BENHAM, BARNES, BRIZARD, AND THE CURIO
A Study in Early Arizona Entrepreneurship, 1895–1908

by
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JAMES W. BENHAM IS A CASE STUDY in Arizona entrepreneurship. At once a showman and shopkeeper, contractor and rancher, politician and ethnologist—and always a promoter—he exemplified the innovative spirit, drive, and flexibility required to wrest success from a desolate land. Never missing an opportunity to better his position, Benham lived a life filled with drama beginning in 1895 when, with his partners Will C. Barnes and Paul A. Brizard, he established The Curio at 147 West Jefferson Street in Phoenix, at the site of the present-day Maricopa County Superior Court Building. Today, at that location, men and women record deeds and file judgments, apply for marriage licenses, file divorce petitions, and bring suit against one another. On the upper floors of the building, judges decide the fate of citizens of Maricopa County whose seat, Phoenix, is the sixth largest city in the United States. A century ago, on the corner of Second Avenue and Jefferson Street, in the curio store of Benham, Barnes, and Brizard, things moved at a much slower pace. Nevertheless, its story illustrates the fluidity of risk and reward that prevailed as three young men sought their fortune in turn-of-the-century Phoenix.

Phoenicians in the 1890s were swept up in a rapidly expanding economy. The city's pleasant climate, fertile soil, and access to water attracted new residents at a rapidly increasing rate, boosting

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James W. Benham, c. 1899. (James H. McClintock Collection, Phoenix Public Library)

the population from 3,152 to 5,554 residents in the last decade of the century. Boosters encouraged newcomers to establish businesses, farms, and ranches in the Salt River Valley. The Indian crafts and souvenirs trade was one of the strategies Arizonans and New Mexicans used to lure tourists to the Southwest in the hope that they would settle. Driven by the popularity of anthropological displays at world's fairs, enterprising businessmen set up urban curio stores to sell everything from one-cent gewgaws to rare one-of-a-kind museum-quality curios and prehistoric "relics" to eager tourists and locals alike. *The Papoose*, a magazine directed at collectors of Indian arts and crafts, noted that "A new industry has sprung up, and every town vaunts its curio and bric-a-brac shop, where a conglomeration of minerals rare and otherwise; modern Indian paraphernalia, made to order, brand new basketry and pottery, and often scores and scores of fine examples of art from the sites of ancient buried cities or from the former nest-like homes of the cliff people are to be found."[1]

J. W. Benham was among the eager entrepreneurs who smelled opportunity in the air. Like all Anglo Phoenicians of his day, Benham was a transplant. Born in Minneapolis, Minnesota,

on October 3, 1866, he moved with his family to Oakland, California, in 1873. Each day, A. M. Benham—J. W.'s father—climbed aboard the transbay ferry system for the commute to his piano business at 647 Market Street in San Francisco. The elder Benham was also involved in bay area land development and California mining activities. With his partner W. R. Thomas, who became mayor of Oakland in 1897, A. M. operated Benham and Thomas Real Estate at 463 Ninth Street in Oakland. As a young man, J. W. attended private schools in San Francisco and completed his education in the public schools of Oakland. He received his first business experience working at the First National Bank of Oakland.[2]

In 1884, eighteen-year-old J. W. Benham traveled to Arizona where he went into business with his twenty-six-year-old cousin Will C. Barnes. Both only children—their mothers were sisters—the two men also formed close personal ties, each taking the place of the sibling the other lacked. Almost immediately, Benham settled in Holbrook, where he and Barnes organized the Esperanza Cattle Company. The pair bought several city lots and, in 1890, established the Esperanza ranch near Winslow.[3]

Apache County records reveal glimpses of Barnes and Benham's enterprises. On January 28, 1888, the pair applied for a $1,000 butcher's bond that allowed them to purchase and slaughter cattle. Together, they registered an anchor brand, resembling the Aztec Land and Cattle Company's hashknife brand, for Esperanza stock. In filing a "claim and appropriation of water for irrigation purposes," Barnes included a precisely detailed map of the Esperanza ranch, showing the ditches and small dam he proposed to construct in order to convey "seven thousand miners inches of water" from Chevelon Fork.[4]

Ranching in northeastern Arizona was a tough proposition, but Barnes and Benham's choice of name for their enterprise (Esperanza means "hope" in Spanish) reflected the aspirations these young cowboy entrepreneurs held for business prospects. By 1892, the Esperanza Cattle Company was grazing 7,000 head of very good range cattle; that summer, Barnes and Benham branded 2,500 calves. But just as quickly, the weather changed and drought fell across the Esperanza range. On January 15, 1893, eighteen inches of hard snow covered the ground. Without grass, the cattle

starved even as the crusted snow cut their legs to the bone. Only 2,000 head survived the winter. A dramatic decline in cattle prices, and the realization that northern Arizona's capricious weather would only sporadically support fodder for cattle, may have sent Benham and Barnes south in search of greener pastures.[5]

Meanwhile, in 1895 twenty-four-year-old Paul A. Brizard joined Barnes and Benham on their Esperanza ranch. The scion of an old northern California family, young Brizard was the grandson of Paul T. Brizard, a French seafarer who, in 1843, had moved his family to Peru, where they operated the first stage coaches between Lima and Callao. Hearing of the discovery of gold in California, Paul T. Brizard sailed to San Francisco in 1849. Sensing good business opportunities, the following year he moved the entire family to Arcata, on Humboldt Bay, 275 miles north of the bay city, where they established a general store. Alexander, Paul A.'s father, ran pack trains into Six Rivers territory east of town and set up branch stores at Orleans Bar, Weitchpec, Somes Bar, Acorn, Willow Creek, Blue Lake, and the Hoopa Indian Reservation, where he was also an Indian trader.[6]

