

Col William Cornell Greene (1852 - 1911)

Birth: Aug. 26, 1852
Duck Creek
Brown County
Wisconsin, USA

Death: Aug. 5, 1911
Sonora, Mexico

Col. William Cornell Greene.

Born August 26, 1852

Died August 5, 1911

Note* Other sources indicate a birth date of Aug 26, 1853.

William Cornwell Greene, who spent his most productive years in Sonora, Mexico, can probably be considered the most important person in Cochise County, Arizona between the years of 1890-1910. In Mexico, where Greene built a copper empire he is known as the founder of Cananea. Greene's copper mines provided some of the richest and most extensive ore ever produced.

Born in Duck Creek, Brown County, Wisconsin to a Quaker family, Greene was educated at a private school in Westchester County, New York, became a clerk in a New York City tea store, and in 1870 headed west. He was a railroad employee in the Dakota Territory, prospected and mined in Yavapai County near Prescott, and by the early 1880's had arrived in Tombstone, Arizona. In 1884, Greene married Ella Moson and together they had two daughters, Ella and Eva. Ella also brought with her two children from her previous marriage, Frank and Virginia Moson.

The family settled near the Huachuca Mountains, and went into the cattle business in a small way on the San Pedro River. Greene also provided lumber from time to time to Ft. Huachuca, and dabbled in mining claims. It was during this time that tragedy struck the Greene family. In 1897, Greene had placed a small dam on the San Pedro River just above his ranch. James C. Burnett, a neighbor of Greene had a ranch down river a bit, and he had enough water for normal pasture needs. However, Burnett decided to expand his operation, and hired a Chinese crew to build a different dam, and some suggested that Burnett let it be known to the Chinese workmen he would not be upset if Greene's dam disappeared.

Sometime during the night of June 24, 1897, the dam was blown up, and the water released. In the afternoon of June 27, Greene's daughters Eva and Ella, along with their friend Katie Corcoran, received



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permission to go to their regular swimming hole to cool off. Katie jumped in the supposedly shallow pool, and went to the bottom. Ella jumped in, realized the horrible change in depth, and yelled to her sister Eva to "go back, go back!" Eva went for help but it was too late. Ella Greene and Katie Corcoran were dead, because the swimming hole had been enlarged from the blasting of Greene's dam.

On July 1, Greene saw Burnett on Allen Street, near the O.K. Corral. He drilled Burnett with three revolver shots, saying later that "I have no statement to make other than that man was the cause of my child being drowned." Greene surrendered to Chief of Police Charley Wiser, who then turned Greene over to Sheriff Scott White. Greene, Wiser and White were close friends, and they had a shared dislike of Burnett in many ways. In the subsequent circus like trial in Tombstone, Greene was acquitted.

Another version of the Burnett killing comes from Joseph "Mack" Axford's book "Around Western Campfires". Axford says that after Greene learned of the death of his daughter he immediately left Cananea for Tombstone. Driving up to the O.K. stables he found Burnett seated in a chair talking to John Montgomery. Greene got out of the buggy and as he approached Burnett, Burnett threw his hands back in order to get up from the chair and Greene shot him just as he raised up, killing him instantly. Greene raising his hand over Burnett's body said, "God's will be done," and turning, walked down to the court house and surrendered to Scott White, the sheriff. By the next morning a half million dollars was available to pay Greene's bail. He was tried and found not guilty--stating that when Burnett threw his hands back in order to raise himself from the chair he thought Burnett was going for his gun.

Over the years, by hard work and sound judgment he prospered. He gradually expanded his geographical interests and traveled considerably around southern Cochise County, and became very familiar with Northern Sonora. The area around Cananea attracted his interest. This silver and gold area had been worked since the 1760's and by the 1850's the rich precious metals had been taken from the earth.

It may seem preposterous that rancher Greene of Cochise County became interested in a Mexican mining area. However, Greene had mined for several years in the Prescott area and knew his ore and geology. In 1896 he incorporated the Cananea Copper Company, the first of many mining operations. After the death of his first wife, Ella Moson Greene in 1899, Greene relocated to Cananea, Sonora, Mexico and in 1901 he incorporated the Cananea Cattle Company and the Greene Cattle Company. That same year he married the daughter of a long-time acquaintance, Mary Proctor, a woman 25 years his junior.

At the peak of his career, from 1899-1906, Greene was a man worth almost fifty million dollars. He owned a copper enterprise, a lumber business, and had accumulated almost one million acres of ranch land in both Arizona and Mexico. He gave himself the title of Colonel in order to impress investors back east. By 1908, due to financial woes including the dramatic drop in the price of copper, the events of the Mexican revolution, and land disputes, Colonel Greene's mining and lumber empire collapsed. He returned to ranching and managed the Greene and Cananea Cattle Companies until his death on August 5, 1911.

Notice of Death in the Graham County Guardian, Safford, Arizona on Friday 11 Aug 1911 - "Colonel William C Greene died at his home in



Thanks for your tremendous work in the copper mining industries of both Arizona and Sonora. Rest in peace. You are not forgotten.

- [Cori Hoag](#)

Added: Nov. 17, 2014

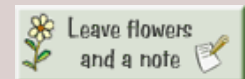


My

great grandfather died in the same buggy accident as Mr. William Cornell Greene. Severiano Moreno was one of his partners in the copper mining operations in Cananea and a fellow member of the Tucson Masonic Lodge. My grandmother Amelia Moreno and my a...(Read more)

- [Kevin Canino](#)

Added: Jan. 11, 2011



Cananea, Mexico Saturday morning as a result of pneumonia which was induced by an accident which overtook him several days before, when he had three ribs and his collar bone broken by being thrown from his buggy when his horse ran away. Special services were held in his honor. His body was taken to Los Angeles, California for burial."

Note* First buried in California and then in 1956 final interment was made to the Cananea Cemetery in 1956 by son William Greene.

While visiting Greene's grave site we spoke to a caretaker who said "Greene's family descendants come from Tucson and visit the grave every year".

Note* The Greene home in Cananea, Mexico can be located at: 30.98539 N. 110.30646 W.

Family links:

Spouses:

[Mary A. Proctor Wiswall \(1876 - 1955\)*](#)

[Ella Roberts Greene \(1858 - 1899\)*](#)

Children:

[Ella Greene \(1887 - 1897\)*](#)

[William Cornell Greene \(1903 - 1969\)*](#)

*Calculated relationship

Burial:

[Cananea Cemetery](#)

Cananea

Sonora, Mexico

GPS (lat/lon): [30.98249, -110.27949](#)

Created by: [C. Fahey](#)

Record added: Jun 07, 2007

Find A Grave Memorial# 19768190