

Arizona city named for historian William Prescott

By GORDON B. SEAVEY

WESTFORD High in the Bradshaw mountains of central Arizona is a bustling city named in an unusual way for a noted historian born in Massachusetts and who died in 1859 five years before the western community was organized.

The historian was William Hickling Prescott, born in Salem in 1796 and whose grandfather was Colonel William Prescott of Bunker Hill fame.

The Arizona city is now a community of nearly 20,000, a cultural center in the midst of over a million acres of national forest.

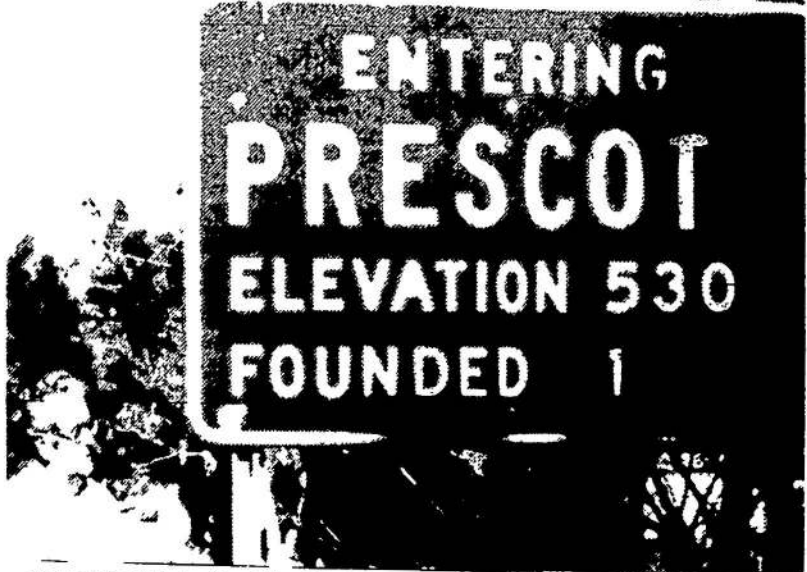
A casual visitor to this attractive city would be hard put to find anyone who knew why their city was named Prescott—a family name so common in several of our Massachusetts communities, particularly in Grafton, Pepperell and Westford.

The Chamber of Commerce did not have the answer nor the reference desk at a very modern library. The curator of a brand new museum (litated mostly by solar rays) did have some information. It proved most interesting—and unusual.

We have pieced the story as follows: Easterners emigrated to mid Arizona and to the Bradshaw Mountains area when in 1863 gold was discovered by explorers while panning in Granite Creek.

Prescott Grew Rapidly

Hungry miners and others quickly flocked to the area and by the next year the town was founded as a territory. John N. Goodwin was the first governor (his homestead is an interesting museum) and Richard C. McCormick was the territorial secretary.



Named for historian Wm. Hickling Prescott, the city by the same name boasts of its mile-high elevation in the Bradshaw Mountains of Arizona. (G.B. Seavey photo)

The new community had to have a designation. The names Audubon and Granite City were proposed. McCormick was such a great admirer of Prescott's factual history of the Southwest that he became entranced with the knowledge and the details to be found in Prescott's work. His suggestion of Prescott was selected.

The town grew and prospered. Although the gold has gone, Prescott is still very much alive. It is located just East of the geographic center of the state on the Northwest slopes. The Bradshaws' mile-high elevation gives the area a mild four seasons climate with an annual rainfall of 18 inches and snowfall of 20 per year.

Snow disappears rapidly due to the dry air; the sun shines 174 days of the year; cloudy days number only 92. It is a haven for retirees who like a well-balanced climate.

The Santa Fe Railroad has a two-story passenger station in mid town, but passenger service has given way to bus and airplanes. Being a county seat and first territorial capitol, its main square is impressive: a huge granite courthouse, a bandstand, gardens and a monument to Teddy Roosevelt's Rough Riders, many of whom came from these hills and ranches.

Along the four streets which make up the square are modern chain stores, next to Victorian styled bank and office buildings complete with awnings. Whiskey Row is the rock name of one street.

The National Guard Armory is where many concerts, art shows and sporting events take place. The annual rodeo is outstanding. There are over 170 clubs which meet on a regular basis.

The city now is spreading down over the foothills. There is a Prescott College and an aeronautical school which attracts students from many areas.

Birthplace Stands

The impressive old homestead where Prescott was born in Pepperell still stands at The Gore on Prescott Street and just over the Grafton line. It was here that Prescott spent much of his time, particularly Summers, while writing his great works, such as the Conquest of Mexico.

He was educated at Byfield Academy and entered Harvard in 1779. An accident cost the sight of one eye and greatly weakened the other. He employed specially trained rest artists to aid him in his work. At the Pepperell homestead his studio still remains over an ell with many windows needed for maximum light.

A noted historian, his works are remembered for their great detail and factual accuracy. They are still considered standard history classics.

William Hickling Prescott died in 1859 and is buried in Mt. Auburn Cemetery, Cambridge, Mass. Since he was born 105 years before his namesake city was incorporated, it is obvious that he never visited Prescott, Arizona.

His name lives on in more than one way!



Participants and observers come from miles around each year for the annual rodeo in Prescott, Arizona, named after a noted Massachusetts historian, Wm. Hickling Prescott. Two-story building at left is the original Palace Bar on "Whiskey Row" which faces court house.