Like many other healthseekers of the era, Paul Brizard sought out Arizona's dry, sunny climate on the advice of his physician. Judging from the high-spirited letters he regularly wrote to Mamma at home, he adjusted quickly to the new environment. "Cowboy life seems to agree with me," he announced during a visit to Phoenix with three carloads of cattle on May 26. "They all say I am learning the cow business very quickly and the 'cow punchers' as cowboys are called, think it is wonderful that I do so well and would do anything for me. They have an idea I am a city boy and all this is new to me." But, always the practical businessman, Paul wasn't taking any chances. On July 18, he informed his mother that he had taken out a life insurance policy. If anything happened to him, his mother and father "could have a lot of fun on the money." The only drawback to the cowboy life was the scarcity of eligible women. "It is awfully lonesome in town," Paul confessed, "no girls but the school marm and she's engaged to another fellow and he takes up most of her time, besides she doesn't amount to much anyway."[7]

Along with Barnes and Benham, Brizard already was casting his eyes on broader horizons. By 1895, the three young men were

operating the Phoenix Wood and Coal Company and living on the premises at 147 West Jefferson Street in Phoenix. Next door, they established a curio store. An early photograph shows the partners dressed in suits, vests, white shirts, hats, and ties standing in front of a small shed identified as "The Curio." An impressive display of Pima, Papago (Tohono O'odham), and Apache baskets, as well as Navajo Germantown and chief blankets, decorate the scene. In the store's catalogue, Benham described The Curio as "The Cutest Place in the West" and invited visitors to sample its stock of "Mexican Drawn Work"; live gila monsters, rattlesnakes, and horned toads; Navajo silver work, opals, pottery, moccasins, and baskets; and the "finest assortment" of Navajo blankets "ever brought to Phoenix."[8]

Together and individually, Benham, Barnes, and Brizard were trying to better their fortunes by taking on whatever opportunities came along. Besides running the curio business, Benham was a rancher and a member of the Arizona Livestock and Sanitary Board. He supervised a 175-man crew digging cañaigre (a

The first Curio store, 1895–1900. (Herb and Dorothy McLaughlin Collection, Arizona State University Libraries)

root used in leather tanning) and superintended the building of a wagon road from Hot Springs Junction to Castle Hot Springs. He served on the executive staff and was chairman of the parade committee for the 1900 Phoenix Indian and Cowboy Carnival. The previous year, he had served in the Twentieth Territorial Legislature, where he unsuccessfully introduced a bill to establish tax-supported libraries in first-class cities. Barnes, a former soldier and Medal of Honor winner, engaged in a host of civic and business enterprises, as well as establishing a reputation as a raconteur and author.[9]

Brizard, the youngest and least experienced of the partners, likewise wasted little time in becoming involved in social, business, and community affairs. Taking turns with Benham managing the Esperanza ranch and the store in Phoenix, Brizard enjoyed the life of an ambitious and carefree bachelor. He went out almost every evening and even joked about his spartan living conditions. "It would be useless to send or bring me some bed linen," he informed his mother, "as I never use it, and if I did it would only add to my expense. I sleep on a cot in the store, used during the day to pile Navajo blankets on, and at night I bring out my night gown and pillow from the boys room and with blankets out of stock make my bed. We have some cheap bed blankets which I put next to me and pile on top all that are necessary to keep me warm. I had one [Navajo] blanket over me last night marked to sell at $50.00, so I doubtless have the distinction of sleeping in one of the most expensive beds in the world and in an apartment that a prince might well be proud of."[10]

In 1897, Brizard and Benham were both scrambling to get involved in "anything that there is a dollar in." By this time, however, most of the ranch work had fallen on Barnes's shoulders. "We have cattle about as good as sold and [I] am sure [we] won't have to bother with them more than a week." Brizard was holding onto his job as a cattle inspector, but implied to his mother that he would not be going back to the ranch "unless everything else should fail." He added, however, that "If Barnes comes down [to Phoenix] early next fall I should like to take a little outing for a month. He could do my work here and I could go up there and come down with the horses." Above all else, Brizard remained confident that he would make his fortune. "I should hate to quit

the country without having made something," he explained. "I wouldn't be any better than any of the rest of the boys who have left home . . . and come back to live off their fathers."[11]

Apparently, the same could be said for Benham. After recounting his partner's experience with the Castle Creek Hot Springs Improvement Company, Brizard shook his head in amazement. "I never saw anything like him. He is always on top of the pile. . . . He is associated with wealthy men and is making himself valuable to them and this may lead to better things."[12]

From time to time, the names of all three partners appeared in the social pages of *The Arizona Republican.* On May 4, 1897, Will Barnes—with J. W. Benham as best man and Paul Brizard as groomsman—stood before the altar of the First Methodist Church to exchange wedding vows with Edith Talbot, the daughter of future Phoenix mayor Walter Talbot. An undated newspaper clipping pasted in Edith's bridal book proclaims that "Never in the annals of Phoenix was there a more conspicuously brilliant affair." Both Brizard and Benham witnessed the wedding certificate.[13]

