

George Cox: A Life in the Mines

Other than a few years spent overseas during World War II, George R. Cox lived nearly his entire life in southeastern Arizona. One of nine children born to the Cox family in Globe, Cox spent his early teenage years traveling the state as part of the U.S. Conservation Corps, digging roads, widening trails, fighting forest fires, building fences for pastures and occasionally punching cows and breaking horses. But what he really wanted to do, and what he eventually spent most of his life doing, was to work in the copper mines in the Globe-Miami area.

After returning from the war, Cox found himself short of funds and short of a home. The sprawling ranch house built in Globe by his father had been systematically dismantled and sold by an older brother who took refuge in the home while dodging the draft. All that remained of the main house was three rooms.

Cox needed a job so he could begin rebuilding his life and his home. Although the war created a greater demand for copper, jobs at the mines and mills were scarce, as there were more men than available positions.

He began taking any odd jobs he could find.

“As time knocked along, I worked wherever I could find work,” Cox recalled. “Finally I tried to hire out at Miami Copper Co.” His first stab at Miami Copper didn’t go to well as he clashed with the company’s employment agent.

He spent some time working for the city of Globe’s streets department, sweeping trash out of the gutters. It was a paycheck, but he never stopped looking for a job at the local mines.

He and a friend tried to rustle a job at Inspiration Copper Co., but after no luck, the friend suggested they go to Miami Copper. Cox felt that after his previous encounter with the employment agent there, his chances of getting hired were slim to none. It came as quite a shock to discover that not only had the agent apparently forgotten their earlier clash, but also was willing to actually hire him. “They put me to work on the concentrator,” Cox said, where pulverized rock is mixed with water to begin the mineral separation process. After only a few months he shifted duties and went to work with a former Conservation Corps buddy on a newly formed Miami Copper rigging gang.

“You have to be an alert person on the rigging gang—everything you handle is heavy and dangerous,” Cox explained. “I liked that kind of work; I didn’t like to stay in those buildings.”

An unexpected benefit of his tenure at Miami Copper was the ability to reconstruct his home using old timbers and other cast-offs from the mine. One room in the home was reconstructed with two-by-twelves for the roof. Other rooms incorporated planks recovered from water tank roofs at the Old Dominion mine, where he also put in his time. “You’d be surprised by the things in that house,” Cox said with a laugh. A co-worker of Cox’s once said that if the mines ever came to reclaim their property from the homes in Globe and Miami, nearly all of the houses would fall to the ground.

At one time or another, Cox worked for nearly every mining company in the area, and fondly recalled his friends and co-workers and the good times they had together.

“I always had my fun. You have to, if you make a living at the mine. Regardless of the rules, there is horseplay. We used to have big water fights and big wrestling matches. We also did our work.”

And work he did—as a smelter, a rigger, a pipefitter, overseeing a concentrator, and eventually, overseeing his own rigging crew as a supervisor. He spent time in nearly all the local mines, from the Old Dominion and Miami mines to the Inspiration and Continental Copper mines.

His hope was to see the glory days of mining return to eastern Arizona. He believed the advances in technology could make the business both safer and more profitable, and he knew there was ore out there just waiting to be found.

“There’s mineral everywhere you look. In my mind, I figure there are still worlds of copper over in that country. I hope they mine it.”

Cox retired from the mining business in May 1984 with some trepidation that he would become utterly bored after a lifetime of activity. But being George, he managed to keep his schedule full, whether it was helping out an elderly neighbor with some minor home repair, or taking a young apprentice under his wing to impart just some of his vast knowledge, or joining local organizations. Cox was a member of the VFW, American Legion, CC Camp Alumni, Gila Historical Society, Bullion Plaza Museum, and the Cornish Society.

He also was an active member of the People of the West, a group whose mission is to resurrect mining and ranching in the American Southwest.

“I was never bored. In my older years, I tried to follow one golden rule, ‘Do unto others as you would have done unto you,’” Cox said.

“When I die, I just hope they say ‘He was our friend,’ that’s all.”

George Cox died Feb. 4, 2005. He is survived by his wife, Hazel, and son Hopkin “Hoppy” Cox.