



ARIZONA HISTORICAL FOUNDATION

Territorial Trollops

They weren't put on pedestals, but the ladies of the evening played a major role in settling the West, especially in places like Tombstone.

By SALLY BENFORD

IF YOU WERE A "working woman" in Territorial Arizona, it usually meant one of a few things: You were a teacher, ran a boarding house, took in laundry, worked as a housekeeper ... or you hung out at the local saloon entertaining men — primarily miners, cowboys and professional gamblers.

In saloons across the territory, good-time gals — called "soiled doves," "shady ladies" or "hurdy-gurdy girls" — managed a certain level of esteem, at least by men. Gamblers and imbibers greeted them with open arms and open wallets, mainly because they contributed to the local economy and provided services that some believed kept the lid on the powder kegs known as mining camps. And, while some ladies of the evening belonged to the lowest levels of society, others bestowed a feminine touch on an otherwise rugged and dreary existence. They came to Arizona from places like Dodge City, Santa Fe and

For more information on Tombstone, call 800-457-3423 or visit tombstonechamber.com.

San Francisco, and many brought pianos, fancy furnishings, the latest fashions and the finest wines with them.

From Tombstone to Prescott, saloons with second-floor rooms were the places these women called home. In 1882, Tombstone boasted 110 saloons, most with some form of entertainment. Many shady ladies worked as singers or dancers to earn extra money. At the Bird Cage Theatre, there was one woman in particular who often took to the stage, floating above the crowd, suspended from wires. She called herself "Lizette, the Flying Nymph." There were others with colorful nicknames, too: "Blond Marie," "Irish Mag," "Crazy Horse Lil," "China Mary" and "Madame Mustache." Some, like "Big Nose Kate," became famous for the company they kept.

Kate was Doc Holliday's common-law wife, and she ran a hotel in Globe that most likely dished up more than breakfast, lunch and dinner to local miners. Kate became a successful female entrepreneur in a man's world, but for most, life was hard and prostitution was the only way to survive in the rugged West.

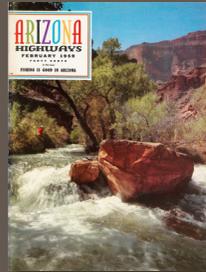
When mines shut down, the hurdy-gurdy girls packed up and moved on to a new boomtown. And as mining camps became more stable, the women were forced into "tenderloin" or "red-light" districts, and eventually, they were driven out as laws against prostitution became enacted. Nonetheless, Arizona's soiled doves have a place in the state's history, and, as some suggest, they may have even helped tame the Wild West.

This month in history

■ In February 1908, Arizona saloon owners raised the price of a mug of beer to 10 cents to offset a law mandating that saloons close each day at midnight and all day on Sundays.

■ On February 18, 1930, at Lowell Observatory in Flagstaff, Clyde Tombaugh confirmed his discovery of a new planet. The new planet was named Pluto.

■ In the early morning of February 22, 1890, the Walnut Grove Dam collapsed, sending a rushing wall of water down the Hassayampa River toward Wickenburg. It's believed that more than 100 people died.



50 years ago

IN ARIZONA HIGHWAYS

In February 1959, we featured some of the state's best fishing holes. From the streams and rivers of the White Mountains to Oak Creek and the reservoir lakes along the Colorado River, the stories and photographs offered information about where to catch rainbows, catfish and other cold-blooded dinner entrees.