All the while that Barnes, Benham, and Brizard were scrambling to make a living they were also developing more expansive ideas of how to make their fortunes. "Business has not opened up very brisk yet," Brizard wrote his mother on November 29, 1897. "There hasn't been enough cold weather in the north to drive people away from home. We have a fine stock of curios and all we need now is customers (very necessary indeed) to make money." A year later, he informed his mother that he had just returned from a buying trip to the Pima Indian Reservation and that the Hoopa Indian baskets from back home "sell well." "People are coming in rather slowly this winter especially the better class," he added. "The Adams Hotel is not more than half full yet. Of course that affects our business considerably. The Adams is the center of Phoenix winter society and the people we meet there spend more or less with us. I inclose a little ad that we have put in the box of each arrival at the hotels. What do you think of it?"[14]

Finally, Brizard put his finger directly on the reason why the three partners were working so hard to survive. "There isn't enough for all three of us in this business and we have to rustle a little on the outside while the business is growing," he explained. "Benham was made secretary of the Arizona Stock Association

A Curio display of Apache, Hopi, Pima, and Papago baskets with Pueblo pottery and Navajo borderless textiles. (Frederick H. Maude, photographer. Courtesy of Terry DeWald)

yesterday. This is only a new thing and is about the same thing as the Lumber Association at home—to control the business and raise prices. They wouldn't take no for an answer and finally Benham took it, after they guaranteed him $100.00 a month and ⅓ of all commissions which will soon bring his salary up to $200 a month. I am glad of this as it gives me a little chance here."[15]

By January of 1898, the number of winter visitors to Phoenix had increased. Assisted by the chilly desert air and the arrival of a cold front from the west, demand for mesquite wood was heavy and business at the Phoenix Wood and Coal Company boomed. "We had five teams at work today and eight men and then couldn't fill all the orders," Brizard wrote after the early morning temperature plummeted to 27 degrees. But by March, he began to tire of the heavy work load. Barnes and Benham were off chasing other business opportunities, leaving Brizard in charge of both the Wood and Coal Company and The Curio store. "Barnes and Benham are neither of them any good to do office work," he groused, "and don't know how and wouldn't if they could, so everything is left for me. As the weather grows warmer, business is

letting up and I have more time to get out and do other things which makes it better for me as well as pleasanter."[16]

Like other curio dealers of the time, Benham, Barnes, and Brizard offered living creatures for sale in order to attract customers. The owners of The Curio capitalized on public fascination with venomous snakes by displaying the reptiles on a screened-in box-like table in front of the store, where the slithery creatures rattled at the approach of curious customers. They also sold vipers by mail order to customers across the country. The colorful writer, philanderer, defrocked Methodist minister, and southwestern traveler George Wharton James was bitten by a rattlesnake that he had taken from its cage at The Curio to inspect. Word spread across the country that James's injury was fatal, causing James to explain "When I saw the fine rattlers in a cage at 'The Curio' in Phoenix, [my intent] was to photograph one of them, measure and possibly extract his fangs . . . in the hope of discovering the antidote to his deadly poison." The snake, however, had other ideas. The bite, although serious, was not mortal.[17]

Snakes were not the only live attractions at The Curio. On April 13, 1898, Brizard sent his mother a photograph of the store's pet burro, which was allowed to come into the house "when he wants sugar and is never tied." In addition to the burro, The Curio was also home to a wildcat, two Gila monsters, three rattlesnakes, a badger, and a turtle.[18]

The following year, Barnes transferred to Benham his half interest in the Phoenix Wood and Coal Company in return for eighty-nine shares of stock in the Esperanza Company. With this transaction, Barnes left the curio business and moved to Colfax County, New Mexico, where he ranched for a number of years before going to work for the U.S. Forest Service and eventually taking a job with the Geographical Place Names Board in Washington, D.C. Nevertheless, Barnes and Benham remained close, meeting frequently at Albuquerque, Raton, and other stops along the Santa Fe Railway.[19]

As the new century dawned, the curio business in Phoenix was booming. Reflecting this prosperity, Benham and Brizard ordered stationary with an elegant and elaborate logo that featured a rattlesnake, a prehistoric human skull, a petroglyph, Indian pots and baskets, and a Spanish lance. Advertising "the

most unique and interesting store in the Southwest," the letterhead displayed an interior view of the shop containing "a complete line of Indian and Mexican curios, Navajo Blankets, Navajo Silverwork, Apache Beaded buckskin goods, Indian Baskets from all Western Tribes, [and] Rare Prehistoric Relics from Mounds and Cliffs of Arizona." An elated Brizard informed his mother that "the curio business has so outgrown the present store that we can't house the stock let alone show goods. Sales are double what they were last year and I expect the net profits in this department alone will be $2,500. The wood business has also grown a lot. I'm glad I'm to get my percent of profits, but am sorry [I] haven't a larger interest. If Will [Benham] incorporates, which I think he will, I'll have an opportunity to get a good interest."[20]

By the spring of 1900, Benham and Brizard's thriving curio business had outgrown its shed and the pair constructed a new Spanish-mission style building to house their expanding operation. "To complete the idea of a mission we had to have a bell at the top in front," Brizard explained. "We tried every where to get one in Los Angeles and in Mexico, but could not get any at a reasonable price so had one made of wood just as we wanted it. It is painted and made so perfectly you can't tell from the ground that it is not genuine." At the back of the store, behind the display and sales room and the office, Benham and Brizard established the Phoenix Free Museum, where they invited local residents to display their collections of prehistoric relics.[21]

