

Gym Rat Rantings

by Bob Ring



Hang on to those Family Treasures

You probably have a treasure hidden away in your closet. I did – in fact, two.

The first is photographs that my grandfather, Ambrose Ring, took more than a hundred years ago on his first mining engineering job - in southern Arizona, near the Mexican border. The year was 1905, seven years before Arizona became a state. Newly married Ambrose and Grace Ring had just moved from the country's biggest metropolis, New York City, to the Arizona desert to live in isolated, barren, dirty mining camps. To record this grand adventure, Ambrose took 33 pictures of the mines, stores, and old shacks around the Ruby mining camp. Only five months after arriving, my grandparents left southern Arizona, and didn't return for 27 years, spending all that time on other mining jobs around the West. The only reason we ever found for their leaving Arizona was my grandfather's diary note, "We stayed until conditions became intolerable (personally)."

This family mystery prompted my brother and me to try to uncover the story behind our grandfather's photos. Starting in the late 1990s, we made many trips over crumbling, rocky, dirt roads to the old mining territory. Of course by that time, all the buildings that appeared in the photos were long gone. But, wonderfully, we were able to figure out where all the pictures were taken by comparing the profile of hills in the background of the photos to what we were seeing while tramping around the area.

To make a long story short – we spent years researching the mining and people history of that Oro Blanco mining district. In 2005 we published a book that captures all that we found out, *Ruby, Arizona – Mining, Mayhem, and Murder*, but ... we never figured out why our grandparents left southern Arizona so suddenly.

The second family treasure is a detailed, handwritten story by Eugene Ring (Ambrose Ring's father and my great grandfather) of his unplanned trip to the California gold rush. On a long sailing trip for his health in late 1848, twenty-one-year-old Eugene was in the middle of South America's Strait of Magellan, when he first heard of the fantastic gold strike from a passing ship. His exciting memoir describes how he got to California, his adventures there in San Francisco, Sacramento, and the gold fields and his almost unbelievable return home across southern Mexico's Isthmus of Tehuantepec, after being abandoned by his ship while ashore foraging for food and water.

My brother and I, together with my youngest son, decided to publish the memoir. The challenge here was to edit the original handwritten record and several subsequent revisions to provide the most complete and readable story. The resulting book, *Detour to the California Gold Rush: Eugene Ring's Travels to South America, California, and Mexico, 1848-1850*, has just been published.

So hang on to those family treasures; there may be a book or two in your future.