



History of Yuma

The City's name evolved from the "Yuma" Indians who lived in this area when Spanish explorers arrived from the Gulf of Mexico (known as the Sea of Cortez) in 1540. The Spanish explorers came up the Colorado River in search of the fabled "Seven Cities of Gold" and actually proclaimed the Yuma area as their "Kingdom of New Spain". Instead of gold they encountered seven Indian tribes whom they collectively named "Yumans."

Missions were established in 1744, however, in 1781, the Yuma Indians, angered by increasing appropriation of their land by Spanish settlers, attacked the settlement and destroyed all the missions and settlers.

In 1803 Yuma was a part of the Louisiana Purchase. During the early 1800's, it began to be occupied by traders, fur trappers and explorers. Beaver was trapped extensively along the Colorado and Gila Rivers. After the Mexican-American War the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo ceded most of the New Mexico Territory to the United States, but the southwest portion remained a part of Mexico.

In 1849, when gold was discovered in California, Yuma became a major departure point for the gold fields. Fort Yuma was the primary military outpost and supply center in 1850, and a portion still stands today as the Yuma Quartermaster Depot at the Yuma Crossing State Park. The military installation was built on the riverbank and remained the center of a military supplies and a transportation route to the California region until Southern Pacific Railroad reached the area in 1877. The railroad was constructed over the Colorado River, negating dependence on the river itself as a transportation route.

In 1854 the Gadsden Purchase gave control of Southern Arizona to the United States and established the current international boundary. The first permanent buildings were constructed and a "town" was established, first named "Colorado City", then "Arizona City", and finally, in 1873, the settlement became known as "Yuma."

The "Village of Yuma" was formed and incorporated in 1873 on land purchased by A.F. Finley. The first recorded minutes from the Village of Yuma date back to 1876, with Mr. Finley signing as Mayor. The first council members were paid \$3.00 per regular meetings, and \$2.00 for special meetings.

The Arizona Territorial Prison was built in 1876 and operated until 1909, and is famous for imprisoning some of the Southwest's most notorious criminals. The structure still exists today as the Yuma Territorial Prison, a State Historical Site and attracts many visitors to view the interesting environment of the famous prison.

In 1902, the Village of Yuma was incorporated into the "Town of Yuma." The State of Arizona was admitted to Statehood on February 14, 1912, and in 1914, the Town requested that Yuma be incorporated as a City. On April 7, 1914 the City of Yuma was incorporated and Governor W. P. Hunt officially approved the City's first charter.