Popular interest in native peoples of the Southwest mushroomed around the turn of the century as visitors to world's fairs in Chicago, Buffalo, St. Louis, and elsewhere encountered authentic Indians living in replicas of their native villages. Construction of the Santa Fe Railway across New Mexico and Arizona in the 1880s, and the cessation of Apache hostilities, made the region safe and accessible to curious visitors from the East. Handcrafted Indian artifacts lent themselves to the rustic interior home design of the arts and crafts movement which was then sweeping the country. Indeed, no arts and crafts home was complete without a "curio corner" displaying collections of prehistoric relics, Indian baskets and pottery, and Navajo blankets. This popularity, together with a prosperous and growing national economy, provided curio dealers like Benham and Brizard with a

burgeoning market for authentic Indian objects and other southwestern mementos.[22]

At the same time, there was a feeding frenzy of archaeological activity in the Southwest that brought Benham into contact with the Hyde brothers, Fred and Talbot, and into conflict with Mesa Verde discoverer Richard Wetherill. Just past their teenage years, the Hydes had used their inheritance from the Bab-0 soap company fortune to fund Richard Wetherill and his brother's exploration of prehistoric Indian sites in Grand Gulch, Utah, in 1893–94 and in Chaco Canyon, New Mexico, during the summers of 1896–99. Since excavation of prehistoric ruins was an interesting but unprofitable occupation, Wetherill and the Hydes developed the idea of selling prehistoric and contemporary Indian craft objects for display in eastern department stores and museums, as well as at world's fairs.[23]

Just how Benham became involved in the Hyde Exploring Expedition organized to buy and sell Navajo blankets is unclear. Nonetheless, by 1902 he is listed on letterhead as the expedition's manager and an officer of the company. According to Frank McNitt, Wetherill's biographer, Benham—whom Wetherill's widow described as having a "bluff and imposing manner which inspired confidence"—did a quick study of the Wetherill-Hyde business relationship and determined that, if he could acquire control of the Hyde Exploring Expedition, he could turn it into a moneymaking enterprise.[24]

Wetherill, who was understandably outraged by this unexpected turn of events, vented his anger in a letter to Fred Hyde. "Now it seems that Benham has taken the business from you in New York in that all his papers have J. W. B., manager [on them] and that the bank account is carried in his name instead of yours," he sputtered. "He evidently thinks you are not a fit custodian of the funds. How would you like me to do the same thing here. I might just as well say that here is the one place where he isn't in it, but he can depend on us as long as he is honest in his work for the Expedition. But under no circumstances will he ever get to run the whole business unless you and I arrange for it."[25]

Years later, Herman Schweizer, who managed the Fred Harvey Company's Indian Department from 1902 to 1943, recalled how Wetherill's management had driven the Hyde Expedition

deeply into debt when Benham took over the business. According to Schweizer, "The capitalization for the Hyde operation was $300,000 and at the close of business in 1903 their losses were $270,000. The entire project . . . was based on the theory of monopolizing the Navajo Indian trade. Fred Hyde also had some philanthropic ideas of stabilizing values, meaning, of course, the raising of the value of the products. In their endeavor to control this business, they first of all tried to buy all existing trading stores. . . . The Hyde Exploring Expedition abandoned this business just about the time we started the Indian Building at Albuquerque. . . . During all this time Dick Wetherill was the general manager of this enterprise with headquarters at Pueblo Bonito. It is needless for me to go into the details of his murder by Navajo Indians [in 1910]. There is no doubt that it was a direct result and a fitting climax of this ill-advised and ill-starred venture."[26]

At the same time the Brizard family, hoping to share in the burgeoning market for Indian curios, helped finance the Phoenix curio store, along with an associated business in Los Angeles. In October of 1903, Paul's younger brother Brousse left Arcata "on an important mission" to work with Benham in opening up "new markets for the sale of Hoopa Indian baskets and curios" that the A. Brizard Company had received in trade from Indian customers at the Brizard trading posts. Although the company sold no baskets or curio goods locally, they had built up a large mail order business through their catalogues and from advertisements in eastern journals. Even so, they had 5,000 items in stock in the fall of 1903.[27]

Always good entrepreneurs, the Brizards made plans to "invade the rich markets of southern California, made so by the myriads of wealthy Easterners who [came] to California each year." To this end, they incorporated the Benham Indian Trading Company and rented a store at 421 South Broadway in Los Angeles, close to hotels frequented by Eastern visitors. Benham and Brizard's Phoenix Wood and Coal Company owned half the stock in the Los Angeles firm. Paul's father, Alexander, was named president and brother Brousse served on the board of directors. Four assistants helped the elder Brizard manage the Los Angeles store, whose principal inventory consisted of the 5,000 Hoopa baskets the company had accumulated. Described as "the largest shipment

Curio float for the 1898 Phoenix Midwinter Carnival. (A. F. Messinger, photographer. Courtesy of Jeremy Rowe Vintage Photography)

of Indian baskets ever made," they filled thirty large cases. The *Arcata Union* was confident that the baskets would "sell well in the southern city [Los Angeles] as the craze for such articles is growing and tourists do not mind paying a good price if they have a large selection to pick from."[28]

