park which includes the town and surrounding desert.

Just inside the gatehouse is the historic locomotive, *Reno*. The *Reno* was used originally by the Virginia and Truckee Railroad hauling silver in the Virginia City and Carson City areas of Nevada. The locomotive was purchased by MGM Studios in 1940 and has appeared in numerous movies over the past 30 years.

The outdoor movie sets which comprise Old Tucson can be divided into several areas: Main and Kansas Streets, the Mexican Plaza, and the High Chaparral Ranch.

One of the major attractions is the gun battle performed six times daily by the actors of Old Tucson. These gunfights relive some of the exciting and dramatic segments of Arizona's early history.

Running north from the gatehouse is Main Street. Here are many of the shops and buildings familiar to the movie-goer, such as a replica of the first adobe school house in Tucson; displays of early medical and dental equipment; an apothecary shop; firearms and tools used by the settlers; the Golden Nugget Ice Cream Parlor; and the Red Dog Saloon and Restaurant. Souvenirs of the old west can be purchased in other shops along the street.

At the Mexican Plaza, the adobe buildings, cantina and the old Spanish Mission provide the visitor with a sampling of our Spanish heritage. Just out of town, across the arroyo from the Spanish Mission, is the ranch set for NBC Television's "The High Chaparral."

Remnants of a battle

For the adventuresome, the desert terrain around the town is inviting. The Phillips Ranch is located in this desert area, and the sharp-eyed may find spent cartridges, shot up during a gun-battle filmed here.

If you prefer to ride, the Old Tucson Stage Line and the narrow-gauge train carry visitors on sight-seeing excursions around the town.

Whether walking or riding, every visitor will find something of interest in Old Tucson. The opportunity to relive our western history and the chance to see a motion picture in production have made it one of the most-visited tourist attractions in Arizona. □