

# DE ARMITT, BERRY HILL

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DE ARMITT, BERRY HILL, born at Hollidaysburg, Huntingdon (now Blair) County, Pennsylvania, March 20, 1828; probably a son of John De Armitt of that County who was of French Huguenot ancestry; married, Maria Garcia Ortiz (1831-86) at Pitiquite, Sonora, Mexico, in 1856; children, Charles, Juan, Magdalena (Mrs. Pablo Yescas), Margaret (Mrs. Jesus Garcia), Matilda (Mrs. Feliciano Contreras) and Julia (Mrs. Jesus Alvarez).

Was in San Francisco, California, in the summer of 1854 when Edward E. Dunbar organized the Arizona Mining and Trading Company to engage in the development of mines in the Gadsden Purchase and was one of a party which left there in October on the steamer Senator for San Pedro; Los Angeles, they obtained horses and pack mules and crossed the desert to Fort Yuma; a narrative entitled "An Arizona Adventure", by "W" printed in the Yuma Arizona Sentinel of March 30, 1878, states that:

Of the 20 all young men that came down into this wilderness, there are but 8 left, Pete Brady, now Sheriff of Pinal county; B. Hill DeArmit, of Florence, Arizona; James Deton, of Yuma; J.R. McElroy, a miner of Calaveras County, California; Jas. Porter, of San Francisco; Oliver C. Hayward, now farming in Canada; Joe Yancey, a rancher in San Diego; and the writer, who is a most accomplished vagabond, always on the go, looking for something better and never finding it.

Our original intention was to go by Tucson and from there to the Rancho de la Arizona, where we were to make our headquarters, but Pete Brady had come through Sonoita with Col. Gray, on the first trans-continental railroad survey in 1852, and while there had seen some very rich specimens of copper ore, rich in silver and gold, so we decided to go by Sonoita and to relocate the Ajo mine - if it was unoccupied, if it had been originally located by a company in Sonora, of which Governor Candaba was one. But the men who had been sent to work the mine, had been murdered by the Indians, and the company had never sent a second force out to the mine.

At Sonoita we found some specimens and a guide. He was the major-domo of Don Chico Redondo at his ranch at Sonoita, and the only man who knew where the mine was, as he was the only man who saw it when the Indians jumped the mine in 1850. Volunteers were called for to hold the mine, while the main body went on to search for the great Planchas de Plata. O. G. - d, James Porter, B. Hill DeArmit, Shepard and the writer (five of us) volunteered to go and take possession of the great Ajo mine; and it is a great and rich mine.

The first ore that we took from the vein was a native and red oxide, working 75 per cent of copper, and giving 3 ounces of gold and 14 ounces of silver to every 100 pounds of ore. After we got returns of the assays, we built great air castles and made plans for enjoying our great wealth. Having been a sailor, I was going to build me a copper steam-yacht, and travel as a gentleman of leisure. But the sweets of expectation were beginning to wane, and we were needing some excitement, when it came with a crash to our feelings, in the form of a demand from Governor Gandara, of Sonora, to vacate instantly, as his company was coming to work the mine.

Several letters passed between us and the Governor of Sonora, and we finally found that he meant business. We learned that a Company of soldiers was on the way from Ures, to drive us off the mine. Then we sent a dispatch to the main body of our Company. They sent down 4 men; that made 9 of us to fight 100, which was the number we heard were coming. However, we were determined not to give up the mine; we had every right to it; the former claimants had abandoned it for more than the time allowed by the Mexican laws; and it was fully forty miles this side of the new boundary.

After the enemy arrived at Sonoita, we kept a sentinel out all the time. One morning, a little after sunrise, he came rushing in with the news that the enemy was in sight. We had built us a breastwork at the water, and were all there waiting. Presently they came in sight and ranged themselves on a hill about 200 yards off, and then sent in the same man who had guided us out, with a flag of truce. He came calling to Charlie Hayward not to shoot. He delivered his message from the commander, that he wished to send his second-in-command in to treat with us.

They numbered 42, but we afterwards found that 6 were miners, leaving 36 soldiers; making four to one, as there were but 9 of us. But what we lacked in numbers we made up in arms, as we had 84 shots, without stopping to load, and we all, with one exception, had been in business before.