Meanwhile, back in New Mexico, Benham incorporated the Benham Indian Trading Company as successor to the Hyde Exploring Expedition. From corporate headquarters in the Metropolitan Hotel—located near the Santa Fe Railway's hotel and depot complex—in Albuquerque, Benham attempted to control the market for prehistoric and contemporary Indian craft objects and nearly succeeded. According to the December 15, 1903, *Albuquerque Morning Journal*, "The Benham Trading Company, the heaviest dealers in Navajo blankets in the world, has about three-fourths of the Navajo blankets on the market. The large portion of the remaining one-fourth is held by Albuquerque dealers."[29]

Along with a store in New York City, the Los Angeles, Phoenix, and Albuquerque operations formed a chain that made efficient use of horizontal integration and economies of scale. They employed common advertising and each location supplied the others with curio specialties from its particular locale. For example, the

Los Angeles store stocked and supplied Hoopa baskets, the Albuquerque store furnished Navajo blankets, and The Curio in Phoenix provided baskets from Arizona tribes and Mexican drawn work, along with petrified wood, tarantulas, horned toads, and other novelties. The New York outlet carried articles supplied by all three of her sister stores, as well as rare articles imported from around the world. "The value of keeping in touch with each other and the local makers under this arrangement will be seen to have manifold advantages," the *Arcata Union* predicted.[30]

Mail-order catalogs advertised the wide variety of curios available from the Benham and Brizard operation. A 1903 catalog for the New York store offered both contemporary and old Navajo blankets, an assortment of southwestern and California Indian baskets, Indian moccasins and jewelry, Mexican drawn work, Pueblo pottery, and George Wharton James's books on basketry. The Albuquerque store's catalog featured inexpensive Indian curio trinkets, swastika jewelry, wicker and coiled Hopi baskets, and small inexpensive Navajo weavings, as well as a "Teddy, The Rough Rider" doll, complete with "khaki uniform, hat, belt,

The new Curio erected on the site of the first store in 1900. Photograph c. 1903. (Courtesy Arizona Historial Society, Tempe)

revolver and spectacles." ("Order early," the caption advised, "as we expect an avalanche of orders for 'Teddy' $.75.") The Phoenix store's catalogue, issued sometime after 1900, contained photographs of exquisite Pima, Hopi, and Apache baskets, together with a price list for Hoopa caps and Pomo baskets. The store accepted special orders for baskets from other tribes, and offered its mail-order customers Pueblo pottery, prehistoric relics, and Navajo rugs. Buyers could also select cardboard-mounted "natural history specimens" that included scorpions, tarantulas, horned toads, centipedes, and trap-door spiders. Live Gila monsters and rattlesnakes were available, in season (May 1 to October), to customers who paid in advance. The reptiles were shipped "by express, securely packed," at a cost of $3.00 per Gila monster and $2.00 per snake.[31]

Wishing to further expand his market, Benham traveled with a Pima basket weaver and exhibited his wares at the 1901 Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo, New York. In 1903, he left Phoenix with a load of curios to display and sell at the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair. Unfortunately, he found upon his arrival that all the display space in the Anthropology Building had been allocated. Thinking quickly, he subleased a portion of another exhibitor's space and even secured the concession to furnish supplies to all the Indians at the fair.[32]

Always concerned about the Fred Harvey Company, his arch rival for Indian curio business, Benham pulled strings to acquire the best possible setup at the World's Fair. Fortunately, an acquaintance, S. M. McCowan, superintendent of the Phoenix Indian School, had been named director of the U.S. government's anthropological exhibits at the fair. On February 27, 1904, Benham informed McCowan of his concerns. "I hope all the Indians that come are not provisioned," he pointedly explained. "If they are our post trader will not be very busy. Possibly if you see Dr. Wilson, I can still get the handling of [the commissary for the Philippine exhibit] . . . and will guarantee him as cheap prices as he can possibly buy elsewhere, and he will have none of the responsibility or trouble. I could put up a building in his village if he preferred." Finally, he asked, "Is the Harvey exhibit to be a sales concession? Have you heard whether they will be in some building, or have their own house?" As it turned out, the Harvey

Company's arts and crafts display was in room 111 of the Anthropology Building; Benham's display was in room 104.[33]

Nonetheless, Benham's connections paid off and he was fairly satisfied with his hectic business at the St. Louis exposition. As he explained on April 20 to archaeologist George Pepper, "everything is rounding up fairly well considering the time I gave to preliminary work. I have been appointed Special Representative for New Mexico and Assistant Superintendent on Indian Exhibits under McCowan and also U.S. Indian Post Trader. No salary with any of my titles, but they will help me in my business." Ever the entrepreneur, Benham offered to provide Pepper room and board at the house he had rented near the fair grounds, where he promised to "take care of yourself and the wife for $25.00 a week and make you feel as much at home as possible." Benham won awards at the 1904 St. Louis exhibition and also displayed crafts at the Lewis and Clark Exhibition in Portland in 1905.[34]

Back in Albuquerque, Benham struggled for business against the fabled Fred Harvey Indian Department. He was fighting against long odds. Formed to "create an attraction for the Santa Fe Railway," the Fred Harvey company had a captive market from Kansas City to Los Angeles. Moreover, it occupied a prime location in Albuquerque's Alvarado Hotel, just a block away from Benham's store, where every arriving Santa Fe Railway passenger was encouraged to browse through the Harvey museum and sales rooms, observe Indian artists at work, and purchase Indian crafts. Denied this easy access to the tourist retail trade, Benham tried to serve his customers through his outlets on the east and west coasts, as well as through mail-order catalogues and advertisements in national publications.[35]

A flier distributed around 1906 typified the imaginative schemes Benham concocted to lure customers away from the flourishing Fred Harvey enterprise. "$3,000 Automobile Not for Sale, We Will Give It Away Free with hundreds of Premiums valued at $2,500.00 and 21 Cash Prizes amounting to $500.00," the advertisement announced. "No investment required to participate in this contest. All we want you to do is interest your friends in our line of inexpensive decorations for 'Cozy Corners' and genuine Indian Goods. We have goods that are new and a plan that is new. Send at once for full particulars, conditions and

James W. and Alice Benham inside the Curio, c. 1905. (Herb and Dorothy McLaughlin Collection, Arizona State University Libraries)

instructions, WRITE NOW AS THIS ADVERTISEMENT WILL NOT APPEAR AGAIN. Benham Trading Company, Albuquerque." A similarly arresting advertisement for the "Old Mission Museum, Benham & Brizard Company" (The Curio) in the January 14, 1908, edition of *The Arizona Republican*, invited curious customers to "See the live Ostriches—On exhibition at the City Show Pens, corner of 2nd Ave. and Jefferson St., back of the Court House. SEE THE NAVAJO BLANKETS—$3.00 and up. The most interesting place in Phoenix is here."[36]

Benham also contacted archaeologists representing eastern museums, hoping to interest them in purchasing Indian artifacts. Stewart Culin of the Brooklyn Museum, for example, visited Benham's Albuquerque store on June 22, 1907, "where Mr. [John Lee] Clark[e] sold me a number of interesting objects: a wooden cross from the old church at Pecos, two of the trident-shaped sticks used in the Matachinas dance by the Indians of Santo Domingo, two turtle-shell rattles from Taos, a pair of Jicarilla Apache woman's moccasins, two dance head dresses from Tesuque and a pair of show shoes from Taos. Then he arranged

to have them shipped with the painted buffalo hide and Apache basket to Brooklyn."[37]

All of Benham's energy and ingenuity, however, could not keep the curio business afloat. An ominous two-column ad on page two of the May 2, 1908 issue of *The Arizona Republican* announced "THREE MORE Auction Sales at the Old Mission Curio. Rare Collection Baskets Offered at evening sales. Choice Navajo Baskets at less than cost on the reservation. Novelties at your own price. Every thing to be sold. Our loss is your gain. You make the price and prices."

Not to be outdone, Balke's Big Curio Store, The Curio's rival in the Phoenix market attempted to defend itself against the goods that Benham and Brizard were dumping on the market, at the same time that it assured its customers that "This sale I am conducting at present is not a selling out sale. I have no intention of leaving Phoenix. . . . I am here to stay." Owner R. L. Balke went on to remind Phoenicians that his was "'NO FAKE' Closing Out Sale," implying some shady dealing on the part of Benham and Brizard.[38]

The end of Benham and Brizard's enterprise was in plain sight. In 1908, Benham sold the Albuquerque operation to employee John Lee Clarke, nephew of Professor Putnam. Clarke continued to operate the business under the name John Lee Clarke Trading Company. The fate of The Curio is less clear. The 1911 Sanborn fire map shows the building still standing at Second Avenue and Jefferson, but does not list the owner.

Sometime in 1908, J. W. Benham forsook the Indian trading business and left the Southwest for good. His reasons for leaving the business are unknown. Was the Indian arts and crafts movement in decline? Was he unable to keep up with mounting competition? Whatever the reason, he moved to Chicago, where the 1910 federal census shows him living in a boarding house at 3001 Michigan Avenue. His occupation is listed as "telegraph poles and railway ties." The same census lists Benham's wife, Alice, and daughter, Mary, living with Benham's parents in Los Angeles.[39]

Over the course of the next few years, Benham reinvented himself. By 1914, he was secretary of the Naugle Pole and Tie Company and a member of Chicago's socially prominent Union League Club. He and Alice maintained a home at 2332

Commonwealth Avenue, where they lived with their daughter and with Benham's widowed mother. Then tragedy struck. On July 27, while heading to Ravinia for an evening's entertainment, the chauffeur-driven car in which J. W., Alice, and several business associates were riding stalled at a railroad crossing in the path of an onrushing locomotive.

An account of the collision filled two-columns on the front page of the next day's *Chicago Tribune* and on page 5 of the *Daily News*. "Witnesses saw the motorists laughing and observed the chauffeur acting excitedly," the *Tribune* explained. "The Northwestern passenger train was sweeping down the track at full speed. Directly in its path was the crowded automobile. The roar of the train drowned the screams of the car occupants. [The engineer] set his brakes and brought the train to a stop a mile beyond the crossing." Grisly coroners' reports filed in both Cook and Lake counties testified to the force of the impact and the distribution of the bodies. Following private services, J. W. and Alice Benham were buried in Oakwoods, Chicago's oldest cemetery.[40]

George Wharton James, in his *Indian Blankets and Their Makers*, penned a fitting epitaph for the one-time curio dealer. "The Benham Trading Company stood between its customers and poor work," James wrote. "Mr. J. W. Benham, the founder of the company, and his father Mr. A. M. Benham, were men of most upright character, who thoroughly understood the business from beginning to end, and they built a large trade by their integrity and conscientious treatment of customers."[41]