When the Lieutenant arrived he delivered a message from his captain to the effect that he had been sent to take possession, peacefully if he could, but to take possession. He pointed out to his force and told us to compare our numbers with his, and tried to convince us that we could not have a ghost of a show in a combat; and finally told us, that if we would give up our arms we might leave in peace. Our answer was, that he might have our arms, but he must come and take them.

That they did not like; and the Captain soon found that he would have to fight if he got the mine. He either had his orders not to go to extremities, or he thought his party would get the worst of a fight. He finally agreed to leave us in peaceful possession, if we would give him and his men water, which we did after they brought in their arms and stacked them in our fort. It was a great bluff they made at us, but they took it all back, and from that time we were not troubled.

Soon after this our President went to San Francisco and got a charter and incorporated. When he returned, we all West to the Gila and settled up our company affairs and received our certificates of stock. Then the boys scattered. Some of them stayed at the mine till the working supplies came; then there was more scattering.

The first President (Dunbar) was appointed Superintendent, and he commenced working in earnest, but without accomplishing much; nor did any of the Superintendents who followed him. For the mine is not more developed today than it was 24 years ago. And I say again, that if another company takes hold of it, with money to back them, they can open up one of the finest mines of the Coast.

Went with his family to Arizona City (Yuma) where he was listed in the 1860 Census as Berry H. Hill, occupation - Blacksmith, property valued at \$1,500; in the Territorial Census taken in the spring of 1864 at Tucson his name appears as Hill De Arnett, occupation - Contractor, resident in Arizona 10 years, property valued at \$1,000; in describing a visit to the Papage Country with Charles D. Poston in 1864, J. Ross Browne makes the following mention of him:

We visited the Bahia, a silver lode of extraordinary richness belonging to the Calumbia Mining Company. There are also very fine copper mines in the vicinity. Mr. Hill de Arnett, who was a member of our party on the trip to Sonora, is largely interested in one of these and considers it one of the best copper leads in the country - quite - to the celebrated Maricopa lead on the Gila.

Appointed by Governor Goodwin as Hill de Arnitte to be sheriff for the 1st Judicial District, April 9, 1864; reappointed by the Governor On December 21, 1864, as the first sberiff of Pima County and served until January 1, 1866; moved to Florence where he was listed in the U.S. Census, 1870, as Berry Hildearnit, occupation - Farmer, property valued at \$1,250; appointed by the Board of Supervisors of Pinal County as road viewer on April 19, 1875; registered as a veterin Pinal County, 1876, as Berry H. de Armitt; elected Trustee of the Florence School District, November 21, 1878; joined the Society of Arizona Pioneers at Tucson, March 15, 1884; owned a 20 acre farm near Florence

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at the time of his death which was announced in the Arizona Enterprise as follows;

One of the earliest settlers in this valley, B.H. De Armitt, better known as Hill De Armitt, died at the County Hospital on January 24, 1891, from injuries received several months ago in falling from his wagon while returning home from town.

Buried in the town cemetery, 2 miles south of Florence; age at death, 62.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- U.S. Census, Huntingdon County, Pennsylvania, 1840.
- Arizona Pioneers Historical Society, Tucson - Membership book, p. 59.
- History of Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, Part 2, pp. 541, 675.
- Probate Court of Pinal County, A.T., - Booklet No. 123.
- The Great Register of Pinal County - November 1, 1876.
- Board of Supervisors, Pinal County, A.T., - Minutes, April 19, 1875, and November 21, 1878.
- Browne, J.R. - Adventures in the Apache Country, N.Y., 1874, p. 284.
- Barney, J.M. - Political Activities of the Territorial Governors, 1864-73, Manuscript, pp. 3 and 8.
- W.P.A. Historical Records Survey - Inventory of Pima County Archives, 1938, Manuscript, p. 4.
- The Arizona Sentinel, Yuma, March 30, 1878, p. 1, c. 2.
- The Arizona Enterprise, Florence, January 31, 1891 (obituary).
- The Arizona Daily Star, Tucson, April 8, 1937.

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Information from the Great Registers.

Year	Residence	Occupation	Age	Nativity
1886	Pinal County, Florence Listed as <u>DeArmitt, A. H.</u>		58	U. S.
1888	Great Register of Pinal County is Missing.			
1890	Pinal County, Florence Listed as <u>D. Armitt, B. H.</u>		60	U. S.

Died at Florence, Arizona, January 24, 1891.