J. W. Benham was enthusiastic and energetic—part showman, part businessman. His business ventures all had flair that attracted customers—caged rattlesnakes, showy plumed birds, and captive foxes were great come-ons to potential buyers. Whether in business, society, or politics, he was a tireless self-promoter. Beneath all the hype, Benham displayed many of the characteristics common to southwestern entrepreneurs. When faced with failure, he picked himself up, forged on, and manufactured a new beginning for himself. In this regard he personified the phoenix—the mythic bird that bestowed its name on the town where he first established his curio business. Had he not died early in life, Benham would likely have emerged from yet another chrysalis.[42]

Paul Brizard was named executor of his former partner's "sizeable estate." Paul and his wife Nellie Cullum, whom he married on February 19, 1909, in Chicago, adopted seven-year-old Mary. Mary and her grandmother moved in with Paul and Nellie in Arcata, where Paul returned in 1908 to run the family business. He died in 1957. Mary Benham Brizard, the only surviving descendant of the three curio partners, died in San Francisco in 1988. Today, traces of the Benham Indian Trading Company and The Curio can be found in Indian baskets, pottery, photographs, brochures, and personal papers preserved in libraries and private collections in Arizona, New Mexico, and California.[43]

Arizona's modern-day curio trade—one of the hallmarks of the southwestern tourist experience—is the legacy of Benham, Barnes, and Brizard. Contemporary curio businesses—be they Chief Dodge, Gilbert Ortega, Gallery 10, Faust Gallery, or Garland's Rugs—share many of the entrepreneurial characteristics of their turn-of-the-century forebears. Whether tawdry or high-class, today's curio dealers shape the visitor's image of Arizona and the Southwest, just as Benham, Barnes, and Brizard did when they established their curio business on a dusty Phoenix street in 1895.

NOTES

1. Jonathan Batkin, "Some Early Curio Dealers of New Mexico," *American Indian Art*, vol. 23 (Summer 1998), pp. 68-81; *The Papoose*, March 11, 1902.

2. Kathleen Leles DiGiovanni, Oakland Public Library History Room, to Kathleen Howard, May 11, 1997, author's files; *Illustrated Edition Oakland Tribune*, January 1, 1890, p. 15.

3. Will C. Barnes diaries, in Will C. Barnes Manuscript Records, 1858-1936, MS 17, Arizona Historical Society (AHS), Tucson; James H. McClintock, *Arizona's Twentieth Legislature* (Phoenix: n.p., 1899), p. 37; Deeds Book 5, pp. 373 and 374, Apache County Recorder's Office (ACRO), St. Johns; Robert Carlock, *The Hashknife: The Early Days of the Aztec Land and Cattle Company, Ltd.* (Tucson: Westernlore Press, 1994), pp. 66, 245, 269, 348.

4. Carlock, *The Hashknife*, pp. 66, 245, 269, 348. Miscellaneous Book 2, pp. 203-204; NERE Water Claims, pp. 89 and 90, both in ACRO. Barnes registered his "O.K." brand in Apache County on September 23, 1885. On February 9, 1891, he filed a homestead application with the General Land Office. Brands—Apache County, in folder 1, box 26, Richard Schaus Collection, Arizona Historical Foundation (AHF), Tempe; The HF Brand was registered to Benham. Index to Brand Book 2, p. 265, ACRO.

5. Will C. Barnes, *Apaches and Longhorns* (Los Angeles: The Ward Ritchie Press, 1941), pp. 129, 131-32.

6. J. M. Guinn, *History of the State of California and Biographical Record of Coast Counties, California* (Chicago: Chapman Publishing Co., 1904), pp. 758-60.

7. Paul Brizard to his mother, July 18, 1895, Brizard Family Papers (BFP), Private Collection, Arcata, California, photocopies in author's files.

8. Newspaper clippings in Edith Barnes bridal book, Will C. Barnes Collection, AHF; Sanborn's 1901 Map of Phoenix, Arizona State Library, Archives, and Public Records, Phoenix; Negative #97696, Arizona Collection, Arizona State University Library, Tempe; J. W. Benham, "The Curio," catalog, Special Collections, University of Arizona Library, Tucson.

9. Robert H. Forbes, *Cañaigre* (University of Arizona Agricultural Experiment Bulletin 21, July 1898); *Phoenix Daily Herald*, September 10, 1895; *Arizona Republican* (Phoenix), January 18, February 7, 1898; "Official Program of the Phoenix Indian and Cowboy Carnival including the Merchants' Street Fair, Phoenix, Arizona," December 10-15, 1900, AHF; McClintock, *Arizona's Twentieth Legislature*, p. 37; G. Wesley Johnson, Jr., ed., *Phoenix in the Twentieth Century: Essays in Community History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993), p. 43. Background information on Benham is in the unpublished research of Louis Giordano, Heard Museum, Phoenix.

10. Brizard to his mother, December 5, 1896, BFP.

11. Ibid., July 5, 1897.

12. Ibid., August 29, 1897.

13. *Arizona Republican*, March 29, 1897; Barnes wedding book.

14. Brizard to his mother, November 29, December 15, 1897, BFP.

15. Ibid., December 15, 1897.

16. Ibid., January 24, March 8, 1898.

17. Undated typescript, George Wharton James Papers, Southwest Museum, Los Angeles.

18. Brizard to his mother, April 13, 1898, BFP.

19. Undated memorandum of agreement between Barnes and Benham, folder 57, box 8, Barnes Collection, AHS.

20. Phoenix Wood and Coal Company Articles of Incorporation, May 1, 1900, Arizona Corporation Commission (ACC), Phoenix.

21. Brizard to his mother, October 17, 1900, BFP; "The Curio," hand-tinted postcard (1903), AHS, Tempe.

22. Robert A. Trennert, "Fairs, Expositions, and the Changing Image of the Southwestern Indians, 1876-1904," *New Mexico Historical Review*, vol. 62 (April 1987), pp. 127-50; and Trennert, "A Resurrection of Native Arts and Crafts: The St. Louis World's Fair, 1904," *Missouri Historical Review*, vol. 87 (April 1993), pp. 274-92; *The Papoose*, January 10, 1903.

23. Robert H. Lister and Florence C. Lister, *Chaco Canyon: Archaeology and Archaeologists* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1981), pp. 20-62; Alfred M. Tozzer, *Biographical Memoir of Frederic Ward Putnam* (Washington, D.C.: National Academy of Sciences, 1933), p. 132.

24. Frank McNitt, *Richard Wetherill: Anasazi—Pioneer Explorer of Ancient Ruins in the American Southwest* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1957), p. 205.

25. Richard Wetherill to Fred Hyde, March 21, 1902, folder 2, box 1, Wetherill Papers, Frank McNitt Collection, New Mexico State Archives, Santa Fe.

26. Herman Schweizer to Jesse Nusbaum, April 7, 1930, Herman Schweizer Business Correspondence, Fred Harvey Papers, Heard Museum, Phoenix.

27. "Finding New Markets," *Arcata Union*, October 28, 1903.

28. Ibid.; Benham Indian Trading Company of California Articles of Incorporation, September 28, 1903, ACC.

29. *Albuquerque Morning Journal*, December 25, 1903, p. 6. See also, Kathleen L. Howard, "A Most Remarkable Success: Herman Schweizer and the Fred Harvey Indian Department," in *The Great Southwest of the Fred Harvey Company and the Santa Fe Railway* (Phoenix: The Heard Museum, 1996), pp. 87-101.

30. "Finding New Markets," *Arcata Union*, October 28, 1903.

31. *1903 Catalog of Benham Indian Trading Co.'s, 138 West 42nd Street, New York; Popular Pre-*

sents [trade catalog], Huntington Free Library, Bronx, New York; Benham, "*The Curio*"; *The Curio, Phoenix, Arizona* [c. 1900], private collection.

32. Advertisements and photograph (p. 38) in *The Indian School Journal* (St. Louis: United States Indian School Exhibit, 1904), Missouri State Historical Society, St. Louis.

33. J. W. Benham to S. M. McCowan, March 29, 1904, Chilocco Indian School Files, Oklahoma City. Copy courtesy of Robert Trennert. The Anthropology Building is now part of the George Washington University campus. The rooms in which Benham and The Fred Harvey Company displayed Indian arts and crafts are occupied by teaching staff.

34. Benham to George Pepper, April 20, 1904, folder 10, box 1, Wetherill Papers; George Wharton James, *Indian Basketry, and How to Make Indian and Other Baskets* (reprint, Glorieta, New Mexico: Rio Grande Press, 1982), pp. 241, 243-46.

35. Herman Schweizer to William Randolph Hearst, December 31, 1905, Business Correspondence, Fred Harvey Papers; *The Papoose*, May 27, 1903. Benham supplied Indian traders J. L. Hubbell of Ganado and J. S. Candelario of Santa Fe with Pima baskets that he acquired from weavers on the Gila Indian Reservation, south of Phoenix. Also, between 1902 and 1906, he sold to collector Homer Sargent a large collection of Apache and Oraibi (Hopi) baskets. Sargent also purchased Hupa, Pomo, Umatilla, and Nez Perce baskets from Benham's Los Angeles store. Notebook, Homer Sargent Collection, Heard Museum.

36. "Curiosity File 1906," box 102-M72-5/20, J. S. Candelario Manuscript Collection, Fray Angelico Chavez History Library, Museum of New Mexico, Santa Fe.

37. Stewart Culin Expedition Journal, June 22, 1907, Brooklyn Museum Archives, New York, copy courtesy of Diana Pardue, Heard Museum.

38. *Arizona Republican*, April 24, May 10, 1908.

39. *1910 U.S. Census*, Cook County, Illinois, microfilm, roll 1374, LDS Family History Library, Mesa; family information provided by David Rose of Redmond, Washington, a distant relative of Alice Benham.

40. *Chicago Tribune* and *Chicago Daily News*, July 28, 1914; Barnes diary, July 14, 1914, states: "Evening paper has account of death of Will Benham and wife at Chicago yesterday. Riding in an auto and struck by a train. Alice and Will and another man killed, 4 others hurt. Wired Naugle Co. asking if I should come. . . . Worked all night on report so as to be ready to go to Chicago if necessary." Death certificates and coroner's reports for J. W. Benham and Alice Benham, nos. 1287 and 1290, Chicago Department of Health. Lake County issued death certificate no. 6702 for Benham. Death notices appeared in *Arizona Republican*, July 31, 1914.

41. George Wharton James, *Indian Blankets and Their Makers* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg and Co., 1914), pp. 52, 207-208.

42. *Arizona Republican*, January 18, 1898, reported on the escape of a pet fox from The Curio.

43. "Called East on a Sad Mission," *Arcata Union*, August 13, 1914; "Paul A. Brizard Funeral Service Held Thursday," ibid., October 18, 1957; Mary (Benham) Brizard Duke death certificate, no. 3-88-38-7883, State of California, copy in author's files.